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Blunders of Virtue: The Problem of Race in Stephen Crane's "The Monster"

Stephen Crane's "The Monster" has been problematic and controversial from the point of its earliest reception. When Harold Frederic heard the story read while still in manuscript, he urged Crane to destroy it, and Richard Watson Gilder rejected it for *Century* with the reflection that it might be too disturbing for the "expectant mothers"[1] among the magazine's readership. While W. D. Howells and Joseph Conrad admired "The Monster,"[2] another contemporary critic found it "unpleasant" and "grim," and at the extreme, Julian Hawthorne denounced Crane's effort as "an outrage on art and humanity."[3] Some of this early reaction is attributable to the elements of horror in the story, suggested by its title, but it also derives from what has seemed to some an excessive and fragmented attention to minor social detail, an uneasy mixture of humor and horror, and ultimately a lack of clarity about the story's ethical meaning. However, compounding these difficulties is the issue of race. For modern readers especially, that the horribly disfigured Henry Johnson is black clearly matters, but how that fact matters, how race and race prejudice fit in with Crane's overall social and ethical concerns, remains one of the most vexing problems in "The Monster."[4]

In essence, the story seems to reflect two directly contradictory attitudes toward African Americans. On the one hand, when Henry Johnson runs into the burning house to rescue the son of his employer, Dr. Trescott, he demonstrates a capacity for bravery unsuspected by the white community. His heroism foreshadows and inspires the heroic sacrifice of the doctor, which suggests, therefore, a measure of ethical equality between them. Furthermore, Henry's subsequent facelessness and the community's violent reaction to him

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seem to symbolize the unjust situation of African Americans generally in the 1890s. Indeed, in one scene—when Henry is at first falsely and stereotypically blamed for starting the fire and then defended from racist taunts because of his newly recognized status as hero—Crane specifically includes race prejudice as an aspect of his social criticism. On the other hand, in the depiction of Henry and of the other black characters, Crane often appears blatantly racist, utilizing the sort of negative racial stereotyping common to minstrel shows and pro-slavery accounts of the Old South. Simply put, such depictions seem incongruous with the elevation of Henry as self-sacrificing hero and with the story's overall attack on bigotry.

As might be expected, critics have varied considerably in addressing the problem of race in "The Monster." One response has been to ignore race altogether, concentrating instead on formal aspects of the story, such as the impressionistic imagery or the questions of narrative technique and unity or on the author's concerns with group psychology and the ethics of individual behavior. Those critics who have seen Henry's blackness as significant often identify him as the prototype for Ralph Ellison's "invisible man," thereby making the story, as R. W. Stallman argues, "an appeal for brotherhood between white and black."[5] Similarly, James Nagel has recently argued that race is an important addendum to the central ethical issues in "The Monster," one which "enriches the social satire of Whilomville, makes the story more 'modern' for the 1890s by capturing the changing ethnic structure of America at the end of the century, and deepens the implications of Trescott's moral dilemma."[6] Nagel characterizes Henry as "nearly perfect" in his heroism, exposing "the racial stereotypes that infest Whilomville" to be "fundamentally corrupt, ethnically reductive, morally offensive,"[7] and he extends Crane's anticipations to include not only Ellison's invisibility trope but W. E. B. DuBois' figure of the veil in *The Souls of Black Folk*.

John R. Cooley was the first to challenge such readings by insisting on the need to consider broadly "Crane's racial attitudes" in relation to "his intentions in creating the character of his black figure, Henry Johnson."[8] In Cooley's view, Crane's point that the "literal fire and disfigurement . . . stand for the real though often disguised injuries suffered particularly by black Americans" is "regrettably" or "unfortunately" undermined when he shifts the focus to Dr. Trescott and resorts to "familiar stereotype" and "comic portraits of contented slaves."[9] For Cooley, these moves constitute both a capitulation to culture and a failure of art, but other critics, while granting less to the artist, have granted more to the art. Melani Budianta, for example, locates Crane's racial stereotyping of many non-Anglo-Saxon groups in the context of a broad pattern of American social views and for-

eign policy of the period, but he argues that Crane produced "works of art whose voices critique as well as constitute the noise and clamor of racial representations of the American 1890's."[10] In Budianta's view, Crane's practices of impressionism and irony, using shifting perspectives and unreliable narrators, involve and expose the reader's own biases: "Crane's ethnic jokes are double-binding. They appear to duplicate or endorse common racial stereotypes, only to laugh at them in the end."[11] Elaine Marshall is even more forgiving in arguing that an actual Port Jervis lynching, witnessed by Crane's brother, may have been the "imaginative source"[12] of the action in "The Monster." Regardless of whether or not Crane was actually affected by this incident, it serves for her as a "powerful analog" for the story because, "Despite Crane's stereotyping, which betrays in him the racial prejudices of his time, his story moves him to imagine in 'The Monster' what most of white Whilomville and the Port Jervis mob could not: the 'negro' as 'a man.'"[13] By contrast, Lee Clark Mitchell identifies "The Monster" as "an overtly racist text,"[14] but his central argument is that Crane addresses the question, "What does it mean to be black?" through a complex exploration of the question, "What does it mean to be defaced, deformed, or otherwise disfigured, to have a surface so marred as to render features *all but* unrecognizable?"[15] Here, as in Joseph Church's psychoanalytic study, Crane's evident racism is neither an embarrassing contradiction that limits his artistic achievement, nor self-reflexive irony, but a paradoxical, unintended means to racial insight. In Church's words, when "The Monster" "draws the black man into the issue, it begins to reveal latent features of race relations in America that exceed its author's intended portrayal of the culture."[16]

