

Dead Tilt: Playing for Keeps at “The Blue Hotel,” the Prize and the Price.

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Abstract

Stephen Crane had not advanced beyond his teenage years before twelve of the sixteen original members of his immediate family had died, and by his early twenties he was becoming symptomatic with the tuberculosis that would kill him at twenty eight. Death, ever present, overshadowed his life and like a threatening eclipse looms, markedly, in his best work. “The Blue Hotel,” a crowning realization of the short story form, is a site for the expurgation of that relentless spectre, its alienated and adversarial Swede a personification of Crane’s own dissolution, forthwith to be ritualistically purged. Such sacrifice is shown to be psychosocially well founded, historical in long practice and supported by current theory as a means of restoring order to exigent chaos; here Crane in 1898, nearing his unruly end, implemented sacrificial victimization allegorically, with cardplaying rather than the casting of lots his aleatory selector, for the most vital personal reason.

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“Desire has its own logic, a logic of gambling. Once past a certain level of bad luck, the luckless player does not give up; as the odds get worse, he plays for higher stakes. Likewise, [he] will always manage to track down the obstacle that cannot be surmounted – which is perhaps nothing more than the world’s massive indifference to him, in the end – and he will destroy himself against it.”

--René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, (“TH”), p. 298

“I am buckling down and turning out stuff like a man. . . . [N]ow that I am in it, I must beat it.”

--Stephen Crane to Paul Revere Reynolds, Feb. 7, 1898

“This is a queer game.”
The Cowboy

Narrative

They are only five, but a handful: a natural pair of Scullys to which are drawn three more “cards” -- a heterogeneous twosome of easterners from New York and a knavish cowboy. The Scullys are a father and son, Pat and Johnnie, as different as a pair can be, while the easterners are an equally non-homogeneous but serviceable doublet¹ comprised of a diminutive Easterner (Mr. Blanc, a name-effaced Crane-surrogate observer-explainer) and a Swede or Dutchman, who gives his occupation as tailor (*suits*). Except for Pat Scully, the Palace Hotel’s impresario, the first chance they get they sit down in pairs of duos, knocking knees under an improvised table, and play cards. Troublesome Johnnie (*Jack*), fresh from two undercard quarrels with an anonymous farmer, partners the other knave (Cowboy) in this *card game within a card game*, as it were, in one of Stephen Crane’s perfect microcosmic isolations. “No island of the sea could be exempt to the degree of this little room with its humming stove,” he writes (Ch. II). But that warm front room of the Palace Hotel is soon in the players’ hands “hideous as a torture chamber” (Ch. V). They play “only for fun,” Cowboy later protests Johnnie’s gratuitous, sharpening deceit. *Fun or not*, the Easterner says, he and his partner-Swede are cheated. Cowboy is chagrined to learn that players in a game without a prize can get taken. The game does, however, have a price, which Crane will register mimetically through his jarring Swede, our little-man Easterner’s doomed, adventitious co-traveler.

Metaphor

Abstracting to sufficiency, Crane describes only gesturally how they play “High Five,” a madly randomized game of trumps and tricks – either silently or by slapping cards violently, “card-whacking,” he calls it – but the repeated way wind-blown placards fly against a wall and end face-up on a floor exactly as his Swede finally does, making five face-up occurrences, are unambiguous adverbial symbols of Crane’s external theme of randomness and annihilation. Historically, High-Five was in the late nineteenth century “the American gambler’s game *par excellence*,”² so taken from experience, High-Five *qua* game specifically as indiscriminate particularizer readily

supplied Crane a primary metaphor of macrocosmic conflict, a *mise en abîme* signifying life's interactivity stemming from systematic but chaotic initial conditions. It availed a figuration of rule-based yet randomized processes shuffling out win, loss and expenditure while also incorporating uniformly unpredictable personal conduct, how we play the game. The cards-gaming metaphor permeates as well internal aspects of the story. As a gamesman, Pat Scully, the Palace Hotel's little-god principal and principled rule giver – "A guest under my roof has sacred privileges," he says (Ch. IV) – is described as "a master of strategy," his accumulation of customers at the Fort Romper train station a draw-pokeresque "marvel of catching three men." Related to cards, the Swede's initial fears are "silly" (Ch. I), as adjectival again in "the fat and painted kings and queens . . . gazed with their silly eyes" (Ch. V); further, "Upon the Swede's deathly pale cheeks were two spots brightly crimson and sharply edged, as if they had been carefully painted" (III); like bedecked kings, queens and jacks peeping from between others in a hand, during the snowstorm fistfight, "Occasionally a face, as if illuminated by a flash of light, would shine out, ghastly and marked with pink spots" (Ch. VI).

