

102 QUOTATIONS



Stephen Crane

(1871-1900)

Stephen Crane wrote *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), the first Naturalist novel in American literature; *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), the classic war novel; and at least 4 world class short stories: "The Open Boat," "The Blue Hotel," "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," and "The Monster." Later writers studied his techniques. Crane is a painterly Impressionist like Kate Chopin and F. Scott Fitzgerald and his "An Episode of War" is like a prototype of Hemingway's stories in style, irony and understatement. No writer is more vivid nor more ironic than Crane. He also wrote Expressionist poems that anticipated the Imagist movement of the Modernists. Living under harsh conditions of poverty in the Bowery of New York and as a war correspondent damaged his health and he died of tuberculosis at the age of only 28.

ORDER OF TOPICS: youth, family, religion, education, apprenticeship, New York Bowery, *Maggie*, honesty, art, Realism, Naturalism, Impressionism, Expressionism, poetic alliteration and assonance, irony, understatement, Existentialism, *Red Badge*, other works, human nature, poverty, politics, heroism, patriotism, fame, death, last words:

YOUTH

My father died when I was seven years old. My mother when I was nineteen.

FAMILY

My great-great-great-grandfather was one of the seven men who founded Newark.

During the Revolution the Cranes were pretty hot people. The old man Stephen served in the Continental Congress (for New Jersey) while all four sons were in the army.

Will, one of my brothers, gave me a toy gun and I tried to shoot a cow with it over at Middletown when father was preaching there and that upset him wonderfully. He liked all sorts of animals and never drove a horse faster than two miles an hour even if some Christian was dying elsewhere.

After my father died, mother lived in and for religion. We had very little money. My brothers tell me that she got herself into trouble before I was old enough to follow proceedings by taking care of a girl who had an accidental baby. Inopportune babies are not part of the Methodist ritual but mother was always more of

a Christian than a Methodist and she kept this girl at our house in Asbury until she found a home somewhere.

Mother's friends were mostly women and they had the famous feminine aversion to that kind of baby. It is funny that women's interest in babies trickles clean off the mat if they have never met papa socially.

RELIGION

I confess that I was surprised to find the most repulsive features of old style Calvinism advanced with scarce an apology for their deformities.

We tell kids that heaven is just across the gaping grave and all that bosh and then we scare them to glue with flowers and white sheets and hymns.

It hurt her [his mother] that any of us should be slipping from Grace and giving up eternal damnation or salvation or those things.

You could argue just as well with a wave.

Let a thing become a tradition and it becomes half a lie.

Upon my mother's side, everybody as soon as he could walk, became a Methodist clergyman—of the old ambling-nag, saddle-bag, exhorting kind.

I used to like church and prayer meetings when I was a kid but that cooled off and when I was thirteen or about that, my brother Will told me not to believe in Hell after my uncle had been boring me about the lake of fire and the rest of the sideshows.

Blustering God, / Stamping across the sky / With loud swagger, / I fear you not...puffing braggart.

The clang of swords is Thy wisdom, / The wounded make gestures like Thy Son's.

The form of the lighthouse had vanished from the southern horizon, but finally a pale star appeared, just lifting from the sea.

EDUCATION

They tell me that I got through two grades in six weeks which sounds like the lie of a fond mother at a teaparty but I do remember that I got ahead very fast and that father was pleased with me.

When I was at school few of my studies interested me, and as a result I was a bad scholar.

The fellows here [Claverack College] raise more hell than [at] any college in the country.

I tried to learn French because my mother thought it important but no foreign language will ever be my friend.

They used to say at Syracuse University...that I was cut out to be a professional baseball player. And the truth of the matter is that I went there more to play baseball than to study. I was always very fond of literature though.

APPRENTICESHIP

When I was about sixteen I began to write for the New York newspapers, doing correspondence from Asbury Park and other places. Then I began to write special articles and short stories for the Sunday papers and one of the literary syndicates, reading a great deal in the meantime and gradually acquiring a style.

