ACTING OUT: COMPARATIVE ANALYSES OF ROMANTIC REALISM IN STEPHEN CRANE AND KNUT HAMSUN

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In this paper I will explore the work of Stephen Crane, an American writer whose career and style parallel those of the most prominent Norwegian writer of the last one hundred and twenty years: Knut Hamsun. I will explore the social context, technique and agency of Crane, which will draw implicit comparisons to Hamsun that raise the question of what is more important when considering literary legacy: product or biography? Both men had commitments to modernism and abstract techniques; and though Crane's *Maggie* proceeded Hamsun's *Hunger* by one year, it was, on American soil, a frightening foray into a world the reading public did not generally want to look, much as Hunger was in Norway. *Maggie* depicted the darkside of capitalism through real language theretofore unacceptable in publishing circles. Additionally, Crane, dead at twenty-eight, wrote *The Red Badge of Courage*, the epic Civil War story that remains as the "best narrative of the war." This novel, too, in terms of the writers' careers parallels nicely Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil* in the sense that both of these novels while thematically challenging difficult periods of national transformation and while salient, epic, rich and extremely lauded, were widely regarded as neither author's most successful artistic efforts. *Maggie* and *Hunger*, respectively, were considered such. Nevertheless as regards the Hamsun, are we to adopt Goebbel's propagandist interpretation that the idyll presented in the *Growth of the Soil* is a particularly Nazi one, even though the novel was written years before the rise of the Nazis, or do we, as we would the Crane in the United States, rather read it as an uncorrupted fiction?

Isaiah Berlin, the British historian of ideas says quite presciently in his book *The Power of Ideas* that Romanticism has not yet died and that we are living in a modernist era and even a "post" modernist era which is tropolologically speaking a mere continuation of the romantic period (Berlin, 165) when authors, for example, were indistinguishable (and happy about it) from their works. This is the dirty secret of "modernism" and one that both Knut Hamsun and Stephen Crane may have never found out: that in trying to make the real real, the merely real simply wasn't real enough, and to leave Plato's Cave is very scary because that more complicated, confusing and less real "real world" is simply much more confusing and alarming than Plato's Cave which is where the character of the author exists in his novel.

While the realist program is somewhat paradoxical it is also indeed trying to do something different from the classical romantic one. The modernist in America egged on by the photographic innovations of Deguerrero and the explosion of Matthew Brady's Civil War photography tried to capture the essence of everyday existence, to frieze it if you will. But that frozen impressionism relied stylistically very much on the "novel" which came before. Did the novel really change with the stylistic shift towards modernism? In some ways of course it did: as we will see in the exposition on Crane, it became more journalistic. But also as is suggested in the Hamsun, the novel, and art in general was becoming more marginalized, thus pushing the artist, the writer into the distance, aiding in a sense that new, higher development of the romantic notion of the writer as protagonist which was furthered in America at least with Hemingway, Mahler and even today with the fetishization of reading tours and dust-jacket author photographs. In any case, the early realists Crane and Hamsun in trying to maintain their objectivity as realist writers, these writers were in fact fighting a losing battle. Real objectivity gets increasingly less realistic as we advance into the modernist and post-modernist eras which to borrow Berlin's conceit we will think of as a continuation of the Romantic era.