These reflections interpenetrate, from characters into cards and games and outward from them, signifying metaphorically "the transmutation from the microcosmic to the macrocosmic . . . game of Fate," James Ellis interpreted them, as the cards predominantly mirror directly the "the war that was raging above them" (Ch. V).³ Their four upsets by wind and turmoil increase in violence with rising action, then subside in sympathy, ebbing with its collapse. Conceived by Crane as a virtual *Tarot*, the card-upsets first provide adumbration, in Chapter V, just before the direful cheating allegation, when Scully exits to meet the 6:58 train and "a gust of polar wind whirled into the room . . . scattering the cards." Then, in concert with those "dreadful three words, 'You are cheating,'" "the board had been overturned and the whole company of cards was scattered over the floor, where the boots of the men trampled the fat and painted kings and queens"; in Chapter VI, when Scully's devolving sociality erupts into an overt "paroxysm of disorder" (*TH* 29) and crucial fisticuffs begin, "Some of the scarred and bedabbled cards were caught up from the floor and dashed helplessly against the farther wall," but finally, when fallen and beaten Johnnie is raised and carried back into the room, "As they entered, some cards again rose from the floor and beat against the wall." Crane thus presents a *recitative* to his visual opera, cards and cardplaying its music.

Foreshadowing events when his four players first take up the cards, Crane intimated his intention with, "A game with a board-whacker is sure to become intense" (Ch. II), referring not exclusively to his inflammatory-dolt Cowboy, the first who whacks enthusiastically his cards upon the board, but to his outsider Swede, whose mimicry in "having adopted the fashion of board whacking" (Ch. V) joins his other "game" peculiarities signaling a markedly ontological otherness. He is, we soon learn, as anomalous and sudden in this otherwise mundane amusement as the intimation of rash mortality is in routine Life. Crane's community of lively "Blue Hotel" characters continually address him as "Stranger" only, signifying a presence lastingly unacceptable; they don't even accept that he is a "Swede."

Allegory

Life is clichéd as a card game. Aphoristically, "We play the cards we are dealt"; aspirations attainable are "in the cards," those unreachable "not in the cards" and, in the worst case, "the cards were stacked against us" – sometimes "in spades." Forlorn hopes are "a house of cards." In support of allegory, card-playing was ideally suited to figuration by Crane, an expert player who said he wished he could write as well as he played poker. (He must have been a *killer* on the baize.) Both early on, in "Four Men in a Cave" (*The Sullivan County Sketches*), which features an otherworldly, priestly hermit who flourishes from a makeshift altar what seems a scriptural or satanic "small volume" that turns out to be a deck of cards, and late, in *The Third Violet*, Crane had depicted cardplaying prominently, in the latter as a normal part of bohemian life, as ordinary as breathing and eating (Ch. XXIV). Upon the playing out of the figures in that *Tarot*-weighted "little book" do the destinies of those "Four Men in a Cave" turn, moreover, and in *The Third Violet* his creative types are engrossed with the game, not a *passa tiempo*, but oneirically, as regular contretemps to productive reality. He figured "The Blue Hotel" -- his masterpiece in the opinion of Hemingway, Berryman and Mencken, who called it "superlative among short stories" – published little more than a year before his death but written three years after his western trip in 1895, on the unpredictability of the deal (his determined Swede in post-cards aleatory redux *by chance* puts his hands on the gambler who will skewer him), on the way we handle our cards, and the certainty, putatively in his case desirability, of every game's long-sought end: "To the Easterner there was a monotony of unchangeable fighting that was an abomination. This confused mingling was eternal to his

sense, which was concentrated in a longing for the end, the priceless end” (Ch. VI).