Critics of "The Monster," then, have tended either to ignore the evidence of Crane's racism, to dismiss it as a cultural influence irrelevant to his larger purposes, or to reconfigure it within his irony in such a way as to enable the story and its author to achieve an unintended racial insight.[17] To some extent, these readings are the result of considering the depiction of Henry and the other black characters in the story without specific regard to Crane's racial views overall as evidenced in his other writings. Although ethnic stereotyping appears prominently in a number of Crane's best-known works (e.g., *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* and "George's Mother"), black characters and the issues of race relations are all but invisible in his major fiction, most noticeably in his Civil War novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*.[18] However, as Budianta and Stanley Wertheim have recently demonstrated, Crane does reveal anti-minority and specifically racist views in a number of his journalistic and other lesser-known pieces. While warning not to dismiss Crane's biases too easily, Wertheim asserts nevertheless that in "The Monster" race is "ultimately a tangential factor."[19] But when the specific content of Crane's

racial views is examined more carefully, it appears neither tangential nor contradictory to the main ethical concerns of "The Monster." Specifically, race is discovered to play a significant role in the story's exploration of the "mystery of heroism" through ambiguous patterns of rescue.

In both his fiction and non-fiction, Crane most often treats black characters as minstrel figures, grotesque stereotypes used for comic effect. A specific description of a minstrel show, performed by cockneys in blackface, appears in a late sketch, "At the Pit Door" (1900), and a similar performance is part of the entertainment provided the working class audience at the music hall in Crane's first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets:* " . . . a woman of debatable age sang a negro melody. The chorus necessitated some grotesque waddlings supposed to be an imitation of a plantation darkey, under the influence, probably, of music and the moon" (I, 32). In these examples, it could be argued, Crane is simply recording the popularity of minstrel shows as one of the cultural realities of his day, but beginning with the description of the Zulu king, Cetewayo, and his music-loving wife, Mursala, in the "The King's Favor" (1891), the comic exaggeration of supposedly Negro traits is the basis of Crane's own attempts at humor. Such stereotyping is even more apparent in the two unpublished racial stories, "The Ideal and the Real" and "Brer Washington's Consolation," and it is the dominant note in the representation of the black characters who appear in several of the *Tales of Whilomville,* most obviously, for example, in "The Knife" where the plot turns on "an American negro's fondness for water-melons" (VII, 184). Even in its mildest expressions, the humor depends on a view of blacks as essentially child- or even animal-like, grotesquely imitating "civilized" (i.e., white) manners, mores, and speech. Such humor characterizes most of Crane's treatment of blacks in "The Monster," perhaps most obviously and offensively in the description of Henry's visit to the Farraguts in "Watermelon Alley": "They bowed and smiled and ignored and imitated until a late hour, and if they had been the occupants of the most gorgeous salon in the world they could not have been more like three monkeys" (VII, 16).

This racial stereotyping has often enough been noticed in "The Monster" as an apparent contradiction to the story's attack on social prejudice, but it is not alone the most significant feature of Crane's recurrent treatment of race. Less obvious is a motif of violence. The comic situation in "The King's Favor," for example, arises when a "prominent New York tenor" (VIII, 570), while visiting South Africa, concludes a "private musicale" for a captured warrior-king with an "inspiring war song" (VIII, 571). The song stirs the king to dreams of glory and vengeance in which he is "leading his hundreds of brown-bodied warriors, snake-like through the rustling grass" to attack "the stolid, calm Britons." In his fantasy, he hears "the muttered war-

chant of his followers, sounding to his enemies in the distance as the most ominous and dreadful of forebodings" and then "the great wild cry of battle as his swarthy demons dyed their spears in the white man's blood."

