

A CONSIDERATION OF REALISM IN THE FICTION  
OF SOME AMERICAN WRITERS OF THE  
PERIOD 1891-1917

by

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## Preface

Realism in American Literature is relatively speaking a new thing. The first traces of it may have been apparent in the 1860's, but as a literary force it did not assume importance until the nineties. The literary period that followed the Civil War had definitely ended in the eighties and the last decade of the nineteenth century was to belong in reality to the twentieth. The literary significance of the nineties is to be found in the appearance of a new group of young writers, most of them born in the sixties and seventies. They were to presage a revolution in American literature. Already the Continent had experienced or was experiencing such a revolution. Powerful writers had risen in almost every country: Dostoevski and Tolstoy in Russia; Flaubert and Zola in France; Ibsen in Norway; and Sudermann and Hauptmann in Germany. England was, as usual, behind the Continent but she too was in the throes of a literary revolution. All in all America had only to look abroad for inspiration to revolt artistically from the regional histories and the costume romances of the preceding period. Most of the young group who were to come of age in the nineties sooner or later became artistically aware of what was happening in Europe. Those whose works have been singled

out for consideration here were but advance forces for the heavier revoltors who were to come. Of the five to be considered, Norris, Crane, Phillips, London and Garland, the first two were dead with the dawn of the new century. Phillips lived on until 1911 and London till 1916 but they all died young with their work but started. Only Garland lived on to pass from the revolting group to a position of ultra-conservatism.

That the revolt in America should follow the lead of the Continent was inevitable but certain phases of it presented aspects intensely native. Even as late as 1893 the stark ugliness of Hamlin Garland's pictures of the Middle Border failed to approach in somberness and tragedy the works of the Russian, French, and German naturalists. Howells pointed out that American realism was more hopeful than European realism because American life was itself more hopeful. The American novelist reflected the temper of a people made tolerant and kindly by prosperity and justice, and necessarily concerned himself with the "more smiling aspects of life, which are the more American." Alas for Mr. Howells, dark clouds were already gathering on the American horizon. The economic trend toward policies dictated by certain classes and operating as class economics was already foreshadowing a future far from democratic in effect.

Men born in the late sixties and the early seventies were coming to intellectual maturity in a new and different age; a new and intensified interest in science and a consolidating economics were creating an entirely new set of factors which were to condition American thought. Great changes were coming over scientific thought and the onward march of scientific investigation was leaving far behind the more benevolent universe of Victorian thinkers. Crane, Norris, Dreiser, and other intellectual children of the nineties produced an art that was a reflection of a very sober period of American disillusion. Vernon Lewis Parrington sets forth this version of the basis of that art:

"The intellectual backgrounds were thus preparing for a gloomier realism than Howells's or Garland's, a realism that took its departure from two postulates: that men are physical beings who can do no other than obey the laws of a physical universe; and that in the vast indifferentism of nature they are inconsequential pawns in a game that to human reason has no meaning or rules. To assume that fate which rules human destiny is malignant, is to assume a cosmic interest in man which finds no justification in science; Man at best is only an inconsequential atom in a mechanical flux, or at worst, as Jurgen puts it picturesquely, only a bubble in fermenting swill. Such a conception, of course, made slow headway against the traditional order of thought; and if it had not been aided by a changing economics it would have found few to follow a line of reasoning that led to such unpleasant conclusions. The mind of the artist is more susceptible to concrete social fact than to abstract physical principle, and the swift, centralizing of economics in the eighties and the nineties provided the stimulus for the extraordinary reversal of thought marked by the contrast between Emerson and Theodore Dreiser." \*

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\* The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America (New York, 1930), pp. 318-319.

The purpose of this Thesis is to consider the works of Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, Jack London, David Graham Phillips and Hamlin Garland in respect to their significance in the use of realism. The definitive editions of both Norris and Crane were carefully examined for realistic tendencies. In the case of Jack London and David Graham Phillips only such of their work as was considered significant was examined and in the case of Hamlin Garland only his Middle Border books were consulted.

My thanks are due to Professor Robert Conover, of the Department of English, for guidance in my study and the preparation of this Thesis, and to Miss Dorothy MacLeod and Miss Marion Barr for careful work upon the proof sheets.



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## PART I

### INTRODUCTION

A short discussion of nineteenth century  
social, economic and literary conditions.



## INTRODUCTION

The opening of the nineteenth century found this country no longer the political and economic thrall of England and the Continent but intellectually and culturally she remained bound to the Old World for more years than it pleases us to recall. It is one thing for a country to secede materially from its fatherland, but quite another for it to establish itself as intellectually and spiritually independent. In the case of our own country the process was rendered increasingly difficult by the problem of bringing the various sections of the country to a realization and consciousness of the mystical relation of each one part with all the other parts. In short, the United States hardly existed save as a sort of abstract political entity. In spirit the several states and localities remained decidedly sovereign and independent. Under such circumstances it was impossible for the stream of American culture to present an appearance strikingly homogeneous. Living conditions, population nationalities, customs, habits of thought, speech, and dress, in short, all those elements going into the making of a culture were sectional rather than nation-wide. However, in one respect there was a semblance of sameness in the cultured thought of all sections--the source. As the Old World had

furnished this land with its first white settlers so she continued to furnish it with spiritual ideas and ideals and in particular it was England that was looked upon as the fountain-head of culture. Our own New England was in truth a new England in the temper of its intellectual life. To be sure this provincial society, New England, had its own political organization, its own seat of authority, and its own economic foundations but Old England was the fountain-head of things of the spirit. It is true that this society was decidedly different from that developing along the American Frontier, but it is equally true that New England acted as sort of a disseminating point for the culture of the New World just as Rome had been the hub from which radiated knowledge and culture in the Dark ages. The Frontier society was a moving, flowing one; its members came from anywhere and everywhere and were bound for the same place. They moved into a new land, became restless and moved on, either in search of a more fertile lands, wilder adventures, more freedom from neighbors and the restraints of civilized society, or just from the habit of locomotion. But, all paths had started from, or crossed New England, and that was the culture carried into new lands by the pioneer. Old World it was and as yet undistilled by its contacts in the new land.

The first years of the nineteenth century found America still decidedly in the Colonial period. The older America was static, fearful of innovation, pessimistic, and intent upon preserving the old order. Growth was a slow and painful process and material independence was to be gained only by individual labor. Life was drab, man was considered essentially evil, and possibilities of change in social status were remote. Such was the outward aspect when the century dawned, but beneath the surface of the old order, for a good dozen years, the process of decay had been going on. Gradually the older America was dying until the end of the War of 1812 marked the rising of a flood of new ideas and concepts which was to sweep down the century, carrying all before it in a restless, shifting, optimistic, adventurous, youthful social order. The older America had belonged to the gray-beards, but youth and courage were to have their fling in the new order of things. The premium was no longer upon sage counsel and tried ideas, but rather the glory and spoils went to the physically courageous and the lustily adventurous. New lands held the allurements of hidden treasure and the speculative short-cut was soon to become an almost ethically legitimate approach to material success.

The period between the end of the War of 1812 and the Civil War saw a great change taking place in the economic

divisions of the country. The East found its life clustering about its factories and fast developing textile industries. With the immigrant and rural populations flocking to these centers of industrial activity the East soon became engulfed in a movement which was to lead to vast expansion of the cities and the consequent transformation of that particular section from a rural to an urban society. Industrial capitalism found its home in such surroundings and settled down like a great pall over cities and industrial centers to remain the prime moving force as well as the principal source of artistic repression down to our own time.

It is not difficult to trace the effect of this new industrialism on the South. With the increase in output of the eastern textile plants came a demand for a decided increase in the production of raw materials. Here the South found her great opportunity and plunged in at once to replace the traditional southern crops with the staple, cotton. In the process the negro slave was exploited, and the South developed an imperialism with a distinctive philosophy based upon the conditions brought about by slavery. The institution of slavery had developed in Virginia, where a generous and gentlemanly culture had communicated to plantation life a decidedly romantic flavor. But the slave system when

transferred to the newer southern states brought about a wholly evil reaction upon the southern people, both plantation masters and poor whites. That same generous culture and feeling of patriarchal responsibility which had characterized the system in Virginia failed utterly to take root in the New South, and in the frontier Gulf states the plantation system created an aristocracy at once swaggering and even vicious in spirit and decidedly arrogant in manners. The social structure founded upon the unequal relationships between white master and black slave, when not acted on by some force tending to ameliorate its inequalities, was bound to bring about an imperialism of a sort. This feeling of imperialism in the Black Belt found itself opposed by the humanitarianism of Virginia and the individualism of the new West and together these three forces waged a three cornered contest for supremacy. Gradually the new imperialism overwhelmed the other two until the eve of the Civil War found every other southern interest sacrificed to slavery while the broader problems which concerned the nation as a whole received scant consideration. Early in the struggle the emotions of the South became bound up with political and social problems until the true situation became obscured by a seething tumult of emotionalized concepts. The decided drift of southern thought towards the



ideal of the Greek democracy became more and more obscured by selfish interests and protective exploitation until suddenly cut short by the advent of the Civil War. This drift of thought had arisen from the need to clarify the logic behind the existing circumstances wherein the system of negro slavery was made the foundation of a social structure which was supposed to have for its guiding spirit the ideals of democracy.

While these transformations were going on in the East and South, that great territory drained by the Mississippi was also undergoing changes. The very expansiveness of the great open spaces to the north and west seemed to creep into the lives of those hardy pioneers whose eyes were turned forever toward the new and unknown. The industrial economic philosophy of the East was looked upon with but little more favor than that southern philosophy based upon the unhappy relationship of master and slave, and Democracy became the cry. But a dangerous sort of Democracy it was, based upon the philosophy of every man for himself and setting forth the idea of the natural right of every citizen to satisfy his instinct for possession by whatever means of exploiting the resources of the country his shrewdness sanctioned. This Democracy was little concerned with Greek ideals or any other ideals, for that matter, and sought no justi-



fication save its appeal to the majority. In its frontier beginnings it was not much more than the establishment of the sovereignty of the popular will and more often than otherwise it proved itself a crude sort of Democracy, little justifying its pretensions. But in spite of all its crudities and all its shortcomings, it established itself as the rising spirit of the West and soon was well on its way toward becoming the hail and cry of all America. Times and conditions were those of economic instability brought about by vast untouched resources, abundant new lands, and rapid increase in population. The old stability of New England and of Virginia was gone as America broke from her moorings and pushed westward. Land became the staple commodity of the West, and progress was measured not in terms of paper profits or crop turnover but in terms of increasing land values. Centers of population were established on highway and byway; soon the real estate speculator arrived and staked out the desirable locations in city lots and a manufactured boom was in progress. The net result was an extravagant increase in the importance of the village and small city and the development of a culture bold, crude, and decidedly middle class.

In considering the drift of literary thought and the general temper of the American mind in that period between

the War of 1812 and the Civil War, I know of no better approach than to consider the country sectionally, taking cognizance of the contributions of the various sections and noting in particular the contributions of some outstanding literary figures. It is certain there was little homogeneity of thought or culture either as far as the country as a whole was concerned, but certain sections did exhibit characteristic tendencies which were later to exert more or less influence on the whole fabric of the American mind.

During the first third of the nineteenth century literary activity seems to have centered somewhat in New York. Before that time New York had not been preeminently a literary center, and indeed then, almost her sole claim to literary affluence was based upon the works of Washington Irving and that little group of authors of mediocre talent who looked to him for inspiration. This group is sometimes referred to as the Knickerbocker School, a name high-sounding and important for a movement of so little consequence. Irving had finished his school career at sixteen and after the experiment of the Salmagundi papers with his brother and James K. Paulding, his first literary venture by himself was The History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty. He had been a keen observer of what was going on on Manhattan Island and

a bookish boy, and his History proved to be a reproduction of the life, as well as a record of events in the staid, stolid, New York of earlier days, the New York of the complacent Dutch. Irving prolonged the days of his youth as long as was possible, and seemed in no haste to begin serious life, nor ambitious to enter upon a career. He enjoyed life as a companion of jolly fellows, as a desirable young man in society, and as a traveller in America and Europe. In The Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent, which is what its title implies, a collection of short, suggestive outlines of narration and incidents, he revealed himself to his readers for the first time, as an accomplished artist. His genius was instantly recognized in England where he lived for some years and Walter Scott's appreciation and assistance brought the new American author into pleasant and profitable relations with the chief publishers of London. A little later he was accepted with enthusiasm in America with a confidence which could rest upon English approval. In 1820 he had removed to Paris where he came into intimate contact with Thomas Moore. As a responsible American writer he did much to promote good feeling between England and America at a time when the ill feeling consequent upon two wars had not wholly subsided. At the age of forty-six he entered upon the most prolific period of his

career and turned out a voluminous amount of writing which at present is not usually ranked as high as his earlier work. Perhaps we remember Irving best as the spokesman for the New York of earlier days. With the vulgarity and commonness accompanying the social changes of expanding New York, he could feel no sympathy. He was a gentleman of the old school and found himself decidedly out of humor with the material ambitions which were in the process of making over the city. To him the present was not nearly so amusing as the past. He felt always a closeness to and interest in Old World Picturesqueness, and as a result became almost English romantic, with a decided distaste for change and innovation. He had the desire to retain the charm of the eighteenth century, which the vulgarity and middle-classness of the nineteenth was so rapidly destroying. Finding himself at odds with the spirit of things as they were he had the good sense to detach himself from contemporary America and remained to the end of his days a reveler in the wit and romance of a generation past. He was forever in pursuit of the romantic and picturesque, a fact which is sometimes apparent in his writings. As he grew older the sparkle and lightness of touch characteristic of youth departed from his work which accounts for the fact that his best work is that done early in his life.



New York had been fortunate in that she had been able to draw unto herself many of the finest of New England minds and she had vast need of the Puritan idealism which marked them, for New York was a decidedly socially-minded city and one much interested in material progress. Even then she was unable to ward off the effects of the materialistic philosophy which had invaded the whole life of the city. Here, in this great American city shrewd Yankee energy had been grafted onto the solid Dutch stock, and this combination produced a society acquisitive in spirit and in a position to profit much from the rage of speculation which was sweeping over the country. New York was wanting not only in intellectual background but in intellectual stimuli as well, as the revolution in politics and economics which she was undergoing unfortunately failed to carry with it a corresponding intellectual upheaval. The niceties of metaphysical distinctions which had so intrigued the New England mind seldom if ever bothered the minds of the stolid Dutch, and while the English gentle-folks sent their sons to English Universities the Dutch seemed little concerned with education and as a result, educational facilities were inadequate. Lacking the inspiration and leadership of dominant personalities and in a society ill-designed to promote literary culture it is not surprising that the talents of the few

struggling literary disciples were engulfed by the voluminous output of hack-writers characteristic of the crass materialism of the time.

For a hundred and seventy-five years New England had been the center of intellectual activity in America, and the revolution in thought which brought about the changes from the aristocratic rationalism of the eighteenth century to the decidedly middle class economics of the nineteenth century exhibited themselves in a more marked fashion there than elsewhere. At once the concepts of the potential excellence of man and the equality of human rights fell into Puritan hands they were given an emotional and intellectual unity from the intense ethical note that marked the Puritan. That the history of New England differs so completely from that of the rest of the country can be traced to the fact that the desire to serve God has always run along parallel with the desire to serve self, and as a result, the material aspects of life have received a generous overlay of religious principles. In early New England the outstanding social figures had been the merchant and the minister, the one furnishing the necessities for material existence, the other pointing the way to so-called spiritual enlightenment. It was the New England minister and those intellectuals who were his spiritual heirs who gave to New England thought its



most characteristic color.

During that first third of the nineteenth century when literary activity seemed for awhile to center itself in New York there was a lessening of enterprise among the New England writers. Theological science as a subject had exhausted itself, which is not surprising since it had furnished the chief theme of discussion for a hundred and seventy-five years. Then there was little else worthy of literary discussion due to the inhospitality of New England toward outer-world books. A renaissance was inevitable, and it came about when German idealism, French communism, and English radicalism began to be heard. Farrington sums up the movement neatly:

"Quite evidently the renaissance resulted from the impact of the romantic revolution upon the Puritan mind, and it issued in a form native to New England experience

.....  
 "Its many-sidedness was both confusing and stimulating. How shall we explain a movement that embraced such different men as Everett and Channing and Parker and Garrison and Whittier and Emerson and Longfellow and Holmes; men often mutually repellent, sometimes sharply critical of each other? No single mind sums up the whole--the theological, humanitarian, mystical, critical, and cultural aspirations of the awakening--as perhaps Goethe may be said to have done for Germany. Emerson, Thoreau, and Parker possibly embodied it most adequately; they were transcendental individualists, intellectual revolutionaries, contemptuous of all meanly material standards. But quite evidently Everett would not travel far along the transcendental path they pointed out, nor Holmes, nor Longfellow. These latter expected no romantic Utopias, wanted no such Utopias. Cambridge and Boston satisfied their hopes; they found the world not such

a bad place for those who knew how to meet it on its own terms. Yet they too were children of the awakening, and in following their individual paths they contributed in their own way to the disintegration of the old authoritarian order that had long held the mind of New England in subjection. Each in some measure and after his own fashion was a rebel, and their total rebellions made up the sum of New England's bequest to a more liberal America. . . . It was an ethical protest against the harsh and unjust realities of the industrial revolution that was so ruthlessly transforming the old order of life in New England; and it took the form of a return to a simpler life." \*

It has often been the case in history that a period of unrest, of controversy and conflict, culminating in actual physical combat, has been productive, throughout the period, of literary works or thoughts of a high order. In the case of our own Civil War and the period preceding it such was not the case; certainly not so far as the South was concerned and but little more of worth came from the North. Hawthorne was little affected by the struggle and was dead before the aftermath had set in. Neither was Melville of the War Party. He was born in 1819, and early in life turned toward the sea and sought adventures in southern waters. His ideas and ideals received their set from his early experiences and dreams and in the controversy which brought on the Civil War he took little part. The silence of the South along literary lines during this period is a bit puzzling and perhaps defies a satisfactory explanation.

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\* V.L. Parrington, The Romantic Revolution in America (New York, 1927), pp. 317-320.

It is true she had a leisure class, and many southerners were American gentlemen of the very highest type, widely travelled in foreign lands, distinguished for culture of manners, and of a decidedly romantic temper. Logically, it seems, such a class could be looked to for artistic contributions. Her dumbness and nonproductivity through her Colonial days has been charged to the isolation caused by settling on wide plantations, instead of in closer bound communities. It is true that these conditions of living persisted till the advent of the War. There was wanting then, that stimulus which comes from mental contact and friction--products of civilization living in close quarters. In the South where tobacco and cotton dominated the economic situation and plantation life furnished the social background all the elements of romance were at hand, but strange as it may seem, neither times nor conditions generated the necessary energy for artistic endeavor. Out of it all comes only the disputed artistry of Poe and this furnished light enough fare indeed for the antagonized Northern critics. Coming from the lesser Virginia aristocracy and reared in the environment of the planter gentry, neither his thoughts nor his actions received the discipline necessary to balance satisfactorily his emotional instability. He had no philosophy and developed no life program save his art. His

interests ran directly counter to every major interest of the New England Renaissance and he stood shakily alone, the first American writer to be concerned with beauty only. If he met only criticism and rebuff from New England, he fared no better among southern ideals. In a world of middle-class economic enthusiasms there was little time or place for the romantic dreamer.

