

## INTRODUCTION

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STEPHEN CRANE was a literary meteor. The publication of *The Red Badge of Courage* on 27 September 1895 when he was yet only 23-years old projected him into instant fame; at 28 he was dead. Within that five-year period Crane enjoyed a significant measure of renown as well as notoriety, but he felt that his talent had ultimately been misjudged. The works of fiction published prior to *The Red Badge* were almost invariably evaluated as apprentice work, and those that appeared subsequent to it were compared to the war novel and predictably judged repetitious or inferior. His poetry was ridiculed and parodied. In his letters Crane lamented the obsession of the critics with "the damned 'Red Badge'" and "the accursed 'Red Badge'" and hoped desperately that readers might "discover now that the high dramatic key of *The Red Badge* cannot be sustained." But it was all to no avail. The core of praise remained focused on his one great success, and to this day, despite periodic academic revivals and celebrations, he retains, even among most sophisticated readers, the reputation of a one-book wonder, the author of the most realistic novel of the American Civil War, which in 1950–1951 was made into a motion picture, written and directed by John Huston in collaboration with James Agee and starring Audie Murphy, that was an artistic triumph but a failure at the box office.

While not slighting *The Red Badge of Courage*, now recognized as more of a psychological study of an individual's ability to overcome egotism and self-delusion in a universe of contending forces than simply a realistic account of a youth's initiation into combat, this exhibition attempts to demonstrate the full range of Crane's achievement. With *Maggie: A Girl of*

*the Streets*, *George's Mother*, and a number of accomplished journalistic pieces, especially "The Men in the Storm" and "An Experiment in Misery," Crane became the first literary chronicler of the burgeoning slums of urban America who refused to sentimentalize his materials. "Environment," as Crane wrote in a number of inscriptions on the mustard-yellow front cover of *Maggie*, "is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless," but in all of his trenchant city fiction and in cameo masterpieces with divergent settings, such as "The Blue Hotel," "The Open Boat," and "The Monster," Crane emphasizes that individuals should assume the burdens of moral involvement, although their efforts to triumph over their physical and social circumstances may be doomed to partial or complete failure.

Crane rarely commented directly on the narrow societal or political issues of his time, but he was intensely aware of the emergence of a new rural as well as urban America. His Western stories reveal the steady retreat of the frontier before the encroachments of a modern Europeanized civilization. To a great extent, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," with its elegiac undertones of the decline of the old West, is a satire of the showdown Western that Crane himself popularized in stories such as "The Five White Mice" and "A Man and Some Others." Crane's neglected poetry, incorporated in *The Black Riders*, *War Is Kind*, and a number of significant pieces unpublished or uncollected in his lifetime, engages the themes of humanity's relationship to God and nature, love, war, and social injustice through ironic epigrams in which the existence of man fails to confer upon the universe "a sense of obligation" and through nondiscursive symbolist poems such as "A man adrift on a slim spar," "Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind," and "The Blue Battalions." Crane has been

called a realist, a naturalist, an impressionist, a symbolist, and an existentialist, and this multifaceted taxonomy of his art is an indicator of his modernism. Above all, his objective as a writer was, as his close friend Joseph Conrad expressed his own aesthetic task in the preface to *The Nigger of the "Narcissus,"* "by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see."

This exhibition displays a selection from an extensive collection brought together in the last quarter century as a corollary to my scholarship on Stephen Crane with the help of many booksellers ranging from John S. Van E. Kohn and Bart Auerbach at the beginning to Maurice F. Neville and Glenn Horowitz in the recent past. It is not intended as a full record for bibliographical purposes but to illustrate the sweep of Crane's accomplishment in his short but furiously creative life, and consequently, although all first editions published in Crane's lifetime are represented here, the many complexities of states and issues have for the most part not been noted.

*Stanley Wertheim*  
*New York City*

## BOOKS

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### 1.

#### *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893)

Crane's first book, privately printed under the pseudonym of Johnston Smith in an unspecified number of copies of which fewer than 40 are extant. *Maggie* is a landmark of American literary naturalism and perhaps the first extended realistic fictional study of New York City's urban slums.

### 2.

#### *The Black Riders* (1895)

Crane's first book of poems, published in an edition of 500 copies by Copeland & Day, a small publishing firm in Boston that emulated private presses in England devoted to the printing of fine books in limited editions. The poems are untitled and printed at the top of pages entirely in capital letters. The covers with their curved black orchids are adapted from a design by Crane's friend Frederick C. Gordon. The unconventional appearance of the book attracted as much attention as Crane's iconoclastic epigrams.

### 3.

#### *The Black Riders* (1895)

Fifty copies of *The Black Riders* were printed for presentation in green ink on japan vellum paper with plain covers and a paper label on the spine.

### 4.

#### *The Black Riders* (1896)

The scarce English edition of *The Black Riders*, published by William Heinemann in a black leatherette binding lettered in gilt.

5.

*The Red Badge of Courage* (1895)

The first American edition of Crane's landmark Civil War novel was published on 27 September 1895 by D. Appleton and Company.

6.

*The Red Badge of Courage* (1895)

A copy of the first American edition of *The Red Badge of Courage*, with a presentation inscription from Elbert Hubbard to his wife dated 21 November 1895. Pasted to the front free endpaper is an invitation to a dinner at the Lantern Club on 7 April 1896 celebrating the success of the novel. William Dean Howells was the principal speaker at the dinner.

7.

*The Red Badge of Courage* (1896)

The first English edition of *The Red Badge*, published by William Heinemann in the Pioneer Series in late November 1895, was widely acclaimed, and Crane became a literary celebrity on both sides of the Atlantic a few weeks after his 24th birthday.

8.

*The Red Badge of Courage* (1896)

The English edition of *The Red Badge* in wrappers published simultaneously with the regular edition. Very few copies thus bound survive.

9.

*The Red Badge of Courage* (1896)

Henry James' copy, with his signature in pencil on the front free endpaper and in ink on the half title. This is the fourth