An even stronger current of violence underlies the mixture of minstrel comedy and local-color in the newspaper sketch, "Stephen Crane in Minetta Lane" (1896), which presents the young reporter's impressions of an infamous crime district in New York. He characterizes the mostly black inhabitants as representing "the very worst elements of their race" to whom "the razor habit clung . . . with the tenacity of an epidemic" (VIII, 399). Even when Italians begin "to dispute possession of the Lane with the negroes" and the "song of the razor is seldom heard," "[i]t is the original negro element that makes the trouble when there is trouble" (VIII, 405). In his concluding paragraph to the sketch, Crane formulates what amounts to an argument against any social concern for the conditions he has described:

> But they are happy in this condition, are these people. The most extraordinary quality of the negro is his enormous capacity for happiness under most adverse circumstances. Minetta Lane is a place of poverty and sin, but these influences cannot destroy the broad smile of the negro, a vain and simple child but happy. They all smile here, the most evil as well as the poorest. Knowing the negro, one always expects laughter from him be he ever so poor, but it was a new experience to see a broad grin on the face of the devil. Even old Pop Babcock had a laugh as fine and mellow as would be the sound of falling glass, broken saints from high windows, in the silence of some great cathedral's hollow. (VIII, 406–07)

The imagery here is striking, beyond the "happy-slave" stereotype in which the "instinct" to laughter provides a buffer against and release from suffering. There is also a suggestion that the fixed grin is the sign of a primal moral indifference mocking the presumptions of Christian salvation.[20]

The question of social or moral amelioration—of "uplift" or "rescue"—is the most significant of the recurring motifs in Crane's treatment of race as it bears on "The Monster." The record of contact between the Crane family and African Americans when Stephen was a boy is scant, comprised primarily of his mother's efforts to organize a "Sunday school among the colored people" as part of her husband's church mission.[21] While incidents such as his defense of prostitutes against the New York police may suggest that he saw himself as a kind of Christian knight, in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* he mocks the sort of missionary work his mother engaged in. Evidence of this skepticism can also be found in "The Knife" in a long passage that can be read as a description of the Port Jervis black community as Crane remembered it. The story's relevance to "The Monster" is apparent in its specific reference to the memory of "the fastidious Henry Johnson" (VII, 186) and in featuring Alek Williams

as one of its central characters. In the passage describing the "scattered colony of negroes" (VII, 185) the narrator observes that the people are "mainly conspicuous" for rapid breeding, laziness, drunken husbands, and a few "dudes" who do menial labor and wear brightly colored clothes. Although the only hardships they suffer are "the wind, the rain, the snow and any other physical difficulties which they could cultivate," nevertheless twice yearly "the lady philanthropists of Whilomville went up against them, and came away poorer in goods but rich in complacency." This sense of the immutability of the black community is also reflected in the main action of the story, both in the stereotyped watermelon-patch confrontation of two black men, each carrying knives, and in Alek's lying to the "oily" voiced "Yankee" (VII, 193), Mr. Bryant, about the owner of the knife found in the patch, thereby protecting both himself and his black friend. In essence, the story presents a pattern of black-white relations familiar in the Old South, the games of deception and masking played for control by the masters and survival by the slaves, continuing in the post-Reconstruction North.

Crane develops what seems an even more explicitly pro-Southern argument in his unpublished narrative, "The Ideal and the Real." The narrator, a Tennessee man, reveals the troubles caused when Miss Cynthia, a Bostonian full of Emersonian "moral philosophy"[22] and Northern expertise on the "negor [sic] problem," comes to take over as head of the household after the death of the man's mother. As revealed through the extended monolog of Aunt Dinah, the black cook, and another ascribed to Uncle Wash, both former slaves, Miss Cynthia has disrupted the household by imposing her "ideals" of spiritual freedom, racial equality, fiscal responsibility, and scientific inquiry on the "reality" of a racially harmonious New South which differs little from the Old South except that "the regular paying of wages" has replaced "gifts and care."[23] Miss Cynthia is a satirical stereotype of the New England sensibility that fuses moral rigor, philosophical idealism, and reforming zeal with economic pragmatism, and through her and through old Wash's account of his trip to Boston after the war, Crane seems to indict the North both for meddling and for hypocrisy. Cynthia, for example, makes a show of respecting Dinah by using her last name but will not trust her with the key to the larder, and "Mister" Washington cannot find work because the employers do not wish to offend their white employees. Wash in particular articulates (to the shock of his listeners at Faneuil Hall) the New South arguments that the freed slaves preferred the benevolent paternalism of their former masters to the putative benefits of social equality and voting rights and that agitation on their behalf only resulted in making "enemies 'mong de fo'ks we libbed wid, an' git lynched an' shot an' hab race wars."[24] Crane may somewhat undercut the apparent pro-Southern argument by depicting the narrator as

overly concerned with well-cooked meals, but the narrative as a whole seems to support the praise of Tennessee (and by implication the South) as a place "whar dey ain't no art, no literchure an' no lies; whar dey kno' a nigger ain't a white man an' nurver kin be."[25] It supports even more the denigration of Boston (and the North) as a place where "dey lubs de nigger in theory an' crucifies 'im in fact."

