Irony in the fiction of Stephen Crane

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IRONY IN THE FICTION OF STEPHEN CRANE

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY
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PREFACE

This thesis is a study of irony as it is reflected in Stephen Crane's most important novels and short stories and of the relationship that exists between his use of irony in the short stories and the novels.

Although studies have been made of Crane's technique, style, and art, there is, as far as I can determine, no detailed study of Crane's fiction from this viewpoint. There are, however, in most histories of American literature and many periodicals, a number of criticisms concerning his works which have assisted me in this study.

As a basis for this study, novels and short stories most representative of the various aspects of irony have been chosen. The novels are Maggie: A Girl of the Streets and The Red Badge of Courage. The short stories are "The Open Boat," "The Monster," "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," "The Blue Hotel," and "Five White Mice."

Chapter I treats the irony in the novels and short stories which Crane reveals through treatment of theme. Chapter II contains a discussion of ironic contrasts. Chapter III presents a treatment of the irony employed in character development.

To Professor Thomas D. Jarrett, director of this thesis, I wish to express my sincere appreciation for the stimulating suggestions, generous guidance, and untiring patience during the period of preparation. Through the kind cooperation of the Trevor Arnett Library and the University of Georgia Library, I have had access to books and periodicals needed to complete this study. I am grateful to Mrs. Ethel B. Hawkins, Director of Readers' Services of the Trevor Arnett Library, who secured books for me through Inter-Library Loan. I also wish to acknowledge the persistent encouragement of Mrs. Rosa J. Fennell, my mother.
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Stephen Crane looked at life clearly and boldly, knew its irony, felt its mystery and beauty, and wrote about it with a sincerity and confidence that spring only from genius. There was something in him that could not wholly surrender to the outside world. He had some queer, cautious, passionate evasion that made him look deeper into himself and trust only the reflection of the world that was there. Crane was intense, volatile, and spontaneous, and what he wrote came unwatched from his pen. He wrote with the intensity of a poet's emotion, the compressed emotion which bursts into symbol and paradox. He wrote as he lived. He saw life, as it were, from a water soaked dinghy with the sea tossing him about. It looked to him like an angry sea with the grim waves menacing and "most barbarously abrupt." This may account for the artist's gift of ironic contemplation, that grace of irony which is so central to his art.

Irony is the key to our understanding of the man and his works. There was first of all an ironic contradiction between his theory of creation and his art. It was Crane's theory that the closer his contact with reality, the greater the artist. Yet his art was at its greatest when he wrote at some distance from the reality he had experienced, or when, to the contrary, he wrote out of no personal experience at all.

When Crane wrote The Red Badge of Courage, he knew nothing of war at first hand. He had not yet witnessed a battle. After his experience in Greece and

Cuba, he could say to a friend, "The Red Badge of Courage is all right." Later experiences confirmed the truth first apprehended chiefly by the imagination. Hamlin Garlin pronounced in his 1893 review: "It [Maggie] is not written by a dilettante; it is written by one who has lived the life." The irony of this is the fact that Crane did not know the Bowery intimately until he had written one or two drafts of the novel. The realism is not studied from life in either novel; it is created in such a way as to render an illusion of reality.

Among the themes recurring in Crane's fiction are heroism, fate, and fidelity. For a clear view of his ironic treatment of the theme, heroism, the term may be examined. A consultation of Funk and Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary of the English Language will reveal a hero as

a man distinguished for valor, fortitude, or bold enterprise; anyone regarded as having displayed great courage or exceptionally noble or manly qualities or who has done a deed showing him to possess such qualities.

The world in all ages has worshipped its heroes, but the standard of heroism has always been changing. We think of heroism today not so much on account of the thing done as for the motive behind the act. Speaking of the war hero, Emerson in his essay, "Heroism," states:

The commonwealth and his own well being require that he should not go dancing in the weeds of peace, but warned, self collected and neither nor dreading the thunder, let him take both reputation and life in his hand, and with perfect urbanity dare the gibbet and the mob by absolute truth of his speech and the rectitude of his behavior.... Toward all this external evil the man within the breast assumes a

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warlike attitude, and affirms his ability to cope singlehanded with the infinite army of enemies. To this military attitude of the soul we give the name Heroism.

Emerson continues by stating that the hero has a mind of such balance that no disturbance can shake his will. Self trust is the essence of heroism.

Crane's characters do not have any innate capacity for heroism. It is not a predictable quality. It is an impersonal gift that is thrust upon man momentarily and with ironic consequences. Therefore, in Crane's war novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, the plumes and trumpets of the glory of battle do not appear. The novel records the thoughts, impressions, and experiences of a youth during his first battle which lasted for three days. The youth, as was to be expected, runs away, but later receives a wound from a musket brought down on his cranium by a more terrified comrade. With this "red badge of courage," he is taken for a hero and proceeds to act like one. Bravery had not before been so enthusiastically dissected. Henry goes to war for excitement and change. He cherishes notions of his own inner fineness and capacity for heroism.

He had of course dreamed of battles all his life -- of vague and bloody conflicts that had thrilled him with their sweep and fire. In visions he had seen himself in many struggles. He had imagined peoples secure in the shadows of his eagle-eyed prowess.... He had read of marches, sieges, conflicts, and he had longed to see it all. His busy mind had drawn for him large pictures extravagant in color lurid with breathless deeds.

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2 Ibid.
4 Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* (New York, 1951), pp. 5-6. All subsequent references to Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*, unless otherwise stated are made to this edition, and are entered without the name of the author.
Although Henry is just a mere pawn in a game of which he does not know the rules, he feels superior to his more stolid fellows, including the lieutenant, "who had no appreciation of fine minds." He wishes to experience a battle and discover that "he had been a fool in his doubts, and was in truth, a man of traditional courage." Here Crane displays his alert sense of irony. The self pity of the new recruit and the sudden panic of the regiment in the face of the enemy are remarkably depicted. Crane gives a kind of ironic, unheroic expose of the utter horrors of combat:

To the youth it was an onslaught of redoubtable dragons. He became like a man who lost his legs at the approach of the red and green monster. He waited in a sort of a horrified, listening attitude. He seemed to shut his eyes and wait to be gobbled.

A man near him who up to this time had been working feverishly at his rifle suddenly stopped and ran with howls. A lad whose face had borne an expression of exalted courage, the majesty of he who dares give his life, was, at an instant, smitten object. He blanched like one who has come to the edge of a cliff at midnight and is suddenly made aware. There was a revelation. He, too, threw down his gun and fled. There was no shame in his face. He ran like a rabbit.

Others began to scamper away through the smok. The youth turned his head, shaken from his trance by this movement as if the regiment was leaving him behind. He saw the few fleeting forms.

He yelled at them with fright and swung about. For a moment, in great clamor, he was like a proverbial chicken. He lost the direction of safety. Destruction threatened him from all points.

Directly he began to speed through the rear in great leaps. His rifle and cap were gone, His unbuttoned coat bulged in the wind. The flaps of his cartridge box bobbed wildly, and his canteen, by its slender cord, swung out behind. On his face were the horror of those things which he imagined.

The lieutenant sprang forward bawling. The youth saw his features wrathfully red, and saw him make a dab with his sword. His one thought of the incident was that the lieutenant was a peculiar creature to feel interested in such matters upon this occasion.¹

¹Ibid., pp. 78-80.
Times of heroism are generally times of terror. Yet Crane exhibits the un dignified cowardices and the temporary spiritual meanness of flight in his hero. In The Red Badge of Courage we see how the normal, absolutely undis tinguished, essentially civilian man from the street had behaved in a ter ri ble and prolonged war. He was without distinction, without military qualities, without special courage, without even any profound apprehension of, or passion as to, the cause of the struggle in which, almost without will, he was engaged.

Crane's ironic method was usually successful. After allowing Henry to violate a basic code of the group by running away from battle, the man is seen rationalizing desperately. "Since the imbecile line had remained and become victors...he felt that he had been wronged." He pitied himself acutely. However, "he had done a good part in saving himself, who was a little piece of the army."

If none of the little pieces were wise enough to save themselves from the flurry of death at such a time, why then, where would be the army?

In further justification of this unheroic act, the youth gives the example of the squirrel, "immediately upon recognizing danger, had taken to his legs without ado." Consequently, he fled because he had superior perceptions and knowledge. Man's self pity and self importance were ironical to Crane in a universe indifferent to man.

