

Stephen Crane and the Green Place of Paint*

Iris Ralph

Department of English
Tamkang University, Taiwan

Abstract

This paper addresses the influence of French Impressionist painting on the late nineteenth-century writer Stephen Crane (1871-1900), a key figure in the movement of literary naturalism and the author of, among other stories, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky*, and *The Blue Hotel*. A journalist and war-time correspondent as well as a literary figure, Crane produced a remarkable number of poems, prose pieces, short stories, and “sketches” in a period of time spanning little more than a decade. Much of his work is characterized by formal devices analogous to Impressionist painting’s seemingly antithetical devices of *atmospheric* (or *animated*) paint and *flat* paint. These formal devices put into question normative, anthropocentric distinctions between human and nonhuman subjects and objects. The short story “An Experiment in Misery” (1889) describes in impressionist painterly language the city’s human and nonhuman subject-objects that implies that ecogenic (nonhuman-made) human and nonhuman subject-objects are outcast, defaced, or bullied by the anthropogenic (human-made) environs of the modern industrial city. The influence of French Impressionist painting on Crane has been addressed by scholars. However, these scholars do not comment on its ecocritical significances. I argue that Crane’s animation of the nonhuman figure and the oft-commented on flattening or caricaturing of the human figure by Crane express a nascent ecological argument.

Keywords

Stephen Crane, French Impressionist Painting, Ecocriticism

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If I should cast off this tattered coat,
And go free into the mighty sky:
If I should find nothing there
But a vast blue,
Echoless, ignorant,—
What then?

— Stephen Crane
Black Riders and Other Lines

This paper addresses the ecocritical significance of the influence of French Impressionist painting on Stephen Crane (1871-1900), a key figure in the late nineteenth-century movement of literary naturalism in the United States and author of, among other stories, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, *The Red Badge of Courage*, *The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky*, and *The Blue Hotel*. A journalist and war-time correspondent as well as a literary figure, Crane produced a remarkable number of poems, prose pieces, short stories, and “sketches” in a period of time spanning little more than a decade. He responds to the formal devices of Impressionist painting of *atmospheric* (or *animated*) paint and its seeming antithesis, *flat* paint, leveling or reducing the figure of the human subject-object relative to the figure of nonhuman subject-objects or, otherwise, animating or personifying nonhuman subject-object figures relative to human subject-object figures, which, analogous to the French Impressionist landscape painting, in effect puts into question normative, anthropocentric distinctions between human and nonhuman subject-objects. This influence long has been addressed by scholars but without consideration of ecocritical concerns. In this paper, I discuss the short story “An Experiment in Misery,” arguing that the references to impressionist or modern painterly language in the descriptions of the human ecogenic (nonhuman-made) figure of the youth, the nonhuman ecogenic figure of the sky, and the nonhuman anthropogenic (human-made) figure of the city, carry a nascent ecologic. The anthropogenic, animate city is represented as a figure that spurns or ostracizes the ecogenic, enervated youth. The night sky is portrayed similarly as a figure that is both defaced by the city and stamped with its signature.

A single sentence in a late prose piece by Stephen Crane titled “War Memories” (1899), the only direct reference to the movement of French Impressionism by Crane (a writer whose brief life from 1871 to 1900 coincided with the movement) conjures the hostile reaction among the public and critics alike to Impressionism’s debut in 1874, the year Claude Monet’s painting *Impression, Sunrise* (1872) was exhibited to the Parisian public. Crane’s sentence is a

description of the interior of a church illuminated by torchlight: "I bring this to you merely as an effect of mental light and shade, if you like; something done in thought similar to that which the French Impressionists do in color; something meaningless and at the same time overwhelming, crushing, monstrous" ("War Memories" 254). Crane's knowledge of Impressionist painting, which was attacked on the one hand for its destabilized perspective and its painters' indecorous and flagrant use of paint and touted on the other hand for its scientific recording of subjects without imposing on these subjects preconceived ideas or notions of the ideal, has been documented by Crane scholars. Their inquiries focus on such concerns as point of view, omniscient narrator, subjective and objective perspective, and the debate about Crane's romantic and realist literary style. The most significant studies in this respect include four mid-twentieth century essays: Sergio Perosa's "Naturalism and Impressionism in Stephen Crane's Fiction" (1964); Orm Øverland's "The Impressionism of Stephen Crane: A Study in Style and Technique" (1966); Stanley Wertheim's "Crane and Garland: The Education of an Impressionist" (1967); and Rodney O. Rogers' "Stephen Crane and Impressionism" (1969). A fifth study, James Nagel's *Stephen Crane and Literary Impressionism* (1980), the only book-length work on the subject, together with Nagel's earlier essay, "Stephen Crane and the Narrative Methods of Impressionism" (1978), also need to be mentioned. Joseph J. Kwiat's essay "Stephen Crane and Painting" (1972) and Bettina L. Knapp's monograph *Stephen Crane* (1987) are two further studies that suggest Crane not only is responding to French Impressionism but also is anticipating the early twentieth-century Expressionist movement. To the author's knowledge no other studies on the subject have appeared in print since Nagel's 1980 monograph.¹

The argument of this paper is Crane's absorption of the dualisms of Impressionist painting, both its objectivist or *ocular* and its seemingly opposite,

¹ David Halliburton's *The Color of the Sky* (1989) is devoted to some discussion of the symbolic meanings of color in Crane's fictions but this discussion (59-66) and Halliburton's study as a whole do not address the influence of French Impressionism or the ecocritical significance of the excess of signification of color that characterizes Crane's writings. Material historian Bill Brown's superb *The Material Unconscious* (1996) addresses the theme of recreation in Crane's corpus (including gambling, football, baseball, and the mass produced iron toy). Another recent and original study, George Monteiro's *Stephen Crane's Blue Badge of Courage* (2000), is an examination of the influence on Crane of the temperance movement.

subjectivist or *anti-ocular* inheritances can be read ecocritically.² This claim, the focus of the discussion that follows, situates itself within the discipline of ecocriticism. Although this is a very broad area of inquiry and one that intersects with many other disciplines, ecocriticism can be summarized as a theory and practice that emerged in the 1980s in response to perceived or acknowledged inequities between the rights given to the human being and the rights given to the nonhuman being including natural environments. Although in the past the term and concept of “rights” was not typically invoked when talking about natural environments, it is being seen more and more in arguments in defense of these environments because of our increased awareness of our ability to profoundly alter and impact these environments. The most radical “rights” arguments are found in the theory of deep ecology, first proposed in 1972 by the Norwegian ecophilosopher Arne Naess. Similar arguments are found in ecojustice or environmental justice theory, ecofeminist theory, and animal rights theory.³

Prior to the 1980s and continuing through this decade, there is seen a rich and sustained interest among scholars in the movement of literary naturalism, a turn-of-the-century movement associated with Crane that focused on the role that external forces or environmental conditions play in shaping and determining the (human) individual. The aforementioned scholars who address the influence of French Impressionism recapitulate the arguments for Crane as a literary naturalist but they do so toward reassessing Crane as a writer who is concerned more with the instability of perspective of the (human) individual and less with the role that the

² Art historical summaries of the painterly movement often refer to Impressionism’s dual, Romantic and Enlightenment, philosophical inheritances. It attempts a union between “the real and the ideal” (Birmingham 55, Hartt 840), or to reconcile “objective reality” and “subjective vision” (Perosa 92). The terms “ocular” and “anti-ocular” are from Martin Jay’s book *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-century French Thought*. Jay discusses the Western European philosophical, “ocular,” tradition that privileged the sense of sight that traces to the Enlightenment and to Plato and the “Hellenic affinity for the visible” (21). According to this tradition, sight stands for the most distantiating, therefore, “the noblest” of senses, with reason and the intellect (Jay 21). It was challenged in the post-Enlightenment period of Romanticism, in the “anti-ocular” reaction against the classical privileging of *ratio* and pure vision. Enlightenment claims of impartial or objective truth were now attacked. External appearances—the visible world—were now disdained or regarded as facile, limited, or superficial grounds of knowledge.