More evidence of Crane's skepticism about the value of moral or social reform as a solution to "race problems" can be found in his commentaries on the Spanish-American War and on the Boer War. Whereas in an early piece ("A Foreign Policy, in Three Glimpses," VIII, 574–78) he criticizes the British imperialists for their indifference to the natives they are rescuing, in some of his newspaper correspondence from Cuba he reports sympathetically the irritation expressed by American soldiers at the Cubans' unwillingness to fight for their own independence: "the American soldier . . . thinks of himself as a disinterested benefactor, and he would like the Cubans to play up to the ideal now and then" (VIII, 163). Paralleling his description of the black colony in "The Knife," he attributes the Cubans' passivity to their having been demoralized by American food and comfort. The issue here is Crane's perspective on "the White Man's Burden," the ideology of Anglo-Saxon *noblesse oblige* used to justify both British and American imperialism during the 1890s, an argument, which—as Melani Budianta has demonstrated—Crane viewed skeptically. Crane's skepticism, however, included not only the colonists' motives, his "assumptions of authority, power, and knowledge . . . over the enslaved natives,"[26] but also the "natives'"—particularly "Afric" (VII, 193) natives'—potential to be helped. Such a view seems to underlie his observations in the article, "Hayti and San Domingo Favor the United States," where he observes that "San Domingo is always the mental superior of Hayti" and that "the more clean and modern the people the more they favor us [the United States]."

More overtly, in a lengthy article on "The Great Boer Trek" (1900) Crane identifies British missionaries and philanthropists as the primary culprits in bringing about a conflict between two "races"—the British and the Boers—who ought to be able to coexist peacefully because they are very much alike. The argument, which has obvious parallels to North-South relations in the United States, is that the British, under the influence of the London Missionary Society, forced their liberal ideas of race and slavery on the Boers instead of permitting them to solve their "negro problem" gradually in their own way. As a result, the Boers living on the South African frontier found themselves unwillingly sharing worship space with "vermin-haunted Hottentots," "overrun" by both wandering natives and newly released slaves, and ultimately subjected to "killing, plundering and burning" at the hands of Kaffir "sav-

ages" (VIII, 253). In Crane's account, the Boers felt no security because "all the support of the British government was given—with a fanatical philanthropy stimulated by the missionaries—to the black races against themselves" (VIII, 254). Such pro-Boer sentiments were hardly original with Crane, and the article, indeed, seems one of his most derivative pieces, but it is significant in that it again formulates a view of well-intended, philanthropic "white rescue" as potentially "one of the blunders of virtue" (VII, 31).

As noted earlier, the most obvious consistency between "The Monster" and the patterns of racial attitudes found elsewhere in Crane's work is the treatment of Henry and the other black characters as comic minstrel figures. This is the Henry who saunters out to court the "saffron Miss Bella Farragut" (VII, 15), resplendent in "lavender trousers" and a "straw hat with its bright silk band" (VII, 13). The double reference to a "cake-walk" (denied by the narrator and affirmed by "one of the profane groups" of white spectators) plus young Griscom's description of him as a "coon" (VII, 14) makes the minstrel stereotyping specific. Crane draws parallels between the social posturing of both the black and white communities, but the behavior of the black characters is given a specifically racial definition and made most insistently comic. Thus, Henry's "cake-walk" is presented as a continuation of a pattern of role-playing. When Jimmie comes to him for consolation, Henry either conjures sins to share sympathetically or becomes a surrogate father dispensing pleasurable guilt, all made possible by "the elasticity of his race" (VII, 11). These ploys failing, he resorts to the "seductive wiles in this affair of washing a wagon" (VII, 12), which, when it finally consumes the "remembrance of a late disgrace," permits him to "display the dignity of a man whose duty it was to protect Jimmie from a splashing."

The key word here is *display,* for the recurrent note in Henry's characterization is outward show: from his polishing the carriage and grooming the horses to his conversion from hostler to dandy he has "an eye for the demonstration" (VII, 15). In "The Knife" Crane identifies Henry and Peter Washington as types within the black community, examples of "the industrious minority" who gain "no direct honor from their fellows unless they spen[d] their earnings on raiment" (VII, 185). Theirs is a sense of worth or distinction based on "personal decoration," especially "more colors." In "The Monster" the narrator mocks the seriousness of Henry's transformation by comparing it to the preparations of a "belle of a court circle" (VII, 13) and to that of a priest. The narrator also distinguishes this transformation from the caricatured stereotyping of a minstrel show: it "has no cake-walk hyperbole in it" but emanates from "a change far in the interior of Henry." In Henry's mind, he is "simply a quiet, well-bred gentleman of position, wealth, and other necessary achievements out for an evening