Again the unheroic is made interesting in the ironic incident in which he receives a slight wound from a fleeing soldier which enables him to rejoin

2 The Red Badge of Courage, pp. 87-88.
his regiment without loss of prestige. It was ironical that the soldier, Henry Fleming, should have gained courage through an accidental knock on the head.

He joins his fellows under false pretenses, lying about his red badge, and thinks that he has found a way out of him moral problem in the success of his imposture. "He had been taught," writes Crane in an ironic passage which clearly denotes Henry's wisdom as sophistry, "that many obligations of a life were easily avoided."

Similar examples of this saving irony that played about the above passage of Henry's rationalization are to be found in Crane's short story, "The Monster." There is the incident of the four influential citizens' visit with Trescott, the leading physician of the town. "It was about what nobody talks of — much.... It's about Henry Johnson." The purpose of this meeting is to convince Dr. Trescott to send Johnson away and save his practice. Trescott, however, does not agree.

In "The Monster" Crane has raised an ineradicable impression of Johnson's Courage and claustrophobic terror in the fire-filled study before the burning chemicals eat away the flesh of his upturned face. He has underlined the whole action with evidences of timidity, hysteria, and fear.

In his sudden momentary apathy there had been little that resembled fear, but now, as a way of safety came to him, the old frantic terror caught him. He was no longer creature to the flames, and he was afraid of the battle with them. It was a singular and swift set of alternations in which he figared twice without submission, and submitted once without fear.

In "A Mistery of Heroism" the soldier who risks his life to bring water to his comrades is in a state of utter fright during his venture. Then when he returns, the bucket is found to be empty. He has spilled most of the water.

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2 The Red Badge of Courage, p. 137.
while giving a drink to a wounded officer on the way. Everywhere in Crane's major fiction the world he envisages is one in which men seek, or seek to avoid physical danger. The courage reflected in the action is not the true courage of the hero. It is courage born through fear as is noted above and may be seen again in "The Blue Hotel." There is the fearful Swede, trembling for his own life, who after being fortified with whiskey, is no longer afraid or concerned about the danger of finding a victim. This ironic treatment of courage and fear is again exemplified in the "red rage" experienced by Henry in The Red Badge of Courage. The same idea recurs in the incident of Wilson "playing with the town; it was a toy for him," in "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky." The incident in which we find the drunken Wilson seeking for excitement and danger is depicted here.

A man in maroon-colored flannel shirt...rounded a corner and walked into the middle of the main street of Yellow Sky. In either hand the man held a long, heavy, blue-black revolver. Often he yelled....These cries of ferocious challenge rang against walls of silence. There was no offer to fight -- no offer to fight. He bellowed and fumed and swayed his revolver here and everywhere.2

Even Crane's language in describing these heroic scenes is ironic. He was forever seeking to convey scenes and feeling to his readers by similitudes, and always they came with a strange flavor of unexpectedness and originality. It would not be expected of him to remark after Henry had overcome many obstacles which he thought to be mountains, that "they had fallen like paper peaks, and he was now what he called a hero." Again "the men dropped here and there like bundles." This type of language is continued in "The Monster."

Crane refers to Johnson just after he has heroically rescued Jimmie and has himself been burned fatally as "a thing which he laid on the grass."

After examining the author's treatment of heroism the idea vanishes that a hero should behave like demigods, with all the marmoreal attributes of memorials. We know that at best the soldier behaves doggedly, but with weary non-comprehension, flinging away his chassepot rifle, his haversacks, and fleeing into the swamps. The idea of falling like heroes on ceremonial battlefield is gone forever: we know that we should fall like street sweepers sub-diding ignobly into rivers of mud. Other incidents of ironic heroism are reflected through Crane's characters and will be discussed in Chapter Three which treats character development.

Like the ironic treatment of heroism, the irony of fate found expression in Crane's prose fiction. He felt that man was alone in a hostile universe. He shows men struggling to no effect in the grip of circumstances and instinct. Crane did not think of nature as cruel, treacherous, wise or beneficent. He was of the opinion that nature was simply indifferent.

The concept of indifferent nature, as he had discovered it in the dinghy from the commodore, is constructed in "The Open Boat." The emotions and reactions of four men in an open boat after a wreck are given with an insight and fidelity to facts which makes the story memorable. Their preoccupation with the things immediately around them, varied by occasional flashes of the distant horizon, where lies their safety, is finely wrought. Irony of fate is always present.

1 Ford, op. cit., p. 37.
Crane inferred from the biological struggle for survival and astronomical immensity of the universe that man is unimportant: "A high cold star on a winter night" is the symbol of the indifference of nature and nature's God. It seemed ironical to Crane who found intense irony everywhere in human experience that the discoverer of the universe should be dwarfed by his discovery, that the chief spiritual result of man's scientific achievements should be the conviction of his own insignificance.1

The following sentence records the resentment the men feel, the resentment men have ever felt, at cruel fate:

These waves were most wrongfully and barbarously abrupt and tall, and each froth top was a problem in small boat navigation.2

The quiet acceptance of fate is another vivid aspect of the story. The men with ironic despair remarks:

If I am going to be drowned — If I am going to be drowned — If I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come this far and contemplate sand and trees?...If this old ninny-woman Fate, cannot do better than this, she should be deprived of the management of man's fortune.3

Cruel fate seemed absurd to these men who could see the land so near yet the breakers prohibited their coming close to the shore. Man's struggle against the ironic gods is reflected here at its height.

After much endurance the men do not protest any more, for they realize that nature no longer regards them as important, and "that she feels she would

1 Blair et al. op. cit., p. 532.
3 Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat" The Red Badge of Courage and Selected Prose and Poetry, ed. William Gibson (New York, 1950), p. 70. All subsequent references to Crane's Maggie and short stories, unless otherwise stated, are made to this edition and are entered without the name of the author.
4 Ibid., pp. 79-80.
not maim the universe by desposing of him." Recognizing the blank indifference of the cosmos, the correspondent, who tells the story, speaks of his lack of emotion at the supreme moment of danger. "It merely occurred to him that if he should drown it would be a shame." It was ironical that the strong oiler who should have been the one to survive the catastrophe of the open boat is the only one to perish.

Whether in external nature or in the subconscious, the primitive force of organic life directs the petty actions of individual men. Crane develops this idea in "The Red Badge of Courage." The boy hero is swept into battle.

He was bewildered. As he ran with his comrades he strenuously tried to think, but all he knew was that if he fell down those coming behind would tread upon him.... He felt carried along by a mob. He is swept away from it.

Others began to scamper away through the smoke. The youth turned his head.... He yelled then with fright and swung about. Eventually he is swept back to self conquest by forces deep inside himself over which he had no conscious control. Upon this action Crane comments:

He saw that it was an ironical thing for him to be running thus toward that which he had been at such pains to avoid.

During the battles the youth felt like he was boxed in by fate. After looking about him

he instantly saw that it would be impossible for him to escape from the regiment. It inclosed him. And there were iron laws of tradition

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1 The Red Badge of Courage, p. 96.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
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and law on four sides. He was in a moving box.

Cruel fate is at work again in "The Monster." Johnson is found trapped in Dr. Trescott's inflamed laboratory with safety only a few steps away. He saves the doctor's son from being burned to death, but he himself is overcome by the flames. The burning acids eat away his face. To quote this horrifying experience is to see cruel fate at work.

There was an explosion at one side, and suddenly before him there reared a delicate, trembling sapphire shape like a fairy lady. With a quiet smile she blocked his path and doomed him... He fell on his back... There was a row of jars upon the top of this desk. For the most part, they were silent amid the rioting, but there was one which seemed to hold a scintillant and writhing serpent. Suddenly the glass splintered, and a ruby-red snake-like thing poured its thick length out upon the top of the old desk. It coiled and hesitated, and then began to swim a languorous way down the mahogany slant. At the angle it waved its sizzling molten head to and fro over the closed eyes of the man beneath it. Then in a moment with a mystic impulse, it moved again, and the red snake flowed directly down into Johnson's upturned face.2

Many of Crane's stories consist of this moment when the characters confront the inescapable impasse of their situation. They are boxed in by fate. Stallman points out that a moment of spiritual collapse follows, but in the Crane story, nothing happens. The characters are left with a sense of loss, insignificance, defeat, futility, or disillusionment. This is true of Johnson in "The Monster" after he becomes the monster. Immediately after the accident he is a hero because he has saved the boy and the people believe that he is dead. When they learn that he is still alive, his deformity makes

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1 Ibid., p. 259.
him an object of horror. Not only does society trap Johnson, but Tresscott
and his wife as well. His practice is affected because he does not send
Johnson away, and his wife suffers social degradation. This is an ironic
attack upon the stupidity and intolerance of a group ruled by the psychology
of the herd. He is this time trapped by his social environment.