Crane probably chose “priceless” rather than “sweet” both to indicate an eventuality beyond the game of commerce, whether square or rigged, and to circumvent the colloquial “sweet end” for obvious homonymous reasons *vis á vis* his Swede. Unquestionably, the idiomatic “merciful end” was also rejected, *mercy* being granted and therefore teleological (see below, “Analysis”). As well, Crane perhaps for reasons related to the present identification thesis both avoided calling the card game “Double Pedro,” one of its “aliases,” the game’s “Pedros” (Peters) its two trump-colored fives, while as “High Five” conflating it with Easterner’s theory of quintuple complicity. Another alias demurred is “Cinch,” as in *mortal locks* and secure saddles, a metaphor Crane was using effectively in “The Price of the Harness” (1898).

Based on these clues, John Berryman viewed “The Blue Hotel” as a localization of Crane’s “thrust toward suicide,” his Swede-end an autobiographical signification of that wish’s discharge. Willa Cather recalled Crane, already “thin to emaciation” and “going to Mexico to . . . get rid of his cough,” saying during his 1895 western trip that he hadn’t even “time to learn how to spell”; a year later he wistfully wrote, “Dear me, how much am I getting to admire graveyards – the calm unfretting unhoping end of things – serene absence of passion – oblivious to sin – ignorant of the accursed golden hopes that flame at night and make a man run his legs off and then in the daylight of experience turn out to be ingenious traps for the imagination. If there is a joy of living I cant find it” (*sic*, Crane to Crouse, March 1, 1896). Central to Berryman’s *thanatropos*, Crane’s plaint for surcease, is High-Five, specified twice, “dealer’s choice” for play at “The Blue Hotel” probably because trump for each hand is determined not by contract bidding, as in Hearts, Bridge or Pinochle, but by foolish chance, the first suit turned from the deck after cards are dealt. In retrospect, “A thousand things might have happened,” Easterner sums the action, as if calculating deck (read experiential) combinatorics the way seasoned card players eventually do (Ch. IX). “The players play their own cards in ‘The Blue Hotel,’” Ellis wrote, “to the macrocosmic game of chance in which the players themselves become cards played upon by Fate.”⁴ Cardplay as amusement is doubled at the Palace, allegorized into a game of existential hazard.

Crane's mute kings, queens and jacks are indifferently tossed about and abused ("grubby, scarred and marked," Ch. III). Throughout his oeuvre his personal changelings fare no better, his Swede a special case among them. *We don't know how it got started or where it will end, but we know the rules of the game we are engaged in making the best of, temporarily, right now,*⁵ is the script they are made to manifest. Except for his aberrant Swede, wrought to represent transcendent, importunate Death, outside the rules. Emotive personal conduct flouting conventions in Crane's tailored match-game between doubles is this anomalous Swede's willful and disastrous, game-ending suit. Unexpectedly emergent – out of the blue, as it were, monstrous Death arises, incarnated in his person determinedly, almost mechanistically.

After his transformative churching-baptism via Pat Scully's private bottle in a typically Cranean chapel of Death, this one a shrine to Scully's dead little daughter, Swede relates to Death as both its *simulacrum* and its *contaminatus*. Relieved of his fears and thus communed, he laughs nervously, "wildly," and embraces his destiny to represent it and to bear it. Thus freshly assimilated to Death in the Scully crypt, he menaces like a wildcard turned face-up in the allegorical game of Life. "The card" in "The Blue Hotel" (Ch. II) is therein equivalent to the ritual games, lotteries, short straws and Epiphanic cakes in René Girard anthropology: "the chance, . . . the aleatory processes . . . used to select a sacrificial victim." Of Crane's emotive characters, given his initial conditions this blameless, insane-with-fear Swede, imbued with bravado-juice and *turned up* in a card game, reveals as one plausibly motivated, both tragically and comically to be "The victim," Girard calls it, who "will be imbued with the emotions provoked by the crisis and its resolution" (*TH* 100-101). The crisis here, as almost always in Crane's dramatic actions, is a crisis of fear; his Swede bears the weight ("He was too heavy for me," Johnnie says) of its contradictions and chaos.