stroll." Earlier, when he met Peter Washington "in his working clothes" their greetings were "'Hello, Pete!' 'Hello, Henry," but now, consistent with his own transformed self-image, he says "'Good evenin', Misteh Washington'" to his still "very dirty" friend. Passing groups of white onlookers on Main Street, Henry is "not at all oblivious of the wake of wondering ejaculation that stream[s] out behind him" (VII, 15), yet he remains impervious to the derisive element in their reaction because he is sustained by "an underground complacency of superior metal" (VII, 14). This seems less the quiet confidence of healthy self-esteem than the sort of dubious assumption of status satirized in "The Ideal and the Real." In a sense, Henry is no more aware of the actual register of his image on others before the fire than after. His social posturing and concern with display, then, go beyond a comic replication of Whilomville traits generally to become a form of childlike fantasy bordering on arrested development. The chief audience for Henry's displays of self-importance as a hostler is his "pal" Jimmie, who "in regard to almost everything in life" (VII, 11) seems to have a mind "precisely alike" his own. Hence, what many critics have objected to as the demeaning equality implicit in the relationship between the boy, Huckleberry Finn, and the man, Jim, is made explicit in "The Monster" as a central feature of Henry's character.

A crucial implication of Crane's defining Henry's character in this way is that it undermines the concept of him as hero and, therefore, the very grounds on which he is sometimes thought to escape or defy racist stereotyping. The "mystery of heroism" is one of Crane's major themes throughout nearly all his writing, usually explored in terms of ironic contrasts between romantic or idealistic assumptions about apparent acts of selfless courage and the reality as experienced by the ones performing them or as seen from a broader perspective. Crane calls attention to this contrast in "The Monster" in the debate among the young boys over the relative merits of the different fire companies. Although "The lads hated and feared a fire" (VII, 27), they welcome the occasion as a chance "to watch their heroes perform all manner of prodigies." As a hero, the quiet, undemonstrative John Shiply is "not much to their fancy," but Sykes Huntington, who "used to bellow continually like a bull and gesticulate in a sort of delirium," is "much finer as a spectacle." In these terms, the image of Henry, identified by his lavender pants and colorful hat while running into the burning house "with an almost fabulous speed" (VII, 21), is closer to the spectacle of Huntington than the efficiency of Shiply. His passage through the fire is luridly lit, especially in the laboratory scene, and at one point Jimmie, the object of his rescue, is linked with the "hat with the bright silk band," both "clutched . . . unconsciously" (VII, 23). The point

is not that Henry is to be seen as consciously self-serving or meretricious in his motives for entering the burning house, but that for a large segment of the public, at least, heroic acts are not recognized unless brightly colored, and Henry's "distinction" throughout is measured in such terms and by such eyes. Significantly, Henry's image as hero is constructed from the account "in full" of Edward J. Hannigan, who only saw him enter the house and run up the stairs, and by an editorial "built from all the best words in the vocabulary of the staff" (VII, 30). Insofar as these accounts silence the rumors that Henry caused the fire and the racist scorn that accompanies them, it seems less an unequivocal truth replacing a racist lie than an exchange of image constructs.

Even more clearly, when Henry enters the house, his inner experience—the reality that contrasts with the heroic ideal—is represented in significantly racial terms. Whatever the ethical bottom-line of entering a burning house to rescue a child may be, given his devotion to his employer as "the moon" (VII, 20), Henry's actions also fit the stereotype of the loyal slave carrying out his duties in the "upper chambers, where he had once held office as a sort of second assistant house-maid" (VII, 21). In the moments when Henry confronts what seem insurmountable challenges, race is specifically invoked to explain his psychology. At one point he gives up both the "idea of escaping" and "with it the desire. He [is] submitting, submitting because of his fathers, bending his mind in a most perfect slavery to this conflagration" (VII, 23). When he recalls an escape route through the doctor's laboratory, he loses "his sudden momentary apathy" and continues the flight, pausing at the threshold to cry out "again in the negro wail that had in it the sadness of the swamps" (VII, 24). Finally, when he confronts the "saphire shape" that "doomed him," he ducks "in the manner of his race in fights," stumbles, and haphazardly flings Jimmie out of harm's way beneath a window. Clearly this is not a case of calm, purposeful action under fire. In the final analysis, Jimmie's salvation, like that of the three survivors in "The Open Boat," owes as much to chance as to concerted human effort, including the vicissitudes of what is characterized as Henry's instinctive racial behavior.

In addition to this invocation of slavery, Crane repeatedly uses images of insurrection and battle in the fire scene. At one level these images seem designed to suggest the natural forces that lie beyond all human efforts at social order and rational control and are always ready to destroy them. One of these forces is the desire for freedom and independence which is implicit in the reference to an engraving, titled "Signing the Declaration," hitting the floor "with the sound of a bomb" (VII, 21) and which conflictingly justified the nation's revolutionary origins, the South's rebellion, and the slave's flight and sometimes violent resistance. Hence, blended with the

references to slavery, the battle images may also suggest the violence that permeates America's racial history, breaking out from time to time in slave rebellions and culminating in the Civil War. In this regard, when Henry becomes "a terror-stricken negro" he is made to seem part of the scene's violence. He leaps on Jimmie and wraps him up in a blanket "as if the whole affair were a case of kidnapping by a dreadful robber chief" (VII, 22), and it is only when he is caught by the "old frantic terror" (VII, 23) that he re-engages the fire in "battle." Henry is not a Nat Turner, but insofar as he can sustain a vision of escape, he reacts to the "envy, hatred, and malice" (VII, 24) surrounding him—a literal holocaust—with both flight and resistance. In the end, the resistance, while it may contribute to Jimmie's salvation, is futile on his own behalf. Rescued from the fire by a brakeman and restored by Dr. Trescott to a fixed, grotesque version of what he was before, he becomes a violently disruptive presence in the community.