One feels the presence of society as a complex relationship of
persons and classes only in Maggie and "The Monster;" in both
of these works society operates as a primal force, like nature,
ruining the individual who would define his integrity by chal-
lenging its mores.  

Through his fiction Crane shows that environment is a thing in the world
and often shapes lives regardless.

"The Monster" has impressed many readers as the story of a man
left without human features by a horrible accident. Others
have seen in it an instance of caprice, the capricious power
of public opinion; But the story by far transcends either in-
terpretation, and achieves its stature as a narrative of fate
which, in a world imperfectly just, is meted out to the generous,
the disinterested, the quixotic.

This thought recurs in Maggie: A Girl of the Streets. The story is full
of illumination on this subject. Maggie's downfall is assured from the start.
She is trapped by heridity and society. Society makes her what she is and
kills her for it. In this novel Crane reports with touches of irony how
Maggie, the heroine of the story, tried to keep her character by working for
five dollars a week in a collar factory. He vivifies her experiences with a
bar tender, who soon casts her aside for a more experienced woman, and her

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1 Hobson Quinn, American Fiction: An Historical and Critical Survey (New
York, 1936), p. 536.
2 Hoffman, op. cit., pp. 5-6.
3 Stallman, op. cit., p. viii.
4 Wilson Follett, "The Second Twenty-Eight Years: A Note on Stephen Crane,"
Bookman, XLVIII (January, 1929), 536.
brutal experiences at home where she is soon turned out by a drunken mother and brother. She is then seen soliciting help from unresponsive men. This is her final plea to society. Since she is refused all possible help, she meets destiny by drowning herself in the river. It was Crane's method to make things happen from the very beginning of the story, one thing leading inevitably into another until tragic fate is met. Tragic irony of the fate of heredity is seen working through her drunken parents while the tragic irony in the fate of environment is represented by Pete and the dozen men who rejected her.

Like Maggie, whose fate could be determined easily at the beginning of the novel, the predestined lot of the Swede in "The Blue Hotel" is immediately known. The Swede, when introduced in the story, has an obvious feeling that he has already been marked for death. This notion is aroused through his own fear. He accuses the men in the hotel of wanting to kill him. That this seems to everyone a monstrous accusation, is one of the ironies of the story. When he is offered whiskey, he fears that it is an attempt to poison him, but after he drinks the whiskey he becomes arrogant and boastful. By declaring that Jimmie, the son of the hotel manager, is cheating in a game of High-Five, he gets the chance to "show what kind of man he is." Although he experiences a flash of false courage, he admits that environment has the greater force in society and he declares: "I won't stand much show against this gang.... Oh, I know what kind of thing this is! I know you'll all pitch on me. I can't lick you all!" After the Swede experiences a taste of victory in the fight with Jimmie, he urges his luck on until he brings about his own destruction. Note Crane's comment. This is what he says of the Swede after he is murdered:

The corpse of the Swede, alone in the saloon, had its eyes fixed upon a dreadful legend that dwelt atop of the cash machine: "This registers the amount of your purchase." Crane could, as is reflected in "The Blue Hotel," show fate working blindly and causelessly in the "muddled lives of men."

"The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," which begins as tragic melodrama and turns out satire, may be classed among his narratives which treat fate ironically. At one moment in the story the fate of the whole town rests in the hands of Wilson, a wild "trigger-happy" ruffin. Socratic irony is employed. The reactions of Wilson are exactly the reverse of what one would expect when he meets Potter, the town's marshall, for whom he was looking. Upon discovering that Potter is married, he calls the much anticipated fight off.

He was not a student of chivalry; it was merely that in the presence of this foreign condition he was a simple child of the earlier plains. He picked up his starbord revolver, and, placing both weapons in their holsters, he went away.

Massive use of ironies are found in Crane's treatment of the theme fidelity. Before we look at the theme itself, it is well to mention the fact that he was motivated by the principle of truth and fidelity to the facts of experience in his writing.

"I understand," he wrote, "that a man is born into the world with his own pair of eyes, and he is not at all responsible for his vision -- he is merely responsible for his quality of personal honesty. To keep close to this personal honesty is my supreme ambition." Crane's virtues as a writer come from the honesty and the clarity with which he recorded what

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1 Ibid., p. 213.
3 Loggins, op. cit., p. 27.
4 "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," p. 121.
he saw; and his weaknesses are the result of his failure to
discover why he saw as he did.  

The writers of the nineties tried to break away from the existing order
of things. They did not seek, however, to remedy the evils about them.
Among the growing intensity of industrial life, there sprang up a school of
fiction which dealt with social and economic problems in a powerful way.
Crane depicted slum life in New York with "painful fidelity" and frankness.
"Crane responded to the tragic struggles of the little people for freedom,
for their place in the sun, for a decent existence."

In Maggie: A Girl of the Streets the author reported with touches of
irony his hatred and fear of the slum and its inhabitants. It seems that he
could not understand how men could regard the slums condescendingly, ignoring
their hideous squalor and sentimentalizing the vile men and women who live in
them. The treatment other writers gave this subject irritated him. It also
appeared that Crane's manner of writing was "too honest" for the critics of
his day.

There is no expressed interest in reform in Maggie as has already been
pointed out, but there are touches of irony which call attention to moral con-
duct. Crane does not hesitate to make "Maggie the stupid victim of stupid
society." The treatment Maggie receives from society has already been cited.
Not only was society's debt to her unpaid, hereditary obligations were not
met. Irony comes into play in relating the unfaithful mother's neglect to her

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1 Granville Hicks, The Great Tradition (New York, 1935), pp. 159-60.
3 Hicks, op. cit., p. 160.
daughter. Maggie grows up in a home with drunken parents where there is no trace of love or security. She makes feeble efforts at supporting herself, but finally succumbs to the seductions of a bartender, Pete. When Jimmie, her brother, learns from neighbors that his sister is "gone teh d' devil," he informs his mother. The ironic attitude of the unfaithful mother is revealed in this passage:

May she be cursed for ever! May she eat nothing but stones and deh dirt in deh street. May she sleep in deh gutter an' never see deh sun shine again.¹

She continues this speech with self praise of the "commendable" way she has "brought up" her daughter. Hence she ironically congratulates herself.

Ah, who would think such a bad girl could grow up in our family, Jimmie, me son. Many d' hour I've spent in talk wid dat girl an' tol' her if she ever went on d' streets I'd see her damned. An' after all her bringin' up, an' what I tol' her and talked wid her, she goes teh d' bad, like a duck teh water.²

The irony of this is the fact that Maggie on several occasions tried desperately without success to talk over her problems with her mother who was always drunk and raging.

Jimmie expresses an attitude which shows that he is concerned about his sister's welfare, but after listening to his mother's speech on respectability, he is soon convinced that his sister has wronged him. His mother assures him that she will never accept her again because

It wa' n't no prod'gal daughter.... It was prod'gal son, anyhow. She can cry 'er two eyes out on deh street before I'll dirty d' place wid her. She abused an' ill-treated her own mudder what loved her, an' she'll never git anodder chance.³

¹ Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, p. 36.
² Ibid., p. 37.
³ Ibid., pp. 47-8.
When Maggie does return home, she is expelled by her mother with the assent of her brother whose attitude is as ironic as his mother's. On sight of Maggie, the mother exclaims:

Dere she stands.... Dere she stands! Look at her! Ain' she a dindy? An' she was so good as to come home teh her mudder, she was! Ain' she a beaut? Ain' she a dindy?2

This is what Crane says of the spectating neighbors, the girl, and Jimmie:

The jerring cries ended in another burst of shrill laughter. The girl seemed to awaken. "Jimmie--"
He drew hastily back from her. "Well, now, yer a t'ing, ain' yeh?" he said, his lips curling in scorn. Radiant virtue sat upon his brow, and his repelling hands expressed horror of contamination. 3

Maggie turned and went.

