CHAPTER \ V

CONCLUSION
**Summary and Evaluation:**

As we come to the end of this study of the themes and the techniques by which Crane has presented them in his novels and stories, we may begin first with a brief recapitulation of what we have seen so far.

Stephen Crane, poet, novelist, story-writer, journalist and war-correspondent, lived a short span of 29 years. These years were packed with much writing, travel, adventure and coverage of at least two wars. Coming at the beginning of the last decade of the 19th century on the literary scene of America, he broke ground with innovations and experiments, in the content and form of literature. John W. Stevenson says about Crane's position in American Literature:

"Crane broke with the tradition of English Literature; in his work can be seen the beginnings of naturalism, which he inherited from Russian and French writers. More significant to us, to quote Mr. Spiller again, is his vivid impressions of life with their linking of instinct and circumstance to chain the individual will to its own
tragic issue....... provided a pattern for the writing of the next generation'."

The *American Tradition in Literature* evaluates him as pioneer and experimenter.

"Had he written *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) or *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) twenty years later, he would still have been as much a pioneer as Sherwood Anderson then was. Even more than Garland, Norris, Dreiser or Robinson - his contemporaries - he made a clean break with the past in his selection of material, his craftsmanship, and his point of view. It was his nature to be experimental."

Starting from his earliest biographer, Thomas Beer, to the present-day critics like R.W. Stallman and Frank Bergon, one element appears especially noteworthy in their evaluation of Crane, the writer. Almost all agree that he was a sort of genius. His arrival and his establishment as writer were marred only by one thing, that is the shortness of time at his disposal. Willa Cather, who was a budding journalist at the time when Crane met her during his stop-over in his

1. John W. Stevenson
   "The Literary Reputation of Stephen Crane"
   *South Atlantic Quarterly*

2. Bradley, Beatty and Long (eds.)
   *The American Tradition in Literature*
journey to Mexico, tells us what he told her about his mis-spellings. He said that he had no time at his disposal to learn to spell correctly. He was always in a hurry. So much had to be done. Vernon Loggins says:

"He is American Literature's 'marvelous boy'. Like the Bowery, he was elemental and vital. He would sleep in a flop house to taste the bitter of experience. He loved living. And adventure enough was crowded into his eight sick years of manhood. He looked at life clearly and boldly, knew its irony, felt its mystery and beauty, and wrote about it with sincerity and confidence that spring only from genius."

In spite of all odds, he never compromised with his principles of writing. He emphasized the virtues of truth and honesty in feeling and expression. Very early in life, he declared his creed:

"I renounced the clever school in literature. It seemed to me that there must be something more in life than

1. Vernon Loggins "I Hear America"
Quoted in
(ed.) Dorothy Nyren
A Library of Literary Criticism
to sit and cudgel one's brain for clever and witty expedients. So I developed all alone a little creed of art which I thought was a good one."

He never fumbled in the function of a true literary artist though there were times in the beginning of his literary career when poverty and neglect could compel him to compromise or stop. His study of life in slums, during the war, at sea, in the West or in the children's world makes us sit and think about life and human beings.

His aesthetic philosophy was never declared in essays or books. He was always reluctant to speak on art and literature. All that we get is in the form of his letters, some stray utterances and a few inscriptions to his own books. But one point is very clear that he held firmly to the principle of artistic honesty. He was against preaching in art. He laid emphasis on one's own personal vision. An artist, according to him, is responsible for his quality of personal honesty and his function is to present the reality, as he perceives it, for the benefit of those who

1. R.W. Stallman
   *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*
do not have the true use of their eyes. He strongly believed that an author is totally involved and can never afford to remain detached from his own vision of reality, but at the same time he is not to be involved emotionally with his characters. His belief seems to be closer to what Emerson had declared regarding self-reliance.

The American Tradition in Literature records this fact in the following manner:

"He (Crane) was convinced that if a story is transcribed in its actuality as it appeared to occur in life, it will convey its own emotional weight without sentimental heightening, moralizing, or even interpretative comment."

He had the tough American attitude toward life. One has to fight and prove one's worth every time. Past glories are of no importance except as learning processes.