Knut Hamsun had a very difficult upbringing. He was born into a dysfunctional working class family and was shipped out to Hameroy as a young child to live with his abusive uncle. Only because of his fine penmanship did his uncle offer young Knut faint praise for his writing (Ferguson, 19). But Hamsun had ambition. He worked very hard to make his voice heard. So when a romantic writer is his own champion, in those publishing circles of the day where newspapers and news were becoming more and more commonplace it took a very individualistic, arrogant and dogged writer to champion his cause, or, the cause of his characters. So that writer/character has to leave the cave to agent himself and his characters. And how can an author then be said to be objective? After he met with serious resistance in Oslo's publishing circles, Hamsun took off for America where he worked as a tram driver in Chicago and a farmhand in the rural Midwest. So Hamsun had a nice, rounded picture of the United States. And it was with this experience, this experience of the future that Hamsun was able to write his breakthrough masterpiece, Hunger which I think is in a way an American novel. Because his experience in the U.S. directly proceeded his return to Europe, and upon his return to Europe he began to continue the intellectual starvation he felt in the U.S. with the physical starvation which resulted in the "inspiration" for *Hunger*. Some years ago, I was walking through the stacks at the Brooklyn College library where I came across the Toquevillesque book Hamsun wrote while in the U.S. accusing the country of being the land of Slavery, of being a place where women have no rights, of being a place where the peasants of the world went to try to find their own little piece of nobility. And even though *Hunger* is written by a Norwegian writer on Norwegian soil, it serves more perhaps as a great critique of the Norwegian-American experiment because the Oslo of Hamsun's day was nothing like the Kristiannia of Hunger. Rather it was a small provincial place. So Oslo is a character, or Hamsun's impressionistic depiction of Oslo is as much a character as the author himself, one might say; and this characterization is for me a very out front undressing of supposed egalitarian Norwegian culture. Because as society supposedly got more egalitarian and focused, and as literature drifted towards the realistic, in fact the tropes of the Romantic era did not disappear but rather showed up more in more subtle ways and morphed into a great disguise of itself in "modernism." Mordernism broadened the field of the novel. Now members of any class could break through by giving the reading public a real look into life in the ghetto, or life in the slums where they then would never have to venture since their "agents of the night" (Riis in *How the Other Half Lives*, Crane in *Maggie* etc.) were doing it for them. These romantic heroes were taking on the task of "slumming it," of reportage about the more real real for those who only knew the real. This was romanticism at its height in that stylistically it takes the existing tropes and merely makes slight alterations to pull at the collective heartstrings of the reading public, to create a greater sympathy through the style of dispassionate passion, a quiet passion with a motive and a theme no less beautiful than the most stirring romantic work, because what are *Maggie* and *Hunger* if not perfectly utopian novels?

"Fame is worse than a fire in one's home. Fame consumes the very home of the soul."–Malcolm Lowry

Now I will move into an exploration of Crane's work and life in context which I hope will draw some implicit comparisons to Hamsun. Both writers left the cave, but Hamsun lived a long life, too long. He alienated a tremendous number of people over the course of his life, whereas Crane did not really have the time since he died so young. But these were each country's impressionistic-realist trailblazers so it is important to make the comparison between them since novels to this date are still written in this style in both countries. Crane said that the writer could only hope to recreate his time and place in his fiction and that the writers tools were form and color, he seemed not to be aware of the implications of being an "author." Hamsun on the other hand very much wanted to become the "author," but he, I would argue, was not fully aware of the ramifications Lowry speaks to in his quote here.

Stephen Crane was born the fourteenth and last child in a large (to say the least) New Jersey family. Though he came from a religious background– his father was a minister– Crane was agnostic and rebellious. From his religious father Crane has said that he inherited the sense of doing things "hard" and "right" and of taking things as they come. Of his father, Crane once said "he was so innocent and good that he might not know much about humanity!" (Berryman, 17) When Stephen was eight years old however, just after he learned to read (this fact remembered by Crane), his father died. In a sense the commencement of Stephen Crane's formal education began with the death of his father. Crane's mother on the other hand was a zealot. A daughter of a line of clergymen from Pennsylvania, she was educated, ambitious and authoritarian. An outspoken advocate of women's rights she was even more insistent with regard to religion than Stephen's father, the minister. So one might say that, quite abstractly, the hard-boiled matron of Crane's *Maggie* is loosely based around Crane's own mother. Crane says of his mother that "You can argue just as well with a wave." (Sorrentino, 72) The record states that living with mother as an adolescent was difficult. Mother spoke as slowly as a big clock ticks and her effects were impromptu" (Sorrentino, 99). Crane's mother was a religious woman who lectured very frequently in public about the positive influence religion can have on a life. People often gossiped that she didn't take care of her own family even though she was so concerned about religion.

Procuring a reporting job at a regional paper, (journalism ran in the family) Crane's mother up and moved to Asbury Park where young Stephen was said to be found at age eleven digging a corpse out of the sand. Crane could often be found running around on the beach drunk as an adolescent, not quite the picture of a religious youth. His mother did give him many books to read when he was a youth, and he developed then a real love of reading and a mind for curiosity.