Crane's helpless and hapless Swede, now become imperviously boisterous and obnoxious, precipitates by that tone his demise, and by raising its specter takes on as its acolyte its mantle, the mantle of Death. Like other god-magnitude, monstrous pagan personae, he is Protean – doubly foreign as a Swede-Dutchman -American easterner out west (but only to Nebraska), timid and bold, taciturn and voluble, stabile and mobile, going from "scared" to "too fresh," from reluctant to insistent, at once fleeing violence and driving it. He is at first sympathetic ("Maybe you think I have been to nowheres" in Ch. II) and finally detestable ("You won't drink with me, you little dude? I'll make you, then! I'll make you!" in Ch. IX). "The victim,"

Girard wrote, “appears to be simultaneously good and evil, peaceable and violent” (*TH* 102). As a paradigmatic Girardian perpetrator-victim *monstre sacre*, Swede personifies Crane’s equation of violence with the sacred, as in the “godlike violence” with which a huge stove hums in Chapter I; Girard is equally explicit: “*The sacred is violence*” (*TH* 32). Allegorically, this Swede, suddenly realizing that he might die *today* (“I suppose I will be killed before I can leave this house” twice in Ch. II) conjures, by presciently declaiming a Delphic *logos phobou* (“expression of terror,” *VS* 148), Crane’s own imminent mortality. And after he spontaneously ignites (“flizzes like a firewheel”) into dangerous, alienating and aggressively deadly clownishness, ignorant of and uncaring for his surroundings, he blusters with new-found bravado (i.e. bluffs) in the face of his former worst fears and, estranged from man and society, he tilts into the storm’s teeth toward mortality: “It suits me,” he says hauntingly, reiterating his pleasure with it *five times*, then, having come up empty-handed with these bad cards among new players, literally and metaphorically folds -- *Dead Tilt*, in cardplayer jargon. Even a lethal Nebraska blizzard, “the bugles of the tempest pealing” both a warning of and a welcome to oblivion, is misread by him, now a flipped wildcard, as agreeable.

Radiant with “the conceit of man” (Ch. IX) at the echoing center of the universe and having repeatedly cursed it blue, alienated from the bosom of humanity he tilts reeling into the storm’s teeth, embracing conclusion: “The victim of this violence both adores and detests it,” Girard noted (*VS* 148). Embodying life-game first as overly cautious (“I don’t want to fight,” unprovoked in II) and fearfully quiet, then in end-game as incautious, inept play, a contradictory incoherence outside the bounds of sane and decorous player conduct, the “rules,” the Swede is positioned liminally to perform symbolically his precipitate, game-changing function. For his Protean nature and connection to violent Death, Swede as “victim does seem to constitute a universal signifier,” one of two existential absolutes (*TH* 102). With Crane’s ontological consciousness the other, his Swede presents functionally as a pre-emptive *dybbuk* amok in it.

Primitive cultures, Girard observed, live according to laws that free them “from subjection to the sacred, . . . that allow them to maintain a precarious independence from divine intervention,” Death being the absolute *interruptus*. Foreigners by contrast “are considered something less and more than human because they fail to follow these rules. They may appear . . . maleficent or . . . beneficent, but in either case they are deeply imbued with