Here Crane's comment about Jimmie places emphasis on his ironic intent. Maggie is not only reviled by her family, but Pete, in a similar manner, rejects her for the more experienced Nell. When she turns to Pete and inquires, "But shere kin I go?" his reply is, "Oh, go to hell!" He dismisses all obligation to her "with an air of relief." Similarly Jimmie dismisses his obligations to Hattie, whom he has placed in the same predicament, with a disgusted, "Oh, go to blazes."

Maggie's last plea to society was unanswered. When she encountered a man whose "face was a picture of benevolence and kind-heartedness, he made a convulsive movement and," like Jimmie in the previous incident, "saved his respectibility by a vigorous side-step. He did not risk it to save a soul."

1 Quinn, op. cit., p. 632.
2 Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, p. 56.
3 Ibid., pp. 56-7.
On the contrary, "the gnarled old woman" welcomed her because she reflected that she "ain' got no moral standing" anyway. An evaluation of humanity is reflected in the irony of these experiences.

An evaluation of fidelity through friendship is found in the incident of Henry and the tattered soldier in The Red Badge of Courage. As they marched together, the tattered soldier, wounded and weary from battle, looked at the youth for encouragement several times. He received none. Eventually, he asked the youth about his wounds, but to his astonishment, the youth disappeared. The second time the youth found himself in the presence of his friend, the tattered man, he showed the same disgust Jimmie and Pete showed Hattie and Maggie who were in desperate need of help. He again deserted the tattered man who, he thought, was merciless because he inquired about his wound. "Turning at a distance he saw the tattered man wandering about helplessly." It recurs in "The Monster."

This story reveals the cruelty of the people of an eastern town to a Negro maimed while recovering the child of the town’s best doctor from a fire.

The completely miserable performance of these people; their laudation of poor Henry Johnson; their editorial on his heroism when it is supposed he is dead; and their disapproval of him after he is saved by Dr. Trescott’s skill and returns to live among them, in his disfigurement and idiocy, faceless, and horrible to look upon...¹

are revealed with ironic consequence. This citation is not only ironical, it leaves the reader cold and hostile toward this character type. These selfish people insist that Johnson be taken out of town to spare their sensibilities. Since the doctor, his one friend, remains loyal to him, his career is ruined.

Everybody forsakes him. The pity and terror of democracy's mob meanness are vividly and ironically treated. This idea has been slightly treated in the discussion of an irony of fate and will be discussed again in Crane's treatment of character development in Chapter III for it is in this faculty of penetrating social criticism, of a vivid, well chosen focus of the human circles and aims he presents, that Stephen Crane excels and interests.

There are other prevalent themes in Crane's prose fiction as well as his poetry, but the objective here is an analysis of the themes of heroism, fate, and fidelity in his representative prose. Crane's intense feeling about unconscious heroism in the ranks appears most clearly in the descriptive passages and dialogues used to reflect his ironic treatment. Man's struggle against the ironic gods within the length of a ten-foot dinghy serves as a basis for his treatment of ironic fate. Finally, in his preoccupation with social determinism, irony is employed to express his dissatisfaction of society. Hence, the theme fidelity is developed.

That he sees life under the light of irony does not diminish his passion but increases it. Are these characters, these situations, these comic or tragic consequences, after all, only the brief concerns of fate? Doubtless. But they have importance for the ephemeral creatures who are involved in them. And they have pattern and color for the...affectionate spectator.

1 Ibid., p. 149.
2 Van Doren, op. cit., p. 13.
CHAPTER II

IRONIC CONTRAST

It has been said, writes Stallman in his "Notes Toward Analysis of The Red Badge of Courage," that Crane is incapable of architectonics; his work is a mass of fragments; he can only string together a series of loosely cohering incidents. He notes Edward Garnett's comment on Crane's fiction. Garnett was the first English critic to appraise his works, and he pointed out that Crane lacked the great artist's arrangement of complex effects. Stallman agrees with this, but he calls attention to the fact that "the very thing that Garnett failed to detect is a structure of striking contrasts." 1

Much of Crane's fiction is designed upon a single crucial paradox or patterned by an irony of opposites. His accomplishment deserves more praise since the pattern of his work is wholly original.

His details are saturated with an almost typical everyday reality which superficially denies all breadth, depth, and poetic beauty: and the details achieve these qualities in all the greater measure by the very extremity of the apparent denial. The realities are of the earth, earthy; the vividness is as a nightmare... 3

There is, first of all, an apparent contradictory effect in his titles. Maggie, A Girl of the Streets implies a study of a bad girl, but Maggie, the heroine of the story, is fundamentally decent.

Maggie is the story not of "A Girl of the Streets," but a good girl declining downward from good to bad. Maggie did not feel like a bad woman. To her knowledge she had not seen any better. 4

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2 Cargill, op. cit., p. 87.
3 Follett, op. cit., p. 535.
The ironic viewpoint from which Crane designs his moral and social intent makes him a master of art.

If we agree with Quinn, The Red Badge of Courage is not a red badge of courage, but a "vivid description of the psychology of fear amid the panorama of war." A similar ironic intent is also implied in the title of the short story, "The Monster."

Short stories representative of his fiction designed upon a single crucial paradox are "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," "Five White Mice," "The Open Boat," "The Blue Hotel," and "The Monster." Speaking of "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," Gibson states:

"The tale builds a violence like the genie emerging from the bottle, only to end in an anticlimax and intense relief. Crane juxtaposes the patronizing pullman passengers and the respectful prone townspeople; the beatitude of the marshal's newly married state and the sense of a hairtrigger line separating him from momentary death. So ferocity and humor are linked by a young writer's gusto in a comedy of manners."

The former mood implies a tragic, the later a comic view of life.

This technique is employed again in "Five White Mice." There is revealed a scene in which a terrifying situation is at its crisis. Then there is an ironic turn of events giving relief. A New York kid escorting his two drunk friends home gets involved in a quarrel with three Mexicans, who challenge him to a fight. After the Mexicans pair themselves with the opponents, the New York kid is convinced that there is "going to be ascreaming murder" fatal to him and his friends. However, at the supreme moment, the kid's revolver

1 Ibid.
2 Quinn, op. cit., p. 538.
"came forth." The Mexicans went away quietly, because "the whole thing had been an absurd imposition." These stories end "with an ironic coda, not with a bang, but a whimper."

In "The Open Boat" there is also an anticlimax which ends with partial relief and rescue. A reverse use of this technique is revealed in "The Monster," where the ironic turn in the story is designed to move, not from a tragic situation toward relief, but from an amusing flow of events to a tragic end. In the same manner, the action in "The Blue Hotel" goes from humorous irony to a tragic finish.

Another technique employed by the writer involves his use of contrasting chapters and parts of chapters. A vivid example of this is seen in the first chapter, as well as most others, of The Red Badge of Courage. The chapter begins with expressed emotions of hope and faith which shift to despair and disbelief in the fourth paragraph. At first we find the men anticipating the idea that they are "goin' t' move t' morrah - sure." Soon another soldier shifts this faith to doubt as he exclaims, "It's a lie! that's all it is - a thunderin lie!" Jim Conklin's prophecy of hope meets with disbelief.

The form of The Red Badge of Courage is constructed by repetition alternations of contradictory moods. The opening scene establishes the same despair-hope pattern as the very last image in the book.¹

This despair-hope pattern recurs in "The Open Boat." Although "none of them knew the color of the sky," the men fought desperately, surmounting one wave after another, because they were optimistic of being rescued. Delay aroused doubt. These and similar words were echoed three times as the men on the open boat fell in moods of despair after brief intervals of optimism.

¹ Ibid., pp. xxiii-iv.
If I am going to be drowned — if I'm going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees?

In some instances Crane allows his characters to reflect hope in their most despairing moments. This is true of the captain when he is almost certain that the men will not live through this dangerous adventure. He expresses faith in the possibility that some of the men may yet be saved. His faith is voiced through these words:

If we don't all get ashore, — If we don't all get ashore, I suppose you fellows know where to send news of my finish. 2

Then the men exchanged some addresses and admonitions.