In Slavery days the Southern writer was not allowed to evaluate the life about him. Indeed it is likely that he was too much a part of it emotionally to evaluate it fairly and in addition there was a general feeling in the South that the idea of slavery should never be attacked, but instead should be glossed over with all its fine romantic trappings. It is easy to understand how difficult it was under such conditions to develop or maintain any high literary standard based upon pure literary worth. However, in the North, southern slavery was a powerful cause of literary activity. Once again the old flood of Puritan idealism broke loose in the New England Renaissance, but this time not directed primarily toward theology. The core of the movement was of course ethical and no higher moral duty could be pointed out than the blotting out of slavery.

Obviously we look in vain toward the West for literature before the time of the Civil War. There was teeming



life there, but the desperate struggle for existence left little time for reading books and still less for writing them. The dweller in those new lands was kept so busy with axe and gun and plow that he found little time for the pen. There was a vast storing up of knowledge and stories of the dangers and difficulties of frontier life, of the hardships of the covered-wagon train trails, of the wild adventures of the gold seekers of '49 and of the dangers and privations of life in the frontier towns and lonely farms, but of literary output there was nothing of note. Later--after the War, this stored up knowledge was tapped, and has been in the process of being exploited down to our own time. In the early half of the century dangers and hardships were too close and threatening to be surrounded with much romantic glamour. As they receded into the background of time, they were gradually invested with romantic colorings of a highly improbable nature. Long drouths, the hardships of rural life, the privations encountered when living upon the barest necessities, Indian fights, and the glory of conquering new lands furnish excellent material for romantic tales and stories if they are far enough in the past. When they had to be faced almost daily, along with countless other dangers, they were too close and too deadly to be romanticized. There is another theory which might help account for this literary

sterility of the West. The condition of having leisure time, freedom from economic worry, and social freedom is one most favorable for promoting artistic interest and production. The man who has time to read and to think and to talk may in the process generate something of artistic importance. The century was approaching its third quarter before any such conditions existed in the West.

It is an accepted fact that the regular function of a novel is to tell a story but it remains that there are many kinds of stories and various ways of telling them. This accounts satisfactorily enough, I think, for the various differences in structure, style, and content in prose fiction--differences obvious even to the casual observer.

James Fenimore Cooper stands as the first nineteenth century fiction writer, and his novels are bold, stirring narratives of adventure on land and sea. The early years of his life were spent at the edge of the wilderness where his father had, soon after the Revolutionary War, secured a large estate on the banks of Lake Ostego in New York. Young Cooper entered Yale at thirteen, but failing to become interested in scholastic pursuits shipped before the mast. It was not until he was past the age of thirty, had married and settled down to rear a family that he became interested in writing. His first novel, Precaution, was published in



1820 and The Spy appeared a year later. Thus begun, his literary output continued for more than thirty years and included thirty-two novels, five volumes of literary and naval biography, ten volumes of travels and sketches, and a countless number of newspaper items. The thing Cooper could write into his novels best was action so that became his stock in trade. His stories of sea and wilderness adventures, the best of which were, perhaps, those of the "Leather-Stocking" series, still appeal to youthful readers. As a writer of out-of-doors stories, of hair-raising adventure stories he stands almost alone. He seemed to know his limitations, passed by psychology, dabbled with sentiment and romance, and was not above falsifying for dramatic effect. His novels, bold and stirring as they are, differ from the morbid books of his predecessor, Charles Brockden Brown as a healthy man differs from a sick one. Neither had he anything in common with his emotional contemporary, Poe.

Someone has said, "Hawthorne was the afterglow of the Seventeenth Century." He was that, but he was something more too. Out of joint with his own time as he was, he was still a symbol of the very disjointedness of that time. Radical as he was in his intellectual processes, he could never greatly attach himself to specific radicalisms. His venture into Brook Farm might brand him as a Transcendental-

ist, but in truth the major conceptions of Transcendentalism did not attract him in the least. His singularly remote and self-sufficient mode of existence was but an expression of his temperament--a sort of self-imposed drawing apart that he might examine more carefully some of the innermost recesses of his own soul. Parrington sums him up so well:

"Self-sufficient he remained to the last, hard-headed and practical, yet missing many a deeper truth that more receptive minds discover. He was traveling the path that leads to sterility, and the lifelong business of playing Paul Pry to the secrets of the conscience brought him at last to the comment, 'Taking no root I soon weary of any soil in which I might be temporarily deposited. The same impatience I sometimes feel, or conceive of, as regards this earthly life.' He was the extreme and finest expression of the refined alienation from reality that in the end palsied the creative mind of New England. Having consumed his fancies, what remained to feed on?" \*

There is a certain similarity between Hawthorne and Herman Melville in spite of the fact that their external differences tend to preclude any such idea. Each one searched for something he was unable to find; each died tired of life's quest; that something each searched for was wrapped in the innermost recesses of his own soul. Once they lived side by side, as neighbors, but it was Melville alone who offered himself in friendship. The mental seclusiveness of Hawthorne, whether intentional or unavoidable, repulsed the warm hearted Melville leaving a wound

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\*Parrington, The Romantic Revolution in America. (New York, 1927), p. 443

which never healed. Melville was born in New York in the same year as Whitman, mixed of the same Dutch-English stock. As a youth he went to sea, jumped ship in the South Seas and adventured among the Marqucsan Islands. In such a life he found the adventures he once thought would fill every desire of his life, but having tasted them his soul cried out for a bigger life, for home, for love, for family ties, for time to examine his own inner consciousness. He returned home, married and tried to set up a successful household. All his burning desires turned to ashes. He found himself chained to an uninteresting job, to his family, to a loyal but uninspiring wife--in short to a drab, ordinary life. Finding the living of life too complex for him, he settled back into physical existence but continued pouring forth his inner life in a stream of novels which had started with Typee and which reached its highest point with Moby Dick. He continued to write through the Civil War and until his death in 1891, but with an increasing sense of the degrading compromises of life. He passed out of existence, unloved, unsung, misunderstood, and almost unknown. Only a few critics of his own time were sympathetic enough to understand him, but recently there has been a revival of interest in his books and a re-evaluation of his life and work.

"Melville's work, taken as a whole, expresses the tragic sense of life which has always attended the highest triumphs of the race, at the moments of completest mastery and ful-

filament. Where that sense is lacking, life shrivels into small prudences and weak pleasures and petty gains, and those great feats of thought and imagination which transform the very character of the universe and relieve human purpose from the scant sufficiency of toiling and eating and sleeping, in a meaningless, reiterative round, shrivel away, too". \*

The Civil War drew once and forever a definite line between the past and the present. When the smoke of many battles had cleared away the old order had passed with it. Change of a new sort was in the air and a great peace-time conflict was at its beginning. The social structure which had been erected with slavery as its base had been forever uprooted and the romantic imperialism which characterized it was gone with it. The East was about to enter on a new era of industrial expansion, the population of the West was being expanded from without by a new flood of homesteaders swelled by disbanded soldiers and all bent upon building up an agrarian empire in opposition to the industrialism of the East. Material changes of so vast a nature were bound to bring spiritual and intellectual changes in their wake. The result was a literary re-creation.

"Whitman himself had felt that the War for the American Union was the Odyssey of his generation; but except for himself and Herman Melville, no one lived to write about it in those terms; the stories of Ambrose Bierce, Stephen Crane, and Upton Sinclair did not treat it in this vein; Whitman did not see that the great conflict might have a Punic ending. As it turned out, the war was a struggle between two

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\* Lewis Mumford, Herman Melville (New York, 1929), p. 361.



forms of servitude, the slave and the machine. The machine won, and the human spirit was almost as much paralyzed by the victory as it would have been by the defeat. In industrial transformation took place over night: machines were applied to agriculture; they produced new guns and armaments; the factory regime, growing tumultuously in the Eastern cities, steadily undermined the balanced regimen of agriculture and industry which characterized the East before the war.

"The machines won, and the war kept on. Its casualties were not always buried at Antietam or Gettysburg; they moldered, too, in libraries, studios, offices. The justifiable ante-bellum optimism of Emerson turned into a waxen smile. Whitman lost his full powers in what should have been his prime. Among the young men, many a corpse was left to go through the routine of living. But before the Golden Day was over, the American mind had lived through a somber and beautiful hour, the hour of Hawthorne and Melville. With them, the sun turned to a candle, and cast black shadow upon the wall, not the empty grotesque shadows of Poe, but the shapes of a magnified if distorted humanity." \*

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\* Lewis Mumford, The Golden Day (New York, 1926), pp. 136-137

PART II

FRANK NORRIS AND REALISM



## FRANK NORRIS AND REALISM.

It is extremely difficult, perhaps impossible to decide once and for all which one of several American novelist should be hailed as the pioneer American realist. Indeed it is difficult to draw any very definite conclusions as to what is and what is not realism. Almost every American novelist since 1880 has held and expressed ideas on realism and its uses, but, queerly enough, seldom have any two of them concurred in their views. In discussing no less an authority than Mr. Frank Norris, Mr. F. T. Cooper has the following to say:

"Norris said in a letter to a critic who had objected to his 'exasperating vein of romanticism', 'For my own part, I believe that the greatest realism is the greatest romanticism and I hope some day to prove it.' In A Plan for Romantic Fiction, he gave the following topsy-turvy, irrational, irresponsible definition:

"'Romance, I take it, is the kind of fiction that takes cognizance of variations from the type of normal life. Realism is the kind of fiction that confines itself to the type of normal life. According to this definition, then, Romance may even treat of the sordid, the unlovely--as, for instance, the novels of M. Zola. Zola has been dubbed a Realist, but he is, on the contrary, the very head of the Romanticists.'

"Now Norris might just as well have defined White as that pigment which we use to paint the rare and precious things of life, and Black as that which we choose for all common every-day things, cups and saucers, table linen, wheel-burrows and cobble-stones. Shoe-polish, he might have added, is generally considered black, but really it is the

most dazzling of all possible varieties of white. This sort of thing is definition run mad, arrant nonsense leading nowhere. There are several perfectly legitimate definitions of the two chief creeds in fiction, any one of which Norris might have adopted, any one of which would have been intelligible to the public at large. There is, for instance, that very simple distinction drawn by Marion Crawford, making realism a transcript of life as it is, and romance, of life as we would like it to be." \*

Henry James has sometimes been referred to as a realist, and also William Dean Howells, but it is at once evident that the realism they made use of was of an entirely different type from the "stark" realism of Stephen Crane, Upton Sinclair, Frank Norris, Sinclair Lewis, and others of a slightly later date. No longer ago than May 1927, Mr. H.G. Wells in referring to Stephen Crane, cited him as not only the pioneer realist of his generation but also the most brilliant. In the Introduction to McTeague, Theodore Dreiser takes exception to Wells' designation of Crane as the "first" American realist. "That honor," says Dreiser, "if any American will admit it to be such, goes to Henry B. Fuller, of Chicago who as early as 1886 published With the Procession, as sound and agreeable a piece of American realism as that decade, or any since, has produced." In The New American Literature, Pattee gives 1895 as the correct date for With the Procession and 1893 as the date for The Cliff-Dwellers, Fuller's most realistic effort. If we accept these dates as correct both The Cliff-Dwellers and Main Travelled Roads,

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\* Some American Story Tellers (New York, 1911), p. 304.

by Hamlin Garland, a sound realistic study of rural life published in 1891, preceded Norris' efforts in the realistic field.

Crane in his impressionistic, Zola-like picturing of the Bowery in Maggie: a Girl of the Streets had succeeded in shocking at least a few American readers. Unable to find a publisher for a story so sordid and full of things about life "no decent person ought to know", Crane borrowed a thousand dollars of his brother and printed Maggie himself in 1892, disguising his own identity with the pseudonym Johnston Smith. No publication ever fell flatter. (The book was republished in 1896.) In 1895 The Red Badge of Courage was published to meet, as had Maggie, an indifferent public. Not until it was learned that England had gone into superlatives over the book did the American demand for it make it a best seller of the season.

According to Charles G. Norris, brother of the author of McTeague, that novel was conceived in 1891 and executed for the most part between 1892 and 1896. It was then almost coincident with The Red Badge of Courage, although McTeague was far more characteristic of the American scene than The Red Badge of Courage.

Crane, while furnishing an excellent picture of our own Civil War, was writing of War as an experience, and as for the value of The Red Badge of Courage, in the realistic

sense, in so far as the American scene is concerned, his presentation of war psychology was but little more vital for America than elsewhere. On the other hand, McTeague, is concerned with life in an American city, San Francisco, and furthermore, with the everyday life of a class of people whose very existence was conditioned by the physical characteristics of that particular city. Crane was concerned with the psychology of war in general while Norris' work was indigenous to America and California.

It seems entirely reasonable to admit Hamlin Garland as the pioneer realist in this country but, at the risk of being pedantic, I would quarrel with Mr. Dreiser for admitting Fuller into the group containing Garland, Crane, and Norris. I would place him rather, with James and Howells. Of course James's importance to American fiction suffered from his absence from the scene of action, but had he remained in America and a part of the vigorous American scene, the simple, direct action characteristic of this country might have become a part of his work instead of the indecision and vagueness which retards it in spite of the finish of his style. Howells, on the other hand, was thoroughly American, at once a New Englander and a New Yorker, and while he had no successors of his own literary stature, Fuller certainly deserves to be referred to as his follower and near equal.



Indeed, parts of both With the Procession and The Cliff Dwellers might have been written by Howells. The styles of the two men are similar; they ran to the same type of subject matter as well as method of treatment. With the Procession does for Chicago what The Rise of Silas Lapham does for Boston. Henry B. Fuller had, in The Chevalier of Pensieri-Bani, shown himself to be one of the finest literary craftsmen in the West. He was not by profession a novelist, but his keen interest in everything literary and artistic turned him to writing. He was a merciless critic of Chicago, and as a native of the city he was in a position to write knowingly. His aim was to picture Chicago as Hardy had pictured Wessex or Zola, Paris, but such a conception was beyond his powers as a novelist and viewed today his efforts seem tame and colorless. However in the nineties they were sensational. With the Procession, the last of Fuller's popular triumphs was even more caustic in its treatment of Chicago society and feminine ruthlessness than its predecessor had been but with it he ended all attempts at realism. Fuller's two realistic efforts and Howells' The Rise of Silas Lapham and The Modern Instance, while hardly belonging in the class of realistic writings of Garland, Crane, and Norris, did lay the foundation for a hardy literature that gave promise of being truly our own. The following passage is an example



of realism as employed by Fuller:

"He stood beside her at the open grave, and supported her there, too, as the rattling sand and gravel rained down upon the coffin. The grave had been set around with ever-green sprays, and the raw mound of earth beside it had been concealed in the same kindly fashion. But Jane, in a self-inflicted penance, would spare herself no pang; she clutched Brower's arm and stood there, motionless, until the grave had been filled in and the overplus of earth had been shaped above it." \*

Compare this with the following passage from McTeague:

"As he rose he caught Marcus's wrist in both his hands. He did not strike, he did not know what he was doing. His only idea was to batter the life out of the man before him, to crush and annihilate him upon the instant. Gripping his enemy in his enormous hands, hard and knotted, and covered with a stiff fell of yellow hair--the hands of the old-time car-boy--he swung him wide, as a hammer-thrower swings his hammer. Marcus's feet flipped from the ground, he spun through the air about McTeague as helpless as a bundle of clothes. All at once there was a sharp snap, almost like the report of a small pistol; then Marcus rolled over and over upon the ground as McTeague released his grip; his arm, the one the dentist had seized, bending suddenly, as though a third joint had formed between the wrist and elbow. The arm was broken." \*\*

Frank Norris, the author of McTeague, was one of the first and certainly the most stimulating and zestful of our early American naturalists. (Parrington defines naturalism as "pessimistic realism") He was born in Chicago in 1870. His father, a business man, first in New York and then in Chicago, had settled finally in California, having gone there for his health. Frank was eleven when the family moved from

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\* Henry B. Fuller, With the Procession (New York, 1886), p. 334.

\*\* Frank Norris, McTeague (Works, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1928), VIII, 201.

Chicago. From his mother, who at the time of her marriage, had been an actress of national fame, he inherited an artistic bent and a love of romance. At the age of seventeen he decided against further school routine and persuaded his father to take him to Paris to study art. The two years he spent there, roaming the Latin Quarter, learning French, devouring Zola and storing up impressions advanced him little as a painter but did succeed in making him conscious of the literary revolution in progress in Paris. Zola, Flaubert, Daudet, exponents all, of French realism--"naturalism", intrigued him and he began to scribble. Although a lover of Zola his first scribbings were romantic nothings. He was no longer interested in art and at his father's suggestion he returned home. In 1890 he entered the University of California but with no serious intention of becoming a scholar. He found little to encourage him in the English department of the University, and after three dull years he transferred to Harvard where he was admitted into the Senior class. There he found a more congenial atmosphere and revelled in his awakening powers. By that time he had become a confirmed follower of Zola. He became a realist, even a "naturalist" and under the stimulating influence of Professor L.E. Gates he produced most of the material which he later wove into Yandover and the Brute and McTeague. Upon

returning from Harvard with his degree he went into journalism and was sent by a San Francisco paper to South Africa to report the Boer War. He arrived on duty just in time to take part in the Jameson raid, to be captured and threatened with death, and then to fall a victim to African fever. It was this attack of African fever so nearly fatal at the time, which later resulted in his death. Upon returning to San Francisco he was given a place in the editorial offices of The Wave. Here many of his early stories and sketches were written. That was the real beginning of his literary career. He set out to become the American Zola--the literary leader in a new revolution. Truth was to be his creed. His views and ideas on novelists and novel writing were often arresting, but having formulated them they became his guiding principles from which he seldom deviated. Never able to forego romanticism he often discussed his realistic tendencies in romantic terms, as in the following:

"They would make the art of the novelist an aristocracy, a thing exclusive, to be guarded from contact with the vulgar, humdrum, bread-and-butter business of life, to be kept unspotted from the world, considering it the result of inspirations, of exaltations, of subtleties and--above all things--of refinement, a sort of velvet jacket affair, a studio hocus-pocus, a thing loved of women and aesthetes.

"What a folly! Of all the arts it is the most virile; of all the arts it will not, will not, will not flourish indoors. Dependent solely upon fidelity to life for existence, it must be practiced in the very heart's heart of life, on the street corner, in the market-place, not in the studios. God enlighten us! It is not an affair of women

and aesthetes, and the muse of American Fiction is no chaste, delicate, superfine mademoiselle of delicate poses and 'elegant' attitudinizations, but a robust, red-armed, 'bonne Femme', who rough-shoulders her way among men and among affairs, who finds a healthy pleasure in the jostlings of the mob and a hearty delight in the honest, rough-and-tumble, Anglo-Saxon give-and-take knockabout that for us means life. Choose her, instead of the sallow, pale-faced statue creature, with the foolish tablets and foolish, upturned eyes, and she will lead you as brave a march as ever drum tapped to. Stay at her elbow and obey her as she tells you to open your eyes and ears and heart, and as you go she will show things wonderful beyond wonder in this great, new, blessed country of ours, will show you a life untouched, untried, full of new blood and promise and vigour." \*

Norris was interested only in truth--truth free from all artificialities, free from prudishness and sentimentality. Then began his real work. First came his journalistic sketchings for The Wave. Soon he was conducting a weekly column, "Little Stories of the Pavements", and under this heading many of his short stories first saw the light of day. He began a novel for serialization in The Wave entitled, Moran of the Lady Letty. It was at once successful and caught the attention of the East. Very soon afterwards Norris accepted a position on the staff of McClure's.