the sacred” – the transmundane, the nonhuman, i.e. (VS 267). As soon as Crane’s Swede intrusively voices invasive Death, for example, allegorical havoc is visited upon the *Tarot*: Cowboy, reacting to his insinuation of murder “tumbled the deck down violently upon the board” (Ch. II). Twinned and twice partnered with the sober, contemplative Easterner – portrayed as cerebral and observing in that only he and the Swede are aware of Johnnie’s unreasonable deceit, though he says nothing, shifting and shirking the responsibility for mayhem, Swede can be seen as shamanistically represents the impudently dying physical and unreliably emotional or reactive, vulnerable half of a “like” suit with Crane, a talismanic *doppelgänger* who, identified and differentiated, manifests as an externalized, inhuman enemy twin to be salutorily sacrificed. As is Girard’s stereotypical ritualized victim invariably blamed for causing disorder, this Swede is isolated, the part that had betrayed Crane adversarially, not his mind, sensibility, creative talent, etc., vivified in his blasé Easterner. (Also feasible is the possibility of seeing Crane’s entire cast of “Blue Hotel” characters as prismatic facets of his own macro personality, namely 1: Johnnie, the willful apostate son of a righteous father, 2: Cowboy, a hot-headed reactionary repeater of violent mimesis who, like Henry Fleming finally advancing wildly in *The Red Badge*, caught in “a holocaust of warlike desire” during the fistfight screams “Kill him, Johnnie! Kill him! Kill him!” 3: Scully, the ethical and judicial, commercial rule-giver, 4: Swede, his doomed, grotesque, outsider, savant-dupe and 5: a killer-instinct gambler.⁶) However, without specifying “external personification” or “objectified persona,” *The Literary History of the United States* calls Swede’s early premonition of violence (“I suppose a good many men have been killed in this room,” his first line, tendered like a wagering ante) “the manifestation of Crane’s own intense fear.”⁷

Fear, chaotic and unsettling, can be *put to rest* both socially and personally by community acting ritualistically (as collective consciousness) or by the individual (particular consciousness) performing aesthetically-symbolically – in each instance via *mimesis*, a “crisis reproduced not for its own sake but for the sake of its resolution” (TH 24). Formally, in perfectly mirrored symmetry with Billie Higgins, the sole named character in “The Open Boat,” also twinned with Crane-Correspondent as that story’s only rowers, the Swede and his murdering “little” gambler are the only nameless main characters in “The Blue Hotel” (even Scully’s departed girl-child is “Carrie,” a son is “Michael,” and an outside barkeep yclept “Henry”). Each is the one performatively distinguished by a naming or, equivalently, a disnaming

speech act, the one who perishes or gets trumped, as Crane, nearing fearsome physical extinction, was about to. Rounding his unholy trinity as Mr. Blanc (= "White" \approx pure) doubled with his nameless "little" gambler – as diminutive as the Easterner and as expert as Crane -- Crane through a "mimetic substitution of antagonists" (*TH* 26) extended the radii of his disnaming tropes protectively to encircle himself.⁸ By fronting surrogatively as alterities personae and names, Crane representatively erased his specific manifestation and sheltered his selfhood from stress conditioned to ephemerality, while simultaneously "anteing up" psychologically, multiplying his selfhood vicariously, mimetically through art: a "differentiation," in Girard, "equivalent to the loss of previous identity" (*TH* 29). As author, Crane in surrendering his identity to skilled delegacy created in his fictions' exemplary existential surrogates. In "The Blue Hotel" he dramatizes with his substituted Swede a manifold lesson in the practice of that symbolic authorial surrogacy. Whether such practice is for critical purposes deemed modern or postmodern (see below, "Two Supporting Theories"), especially compelling is Anthony Giddens' summary regarding Jürgen Habermas relative to Crane's moment, particularly "... the temporal self-destructiveness of the avant-garde which is constantly implicated in the moment of its own dissolution."⁹ *The moment of its own dissolution*, as in the earnest decadence of fin-de-siècle art. Its "mauve decade" was Crane's milieu.

They are also five at the unnamed saloon the Swede, by this time an all-in player, finds in exile after winning his fight with Johnnie – again four at table and one "guardian," precisely as at the Palace with Scully surveilling. But the Swede intrudes, making from the perspective of hands a supernumerary, expendable sixth, soon to be played out. Again perceived as alien, as he was at Scully's, among the last words he hears are the differentiating, "My friend, I don't know you," from the diminutive gambler who refuses to drink with him and shortly thereafter fatally punctures him in the fullness of his inflation. This sharp gambler's agency, entirely disconnected from Johnnie's cheating, which had escalated the previously psychological crisis into violent This sharp gambler's agency, entirely disconnected from Johnnie's cheating, which had escalated the previously psychological crisis into violent kinesis, is described, remarkably, in Girard's psychoanalytically-based sociology: in finale "The rivals are apt to forget about whatever [is] . . . in principle the cause of the rivalry and instead become fascinated with one another. In effect the rivalry is purified of any external stake and becomes a matter of pure rivalry and *prestige*" (*TH* 26).

