

## UNIT 6

**STEPHEN CRANE (1871-1900)**

***THE OPEN BOAT & THE BLUE HOTEL***

### I. INTRODUCTION: BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Thomas Beer (biographer): "the mistress of this boy's mind was fear" Themes: poverty, innate cruelty, war & death (= Ambrose Bierce)

Life ≠ pessimism & sensibility of tales & poems

Record of life confused & shrouded in myth (= Poe) --> himself into fiction (= Zola) --> philosophy of romance experimental

(= De Maupassant/Turgenev) --> sensory acuteness, brevity, Impressionism

Advance of psychological knowledge --> effects of environmental & instinct on individual ==> Behaviorism, social psychology & psychoanalysis

28, dozen volumes & legendary (+ complexity & interest to scholars/readers)

Son of Methodist minister --> rejected religious & social traditions +

identified urban poor + 'married' mistress 'of ill-fame' (Jacksonville, Flo.)

Gentle man obsessed by physical & psychic violence + life of penniless artist

+ ambitious & snob + poet & impressionist (journalist, social critic & realist)

==> paradoxical (original & not easy to be right about)

Restless, peripatetic <-- last of 14 children, moved with family 3 times -->

school, 7, Port Jervis (NY) --> father died 1880 --> Ashbury Park, NJ --> Next

5 years --> Edwin H. Cady (biographer/critic): 'confirmed in the sensitive, vulnerable, fatherless preacher's kid his fate as isolator'

Syracuse University --> baseball player --> 1891, newspapers -->

(artist friends & brother Edmund's, Lake View, NJ --> extreme privation) ==>  
 observer of psychological & social reality (realistic credo of Hamlin Garland)  
 --> rejected by NY editors --> 1893 (own expense), *Maggie, A Girl of the  
 Streets* (literary naturalism in America) <--> mass audience  
 Syndicate that took *Red Badge* (fortune improve) --> 1895, reporter to  
 American West & Mexico ==> "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" & "The  
 Blue Hotel" --> *Then Black Riders and Other Lines*, first poetry  
*The Red Badge of Courage* (fall) --> realistic in modern way (intnl acclaim)  
 Religious, social & literary rebelliousness --> direct action (NY police) 1896-  
 97, cover insurrection against Spain in Cuba (Cora Howorth Taylor, Hotel de  
 Dream in Jacksonville, Florida) --> 3 last years of his life  
 The Commodore sank off coast of Florida ==> "The Open Boat"  
 (physical/emotional/intellectual responses under extreme pressure + nature's  
 indifference to humanity's fate --> need for compassionate collective action)  
 1897, cover Greco-Turkish War + England (Joseph Conrad, H.G. Wells + Ford  
 Maddox Hueffer & Henry James + Harold Frederic)  
 1898, Spanish-American War (Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*)  
 Last months, desperate situation = tuberculosis + in debt (write for money) -->  
 1899, 13 stories (Whilomville for *Harper's Magazine*) + 2nd poetry, *War Is  
 Kind* + weak novel *Active Service + The Monster and Other Stories*  
 --> 9 articles (great battles) + 25 chap. novel *The O'Ruddy* --> (assistance of  
 Henry James) dies, Badenweiler, Germany, June 5, 1900

## II. CHRISTIAN (PAGAN) VISION OF THE WORLD?

Skepticism of generation (young for Civil War + America's power)

"God is dead" --> 1890s, prose & poetry of Stephen Crane

World = violent cosmic unrelated to longings/ideas/beliefs (human = victims)

Smart-alecky, "fresh", cocky --> more mature than Hemingway (stoicism)

Style never an end --> deliberate & highly colored ==> provocative way

Sensibility = aggressive, stoic, humorous, not frivolous = power of literature = concentrate, condense, reduce into shape certain intractable images

Turned in one direction & never willing to look in another

"War is life and life is war" --> pressure of others ==> "Art is a child of pain" -

--> artist describe situation on the "slant" (narrow, crooked, field) --> *The Red Badge of Courage*, 1st American impressionistic novel (popular) --> appeal to

popular audience & money ("pot-boiler" = no quality) --> education of young man in context of struggle (dominant story-type) Distinctively modern =

identity complex/ambiguous + readers to judge

### III. CRANE'S LITERARY DEVELOPMENT: REALISM, NATURALISM & IMPRESSIONISM

Personification + zeugma (elipsis) as figure --> classical tendencies

Daniel G. Hoffman: "Crane was a literary chameleon"

Naturalist only historically (*Maggie*, 1893) <--> minor undeniable role

No naturalistic (*Red Badge of Courage*) <--> Bowery tales: "The Men in the Storm"/"An Experiment in Misery") --> + epistemological / - determinism

==> Free will more important than chance/fate + irony discordant with

Naturalism (<-- false estimate of self leads to climactic diminution)