Then ensued a period of feverish intensity with one novel following another with such rapidity that there was apparently not time to publish all of them. At any rate this is the manner in which Charles Norris accounts for the

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\* Frank Norris, Responsibilities of the Novelist (Works, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1928), VII, 158.



pushing aside of Vandover and the Brute, the greater parts of which were written in 1894 and 1895. It was completed in 1895, having been written almost simultaneously with McTeague, although the latter book was conceived and actually begun at an earlier date, and finished fully two years later. Moran of the Lady Letty, in reality Norris' third novel, was the first to appear in book form, being published in September 1898. Blix, and McTeague followed in 1899, and A Man's Woman in 1900. There seemed no room at the time for Vandover and the Brute. It was destined to have a queer history. In 1901 he published The Octopus, a Story of California. This was the first volume of a trilogy, "the epic of the wheat" which Norris had conceived on a grand scale. The Pit, a Story of Chicago, the second volume of the trilogy was published in 1902, and Norris' untimely death in the same year cut short the writing of The Wolf, which had been planned as the third volume. After the death of Norris the original manuscript of Vandover and the Brute, of which no copy had ever been made, had been packed away in a crate, and was in storage in a warehouse in San Francisco. Certain publishers learning of the existence of a completed novel from his pen desired to publish it. It was not known in which crate the manuscript had been packed away and while the manner of discovering which crate it was in was being



discussed, the warehouse was destroyed by the earthquake and the fire which followed. It was thought at the time that the crate containing the manuscript had been destroyed along with the other contents of the building which contained it, but about 1912 or 1913 a letter was received by Charles Norris informing him of the fact that certain furniture and boxes had been moved away from the warehouse just before the building caught fire. These had been transferred to a safer place and when a readjustment took place, it was discovered that a few of the crates had not been properly labelled and the contents of one or two of them failed to identify the owner. The manuscript of Vandover and the Brute was found, but it so happened that the signature of the title sheet had been cut out for the sake of the autograph. The matter remained unsettled for seven years until a junior member of the storage firm one day began to read the manuscript, recognized its author's style at once, and a complete identification resulted. So, at last, in 1914, twelve years after the death of its author, Vandover and the Brute was published under the direction of the author's brother Charles G. Norris.

Norris was a clever, versatile writer and an independent thinker and although we think of him as being primarily a realist he was at the same time incurably romantic and an ardent follower of Zola's methods in the use of ~~symbolism~~.

His works show an amazing ability to employ one method alone or to join the realistic approach, with an often protracted use of symbolism and constant excursions into romanticism. Moran of the Lady Letty, is quite frankly no more than an adventure story. The plot is pure romance although the treatment is sometimes realistic. The real significance of Moran lies far less in the plot than in the resourceful vigour of the author's language and his admirable accuracy where minor details are concerned. The following passages give excellent examples of the type of realism he employed.

"The name of the boat on which he found himself was the 'Bertha Millner.' She was a two-topmast, 28-ton keel schooner, 40 feet long, carrying a large spread of sail--main-sail, foresail, jib, flying-jib, two gaff-topsails, and a staysail. She was very dirty and smelt abominably of some kind of a rancid oil. Her crew were Chinamen; there was no mate." \*

"The anchor-chain, already taut, vibrated and then cranked thru the hawse holes as the hands rose and fell at the brakes. The anchor came home, dripping gray slime, a nor'west wind filled the schooner's sails, a strong ebb tide caught her underfoot." \*\*

Although not the best known of Norris' works, Moran contains many examples of the splendid type of writing which was to bring fame to him. Few authors indeed have been able to write more into a descriptive passage than Norris puts into the following:

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\* Frank Norris, Moran of the Lady Letty (Works, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1928), p. 188.

\*\* Ibid., p. 190.

"The wind blew violent and cold, the spray was flying like icy small-shot. Without intermission the 'Bertha Millner' rolled and plunged and heaved and sank. . . . Wilbur was drenched to the skin and sore in every joint, from being shunted from rail to mast and from mast to rail again. The cordage sang like harpstrings, the schooner's forefoot crushed down into the heaving water with a hissing like that of steam, blocks rattled, the Captain bellowed his orders, rope-ends flogged the hollow deck till it reverberated like a drum-head. The crossing of the bar was one long half hour of confusion and discordant sound." \*

McTeague is frankly brutally realistic and in the days of its first circulation, there was considerable complaint as to its vulgarity and the ignorance and brutality of its principals and their associates. "Those were the days of transcendental perfection (on paper) throughout America!" It is a study of heredity and environment, symbolizing the greed of gold and dominated throughout by the gigantic figure of the dull and brutish dentist, ox-like, ponderous and slow. It abounds with passages of horribleness such as the following one describing Trina's death:

"Trina lay unconscious, just as she had fallen under the last of McTeague's blows, her body twitching with an occasional hiccough that stirred the pool of blood in which she lay face downward. Toward morning she died with a rapid series of hiccoughs that sounded like a piece of clockwork running down." \*\*

Elix, offers a sharp contrast to McTeague. It is a sparkling little love story, clean and wholesome, the chronicle of an unconscious courtship between a young couple

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\* Norris, Moran of the Lady Letty, p. 192. .

\*\* Norris, McTeague, p. 328.

who begin by agreeing that they do not love each other and then make the dangerous experiment of trying to be simply and frankly good comrades. Blix more than any other of his books, is the story of Frank Norris himself--the story of his early manhood. He coined the word Blix himself to express the joy and freedom and friendship of youth, and these are the qualities he captured in the little book. He gives to Blix, Travis Bessemer, the qualities he found in his first love, the woman who became his wife. The book fairly bursts with romance and abounds with passages such as the following,--pretty, but extravagantly, almost foolishly sentimental:

"As ever, her round, strong neck was swathed high and tight in white satin; but between the topmost fold of the satin and the rose of one small ear-lobe was a little triangle of white skin, that was partly her neck and partly her cheek, and that Condry knew should be softer than down, smoother than satin, warm and sweet and redolent as new apples." \*

A Man's Woman, which ran serially in the San Francisco Chronicle and the New York Evening Sun has for its central figures an Arctic explorer, whose heart is divided between two passions, his love for a woman and his ambition to reach the North Pole; and a woman, "a man's woman", strong enough to subordinate her own love for him to the furtherance of that ambition. The story abounds in dramatic situations of

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\* Frank Norris, Blix (Works, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1928), p. 201.



an intensity sometimes bordering on the repellent. Evidently Norris plainly intended it for a "thriller". As a narrative it fairly bursts with energy and verve, but it is sometimes necessary for the author with his usual shrewdness to divert us from certain extravaganzas of coincidence by his special attention to technical detail.

As Norris gained experience as a novelist he ceased to be interested in romance and adventuring alone, and as he proceeded further with his experiments in realism his whole literary conception took on grand proportions. His literary plans became epic in their scope. He planned a trilogy that was to tell the story of the wheat and which was to exceed the continents in its bounds, while the trilogy treating the battle of Gettysburg which Norris is said to have had in mind was to be the epic of our Civil War. We can only conjecture as to how successful he would have been with the latter as he died before a line of it had been written. In the trilogy of the wheat Norris outlined his plan in the Preface to The Octopus as follows:

"The Trilogy of the Epic of the Wheat will include the following novels; The Octopus, a Story of California; the Pit, a Story of Chicago; The Wolf, a Story of Europe. The first novel, The Octopus, deals with the war between the wheat grower and the Railroad Trust; the second, The Pit, will be the fictitious narrative of a 'deal' in the Chicago wheat pit; while the third, The Wolf, will probably have for its pivotal episode the relieving of a famine in an Old World community."



The Wolf is said to have been partially planned by Norris but his early death prevented the actual writing of it.

The Octopus, is a story of the great open spaces, of the great wheat valleys of California and of the evils brought into farm life by the railroad. It is epic in its breadth and it is quite evident that Norris allowed himself to be carried away by the grandness of his theme. Rolling acres of golden ripe grain, a fertile land producing to excess--and then the tragedy wrought by the Southern Pacific Railroad--man's self-made machinery of economic depression. In choosing this theme Norris not only hit upon a subject pertinent and much discussed, but also one of which the facts were well known and of a nature to appeal to his own imagination. Indeed, herein lies a part of the weakness of the treatment. Norris allows his sympathies to be aroused and he becomes the propagandist--the very thing he had criticized in Zola.

"Unskillfully treated, the story may dwindle down and degenerate into mere special pleading, and the novelist becomes a polemicist, a pamphleteer, forgetting that although his first consideration is to prove his case, his means must be living human beings, not statistics, and that his tools are not figures, but pictures of life as he sees it.

"Consider the reverse--Fecondite, for instance. The purpose for which Zola wrote the book ran away with him. He really did care more for the depopulation of France than he

did for his work. Result--sermons on the fruitfulness of women, special pleading, a farrago of dry, dull incidents, overburdened and collapsing under the weight of a theme that should have intruded only indirectly." \*

It is true that Norris never degenerates into the mere "pamphleteer", but on the other hand he is never quite able to achieve the amoral attitude. He concerned himself more and more with ethical values as is increasingly evident in The Octopus and The Pit. The Octopus contains some of Norris' best work as well as some of his very poorest. More than ever symbolism intrigued him and his protracted use of it is often times a source of weakness rather than of strength. Any mention of the railroad was the signal for a symbolistic passage such as this:

"It was as though the State had been sucked white and colourless, and against this pallid background the red arteries of the monster stood out, swollen with life-blood, reaching out to infinity, gorged to bursting; and excrescence, a gigantic parasite fattening upon the life-blood of an entire commonwealth." \*\*

And the wheat too always called for symbolism.

"You are dealing with forces, young man, when you speak of Wheat, and the Railroads, not with men. There is the Wheat, the supply. It must be carried to feed the People. There is the demand. The Wheat is one force, the Railroad another, and there is the law that governs them--supply and demand. Men have only little to do in the whole business." \*\*\*

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\* Norris, Responsibilities of the Novelist, p. 22

\*\* Frank Norris, The Octopus (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1909), p. 289.

\*\*\* Ibid., p. 576.

"Men were naught, death was naught, life was naught; FORCE only existed--FORCE that brought men into the world, FORCE that crowded them out of it to make way for the succeeding generations, FORCE that made the wheat grow, FORCE that garnered it from the soil to give place to the succeeding crop." \*

Whether or not Norris' rapid rate of turning out fiction was telling on the quality of his output or whether his constant fight to overcome the opposition to realism--an opposition which had gradually given way before the onslaught of the journalistic realists, had weakened his powers, the fact remains that his literary conception was undergoing a change. Sentimental passages such as the following could never reflect credit on a man of Norris' caliber:

"Around her beautiful neck, sloping to her shoulders with full, graceful curves, Love lay encircled like a necklace--Love that was beyond words, sweet, breathed from her parted lips. From her white, large arms downward to her pink finger-tips--Love, an invisible electric fluid, disengaged itself, subtle, alluring. In the velvety huskiness of her voice, Love vibrated like a note of unknown music." \*\*

And again, the following is a "tear-wringer" of the Hollywood variety:

"My Gott, oh, I go crazy bratty soon, I guess. I cen't hellup you. I can't ged you noddings to eat, noddings, noddings. Hilda, we gowun to die togedder. Put der arms around me, soh, tighd, leddle babby. We gowun to die,

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\* Norris, The Octopus, p. 634.

\*\* Ibid., p. 497.

we gowun to vind Popper. We aindt gowun to be hungry eny more." \*

Much less often than in McTeague and Vandover and the Brute does Norris fall into the stark realism of his earlier works. In The Octopus, realism such as the following is the exception rather than the rule:

"One leg of his trousers was soaked through and through with blood. His eyes were half-closed, and with the regularity of a machine the eyeballs twitched and twitched. His face was so white that it made his yellow hair look brown, while from his opened mouth there issued that loud and terrible sound of guttering, rasping, laboured breathing that gagged and choked and gurgled with every inhalation." \*\*

But after all, one soon forgets all this. The tremendous thesis of the trilogy asserts itself and Norris wields his usual power. The episodes are told with a gripping, compelling emotion--the plunge of the Pacific fast train through the flock of sheep on the track; the chase of the deposed engineer, Dyke; the death of the railroad representative, Behrman, drowned in the wheat from his own elevator. And F.L. Pattee asks, "What novel written in America before 1900 comes nearer being the 'great American novel' than The Octopus?"

Of all Norris' fiction, The Pit is perhaps the most conventional. The choice of subject doubtless rendered the conventional treatment a necessity, but like Garland's,

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\* Norris, The Octopus, p. 610.

\*\* Ibid., pp. 527-528.



Norris' rebellion seems to have failed. He was seemingly unable to sustain the mood that had evolved McTeague and Vandover. The Pit is the story of a wheat "deal" in the Chicago wheat pit. Curtis Jadwin, a successful middle-aged business man--one who never speculates, marries Laura Dearborn. In his desire to accumulate a huge fortune for Laura, Jadwin starts to speculate on the wheat market. He is successful and the speculative fever gradually masters him to the exclusion of everything else, even interest in his beautiful young wife. Finally Jadwin succeeds in "cornering" the wheat market, a feat seldom accomplished but the collapse of the market brings financial ruin to him and to his friends. He realizes that his obsession with manipulating the market has brought about the death of his best friend, Charley Cressler, the ruination of his own health, the breaking up of his home and worst of all he almost loses his wife to the artist, Sheldon Corthell.

At no point does The Pit ever reflect great credit on Norris. Its characters are all commonplace, its situations trite and only some traces of the author's earlier brilliant style save it from utter commonness. There is no grandness of either theme or treatment and these are the two elements without which Norris is not Norris. In The New American Literature, Pattee says of him:



"With Norris however, one is inclined to feel that the end came not too soon if he was to be reckoned among the leaders of his period. From the moment he reached New York City more and more in his work are to be found symptoms of surrender. 'New York,' Ambrose Bierce once wrote, 'is cocaine, opium, hashish.'"

Pattee cites Norris' own story Dying Fires, as emblematic of his career as an author. Young Overbeck, the central figure of the story, Pattee likens to Norris himself, living vitally in the great West, knowing and understanding the life of the mountains, of the plains, of hardships and rough-and-tumble existence.

"This life, tumultuous, headstrong, vivid in color, vigorous in action, was bound together by the railroad, which not only made a single community out of all that part of the east slope of the Sierras's foothills, but contributed its own life as well--the life of oilers, engineers, switchmen, eatinghouses, waitresses and cashiers, "lady" operators, conductors." \*

This was the type of thing young Overbeck knew about and it was the kind of thing he could write about but sophistication came upon him when he moved to New York.

"By rapid degrees young Overbeck caught the lingo of the third-raters. He could talk about 'tendencies' and the 'influence of reactions'. . . . An anticlimax was the one unforgivable sin under heaven. A mixed metaphor made him wince, and a split infinitive hurt him like a blow." \*

But as Overbeck's sophistication increased his powers decreased. He finished his novel but its end was a decrescendo effect--art was there but life had departed.

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\* Frank Norris, "Dying Fires," from The Third Circle and Other Stories (New York: John Lane Co., 1909).

"The golden apples, that had been his for the stretching of the hand, he had flung from him. Tricked, trapped, exploited, he had prostituted the great good thing that had been his by right divine, for the privilege of eating husks with swine." \*

To be sure, Norris suffered no such loss of power as did young Overbeck but his progress was toward rather than away from conventionality. Indeed, The Pit resembles both in theme and treatment, With the Procession and the Rise of Silas Lapham, much more than it does Norris' early novels of adventure or the naturalistic McTeague and Vandover.

Vandover and the Brute is no less revolting in its realism than McTeague. Indeed there is ample evidence that these two novels were conceived in the same period. They represent Norris' contribution to Naturalism. The theme of Vandover is revealed in the title. It is a story of the warring of the two natures of man. In the end the Brute predominates, till the naked man, completely reverted, is on all fours, padding up and down his room. It is a study in will. Vandover, weak, yielding, creature of impulse, might have willed himself into an environment which would have allowed him to develop his evident artistic talent; instead he allows the sensual in his nature to predominate and sinks lower and lower. No author has pictured more horribly the complete degeneration of a character than

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\* Frank Norris, "Dying Fires," from The Third Circle and Other Stories (New York: John Lane Co., 1909).

Morris in dealing with Vandover. The three scenes described in the following passages, once read can never be forgotten:

"The game ended in a quarrel, Vandover, very drunk, and exasperated at his ill luck accusing his friend Toedt, the rancher, of cheating. Toedt kicked him in the stomach and made him abominably sick. Then they went away and left Vandover alone in the little dirty room, racked with nausea, very drunk, fallen forward upon the table crying into his folded arms. After a little he went to sleep, but the nausea continued nevertheless, and in a few moments he gagged and vomited. He never moved. He was too drunk to wake. His hands and his coat-sleeves, the table all about him, were foul beyond words, but he slept on in the midst of it all, inert, stupefied, a great swarm of flies buzzing about his head and face." \*

"Vandover was down in the basement filling a barrel with the odds and ends of rubbish left by the previous tenants; broken bottles, old corsets, bones, rusty bed-springs. The dead hen he had taken out first of all, carrying it by one leg. It was a gruesome horror, partly eaten by rats, swollen, abnormally heavy, one side flattened from lying so long upon the floor." \*\*

"The sink pipes were so close above him that he was obliged to crouch lower and lower; at length he lay flat upon his stomach. Prone in the filth under the sink, in the sour water, the grease, the refuse, he groped about with his hand searching for the something gray that the burnisher's wife had seen. He found it and drew it out. It was an old hambone covered with a greenish fuzz." \*\*\*

It is easy to perceive after reading the novel, how the story ran away from its author. Parrington refers to it as, "An unfinished work--but a huge and terrible torso". The whole conception of the book is too big. The dominant

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\* Frank Morris, Vandover and the Brute (Works, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Co., 1928), p. 297.

\*\* Ibid., p. 304.

\*\*\* Ibid., p. 308.

idea evidently possessed the author to the exclusion of the less important details of the plot. The influence of Zola is evident throughout, as is also Norris' utter sincerity. Indeed there is no better example than Vandover, of what Norris had in mind when he wrote years later in an essay entitled, The True Reward of the Novelist, "Once more we halt upon the great word--sincerity, sincerity, and again sincerity. Let the writer attack his. . . .novel with sincerity and he cannot then go wrong. . . . His public may be small, perhaps, but he will have the better reward of the knowledge of a thing well done."