As to Crane describing his gambler as “a slim little man”: that shrewd sharper who is adept at this game killing for reasons of personal honor or prestige the “burly” and emotionally reactive, fear-mad Swede presents as a psychological metaphor of Crane’s heightened artistic rationality observing and confronting his own bodily demise,¹⁰ a differentiation enacting transference – as all differentiations do -- but hopefully transposition as well as, reciprocally, release. In “The Blue Hotel,” seemingly the only one surprised at the outcome of events, conclusively, the Swede, “pierced as easily as if he had been a melon,”¹¹ falls “with a cry of supreme astonishment,” Crane’s symbolic, purgative transfer and postponement of terrifying death to his designee thereby a *fait accompli*.

In denouement, Easterner sharingly metes out his guilt, explaining to Cowboy, “We five of us have collaborated in the murder of this Swede. . . only five men – you, I, Johnnie, old Scully and that fool of an unfortunate gambler” (Ch. IX), as if Crane had successfully marshaled his alter egos against personified dissolution. But we see the objectifying adjectives: Unfortunate. A foreign “Swede” of unspecified origin who behaves as any human might given his circumstances (“believed to have brought about his own death,” even: *TH* 27). Alienated and differentiated. Astonished, then dead. Estranged by disease from living fully, cheated, a fool for believing that life has meaning in some ultimate prize, this is Crane in a purgatorial torture chamber (“right in the middle of hell,” Ch. IV); his is an oppressive psychic-somatic situatedness as he nears the end of a lingering and tiresome illness, one noted for repeatedly raised and dashed hopes -- like unchanging cards merely reshuffled and redealt. He is signifying ruefully his cozened self mimetically.

Two Supporting Theories

Crane’s “foremost trait,” he self-identified his propensity for “vanishing and disappearing and dissolving,” seems bespoken to post-structural criticism. John Berryman, integrating in 1962 his critical biography written early (1950) in the second revival of Crane appreciation, wrote that Crane “had remained . . . persistently invisible behind his creation,” an observation that appears tailor-made for postmodernists. Michel Foucault’s statements in “What is an Author?” that “the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; [that] he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing” can be seen as literalized allegorically

by physically deteriorating Crane's prismatic identification with both his ludicrous, doomed and estranged, frontier-tyro Swede and the gambler who kills him in "The Blue Hotel." On its façade only, and ideologically ignoring potential authorial signification, Foucault equated such possibilities with the essence of authoring, "of creating a space into which the [author] constantly disappears," a "voluntary effacement . . . brought about in the author's very existence." Crane's plethora of name-effaced authorial surrogates, from the "little man" who first appears in *The Sullivan County Sketches* and *The Black Riders*, to Henry Fleming, Peza in "Death and the Child," possibly the shunned outsider-hero Henry Johnson (literally *defaced*) in *The Monster*, and guilty but understandable ingrate George Kelcey in *George's Mother*, as well as his Easterner and "slim little gambler" here and Correspondent in "The Open Boat," were putatively originally designed by Crane psychologically to "ward off death" in Foucault's words – or to confront the fear of death from behind dramatic masks, deflective functions into which narrative may have metamorphosed from its earliest forms, as in the *Scheherazade*. The "relationship between writing and death is . . . manifested in the effacement of the [author's] individual characteristics," according to Foucault, "to keep death outside the circle of [the author's] life."¹²

Characters such as Crane's discarded Swede and objectified-aestheticized microcosms like that at Fort Romper are in Foucault's terms "contrivances that [the author] sets up between himself and what he writes" for the specific purpose of "cancel[ing] out the signs of his particular personality" including therein latent individual ephemerality and perhaps perceived disaffection, especially those life-exigencies beyond control or outside of mentation. (They protect like small vulnerable boats tossed on steep oceans of swamping danger, only provisionally and barely effectively.) Ernst Cassirer agreed with this theory's anthropological psychology, writing in *Language and Myth* that some tribal people "give children, and especially those whose elder brothers or sisters have died young, a name that has a frightful connotation, or attributes some non-human nature to them; the idea is that Death may be either frightened away, or deceived, and will pass them by as though they were not human at all. Similarly, the name of a *man laboring under disease* or bloodguilt is sometimes changed, on the same principle that Death may not find him." Mimesis, René Girard revealed in his socio-analytic study of purgative ritual, is a formal shield of similar psychology: "Primitive societies abandon themselves, in their rituals, to what they fear most during normal periods: the dissolution of the

community in the mimetic crisis . . . as if they believed that a simulated disintegration might ward off the real disintegration” and provide “miraculous deliverance” (*TH* 22, 28).