This incident may be compared with its parallelism in The Red Badge of Courage. As the complexity of the battles increased, the loud soldier despaired, and all of a sudden he placed "a heavy and sad hand" on Henry's shoulder and remarked with "intense gloom"

It's my first and last battle, old boy, ....It's my first and last battle old boy, ...Something tells me — I'm a gone coon this first time and — and I w—want you to take these things — to — my — folks. 3

He gave the youth a little packet of letters done up in a yellow envelope. He has faith that all will not be lost in battle. Hope and despair pervade both stories.

It is interesting to trace Crane's use of this double-mood pattern in his employment of ironical contrasts. He further establishes it in The Red Badge of Courage in the incident when "a negro teamster who had been dancing upon a
cracker box with the hilarious encouragement of two score soldiers" was deserted. This gay mood immediately shifts to a sad one because "he sat mournfully down." Henry, after watching the strange behavior of the tall soldier during his death, exhibits double emotions. He had watched this procedure in a spellbound manner, then he "turned, with sudden, livid rage, toward the battlefield," and he shook his fist. "He seemed about to deliver a philippic." His next comment was "hell-" This former quiet mood turns into angry raging as he blasphemes against the sun. Here it is interesting to note that Maggie's mother displays this emotional pattern. After raging with her husband and children,

her mood changed, and she wept as she carried little Tommie into another room... Then she came and moaned by the stove. She rocked to and fro upon a chair, shedding tears and crooning miserably to the two children about their 'por mother' and "yer fader, damn 'is soul." Her mood shifts from a furious one to a sentimental one.

The gay-pensive mood pattern is reflected through Pete as he displays his admiration of a "very small monkey threatening to thrash a cageful because one of them had pulled his tail and he had not wheeled about quickly enough to discover who did it." Minutes later he is seen moralizing over the mummies.

In his ironic contrast Crane makes use of paradox in images. The way of reflection is what concerns us here. Here again he employs the contradictory effect. One writer states: "It is better to present one image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works." What makes Crane of such exceptional critical interest is the great range and number of images found in his fiction.

1 Maggie, A Girl of the Streets, p. 8.
2 Stanley Coffman, Jr., Imagism (Norman, 1951), p. 10.
Before a discussion of Crane's images is initiated, let us indicate its meaning. Pound gives this definition of the term:

An "Image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.... It is the presentation of such a "complex" instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.1

"The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer." This image has probably given Crane the distinction of having created the most notorious metaphor in American literature. It symbolizes salvation through death. This lifeless sun represents Henry's lifeless conscience. It symbolizes Henry before he passes through a spiritual change, before he achieves in the end, the peace of a quiet confident courage. Before this change took place in Henry, he pondered a serious problem. "He tried to mathematically prove to himself that he would not run from battle." In doing so "he recalled his visions of "broken-bladed glory." An idea of paradox is advanced in this image. Henry's red badge symbolized his conscience reborn and purified, not the actual wound received from the blow of the rifle. Stallman writes that The Red Badge of Courage is about the self combat of a youth who fears and stubbornly resists change and spiritual growth. The battles are therefore symbolic of life and its problems.

Another significant image is the flag.

It was a creation of beauty and invulnerability. It was a goddess, radiant, that bended its form with an imperious gesture to him [Henry]. It was a woman, red and white,

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2 Stallman, op. cit., p. xxxv.
4 Stallman, op. cit., p. xxx.
loving and hating, that called him with the voice of hopes.

A paradox is in the idea of loving and hating. This seems as ironical as the tall soldier washing his shirt in muddy water to clean it. Its counterpart is found in the image where Henry becomes a man from his experiences in "the vast blue demonstration" when he is most insignificant. Henry's complete change from a vain-glorious recruit to a man of courage is epitomized in the very last image in the novel.

It rained... Yet the youth smiled, for he saw that the world was a world for him, though many discovered it to be made of oaths and walking sticks. He had rid himself of the red sickness of battle. The sultry nightmare was in the past. He had been an animal blistered and sweating in the heat and pain of war. He turned now with a lover's thirst to images of tranquil skies, fresh meadows, cool brooks - an existence of soft and eternal peace.

Over the river a golden ray of sun came through the host of leaden rain clouds.¹

I think this is the most significant image in the novel. Not only does it complete Crane's pattern of paradox and double mood, but it, at the same time, summarizes the theme of the story. It dominates Crane's ironic note.

In "The Monster" the judge gives his views about the doctor saving Johnson's life after his face was burned beyond recognition. He says that "it is one of the blunders of virtue" to save a man in this condition who would, "hereafter be a monster." The author comments on the manner of the spoken words. "Blunders of virtue," says he, "were spoken with a particular emphasis, as if the phrase was his discovery." Crane emphasizes the paradox with this comment.

Crane's language is the language of symbol and paradox. Another example

² Ibid., pp. 266-67.
recurs in "The Open Boat" in his description of the birds sitting comfortably on the cold sea. The writer juxtaposes the quiet, peaceful sea gulls and the fearful, excited men in the open boat at the mercy of a wrathful sea:

Canton-flannel gulls flew near and far. Sometimes they sat on the sea, near patches of brown seaweed that rolled over the waves with a movement like carpets on a line in a gale. The birds sat comfortably in groups, and they were envied by some in the dinghy, for the wrath of the sea was no more to them than it was to a covey of prairie chickens a thousand miles inland.¹

Note how he draws this contrast between the dangerous predicament of the men in the boat and the comfortable, domestic position of the birds. In "The Open Boat,"

The chief image is of course water,...Associated with it in the story are other images drawn from the ocean scene - gulls, sharks, seaweed - and contrasting images of land and domesticity. Water is not only implacably menacing; it is the source of life. When "the four waifs rode impudently in their little boat...with an assurance of impending rescue... Everybody took a drink of water. Water's ambiguous connotations lend further irony to the image at the outset.²

Similar connotations reflected in other expressions are noteworthy. "Many a man ought to have a bathtub larger than the boat which here rode upon the sea." In a domestic bath water serves man, but in this situation it only creates a menacing problem.

Another especially good touch of Crane's irony in paradox is reflected in the expression, "a singular race." This is his description of the tall soldier's flight when he was looking for a "suitable" place to die.

Thus far, I have attempted to show, in a limited sense, how Crane makes use of contradictory effect in titles, how he designs his short stories upon

¹ "The Open Boat," p. 74.
² Hoffman, op. cit., p. 273.
a single crucial paradox, his technique in contrasting chapters and parts of
chapters, his double mood pattern, and his use of paradox in images. Now let
us look at his ironic contrast in descriptive scenes. Note the interchange of
shadow and light, of the known and the unknown, making irony.

Batteries were speaking with thunderous oratorical effort.
Here and there were flags, and splashed bits of warm color
upon the dark lines of the troops.
The youth felt the old thrill at the sight of the
emblem. They were like beautiful birds strangely undaunted
in a storm.
As he listened to the din from the hillside, to a deep
pulsating thunder that came from afar to the left, and to
the lesser clamors which came from many directions, it
occurred to him that they were fighting, too, over there,
and over there, and over there. Heretofore he had supposed
that all the battle was directly under his nose.1

The noise and turmoil of the battle are in contrast to the quiet aspects of
nature as he continues.

As he gazed around him the youth felt a flash of
astonishment at the blue, pure sky and the sun gleam-
ing on the trees and fields. It was surprising that
nature had gone tranquilly on with2 her golden process
in the midst of so much devilment.

This idea is reiterated in "The Five White Mice." When the Eastern kid
stands facing his Mexican opponent in a crucial moment, this observation is
made:

And now here is the unreal real: into the kid's nostrils,
at the expectant moment of slaughter, had come the scent
of new-mown hay, a fragrance from a field of prostrate
grass, a fragrance which contained the sunshine, the bees,
the peace of the meadows, and the wonder of a distant croon-
ing stream. It had no right to be supreme, but it was
supreme, and he breathed it as he waited for pain and a
sight of the unknown.3

1
The Red Badge of Courage, p. 73.
2
Ibid.
3
"Five White Mice," p. 234.
The contrast of nature's tranquil surroundings with the confused emotions of man and that of his physical state are evidenced.

The contrast in the distance that the soldiers in The Red Badge of Courage had actually travelled with that they supposed they had gone is ironically striking. When they reached their old position they looked back to see how far they had charged. They were astonished. The youth discovered "that the distances, as compared with the brilliant measurings of his mind, were trivial and ridiculous."