As a child, his mother encouraged Crane's reading with *Tour of America,* which he liked, and which possibly implanted Stephen with his first ideas of "The West." After reading this, Crane then began to read hungrily Western paperbacks to the point of becoming familiar with the gang names represented in them. It provided for him a very clear escape into other regions, other realities; and as a child he fantasized readily about these places to escape the mendacity of being the favorite son of a zealous mother intent on neglecting him so as to give speeches to the community on religion. So we can see that Crane was a man tormented somewhat from the death of his father, the neglect of his mother, the abuse of his siblings and rather than turn to religion, Crane sought other, more imaginative ways to fend off his demons. Later in the same year that he was said to have dug up a corpse, he saw while mounted on his horse, a white girl stabbed by her black lover. Crane said nothing and galloped home in mortal fear. And this occurrence matched somewhat a dream that he had as a child which he would never forget "of black riders on black horses charging at him from the surf up to the shore." (Berryman, 9)

So Crane established an identity as a youth as that of an outcast. However, at the same time he craved a social life and the attention of his mother and his friends. So at first he managed this situation in the culturally important position of catcher on the baseball team. In fact he became a world-class catcher, good enough to play for the Syracuse Baseball team, one of the best in the country at the time. He was a scrawny college kid who weighed no more than 120 pounds, and catcher is the most demanding of positions in the game of baseball. It is a tremendous responsibility and a physical struggle as the catcher must sit in a crouch position to receive each pitch. And not only must you call which pitch you want the pitcher to throw, you must also catch the often challenging pitch. There is also the responsibility of throwing out base-runners attempting to steal bases, and blocking home plate when tagging out what might be the final, crushing run. And then there is the hitting. Unlike the pitcher, the other player involved in each defensive play, the catcher is an everyday position. In short, the Catcher is the most important position on the team, and the one which requires the most skill and stamina. Crane was said by his team-mates to have been the heart and soul of the team and a tremendous talent. And I believe that it was in his role of catcher that Crane established the good relationship with monotony every writer needs. He liked to refer to the field as the diamond on salt hill, and whether this was an accepted name or one he himself made up it was a very appropriate reflection on the experience and joy of his relationship with monotony.

Journalism

After failing out of college Crane moved back to New Jersey to become a newspaper reporter. And thus was the true formation of the man as a writer. The world and craft of journalism served for most successful writers of Crane's era as a free apprenticeship. While Walter Benjamin eloquently claimed in his 1935 Essay "The Storyteller," that journalism is information: the journalist, he says, deals with verifiable information while the author offers wisdom. His claim that journalism is lower on the hierarchical ladder due to the inherent satisfactions offered by narrative prose is thin. If one's journalism informs one's prose it cannot be so dismissed. Journalistic forms change however, and to be sure Crane stole many of his stylistics (and themes) from his experience in journalism. Michael Robertson reiterates the point in his book *Stephen Crane and the Making of Modern American Literature* that any analysis of Stephen Crane's life and art would be greatly remiss without taking a hard look at the effects of his journalistic work on his literary art. Instead of taking the two as equals on a playing field however, I would like to look at the way Crane's journalism informed his literature.

The journalism of Crane's day mirrored the "...deliberately disorienting descriptions [which] follow one another in quick succession in Crane's work, [and are] joined by syntactically jerky sentences that are in turn assembled into short disconnected paragraphs." (Robertson, 79) The abrupt style which was the norm of the fact/fiction journalism of the day that Howells and James were so afraid of was a journalistic convention of the era which Crane co-opted for his fictional form. This is clear in "The Blue Hotel" where Crane shifts from one character's point of view hastily to another's (and skillfully). So while James and Howells were running with their myth postulating the destruction of literature by journalism, Crane was running against this grain, co-opting his techniques from journalism and thus creating perhaps the more enduring American myth (see Dreiser, Hemingway, et al.) that journalism in fact rather feeds the art not only in content, theme and bread, but in style.

It can be said that Crane's wild ironical inappropriateness of images, the montage clustering of images and the talent for human psychology all come straight from his journalism, and it is in fact these narrative flares that bind the reader to the text. A story is a story, and a talented writer will tell a story no matter what format he is writing in. He might lose his job, or produce unconventional journalism as Crane most certainly did, but he would be writing the story in some semblance of his/her narrative voice regardless. While much of Crane's famously sparse, crisp journalistic work may not provide for his most powerful prose, it is often quite powerful in any event and undoubtedly informs his prose style.

The emotional agitation ever-present in Crane's work binds tightly the reader to both his journalism and his prose. "The Open Boat", a seminal Crane work that has been read for the most part from the formalist angle, and "Stephen Crane's Own Story," a journalistic piece that appeared in the New York Press and other newspapers four days after the rescue, both came out of the infamous shipwreck of the S.S. Commodore in January of 1896 in which Stephen Crane nearly lost his life. The two pieces contain rapid fire imagery of tremendous range with a full palette of color, and some reportage of basic facts. "The Open Boat" is of course the more polished of the two pieces, but it was written with more care, and had months in editing. The journalistic work is not your typical, pat journalism, with the exception of the work from Lincoln, Nebraska where he met Cather. Thusly the habits he developed in writing his journalism informed his literary imagination. For Crane, writing was writing. It took concentration and imagination and you could be sure of two things: form and color. This paradigm held as true for his disciplined prose work as it did for his largely indulgent, and conspicuously withholding journalism. As in every other mode of life, in journalism Crane bent the rules so as not to cramp his style.