Such deflections, playing perfectly even when, as in the first case, they are limned within a poststructuralist defection, an “infinitely deferred . . . authorial imitation,” provide one theoretical baseline for interpreting Crane’s psychological direction in “The Blue Hotel,” for at issue here is not a radically reductive reader rhetoric that sees merely the proximate circumferentia of a *sphaera intelligibilis* passing through critical flatland, but a comparatively volumetric, historicist possibility based on rationalist human interiorization. Deconstruction’s once-widely accepted circular logic, dispraised by Girard as “a unionization of failure” (*TH* 40), was based on the assumption of unknowable authorial intention. “As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting on reality but intransitively, . . . outside any function other than the practice of the symbol itself,” Barthes wrote, “the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death.” Conversely, Crane may precisely through analogous identity effacements have been magically, mimetically, *transitively* “acting on reality,” conceded that “vanishing and disappearing” resonate in his momentary diversions and name-changed masks, like the hallucinatory functions of shamanism’s “ritual *masks*” (*TH* 35). Once this mimetic confrontation with “his own death” has been aestheticized narratively, for example, that ultimate, immanent historical inevitability is objectified irrepressibly as a functional actor in the artistic game in the same way that ritual functions communally. (Not ontological to Crane’s demystified universe and therefore unavailable to him for excoriation was traditional human-family villain Lucifer.) Having witnessed innumerable contemporaries succumb to tuberculosis, quantitatively for two centuries the grimmest reaper of all groups, Crane knew at the time of writing “The Blue Hotel” that he was immediately facing a player for the house (Swede identifies the hotel as a *house*) who in the long game never loses.

By proffering in acknowledgment a surrogate-victim, a sadly weird, multiply dislocated, otherworldly Swede mistaken for a Dutchman, Crane imagines not only his own dissolution, but reconstructs from it artistically a doubled alterity, a proxy for his – and ultimately everyone’s – inexorable, collapsing house-of-cards progress toward it.¹³ He thus plays out our existential hand mimetically on the page. At the deepest rhetorical level, his Nebraska tale becomes thereby a structure at once willfully anonymous and

identifying, an aesthetic, objectified reproduction of a priceless end, which he tacitly feared and explicitly welcomed.

"The Blue Hotel," a duality embraced dispassionately as doubling art albeit sympathetically as single psychology, is Crane somehow brilliantly intuiting structurally and depicting allegorically in ritualistic circumstances a violent social rupture the violent negation of which ransoms peaceful continuity. Such doubles and doubling are always symbolic: in the duality of Easterner-Crane's monstrous, accidental fellow-traveler Swede, "the double and the monster [as] one and the same being, . . . the true structure of the experience is put in relief. . . . The decisive act of violence is directed against this awesome vision of evil and at the same time sponsored by it" (*VS* 160, 161). Projecting onto his secular experience the sacramental practice of sacrificial victimology – until Stephen's generation the hereditary Crane-Peck family business -- Crane figures masterfully his conflicted personal reality in ritualistic metaphor, mimetically, that is, by constructing artistically for *consumption* a straw-man surrogate sacrifice.¹⁴ It is a revelatory imaginative development, but not unparalleled: "Mythological elaboration is an unconscious process based on the surrogate victim and nourished by . . . violence"; "To say that the monstrous double is a god or that he is purely imaginary is to say the same thing in different terms" (*VS* 126, 161); "The fact that the metaphor applies both to the group and to the individual . . . demonstrates that much more is involved than an allusion to specific [death]" (*TH* 165). Cultural mythogenesis and personal aesthetic creation, both deployed for a single purpose, are thus in Girard isomorphic, identical within the terminology of mimetic reproduction.