³ For an overview of the main environmental positions since the 1980s, see Garrard 16-32. Peter Singer and Tom Regan are the two most famous spokespersons for the movement of animal rights.

environment plays in shaping this individual.⁴ What is missing from their work and from the larger body of scholarship that deals with the movement of literary naturalism, including the essays collected in Donald Pizer's edited *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism*, is an interest in the environment for itself, or an interest in the ways that environments are not only active agents but also agents that have intrinsic value. Many of these studies, moreover, are characterized by a lack of interest in or defense of ecogenic environments on the basis of their vulnerability, impressionability, receptiveness, and porousness. Far more attention is given to the aggressive and hostile aspect of ecogenic environments in the context of human contact and interaction with these environments. Since the emergence of the discipline of ecocriticism this imbalance has been redressed. Attention to the perspective and interests of the nonhuman being is emphasized. At the same time, ecocritics are keenly aware that they cannot escape the pathetic fallacy or making claims for the nonhuman being that might not be its claims. Ecocriticism thus might be said to be language's and literature's ineluctably unequal exchange with languages and texts outside the human. It also might be said to be the willingness on behalf of humans to acknowledge "the otherness of [nonhuman] voices" that are "embedded" in our usage of language even if this does not in the least change nature's existence "as a force in itself" (Opperman 123).⁵

In what follows I will argue that Crane alludes to French Impressionist *color* in his animation of objects in ways that undercut distinctions between human and nonhuman subject-objects. I also will argue that Crane alludes to a second, seemingly antithetical, hallmark device of Impressionist painting, *flatness*. He uses devices of flatness of his own (literary devices) that level human subject-object figures relative to nonhuman subject-object figures, which seem to express the

⁴ Although he does not address the influence of French Impressionism, Halliburton also addresses the characteristic fragmented, shifting, and limited perspectives of characters in Crane's fictions.

⁵ Although I do not address Crane according to critical studies that place him in the literary as opposed to the painterly movement of Impressionism, a fuller treatment of Crane would need to address this body of scholarship. Jesse Matz's *Literary Impressionism and Modernist Aesthetics*, perhaps the strongest critical assessment of Crane and the literary movement, traces the origins of the movement from its "apotheosis" in the fiction of Crane, Joseph Conrad, Henry James, Marcel Proust, and Ford Madox Ford—the "father" and "shepherd" of the "English Impressionist Writers" (Pound qtd. in Matz 14)—through the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Romantic thinkers back to the seventeenth-century Empiricist philosophers including Locke and Hume (13).

human subject has no more significance or import than the nonhuman subject. The influence of Impressionist painting often crops up in references to Crane in critical anthologies of American Literature. In these references as well as full-length critical studies of Crane, the focus is on human-centered problems of perspective, formal or epistemological, or on Crane's aesthetic or literary style. Scholars comment on Crane's debt to the painterly movement especially in the context of the hallmark device of Impressionism of *color*, but they do not address this debt according to what it might tell us about the environmental imagination of Crane. They also often comment on the flat or caricature-like appearance that characters have without making an environmental argument about Crane's flattening of characters or about the possible ties between this flattening and the influence of modern painterly flatness. In the discussion that follows, I comment first on the painterly movement of French Impressionism in the context of the environmental arguments that its painters were making either consciously or unconsciously because my implicit argument is Crane read this painting in these terms. I then turn to Crane and one of his late fictions "An Experiment in Misery" in the given context.

Art historical accounts provide for Impressionist painting the inaugural date of 1874, the year the most popular and commercially successful member of the group Claude Monet exhibited *Impression, Sunrise* (1872). The movement flourished in France in the 1870s and 1880s. Its influence on painterly movements in the United States was almost immediate and the movement of American Impressionism debuted at the Chicago Fair's World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. (In this same year Crane made his literary debut with the private publication of the short story *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*.) By 1898, the year of the famous exhibit at the Durand-Ruel Galleries in New York of American Impressionist painting advertised as "The Ten American Painters," the American movement was well known to gallery goers. The artists (actually eleven in number) represented in the exhibit included Thomas Dewing, Childe Hassam, John Twachtman, and Julian Alden Weir, the patriarch of American Impressionist painting (Gerds 34, 71). William Merritt Chase, from 1880 onwards the most significant teacher of American Impressionism (Gerds 24), was another leading figure. Both he and Twachtman were teachers at the Art Students' League in New York (Gerds 67), an art school where Crane hung about off and on during the early 1890s. I will comment upon this later in my paper. The group of American painters who were identified as "American Impressionists" did not remain the same over time and several of its members would refuse the appellation. Nonetheless, their work speaks as a whole for the movement in the United States. It was remarked on for its incongruous

subject matter, or subjects deemed too common or coarse for artistic consideration or representation, its broken or visible brushstrokes, lack of finish, flattened or unsettled or destabilized perspectives, and bright, or undiluted or unmixed, primary color (i.e., red, yellow, and blue).

Although by the 1890s, the decade in which Crane produced the bulk of his work, Impressionism was no longer lambasted by art critics, it continued to draw criticism from both these critics and the general public. In particular, the non-traditional or non-ideal subject of the land or ecogenic nature continued to be seen to be, if not an unworthy subject for painting, a subject that had no value in its own right.⁶ Impressionism seemed to those hostile to it to be unduly elevating this world of nonhuman being in ways not seen before. Also, although the Impressionists' works were not limited to paintings of the countryside, this subject was that by which the painting had first gained notice. Confronted by a painting with no human figures, or diminutive or hardly discernible human figures in the composition, many people dismissed or scoffed at it for lacking a proper subject matter, i.e., a human-centered focus. Even the movement's most staunch supporters were somewhat baffled by landscapes that seemed to say, "even for a landscape," very little (Maloon 18). In an essay that appeared in 1870 in the French journal *L'électeur libre*, French art critic Théodore Duret writes: "He [Pissarro] often comes to paint insignificant sites, where nature herself makes so little of a picture, that he paints a landscape without making a picture" (qtd. in Maloon 18).