Almost never did Norris write less than brilliantly and here he covers the deficiencies of a weak plot with a writing style and craftsmanship which makes the reader forget all else. He was a man who had a vast appreciation for the dynamic force of words and he seemed always able to bend them to his own uses. He saw life as it was in his day, earnest and pulsating, and he courageously regarded the function of the novel as something higher than a mere pastime for the casual reader. Much of his independence is doubtless due to his journalistic training and the experiences incidental to it. Of the writers who helped to form him, Kipling is one of the most obvious. His literary creed was of course realism but paradoxical as it may seem



there is an obstinate streak of romanticism running thru much of his work. This seems to be his besetting sin, so to speak. As a disciple of Zola and de Maupassant, he adheres doggedly to the blunt truth and at times is brutally outspoken, never softening a thought where he conceives it as essential to the fidelity of his picture. But occasionally this clear visioned writer will perversely sacrifice not only truth but even verisimilitude for the sake of a melodramatic stage effect, even at the risk of "an anticlimax worthy of Dickens", as Mr. Howells has characterized the closing scene in McTeague wherein McTeague finds himself handcuffed to the dead Marcus, stranded, alone, waterless, in the alkali flats of Death Valley. However, in spite of his romantic streak Norris is a realist by instinct as well as by creed, but like Zola he uses realism with a half-unconscious symbolism underlying it. For instance the symbol in McTeague is the spirit of greed represented by gold. We find him working this symbolistic device almost threadbare. We find it first in the lottery prize which Trina wins; later in the huge gilded tooth so dear to the dentist's heart; in the Jew, Zerkow, "the Man with the Rake, groping hourly in the muck heap of the city for gold, for gold, for gold;" in the visionary gold dishes of the half-mad Maria Macapa's fancy; and finally in the gold coins over which Trina gloated, and which finally lured McTeague

and his enemy Marcus to their doom in the desert. Again and again in The Octopus, wherein Norris resorted more and more to symbolism, the railroads are symbolized as huge blood-sucking monsters devouring the country.

"Between them and the vision, between the fecund San Joaquin reeking with fruitfulness, and the millions of Asia crowding toward the verge of starvation, lay the iron-hearted monster of steel and steam, implacable, insatiable, huge--its entrails gorged with the life-blood that it sucked from an entire commonwealth, its ever hungry maw glutted with the harvests that should have fed the famished bellies of the whole world of the Orient." \*

Norris showed but little interest in psychological problems--in introspective men and neurotic women, the products of our modern complex civilization. Usually his characters are too simple, too direct, too primitive, to allow for the psychological treatment which later became so popular as a novelistic method. Few if any of his characters are bothered with over-refinement of sentiment. They are for the most part normal beings with a healthy animality about them, rugged and rough men and dauntless, self-sufficient, women. His favorite male characters are most often cast in a giant mould, big of bone and strong of sinew, and his women are often shockingly large and masculine. In dealing with women it was Norris' delight to dwell mainly on physical attributes. He apparently never wearied of describing their features, the colour of their hair and

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\* Norris, The Octopus, p. 322.

eyes and never did he overlook "the odour of their neck and arms, their whole sweet personality". When he writes of women he is hopelessly romantic, even sentimental. Nothing of Dreiser about Morris where femininity is concerned! Women's hair seems to fascinate him almost to the point of becoming an obsession. He dwells upon it constantly, lingeringly; it is the stock charm of all his heroines from Moran to Trina.

"She was as trig and trim and crisp as a crack yacht; not a pin was loose, not a seam that did not fall in its precise right line; and with every movement there emanated from her a barely perceptible delicious feminine odour--an odour that was in part perfume, but mostly a subtle, vague smell charming beyond words, that came from her hair, her neck her arms--her whole sweet personality." \*

Moran Sternerson in Moran of the Lady Letty has "an enormous mane of rye-coloured hair". Travis Bessemer, in Blix has yellow hair, "not golden nor flaxen, but plain honest yellow". Lloyd Searight in A Man's Woman has auburn hair, "a veritable glory; a dull red flame, that bore back from her face in one grand, solid roll, dull red like copper or old bronze, thick, heavy, almost gorgeous in its sombre radiance". Delicate Trina McTeague has "heaps and heaps of blue-black coils and braids, a royal crown of swarthy bands, a veritable sable tiara, heavy abundant, odorous". It is not alone the scent of feminine hair and

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\* Morris, Blix, p. 101.

neck and arms on which Morris loves to dwell; smells of all sorts seem to intrigue him in Elly. The Chinese quarter suggests "sandalwood, punk, incense, oil and the smell of mysterious cookery". McTeague's dental parlours exhale "a mingled odour of bedding, creosote and ether", and in A Man's Woman a glimpse into Bennett's tent in the Arctic gives this impression:

"The tent was full of foul smells; the smell of drugs and of mouldy gunpowder, the smell of dirty rags, of unwashed bodies, the smell of stale smoke, of scorching seal-skin, of soaked and rattling canvas that exhaled from the tent cover--every smell but that of food."

Morris is never as convincing as when he is depicting the physical side of life, the smells and sounds and tastes of the external world around us. He seems to recognize the important part that the senses still play in our modern social life, and delights in pointing out that in spite of our boasted civilization man is still very near the primitive stage. He loves to face primitive forces in either man or nature and his greatest strength doubtless lies in depicting life, man, and nature on a gigantic scale. He has turned instinctively to the wildest of regions, the alkali waste of Death Valley, where "the very shadows shrank away, hiding under sage bushes"; the limitless desolation of the Arctic regions where "the illimitable waste of land, rugged, grey, harsh, snow and ice and rock, rock and ice



and snow, stretched away there under the sombre sky forever and forever"; and he delights in the storm tossed expanse of a foaming sea where "the wind blew violent and cold, the spray was flying like icy small-shot." On the other hand he gives further proof of the greatness of his talents in his ability to grasp and depict almost equally well the physiognomy of a street or of a room, so as to give you the illusion that you must yourself have known them well in some unremembered period of the past. The Bessemer's stiff little parlour in Blix, McTeague's dental rooms with the stone pug-dog, the steel engraving, and the bird in its gilded cage are good examples. His description of a hotel room which appearing first as a separate sketch was later incorporated into Vandover and the Brute renders an acute impression on the reader almost haunting in its intensity and persistence.

"But the interior of the room presented the usual dreary aspect of the hotel bedroom--cheerless, lamentable. The walls were white-washed and bare of pictures or ornaments, and the floor was covered with a dull red carpet. The furniture was a 'set', all the pieces having a family resemblance. On entering, one saw the bed standing against the right-hand wall, a huge double bed with the name of the hotel on the corners of its spread and pillow cases. In the exact center of the room underneath the gas fixture was the center-table, and upon it a pitcher of ice-water. The blank, white monotony of one side of the room was glared upon by the grate and mantelpiece, iron, painted black, while on the mantelpiece itself stood a little porcelain matchesafe, with ribbed sides in the form of a truncated cone. Precisely opposite the chimney was the bureau,

flanked on one side by the door of the closet, and on the other in the corner of the room by the stationary washstand with its new cake of soap and its three clean glossy towels. On the wall to the left of the door was the electric bell and the directions for using it, and tacked upon the door itself a card as to the hours for meals, the rules of the hotel and the extract of the code defining the liabilities of innkeepers, all printed in bright red. Everything was clean, defiantly, aggressively, clean, and there was a clean smell of new soap in the air.

"But the room was bare of any personality. Of the hundreds who had lived there, perhaps suffered and died there, not a trace, not a suggestion remained; their different characters had not left the least impress upon its air or appearance. Only a few hairpins were scattered on the bottom of one of the bureau drawers, and two forgotten medicine bottles still remained upon the top shelf of the closet." \*

It is difficult to say exactly how many years the New England school dominated the entire range of American literary output. Obviously the years of its domination were too many and the net result as far as fiction was concerned was a set of strictures limiting, polishing, and refining it to, and beyond the point of lifelessness. Fiction was narrowed down to a veritable cult to be practiced by the few, the aesthetes, the literary aristocracy and in the hands of these elect "literature" was allowed to suffocate "life". In truth the novel should teach us to see life, but under the New England influence life was observed from the studio window rather than in the highways and byways of the world. Novels were filled with laboratory experiments

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\* Norris, Vandover and the Brute, pp. 236-237.

in emotion, and their pages were stuffed with artificial humans with consciences, all busy and heated with artificial activities and given to "emoting" upon the slightest pretext. James certainly was not free from such weaknesses. Then too, his style hampered him--it was too fine for handling the coarsenesses of common, everyday life. Howells was aloof--too much the onlooker--never a part of the struggling mass of "bread-hunters". Whitman and Whitman alone was the Godfather of all that was virile in the new literature movement. He it was who cried out for hard words, harsh words, great, crude words to fit the emotions of the great "unwashed". Polite convention was poison to him. To Whitman, the people came out of the dirt, and everything came out of the people--not educated people, just people. Life was raw, emotions were crude and unrestrained; good and bad existed side by side, and fine words and polished phrases could not tell the whole tale. Now, it is evident that the new literary leader could not come from the New England circle. The New Man must be free from inhibitions, restraints, polite literary practices, and above all, any sense of obligation toward the past. Perhaps Frank Norris came as near to fulfilling the requirements of a leader as anyone we could mention. He was an innovator by training as well as by temperament. He was free from the New England

"taint" and he was unlocalized. From the very first he considered himself as a leader--a leader in the search for Truth. Sincerity and Truth were the twin foundations of his creed.

"And when the last page is written and the ink crusts on the pen point and the hungry presses go clashing after another writer, the 'new man' and the new fashion of the hour, he (the sincere author) will think of the grim, long grind, of the years of his life that he has put behind him and of his work that he has built up volume by volume, sincere work, telling the truth as he saw it, independent of fashion and the gallery gods, holding to these with grip-ped hands and shut teeth--he will think of all this, then, and he will be able to say: 'I never truckled; I never took off the hat to Fashion and held it out for pennies. By God! I told them the truth. They liked it or they didn't like it. What had that to do with me? I told them the truth; I knew it for the truth then, and I know it for the truth now.' And that is his reward--the best that a man may know; the only one worth the striving for." \*

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\* Frank Norris, Essay, The True Reward of the Novelist.



## FRANK MORRIS, 1870-1902

## Reading List

- Yvernelle (romantic narrative poem), 1892  
 Moran of the Lady Letty, 1898  
 Blix, 1899  
 McTeague, a Story of San Francisco, 1899  
 A Man's Woman, 1900  
 The Octopus, a Story of California, 1901  
 The Pit, a Story of Chicago, 1902  
 The Responsibilities of the Novelist and other Literary  
 Essays, 1903  
 A Deal in Wheat and Other Stories, 1903  
 The Joyous Miracle, 1906  
 The Third Circle, 1909  
 Vandover and the Brute, 1914  
 Collected Writings, 1928

In 1903 the complete works of Frank Morris were published in the Golden Gate Edition. This edition included only the works through Responsibilities of the Novelist. From time to time after this so-called "complete edition" the remaining volumes were published. In 1928 Doubleday, Doran and Company published a complete edition containing everything previously published and in addition the volume Collected Writings.

## Additional Reading List

The Red Badge of Courage	Stephen Crane
With the Procession	Henry B. Fuller
The Cliff Dwellers	Henry B. Fuller
Main Travelled Roads	Hamlin Garland
Son of the Middle Border	" "
Daughter of the Middle Border	" "
Trail Makers of the Middle Border	" "
The Long Trail	" "
The Rise of Silas Lapham	William D. Howells

PART III

STEPHEN CRANE AND IMAGISM

## STEPHEN CRANE

The first Stephen Crane in America is said to have come to Massachusetts from England in 1635. On November 1, 1871, the Stephen Crane of literary fame made his appearance as the fourteenth and last child of Jonathan Townly Crane, D.D. The male ancestors of the Crane family had been soldiers and clergymen and an earlier Stephen had signed the Declaration. Was it any wonder that Stephen was an honored name in the Crane family? And what more natural than that it should be bestowed upon the youngest of the clergyman's family. There were eight older children living when Stephen was born, and it is not surprising that he became the pet of the family. As a youngster, he was not strong, but frail and rather quiet. The Crane family had long been attached to the state of New Jersey, and when in 1874 Dr. Crane's time was up at the church in Newark, where Stephen had been born, it was only natural that the family should desire to remain in its beloved state. As a consequence the family moved to Bloomington N.J., on the Raritan river and in 1876 they again moved, this time to Patterson. In 1879 Dr. Crane became the Methodist minister in Port Jervis just over the border in New York state and it was in Port Jervis that Stephen first started to school, at the age of eight. His



delicate health had up until that time kept him from attending school, but once started he made rapid progress through the first two grades, spurred on as he was, by the humiliation of being in a class of five and six year old "infants" as he called them. Jonathan Crane died while Stephen was still a little lad and the memory of his father's funeral and the feel of the cold silver handle of the coffin made an impression of horror on the boy's mind which he never completely succeeded in throwing off. In his own words: "We tell kids that heaven is just across the gaping grave and all that bosh and then scare them to glue with flowers and white sheets and hymns. We ought to be crucified for it! . . . . I have forgotten nothing about this, not a damned iota, not a shred."

In 1883 Mrs. Crane moved the remaining part of her family to Asbury Park, New Jersey. Stephen's reading tastes at that time ran to stories of war and adventure, and his brother Edmund fed the flame of his desire with volume after volume of Harry Castleman's "Frank" series. These were tales about a boy in the War, written by Castleman especially for boys. It seems that Mary Crane was herself somewhat literary, and after the death of her husband and her removal to Asbury Park she wrote articles for Methodist papers and reported Asbury Park local news for a New York

and a Philadelphia paper. She was a very religious and public spirited woman, and the last years of her life were stimulated by her active participation in the fight to prohibit the sale of alcohol to children in New Jersey. She was not, as she has sometimes been pictured, a religious fanatic.

Stephen's interest centered itself on words and baseball. At fourteen he had difficulties with his algebra at school, but his memory of words was little short of phenomenal. He shared the secret ambitions of most adventurous red-blooded schoolboys in their middle teens--he wanted to be a professional ball-player and strongly desired to enlist in the army. His ability as a ball-player made him eminent in the Hudson River Institute at Claverack New York, which he attended from February 1887 through the spring of 1888. During the summer of 1888 he worked for his brother, Townley, collecting news items for Townley's press bureau. In 1890 he spent two terms at Lafayette College where he was remembered as a rather pleasant lad, more interested in baseball and boxing than in academic pursuits. In 1891 Townley Crane secured for his young brother a job as correspondent to the New York Tribune in the town of Syracuse, where Stephen entered Syracuse University. He entered as an engineering student but soon changed to "belles lettres."

It seems his desire was to become a writer but his interest in baseball had never flagged and he played shortstop on the college team. And more than that, he was elected its captain. His mother had died just previous to this time and Stephen was "on his own". All in all he found college too confining and the police court much more interesting. Without finishing his course he left Syracuse University in June 1891--done forever with things academic. Someone has said of his stay at Syracuse: "He soon proved himself to be unstudious, brilliant, volatile, entertaining, and giftedly profane. He was at that time in years about nineteen and in worldly experience about eighty-seven." \*

The autumn of 1891 found Crane living with his brother Edmund at Lakeview, New Jersey, but making trips into New York almost daily with the hope of finding a place on the New York Herald. Daytime found him lounging in some obscure out-of-the-way Bowery hang-out while night after night he called on a Miss Helen Trent, a beautiful but unsuccessful contralto. Perhaps he fell in love with her after the fashion of a nineteen year old--at least the announcement of her approaching marriage to a young doctor came as a severe blow to the first romance of his life. Crane did obtain a

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\*Practically all of the material for this short sketch of the early life of Stephen Crane was taken from Stephen Crane, by Thomas Beer.

place as a reporter on the New York Herald and January 1892 found him sharing a room with some young actor on East 23rd Street. His job was reporting but his chief interest in life was the Bowery which had become one of the "show places" of the city. New York had grown almost proud of this district of tawdry streets, tough saloons and commercialized vice. The name "Bowery" had come to be inclusive; it signified a district, a social class, a certain dialect and in reality, incredible debauchery. To Crane the Bowery was the only interesting place in New York and he was going to write a book about it, and show how its people lived and what they thought. Nobody up until that time had written anything sincere about it or its people. The Bowery was supposed to be funny. Comedians aped its dress and speech, but no one seemed to take it seriously. So, the first fruit of Crane's life in New York was Maggie: a Girl of the Streets. It is said he showed the manuscript, then nameless and with the characters also nameless, to his boyhood friend Wallis McHarg with the explanation that he had written it in two days before Christmas 1891. It struck McHarg as queer that no character in the story had a name and the bald story of a girl seduced by a bartender and the use of "God Damn!" appealed to him as impossibly accurate. McHarg was right when he predicted that nobody would print such a story. By



February Stephen had introduced some names into the story and his brother William had given it a name which stuck-- Maggie: a Girl of the Streets. The same month saw Stephen fired from the Herald. His short term with the Herald was an accurate prophecy of his whole career as a journalist. He could write but he could not report. What is more he would not even try to report. Richard Watson Gilder editor of The Century turned down Maggie for that magazine on March 23, 1892, and for a time thereafter the manuscript roamed the offices of various magazines. Stephen in this interim became a free-lance writer, sending sketches to the New York Tribune and helping his brother Townley gather notes for his news bureau. In November he borrowed a thousand dollars from his brother William, went into the City, signed a statement that he was twenty-one years old, and left the revised manuscript of Maggie in the hands of a firm of religious and medical printers for printing. The name of this firm, the original printers of this American forerunner of naturalism seems to be lost forever. Not even Crane's name appeared on the ugly yellow paper cover of the book, but instead, the pseudonym "Johnston Smith", as Crane said, "the stupidest name in the world." The bill for printing eleven hundred copies was \$869 and the book was put on sale at "50 cents" according to the note in the right hand upper corner of the

cover. The book did not make a hit, and even booksellers refused to take copies. Brentano's are said to have taken twelve copies and returned all but two of them. Book buyers took no notice of Maggie, and the press either ignored or condemned the author. Some of the paper covered copies went to light a fire, and Stephen went into a period of self-imposed semi-starvation. (The irony--in 1930 a presentation copy of Maggie sold for \$3700 and an ordinary first edition of the paper covered volume brings \$2100.) He could have stayed with William or Edmund until he had somehow established himself, but his family knew little of his difficulties, and his independence took a bent somewhat savage in its self-punishment. These were gloomy days in the old building of the Art Students' League where Crane lived with a group of art students. As Hamlin Garland said, "They slept on the floor, dined on buns and sardines and painted on towels and wrapping paper for lack of canvas, 'all dreaming blood-red dreams of fame.'"

About this time Crane met Hamlin Garland who at once recognized his talent, loaned him a little money, fed him, and above all encouraged him. On Garland's suggestion a copy of Maggie was sent to Howells and through the help of Garland, Crane sold a sketch or two. Howells, it seems, was pleased with Maggie and endeavored to get Henry Harper to

have the book reprinted in a more becoming manner. Howells invited Crane to dine with him and introduced him to the other guests with, "Here is a writer who has sprung into life fully armed." Such praise from Howells was more than food and drink to the young realist. It is said that after the dinner was over Howells read some of Emily Dickinson's poems aloud, introducing them to Crane for the first time. They became the inspiration for Crane's first volume of verse, Black Riders and Other Lines. The combined efforts of Howells, Garland and Crane did not aid the sale of Maggie, although in May 1893 there was a possibility that the Philadelphia Press might take it as a serial. The prospect died on its feet and with it Crane's hope of receiving one hundred dollars for the serial rights. In The Arena for June 1893, Hamlin Garland wrote what was probably the first review of Maggie:

"It is a story which deals with vice and poverty and crime--not out of curiosity--not out of salaciousness--but because of a distinct art-impulse to utter in truthful phrase a certain rebellious cry. It is the voice of the slums. The young author, Stephen Crane, is a native of New York City and has grown up in the very scenes he has described. His book is the most truthful and the most unhackneyed story of the slums I have ever read--fragment though it is. It has no conventional phrases. It gives the dialect of the people as I have never before seen it written, crisp, direct, terse. It is another locality finding voice. Mr. Crane is but twenty-one years of age."