The furious fighting and noises of the battle field are compared with the "sad silence" of the chapel scene. Contrasts in sound, color, scenery, and motion are revealed. Flashes of his contradictory effect are depicted through nature's changing moods. There is also a noticeable difference in Henry's inner turmoil and tranquil nature. He seems to gain assurance from nature after many "protestations" of it. His mood changes again, however, when he enters the chapel itself. He becomes frantic when he encounters the dead man inside. Crane's contrast of the living and the dead is drawn in an interesting way. I feel that quoting this long passage is the most adequate way of giving a true representation of Crane's use of irony of opposites reflected through it. When necessary, however, I shall interrupt to make brief comments.

He wished to get out of hearing of cracking shots which were to him like voices.

The ground was cluttered with vines and bushes, and the trees were close and spread out like bouquets. He was obliged to force his way with much noise. He could not conciliate the forest.

Because Henry was experiencing a kind of inward unrest, it appeared to him

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1 The Red Badge of Courage, pp. 89-90.
that the still aspects of nature were expressing his anxiety.

As he made his way, it was calling out protestations. When he separated embraces of trees and vines the disturbed foliages waved their arms and turned their face leaves toward him. He dreaded lest these noisy motions and cries should bring men to look at him. So he went far, seeking dark and intricate places.  

An apparent change in nature follows, and Henry gains assurance.

After a time the sound of musketry grew faint and the cannon boomed in the distance. The sun, suddenly apparent, blazed among the trees. The insects were making rhythmical noises. They seemed to be grinding their teeth in unison. A woodpecker stuck his impudent head around the side of a tree. A bird flew on lighthearted wing.

Off was the rumble of death. It seemed now that nature had no ears.

This landscape gave him assurance. A fair field holding life. It was the religion of peace. It would die if its timid eyes were compelled to see blood. He conceived Nature to be a woman with a deep aversion to tragedy.

At this point Henry's mood is in complete agreement with Nature's mood. He felt that "Nature was of his mind," but

At length he reached a place where the high, arching boughs made a chapel. He softly pushed the green doors aside and entered. Pine needles were a gentle brown carpet. There was a religious half light.

He was being looked at by a dead man who was seated with his back against a columnlike tree.

Crane makes much use of this figure in which the dead ironically takes his place among the living. This, however, need not be discussed just yet; for he continues this description with a striking shift of color image which is so common to his art.

The corpse was dressed in a uniform that once had been blue, but was now faded to a melancholy shade of green.

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1 Ibid., p. 90.
2 Ibid., pp. 90-91.
3 Ibid., p. 92.
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.... The dead man and the living exchanged a long look.... At last he burst the bonds which had fastened him to the spot and fled, unheeding the under brush....

After a time he paused, and, breathless and panting, listened. He imagined some strange voice would come from the dead throat and squawk after him in horrible menaces.\(^1\)

The same quiet peaceful mood experienced by Henry, as he went into the forest seeking assurance, returns. But this time there is a sadness mingled with the silence of the forest. "The trees about the portals of the chapel moved soughingly in a soft wind," and "a sad silence was upon the little guarding edifice." Like the battle scene placed before the chapel scene, one follows it.

To return to Crane's opposites of the living and the dead is, in a sense, to examine his contradictory effect in its lighter manner of irony. This is what he says of a dead man as he lay among the moving regiment:

\[
\text{He lay upon his back staring at the sky.... The invulnerable dead man forced a way for himself.}^2
\]

Referring to the contest of the youth and the color sergeant showing their desires to take the flag, he makes this comment.

\[
\text{They jerked at it, stout and furious, but the color sergeant was dead, and the corpse would not relinquish its trust. For a moment there was a grim encounter. The dead man, swinging with bended back, seemed to be obstinately tugging in ludicrous and awful ways, for the possession of the flag.}^3
\]

The corpse of the Swede in "The Blue Hotel," had its "eyes fixed upon a dreadful legend" that was just above the cash register on which was written,

\(^1\) Ibid., pp. 92-4.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 44.
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 216.
"This registers the amount of your purchase." These incidents are not really sincere; they are ironical.

Crane, ironical in a way of his own, employs ironic contrast as one of his basic techniques. In this lies the secret of much of his power to interest his readers. Through contradictory effect, paradox in images, and opposites in descriptive scenes, as well as opposites in his character development, Crane colors his fiction with irony. It is evident, if viewed in the light of the representative prose I used, that the author had a deliberate pattern in mind when he wrote. This pattern of contrast is widely reflected in his ironic treatment of character development. Since its scope is of such a broad nature, it will be treated separately in the third chapter of this study.

1 "The Blue Hotel," p. 213.
CHAPTER III

IRONY IN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

You can never do anything aesthetically - and you can never do anything that's any good except aesthetically - unless it has meant something important to you.¹

Although Crane established his aesthetic theory in this statement, his essential concern was, as Conrad phrased it, "the moral problem of conduct."² He found life far less desirable than it had been represented as being. His revolts were therefore directed against the moral code of his generation. He was concerned with human stupidity and corruption. He had a violent hatred, an almost physical loathing, for poverty and suffering. He saw in the poor the depths to which a human being might fall, and he "trembled at the abyss thus opened before him." His aim was to make plain that the root of Bowery life is a sort of cowardice or a lack of ambition.

In accomplishing this aim through character development Crane gives his characters an ironic outlook on life. He not only displays skill in characterization, but he reveals the fact that at one time these views of life meant something important to him. His method was to suggest subtly far more than he told. As Follett observes,

Once - once only - I believe - Crane violated all his own Canons by tacking on to a story of action one of those deliberate morals in which the abstract and generalized meaning of a tale can be manifest to the incompetent reader.⁵

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¹ Gibson, op. cit., p. xv.
² Ibid.
³ Hicks, op. cit., p. 160.
⁴ Gibson, op. cit., p. vii.
⁵ Follett, op. cit., p. 536.
Follett has reference to Crane's short story, "The Blue Hotel." After the Swede is murdered by the gambler, the Easterner gives this theory of the incident.

We are all in it! This poor gambler isn't even a noun. He is kind of an adverb. Every sin is the result of a collaboration. We, five of us, have collaborated in the murder of this Swede. Usually there are from a dozen to forty women really involved in every murder, but in this case it seems to be only five men - you, I, Johnnie, old Scully; and that fool of an unfortunate gambler came merely as a culmination, the apex of a human movement, and gets all the punishment.\(^1\)

Writers have given varied opinions of Crane's characters. It is commonly agreed that the persons of his fiction are not persons but just "Everyone." They are typical representatives of a group such as the Bowery bum, the cowboy, and the untried recruit. They are usually common, insignificant, and sometimes nameless persons. Critical opinion frequently comments that Henry Fleming in *The Red Badge of Courage* becomes almost an abstraction. This is similarly an operative factor in *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* of which the first version calls the characters simply "the girl," "the girl's mother," and "the girl's brother." It is also agreed that no Crane character is heroic, none is a leader, and none is an ideal.

On the contrary, another opinion holds this view:

People in fiction are composed of words, not flesh and blood, and to identify them with reality is absurd. Though Crane's characters are not individuals but types, individualized characters are not more true-to-life than "mere types;" their anonymity reflects his intention in *Maggie* which was (said Crane) "to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world, and often shapes lives regardless."\(^1\)

\(^1\)"The Blue Hotel," p. 214.
\(^2\)Stallman, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
Like the contrasts and parallelisms used by Crane to reinforce his themes, there is a dominate use of contrasts and parallels in his ironic treatment of character development. In *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* there may be noted, first of all, a distinct contrast in characters.

Maggie "with none of the dirt of Rum Alley in her veins" is placed in a Bowery world where disorder and confusion always pervade. Her environment includes formidable tenement women "with uncombed hair and disordered dress," screaming in frantic quarrels; a mother who turns the household into a battle field, smashing furniture and fighting with husband and children as well as street urchins; a brother who succumbs to hard work and drink. Then there is Pete, her lover, who is a magnificent bar tender. He is a Bowery fashion plate of social decorum. Maggie pictures him as a knight at arms, and confuses him with "a golden sun." In addition to these characters there is Nellie, "the woman of brilliance and audacity, who is first seen with Freddie, "a mere boy." Pete, the magnificent bar tender, is as helpless in the hands of Nellie, the experienced woman, as Maggie has been in his.