According to legend, Crane started his famously inauspicious college career, on the heels of two successful and happy years at a Military Academy, at Lafayette College where he "raised hell" with the "madmen" of the fraternity houses. After a short stay at Lafayette College, he quickly transferred to Syracuse University where as mentioned previously he played catcher for the baseball squad, excelled in English (the only class he enrolled in), and impressed a dean before failing out. Crane did not like being told what to do. While at Syracuse he got started on a draft of *Maggie* which raises the question: How was Crane able to create such vivid descriptions of places he had not been, and experiences he did not have? Crane would say concentration and imagination were the only things tacit in order to create "legible" prose and "form and color," he would say, "were the only things an author could be sure of." (Sorrentino, 219)

Crane based many of his fictions rather on literary forms that were tropes of the day. It is widely known that he borrowed shamelessly from war chronicles and Matthew Brady's photography for *The Red Badge of Courage*, and from the slum fiction that abounded in his time for *Maggie*. Crane however, in his artistry, managed to metamorphose his work within these "genres" into fresh, searing prose, in turn metamorphosing the genres themselves. Crane's *Maggie* was *the* slum novel as his *Red Badge of Courage* became *the* war novel.

Form

It was said by Mr. Hamlan Garland that Mr. Crane was perhaps too brave for his own good. Crane would be the first to tell you that fast, hard, very hard living had everything to do with good writing. He was of the mind that if you are not suffering, your artwork is. (Sorrentino, 46)

So somehow Crane wanted to live as intensely as his characters, and this was a difficult challenge indeed "Crane's stated allegiance to

William Dean Howell's variety of literary realism was always less an aesthetic conviction than a commitment to intense experience." (Benfey, 10) As I mentioned earlier, Crane believed the old myth that to write well you must suffer. It was one of his few postulations on the art of writing on record, and that gives it all the more credence as a personal paradigm.

And perhaps Crane, for lack of imagination, or for effectiveness of prose wanted to suffer in the way that his characters suffered, wanted to go to the horrible places that his characters knew so that he could know definitively himself about the more real real, and know what his characters knew because what was he if not his characters? And what were his characters if not him? Concentration and imagination, form and color. These were the literary mandates of Crane, but the effect of accumulated work on the soul is an interesting one, and is especially so when we look at the life of a writer with a soul so battered as Crane's or Hamsun's. So I propose that a conscious or unconscious question the early modernists asked themselves is the following: how can one justify comment on the lives of one's characters if one did not get to know himself without getting to know his characters' often difficult predicaments?

It has been said that Crane took the war correspondent positions after he wrote *The Red Badge of Courage* because he needed the money. Crane had lived in the slums by choice, and was just coming off of a huge success in *The Red Badge of Courage*. Did he really need the money? While it is true that in Crane's day the Civil War weighed heavily on the minds of men, and that men wanted, generally, to take risks in the increasingly technocratic world; not to look away from the bellicose state of human nature, but to confront it, Crane also needed the war correspondent experience to fill a void between his novel and his experience. He yearned for a self reflection that would be burgeoned with the proof that passing this personally designed test of his spirit and his soul would provide. He craved to see how close he had gotten to the truth, and he craved getting even closer; famously not relying on anyone else to do the job, Crane tested himself.

After failing out of Syracuse, Crane made the journey south over to New York City where he settled on the Bowery with some other fellows. Upon settling in he looked for work as a newspaper man and set out to sell *Maggie*. When he was unable to do so, he borrowed some money from his older brother to put the book out himself. He covered slum life in New York, tested his imagination, and formulated some ideas that remained in the margins, as Crane's motto was, much unlike Riis's, not to let personal judgment slip into the narrative. In his war journalism we see a slight nationalistic jingoism, but otherwise, Crane's work is notorious for its unapologetic impartiality, which in its very attempt at objectivity represents a partiality towards egalitarianism and equality.