On Howells' suggestion, copies of the paper bound volume were sent to Dr. Parkhurst and another minister who was

supposed to be interested in conditions in the slums. No replies were received from either of these honored gentlemen. A copy of Maggie addressed to Rev. Thomas Dixon has been preserved and these words are to be found written across the ugly yellow cover: "It is inevitable that this book will greatly shock you, but continue, pray, with great courage to the end, for it tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in this world and often shapes lives regardlessly. If one could prove that theory, one would make room in heaven for all sorts of souls (notably an occasional street girl) who are not confidently expected to be there by many people."

The conception of heaven and hell entertained by the churchmen and good folk of 1893 always excited a great scorn in Crane, a scorn which he was always more than willing to put into words. More than a little of it crept into Maggie as can be seen from the following passages:

"A reader of the words of wind demons might have been able to see the portions of a dialogue pass to and fro between the exhorter and his hearers.

'You are Damned,' said the preacher. And the reader of sounds might have seen the reply go forth from the ragged people: 'Where's our soup?'" \*

"Suddenly she (Maggie) came upon a stout gentleman in a silk hat and a chaste black coat, whose decorous row of buttons reached from his chin to his knees. The girl had heard of the grace of God and she decided to approach this

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\* Stephen Crane, Maggie: a Girl of the Streets (1st ed.; New York: Appleton and Co., 1896) p. 29.



man.

"His beaming, chubby face was a picture of benevolence and kind heartedness. His eyes shone good will.

"But as the girl timidly accosted him, he made a convulsive movement and saved his respectability by a vigorous side step. He did not risk it to save a soul. For how was he to know that there was a soul before him that needed saving?" \*

These semi-poetic conceptions do nothing to hide the irony and bitter scorn in the author's mind, indeed, if anything they emphasize it.

A note to a Mrs. Armstrong dated April 2, 1893, from whom he borrowed a copy of Battler and Leaders of the Civil War, contains the first intimation of Crane's active interest in a war story. In his own words: "I have spent ten nights writing a story of the War on my own responsibility, but I am not sure that my facts are real, and the books wont tell me what I want to know, so I must do it all over again, I guess."

June found Stephen again at Edmund's house and we hear of his reading bits of his War manuscript which he had christened The Red Badge of Courage to Edmund. By September, Stephen was back in New York with the manuscript of most of the Red Badge in his valise. He dropped in on Frederick Gordon in the Art Students' League building, was violently ill for more than a week and ended by staying on with Gordon.

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\* Stephen Crane, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (1st ed.; New York: Appleton and Co., 1896) pp. 137-138.

In February 1894 Crane took the manuscript of The Red Badge of Courage to a typist to be copied. Thirty dollars was the typist's charge but the author was able to pay but fifteen, and had to leave half of the manuscript until he was able to pay the balance. He recited his troubles to Hamlin Garland who loaned him the necessary fifteen dollars to free the last half of Red Badge. By February 24, Crane had sold the serial rights to The Red Badge of Courage to Irving Bacheller's syndicate for less than a hundred dollars.

The few short, erratic letters of Crane still in existence fail to give a very definite picture of his activities during the next year or two. Bacheller sent him west to write some sketches for the Bacheller syndicate with the provision that he should end up in Mexico. At the time Crane had three immediate wishes. He wanted to see a cowboy ride, he wanted to see the Mississippi and he wanted to be in a real western blizzard. He seems to have attained all his queer wishes on this trip, and in addition, while changing trains at some dreary junction town he came upon a hotel of a dreadful blue that fascinated him. The sight of this hotel and a blizzard he experienced in Lincoln, Nebraska, in February, furnished the name and setting for the short story The Blue Hotel, which he wrote sometime later. He did get into Mexico and also out again in something of a hurry with

the fashionable bandit Ramon Colorado in pursuit, too close behind for complete comfort. This exploit furnished the emotional inspiration for Horses-One Dash.

Crane was exceedingly careless about dates and to this trait may be attributed the uncertainty over the date of his little book of poems, Black Riders and Other Lines. It seems fairly certain that the first lines were written after the first of April, 1893. The whole manuscript was lost twice, once by Crane himself and once by a friend, but in 1894 it was sold to Copeland and Day, publishers, of Boston and issued by them in a clever cover, in April, 1895. Most of the reviews set the author down as slightly insane. Unrhymed, cadenced verse is no new thing to us, and indeed it can hardly be said that it was new to Crane's time. Readers had been offered the unrhymed sonnets of Anna Brackett, and Walt Whitman, the Godfather of the so-called modern poetry movement had written long unrhymed poems, but the bitterness behind Crane's utterances coupled with the novelty of his form and his highly spiced brand of imagism certainly was too much for an American reading public which was rearing its young on Louise Alcott's "moral pap for the young" and the slightly overblown rhetoric of Henry James. A world that could find a place for professional idealists of the Bronson Alcott type would be expected to have difficulty admitting into its literary consciousness a fragment such as

the following:

"In the desert  
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,  
Who, squatting upon the ground,  
Held his heart in his hands,  
And ate of it.  
I said, 'is it good, friend?'  
'It is bitter--bitter,' he answered;  
'But I like it  
Because it is bitter,  
And because it is my heart.'" \*

What could be done with a fellow who even on paper  
flouted defiance in the face of divine justice, thus:

"Two or three angels  
Came near to the earth.  
They saw a fat church.  
Little Black streams of people  
Came and went in continually.  
And the angels were puzzled  
To know why the people went thus,  
And why they stayed so long within." \*\*

"Charity, thou art a lie,  
A toy of women,  
A pleasure of certain men.  
In the presence of justice,  
Lo, the walls of the temple  
Are visible  
Through thy form of sudden shadows." \*\*\*

In the splendid Introduction which Amy Lowell wrote for  
Volume six of the Knopf, Limited Edition publication of  
Crane's works (1926) she makes mention of Crane's rather  
extraordinary method or manner of writing the poems making

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\* Stephen Crane, The Black Riders and Other Lines (Works  
New York: Alfred Knopf, 1926), VI, 35.

\*\* Ibid., p. 64.

\*\*\* Ibid., p. 48



up the Black Riders volume. It is quite likely that Hamlin Garland, to whom the volume, was dedicated knows more of how the lines came to be than any other living man and Miss Lowell quotes him as he questioned Crane when the latter appeared at the Garland flat with the pockets of his ulster suggestively bulging with papers. This is the way Garland tells the story:

"Come now, out with it," I said. "What is the roll I see in your pocket? "

"With a sheepish look he took out a flat roll of legal cap paper and handed it to me with a careless boyish gesture. . . . .

"I unrolled the first package, and found it to be a sheaf of poems. I can see the initial poem now, exactly as it was then written, without a blot or erasure--almost without punctuation-- in blue ink. It was beautifully legible and clean of outline.

"It was the poem which begins thus: 'God fashioned the ship of the world carefully.'

"I read this with delight and amazement. I rushed through the others, some thirty in all, with growing wonder. I could not believe they were the work of the pale, reticent boy moving restlessly about the room.

"Have you any more?" I asked.

"I've got five or six in a little row up here," he quaintly replied, pointing to his temple. "That's the way they come--on little rows, all made up, ready to be put down in paper."

"When did you write these?"

"Oh! I've been writing five or six every day. I wrote nine yesterday. I wanted to write some more last night, but those "Indians" wouldn't let me do it. They howled over the

other verses so loud they nearly cracked my ears. You see, we all live in a box together, and I've no place to write, except in the general squabble. They think my lines are funny. They make a circus of me.' "

The next day, Crane came again, this time with part of the typescript of The Red Badge of Courage. Having looked at the first page and suggested that Crane leave the book, Mr. Garland asked:

"Did you do any more "lines"?"

"He looked away bashfully.

"Only six."

"Let me see them."

"As he handed them to me he said: 'Got three more waiting in line. I could do one now.'

"Sit down and try," I said, glad of his offer, for I could not relate the man to his work.

"He took a seat and began to write steadily, composedly, without hesitation or blot or interlineation, and so produced in my presence one of his most powerful verses. It flowed from his pen as smooth as oil."

Miss Lowell seems to have felt that in spite of the poetry in Crane's prose he was not a great poet which is perhaps not an unfair estimate of him. He lacked many of the characteristics of a poet. Any sort of form was distasteful to him, he seemed not to be capable of sustaining a mood for any great length of time and his images though always "pat" and generally diamond clear often failed to identify themselves with a poetic conception. Crane is often wrongly grouped as a poet with the Symbolists of

France and England. Certainly he might have learned from them--they spoke his speech and might have furnished him guidance, but the real truth of the matter is that he had never read a line of them. Perhaps he had heard of them, but he was woefully ignorant where reading was concerned. Miss Lowell suggested that for the same reason the Japanese and Chinese Poets who might have lead him to his almost Oriental word economy could not have affected him. She places him as a poet, thus:

"What then is Stephen Crane, in so far as his poetry is concerned? A man without a period, that is at once his plume and his forfeit. He sprang from practically nowhere, and he has left only the most isolated of descendants. . . . He is that rarest of artistic phenomena, a man who creates from inner consciousness alone. . . . He died too soon. He did much, but the temperature of the world he lived in was unsuitable. He ranks in America somewhat as Chatterton ranks in England. A boy spiritually killed by neglect. A marvellous boy, potentially a genius, historically an important link in the chain of American poetry." \*

In December 1894, Ripley Hitchcock bought The Red Badge of Courage for Appleton's, but Crane's trip to Mexico so delayed correction of the proofs that the book itself did not appear until October 3, 1895. Its success has become a legend in American publishing and Crane became famous almost overnight. Magazine editors who had not so long before turned down his offerings with a curt disinterested nod now pursued him for articles and the whole collection of stories

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\* Crane, The Black Riders and Other Lines, Introduction.

done on his Texas-Mexico trip went to McClure's. Hitchcock was insisting that Maggie be revised and published again, and another publisher was making a strong bid for George's Mother, which Crane was in the process of writing. Success draws compliments and 'fair weather friends' as a magnet draws steel filings, but artistic success often brings with it also ugly stories of the license of genius. In his biography of Crane, Beer quotes Weit Mitchell, a neurologist in the following speculation:

"The phenomena of envy are very much more marked among artists than in other professions. Invariably or nearly so, these take the form of gossiping stories about the personal character of a successful writer and the stories always show the same trend: the successful man is given to heavy indulgence in alcohol or to irregular use of drugs. The point is most interesting when one considers that artists are perpetually demanding for themselves the license of conduct which they deplore in print." \*

As early as 1896 unsavory tales were gathering about Crane. Not only was he accused at one time or another of every sort of excess and irregularity in the use of alcohol and drugs--in addition it was rumored that he broke every other moral law largely and with gusto. A whole fabric of myths arose concerning him. He was the illegitimate son of a President of the United States; he served a term in prison for some crime; he had a love affair with Sarah Bernhardt; he had an illegitimate child by a girl in the slums, who then

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\* Thomas Beer, Stephen Crane, p. 131.



went on the streets; he married and deserted a number of women; he was an alcoholic and drug-fiend; and when his short life came to an end it was rumored that he died of delirium tremens in Paris. It was never explained how he found time in the thirty-one years of his short life to involve himself in so much that was unholy. We have Mr. Beer's word for it that not one of these myths was even founded on truth. Floyd Dell explains these legends as springing not from malice, but as the tribute of Crane's generation to his genius. It is quite true that these legends, which reveal nothing of the man himself, reveal much as to the state of mind of the times in which he lived. These tales embodied what the American public of the late nineteenth century thought a genius should be. Genius consisted of breaking rules!

In June, 1896 Appleton's issued a slightly revised Maggie, and while it was obviously shocking, the reviews were not too unkind. However, the wider sale of Maggie now had the effect of deepening the hue of the rumored purple patches of Crane's life. His knowledge of the Bowery and of fallen women was supposed to have been derived from contacts first-hand and it cannot be denied that his exaggeratedly romantic attitude toward street-walkers--an attitude which he seemed to delight in throwing open to the public gaze but added

fuel to the flames licking so hungrily at his reputation. But Maggie is not a salacious story. It is a simple story of "the poor among the poor", of a common, warm-hearted, pleasure-loving girl, a stitcher in a collar factory who is betrayed and deserted by a cheap-sport barkeeper. Maggie, the girl, pursues in poverty, unsuccess and despair her final calling as a street-walker for a few weeks and ends in the river. The story is told in first-hand terms of crowded life, the terms of the life in New York tenements, tenement-streets and saloons. It is told without comment, without judgments, but with searching humor and desire for the truth. It is a profound example of the power of understatement. Witness the report to the mother of Maggie's death:

"In a room a woman sat at a table eating like a fat monk in a picture.

"A soiled, unshaven man pushed open the door and entered.

"Well,' said he, 'Mag's dead.'

"What?' said the woman, her mouth filled with bread.

"Mag's dead,' repeated the man.

"Dsh blazes she is!' said the woman. She continued her meal. When she finished her coffee she began to weep." \*

Filbustering had become quite the thing in 1895 and 1896, and conditions in Cuba were in a decidedly unsettled

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\*Crane, Maggie: a Girl of the Streets, p. 152.

state. Crane had a crazy hankering to see a war first-hand so the Bacheller Syndicate, feeling that the threatened break might come off at any time, provided him with a belt full of gold and sent him southward. With him went also the manuscript for The Third Violet which he was in the act of revising. By December 19, Crane was aboard an old steamer named "The Commodore", loaded with arms and Cuban insurrectionists and headed for Cuban waters. Before she was well into salt water, "The Commodore" foundered leaving Crane, the ship's captain, the cook and an oiler alone on a rough sea in a ten foot dinghy. The Open Boat is Crane's report of this event. Already Crane was suffering from some intestinal trouble and the exposure he suffered in the "Commodore" episode so undermined his constitution, that in the opinion of his brother, health never returned. He did not manage to get to Cuba but his desire to see a war was no whit abated and he managed to get an appointment from the Journal to "do" the war which seemed imminent between Greece and Turkey. At the time Crane was planning to write a play in conjunction with Clyde Fitch, but with a bad cold he set out for Greece by way of England, leaving the proposed play to await his return. In London, he was entertained by Harold Frederic and on April 1, continued on his way to Greece, via Paris. As a war correspondent Crane proved a

complete failure, and soon returned from the field to Athens where his illness took on a more serious aspect. In Athens he was nursed by a Miss Cora Taylor, who had fallen in love with him at Jacksonville and had come after him to Greece. Late in August 1896, they were married. They decided to take up their abode in England. Joseph Conrad states in the Introduction to Beer's biography of Crane that his wife's recollection is that he met Crane in London in October 1897, and that Crane visited in the Conrad home in the following November. From this meeting of Crane and Conrad grew a friendship that lasted throughout the few remaining years of the former's life, and remained in the mind of Conrad until his death as one of the happiest and most valuable associations in his life. In November 1897, on the suggestion of Frederic, Crane started work on a novel about his trip to Greece, the book to be called Active Service. Work on the novel went forward slowly, but he did finish some other tales. Early in December he had finished The Monster and read the manuscript to his friends Frederic and Bennett. The story was offensive to Frederic; Bennett liked it, but when it was offered to The Century, it was promptly turned down. Things did not go well at the English home of the Cranes. There were too many unpaying guests and too little steady money income. English manners, customs, and habits



amused, bored and angered Crane. They would have it that his realism was stolen from the French and in spite of the fact that he had read but little of Zola, Loti, and DeMaupassant, and had never read Stendhal's La Chartreuse de Parme it was insisted that The Red Badge of Courage was a steal from the latter.

When the "Main" was blown up on February 15, and the trumpets broke forth hailing a new war, Crane was again eager to get into the midst of things. He returned to the United States, offered himself as a Navy recruit, was turned down and accepted an offer which the New York World made for his services to cover the war. While waiting in Key West for things to happen, Crane revised the story called Vashti in the Dark, which tells how a young Methodist preacher from the South killed himself after discovering that his wife had been ravished by a negro in a forest at night. But he had not long to wait and was soon in the midst of that miserable failure of a romantic sentimental gesture the Spanish American War. As a war correspondent, Crane once again proved his utter unfitness. He was most likely to be any place but the place where he should be. He exposed himself needlessly and foolishly, took no care of his health, and failed miserably in sending in his stories. His health broke and he tried to keep up his strength and energy with

quinine and whisky. He was now seriously ill with all the symptoms of intestinal consumption. He was accused of cynical coldness as to the war, but his real mood was his usual indifference to cheap sentiment. He had but little interest in the officers, but every act of the common soldiers was a matter of deep concern to him. He returned to this country, ill and exhausted.

George's Mother and The Little Regiment, had been published in 1896, The Third Violet in 1897, and The Open Boat and Other Tales of Adventure in 1898. The Monster and Other Stories and Active Service were published in 1899, and Frederic Stokes published another volume of poetry, War is Kind, in the same year.

In the first week of January, 1899 Crane had his last look at New York. He was once again sailing for England. The Cranes settled at Brede Place, a ruined-castle sort of place where they entertained indiscriminately and endlessly much to the harm of Stephen's work. About this time began the friendship between Crane and Conrad which came to mean so much in the lives of each. Critics and public still took little interest in Crane's work. Even his short stories for the most part failed to "catch on". By January, 1900, his health to the most casual observer was failing rapidly. He had begun a fantastic novel The O'Ruddy and was finishing up

War Memories. Harper's Magazine had printed serially Whilomville Stories, and in so doing both shocked and pleased its readers. These stories were to be published later that same year in book form and also, Great Battles of the World and Wounds in the Rain. In March, Crane was fatally stricken and his wife hastily borrowed money to take him to the Black Forest where she thought he might have some chance for recovery. Conrad, himself ill, made the trip to Dover to see Crane off and knew at first glance that it was their last farewell. Crane died in Badenweiler just before dawn on the fifth of June, 1900. The O'Ruddy was left unfinished, but Crane had outlined the story to Robert Barr and the latter completed it. Crane was buried at Elizabeth, New Jersey.