There is an interesting parallel of Jimmie and Hattie to Pete and Maggie. Crane writes the three beer-hall scenes to dramatize Pete's increasing boredom with Maggie. Jimmie shows his disgust and boredom with Hattie when he dodges her by darting into the front door of a convenient saloon. These two men have similarly seduced the two women. Hattie and Maggie are pictured in dramatic scenes as two forlorn women searching over town for their lovers, only to be cast aside when they find them.

Another effective use of character contrast is reflected in Maggie's adventures of a single evening as she moves from the brilliantly lighted theater district to the "blackness of the final block." She passes the young man in evening dress down through half a dozen economic levels to the river Archeron.
This is Crane's description of her and the men who reject her.

A girl of the painted cohorts of the city went along the street....

A tall young man smoking a cigarette with a sublime air strolled near the girl. He had on evening dress, a moustache, a chrysanthemum, and a look of ennui.... He wheeled about hastily and turned his state into the air....

A stout gentleman, with pompous and philanthropic whiskers, went stolidly by....

A belated man in business clothes, and in haste to catch a car, bounced against her shoulder.

A young man in light overcoat and Derby hat... said, "You don't mean to tell me that you sized me up for a farmer?"

A laboring man marched along....

She smiled squarely into the face of a boy.... He turned his head and smiled back... "Not this eve—some other eve."

A drunken man began to roar at her. "I ain' go' no money!"

The girl went into gloomy districts.... There stood a man with blotched features.

Farther on in the darkness she met a ragged being with shifting, bloodshot eyes and grimy hands.

The contrasting experiences of Jim Conklin, the tall soldier, and of Wilson, the loud soldier, are evident in The Red Badge of Courage. Conklin's death terrifies Henry; Wilson's losing his fearful self-centeredness early in the action of the story helps to motivate Henry's change.

The fearful Swede's opposite in "The Blue Hotel" is the calm little gambler. Finally, in "The Monster"

Through one character, that of an old maid, who alone refuses to follow the herd, Crane conveys the acid comment of an uncompromising individualist upon the brutal instinct of the small town mind. This is her function in the book.

1 Maggie, A Girl of the Streets, pp. 61-62.
2 Gibson, op. cit., p. viii.
3 Quinn, op. cit., p. 536.
Her opposite is voiced by the whole community. Other opposites in character have been used in Chapter II in a discussion of ironic contrast, and they need not be treated again here.

Crane's characters tend to lose all identity as he employs irony in tracking their growth through his novels and short stories. "Perhaps nothing is more convincing than the way in which, without the author remarking on it, the youth, Henry Fleming loses all identity in The Red Badge of Courage."

Most important, however, is the change in the boy's nature. He experiences a "spiritual baptism of fire through which a man is purged of the original sin of cowardice." Finally, he passes from active heroism to the more permanent courage of character. After "marshalling all of his acts,"

He found that he could look back upon the brass and bombast of his earlier gospels and see them truly. He was gleeful when he discovered that he now despised them.

With the conviction came a store of assurance. He felt a quiet manhood, non-assertive but of sturdy and strong blood. He knew that he would no more quail before his guides wherever they should point. He had been to touch the great death, and found that, after all, it was but the great death. He was a man.

It is commonly thought that the characters in Maggie: A Girl of the Streets had no power to elicit sympathy, because they had no spiritual importance, but Henry Fleming represents one of the most appealing motives of fiction: victory for a great cause won first by a victory over one's self.

There was also a "victory over self" in the loud soldier. Since the days of camp life on the river bank, he no longer regarded "the proportions of his

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1 Cargill, op. cit., p. 87.
personal prowess." The youth, who had been used to regarding his comrade as a "blatant child with an audacity grown from his inexperience, thoughtless, headstrong, jealous, and filled with a tinsel courage" now took note of his change. The youth observed that the loud soldier

was not furious at small words that pricked his conceits. He was no more a loud young soldier. There was about him now a fine reliance. He showed a quiet belief in his purposes and his abilities.... Apparently, the other had now climbed a peak of wisdom from which he could perceive himself as a very wee thing. 1

The New York kid "found it strange that he should be able to speak after this silence of years." This statement has reference to the change in the man. He admits that he is willing to call the quarrel off with the Mexicans even though he was furious when he learned that "there had been an equality of emotions." He once felt that he would never be able to forgive the Mexicans for letting him suffer from fear as he had. "He was bursting with rage, because these men had not previously confided to him that they were vulnerable." Nevertheless, he emerged from this experience with a pleasant "Good night," to the Mexicans.

In "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" and "The Monster" there is a contrast between the outward and the inward man. It belongs to the very essence of true irony to have this double character, this juxtaposition of the comical and the serious. No one would detect from Wilson's raging and furious conduct that inwardly he was "a simple child of the earlier plains." Here Crane vivifies this character into "life" by metaphor.

1 Ibid., pp. 164-65.
After Henry Johnson ate his supper in the Trescott's kitchen, he went to loft and dressed himself carefully. Although Crane uses wit and humor to heighten the effect of the irony involved, there is an apparent change in the man as well as his outward appearance. "He was simply a quiet, well-bred gentleman of position, wealth, and other necessary achievements out for an evening stroll, and he had never washed a wagon in his life." 

In the morning, when in his working clothes, he had met a friend - "Hello, Pete!" "Hello, Henry!" Now in his effulgence, he encountered this same friend. His bow was not at all haughty. If it expressed anything, it expressed consummate generosity - "Good - evenin', Misteh Washington." Pete who was very dirty, being at work in a potato patch, responded in a mixture of abasement and appreciation - "Good - evenin', Misteh Johnsing." 

More of this ironic humor plays about many of the serious scenes of "The Open Boat." It begins when one of the gulls jumped in the air "chicken-fashion" and tried to alight on the captain's head. The Captain "wished to knock it away...but he did not dare do it, because anything resembling an emphatic gesture would have capsized this freighted boat; and so with his open hand, the captain gently and carefully waved the gull away."

On another occasion the crew imagines that they see a lifesaving station in the distance. They cannot understand why the men at the lifesaving station do not see them and come to their rescue. They criticise the life saver's eyesight, and comment on his bravery. At this point the author intrudes to say that there was not a life-saving station within twenty miles. Again the

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2 Ibid., pp. 126-27.
3 "The Open Boat," p. 74.
effect of irony is heightened.

A last irony in the tale makes this final significance not yet evident to the correspondent: he views the vacationer who rushes down the Florida beach to "save" him as haloed and saintlike. But he does not think in such terms to tell us that "In the shadows, face downward, lay the oiler," their real savior by the grace of whose sacrifice the three others may live.¹

Irony is revealed through Crane's method of describing his characters. He describes the soldiers in *The Red Badge of Courage* in terms of children. He uses a child image. Their faces were "soiled like urchins." They were often seen "running with excited faces."

The nature image is also employed. When the men were exposed to war they became more like animals. It was Henry's idea, which he deducted from the actions of the squirrel, to run away from danger and remain human. He also experienced a "red rage." He behaved like a "well meaning cow worried by dogs." The men ran like rabbits from battle. On other occasions "they stood as men tied to stakes." The forest seemed a vast "hive of men buzzing about in frantic circles."

Crane had a genius for phrases.

In speaking of a truck driver he said, "In him grew a majestic contempt for those strings of street cars that followed him like intent bugs." As for Maggie, "To her the earth was composed of hardships and insults." Of the 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."²

¹ Hoffman, op. cit., p. 278.
² Garlin, op. cit., p. 494.
Not only what he says about the character is impressive, but the language he employs in their conversation is ironic and grim. He set down some Bowery coinages. One of Pete's mistresses, after returning from Buffalo where she had gone with another man, declares, "Well, he didn't have as many stamps as he tried to make out, so I shook him, that's all." Much of Crane's dialogue is of the variety show order, and if read aloud, always provokes a laugh.

Crane employs transcendental realism in his treatment of ironic character development. His characters feel superior to their environment. At the outset of Maggie, A Girl of the Streets this idea is dominant. Jimmie, Maggie's brother, defends the "honor" of Rum Alley against the gutter urchins of Devil's Row. Though these characters never actually see themselves as they really are, they often suffer from a collapse of their illusions. Jimmie's illusions of grandeur suffer degradation when his drunken father comes by and drags him home.