The distinction the Impressionist painters gave to landscape painting according to the meaning of "landscape" of formal pictorial genre also was significant. The genre occupied a low position in the painterly hierarchy, lower even than the still life (depictions of carefully arranged objects such as a bowl of fruit, vase of flowers, the remains of a meal, the carcasses of small animals hanging from a hook or laid out on a table). The Impressionists were the first group of

⁶ In the last thirty years the discipline of ecocriticism has grown enormously. The use of the terms ecogenic and anthropogenic, which might be regarded as a re-designation of the older classic terms "nature" and "culture," is not always productive. In *Ecology Without Nature* (2007), Timothy Morton, one of the most prominent ecoscholars today, argues that the present environmental crisis is because we have conceptualized nature as something separate from us rather than as something that we are. I use the terms ecogenic and anthropogenic here, however, as I think they remain useful in the context of discussing environments in Crane's time, including nineteenth-century rural France. Although these and other environments evidence the presence of the human—thousands of years of agricultural activity—they are not radically and violently transformed to the extent that they are transformed in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries.

painters to elevate the genre, which first emerged in its own right four hundred years earlier. In electing the landscape as their primary subject and genre, the Impressionists in effect were flouting a venerable tradition that traced back to the Renaissance that gave primordial status to the human figure by way of the distinguished genres of i) the history painting, ii) the portrait, iii) the “genre” or “family” scene (a painting of a group of human figures, either religious or secular in cast), and iv) the still life. The landscape stood on the lowest rung of this hierarchy that spoke for the “insistence of an ontological difference between *Homo sapiens* and the rest of the biosphere” (Manes 20) even as this hierarchy seemed to celebrate secular and earthly existence in contrast with the Judeo-Christian religious content of medieval painting, e.g., the depiction of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the apostles, and so on. Additionally, the Impressionists’ practice of painting directly from the subject suggests an awareness of the reciprocity of exchange between human and other beings. The immediate predecessors of the Impressionists, the French Realists or Naturalists, known also as the Barbizon school painters after the name of the village near the forest of Fontainebleau where these painters worked—Gustave Courbet, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Jean-François Millet, and others—had introduced the concept of *plein air* or outdoor painting to the younger group but the Impressionists were the first to put this into practice. Pissarro foremost among them, they took up the habit of painting out-of-doors, immersing themselves in the landscape, working side-by-side with it.

In addition to the arguments made above that the Impressionist painters are in effect recognizing the non-human world as an active rather than a passive agent by working out-of-doors when painting a rural or urban scene and the Impressionist painters are in effect redeeming the value of the nonhuman world in their elevation of the genre of the landscape, a third ecocritical argument one might make about Impressionism is in the context of its identification with Modernism, the movement in art and literature that can be said to extend from the last two-thirds of the nineteenth century to the first two thirds of the twentieth century. Modernism has been called an “urban phenomenon” (Harvey 25). It coincides with and responds to a period of unprecedented industrialization and urbanization. The Impressionist landscapes appear at a time when iron, glass, steel, and cement were transforming the ecogenic world of Europe and North America. Frank Norris, Crane’s contemporary, records this transformation in his novel *The Octopus*, the title of which refers to the transcontinental railroad that snaked across and opened the American West to settlement and exploitation. Hart Crane’s high modernist poem *The Bridge* is a dark paean to the nineteenth-century Roebling brothers’ suspension

bridge, a design made possible in part by improvements in the manufacture of steel from iron ore and carbon. Social realist Pietro Di Donato's novel *Christ in Concrete* records the emergence of urban America and the burying beneath its vaticans of cement of the workers who died building it. This literature—late nineteenth-century naturalism, early twentieth-century high modernism, and mid-twentieth-century social realism—reflects the replacement of an ecogenic by an anthropogenic order even as the members of this anthropogenic order believed that natural environments were inexhaustible, infinitely abundant, and negligibly affected by humans. The most important Impressionist painter with regard to the nineteenth-century's burgeoning awareness of the mortality of the natural world was Camille Pissarro. It is not a coincidence that he also was the most socially revolutionary of the group (Shiff 33-45; Rewald 315, 568), or "the only one of the original impressionists to concern himself with revolutionary politics" (Greenberg, "Review of *Camille Pissarro: Letters to His Son Lucien*" 214).⁷ Enfranchisement was hardly a concern of Pierre-Auguste Renoir or Claude Monet, the most popular and successful of the Impressionists. It also was not a preoccupation of the two most aristocratic members, Edgar Degas and Eduard Manet. Greenberg speaks of Manet's "insolent indifference to his subject" ("Towards a Newer Laocoon" 29-30). (Nonetheless, as T. J. Clark argues in *The Painting of Modern Life*, Manet's paintings represented a scathing indictment of middleclass attitudes towards the lower classes.) In general, however, in the Impressionist landscape paintings, in those by the French painters Pissarro, Sisley, and Monet and in those by the Americans Theodore Robinson, Childe Hassam, Theodore Clement Steele, and Robert Henri, the subject of the nonhuman figure—a building, a haystack, a sea, a tree—is a living, breathing, animate entity that is as sensate, present, and fulsome as any given human figure in the composition.

From the very beginning, supporters and detractors of the movement remarked on the animation of the nonhuman figure relative to the human figure, an effect produced in part by effects of (so-called *atmospheric*) color, such that the forms of human figures merge with the forms of nonhuman figures (trees, water, sunlight, sky, etc.). A posthumously published essay "L'Impressionisme" by Jules Laforgue, art critic and French Symbolist poet, comments on this as well as on the Impressionists' rejection of the studio and studio lighting in favor of *plein air*

⁷ See Pissarro's criticism of the middle class he belonged to in a letter to his son dated July 8, 1891: "Letter to Lucien Pissarro," rpt. in Linda Nochlin, *Impressionism and Post-Impressionism*, 57-58.

techniques, which put the painter on less mediated terms, in more immediate contact with his or her subject.⁸ Laforgue speaks of the Impressionists' replacement of "theoretic perspective" by "atmospheric perspective" or "natural perspective," whereby "color vibration and contrast" substituted for the older practice of line or linear perspective (qtd. in Nochlin 16). This in effect underscored rather than downplayed the relations between subject-objects, regardless of the subject-objects' human or nonhuman identities.

In an older art history, according to "theoretic perspective," the painter would start out by making a series of sketches or drawings of the given subject, relying on a mathematically constructed perspective that owes to the fifteenth-century polymath Leon Battista Alberti. Such perspective was used to create the illusion of depth and to distinguish between and hierarchize objects in space. Color was less important in this regard, typically being applied afterward. Also, the drawings and sketches that formed the preliminary stages of the composition and functioned as the basis *for* not *as* the final composition, often would be discarded and the final composition would be completed on a separate canvas in the artist's studio.

Impressionism's substitution of color for line, or of atmospheric perspective for linear perspective, blurs the demarcations between subject-object figures in the painting, either between human figures in the painting or between human and nonhuman figures in the painting. It "sees and renders nature as she is, which is to say solely by means of colored vibrations" (Laforgue qtd. in Nochlin 16). Subject-object figures are equidistant in formal representational terms, neither receding in relation to nor backgrounded against other subject-object figures in the painting. Nonhuman figures seem to possess significance coterminous or compatible with the human figure. This is seen in both the landscapes and paintings of nineteenth-century Paris: Pissarro's *The quays at Rouen* (1883) and *Coin de village, effet d'hiver* (1877), Monet's *La Grenouillère* (1869) and *Boulevard Saint-Denis, Argenteuil* (1875), and Berthe Morisot's *Dans les blés* (1875). Human figures subtly oscillate with the nonhuman "figures" of water, land, and sky. The former are not foregrounded against or made more prominent relative to the latter. The boundaries or distinctions between figures of trees and fields and humans are collapsed or blurred. Nonhuman and human figures each insists in the composition, neither yielding nor condescending to the other. These and other paintings—neo-

⁸ Laforgue wrote this essay in 1883. It was published posthumously in *Mélanges posthumes, Oeuvres complètes*, 4th ed., Vol. III (Paris, 1902-3). Excerpts from the English translation by William Smith, "Impressionism: The Eye and the Poet," *Art News*, LV (May, 1956): 43-45, are reprinted in Nochlin, 15-18, and Clark, 16-17.