NEW YORK CITY BOWERY

I decided that the nearer a writer gets to life the greater he becomes an artist.

Maggie, A Girl of the Streets (1893)

At the age of twenty I wrote my first novel—*Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*.... I was always looking forward to success. My first great disappointment was in the reception of *Maggie*. I remember how I looked forward to its publication, and pictured the sensation I thought it would make. It fell flat.... It never really got on the market but it made for me the friendships of W. D. Howells and Hamlin Garland.

The girl, Maggie, blossomed in a mud puddle.

HONESTY

I understand 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 personal honesty. To keep close to this personal honesty is my supreme ambition.

You mean that the story's too honest? [of *Maggie* to an editor]

ART

The secret of every lasting success in art and literature lies in a powerful, sincere, emotional concept of life first, and, second, in the acquired power to convey that concept to others.

An artist, I think, is nothing but a powerful memory that can move itself at will through certain experiences sideways and every artist must be in some things powerless as a dead snake.

My complaint is that all literature has gone over to the side of the schoolmaster and that it used to be carried on by the boys themselves.

REALISM

Most of my prose writings have been toward the goal partially described by that misunderstood and abused word, realism.

His brow was heavily flushed, and his fingers were picking nervously at one of his buttons. He bent his head and fastened his eyes studiously upon the button as if it were a little problem.

Somewhere in her expression there was a terrible pride, that kind of pride which, mistaking the form for the real thing, worships itself because of its devotion to the form.

He had been slow in the act of producing the packet because during it he had been trying to invent a remarkable comment upon the affair. He could conjure nothing of sufficient point. He was compelled to allow his friend to escape unmolested with his packet. And for this he took unto himself considerable credit. It was a generous thing.

Eventually they entered into a dark region where, from a careening building, a dozen gruesome doorways gave up loads of babies to the street and the gutter. A wind of early autumn raised yellow dust from cobbles and swirled it against an hundred windows. Long streamers of garments fluttered from fire-escapes. In all unhandy places there were buckets, brooms, rags and bottles. In the street infants played or fought with other infants or sat stupidly in the way of vehicles. Formidable women, with uncombed hair and disordered dress, gossiped while leaning on railings, or screamed in frantic quarrels. Withered persons, in curious postures of submission to something, sat smoking pipes in obscure corners. A thousand odors of

cooking food came forth to the street. The building quivered and creaked from the weight of humanity stamping about in its bowels.

NATURALISM

A man said to the universe, "Sir, I exist!" "However," replied the universe, "The fact has not created in me a sense of obligation."

When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no bricks and no temples.

This tower [windmill] was a giant, standing with its back to the plight of the ants. It represented in a degree, to the correspondent, the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual—nature in the wind, and nature in the vision of men. She did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent.

It is inevitable that you will be greatly shocked by this book [inscription in gift copies of *Maggie*] but continue please with all possible courage to the end. For it tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently [but not always] shapes lives regardless. If one proves that theory one makes room in Heaven for all sorts of souls (notably an occasional street girl) who are not confidently expected to be there by many excellent people.

The remnants of a meal, ghastly, like dead flesh, lay in a corner. Maggie's red mother, stretched on the floor, blasphemed and gave her daughter a bad name.

A very small boy stood upon a heap of gravel for the honour of Rum Alley. He was throwing stones at howling urchins from Devil's Row, who were circling madly about the heap and pelting him.

One viewed the existence of man then as a marvel, and conceded a glamour of wonder to these lice which were caused to cling to a whirling, fire-smote, ice-locked, disease-stricken, space-lost bulb.

It is not well to drive men into final corners, at those moments they could all develop teeth and claws.

He had grown to regard himself merely as a part of a vast blue demonstration.

Over the gray skin of the face ran little ants.

Every sin is the result of collaboration.

He was in a moving box.