It is impossible to arrive at any satisfactory evaluation of Crane's work without a rather detailed and careful consideration of his life and the period in which he lived. Such a statement might be expanded into a generalization to be applied to all writers, but in the case of Crane it seems utterly impossible to divorce the man from his work. War, physical conflict, the display of heroism by the unheroic--these were his obsessions. He wrote of war before he had seen one, and then spent most of the remainder of his life pursuing war to prove to himself that his first views were correct. They were correct! Even he, doubter that he was,

finally convinced himself, but the anomaly remains that his finest pieces about war were written before he had seen one and of a struggle which ended six years before his birth. Wholly aside from his interest in war Crane's life may be cited as a perfect example of the effect of the conventional literary concepts of the 1890's on a spirit free, frank, and passionately searching for truth and his literary efforts starting along about 1894 may be said to have ushered in Modern American Literature. Howells and James were middle aged and along with Clemens had already established reputations on safe territory. Throughout their lives Howells and James never strayed far from the beaten path, and Clemens seemed content to remain a local hero. The New England Brahmins were all dead save Holmes, and in actuality their precepts had not to any great extent permeated the country. Their output was directed toward the culturally elect and America's "great unwashed" was, so to speak, left out in the cold. There was no literary expression coming from or concerned with that great bulk of common folk who labored physically for their daily bread. It is true that there were things in people's minds which wanted saying. Social conditions were not, and for that matter never had been, what they should have been and there were dark questions as to the why of things. The Columbian Exposition had



shown this country new marvels and for the first time the countryside was treated to the wonders of beholding authentic examples of foreign life and customs for the relatively small outlay of the price of a ticket to Chicago. And the Panic of 1893-1894 had set in motion a good many thoughts in the minds of those who had previously not been supposed to think. It would be foolish to represent Crane as the spokesman of the under-dogs, of the laboring classes. If all the things Crane was not, were to be expressed in one word no fitter word could be found than Propagandist! No, in spite of his keen observation and his search for the truth his attitude was one of aloofness. Even his own difficulties he looked upon as impersonal--just a part of a scheme over which he had no control. Life was that sort of a proposition because--well just because it was and a man couldn't help matters any by making faces or throwing naughty words at Life the relentless. But, if Crane did not want to talk for these people he did want to talk about them, and if we need an explanation of outbursts such as Maggie, George's Mother, and Black Riders, here it is. Crane was one of those poor devils who had to write--his vocation rode him to the bitter end of his short life. As a writer he sprang forth almost fully developed at the outset. From first to last his output showed but little improvement. He had practically no

formal training as a reader, and scarcely more as a writer since at the time he produced Marric he was only a beginning newspaper reporter. If he had any literary models at all they were Flaubert, Tolstoy and probably Zola. Tolstoy was his favorite author but he did admit Flaubert could write also, in spite of the fact that he was not enthusiastic about Salambo. He threw aside Zola's The Downfall, with some disgust and when one of his friends asked if he thought he could do better, he is said to have admitted that he had such a thought. His effect on Anglo-American prose has seldom been questioned by critics of competence and his vigorous departure from the traditions of written English startled and shocked his early readers. Of course there were objections, and loud ones too. Obviously, it was urged, no decent youth in his right mind would attempt to describe emotions in terms of colors, and furthermore, what should be done about the wildness of his grammar? There is no use in denying his eccentricities. His use of adjectives was extravagant, and he did make grammar do funny tricks, but, he could think! He seemed to have little interest in life at its conventional level. His interest was in life above or below the line of conventionality--the slums, the battlefield, dangerous adventures. He did not invent adventures, but simply noted the successions of facts regarding a person or a group of people. The whole process seemed

casual and heartless, but Crane was content merely to reveal the train of causation and allow the reader to interpret as or if he wished. Laying aside any suggestion of a foreign influence in Crane's work, this was essentially Zola's idea of how to write a novel. It is true, Zola did not wish to produce a minute copy of nature. The camera could outstrip the realist there every time. Photographic details were a part of the process, but never the whole of it. Observe this passage from The Downfall:

"A dozen corpses were already there in a row, still and stark, some drawn out to their full length as if in an attempt to rid themselves of the agony that racked them, others curled and twisted in every attitude of suffering. Some seemed to have left the world with sneers on their faces, their eyes retroverted till naught was visible but the whites, the grinning lips parted over the glistening teeth, while in others, with faces unspeakably sorrowful, big tears still stood on the cheeks. . . . And at the feet of the dead had been thrown in a promiscuous pile the amputated arms and legs, the refuse of the knife and saw of the operating table, just as the butcher sweeps into a corner of his shop the offal, the worthless odds and ends of flesh and bone." \*

Here Zola gives us the photographic details and then drives the whole thing home with that reference to the butcher-shop which stamps the scene in the reader's mind forever. Here is illustrated one of the fundamental differences between the art of the reporter and that of the novelist. Here is another passage of a like nature:

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\* E. Zola, The Downfall (Translation, New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1902), pp. 324-325.

"It was in vain that some attempts had been made the night before to clean up the room after the bloody work of the operations; there were great splotches of blood on the ill-swept floor; in a bucket of water a great sponge was floating, stained with red, for all the world like a human brain; a hand, its fingers crushed and broken, had been overlooked and lay on the floor of the shed. It was the parings and trimmings of the human butcher-shop, the horrible waste and refuse that ensues upon a day of slaughter, viewed in the cold, raw light of dawn." \*

There are the details, neither better nor worse nor much different from a medical journal description, but it is the literary artist and not the reporter who makes the scene indelible with those last few words, "viewed in the cold, raw light of dawn." Well, if Crane did not learn from Zola, more is the pity! Zola was the greatest artist of them all.

Reality for Crane had to be immediate and intense. When he went into the slums it was not to go slumming. He went there first because the atmosphere of the place fascinated him, and second because he wanted to store up in his mind images and words so that he might be able to reproduce the speech of his characters as it actually was and not as other writers of his period and the one directly before it had done. It made no difference to him if the viciousness of some of his incidents or the speeches of some of his characters shocked beyond measure the good folk of his day who read books. His method was as direct as his

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\* Zola, The Downfall, pp. 384-385.



attitude. No pointing out of moral tendencies, no sloppy sentimentality for him. No preaching a sermon around a corner! But, in spite of the fact that Crane was never the moralist even his most realistic efforts, Maggie, and George's Mother cannot be thought of as without a moral tendency. No boy ever forgot his mother or his parents because of the intrigue of Crane's picture in George's Mother and certainly no girl was ever led to abandon the "straight and narrow" by the seductiveness of the situation in Maggie. It would have been ridiculous for Crane to have pointed out moral tendencies here--weren't they obvious enough. To his contemporaries Crane seemed heartless in his treatment of horrible subjects, but the truth intrigued him far more than the approbation of his contemporaries.

In The Red Badge of Courage, Crane's handling of war referred not so much to Flaubert or Tolstoy as to a subtle something much more native. Since the close of the Civil War the tendency, at least the literary tendency, had been to make of the struggle a conflict of epic proportions, decked out in gay and attractive colors and full of pomp and heroism. Along with this literary concept had grown up another--not so pleasant but much truer. It was that account of battles and wounds, of mud and discomfort, of sickness and brutality which was passed around by word of

mouth, from one ex-soldier to another and to all others who cared to listen. This was the Civil War history that Crane exploited. Doubtless he heard much of it from the "curbstone sitters" of his boyhood days. Though he had never seen a battle he found later that he had been accurate in his account of one, and the fact can be explained when we realize that he placed the center of the affair not in his understanding of military strategy, but in the experience of an individual soldier. This young soldier was Crane's creation--he had Crane's emotions. The author projected his own personality into situations which had been described to him by others, and as a result he attempted to make the young soldier's reactions what his own would have been under the circumstances. He disregarded the heroic and the grand style and descended not only to the thoughts, but to the language of the raw recruit. However, it is not the language alone that gives the narrative its authenticity and its thrill, it is rather, the perfect candor and the intensity of the conception. Consider the following passages:

"Once the line encountered the body of a dead soldier. He lay upon his back staring at the sky. He was dressed in an awkward suit of yellowish brown. The youth could see that the soles of his shoes had been worn to the thinness of writing paper, and from a great rent in one the dead foot projected piteously. And it was as if fate had betrayed the soldier. In death it exposed to his enemies that poverty which in life he had perhaps concealed from his friends." \*

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\* Stephen Crane, The Red Badge of Courage (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1904), p. 43.

"He was being looked at by a dead man who was seated with his back against a columlike tree. The corpse was dressed in a uniform that once had been blue, but was now faded to a melancholy shade of green. The eyes, staring at the youth, had changed to the dull hue to be seen on the side of a dead fish. The mouth was open. Its red had changed to an appalling yellow. Over the gray skin of the face ran little ants. One was trundling some sort of a bundle along the upper lip. . . . At last he burst the bonds which had fastened him to the spot and fled, unheeding the underbrush. He was pursued by a sight of the black ants swarming greedily upon the gray face and venturing horribly near to the eyes." \*

Crane had a pungency of expression that enabled him to set down a fact or describe a situation not only neatly but in such a manner that once read it remained in the mind of the reader. Added to this he had a flare for creating images seldom equalled in literary circles. After reading the following passage, try to put it out of mind.

"As the flap of the blue jacket fell away from the body, he could see that the side looked as if it had been chewed by wolves.

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

"'Hell-----'

"The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer." \*\*

What a masterpiece of understatement! It was as an imagist that Crane stepped with a long step in the direction which American literature was to travel for a generation.

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\* Crane, The Red Badge of Courage, pp. 92-93.

\*\* Ibid., p. 115.

It is not wrong to speak of him as a post-impressionist--one who used the method about the time the French painters and musicians were getting under way with it. It was not a method which he had to learn. It was rather, the result of the fact that he knew instinctively how to handle detail. He seemed able to estimate a detail for what it was worth, to use it, to make it serve his purpose and then to feel no further responsibility for it. In the Introduction to Wounds in the Rain, (Knopf), Willa Cather stresses this ability of Crane's as one of his most outstanding ones.

"I doubt whether he (Crane) ever spent a laborious half hour in doing his duty by detail--in enumerating, like an honest, grubby auctioneer. If he saw one thing that engaged him in a room, he mentioned it. If he saw one thing in a landscape that thrilled him, he put it on paper, but he never tried to make a faithful report of everything else within his field of vision, as if he were a conscientious salesman making out his expense account. . . . Perhaps it was because Stephen Crane had read so little, was so slightly acquainted with the masterpieces of fiction, that he felt no responsibility to be accurate or painstaking in accounting for things and people. He is rather the best of our writers in what is called 'description' because he is the least describing. Cuba did not tempt him to transfer tropical landscapes to paper, any more than New York State had tempted him to do his duty by the countryside.

"The day wore down to the Cuban dusk. . . . The sun threw his last lance through the foliage. The steep mountain range on the right turned blue and as without detail as a curtain. The tiny ruby of light ahead meant that the ammunition guards were cooking their supper.' Enough, certainly. He did not follow the movement of troops there much more literally than he had in The Red Badge of Courage. He knew that the movement of troops was the officers' business, not his. He was in Cuba to write about soldiers and soldiering, and he did; often something like this: 'With his heavy roll of blanket and the half of a shelter tent cross-



ing his right shoulder and under his left arm, each man presented the appearance of being clasped from behind, wrestler-fashion, by a pair of thick white arms.

"There was something distinctive in the way they carried their rifles. There was the grace of the old hunter somewhere in it, the grace of a man whose rifle has become absolutely a part of himself. Furthermore, almost every blue shirt sleeve was rolled to the elbow, disclosing forearms of almost incredible brawn. The rifles seemed light, almost fragile, in the hands that were at the end of those arms, never fat but always rolling with muscles and veins that seemed on the point of bursting."

"That is much more to his purpose than what these men were about. That is important, all of it--and that sense of the curious smallness of rifle-butts in the hands of regulars is most important of all." (The passages Miss Cather quotes here are from The Price of the Harness a short story of the Cuban campaign which appeared in Wounds in the Rain.) \*

As one of the first of the imagists had Crane been less the artist he might have fallen into some of the pitfalls which were the undoing of later imagists. But, strange as it may seem, his images are seldom blurred nor does he often sacrifice movement in order to elaborate striking details. His impressionism is not carried to any dizzy extreme. Sane commonsense and his passion for truth were his balancing gear. Much of his charm springs from his free and courageous mind and his calm intelligence. Despite the fact that poetry as a form seemed to hamper him his use of imagism in prose composition was often times decidedly poetic.

"They made toward a little glass-fronted saloon that sat blinking jovially at the crowds. It engulfed them with

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\* Stephen Crane, Wounds in the Rain (Works), IX, Introduction.

a gleeful motion of its two widely smiling lips." \*

"From the window at which the man raged came the sound of an old voice, singing. It quavered and trembled out into the air as if a sound-spirit had a broken wing." \*\*

"At first the gray lights of dawn came timidly into the room, remaining near the windows, afraid to approach certain sinister corners. Finally, mellow streams of sunshine poured in, undraping the shadows to disclose the putrefaction, making pitiless revelation." \*\*\*

"In a dark street the little chapel sat humbly between two towering apartment houses. A red street-lamp stood in front. It threw a marvellous reflection upon the wet pavements. It was like the death-stain of a spirit. Farther up the brilliant lights of an avenue made a span of gold across the black street." \*\*\*\*

Crane had a genius for expression, for creating phrases which few if any American writers have surpassed. In fact this one characteristic of his writing is alone enough to set him off from and above most American writers. His ability to "ticket" a character, a scene, or a situation, tersely and cleverly, but not too cleverly, was almost uncanny and nearly always "sure-fire". He seemed always able to put into a few words enough about a character so that that character's reactions were thenceforth intelligible to the reader. It is startling the illumination he can bring about with a single phrase. In Maggie he "fixes"

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\* Stephen Crane, George's Mother (1st ed.; New York: Arnold, 1896) p. 10.

\*\* Ibid., p. 19.

\*\*\* Ibid., p. 10.

\*\*\*\* Ibid., p. 117.

Maggie's brother, the truck-driver with a single sentence.

"In him grew a majestic contempt for those strings of street cars that followed him like intent bugs."

Maggie's relation to society is explained in even fewer words.

"To her the world was composed of hardships and insults."

And here is Maggie's mother.

"It seems that the world had treated this woman very badly and she took a deep revenge upon such portions of it as came within her reach. She broke furniture as if she were at last getting her rights. She swelled with virtuous indignation as she carried the lighter articles of household use, one by one, under the shadows of the three gilt balls, where Hebrews chained them with chains of interest." \*

It is possible to go on almost endlessly multiplying such evidences of Crane's genius as a phrase maker. He was always so "pat"! Here are a few more.

"Quiet Germans, with maybe their wives and two or three children, sat listening to the music, with the expression of happy cows." \*\*

"Two girls, set down on the bills as sisters, came forth and sang a duet which is heard occasionally at concerts given under church auspices. They supplemented it with a dance, which, of course, can never be seen at concerts given under church auspices." \*\*\*

"Nevertheless, he had, on a certain starlit evening, said wonderingly and quiet reverently: 'Deh moon looks like

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\* Crane, Maggie: a Girl of the Streets, p. 63.

\*\* Ibid., p. 53.

\*\*\* Ibid., p. 53.

hell, don't it?" \*

"On a corner a glass-fronted building shed a yellow glare upon the pavements. The open mouth of a saloon called seductively to passengers to enter and annihilate sorrow or create rage." \*\*

"Reilly never saw the top of the hill. He was heroically striving to keep up with his men when a bullet ripped quietly through his left lung, and he fell back into the arms of the bugler, who received him as he would have received a Christmas present." \*\*\*

Probably no other writer and certainly no other modern realist has had similar reluctance to refer to his characters by their ordinary human names or a like success in making his reader forget the names actually used. Apparently there was no reason for Crane's predilection to allow his characters to go unnamed. Had he made his literary output adhere to any strict set of rules or regulations aside from his aesthetic consciousness it might be possible to uncover reasons for some of his eccentricities, but he wrote as he felt and doubtless these eccentricities were inherent in his own character. It is said that in the first version of Maggie no character was named at all, Maggie was simply "the girl", and the others were simply "the girl's mother," "the girl's brother," etc. However, upon the suggestion of friends and his brother, Crane, when rewriting the story for its first appearance between boards did attach names to the

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\* Crane, Maggie: a Girl of the Streets, p. 37.

\*\* Ibid., p. 87.

\*\*\* Stephen Crane, Tales of Two Wars (Works, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1926), II, 241.



characters--more perhaps, to conform to literary practice than from any actual need. The negro in The Monster was named Henry Johnson, but one remembers him only as the man who had no face. The chief character in The Blue Hotel is simply "the Swede". In The Open Boat, the only vestige of a name is the oiler's "Billie."

In "A Note on Stephen Crane" which appeared in Volume 68 of The Bookman, Wilson Follett speaks of Joseph Conrad's impression that the unheroic hero of The Red Badge of Courage was nowhere given a personal name. He points out that Conrad was wrong; the surname of Henry Fleming appears in the text of the story at least once, and his given name several times. He is represented in the story as a young man--hardly more than a boy. Fleming entered the army in 1863 from a farm on the outskirts of an Orange County town--the Port Jervis of actuality, the Whilomville of Crane's short stories. And when the War was over he simply resumed the life, the mental outlook, the form, the very dialect, to which his origins had destained him. He married, had sons, grew elderly, grew old, and even achieved some local dignity. His Swede farm hand set his barn on fire and as Fleming rushed into the blazing building to save two colts in box stalls at the back of the barn the building collapsed on him.

It is evident that Crane consciously or unconsciously reckoned personal names as among the least expressive of words. Superficially, this instinctive preference of his records a quiet confidence in his own power of characterization. A name is an easy identification--a tag, or handle, an easy sort of technical device which Crane instinctively spurned.

Conrad once referred to Crane as "The most single-minded of verbal impressionists," and indeed the vividness of his style threw each thing of which he wrote into startling relief as though revealed in the brilliance of a spotlight and in such a way as to stand as a symbol of all things of its kind. The ordinary, everyday reality of his details is set off with a vividness almost unearthly and the net result is an image or impression not soon to be forgotten. The two following passages are examples.

The clusters of little brown roses on the wall-paper at which Kelcey stared in George's Mother, "He felt them like hideous crabs crawling upon his brain."

"It sounds as if the dishes of Hades were being washed. . . . Once, indeed, in the night, I cried out to them: 'In God's name go away, little blood-stained tiles.' But they doggedly answered: 'It is the law.'" (From the sketch called A Tale of Mere Chance. It is the monologue of an insane man, who having killed his rival on a white-tiled

floor, is pursued by a flock of the blood-stained tiles, raising their little hands and screaming, "Murder! It was he!" The story is an extraordinary depiction of conscience joined to a homicidal mania.)

Crane's style is tense, dynamic. His sentences are short and terse, facts stated casually, simply, almost impersonally, not seeming to advance one beyond the other and yet bringing us suddenly to a climax. His method is particularly effective where the climax is a scene of horror. Could anything be more dramatic than the sudden climax in the short story, A Dark Brown Dog, when the liquor-crazed father, looking for prey, seizes suddenly upon the crouching dark-brown dog and sends him crashing through the window? Crane's morbid humor is one of the most arresting elements of the story. He states things in a detached way as if he had no real feeling in the matter. And yet how deeply he has looked into the ragged little souls of his boy and dog, and how sympathetically he has watched their queer friendship grow.

The short story and the sketch were the forms in which Crane was most completely himself. The restrictions of poetic forms hampered him quite as much as the freedom of the full-length novel and in neither was he eminently successful. The all too evident weaknesses of The Third Violet, Active Service and The O'Buddy (weaknesses in the case

of The O'Ruddy, only partially his) point to his difficulties in sustaining interest, creating characters, developing characters, furnishing settings and indeed in handling most of the constructive elements of the novel. However, in the use of the sketch and the short story form he is to be ranked with the greatest. The random recital of petty happenings, vagrant comments, and unstudied attitudes, entirely inadequate as they were in the novel were most properly placed by Crane when he embodied them in sketches or short stories. Soldiers, boys, horses and dogs, he understood instinctively. In the Introduction which William Lyon Phelps prepared for the Knopf limited edition of Whilomville Stories he pays tribute to the verisimilitude of Crane's "boy" stories.

"He depicts the boys as individuals and in the mass, with an analysis as profound as his humour is gay. They exhibit together the herd mind in its most unlovely aspect, a compound of cruelty and cowardice; and they have that inextinguishable love of romance that will forever dominate the human race. Nor is he any the less relentless in the portrayal of little girls. The 'angel child' is as unscrupulous a tyrant as can be found in the annals of irresponsible monarchy.