impressionist George Seurat's *Man Painting a Boat* (1883), Pierre-Auguste Renoir's *Les Grands Boulevards* (1875) and *La Balançoire* (1876)—speak for the belief that the human and the non-human worlds are intimately connected. The American Impressionists Robinson, Hassam, Twachtman, and Weir similarly eschew demarcating figures when they use the device or techniques of *atmospheric* color. Joseph J. Kwiat in his essay “Stephen Crane and Painting” makes the argument that the influence on Crane of the “new disintegrations” of the American impressionist painters, which these painters had learned from their French colleagues, notably Monet and Sisley (184), was especially by way of the painters Hassam, Twachtman, and Weir. The art critic Laforgue states:

Where the academic sees only lines at the edges of things . . . , the Impressionist sees real living lives, without geometrical form, built from thousands of irregular touches which, at a distance, give the thing life. Where the academic sees only things set down in regular, separate positions within an armature of purely theoretical lines, the Impressionist sees perspective established by thousands of imperceptible tones and touches, by the variety of atmospheric states, with each plane not immobile but shifting. (qtd. in Clark 16)

The preeminent Bauhaus painter and photographer Laszlo Moholy-Nagy characterized Impressionist painting (and the abstract movements that followed it—neoinpressionism, fauvism, expressionism, cubism, etc.) as the “supremacy of color over story” and the “directness of perceptual sensorial values against . . . illusionistic rendering[s] of nature” (141). While he and his contemporaries were not making any ecocritical claims for this painting, their observations imply that modern painting was the effort to see the world as it is without “framing” or foisting upon it a narrative stigmatized by an anthropocentric lens. Clement Greenberg in “The Role of Nature in Modern Painting” analyzes “the paradox of French painting between Courbet and Cézanne” (272) with respect to the painting’s fidelity to the objective condition and its unwillingness to give up nature as an equal. He states:

While in effect departing further and further from illusionism, it was driven in its most important manifestations by the conscious desire to give an account of nature that would be more accurate or faithful *in context* than any before. The context was the medium, whose

claims—the limitations imposed by the flat surface, the canvas's shape, and the nature of the pigments—had to be accommodated to those of nature. The previous century of painting had erred in not granting the claims of the medium sufficiently and Cézanne, in particular, proposed to remedy this while at the same time giving an even more essentially accurate transcription of nature's appearance. (272)

Art historian T. J. Clark also remarks on the Impressionists' self-conscious notice of the medium and their effort to produce a painting that would “declare itself [to be in]...profound agreement with nature” (182). Impressionist painting's undiluted colors, equal in value, and “actual material of oil and canvas” “stood for nature itself,” for an “unparalleled presence and unity” (Clark 182). Seen now against the modern, urban environs of nineteenth-century Paris, nature “possessed consistency . . . in a way that nothing else did” (Clark 182). The critic Charles Altieri describes the French Impressionist landscape as “the capacity of coloristic mobility to transform our sense of the psyche's relation to nature” and “the play of color relations its means of liberating itself from the forms of significance demanded by humanist values” (166). Quoting Paul Valéry, he characterizes the painting as the attempt to live “in the midst of what one is trying to capture” (167).

Recent nineteenth century scientific discoveries in chemistry and optics also might be approached from an ecocritical perspective insofar as such discoveries gave weight to the belief that the human mind was connected to the body of the world. According to an older, Cartesian thinking, the faculty of sight or vision stood for immaterial, so-called pure or objective ‘sight’ or reason, and color stood for spurious emotion or a state issuing from the body that was secondary, inferior, base, and unreliable. In the nineteenth century color continued to be associated with “earthbound tasks” but this now had positive value. Color placed one “in contact with reality” (Olin 208). It imparted the ideas of “weight and solidity” (Olin 208). Descartes's seventeenth century had relegated color to “the uncertain workings of the fallible human,” identifying truth with a pure, “uncolored” sight. The nineteenth century and burgeoning field of psychology shifted truth or vision away from a “transcendent, atemporal viewing subject,” towards the body, by way of the “physiological terrain” of color (Jay 152). A seminal study in this regard was Goethe's dissertation on color, *Farbenlehre (Theory of Colors)* published in 1810, which upset ideas stemming from Isaac Newton's discovery that color was the reflection of light from objects, or ‘bodies.’ Otherwise, color had no material or

physiological basis. Goethe argued that at least some colors were externally or physiologically produced by objects. Another influential study was Schopenhauer's *Über das Sehen und die Farben (On Vision and Colors)*, published five years after Goethe's *Farbenlehre*. It was instrumental in disseminating Goethe's work and pushed Goethe's findings further in its argument that color was entirely physiologically based. Goethe's and Schopenhauer's color theories deeply impacted modern painting beginning with the French Romantics (Eugene Delacroix and others) and culminating with the Impressionists. Color now was given recognition equal to line and was positively represented as embodied or weighted vision.

I turn now to the subject of Stephen Crane in the context of his absorption of the movement and the ecologic that he read in it. He was exposed to the movement probably as early as 1887, the year his beloved older sister Mary Helen, an accomplished painter, established an art school in Asbury Park, New Jersey. By the 1880s, the Paris art dealer and longtime financial supporter of the Impressionist painters Paul Durand-Ruel, was bringing the painting to the United States. Crane's later contact with the Art Students' League in New York City further exposed him to the avant-garde movement. Between the fall of 1893 and the spring of 1895, he lived on and off at the old Art Students' League building at 143-147 East Twenty-Third Street. He shared rooms there with the artists and illustrators William Carroll, Nelson Greene, David Ericson, and R. G. Vosburgh and became friends with other artists and illustrators around this time including Frederic C. Gordon, Corwin Knapp Linson, Charles and Gordon Pike, and Gustav Verbeek. Greene had studied at the Art Students' League under William Merritt Chase. Ericson also had studied at the Art Students' League under Chase. Later he studied with the American Impressionist James McNeill Whistler in Paris. (Whistler rejected the label of Impressionist; nonetheless, he has close ties to the movement.) Charles Pike had studied under the French sculptor and naturalized American citizen Augustus Saint-Gaudens, an artist whose work sums up Impressionism's "immediacy and insubstantiality" (Hartt 860). Both Pike and Corwin Knapp Linson, a photographer as well as a painter and illustrator, had studied in Paris at the conservative establishments the *Académie Julian* and *École des Beaux Arts*. Although Linson, like Whistler, disliked the avant-garde movement of Impressionism, he and the other "young men" who befriended Crane at the Art Students' League, were studying "under the first generation of American art teachers to have brought home the doctrines of Monet, Cézanne, and Seurat" (Hoffman qtd. in Nagel 16).