Henry, of course, is not *responsible* for the disruption in the sense that he does not choose to be disfigured or intend to frighten anyone. In fact, as many critics have argued, the hysteria that follows in Henry's wake makes the small-minded and rigid community seem the true monster of the story. But this needs qualification. If having "no face" represents the possibility of non-being or non-identity that is, like the "whiteness of the whale" in *Moby–Dick,* capable of evoking primal terror, then Whilomville's reaction to Henry is not completely unwarranted: Henry's role in the gothic plot structure, like that of the white whale, arguably requires that he be at some level terrifying. Dr. Trescott, on the other hand, is portrayed as a responsible agent. He chooses to use his medical skills to save Henry's life, and he acts consciously against the advice of others to keep him in the community. These choices and actions then form the core of Crane's ethical explorations in the second half of the story. However, as suggested by the shift in narrative focus from Henry to Trescott, Crane's exploration of the white doctor's ethical dilemma involves a transaction in which the black hostler's disfigurement is crucial. That is, for the doctor's efforts in rescuing Henry to be problematic, for there to *be* an ethical dilemma, it is necessary that the results apparently not justify the rescuing effort—that Henry become a "thing." Hence, to Cora Crane's observation that Henry "was a hero only as he was a horror" it could be added that Trescott also is a hero only as Henry is a horror.[27]

To be sure, for most critics Trescott is the most sympathetic character in the story, one whose ostracism after doing good may reflect Crane's own experience and sense of himself in trying to rescue prostitutes in New York. However, as with Henry, Crane significantly qualifies the doctor's heroism, underscoring its ambiguities or "mystery." First of all, Trescott's role as doctor identifies him with the presumptions of rational order and control

of nature that the fire seems to rebel against. The limits of his healing powers are ironically foreshadowed in the opening scene when the doctor, while creating a "strong and healthy" (VII, 9) lawn by cutting it, makes no effort to rescue the peony Jimmie has broken and has tried childishly "to stand on its pins." However, Crane mocks his presumptions of control more directly by having the sound of the fire alarm intrude at a precise moment of self-satisfaction: "Doctor Trescott had been driving homeward, slowly smoking a cigar, and feeling glad that this last case was now in complete obedience to him, like a wild animal that he had subdued, when he heard the long whistle" (VII, 25). In his exercise of these same powers to preserve Henry's life he resembles Dr. Frankenstein or a "modern Prometheus," usurping nature's creative power ostensibly in service to humanity. Crane invokes this comparison almost specifically when Judge Hagenthorpe warns the doctor,

> He will be your creation, you understand. He is purely your creation. Nature has very evidently given him up. He is dead. You are restoring him to life. You are making him, and he will be a monster, and with no mind. (VII, 32)

Secondly, Trescott's motive for rescuing Henry is presented as a kind of instinct, an impulse born in passion and eluding explanation, like that of the soldier in battle. When he learns that his son is upstairs in his burning house, he grows "hard and chill" and then repeats Henry's act of confronting the fire but with a more reasoned strategy. However, when he is told that Henry has gone into the house "after the kid" but not come out, his reaction seems atavistic and violent. He struggles with the men and boys trying to hold him back, "swearing, unknown to him and to them, all the deep blasphemies of his medical school days," his behavior "much affright[ing]" them. Told later that Henry is doomed his glance impresses the observers as "both leonine and impractible" (VII, 30), and he responds with "polite fury" (VII, 32) to Hagenthorpe's coldly judicial arguments to let nature take its course, "his eyes suddenly lighting like an outburst from smouldering peat." Pressed further, he attacks the judge with a "perfectly childish allusion to the judge's bachelorhood," and when he delivers his ultimate defense of his actions, that Henry "saved my boy," he turns "red" and speaks "with new violence." The stark simplicity, even reductivenes of that defense, in light of what both men seem to recognize as a morally ambiguous "old problem," underscores the instinctiveness, if not the perversity of Trescott's behavior. When warned accurately of the consequences of preserving Henry's life, he retorts, "He will be what you like, judge," and then, "He will be anything" (VII, 32), suggesting his disregard both for the community and, ultimately, for Henry himself. The doctor's concern that Henry be preserved both from

further physical harm and from indignity, however admirable it seems, is also curiously self-validating since, as the chief of police observes, ". . . there isn't much of him to hurt any more" and his mental state leaves him oblivious to any humiliation. At the level of consciousness, what the doctor seems dedicated to is not an enlarged understanding of Henry's humanity, not an awakened sense of brotherhood, but the idea of the hostler's service to him and the obligation it has created. Born of strong feeling, something like the instinct of the soldier in battle—and in that regard worthy of respect—the doctor's preserving Henry as a "thing" expressive of his sense of obligation and gratitude, takes the shape of a sentimental gesture: the cause, not the act, is suspect.