They [Crane's characters] challenge the universe, they disdain their environment under the illusion of being superior to it, but meanwhile they contend not against it but only against each other, seeking relief from it in "places of forgetfulness," in saloons, "hilarious" halls of "irregular shape," and in mission houses where the preacher exhorts the sinners with "You are damned." To which the people demand "Where's our soup?"

Jimmie, the truck driver, imagines himself a "sun-charioteer," and seated on his throne, he challenges the "god-driver" who obstructs his path. He dains the moon: "Deh moon looks like hell, don't it?" However, he achieves a respect for a fire engine. "A fire engine was enshrined in his heart as an

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1 Cargill, op. cit., p. 85.
2 Stallman, op. cit., p. 18.
appaling thing that he loved with a distant dog-like devotion." He even feels superior to his family, especially Maggie. Although "two women in different parts of the city, and entirely unknown to each other, caused him considerable annoyance by breaching forth, simultaneously, at fateful intervals, into wailings about marriage and support and infants," he reviled Maggie when he learned that she was "ruined" by Pete. He once felt that Maggie would have been better if she had known how, but he did not wish to hold this opinion of her, so he cast it aside hastily. He also thought that "he had a great idea of women's frailty, but he could not understand why any of his kin should be victims."

Pete considers himself a virtuous type. When he visited Maggie, "his mannerisms stamped him as a man who had a correct sense of his personal superiority." Through his bragging and boastful manner he showed that "he had certainly seen everything, and with each curl of his lip he declared that it had amounted to nothing." Pete did not consider that he had ruined Maggie. He felt that her mother and brother were responsible. He could not understand why "dey wonna raise such a smoak about it." He was disgusted with their attitude. "He saw no necessity that people should lose their equalibrium merely because their sister or their daughter had stayed away from home." His outlook on life is as ironic as Jimmie's.

Let us deviate at this point to see how Crane colors his description of the characters with irony. After he has established Pete as one whose "aristocratic person looked as if it might soil," he makes him a pretty slick villain with his hair "curled down in an oiled bang," and "his blue double-breasted coat, edged with black braid, buttoned close to a red puff tie, and his patent leather shoes looked like weapons."

Crane uses the same kind of ironic humor in "The Monster." After Henry
Johnson is pictured as a "well-bred gentleman of position," the author declares that "it was not altogether a matter of the lavender trousers, nor yet the straw hat with its bright silk braid" which gave him this superior feeling.

In "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" Crane shows the drunken Wilson lurching through the streets of barred and silent houses, with death in his hands, then he makes the man absurd in the universe by mentioning his shirt from a Bowery sweat shop and his boots with the red tops dear to little boys in snowy winter. The abode house scarred by Wilson's bullets rebukes his magnificence with its immobile dignity.

Finally, the best example of transcendental realism which epitomizes the machinery of the whole novel, for everyone in it transcends reality in self-deluding dreams and maudlin sentiment, is reflected through Maggie's mother. She talks in a highly moralistic tone. Her surprise when she discovers Maggie's seduction is simply absurd. She cannot understand how her daughter could disgrace the family's "honor." She exclaims, "Ah, who would t'ink such a bad girl could grow up in our family.... Wid a home like dis an' a mudder like me, she went teh d' bad." Later Maggie's seduction proves convenient for her.

When arrested for drunkenness she used the story of her daughter's downfall with telling effect upon the police justices. Finally one of them said to her, peering down over his spectacles: "Mary, the records of this and other courts show that you are the mother of forty-two daughters who have been ruined. This case is unparalleled in the annals of this court, and this court thinks ---" 2

Mary Johnson's high moral standing is shattered by the comment of judge.

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2 Quinn, op. cit., p. 333.
Her hypocrisy after the suicide is grimly ironic. When word is brought
by a "soiled, unshaven man" that "Mag's dead," her comment is, "Deh blazes
she is!" Then she finishes her supper before breaking into due lamentations.
She moaned: "I kin remember when her two feet was no bigger dan yer t'umb,
and she weared worsted boots."

Over the corpse of the daughter she has brutalized and driven from home,
she weeps an orgy of maudlin, self-pitying sentiment. In this final episode
Crane fashions a parody of pious sentiment. The mother cries,

I kin remember when she used to wear dem!
Jimmie, boy, go git yer sister an' we'll
put deh boots on her feets!

As she mourned in this manner, a woman in black came forward and asked,

Yeh'll forgive her, Mary! Yeh'll forgive
yer bad, bad chill? Her life was a curse an'
hers days were black, an' yeh'll forgive yer
bad girl? She's gone where her sins will be
judged.

The grotesque buffoonery of this mock lamentation is comic enough, but tragedy
under lies it: all is sham even between mother and daughter. Urged on in
this manner by friends Mary Johnson concludes the story with the cry, "Oh,
yes, I'll forgive her! I'll forgive her!" and the first ironic novel ever
written by an American thus crisply ends.

1 Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, p. 68.
2 Stallman, op. cit., p. 18.
3 Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, p. 68.
5 Stallman, op. cit., p. 18.
6 Beer, op. cit., p. 85.
The irony, which is a criticism of life, employed by Crane in his treatment of character development is, in the words of one writer, "as hard to define as poetry." On the other hand, however, it is perhaps no harder to recognize. I have tried to deal with concrete incidents and tell things which happened throughout the representative fiction used in this study to reveal Crane's opposites and contrasts in characters, to show how his characters ironically lose all identity, to show his use of wit and humor in describing characters, and to show his employment of transcendental realism as a humorous aspect of his irony. I have noted Crane's irony in the details of his fiction, where a modern writer would put it, rather than in the whole.

1 Thomson, op. cit., p. 2.
SUMMARY

An examination of Crane's novels and short stories shows that the first aspect of irony can be clearly traced through his treatment of theme. The second aspect shows that he continues his use of irony through ironic contrast. Finally, his irony can be traced in character development.

Chapter One analyzes the themes of heroism, fate, and fidelity in his representative prose. In conclusion, one may safely say that Crane had an intense feeling about unconscious heroism which is reflected throughout his works in descriptive passages. His ironic treatment of fate reveals man alone in a hostile universe. Man's self-importance and his self-pity were ironical to Crane in a universe indifferent to man. In his preoccupation with social determinism, he employs irony to express dissatisfaction of society.

Chapter Two is concerned with Crane's ironic contrasts as a basic technique. It proceeds with a series of paradoxes and opposites. The contradictory effect is a basic element of his irony. His deliberate pattern for drawing opposites, which is sometimes mistaken for careless art, is also illustrated in this chapter.

By some queer turn of irony, Crane has been left out of the cannon which the experts in the short story have gradually evolved, but of late this mastery of the form is coming to be more and more admitted.

Another significant aspect of Crane's irony deals with character development. The problem of evil was with Crane as much as with the other writers of his day. However, his fiction was not didactic; it freed fiction from euphemism and sentimentality. It aimed at immediate sense of life. His characters are vivified into life by metaphor. He ironically reveals them as opposites and parallels, during their growth they ironically lose all identity, they possess transcendental realism. Through his wit and humor they sometimes
become ironically grim.

Modern American literature may be said, accurately enough, to have begun with Stephen Crane. He broke sharply from current literary modes, took the most contemporary life for his material, and made himself heard before the decade ended. I therefore assume that his irony leavened the thought of his age.

His art developed irony of situation. He makes the commonplace look as if it were not commonplace. His subject matter is commonplace; the style is not. The irony lies not in the author's mind but in the facts themselves.

In presenting Stephen Crane as the first American who used irony extensively. I hope that this study has given insight into the man as an individual and as a writer. Crane's work is the most electric prose written in his day. His influence on his time which succeeded his day was tremendous.

He had an authentic genius which merits much praise. But, whatever its promise, it remained in the few years allotted to him excessively narrow in range and consisted in an austerely objective approach to his matter and an impressionistic style that first caught the eye of literary men like Joseph Conrad at the beginning of an era of experimentation with techniques in fiction and brought about the wide recognition of his peculiar genius.

One does not need to prove one's case in claiming for Stephen Crane the grace of irony. The claim has always been admitted and therefore to support it by quotations from his works has been a pleasant experience. It is the quality, not the existence of the irony, that is still open to consideration.

\[1\]
Hatcher, op. cit., p. 18.
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