IMPRESSIONISM

"Will [brother], isn't that cloud green?... But they wouldn't believe it if I put it in a book."

[*Maggie* is] a succession of sharply outlined pictures, which pass before the reader like a panorama, leaving each its definite impression.

The Easterner's mind, like a film, took lasting impressions of three men... For a time the encounter in the darkness was such a perplexity of flying arms that it presented no more detail than would a swiftly revolving wheel.

In the eastern sky there was a yellow patch like a rug laid for the feet of the coming sun; and against it, black and patternlike, loomed the gigantic figure of the colonel on a gigantic horse.

Once he saw a tiny battery go dashing along the line of the horizon. The tiny riders were beating the tiny horses.

There was a lull in the noises of insects as if they had bowed their beaks and were making a devotional pause.

Tents sprang up like strange plants. Camp fires, like red, peculiar blossoms, dotted the night.

She returned and stirred up the room until her children were bobbing about like bubbles.

His eyes blazed with light and his throat worked like a pump.

The moon had been lighted and was hung in a treetop.

Potter's mouth seemed merely a grave for his tongue.

The line fell slowly forward like a toppling wall.

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

None of them knew the color of the sky.

EXPRESSIONISM

Swift pictures of himself, apart, yet in himself, came to him—a blue desperate figure leading lurid charges with one knee forward and a broken blade high—a blue, determined figure standing before a crimson and steel assault, getting calmly killed on a high place before the eyes of all. He thought of the magnificent pathos of his dead body.

In the darkness he saw visions of a thousand-tongued fear that would babble at his back and cause him to flee, while others were going coolly about their country's business.

God fashioned the ship of the world carefully.
With the infinite skill of an all-master
Made He the hull and the sails,
Held He the rudder
Ready for adjustment.
Erect stood He, scanning His work proudly.
Then—at fateful time—a wrong called,
And God turned, heeding.
Lo, the ship at this opportunity, slipped slyly,
Making cunning noiseless travel down the ways.
So that, forever rudderless, it went upon the seas
Going ridiculous voyages,
Making quaint progress,
Turning as with serious purpose
Before stupid winds.
And there were many in the sky
Who laughed at this thing.

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

And because it is my heart.”

He was naked—naked as a tree in winter; but a halo was about his head, and he shone like a saint.

ALLITERATION AND ASSONANCE

A glaring fire wine-tinted the waters of the river. Its rays, shining upon the moving masses of troops, brought forth here and there sudden gleams of silver or gold. Upon the other shore a dark and mysterious range of hills was curved against the sky. The insect voices of the night sang solemnly.

He pointed out to her the dazzling fittings of the coach; and in truth her eyes opened wider as she contemplated the sea-green figured velvet, the shining brass, silver, and glass, the wood that gleamed as darkly brilliant as the surface of a pool of oil.

IRONY

Do not weep, babe, for war is kind.

“Wid a home like dis an’ a mudder like me, she went to the deh bad.”

“Oh, yes, I’ll fergive her! I’ll fergive her!” [Maggie’s mother]

The oiler was ahead in the race.... In the shallows, face downward, lay the oiler.

He tried to mathematically prove to himself that he would not run from a battle.

As for himself, he had fled with discretion and dignity.

He wished that he, too, had a wound, a red badge of courage.

He conceived Nature to be a woman with a deep aversion to tragedy.

He had not enlisted of his free will. He had been dragged by the merciless government.

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.

He turned now with a lover’s thirst to images of tranquil skies, fresh meadows, cool brooks—an existence of soft and eternal peace. [Henry Fleming does not know he is marching to Gettysburg.]

Nevertheless, he had, on a certain star-lit evening, said wonderingly and quite reverently, “Deh moon looks like hell, don’t it?”

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.’