These qualifications, however, do not suggest that Crane takes sides with the community against Dr. Trescott or that he uses Judge Hagenthorpe and John Twelve to express his own views. Twelve's "reasonable" arguments, aimed ostensibly to rescue Trescott from himself, smack of moral expediency designed to restore social and economic stability. Hagenthorpe's unsentimental wisdom, associated with his ivory headed cane, is that of the law, the systems of social order and civility in which the truths of feeling and experience are never fully expressed. Nevertheless, although he retreats to "the cold manner of the bench" (VII, 31) and delivers his views "with his habitual oratory," the judge's statement that Trescott performs "a questionable virtue in preserving this negro's life, . . . that it is one of the blunders of virtue," is consistent with the pattern of Crane's racial views described above. The images of slavery and battle in the fire scene, the themes of rescue and moral obligation, seem echoes of the Civil War and its aftermath, and, as Melani Budianta has demonstrated, the issues of America's racial history were involved in the 1890s debate over imperialism and the "white man's burden":

> Amid the discussions about the white man's colonial burden in foreign territories that pervaded the American mass media of the 1890s was a concern about the white man's burden within domestic boundaries. Writers were especially concerned with the "negro problem" in the South and the North during the difficult decades after the period of Reconstruction. However, while proponents of American expansion argued for the need of the United States as one of the great Anglo Saxon nations to shoulder the responsibility of being the redeemer nation abroad, they tended to overlook America's domestic burden.[28]

In light of Crane's racial views overall, "The Monster" seems less, as Budianta claims, to resist "this desire to forget the American white man's burden of his past actions against the black ex-slaves" than to question the rescue efforts themselves: as if, in short, he were suggesting that the Civil

War, Reconstruction, and further Northern intrusions in Southern affairs were—to whatever degree matters of conscience—ultimately blunders of virtue.

Crane's racism in "The Monster," then, can be seen as something more than an embarrassing cultural tic manifest in his representation of African American characters, contradictory, perhaps, but essentially irrelevant to his main concerns. The issue here is not the same as that in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* where Twain's use of the comic racial stereotyping common to the era seems to undermine his efforts to represent Jim's human dignity. Where Jim develops at least in Huck's eyes, becoming as he says "white inside,"[29] Henry remains locked in the author's version of a black identity, baffling rescue or uplift, a benign presence causing violence. Race may not be all that haunts "The Monster," but the obduracy of the racial image plays a crucial role both in the initiation of the ethical dilemma facing Dr. Trescott and in shaping its historical content. Perhaps in all his work, but certainly in "The Monster," Crane's racial views—like Henry himself—can not be easily dismissed or conveniently housed, however much the critic may desire it.

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Notes

1. Quoted by J. C. Levenson, in "Introduction" to Stephen Crane, *Tales of Whilomville,* Vol. VII of Fredson Bowers, ed. *The Works of Stephen Crane,* (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virgina, 1969), xxx. All references to Crane's published work will be to volumes in this edition and cited parenthetically in text. Frederic's and Gilder's responses to the story were first reported in Thomas Beer's *Stephen Crane: A Study in American Letters* (1923) and so may be suspect.

2. For an account of Frederic's and Conrad's reactions see Levenson, pp. xxix. Howells' opinion is cited in R. W. Stallman, *Stephen Crane: A Biography* (New York: George Braziller, 1968), p. 334.

3. For these and other reviews see Richard M. Weatherford, *Stephen Crane: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 258–64.

4. Alice Hall Petry in "Stephen Crane's Elephant Man," *Journal of Modern Literature,* 10 (June 1983), 346–52, argues that the more significant life-model for Henry Johnson was not the Port Jervis garbage collector, Levi Hume, that Crane's niece remembered, but John Merrick, the well known "Elephant Man," a more immediate contemporary whose experience of social ostracism more clearly parallels Henry's. However, that the model for Henry may have been white does not negate the significance of Henry's being black, and Crane's sense of the relationship between race and disfigurement becomes, if anything, murkier.

5. Stallman, p. 334. Stallman notes that Crane wrote at least one unpublished racist story, "Vashti in the Dark," but does not let this knowledge alter his view of "The Monster." For Ellison's comments on "The Monster" see "Stephen Crane and the Mainstream of American Fiction" in *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964), pp. 60–76. See also Charles Mayer, "Social Forms vs. Human Brotherhood in Crane's *The Monster*," *Ball State University Forum,* 14, iii (1973), 29–37.