"One has on every page the pleasure of recognition. We remember these scenes, these schools, these holidays, these fights, these picnics, these little people. The days of childhood return; and if they are not exactly the same in radiance as the shining dawns depicted by Wordsworth, they are as true from the standpoint of the realistic novelist as his were from that of the imaginative poet.

"Stephen Crane was a curious compound of patience and impatience. As a man he was wildly impatient with hypocrisy, cant, pretense, falsehood, brutality, sentimentalism,



injustice, and cruelty; as an artist, he was unendingly patient in dealing with these very things.

"Even as in writing of war he wrote honestly when nearly everyone wrote sentimentally, so in writing of boys and girls he wrote sincerely. And as in reading his tales of social life in cities and of horror on the field of battle, one feels his flaming hatred of meanness and of tyranny, so in his depiction of these children at play I seem to feel, underneath the mirth and nonsense, a terrible hatred of mass opinion, a fervent faith in the individual's right to live."

If Crane's reputation as a writer has suffered a partial eclipse since his death in 1900 the reasons are not hard to locate. He died at twenty-eight, only four years after his first success. The amount of work he left as evidence of his existence was of necessity small and with the exception of one or two volumes was out of print for decades. Moreover, that very flair for vividness which compelled Crane to isolate each of his subjects as if in the glare of a spotlight has tended to obscure the wholeness of his perception, signified by, for instance, his repetition of characters and communities from story to story and even more so by his ability to set the whole American background and character by the unimportant conversation of nobodies.

Placing Stephen Crane in the literary sense has been a task beyond most literary historians and critics, but Thomas Beer in his Stephen Crane has doubtless succeeded at last in putting Crane in his rightful place. Certainly the Crane enthusiasts are satisfied. Beer ends his Introduction to The O'Ruddy, (Knopf, lim. ed) with this:

"The diffuse and photographic realists annoyed him (Crane). He came to believe that The Red Badge of Courage was too long, and as this distaste for length--emblematically--included his own life, he is to remain a halved portrait, an artist of amazing talent and of developing scope who died too soon for our curiosity. He was plainly drifting from the intense studies of excitement which made the force of his early period; the social critic was beginning to appear in The Monster and in passages of the Whilomville tales. A man so brilliantly impatient of shams had surely something amusing to say, and the legitimate pity of the case is that he did not live to say more." \*

"A man said to the universe:

'Sir, I exist!'

'However,' replied the universe,

'The fact had not created in me

A sense of obligation.'"

Thus did Crane dispose of metaphysics.

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\* Stephen Crane, War is Kind (Works, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1926), VI, 131

## STEPHEN CRANE, 1871-1900

## Reading List

The Work of Stephen Crane.

Knopf, Limited Edition, 1926

The Red Badge of Courage, 1895	Vol. 1
The Veteran	
Tales of Two Wars	Vol. 2
The Monster, 1899	Vol. 3
The Third Violet, 1897	
Active Service, 1899	Vol. 4
Whilomville Stories, 1900	Vol. 5
The Black Riders and Other Lines, 1895	Vol. 6
War is Kind and Other Lines, 1899	
The O'Ruddy (Part I)	Vol. 7
The O'Ruddy (Part II)	Vol. 8
Wounds in the Rain and Other Impressions, 1900	Vol. 9
George's Mother, 1896	Vol. 10
The Blue Hotel	
Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, 1892, 1896	
Midnight Sketches and Other Impressions	Vol. 11
The Open Boat and Other Tales, 1898	Vol. 12

## Additional Reading List.

Eugenie Grandet	Balzac
Ursule Mirquet	Balzac
The Brothers Karamazov	Dostoevsky
The Downfall	Zola
Madame Bovary	Flaubert
Salammbo	Flaubert
The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard	France
Master and Servant	Tolstoy



#### PART IV

#### OTHER FICTION WRITERS OF THE PERIOD WHO USED THE REALISTIC METHOD

Jack London and "red-  
blooded" fiction

David Graham Phillips  
and his novel  
Susan Lenox

Hamlin Garland, Veri-  
test

JACK LONDON AND "RED-BLOODED" FICTION

## JACK LONDON

When Jack London died in 1916 his published work included twelve volumes of collected short stories, thirteen novels or long single tales, and eight non-fiction books. Thirty-three volumes in all--no small output for a writer who died at forty and whose serious literary life did not begin until he was past twenty. Also since 1916 other stories and collections have been published posthumously. All that he wrote was but a transference to paper of the personality of Jack London. In truth his fiction is his autobiography. He made his entry into the world January 12, 1896, in San Francisco. Born of the working class he early took up his own struggle for existence. At ten he was selling newspapers in the streets; at sixteen he was an oyster thief and after that sailor, longshoreman, roustabout, and a worker in canneries, factories and laundries. All of that and more before he was eighteen! In 1894 he set out to see the sights of the country as a hobo and later the same year entered high school. By some miracle of cramming he was able to pass the entrance exams and entered the University of California in 1896, but his college career was short and in 1897 he joined the gold rush to the Klondike. Unsuccessful as a gold-hunter he returned and once

again took up the life of a hobo. This last phase lasted but a short time and a little later he was fairly embarked on his literary career the struggles and details of which he tells in his autobiographical novel Martin Eden.

In his travels as a transient laborer and hobo he observed first hand many of the evils of a social system dominated by capital and in which the worker and "under-dog" were exploited. This phase of his experience formed the basis for his socialistic leanings. The non-fiction group of his books is inspired largely by what he called socialism. In reality London's socialism lacked the saving grace of a constructive policy and amounted to little more than emotional radicalism. The reason for this can doubtless be found in that he saw the other side of the commercial battle--the side that means exploitation and oppression--and seeing it in this way as something hard, cruel, and wrong, he felt the urge to stamp it out. His literary interest in it was the spreading of propaganda against it. These books have some importance in the evolution of Jack London, but are of little value in solving the problems of the world. It is as a teller of tales that he will live--his radical social ideas no longer hold any interest for us.

The scenes of many of London's best stories are laid in the North and most of them are stories of the greed for gold and of hardship and sudden death amid the pitiless snows. Of



his stories the scenes of which are laid in southern waters, there is one thing they have in common--they are almost all of them stories of man's battle with the elemental forces of nature, with wild storms or with wilder savages. Few of his stories deal with the conflict of man and his own nature, the battle of man to win or to keep his own soul. He was not, fundamentally, an artist and a thinker; he was a man of action, a doer. The very core of his style is to be found in his tendency to think in terms of concrete objects rather than in abstractions. "Progression in his stories is from object to object, from act to act. In none of them is there any elaborate exposition of mental states." Like a good many Americans London felt no admiration for the intellectual life. His intensity was physical, muscular. His power to portray men was far greater than his power to portray women. Or perhaps he owed his success with male characters to the fact that he chose usually to portray types of men he knew and understood best. Women of the higher type, he failed utterly with. He tried hard to idealize them but fell far short of understanding them. Half-breeds, Indians, women of the underworld and the drifters in the mining camps of the North he wrote of with more success. In dealing with men, too, his most successful male characters are those of brute courage and brawn rather than of intellectual subtlety.

There is a similarity about his men but within the type they vary considerably. Wolf Larson stands as the ideal of the type.

In much of London's best fiction we get a feeling of bigness, of the elemental, the primitive, but he is not a naturalist as Norris was. He uses the realistic method when it will serve his purpose best, but it springs usually from his photographic description of action rather than from any innate literary feeling for realism. In speaking of his life as a hobo, London once said the successful hobo must be an artist in impromptu story telling. He must gauge his audience the moment the kitchen door is opened and be able to tell just the story that will bring about the desired meal or cast-off clothing in every case. It made a realist of him, he says. "Realism constitutes the only goods one can exchange at the kitchen door for grub." And that is the way he employed realism--to serve a purpose, not as a creed. If he did carry the elemental of Norris into the primitive and abysmal at times he swung into the other extreme of exaggerated romanticism in the things he made his characters do. No "Three Musketeers" could surpass the exploits of London's heroes. No difficulty apparently is great enough to cause them a moment's apprehension. Daylight, the pride of the Yukon can spend a night of wild dissipation at the Tivoli in Circle City, where he has lost

the fruits of a year's labor in one game, and then throw all comers in a wrestling match on the snow, recoup his fortunes with a thousand-mile sledge trip with the government mails in record breaking time, wearing out three Indians by the way. On his return he spends another wild night at the Tivoli, starts next morning to seek his fortune in the Klondike, rescues a friend from almost certain starvation, triumphs over the most cunning opposition, and almost in a day wins himself a fortune of eleven or so millions. Call such a plot realistic if you will! Then follow the exploits of Martin Eden which are supposedly based on London's own efforts to succeed as a writer. Reared on the sea, wise in ship-lore, this man, to whom a brawl on the 'Frisco waterfront was child's play learns all the secrets of sociology, literature, culture, platform-speaking and God knows what all else in so short a time as a year or two. Not realism here--only Jack London's ego at work. He thought he had learned about all these things when he had plastered himself over with a thin veneer of hastily acquired culture resulting from a course of rapid, intense, but undirected reading. God, if culture and understanding and knowledge only came so easy! No, Jack London had a passion for romance. It bubbled out in his life as it bubbled out in his books. Both his eye and his soul longed for the unusual, for romance,

the thing that was not every day. It might be cruel or brutal, but it must not be sordid. He could theorize and paint too glowingly the wrongs of the socially oppressed, but he could not isolate them for fiction. His energy was physical and coarse--deep down he was a man of action, to whom learning was a fraud and a delusion. To the last, culture and "highbrow" were synonymous to London--states of mind to be suspected, scorned and combated. He will be remembered not as a great realist--not even as a great writer, but as a picturesque figure in the history of literature, the founder of a school of writers of red-blooded fiction.



## JACK LONDON, 1876-1916

## Reading List

- The Son of the Wolf, 1900  
The Call of the Wild, 1903  
The Sea Wolf, 1904  
White Fang, 1907  
Martin Eden, 1909  
John Barleycorn, 1913  
Jerry of the Islands, 1917

DAVID GRAHAM PHILLIPS AND HIS NOVEL SUSAN LETOX

Davis Graham Phillips and his Novel Susan Lenox

The only marked significance of David Graham Phillips as a writer of realistic prose is to be found in his posthumous novel, Susan Lenox. He was a rather important figure in the development of American fiction of his own day, and there is little doubt but what he had great possibilities as a writer of realistic fiction--possibilities cut short by his tragic death in 1911. Phillips was born in Madison, Indiana, in 1867. His father was a banker of substantial means and the boy's life, while rugged and stimulating, was free from the trials and troubles of poverty and want. He entered the Sophomore class of DePauw University at fifteen and from there went to Princeton where he took his degree in 1887. From college he drifted into newspaper work, first in Cincinnati and then in New York. His first books were written in moments snatched from his daily routine but his later novels were done more leisurely as in 1902 he broke away entirely from newspaper work. From the first Phillips' instinct was to write purpose novels; his interest in social and economic problems was in some respects keener than his interest in people. He had an interest in socialism--at least enough of an interest to make him write about it, and he was also interested in exposing corruption in big

business and in politics, as for example his articles on the Senate. He was, however, a Socialist from "the other side" as compared to Jack London. Phillips was a Socialist in the sense that he had experience and genius enough to recognize the fundamentally unjust social conditions that obtained in his time, in particular, the exploitation of the multitude rendered possible by the dishonesty and lack of ability of the political representatives of the time. In his novel The Elm-Tree, a compelling picture is presented of the overthrow of democracy, the enthronement of plutocracy or privileged wealth, and the degradation of the political life of the nation through corrupt politics and the money-controlled political machine. It is a powerful story of conditions of a certain period--the muckraking period. One of Phillips' greatest weaknesses can be attributed to the fact that he lived in and was a part of the muckraking period in America, that period made notorious, if not famous, by Munsey's Magazine and Mr. Lincoln Steffens. Many of Phillips' novels suffer from the effects of this muckraking trend in American writing. He was so much a part and product of his time and the existing social conditions that his work suffered naturally from every blight that affected the period. The muckraking process was a destructive one--criticism with little action on the part of those criticizing and when the



method was carried over into literature the result could not be a happy one. In spite of the fact that Phillips' outlook on life was extremely broad and that he was a clear-eyed and impartial observer of life in most of his works he is also a partisan and reformer. He seemed always to be so keenly interested in the problem that he was setting forth that he could not keep himself and his ideas out of them. The reformer's instinct consciously or unconsciously possessed him and his novels are so colored by personal feeling and bias as to be artistically spoiled in the eyes of some critics.

One of Phillips' strongest qualities as a writer was his ability to convey the sense of life and motion and the clash of many interests. He saw each little happening of life not as an isolated incident but as a detail of a tremendous and universal scheme. His plots were never elaborate or involved but they were always logical. Many of his novels were about marriage. The Fashionable Adventures of Joshua Craig, Old Wives For New, A Woman Ventures--all of these have marriage for a theme. The Husband's Story is a study of a marriage that failed. The Hungry Heart is a sincere and detailed study of a marriage that threatens to be a failure because the man adheres to old fashioned standards regarding women, while the wife, with her modern education and progressive views, finds it impossible to accept the role of domesticity and inaction to which he would assign

her. In all the stories in which Mr. Phillips is concerned with the relation between a man and a woman he is never an admirer of woman as she is. He maintained to the last that she was not only over-estimated by man, but by herself. He considered her not so much as the "frailer" vessel as she was the parasite which lives upon man and his endeavors. In her inability to meet her share of the duties of life, he discovers her as "a social incubus".

One day in the eighties Phillips was walking down the street of his native town of Madison, Indiana, when he saw a beautiful girl sitting disconsolate in a farm wagon alongside a country lout she had been forced to marry. The incident in question occurred when the author was only fourteen but the beauty and pathos of the young woman in the wagon haunted him long afterward and finally became the starting incident of Susan Lenox. Sometime after he had seen the girl he heard her story and the important incidents of it were said to have been much the same as he later wrote into the early part of Susan Lenox. In reality the girl's story had nothing to do with Mr. Phillips' book, but the suffering on her face was his inspiration a quarter of a century later. Briefly this is the story of Susan Lenox. She was born out of wedlock in Sutherland, a small Indiana town on the banks of the Ohio River. Her mother paid for her with her own life and she died steadfastly refusing to reveal the name of the

child's father. Susan grows up to be a beautiful and appealing girl and is totally unconscious of the social stain in her life until the truth about her birth is brutally told her by a jealous cousin. Susan's one desire is to escape, to get away from that community where everyone knew the story of her shame. She runs away, is brought back by her uncle and forced by him into a marriage so hideously revolting that she flees in horror from her matrimonial prison on her wedding night. A child in years and experience she becomes "a bird of passage, doomed from that hour to flutter in a world of hunters." She makes a desperate attempt to go straight but succumbs from the sheer weight of poverty. For two or three years her life is a series of episodes alternating between periods of desperate poverty whenever she attempts to live decently and purple patches of sexual encounters as she treads the primrose path. Gradually she sinks to lower and lower physical depths but finally she emerges victorious and becomes a great emotional actress. It is this final near-happy ending that awakens one to the falseness of Phillips' development of the character of Susan. A reviewer for the New York Times wrote of Susan Lenox:

"The book is essentially false in its definition of life, and therefore profoundly immoral in three ways. Susan is represented throughout as being a woman of unusual mental capacities and endowments and fine, strong character. That sort of woman does not go down into the depths. The latter

are peopled by the weak and flabby of character and the dwarfed and crooked of soul. She is represented as having come through years of vice with heart and soul still fine and pure--she has merely 'learned how to live'. The most inveterate romanticist never denied and belied the facts of life more crudely than just then has Mr. Phillips, bent upon utter realism. Finally, the story is grotesquely and conventionally false, false to life in its dependence upon that long-ago-exploded fabrication of the muckrakers of economics, that a woman can get nowhere except through sexual dependence upon man. The whole story is based upon that assumption, and it inspires characters and situations and conversations and the philosophic comment of the author, which he sprinkles plentifully throughout the story."

Perhaps this is a too severe criticism of Mr. Phillips, but in the respects which the reviewer points out, the book certainly suffers from an over-dose of something. Too many terrible things happen to Susan. Even though such a life might have been lived by an actual person and the author have been realistic to the extreme in telling only what happened, the story would still be false in its conception, for the novelist who would paint the unusual, the freak case and sell it to us as a cross-section of life is not to be trusted. Never was a girl so beset by fate, so dogged by destiny as Susan. (All the horrible things that would normally happen to half a dozen girls are made to happen to this one--a device Mr. Dreiser employs endlessly.) She sold her body but she never sold "the unconquerable thing which was her spirit and herself." This is Phillips' main theme and he never lets us forget for a moment that her soul is still untouched!! She was trailed in the dirt but she



emerged clean. She was a flower that flourished amid filth. Physically she lived one life, mentally and spiritually she prepared to dwell in another. Contrast Phillips' Susan with Crane's Maggie. Here is a glimpse into Susan's mind:

"Ideas beyond her years, beyond her comprehension, were stirring in her brain, making her grave and thoughtful. She was accumulating a store of knowledge about life; she was groping for the clue to its mystery, for the missing fact or facts which would enable her to solve the puzzle, to see what its lessons were for her. Sometimes her heavy heart told her that the mystery was plain and the lesson easy--hopelessness. For of all the sadness about her, of all the tragedies so sordid and unromantic, the most tragic was the hopelessness. It would be impossible to conceive these people better off. They were such a multitude that only they could save themselves--and they had no intelligence to appreciate, no desire to impel. If their miseries--miseries to which they had fallen heir at birth--had made them what they were, it was also true that they were what they were--hopeless, down to the babies playing in the filth. An unscalable cliff; at the top, in pleasant lands, lived the comfortable classes; at the bottom lived the masses--and while many came whirling down from the top, how few found their way up!" \*

And here is the final picture of Susan.

"It was a few evenings ago, and she was crossing the sidewalk before her house toward the big limousine that was to take her to the theatre. She is still young; she looked even younger than she is. Her dress had the same exquisite quality that made her the talk of Paris in the days of her sojourn there. But it is not her dress that most interests me, nor the luxury and perfection of all her surroundings. It is not even her beauty--that is, the whole of her beauty." \*\*

In Crane's Maggie the girl is seduced, unromantically, by a cheap bartender and is cast out of her miserable home

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\* David Graham Phillips, Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1931), p. 344.

\*\* Ibid., p. 488.

by her drunken mother. She pursues miserably and unsuccessfully the profession of street-walker. This is Maggie:

"A girl of the painted cohorts of the city went along the street. She threw changing glances at men who passed her, giving smiling invitations to those of rural or untaught pattern and usually sedately unconscious of the men with a metropolitan seal upon their faces." \*

Maggie offers herself to a tall young man in evening dress, to a "stout gentleman, with pompous and philanthropic whiskers", to a belated business man. She passes out of the section of restaurants into that of saloons. On and on she goes offering herself lower and lower with never a taker.

"The girl went into gloomy districts near the river, where the tall black factories shut in the street and only occasional broad beams of light fell across the sidewalks from saloons. . . ."

"She went into the blackness of the final blocks. The shutters of the tall buildings were closed like grim lips. . . ."

"At the feet of the tall buildings appeared the deathly black hue of the river. Some hidden factory sent up a yellow glare, that lit for a moment the waters lapping oilily against timbers. The varied sounds of life, made joyous by distance and seeming unapproachableness, came faintly and died away to a silence." \*\*

This is the end of Maggie:

"In a room a woman sat at a table eating like a fat monk in a picture.