Crane also was exposed to Impressionism through Henry McBride, a prominent New York art critic. He, and Charles and Gordon Pike met McBride for dinner on occasion between 1895 and 1896 in New York in the Tenderloin district (McBride 46).⁹ It is likely Crane saw, too, firsthand, some of the “modern painting” of the French Impressionists that Durand-Ruel and other art dealers were bringing to the United States. In 1886, Durand-Ruel organized the first large-scale exhibit of French Impressionist painting including three works by Seurat, fifteen by Sisley, seventeen by Manet, twenty-three by Degas, thirty-eight by Renoir, forty-two by Pissarro, and forty-eight by Monet (Gerds 29). After this pivotal year for the movement, exhibits of Impressionist painting occurred frequently and regularly. Although Crane did not read in the original German Goethe’s anti-Newtonian dissertation, *Farbenlehre* (1810), he probably read the English translation by Charles Eastlake, *Goethe’s Theory of Colours* (1840). He was aware of the influence of Goethe’s theory on the French Impressionists at this time (Hough 136). In a December 7, 1926 correspondence by Frank W. Noxon (who had known Crane when both men were enrolled at Syracuse University), Noxon writes:

Incidentally, the use of the word “Red” in this title [*The Red Badge of Courage*] was part of a program. After the book appeared he 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 upon the human mind. Upon Crane this had made a profound impression and he had utilized the idea to produce his effects. (Stallman and Gilkes 336)¹⁰

Hamlin Garland was by far the most critical influence on Crane with regard to his knowledge of Impressionist painting and the color theory surrounding it. Davis calls him Crane’s “literary father” (134). In particular, Garland’s lectures on art and literature, published in 1894 in a slim volume titled *Crumbling Idols: Twelve Essays on Art Dealing Chiefly with Literature, Painting, and the Drama* (1894) were a deep influence (Wertheim, “Crane and Garland”). Crane first met Garland in 1891

⁹ For evidence of Crane’s contacts with McBride and the Art Students’ League, I have relied mostly on Stanley Wertheim’s *A Stephen Crane Encyclopedia*. Wertheim provides brief biographies of many of the artists Crane came into contact with including their ties to American and French Impressionist painting.

¹⁰ Noxon was a Delta Upsilon Fraternity brother of Crane at Syracuse University (Halliburton 326, 18n).

at the New Jersey seaside resort, Avon-by-the-Sea, where Crane was assisting his brother Townley as correspondent to the *New York Tribune*. Garland was giving a series of lectures on American literature. Crane wrote a report on Garland's lecture on William Dean Howells that appeared the day after, on August 18, 1891 (Wertheim, *ASCE* 122). He would later read Garland's essays inspired by the June 1893 exhibition of European and American Impressionist painting at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. These were the most "succinct and perceptive rational for Impressionism to be written by an American" at the time (Gerdt's 17).

In the ninth essay of *Crumbling Idols*, "Impressionism," Garland discusses the characteristic, "naturalist," material color of the avant-garde painters: "They are," he writes, "referring constantly to nature" (123). They use "raw" and "frank" as opposed to "toning" and "harmonizing" color in order to match nature, whose "colors" also "are primary" (126, 130). "Values are almost equal everywhere" (124). Colors are not mixed upon the palette but painted "with nature's colors—red, blue, and yellow" (Garland 126). They are placed "fearlessly on the canvas side by side" such that they give "a crispness and brilliancy, and a peculiar vibratory quality to sky and earth which is unknown to the old method" and such that the entirety of the canvas constitutes a "single idea impossible of subdivision without loss" (122, 127). Garland also comments as does Laforgue before him on Impressionism's flat paint, the hallmark of modernist painting that is dissimilar to atmospheric color in that it "flattens" and theatricalizes content and that is similar to atmospheric color in that it works against older Renaissance conventions of representing real perspective. The most famous statements on modernist pictorial flatness are by a later, major twentieth-century figure in the United States, the critic and historian Clement Greenberg. In a now famous essay, "Modernist Painting," Greenberg argued that flatness was the "condition" by which the painting distinguished or "declared" itself distinct from any other art (87).¹¹ Such painters as Eduard Manet and Gustave Courbet, two key figures in the 'modern painting' that appears after 1860, began to apply primary, so-called pure or saturated *color* (or *hue*) directly to the canvas. Before this, primary colors—red, yellow, blue, and black—were mixed on the palette prior to application to the canvas to produce various secondary colors

¹¹ See also two earlier essays by Greenberg, "Towards a Newer Laocoon (1940) and "Abstract Art" (1940), which discuss Modernist painting's dismantlement of classic realistic pictorial space and flattening of perspective, as well as *The Painting of Modern Life* (4-22) by art historian T. J. Clark, in which Clark discusses the various meanings in the nineteenth century that were given to flatness or "the literal presence of surface" (12).

(diluted or mixed color or *tones*). This could create sculptural effects, or the illusion of depth (Moholy-Nagy 159), as well as the illusion of an “interior” space or realm apart from the physical and material realm. Techniques of shading and chiaroscuro were used to create the illusion of interiority. In eschewing interiority the Impressionists seemed to be validating the material physical site against a putatively richer, immaterial, metaphysical reality. In many instances their painting seems to reject the belief in a world that exists *distinct from* or *more than* physical being, breaking completely with conventions of representing interiority, such as in Manet’s “colored patches” and Courbet’s rendering of material surfaces in a quasi-photographic, scientific language, without suggestion of psychological or spiritual “depth” (Fried, *Manet’s Modernism*, 193 n2).¹²

In returning truth or vision to material sites, in self-consciously acknowledging the medium, in presenting paint and canvas as (no less and no more than the subject of the painting) a material *site*, in rejecting painting that downplayed the medium in order to sustain the illusion of spatial depth, and in seeming to seek “nothing more than the materiality of things, their ‘reality’” (Shiff 37), Impressionism reinvested material sites with or restored to these sites meanings ordinarily reserved for speaking about the spiritual realm, psychological interior, or non-physical or meta-physical space. In “An Experiment in Misery,” Crane does not describe the youth’s thoughts, or psychological interior, so as to emphasize or give more weight to the role the material condition plays in consciousness and so as to emphasize the location of consciousness in the material body. In the flyleaf of several unsold copies of his first (privately) published novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, Crane inscribed these words:

It is inevitable that this book will greatly shock you, but continue, pray, with great courage to the end, for it tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world, and often shapes lives regardlessly. If one could prove that theory, one would make room in Heaven for all sorts of souls (notably an occasional street girl) who are not confidently expected to be there by many excellent people. (Stallman and Gilkes 49)

¹² In an essay published in 1892 in *Salon*, the French art critic Jules Antoine Castagnary used the term “colored patches” (qtd. in Fried, *Manet’s Modernism* 193) to describe painting by Manet. Another critic, Théodore Pelloquet, a contemporary of Castagnary’s, spoke of Courbet’s flat color (cited in Fried, *Manet’s Modernism* 193).

These words are repeated almost verbatim in at least two other copies of the novel, one of which was given to Hamlin Garland around the time the novel first appeared in print in 1894.¹³ They have been used by scholars when discussing literary naturalism. These scholars critically identify Crane and his close contemporaries Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodor Dreiser with this movement. These writers show interest in Darwinian theories of environmental determinism¹⁴ Crane's writings (as perhaps Norris's and London's) go further, questioning normative anthropocentric distinctions between humans and nonhumans and subjects and subject-less objects. They express not only that the "tremendous thing" of environment shapes the individual (human) being but also that the human is not a primordial or superior being. Crane reduces or levels the human figure relative to the nonhuman figure to express the human is not a more distinguished species than other species. This is seen in his most celebrated and anthologized writings: *Black Riders and Other Lines* (1895); *War Is Kind* (1899); the Civil War novel *The Red Badge of Courage* (1899); the "western" fictions *The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky* and *The Blue Hotel*; *The Open Boat*, a story set off the coast of Florida; and the short story "An Experiment in Misery" (1898). In the earlier version (1894) of "An Experiment in Misery," the main focus is the human characters in the story. In the revised version, this focus is undermined. The substantial dialogue between human characters in the earlier version is dropped, and the story's nonhuman "characters" in the revised version are given more agency. The playing field in which human and nonhuman "characters" or "figures" move about is leveled. Crane achieves this by strategies that suggest the influence of impressionist "painterly" or "atmospheric" color, and flatness.