The 1890's in America was a period which has been discussed by many critics and scholars from different angles. The atmosphere was one of change in all fields. In literature

1. Bradley, Beatty and Long (eds.)
   The American Tradition in Literature
there was a great upheaval and writers were groping for a philosophy of artistic creation which could suit the changing times. Crane started writing when this dilemma was being faced by writers, and new theories were coming up. Émile Zola was a powerful influence on the American Literature of this period. Zola's naturalistic philosophy of literature seemed to be more applicable to writing dealing with the growth of slum areas as a result of great industrial development. This philosophy of scientific determinism which laid emphasis on environment, was in Crane's mind when he wrote his novels and stories of slum-life. But he imbibed only some aspects of this theory and was untouched by the fatalistic belief of the theorists and scholars. Crane made a synthesis and evolved a new creed which could be compared to that of Howells and Garland. His naturalism took another route and came closer to realism. It was further coloured and given a new dimension by his impressionistic technique. He devoted much thought to the question of freedom of will. William Dean Howells and Hamlin Garland were the greatest influence on the young writers of this period in America. Emerson's intellectual declaration of independence was the moving force which inspired the young writers, as it had inspired almost all American writers.

In *The American Tradition in Literature*, he is
evaluated thus:

"At twenty he wrote *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, our first completely naturalistic novel. By the age of 24 he had produced, in his earliest short stories and his masterpiece, *The Red Badge of Courage*, the first examples of modern American Impressionism. He was the first to respond to the radical genius of imagist impressionism twenty years in advance of official imagists."

There is little emphasis on plot in Crane's fiction. Most of the plots of his novels and stories are simple, and have a linear progression. This is because Crane was more interested in the inner struggle of man. His aim and purpose was to study the working of the human mind. The exterior was not so much important for him. His works are mainly an attempt to study the internal response and reactions of a person.

It was enough for him that the characters should be put in a situation calling forth their reactions, or involved in some event or happening that, as it were, tried their souls.

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1. Bradley, Beatty and Long (eds.)
And their reactions, expressed in their own words or their thoughts as presented by the author in an impressionistic manner, convey to us a picture of the state of their minds—'what they are going through'. The events and episodes thus become stimuli or activators. While Crane does not adopt any special technique of plot-making, he has great skill in devising crucial events and situations—Henry Fleming in the field of battle, the four men in a boat in a perilous situation, a fire which brings out a negro servant's heroism, and his monstrous disfigurement which tests his white master's decency.

He creates variety by selecting different situations for basing his novels and stories. The situations are so varied that they give Crane a chance to show a large number of circumstances in which the mind of man can be studied. Different moral and emotional questions emerge as the problems to be confronted by his characters. Whether it is Maggie, Henry Fleming, George, the Swede, the four men in the boat, Henry Johnson, or Dr. Trescothall are involved in mental conflict and try to search for an answer. In their attempts, Crane studies different problems and the solution of how man can achieve a modicum of courage, honesty, truth, understanding or manhood. There are forces which are beyond human power to control. While Crane makes his study, the
situations go on changing from one story to another or from one novel to another. But there are some aspects on which Crane laid more emphasis, like the moral question of true courage. Hence war and its other aspects are put as situations. War has given him a variety of plot-situations. The most recurrent theme in the fiction of Stephen Crane is the assertion of manhood through suffering, loss or pain and the achievement of true courage. The theme of initiation and isolation is closely associated with the process of learning. Crane also touches upon the idea of loneliness. In a crisis of life or the moment of great stress, man is alone. This is his real test. Nature is indifferent to the plight and to the struggle of man. Past glories are of no great importance except as training ground. Man has to prove his worth every time the crisis comes. Each experience is to be tackled anew. Courage, honesty, sincerity, a feeling of brotherhood and a strong conviction in respect of one's own ideas and principles are the only virtues which could bring salvation. Crane has shown in his fiction that man's victory is not any material gain or success. He rises in his own esteem. But for Crane this personal gain of an individual is more important than any other thing. Death and loss are insignificant when compared with true courage, and the satisfaction in having preserved one's integrity.
Crane believed, like Hemingway, that a code of conduct has to be followed. He shows, as in the story, *The Monster*, that the 'quality of personal honesty' - is in itself a reward. True courage is also the only criterion for calling oneself a man. Crane is not blind to the thoughts and beliefs of society. In a number of his stories and two of his novels, his theme is how the distorted thinking and double standards of morality and the sham of institutionalized religion can play havoc in the life of some individuals. He also takes up the theme of how illusions can prevent man from recognizing reality and how this leads to unhappiness. In the children's stories he takes up the theme of how children copy the behaviour of the adult world. The negligence or neglect of elder people can cause much pain and suffering to children. The psychology of children is studied and some questions are raised in the form of themes in stories like *Shame*, *His New Mittens* and *The Angel Child*.