After having published *Maggie* himself, legend has it that Crane went so far as to pay four young gentlemen to ride around the streetcars of the city reading copies. If nothing else, Crane believed in this book. It was the most important thing in his life, the thing that would make or break him. It was controversial and he knew it. The infamous photo of him celebrating the publication of *Maggie* is a dead giveaway on this front. Crane had failed out of college, had been unceremoniously booted from his job as a newspaperman due to a clownish report of a parade in Asbury Park, his reputation damaged considerably– so, in a very real sense Maggie was all he had to maintain his reputation. However, Crane could not sell the copies he had printed. He used them as proverbial doorstops, as chairs, furniture, and as a method of barter. He even dedicated one copy of Maggie to a young woman because he owed her father money for tobacco. (Berryman, 189)

Like many successful writers of his day, Crane owed his fame largely to the sensibility of William Dean Howells who upon finally getting around to reading Maggie years after he was given it went so far as to compare Mr. Crane's writing to classical Greek tragedy in an 1896 review of Maggie for Harper's. Though Crane had less in common, instinctively, with Howells' urban temperament than with Willa Cather, or Hamlin Garland, for example, Howells was able to enjoy the book for what it was. In a letter referring to Crane's accomplishment with Maggie, Howells wrote gushingly, "I do not think America has produced a more distinctive or vital talent." (Sorrentino, 236)

Crane and Howells enjoyed a friendship that included visits and discussions, as did Crane and Garland. Conrad, his cohort in England at the end can also be counted as an admirer of Crane. Curiously, Cather, upon meeting Crane, had a very powerful, and altogether unfavorable impression of the man however. He was on his way south on his famous trip to Texas and Mexico which he chronicles so brilliantly in the collection Stephen Crane in the West and Mexico, when he stopped in Lincoln for two weeks to write some articles on Nebraskans to sell to the New York Tribune.

> Quite without invitation on my part... [Crane] began to talk, began to curse his trade from the first throb of creative desire in a boy to the finished work of the master... In all his long tirade, Crane never raised his voice; he spoke slowly and monotonously and even calmly, but I have never known so bitter a heart in any man as he revealed to me that night. It was an arraignment of the wages of life, an invocation to the ministers of hate. He declared that his imagination was hidebound, it was there, but it pulled hard. After he got a notion for a story, months passed before he could get any sort of personal contact with it, or feel any potence to handle it. The detail of a thing has to filter through my blood, and then it comes out like a native product. (Sorrentino, 93)

Crane was the "first man of letters [Cather] ever met in the flesh." (ibid. 94) and it is quite clear that he was his usual magnetic self, and made quite an impact. He greeted her coughing, garbed shabbily in a flannel shirt, a felt hat pulled down over his eyes, and dusty and worn down shoes. From Nebraska Crane would write the toughest "nails and bolts" journalism of his career; the work was not at all wishy-washy and indeed was rather strong. In an important letter written to his friend Clarence Peaslee from Lincoln he felt compelled to echo the strategies in the writing craft that he had outlined with such bile for Ms. Cather. "I always want to be unmistakable," he wrote, "what to my mind is good writing. There is a great deal of labor connected with literature. I think that is the hardest thing about it. [In the end], there is nothing to respect in art, save one's own opinion of it." (Sorrentino, 100) That there is great labor in literature, and that only one's own opinion of it matters paints the inherent paradox that informs the loneliness, and solemness of the task. Crane articulates this oft-crossed paradox with much greater economy than most other wistful writers on the subject. But he also makes the point loud and clear that the chief reader, or, protagonist in the book therefore is the writer himself; that the novel, every novel is by nature a closed system.

Before leaving for Lincoln and later Mexico, Crane was leading a painful existence in the Bowery. He was not eating three square meals, and much like his European contemporary, Knut Hamsun of Norway who was off producing his revolutionary work Hunger about the starving writer, Crane was also writing his way out of starvation and into fame with his *The Red Badge of Courage*. The novel arose famously from the depths of the city slums to be the greatest American "war" novel ever written. Again, Crane would tell you that the suffering rather helped. Hamsun grew up and matured, and even won the Nobel Prize, luxuries not afforded our young Crane; and though they never met, and perhaps never read each other's work, I believe that Hamsun and Crane shared many idiosyncrasies ansd are generally comparable with regard to stylistic innovation in their own national literatures. Crane, comparable to Homer according to Howells, introduced a naturalistic impressionism: at heart (and in practice) he was something of a painter; while Hamsun, comparable to Munch, introduced his brand of cultivated impressionism on his side of the Atlantic. Hamsun's was a more direct approach in many ways, but his could be so because of the relative homogeneity and longer history his country had.