Both versions of "An Experiment in Misery" emphasize the disparity between a poor person's and an affluent person's experience of nineteenth-century New York's infamous Bowery, a tenement district on the lower southeast side of Manhattan.¹⁵ The first version makes clear that the youth is a middleclass individual

¹³ Stallman, *Stephen Crane* 78; Brown 70. The other copy was given to Lucius L. Button, a boardinghouse friend who at the time was studying medicine in Germany (Stallman, *Stephen Crane* 574; Winterich 124).

¹⁴ Depending on the scholarship, literary naturalism is treated as an outcropping of or a conscious break with literary realism. See Donald Pizer's edited *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism* including Louis J. Budd's essay, "The American Background" (21-46).

¹⁵ Crane biographer Linda Davis describes the Bowery district of Crane's time: "a brazen, mile-long strip of saloons and dance halls, brothels, flophouses, and dirty, unlighted alleyways" that

who is trying out the experience of being homeless in order to know what it is to be destitute. In the revised version it is uncertain whether or not the youth is pretending to be poor or is actually poor and cannot step back or escape from this material condition. The revised narrative underscores, further, the ways in which the anthropogenic city bullies the youth or overdetermines his fate.¹⁶ In a passage that stands out for its striking allusions to modernist painterly flatness, Crane seems to be invoking a comparison between the ecogenic youth and another ecogenic “figure” or being, the sky. Both are represented as vulnerable and impressionable in contrast with the anthropogenic environment of the city. The city, as a character or figure also in its own right, spurns the youth and defaces the sky, stamping the latter with its signature.

extended east of Broadway from Worth Street to about East 4th Street” (42). Park Row, an area further south, began where Park Street and Nassau and Spruce Streets converged (Davis 45).

¹⁶ One of the most poignant accounts in Crane’s panoply of stories of nonhuman animals mistreated by human animals appears in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, a story set in the New York tenement district Devil’s Row. Mounted police on horses are attempting to force their way through the blocked traffic: the “blue policemen turned red,” “frenziedly” beating the “soft noses” of their horses (12). In the journalist piece, “In the Depths of the Coal Mine,” commissioned for *McClure’s Magazine*, Crane reported on the coalmines of Scranton, Pennsylvania, including the mules housed underground in the mines for up to four years. When “brought to the surface,” they would “tremble at the earth, radiant in the sunshine” (598). Later, they “go almost mad with fantastic joy” (598). In a short story “Death and the Child,” set in Italy at the time of the Greco-Turkish War, the description of a war-torn landscape ingenuously plays with normative anthropocentric perspectives. The nonhuman character is an expanse of golden field, disfigured by lead shot. “The landscape bewildered, agonized, was suffering a rain of infamous shots” (131). Piza, a human character caught up in the suffering, imagines “a million eyes gazing at him with the gaze of startled antelopes” (131). Crane’s fondness of dogs and horses also is very well known to scholars. Berryman has called it “an obsession with dogs and horses” (“The Color of This Soul” 7). Such sentiment was not uncommon in the Victorian period. Dogs and horses received more moral consideration than other domesticated animal species. However, Crane seemed to have a more than ordinary respect for these animals. In her biography of Crane, Davis frequently mentions his sensitivity to them. In a letter by Crane’s Syracuse University classmate Frank W. Noxon, dated December 7, 1926, addressed to the then president of the Stephen Crane Association Max J. Herzberg, Noxon writes:

Among his [Crane’s] favorite objects of solicitude were dogs. He loved them and was beloved by them. He embraced without question that well-known theory, which I had then never heard before, that the instinctive attitude of a dog toward a new human acquaintance was an infallible test of character, and that no man who felt repugnance or even indifference toward canines, familiar or casual, could be wholly trusted for a kind heart toward those of his own species. (Stallman and Gilkes 334-35)

The earlier version of “An Experiment in Misery” begins with a conversation between two men regarding a person who is less well off than they are. The younger of the two men decides he will try out the experience of being poor in order to understand it:

Two men stood regarding a tramp.

“I wonder how he feels,” said one, reflectively. “I suppose he is homeless, friendless, and has, at the most only a few cents in his pocket. And if this is so, I wonder how he feels.”

The other being the elder, spoke with an air of authoritative wisdom. “You can tell nothing of it unless you are in that condition yourself. It is idle to speculate about it from this distance.”

“I suppose so,” said the younger man, and then he added as from an inspiration: “I think I’ll try it. Rags and tatters, you know, a couple of dimes, and hungry too, if possible. Perhaps I could discover his point of view or something near it.” (862)

The story ends with the two men reuniting, after the younger has completed his “experiment in misery”:

“Well,” said the friend, “did you discover his point of view?”

“I don’t know that I did,” replied the young man; “but at any rate I think mine own has undergone a considerable alteration.” (863)

The revised version (1898) omits the opening and closing lines of the first version and much of the dialogue elsewhere in the story between human characters. As a result of these deletions, the youth appears more, in the normative anthropocentric sense of these words, as a subject-less object or a non-self-conscious being. The narrative underscores that to be socioeconomically destitute is to be bound up in an objective reality so oppressive, so overwhelming, it reduces or impoverishes a human individual being’s ability to subjectively capture, think, frame, articulate, express, imagine, communicate, or negotiate this objective condition. But in removing any content that shows that the youth in the story can exit or retreat from this experience, in thrusting the reader immediately, vicariously, *sensationally* into the experience of the youth, Crane also reinvests or reevaluates the objective

condition in the context of normative notions of the objective condition that in effect treat this condition as secondary to the (human) subjective condition.

In both versions of the story, following the conversation between the two men, Crane alludes to the Impressionists' effects with blue paint. In the 1894 version, the narrator relates: "It was late at night, and a fine rain was swirling softly down, covering the pavements with a bluish luster" (862). In the 1898 version, he relates, "It was late at night, and a fine rain was swirling softly down, causing the pavements to glisten with hue of steel and blue and yellow in the rays of innumerable lights" (779). *George's Mother* (1896), another short story, also alludes to the Impressionists' direct application of primary hues to the canvas (Øverland 248-49). It begins: "In the swirling rain that came at dusk the broad avenue glistened with the deep bluish tint which is so widely condemned when it is put into pictures" (115). Another story "One Dash-Horses" (1896) refers to the astonishing green paint of Pissarro and his fellow Impressionists. Crane describes the color of the sky as "that marvelous tone of green—like still sun-shot water—which people denounce in pictures" (13). Even the Impressionists' erstwhile teachers the French Realist/Barbizon painters were shocked by the Impressionists' bold use of green paint. Camille Corot expressed his dismay at Pissarro's excessive, flaunting use of green, which at the time stood for reality, or a secondary, base condition. Before Pissarro, very few European painters made "extensive use of green in their landscape" (Maloon 25). Brown signaled the "ideal condition" of the landscape painting (Maloon 24). Green signaled a non-ideal condition: "the colour of non-ideality, the colour of realism" (Maloon 25).