There is one novel, at least, which does not fit into the general categories of his fictional world. *The O'Ruddy* is a picaresque, swash-buckling, romantic novel, and has the theme of how cunningness, cowardice, irresponsibility, shamelessness and lack of principle could also succeed in a way in this material world. But the treatment is such that it becomes clear that Crane does not intend the novel
to be a profound 'criticism of life'. It is more in the nature of the 'romances of roguary', about the amusing and successful capers of an engaging rascal.

Crane's world is almost like Hemingway's where the winner takes nothing. It is also a world similar to that represented by the modern absurdist theatre, as is shown in his story *The Open Boat*.

Crane depicts a vast range of characters. They are generally young inexperienced people, searching for answer to some moral or emotional problems. There are some exceptions like Dr. Trescoott or Henry Johnson or Old Henry Fleming who are older and more experienced people. His characters, with a few exceptions, belong to lower middle class society. They are simple, honest and sincere people who believe in some codes of decency. There are soldiers, military officers, factory workers, drunkards, prostitutes, hobos and city bums and negro servants. He creates a character like Maggie - simple and innocent - and he also creates a character like Mrs. Johnson who is cunning, shrewd and selfish. If there is Peter Washington who does not hesitate to tell a lie, then there is Henry Johnson who is willing and ready to make a great sacrifice in his devotion to duty. There are respectable citizens, including a magistrate, who want to kill or separate a poor negro servant, and just in contrast to
them in the same story (The Monster), there is Dr. Trescott, a truly courageous man.

There is a priest who is too callous to offer a crumb of comfort to a fallen woman, and there is an old woman who offers shelter and sympathy to Maggie.

Some of the military officers are more concerned with their personal comfort and pleasure, but there are others like the officer in Virtue in War - who commands his soldier to leave him to die and take steps for own safety.

The ship-wrecked people follow a discipline and try to achieve something in a fierce battle with the sea. They are ready to sacrifice their comfort and safety for their wounded companion. There are soldiers who are willing to do any duty in spite of their dislike for their officer. Crane has tried to show this through the character of Wagram, a soldier in the story Virtue in War.

The children, in Crane's fiction, are cruel, merciless and mischievous but they are lovable because they are not corrupt, cunning or calculating. They never have designs of revenge or desire of hurting other's feelings. Their behaviour is spontaneous response or reaction to a particular situation without any guile. They are simple as in real life. They try to copy the adult world, and pain and suffering
is caused. His children love games, pranks and innocent 
tricks like not eating food or threatening the parents with 
the consequences of their running away from home. They are 
extremely curious as children generally are.

Crane has also created a humorous character like 
O'Ruddy who, in spite of all his actions, remains a lovable 
rogue.

Some of Crane's characters like Henry Fleming, Maggie, 
Henry Johnson and Dr. Trescott have been compared to great 
characters of fiction by many critics, and indeed they are, for 
they are authentic human beings.

Crane's technique of characterization consists of the 
use of impressionistic devices, imagery, colour and irony. 
We know them also from their language as much as by what 
they say. Their reactions and responses and their mental 
processes also reveal to us their true identity. In fact 
presenting the internal reactions of a character to a 
particular situation is the most dominant element in Crane's 
technique of characterization. Crane is less concerned with 
describing the exterior phenomena. He often avoids specifying 
the causes or locations of events. Crane also has the habit 
of not giving names to his characters. They are only known 
by some particular trait of their personality or profession or
even the name of the place to which they belong like 'the Easterner', 'the oiler' or the 'loud soldier' or 'the tattered man'. The reactions of their minds are presented as impressions in the mind of the character with the words 'felt' or 'thought'.

He uses animal and war imagery to characterize the persons in the war-novel and the slum novel respectively. He also uses combat, battle, machine, box and other images to present how the character felt or thought. There are numerous examples of imagery, colour and impressionistic treatment of feelings, emotions and thoughts, situation, events which make the character clear and present them vividly. Sometimes Crane uses ironical contrasts to point out the difference between two characters. This also helps us to know the character better.

Crane uses many narrative and other devices to construct his fictional world. The main function of these devices is to make plainly clear before our eyes the events and characters. The picture-like descriptions in colour present to us the reality as perceived by the character or participant in an event. Crane splashes his fiction with colour-strokes which give us the impression of looking at a master's canvas. The reader is so engrossed that he forgets
to question the locale or the cause of an event as in the novel *The Red Badge of Courage* or the long short-story *The Open Boat*.

To describe a scene or event, he uses imagery of many types which convey the ideas more quickly and in a better way than an ordinary normal literal description of an event. A peculiar thing about Crane's technique is the use of simile, metaphor, transferred-epithet, and the synesthetic images. He also uses ironical contrasts to present a reality which is different from the appearance.