"A soiled, unshaven man pushed open the door and entered. 'Well', said he, 'Mag's dead.'"

"'What?' said the woman, her mouth filled with bread.

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\* Stephen Crane, Maggie: a Girl of the Streets (1st ed.; New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1896), p. 140.

\*\* Ibid., pp. 143-144.

"Mag's dead," repeated the man.

"Deh blazes she is!" said the woman. She continued her meal.

"When she finished her coffee she began to weep. 'I kin remember when her two feet was no bigger dan yer t'umb, and she weared worsted boots,' moaned she." \*

Perhaps one of the greatest faults of Susan Lenox is the fact that throughout Phillips makes us feel his sympathy with Susan. He grows sentimental over her--he grows sentimental with her. It is true that the specific pictures he paints of life among the very poor, and of the struggles of Susan against poverty, are often sadly true and realistic to the last degree but the long-drawn-out pages hold much the same interest as the report of a vice commission. It is the girl's reaction to her surroundings which is falsely conceived. Perhaps the truest, most powerful element in the whole novel is that Sutherland might be any town, that the sin of Susan's parents is the heritage of many young people, and that the sacrifice and suffering she was compelled to undergo is the usual penalty that compromise with convention exacts even from the innocent. It is another instance of the sins of the father being visited upon the children.

Coming at the particular time it did Susan Lenox was bound to be a storm-center of controversy and criticism for at that time it was certainly the frankest statement of the

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\* Crane, Maggie, p. 154.

sex case yet made in our literature. Such things in literature, if they had ever shocked in France and Russia, had long passed the shocking stage. It is this very frank handling of sex intrigue that gives the book its chief distinction as realistic fiction. For almost the first time the sordidness of social conditions represented by irregular sex affairs was treated in an American novel. It was bold and bald and unashamed and shocking beyond words when compared to that school of fiction founded on the Pollyanna sop of "Gods in His heaven; all's right with the world."

In The Bookman Magazine, for March, 1917, Isaac F. Marcasson writes:

"When David Graham Phillips died in 1911 we were at the high-tide of the so called 'white-slave' epoch in our writing. Frank dealing with the oldest human relation which had become second nature in French literature, suddenly descended upon the American novelist. It was precipitated by revelations of vice and protected corruption in congested centers like New York and Chicago. An old social sore was suddenly laid bare under the searchlight of 'investigation'. The 'timely' novelist got busy and the result was a flood of cheap, fictionized vulgarity, masquerading as 'sociology' and labelled 'book with a purpose'. Because they were mere surface scrapings they vanished and were forgotten like foul bubbles on the crest of the mighty tides of life."

It was the fact that Phillips conceived and wrote Susan Lenox some years before the outbreak of the movement that happened to have the social problem as its motive that caused the novel to draw so much adverse criticism. Had it been written ten years later it might still have drawn at-



tention and criticism but not from the same cause, as frankness concerning sexual matters had by that time been incorporated, part and parcel, into American Literature. At the time the book was published the very mention of "a woman of the streets" would cause thin-skinned respectability to shrink and bring a cry of protest from outraged conventionality. Yet the subject itself was not new. Such characters had been in many books from the narrative of the Magdalen on. The trouble had always been that the average novelist had employed the street-walker as a cloak for pruriency: as a sort of speeder-up for sensational effect. He had used her as a selling point for his stories. Phillips was too sincere an artist to make that mistake, indeed it was his sincere aim to make Susan Lenox the expression of, a condition, not the root of Sin but an important stone in the foundation of Society itself. That he grew romantic and sentimental over his theme is to be lamented.

Much of Phillips' significance as a realistic writer rests upon the introduction of his bold sex creed at a time when such things were still shocking to the American reading public. This sex creed was contained in the foreword to his play The Worth of a Woman, produced in 1903.

"There are three ways of dealing with the sex relations of men and women--two wrong and one right.

"For lack of more accurate names the two wrong ways may

be called respectively the Anglo-Saxon and the Continental. Both are in essence processes of spicing up and coloring up perfectly innocuous facts of nature to make them poisonously attractive to perverted palates. . . . The Anglo-Saxon 'morality' is like a nude figure salaciously draped; the Continental 'strength' is like a nude figure salaciously distorted. The Anglo-Saxon article reeks the stench of disinfectants; the Continental reeks the stench of degenerate perfume. The Continental shouts 'Hypocrisy!' at the Anglo-Saxon; the Anglo-Saxon shouts 'Filthiness!' at the Continental. Both are right; they are twin sisters of the same horrid mother.

"There is the third and right way of dealing with the sex relations of men and women. That is the way of simple candor and naturalness. Treat the sex question as you would any other question. Don't treat it reverently; don't treat it rakishly. Treat it naturally. Don't insult your intelligence and lower your moral tone by thinking about either the decency or the indecency of matters that are familiar, undeniable, and unchangeable facts of life. Don't look on woman as mere female, but as human being. Remember that she has a mind and a heart as well as a body. In a sentence, don't join in the prurient clamor of 'purity' hypocrites and 'strong' libertines that exaggerates and distorts the most commonplace, if the most important feature of life. Let us try to be as sensible about sex as we are trying to be about all the other phenomena of the universe in this more enlightened day." \*

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\* Phillips, Susan Lenox, "Foreword," pp. IX-XI.

## DAVID GRAHAM PHILLIPS, 1867-1911

## Reading List

The Deluge, 1905

The Plum Tree, 1905

Light-Fingered Gentry, 1907

Old Wives for New, 1902

The Fashionable Adventures of Joshua Craig, 1909

The Hungry Heart, 1909

The Husband's Story, 1910

Susan Lenox: Her Fall and Rise, 1917

HAMLIN GARLAND, VERITEST



### Hamlin Garland, Veritest

Hamlin Garland was born in Wisconsin in 1860. His father moved his family from Wisconsin to Iowa where the young Hamlin made that personal acquaintance with actual farm work which was later to give direction to his pen. Every day that he toiled long hours at difficult, dirty, uninteresting tasks but made him the more determined to escape a life bounded by such toil. He was convinced that only through education might he be able to enter the type of life that most appealed to him, that of mental activity as opposed to physical labor. By grasping every possible opportunity to attend school he managed to graduate from a local academy in 1881. The following year he went East, expecting to find intellectual stimulus as well as financial security in Boston. The intellectual stimulation came from his opportunities to read in the Boston Public Library but from almost no other source and financial security came not at all. The next winter he taught school in Illinois and then entered upon a brief and unsuccessful experiment in land speculation in Dakota. In 1884 he established himself in Boston and took up literature as the serious calling of his life. He felt convinced that there was a place in American

Art for the literature of the Middle Border and he felt further that his own experiences had particularly fitted him for the task of contributing to that literature. His A Son of the Middle Border, is autobiographical and tells of his early struggles as a writer. In it he sets forth his literary creed--and it was then the creed of a literary radical.

" . . . my first writing of any significance was an article depicting an Iowa corn-husking scene.

"It was not merely a picture of the life my brother and I had lived--it was an attempt to set forth a typical scene of the Middle Border. 'The Farm Life of New England has been fully celebrated by means of innumerable stories and poems!' I began, 'its husking bees, its dances, its winter scenes are all on record; is it not time that we of the West should depict our own distinctive life? The Middle Border has its poetry, its beauty, if we can only see it.'

"To emphasize these differences I called this first article The Western Corn Husking, and put into it the grim report of the man who had 'been there' and insistence on the painful as well as the pleasant truth, a quality which was discovered afterwards to be characteristic of my work. The bitter truth was strongly developed in this first article."

" . . . I had no models. Perhaps this clear field helped me to be true. It was not fiction, as I had no intention at that time of becoming a fictionist, but it was fact, for it included the mud and cold of the landscape as well as its bloom and charm." \*

"I grew up on a farm and I am determined once and for all to put the essential ugliness of its life into print. I will not lie, even to be a patriot. A proper proportion of the sweat, flies, heat, dirt, and drudgery of it all shall go in. I am a competent witness and I intend to tell the whole truth." \*\*

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\* Hamlin Garland, A Son of the Middle Border (New York, 1917), p. 351.

\*\* Ibid., p. 416.

"Obscurely forming in my mind were two great literary concepts--that truth was a higher quality than beauty, and that to spread the reign of justice should everywhere be the design and intent of the artist. The merely beautiful in art seemed petty, and success at the cost of the happiness of others a monstrous egotism." \*

This is Garland the literary radical. He had enlisted under the banner of Henry George for the abolition of poverty and became what he called "a Veritest". This term he had borrowed from a French writer, but it seemed to him to fit well his efforts as a writer of the truth--the truth at any price. He desired with all his heart to tell the truth about the frontier farmers and their wives in language which might do something to lift the desperate burdens of their condition. In such a fashion his passions and his doctrines joined together to fix the direction of his art. He hated the frontier with a hate born of a complete knowledge of its hardships, and he tried to hint at definite remedies which he thought might make life on frontier farms more endurable.

"Alas! Each day made me more and more the dissenter from accepted economic as well as literary conventions. I became less and less of the booming, indiscriminating patriot. Precisely as successful politicians, popular preachers and vast traders diminished in my mind, so the significance of Whitman, and Tolstoi and George increased, for they represented qualities which make for saner, happier and more equitable conditions in the future." \*\*

"All that day I had studied the land, musing upon its

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\* Garland, A Son of the Middle Border, p. 374.

\*\* Ibid., p. 377.

distinctive qualities, and while I acknowledged the natural beauty of it, I revolted from the gracelessness of its human habitations. The lonely box-like farmhouses on the ridges suddenly appeared to me like the dens of wild animals. The lack of color, of charm in the lives of the people anguished me. I wondered why I had never before perceived the futility of woman's life on a farm.

"I asked myself, 'Why have these stern facts never been put into our literature as they have been used in Russia and England? Why has this land no story tellers like those who have made Massachusetts and New Hampshire illustrious?'

"These and many other speculations buzzed in my brain. Each moment was a revelation of new uglinesses as well as of remembered beauties." \*

As the first wave of settlers had spread from the rock-strewn farms of New England over the fertile prairies of the Middle Border country a mood of hopefulness and optimism had colored their dreams. In the new land there were no hills to conquer, no rocks to blast, no stumpage to grub out, but here they found treeless fields of rich soil, level and clear, holding every promise of rich harvest. In natural productiveness it was perhaps the fairest portion of all America and the land-hungry settlers built their cabins and filed on their claims with a hopefulness that a few short years would see that section transformed into the wonderland of the continent. Sadly enough the glamour did not last and in recording its passing Hamlin Garland was no "frontier romantic" but a stern reporter of facts. Parrington speaks of the period as one of change, a period of sombre awakening.

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\* Garland, A Son of the Middle Border, p. 356.



"But as the seventies gave place to the eighties a subtle change came over the mood of the Middle Border. Disappointment and disillusion settled upon a land that before had smiled in the spring sunshine. The harvest was not fulfilling the expectations of the seedtime. The changed mood came in part from the harsh toil and meager living that were the necessary price the frontiersman must pay for his small winnings. It is no holiday job to subdue an untamed land and wrest abundance and comfort from a virgin soil. Only for the young who can project their hopes into the future is it endurable; for the middle-aged and the old it is a heart-breaking task. The history of the western frontier is a long drab story of hardship and privation and thwarted hopes, of men and women broken by the endless toil, the windows of their dreams shuttered by poverty and the doors to an abundant life closed and barred by narrow opportunity. It is true that the prairies took no such toll as the forests had taken; the mean and squalid poverty through which Lincoln passed was not so common in the Middle Border as it had been along the earlier frontier. Nevertheless a fierce climate and a depressing isolation added their discomforts to a bleak existence. The winds were restless on the flat plains, and the flimsy wooden houses, stark and mean, unprotected by trees and unrelieved by shrubbery, were an ill defense against their prying fingers. In winter the blizzards swept out of the North to overmaster the land, and in summer the hot winds came up from the Southwest to sear the countryside that were rustling with great fields of corn. Other enemies appeared, as it were, out of a void. Endless flights of grasshoppers descended like a plague of locusts, and when they passed the earth was bare and brown where the young wheat had stood. Armies of chinch-bugs came from nobody knew where, and swarming up the tender corn-stalks left them sucked dry and yellow. It is nature's way, to destroy with one hand what it creates with the other; and for years the western farmers were fighting plagues that had possessed the prairies before the settlers came.

"The disillusion of the Middle Border deepened into gloom as the widespread economic depression of the times added its discouragements. A period of falling prices was curtailing industry and forcing down the market values of all produce. From such depressions a debtor community always suffers most severely, for falling produce-prices mean rising money-values and a shifting standard of values for deferred payments. The farms of the Middle Border were heavily encumbered to provide tools and livestock and building and

the earnings were consumed by the interest that went East to the mortgage-holders. Debt was a luxury the farmer could ill afford, and when the debt was silently augmented by the rising value of the dollar he was forced to consider the situation." \*

This was the period and the situation that produced Garland and other writers of his type. It was a time for protest--a time for a sober facing of the facts. It was in 1887 that Garland, brooding over his reading at the Boston Public Library, wrote his first sketches of life in the Middle Border. No one was more keenly aware than he that the romance had faded from the prairies. He had had that sober fact borne home to him by endless days of heart-breaking toil. He felt personally the burdens of the western farmer and he could foresee no time when they would be lighter. Depression had settled on the Middle Border, and Garland felt that depression as a man who had suffered under it. The blight laid upon men and women and children by the rigours of the farmer-pioneer's life was a familiar fact to him. The Garlands and the McClintocks had suffered from it as their kind had suffered and Hamlin Garland's young and sensitive mind was filled with wrath when he pictured the actuality.

" . . . the barnyards where tired men did the evening chores, the ungainly houses where tired women stood over hot stoves, the fertile acres that produced more than the markets consumed. It was a life without grace or beauty or homely charm--a treadmill existence that got nowhere. If

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\* V.L. Parrington, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America (New York, 1930), pp. 260-261.

this were the Valley of Democracy then the democracy was a mean thing and hopeless, and having himself escaped from it he would do what he could to help others escape. In the completeness of his disillusion the glamour of romance was swept away and he proposed to set down in honest plain words the manner of life lived by these Middle Border folk, and the sort of earnings won by their toil. He would speak frankly out of the common bitter experience. The way to truth was the way to realism." \*

Youth is the time for revolt, for protest--youth makes a savage realist, for youth has boundless hope, and confidence and exultation in itself. When a man begins to doubt his ability to reform, to change by challenge, he softens, he allows himself to speculate, to condone, and then to pity. In Main Travelled Roads and A Son of the Border Garland the Veritest, hammered out his creed in staccato-like passages of astonishing simplicity. His interest was in scenes and characters near at hand--indeed, members of his own family served him as characters. He omitted moralizing and all impertinent comment. He made the actual the basis of his art. His realism differs completely from that of Zola in that he treats of the average, the normal, rather than the abnormally developed, the criminal. He painted his scenes as they appeared to him allowing his own biases and concepts full play.

"The fact that I, a working farmer, was presenting for the first time in fiction the actualities of western country life did not impress them (the critics) as favorably as I had expected it to do. My own pleasure in being true was not shared, it would seem, by the others. 'Give us charm-

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\* Parrington, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, pp. 290-291.

ing love stories!" pleaded the editors.

"No, we've had enough of lies," I replied. "Other writers are telling the truth about the city,--the artisan's narrow, grimy, dangerous job is being pictured, and it appears to me, that the time has come to tell the truth about the barn-yard's daily grind. I have lived the like and I know that farming is not entirely made up of berrying, tossing the new-mown hay and singing "The Old Oaken Bucket" on the porch by moonlight." \*

"Thus by a circuitous route I had arrived at a position where I found myself inevitably a supporter not only of Howells but of Henry James whose work assumed even larger significance in my mind. I was ready to concede with the realist that the poet might go round the earth and come back to find the things nearest at hand the sweetest and best after all, but that certain injustices, certain cruel facts must not be blinked at, and so, while admiring the grace, the humor, and satire of Howells' books, I was saved from anything like imitation by the sterner and darker material in which I worked." \*\*

Garland felt that the young author should abjure all models and masters, all "good" English, falsely so called, all rhetorical rules, and be his own spontaneous self. He should saturate himself in local color, he should become a literary anarchist. He should write in a new American way, using a new American language to celebrate the plain American people. (Of course that idea was not new as Whitman had voiced much of it years before in his plea for homely, American, "he-man" words) Garland had faith in America as a field for genuine literary art as opposed to literary ex-

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\* Garland, A Son of the Middle Border, p. 376.

\*\* Ibid., p. 384.



plotation. He had a deeply rooted interest in the common people and a love for them. He loved his work, was courageous and self-confident, but also self-willed and contemptuous of those better trained than himself. His early style was generally effective though often rough and even incorrect. Many of his sketches are only too plainly biased by the anger at circumstances felt by a young man, ambitious of the intellectual life, who is forced into hard, uncongenial physical labor. It was this very bias that made Garland the literary rebel, but it also indirectly made him over into the reactionary, for by the time he had worked out of his place as a toiler his anger had abated. In an article in The Nation Magazine for November, 1930, Mr. Hartley Grattan has this to say about Garland:

"Once upon a time Mr. Hamlin Garland was aflame with a passion for social justice. . . . Once upon a time he was a literary radical. Now he can covertly sneer at the active writers: 'our present-day school of pornographic fiction.' Once he was a Veritest and a proponent of local color and looked toward the future. Now he is a member of The American Academy and rests on his laurels. . . . But the situation reveals the important fact that Garland never quite knew where he was going. He wanted to be truthful in his own stories, but he got himself confused by thinking about 'wholesome' realism. He sensed the immense brilliance of Stephen Crane, but regretfully concluded that Crane would never develop like Booth Tarkington and Owen Wister!"

This is a too severe criticism of Garland by a writer whose views are slightly warped by his own prejudice but we must face the fact that Mr. Garland's success was on the wane after Main Travelled Roads, A Son of the Middle Border,

Prairie Folks, and Rose of Dutcher's Coolly. With Jason Edwards, A Spoil of Office, and A Member of the Third House, Garland turned to corruption in politics and other affairs about which he neither knew nor cared so much as he knew and cared about the actual lives of working farmers. He followed what proved in his case to be a false light--that of local color, to the Rocky Mountains and began the series of romantic narratives which further interrupted his true growth and gradually his true fame. Perhaps he looked upon local color as the end rather than as the beginning of fiction for he evidently felt that he had exhausted his old community and must move to fresher pastures. He came to lay too much stress on outward manners and allowed his plots and characters to fall into routine and uninteresting formula. He is most successful when dealing with action for he often reverts to sentiment when he deals over much with thought. From the very first Garland has been at his best when he has been most nearly autobiographical, and his true and lasting fame is based on his early stories of the lives and characters of his own family and his neighbors.

His latest book, Companions on the Trail, (1931) is an excellent piece of literary craftsmanship but adds nothing to his reputation as a realist.

## HAMLIN GARLAND, 1860-

## Reading List

Main-Travelled Roads, 1891

A Son of the Middle Border

Rose of Dutcher's Coolly

Jason Edwards; An Average Man, 1892

A Spoil of Office, 1892

Member of the Third House, 1892

Moccasin Ranch

Back Trailers from the Middle Border

Prairie Folks, 1899

Other Main-Travelled Roads, 1910

A Daughter of the Middle Border, 1923

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|------------------|--|
| Beer, Thomas     | Stephen Crane<br>New York: Knopf, 1923                               |
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