Nat. = epic in length & focus + omniscient narrator + symbolization +

sincerity + common characters -> elevation & broad social significance ==>

"truth" <====> Crane = episodic units (brevity) + restricted narrative + sensory images & imagistic correlatives (<-- characters' minds) ==> psychological state -> ironical reduction & specificity (individual + isolation)

Realism & Impressionism = similar characters + common folk (middle-America) + objective narrative methods -- > Realistic more access to information (biographical) directly or through dramatic method

Impressionism = no resolution of ethical issues (no complete circumstances)

Realism = reality known & recorded = stable, certain, comprehensible (what to do) <--> Impressionism = not certain = rapid flux (define & understand)

- stories use moral crisis as climactic moment --> + growth of character

Little distinction structural units of short stories & novels (episodes strung together by character/place, not action) + not Jamesean psychological realist

Compelling of mental lives is normality --> psychological "realism" = epistem. record of sensory experience (-> internalization, reflection, fantasy)

Dramat. psychological realism in *Red Badge* = naturalistic view of heroism --> hero discover manhood by violent action --> reportorial art maturity ("The Blue Hotel" & "The Open Boat" --> effect by understatement)

Balance between reality-imagination = great art + instinct-circumstance --> individual-tragic issue --> next generation (Hemingway, Steinbeck)

Even journalism --> + psychological process -- descriptive detail

Realism = Crane ==> Rejection of Romanticism (stylistic elevation + transcendental metaphysics & pantheism + symbolization + allegorical plots & characters + people/events as emblematic) --> ordinary people

Unlike realists (things "are") ==> unstable, changing world (things "seem")

Sullivan County tales = dramatic irony --> central character = limited view <--> reader's perspective = systematically enlarged ==> Resolution = epiphany reveals absurd role in situation (Orm Øverland)

Tone = apprehension born of isolation & uncertainty

*The Red Badge of Courage* = 1st impressionistic novel in Am lit

Epistemology (psychological conflict -> resolution = thought/feeling)

Sensory emphasis = + visual -- verbal experience

*The Third Violet & Active Service* (<-- popularity of Genteel novels)

*The O'Ruddy* -> picaresque (Ireland-Frederic's *The Return of the O'Mahony*)

Crane's world (unsettled, tentative, inscrutable for his time) + characters

(uncertainty, anguish & isolation) = Modern sensibility (Hemingway) --> no background, no sympathy by narrator, no moral opinion, no conclusions

Impressionistic style (Hamlin Garland, Henry James, Harold Frederic, Bierce, Kate Chopin & English Ford Maddox Ford and Joseph Conrad)

In essence no Realist --> symbolic artist (extends Realism) + Irony = chief technical instrument ==> paradox of man, his plight (Flaubertian style)

Work = sparse, crisp, sensory + no authorial presence + little description & judgment + few wasted words ==> aesthetic impact + no call to social action + no program of economic reform + rarely popular social theory + brevity

/sharpness (Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Caroline Gordon & parts of John Steinbeck, William Faulkner, John Dos Passos...)

Impressionist relativistic realities ==> Modernism (indifferent & undefinable universe + lack of individual significance) => Expressionism (evocative & surrealist imagery) ==> Existential alienation (despair & anguish) ==>

Absurdity of French New Novel & Post-Modernism (interpretive

uncertainties) ==> US Sur-Fiction (anti-didacticism & art-for-art's sake)

Enthusiastic interest emerged in 1920s (life & work in modern scholarship)

==> continuing value of his contribution --> literary Impressionism

#### IV. *THE OPEN BOAT* (1897)

Finest short story & masterwork of XIX cent. American literature

"A Tale Intended to Be after the Fact. Being the Experience of Four Men from the Sunk Steamer Commodore" = fictional reworking (Atlantic-Flo.) To be accurate & interpretation with broad social/metaphysical significance

*Scribner's Magazine* (collected in Am & Eng eds of *The Open Boat*)

Ironic narrative juxtaposition --> preoccu of 4 men vs. detached perspective

Opening line = severely restricted view <--> omniscient narrator (objective)

Limitations more acute <--> juxtaposed: detached observation of narrator

Moments of great intensity vary in significance --> accord to perspective ==>

reader to consider plight of men (abstract view & situation in the boat) -->

reconcile intrusive passages (omniscient) & restrictive Impressionism

Men relative strangers --> unexpected community ("brotherhood") Microcosm of dinghy = society collaborative --> insignificance of individual Detachment of narrator not Crane's (author = experienced events himself)

"Objective" pole of impressionistic narration = pure sensation & "subjective" extreme = mental activity (<-- sensory data) --> stream of consciousness?