"An Experiment in Misery" (1898), unlike much of Impressionist painting, does not reference Impressionist painting's *atmospheric* color with the intent of representing the consonant relations between nonhuman and human figures. It animates or vivifies the human-made, i.e., anthropogenic, environment towards actively noticing the medium of the environment, but it does so towards pointing to the profoundly disagreeable relations between the formidable anthropogenic character, a slum district in New York city, and the diminutive ecogenic character, a youth. It contrasts the imposing, imperious city character with the ecogenic character of a sky as well, which is both blocked out by the city buildings and printed with the city's gas streetlamps. In the Impressionist landscape the figures of trees, water, and sky do not threaten or reproach the figure of humans. They are represented to communicate or correspond with one another on sanguine terms. They belong to one salutary whole. (Pissarro was fond of describing this as "a relationship of accords" (qtd. in Maloon 20).) Crane's story represents the profound

alienation of the youth by the hard, obdurate, anthropogenic environment. The reflection of the street lights thrown up by the city pavements attacks in “hues of steel blue and yellow” the youth’s drab, colorless, despondent figure, “trudging slowly, without enthusiasm . . . toward the downtown places where beds can be hired for coppers” (779). His suit is “aged and tattered”; his hat, “a marvel of dust-covered crown and torn rim” (779). *George’s Mother*, which also takes place in a New York tenement district, paints a similar scene: the brilliantly colored, animated environs of the city are antagonistic to the dull “brown” figure of the main human character (115). In “An Experiment in Misery,” the anthropogenic (human-made) city environs are inimical to the youth. The “rows and circles of deserted benches” that reflect the “quivering glare” (779) of the city nightlights discourage the youth from making any advances towards them. Streetcars, “great affairs shining with red and brass,” threaten the youth with “formidable power” (779). Buildings are “sternly high” and look down disdainfully upon him in “pitiless hues” (785). The 1894 version paints the city in a similarly bold and spectacular language but it describes the city at times as a munificent, gracious, accommodating being. Streetcars are reassuring presences. They rumble “softly” through the city streets “as if going upon” the “carpet” of a church “aisle” (863). The “pillars” of the elevated train line are staunch, protective structures.

The allusions to Impressionist *atmospheric* color in “An Experiment in Misery” are augmented by the literary device of personification, a much remarked upon device of Crane’s. In the 1898 version an elevated train upon “leg-like pillars” resembles “some monstrous kind of crab” (779). The “quick fat puffings” (779) of trains evoke the exertions of a being either nonhuman or human. A saloon on a street corner near Chatham Square, has a “voracious air” (780). It “[gorges] itself with plump men, eating with astounding and endless appetite, smiling in some indescribable manner as the men [come] from all directions like sacrifices to a heathenish superstition” (780). Its swinging doors “snap . . . to and fro like ravenous lips” and make “gratified smacks” (780). Again, rather than emphasizing accord between human subject-object and nonhuman subject-object figures as is often found in the Impressionist landscape painting, the story describes the alienation between these two figures in the context of an urban anthropogenic environment. Unemployed homeless men—the city’s “usual freights” (779)—are enervated, mortified figures in comparison to the city’s predominantly anthropogenic and inorganic but animate characters. The men who can afford a night’s lodging in a flophouse are barely distinguishable from corpses. They lie prostrate, in “death-like

silence” (782) on cots “cold as melting snow,” breathing with the “tremendous effort” of “stabbed-fish” (782). They are “statuesque, carven, dead” (782). Even the city’s economically prosperous residents are depicted in relatively static, inert, deflated terms. Hurrying along the streets, they are “black figures, changing, yet frieze-like” (785).

Crane does not delineate in great detail the interior thoughts, reflections or ruminations of human characters. In doing so, he seems to be erasing a normative distinction between the human and the nonhuman, which is that humans have an interior or “second nature” (language, thought, expression, cultural/intellectual property) in addition to an exterior “first nature” (Bookchin qtd. in Manes 23). This second nature is normatively treated as a subjective condition—consciousness—and as exclusively human. The first nature of human beings is considered a baser condition precisely because we share it with nonhuman beings. It has been suggested by scholars that Crane’s leveling of human characters to non-self-conscious, subject-*less* objects, as is seen in “An Experiment in Misery” in the descriptions of the penniless youth, betrays Crane as a misanthrope. However, if we consider this leveling in an ecocritical light, it might carry more positive and constructive meaning. Crane seems to be questioning humans’ dismissal of the nonhuman according to the first nature/second nature dyad that licenses condescension to the nonhuman material realm and all its beings and affects. In representing the youth as a being that might be able to feel but that does not self-reflect (according to anthropocentric notions of self-reflection and self-reflexivity) upon this or any other of its material or immaterial conditions, the narrative questions an ethics that elevates human beings above other beings not on the basis that human beings suffer but rather on the basis that they can self-consciously think, articulate, express, or disinterestedly frame or step back from reality. It questions an ethics that disregards the suffering of a nonhuman being by virtue of the fact this being does not or cannot communicate its suffering in human language. It seems to set up in order to dismantle the argument that a being cannot have a self (a subject identity with subject rights) if it cannot express this to another being in language that is recognizable or intelligible to, or accepted by, the other being.

The youth is described more according to the impact the city environment has on his identity as a *sentient* being and less according to the impact it has on his identity as a *thinking* being. The cutting hues of the lights reflected off the wet streets and the irreproachable city benches cause in him a “profound dejection” (779). He “*felt* that there no longer could be pleasure in life” (779, emphasis added). When he arrived “in his own country,” at Chatham Square in Park Row, an even

seedier district south of the Bowery, he “*felt* relief” (779, emphasis added). Arrested by a sign for “Free hot soup” that hangs outside the entrance of a saloon, the youth enters the building. Inside the warm interior and sipping from a steaming bowl of broth, he “*felt* the cordiality expressed by the warmth of the mixture” (780, emphasis added). A fellow homeless man introduces the youth to a cheap place of lodging. The two men mount the steep stairs to the entrance of a poorly lit and badly ventilated room that assails them with “strange and unspeakable odors” (781). At this assault, the youth “*felt* his liver turn white” (781, emphasis added).

“An Experiment in Misery” describes nonhuman and human figures alike in language that seems to allude to, further, the hallmark device of modern painting of flatness, what art critic Clement Greenberg called the fleeing “from spirit to matter” (“Towards a Newer Laocoon” 29). The fiction describes a glimpse of night sky sandwiched in between towering buildings at the end of an alley in the language of a flat, painted, artificial scene: “Down an ally there were somber curtains of purple and black, on which street lamps dully glittered like embroidered flowers” (779-80). In the earlier version, the night sky is described as “mystic curtains of purple and black” (863). The word “mystic” romanticizes and immortalizes the nonhuman night sky. It connotes depth and infinitude. In the second version, the image of the night sky is represented as an entity capable of being altered or defaced by way of allusion to modernist painterly flatness. Crane, as many of his contemporaries, might have found ludicrous the idea that human activities could alter the atmosphere of the earth. Nonetheless, he anticipates a world in which anthropogenic bodies displace older ecogenic realms. He seems to enlist modern painterly language, alluding to the techniques of Manet, Whistler, and Degas that flatten figures (either human or nonhuman), in order to depict a sky stamped by the presence of the human. It now is a mere piece of fabric or cloth, a flimsy painted screen, a background prop, inscribed with the gas-lit street lamps of the lights of the city. The signature of the human replaces the stars of the universe. Crane ecocentrically “flattens” the youth by emphasizing the youth’s material circumstances. He does so in order to represent the human as simply one “figure” among many “figures” in a given environment. In a very different sense, that of modern painterly “flatness,” Crane flattens the sky. He seems to do so to represent the sky as something that now is framed by the human.