The judge retreated to the cold manner of the bench. “Perhaps we may not talk with propriety of this kind of action, but I am inclined to say that you are performing a questionable charity in preserving this negro’s life. As near as I can understand, he will hereafter be a monster, a perfect monster, and probably with an affected brain.” [“The Monster”]

UNDERSTATEMENT

And this is the story of how the lieutenant lost his arm. When he reached home, his sisters, his mother, his wife, sobbed for a long time at the sight of the flat sleeve. “Oh, well,” he said, standing shamefaced amid these tears, “I don’t suppose it matters so much as all that.”

The babe, Tommie, died. He went away in a white, insignificant coffin, his small waxen hand clutching a flower that the girl, Maggie, had stolen from an Italian.

He mentioned to the boat in general how the amusement of rowing struck him, and the weary-faced oiler smiled in full sympathy.

It merely occurred to him that if he should drown it would be a shame.

EXISTENTIALISM

If she has decided to drown me, why did she not do it in the beginning and save me this trouble? The whole affair is absurd.

The Red Badge of Courage (1895)

The latter part of my twenty-first year I began *The Red Badge of Courage* and completed it early in my twenty-second year... It was an effort born of pain—despair, almost; and I believe that this made it a better piece of literature than it otherwise would have been.

That was at Chancellorsville. Of course, afterward I got kind of used to it. A man does.

OTHER WORKS

I suppose I ought to be thankful to *The Red Badge*, but I am much fonder of my little book of poems, *The Black Riders* [1895]. The reason, perhaps, is that it was a more ambitious effort. My aim is to comprehend in it the thoughts I have had about life in general, while *The Red Badge* is a mere episode in life. Last week I finished my new novel, *The Third Violet* [1896]. It is the story of life among the younger and poorer artists in New York.

HUMAN NATURE

But he said, in substance, to himself that if the earth and moon were about to clash, many persons would doubtless plan to get upon the roofs to witness the collision.

POVERTY

In a story called "An Experiment in Misery" I tried to make plain that the root of Bowery life is a sort of cowardice. Perhaps I mean a lack of ambition or to willingly be knocked flat and accept the licking.

POLITICS

And the wealth of the few shall be built upon the patience of the poor.

I was a Socialist for two weeks but when a couple of Socialists assured me I had no right to think differently from any other Socialist and then quarreled with each other about what Socialism meant, I ran away.

"Think as I think," said a man, "or you are abominably wicked; you are a toad." And after I thought of it, I said, "I will, then, be a toad."

HEROISM

You cannot choose your battlefield, God does that for you. But you can plant a standard where a standard never flew.

There was the delirium that encounters despair and death, and is heedless and blind to the odds. It is a temporary but sublime absence of selfishness.

When the roof fell in, a great funnel of smoke swarmed toward the sky, as if the old man's mighty spirit, released from its body—a little bottle—had swelled like the genie of fable. [Henry Fleming, "The Veteran"]

PATRIOTISM

Within him, as he hurled himself forward, was born a love, a despairing fondness for this flag which was near him. It was a creation of beauty and invulnerability. It was a goddess, radiant, that bended its form with an imperious gesture to him. It was a woman, red and white, hating and loving, that called him with the voice of his hopes. Because no harm could come to it he endowed it with power. He kept near, as if it could be a saver of lives, and an imploring cry went from his mind.

FAME

For the first time I saw the majestic forces which are arrayed against man's true success—not the world—the world is silly, changeable, any of its decisions can be reversed—but man's own colossal impulses more strong than chains, and I perceived that the fight was not going to be with the world but with myself.

DEATH

The ranks opened to avoid the corpse. The invulnerable dead man forced a way for himself. The youth looked keenly at the ashen face. The wind raised the tawny beard. It moved as if a hand were stroking it. He vaguely desired to walk around and around the body and stare; the impulse of the living to try to read in dead eyes the answer to the Question.

LAST WORDS

Robert [Barr, a friend] — when you come to the hedge — that we must all go over [he gasped slowly] — it isn't bad. You feel sleepy — and — you don't care. Just a little dreamy anxiety — which world you're really in — that's all.