Prior stream of consciousness & Express --> occasional subjective distortion

Chorus technique = pertains to underlying themes (death)

Refrain = generalized thinking of 4 men in boat <--> cosmic indifference

Narrator's projection of thoughts as mental flow --> 1st refrain (= danger + protest against unjust Fate + absurdity + egotistical rage)

2nd refrain (abbrev) = 3rd = correspondent = Carol Norton sentimental hero

4th section (midpoint) = no help from people on shore

Refrain mode = stream-of-consciousness narration & intrusive narrative projections --> thought of narrator to interpret action + thinking of men cosmological presumptive with malevolence of agents in universe

1st refrain = assessment of danger --> 2nd = man on shore don't help --> 3rd = night correspondent sees a shark

6th section --> no collective consciousness --> correspondent's mind ==>

theme: action & danger --> epistemology & nature: hostile to indifferent

Correspondent's mind: distant star (protest to nature indifference) & tower on beach (reality/man's perception) = impressionistic themes

Chorus-refrain = narrator's projection of interpretation of events + quasi

Romantic statement by nature + stream-of-consciousness of precognitive thought + generalized statement of what characters "must" be thinking ==>

restrict sources of information (limitation & erroneous interpretations)

Oiler (only competent sailor) drowns --> no Darwinian doctrine of survival of the fittest & efficacy of brotherhood --> each man must swim to shore alone --> death of oiler = indifference of nature & isolation of man

Thematic development = growth of perception --> increased understanding of perceptual realities & problematic nature of interpretation

Illusion of sensory reality being apprehended by a character (<-- brief units of sensation --> structure of episodes unified by theme & character)

Speech of men abrupt & disjointed sentences ==> confused motion & change

Episode = sensorial description --> dialogue & description of action

In process: narrative perspective = mind of single character --> awareness of fictional world of character & restriction to third-person identification with mind of character --> human beings comprehend only partial truths

& delude themselves about knowledge & distortion & data reconstruction

Reader's mind = first exposed to narrator --> identified with character ==>  
 emphasis on psychological reality + human receptor of sensory experience  
 World = ephemeral, evanescent, shifting & defying precise definition  
 Narrative restriction + limited sensory data + distorted interpretations of info.  
 + modulations among differing p.o.v. = methods of presentation  
 ==> narrative strategies related to episodic plots, sensory imagery &  
 epistemological themes (involving perception & realization)  
 "The Open Boat" = impressionistic Realism (*Maggie*) + symbolic Realism  
 (*Red Badge*) ==> foremost engineer of techniques of modern fiction

## V. *THE BLUE HOTEL* (1898)

Best Western story + *Collier's Weekly* (*The Monster and Other Stories*)  
 Extreme, improbable circumstances (Fort Romper, Nebraska) + Patrick Scully  
 & Son (Johnnie) + Swede + Cowboy (Bill) + Easterner (Mr. Blanc) Swede:  
 paranoid fear (fictional representation of West) --> card game (Johnnie  
 cheats?) --> Scully-Swede --> card game --> Swede <-> Johnnie  
 --> Swede to saloon (bartender + 2 businessmen + district attorney) --> Swede  
 <-> gambler (into drinking) = Swede's death --> judgement  
 Saloon = resort of convivial humanity -> Legend on top of cash-machine  
 Swede = Wild West + disturbed mental state + actions to death (isolation)  
 9th section = different moral view ==> failure of community  
 Cowboy in Dakota line + Easterner (3-year sentence) --> cowboy (<->  
 Swede's accusation of Johnnie) + Easterner (Johnnie was cheating) +  
 conspiracy of silence --> Swede's death

Antithetical interpretations = Howellsian doctrine of complicity or existential  
 necessity for human brotherhood + naturalistic outlook (no man's control) +  
 logical gap (Swede's responsibility & Easterner's on group culpability)  
 Hyperbolic Easterner's speech --> burlesque literary naturalism (complicity)  
 One man can terrorize a group = unexpected character of Swede (humor)  
 Swede's effect = funny, hysteria-making --> not understood/believed  
 Scully = caricature of business dealing with...Hitler (Swede = buffoon)  
 Clumsiness of men fighting in snow & others to take Swede down (normalize)  
 Every sin is a collaboration (character in alien environment & desire to  
 cooperate) ==> existentialist quality = Swede aims at own destruction (fate)  
 Demonstration = exposure of secret pattern + logic of life itself ==> crazy  
 startling humor of savage denouement --> unexpected = factor to the end  
 (not "moral" of story but weirdness of situation remains with readers)  
 Swede = villain + victim + ominous fortune-teller in us  
 Drama in two card games --> beauty of Crane's story = mood (literary images  
 + description of characters + whole feeling of place)  
 Zany (strange) = bridge to horrible + horror = threat hanging over us  
 Great story (<-- recognize ourselves in it without knowing why)  
 Political content = universal & timeless + Strong irony (West myths/legends)  
 Contradict endings ==> modernistic awareness of multiplicity & partiality of  
 individual perceptions & futility of coherence on chaos of existence