Crane’s description of the night sky effects what Michael Fried characterizes as modern painting’s “instantaneous stamping or cutting-out of the image as a whole” (*Manet’s Modernism* 405). (These techniques were used also for another

purpose, the defense of “art for art’s sake,” which I do not address here.) Crane perhaps was thinking in particular of the ‘flat paint’ of an artist close to home, Fredric Remington, an extraordinarily popular illustrator and painter of western scenes who was associated at the time with Impressionism, and whose work Crane had been familiar with since childhood.¹⁷ In *Crumbling Idols*, Garland discusses Remington and other artists who were using primary or flat colors to project background content forward into the pictorial space, upstaging the foreground content: “The Impressionist painter leads Remington” to paint in “blue or purple” hues the “hot hollows between hills of yellow sand, over which a cobalt, cloudless sky arches (134); he and others “shake their heads at [the older so-called naturalist painters] Inness, Diaz, Corot, Troyon, Rousseau, and Millet” (135). This language of flatness interferes with the viewer’s suspension of disbelief. North American literary scholar J. Hillis Miller characterizes modernist literature as a whole as “the breaking of the illusion that language is a transparent medium of meaning” (Miller xiv). In an older, romantic and symbolist literary tradition, “space frequently leads out or ‘behind’ or ‘beyond,’ which the poet may reach through named objects, or which the objects in the poem signify at a distance” (Miller 356). In the former there is the “return to immediacy” (Miller 360). Symbolism tends now to be eschewed accompanied by the absence of the “dimension of depth” (356).¹⁸

¹⁷ Crane met Remington at least once, in 1898 when both he and Remington were in Cuba covering the Spanish-American war (Davis 262). Crane had gone over as a reporter, Remington as an illustrator. They met at a battle on July 1, 1898. As a boy he had grown up on Remington’s illustrations. A trip to the west in 1895, the raw material for *The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky* and *The Blue Hotel*, was directly inspired by Remington’s representations of the American west (Berryman, *Stephen Crane* 97, Conron 415). Berryman writes:

The passion [for the West] felt by most American boys . . . had been inflamed in this one [Crane] by the revolver he had had since a lost Wyoming cowboy gave it to him on the Jersey shore, by Frederic Remington’s pictures, by the stories of Garland and John Hilliard and a cowboy artist of 23rd Street [the Art Students’ League building in Manhattan] who went crazy and died. (*Stephen Crane* 97)

¹⁸ See also Michael Fried’s study of Crane and the nineteenth-century American realist painter Thomas Eakins, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration*. Fried argues that Crane was acutely self-conscious of his handwriting in the process of drafting stories. He theorizes this as the “problematic of the *materiality* of writing as that materiality enters into . . . Crane’s prose” (xiii). That is to say, the actual scene of writing (chirographic or typographic marks, and pens, pencils, lead, ink, and paper) is simultaneously elicited and repressed in the fiction itself, notably in the letters “s,” and “c,” the initials of Stephen Crane. These turn up in the fiction as serpents, among other guises. The ‘scene of writing’ is “elicited” because “under ordinary circumstances, the materiality precisely doesn’t call attention to itself—in fact we might say it effaces itself—in the

On formal, or representational, grounds, Crane's fiction acts out modernist painting's self-conscious flattening of perspective, announcing itself *as* flat, artificial. The sky is not represented with the intent of verisimilitude. Rather it is deliberately theatricalized. The staged flatness is augmented by the description of the city street lamps, "embroidered flowers," which evokes the image of yellow-colored cloth fabric (representing lamp light) appliquéd to a larger piece of dark blue fabric (representing sky). On ecocritical grounds, "An Experiment in Misery" describes a human-made environment that threatens the youth and the sky. Paradoxically, in deliberately dismantling the illusion of the real by representing the figure of the night sky as a quasi-flat surface, as a façade or theatrical prop or painted screen—"somber curtains of purple and black, on which street lamps dully glittered like embroidered flowers" (779-80)—Crane draws attention to the fact that the sky is overwritten, inscribed, or graffitied by an anthropogenic universe. From an ecocentric perspective, he seems to be comparing the night sky to the youth. Relative to the hard, inorganic environment of the city, the youth and sky are impressionable and vulnerable. The youth is bullied by the anthropogenic city environment. The sky is stamped with the city gaslights. The hard lines of the city's silhouette eclipse the sky. If we regard the sky as a kind of being and realm in its own right, Crane's description seems to suggest that the city threatens, effaces, and ostracizes this being and realm. Similarly, the hard objects of city buildings, benches, and streets disclaim and assault the vulnerable, impressionable figure of the youth.

"An Experiment in Misery" comments upon the alienation between the human and the nonhuman in the context of an anthropogenic environment that overdetermines the identities of a youth and a sky. This environment may be handsome and spectacular to some of its communities but it is hostile to many of its other communities. Its "multitude of buildings" is "emblematic" of an order that "forc[es] its regal head into the clouds"; it "throw[s] no downward glances"; "in the sublimity of its aspiration" it "ignor[es] the wretches who may flounder at its feet" (785). In borrowing from Impressionist painting's *atmospheric* color and *flatness*, Crane's narrative questions normative anthropocentric distinctions between the human and nonhuman. It levels or reduces human figures in relation to nonhuman figures,

intimately connected acts of writing and reading" (xiv). Also it is "repressed" because "were that materiality allowed to come unimpededly to the surface, not only would the very possibility of narrative continuity be lost, the writing in question would cease to *be* writing and would become mere mark" (xiv, original italics).

animating nonhuman subject-objects in relation to human subject-objects such that the former acquire equal or more stature as characters in the story and investing material sites with a significance we typically reserve for sites understood as ‘interior’ and exclusive to the human. These strategies are a signature of Crane. Representing in equal relief or with equal measure human and nonhuman subject-object figures, his writings hold in abeyance, stall, or reverse a dominant humanist-based discourse in which ecogenic being has shifted, in the words of ecocritic Christopher Manes, “from an animistic to a symbolic presence, from a voluble subject to mute object” (17).

LV

A man toiled on a burning road,
Never resting.
Once he saw a fat, stupid ass
Grinning at him from a green place.
The man cried out in rage,
“Ah! do not deride fool!
I know you—
All day stuffing your belly,
Burying your heart
In grass and tender sprouts:
It will not suffice you.”
But the ass only grinned at him
from the green place.

— Stephen Crane
Black Riders and Other Lines

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About the Author

Iris Ralph is an Assistant Professor in the English Department of Tamkang University, Taiwan. Her articles have appeared in *The Ecohumanist* (Taiwan), *Write On* (a journal of Queensland Council for Adult Literacy/QCAL), *Fine Print* (a journal of Victorian Adult Literacy and Basic Education Council/VALBEC), *Colloquy/Text Theory Critique* (a journal of Monash University, Australia), and *International Journal of Environmental, Cultural, Economic and Social Sustainability*. Currently, she teaches the following courses at Tamkang University: Ecocriticism & Ecofilm, Greek Mythology, Women's Literature, and English Literature. Her specialties are literature and ecocriticism.
E-mail: irisralph@mail.tku.edu.tw

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