Color

Here I would like to move into a discussion of color in the work of Stephen Crane. F. Noxon, an early friend of Crane's writes,

> After the book [The Red Badge of Courage] appeared he [Crane] and I had somewhere a talk about color in literature. He told me that a passage in Goethe analyzed the effect which the several colors have on the human mind. Upon Crane this had made a profound impression and he had utilized the ideas to produce his effects. (Gilkes, 336)

Crane uses color vividly and to great affect. Some of the critics of his day considered him a "rainbow writer" but I find the color in his work as one of the most appealing attributes.

Crane and the painter Winslow Homer had similar themes with regard to naturalism. I looked, but unfortunately did not find any personal relation between the men in my research, but that does not indicate that one's work might not have been important to the other.

"The Open Boat" feels like some of Homer's later work of the Maine coast, while *The Red Badge of Courage* brings to mind the Homer watercolors in their intense flame of color and ever surprising precision.

Some people have said that Crane's art is a literary sort of pointillism: "Crane paints with words "exactly" as the French impressionists paint with pigments: both use pure colors and contrasts of colors." (Gilkes, 186) This leaves the focusing, as it were, to the "reader" of the painting. In painting out the pure color of each small detail, Crane does much the same thing. As Hough says in his essay, Goethe held that "emotional reactions to colors were caused by physiological changes in the eye which brought about changes in the mind. Thus one was physically conditioned to certain responses of color and light not psychologically conditioned." (Hough 192)

While Crane was certainly not a theoretical writer, he did think often about color. One might bring into consideration the very pointillist idea of Goth's that, "color combinations have also the common quality of producing the intermediate color of our colorific circle by their union, a union which actually takes place if they are opposed to each other and seen from a distance. A surface covered with narrow blue and yellow strips appears green at a certain distance." (Goethe as quoted in Hough, 192). If we look for it, we can see this phenomenon in Crane. One need go no farther than "The Open Boat." In this case, we can see Crane almost painting a picture in his story when he approaches the story/canvas by establishing the slate color of the waves with their white tops, and then going on to say that none of the characters "knew the color of the sky." Later, when the men have got their lifeboat legs Crane describes the "yellow tone" of the sky, attesting to some relaxation of their apprehension. Then later Crane gives us a full burst of color as well as depth and an enlarged perspective. "As darkness settled finally, the shine of the light, lifting from the sea, in the south, changed to full gold. On the northern horizon a new light appeared, a small bluish gleam on the edge of the waters. (Holton, 190) This word imaging creates a vivid backdrop for the action of the story and in some cases might even take precedence over the story.

Crane also uses the technique of imbuing meaning in things that are undeserving of meaning. This is invaluable in his creation of the agitation or conflict I mentioned earlier. For example, the brown roses, which George Kelcey feels to be "hideous crabs crawling upon his brain" in George's Mother educe their significance from George's guilt and penitence rather than from any historical meaning roses might have. Crane uses this technique often.

The Back Page

It could be said that fame was Crane's mortal enemy. He never felt totally comfortable upon achieving it, and unfortunately drove himself to live too hard and too fast, perhaps, because of it– because he was so passionately looking for the real real that his characters knew so well. In these paragraphs I have tried to depict some of the influences on Stephen Crane's art. He would argue with me, and would rather claim that there are but two things the writer can be sure of: form and color. That he could articulate and comply with a concept as lucid, fresh and cogent as this speaks volumes of Stephen Crane the innovator, because he reduced the thing, as Wagner and Stravinsky did, into an impressionism based on existing tropes, only moreso: as Euclid might say, his elaboration of form and color was in its simplicity more complex than the realism of James, so concerned with the techniques of verisimilitude.

But what of Hamsun? He was by all accounts as innovative in his native Norway as Crane was in his USA One wonders, had Crane lived as long as Hamsun, would he have gotten himself into as much trouble trying to discover a "place" for the writer in the developing society? Ironically, Hamsun was never able to transcend the very character he created in Hunger– most importantly of all– for himself. By the end of his life he still has not found a "place" in society for the writer that that nameless protagonist set out looking for in Hunger.

America has forgiven and rather embraced Crane the impressionist genius for his hard living, and even for his naïveté. Had Hamsun become a hermit earlier, or rather died younger (in Paris,) would his legacy remain the question mark that it currently is today in Norway? It can be said that it was fame and Hamsun's insatiable seventy year obsession with charisma, with character (symptomatic to the modernists) that eventually destroyed the very home of his soul; however, at the same time these did not destroy the brilliant artwork, the great testament of this sad man which not incidentally remains as some of the most innovative in the whole canon of western literature.

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