6. Nagel, "The Significance of Stephen Crane's 'The Monster,'" *American Literary Realism,* 31 (Spring 1999), 54.

7. Nagel, p. 55.

8. "'The Monster'–Stephen Crane's 'Invisible Man,'" *Markham Review,* 5 (Fall 1975), 10.

9. Cooley, p. 13.

10. Budianta, "A Glimpse of Another World: Representations of Difference and 'Race': Stephen Crane and the American 1890s," Diss. Cornell Univ. (August 1992), pp. 115–116.

11. Budianta, p. 152.

12. Marshall, "Crane's 'The Monster' Seen in the Light of Robert Lewis's Lynching," *Nineteenth-Century Literature,* 51 (September 1996), 206.

13. Marshall, p. 223.

14. "Face, Race, and Disfiguration in Stephen Crane's *The Monster,*" *Critical Inquiry,* 17 (Autumn 1990), 180.

15. Mitchell, p. 175.

16. Church, "The Black Man's Part in Crane's *Monster,*" *American Imago,* 45 (Winter 1988), 377.

17. To some degree, the critical tendency is to dehistoricize "The Monster." Budianta's dissertation is an obvious exception, and Michael Fried in *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987) offers another kind of historical reading in which Crane is placed in nineteenth-century scenes of reading and writing represented by the images of upturned faces in his work, including "The Monster." Bill Brown challenges Fried's position in "Writing, Race, and Erasure: Michael Fried and the Scene of Reading," *Critical Inquiry,* 18 (Winter 1992), 193–236, by arguing that race must be included in the historical inquiry. It is interesting to note that the tendency to dehistoricize is characteristic of critical responses to gothic fiction generally in that such writing traditionally has been viewed as an escapist rebellion against the restraints of bourgeois realism, located in the timeless world of the repressed unconscious. For all of its social realism "The Monster," with its obvious echoes of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,* certainly qualifies as a tale of terror. Recently, however, Teresa Goddu in *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1997) has argued that "the Gothic, like all discourses, needs to be historicized" (p. 2), and while she does not discuss Crane, "The Monster" would seem to fit her claim that "the American Gothic is haunted by race" (p. 7). For a similar argument about the significance of ignoring race in reading Poe see John Carlos Rowe, "Antebellum Slavery and Modern Criticism: Edgar Allan Poe's *Pym* and 'The Purloined Letter,'" in *At Emerson's Tomb: The Politics of Classic American Literature* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 42–62.

18. Verner D. Mitchell in "Reading 'Race' and 'Gender' in Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage,*" *CLA Journal,* 40 (September 1996), 60–71, argues that race is more central to *The Red Badge of Courage* than has been generally recognized. By "foregrounding" and "interrogating" the issue of race in Crane's brief reference to a "negro teamster," Mitchell finds "the novel's great message" to include the notion of Henry Fleming's moving "beyond hierarchical, dichotomous notions of race." Such a claim is hard to square with the treatment of race in Crane's writing elsewhere.

19. Wertheim, "Unraveling the Humanist: Stephen Crane and Ethnic Minorities," *American Literary Realism,* 30 (Spring 1998), 68.

20. Interestingly, in his most direct and extended discussion of reform issues, "The Mexican Lower Classes," Crane uses similar language to describe the slum dwellers "of our own cites" (VIII, 436) in contrast to the "meek and submissive" (VIII, 437) Mexican poor:

> That vast army with its countless faces immovably cynical, that vast army that silently confronts eternal defeat, it makes one afraid. One listens for the first thunder of the rebellion, the moment when this silence shall be broken by a roar of war. Meanwhile one fears this class, their numbers, their wickedness, their might—even their laughter. There is a vast national respect for them. They have it in their power to be terrible. And their silence suggests everything. (VIII, 436)

Although the "vast army" here is not specifically or even implicitly black, the echoes of the Minetta Lane description are striking, and the last two sentences presage the tone and effect of "The Monster."

21. See Stanley Wertheim and Paul Sorrentino, eds., *The Crane Log: A Documentary Life of Stephen Crane, 1871–1900* (New York: G. K. Hall, 1994), pp. 15, 19, 20.

22. Lyle D. Linder, ed., "'The Ideal and the Real' and 'Brer Washington's Consolation': Two Little-Known Stories by Stephen Crane," *American Literary Realism,* 11 (Spring 1978), 5.

23. Linder, p. 7.

24. Linder, p. 19.

25. Linder, p. 21.

26. Budianta, p. 204.

27. Quoted in a brief note on Crane in *Academy,* 2 (March 1901), 177. The note is reprinted in R. W. Stallman, *Stephen Crane: A Critical Bibliography* (Ames: Iowa State Univ. Press, 1972), p. 144.

28. Budianta, pp. 204–05.

29. Robert H. Hirst, ed., *The Works of Mark Twain* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988), XIII, 341.