Metaphors, similes, images, comparisons, contrasts, compressions, irony, far-fetched-conceits abound in his work giving it a dream-like quality. The oft-repeated example from *The Red Badge of Courage*, 'the red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer' could again be quoted, as the sentence in a microcosm recalls to us the mind which looked at things, perceived, and expressed the impression rather than the photographic reality. The sentence has everything like colour, imagery, metaphor, and becomes an example of the type of language which Crane uses in his best pieces of fiction. In the dialogues he reproduces the exact notations of the language spoken by a particular type of person in a particular situation. The soldiers, the city bums and the negro servants are given a language which suits them and makes the characters real.
Crane's humour is sometimes the result of a tough, and cynical attitude toward life and man. It is also ironical and satirical in some cases.

We have noticed that Stephen Crane's themes are of the stuff which comes home to man's 'business and bosoms' - the kind that every sensitive reader feels to be important or even of vital concern to himself. The circumstances may not be the same but, a young man might find, as Crane's Henry Fleming did in the novel The Red Badge of Courage, that his career in law or medicine or politics brings in many nasty surprises - no less about himself as the actor than about the activity itself - to find that the reality is far different from his imaginary concepts. Like Shaw's Sergius (in Arms and the Man), he might discover that war is very different from what he had imagined it to be. Stephen Crane was a sensitive realist, and he had some ideas about what life was like, and how people were. He had seen, as a realist, that the righteous are often forsaken, that they are forced or betrayed by circumstances into actions which they themselves would not appreciate.

While determined not to be didactic, Crane has presented possible combinations of circumstances - as in The Red Badge of Courage or Maggie: A Girl of the Streets or in many of his short stories - the bitter truth about real life. Yet, under the ethically neutral exterior, as behoved a realist and
naturalist, he has not kept out the ethical dimension. Circumstances may be compelling, but man, as in Hemingway, has a choice (if he has courage) to be a decent, self-respecting human being or merely a straw in the wind or the flood. What is valuable, about Crane's fiction, is that he has faced the issues squarely. What is inspiring about them is the optimistic answer which the best of Crane's protagonists are able to give—that a man or a woman can be a worthy human being in spite of all that fate or chance or an unimaginative society can do to them. The emphasis in Crane's work is on this human element, and what makes it a valuable document, is that it is not simply fanciful and sentimental but is anchored in reality. We have the steady, uncompromising recognition that life can be a sorry business—different from what we may have thought about it in the days of our youth—but a human being can still achieve dignity—like Henry Fleming or Maggie or Dr. Trescott—by a dignified avoidance of the easy way out. Thus, we find Crane presenting real-life issues, and his work is convincing precisely because he neither seeks nor offers easy solutions. Thus, his work as a whole is a profound 'criticism of life' as Matthew Arnold would define it.

Of course, the finest philosophy and the most impressive ideas must, in a work of art, emerge naturally
without undue verbalization. The exigencies of art demand that an idea, however great, must be 'embodied' in persons, events and circumstances. We have found also that his technical skill in the presentation or the externalization of these ideas is of a high order. We have convincing personages involved in crucial situations of choice, and making choices, each, as it were, according to his own ability and his own need. We find thus that Stephen Crane was not only a man of ideas - about human psychology and about the pressures on human beings in real life - but had the capacity to devise situations and events appropriately and to present convincing portraits of the people who find themselves in such situations.

From this account of Stephen Crane's fiction, its themes and technical skill with which they have been presented, we may now arrive at an evaluation of him as an artist. The different themes we have identified have this in common - that they are highly relevant to a human being's understanding of the terms of his existence in a world and in a society that do not offer convenient props, and bring out, implicitly, a clear-eyed optimism, not ignoring the difficulties and, likewise, not ignoring the possibilities for virtue and decency. Though not a theorist in fiction - insisting more on the moral quality of sincerity than on technical
excellence—Stephen Crane has nevertheless presented some memorable vignettes of life. In one sense an existentialist but without the existentialist's despair, Stephen Crane has presented through his fiction a view of man which does not deny that a man may achieve dignity in a difficult situation that challenges his integrity. This makes him as good a modern as anyone else. A sincere and capable writer is indeed everyone's contemporary. Thus, in theme and technique, Stephen Crane is the kind of writer who will never be irrelevant. Fashions may change in respect of devices employed, but an honest perception of the truth and a faithful rendering of it will never go out of fashion. While writers come and go, we cannot ignore the worth and the force of Stephen Crane's work.