Sacrificial authorship, whether objectifying, cathartic, conciliatory, mimetic, purgative, restorative, restitutive or otherwise, requires a substitute. In aesthetic-rhetorical replication of his personal demise, not even Moses, putative author of the Pentateuch, could have described therein his own death and burial (Deut. 34:5-6). Skilled with plenty in his role as an author of compulsively many veiled surrogates – a praxis of "symbolic individuality" undoubtedly developed professionally as required in *reportage*, thus "artificially isolated" (*TH* 37), Crane in his fictions routinely characterized himself and his situational psychic states vicariously, *a fortiori* in this case ceremonially through the surrender of his created anomalous Swede. Rhetorical distancing, it seems, provided space for dramatic figurative reification; as well it allows readers a glimpse of authorial psychology, an "inversion of [usual normative] roles in the relation between

the collectivity and the individual,” especially regarding the creation of his double, in Girardian terms a materialized sacrificial object-victim. By this means Crane dyadically reveals while concealing, emerges while hiding; his is a game played between unique individual Life and repetitive mechanistic Death, a sport of illuminating tropes and muffled cries in “The Blue Hotel,” where he enacts a ritualistic “collective murder” (Mr. Blanc explains the collaboration) to resolve troublesome Death through a personal “sacrificial mimetic crisis.” Precisely as in Girard’s anthropological studies (“Even when the sacrifice is performed by a single person, that person . . . acts in the name of everyone involved,” *TH* 24), Crane’s duplicate-prey is paradigmatically deployed communally, by a handful of Crane surrogates, identified and separated (differentiated¹⁵), scorned and mimetically victimized -- to create by his death release from chaotic violence and to restore psychic peace.

Crane’s narrative arrival at this salvific point is analogous to Girard’s buckling sociality, “Where previously there had been a chaotic ensemble of particular conflicts, there is now the simplicity of a single conflict” (*TH* 24), as he transitions from a generally percolating disunity, Johnnie *vs.* Farmer, Scully *vs.* Johnnie (who, accosted by his father, begins nervously “to shuffle the cards, fluttering them together with an angry snap”), Johnnie *vs.* Swede (“Why, this is the wildest loon I ever see”), Cowboy *vs.* Swede (“What’s wrong with you, Mister?”), Scully *vs.* Swede (“Man, you’re off your nut!” “This damned Swede”), to Swede in fisticuffs *vs.* Johnnie-community, whose members assemble in singular, “unanimous polarization” and cheer “like a chorus of triumphant soldiery” when the Swede falls (Ch. VI). Theirs is an all-against-one focus of antagonism that Swede recognized early (“Oh I see you are all against me,” Ch. II). It moves toward resolution with “the entire community on one side, and on the other, the victim” (“I don’t stand a chance against all of you . . . I know you’ll all pitch against me,” Swede perceives, Ch. VI). Pivotal and worst of all these insults, Easterner’s virtual, Pilate-like hand-washing, is as essential to Crane’s trope of sacrifice as Pilate’s was in advancing the sacramental, reparative New Testament sacrifice. Crane even echoes the three denials by Peter in Mark 14:68-72, here by Swede’s three fellow game-players: first Johnnie’s “I don’t cheat, and I won’t let no man say I do!” (Ch.V), then Easterner’s *crucial* betrayal of his “partner” (“I didn’t see anything wrong”), and finally fight-happy Cowboy’s story-ending words, “Well, I didn’t do anything, did I?” We are reminded by their murderous collaboration again of the Biblical singularity when, as described paradigmatically by Girard, “A hostile crowd denounces

the misconduct of this miscreant, who is . . . nothing more than a criminal and a social outcast" (VS 105). In his well-known estrangement from family religion, Crane may have been parodying Christian precedents (cf. "Analysis," below).

After the preclimactic snowstorm fight, "when division is most intense, . . . unity emerges [and] the community affirms its unity in the sacrifice," no one at the Palace Hotel opposes the Swede's *exit*, in effect his *excision*. Girard's "abandonment of the endless cycle of vengeance" (TH 27) as community finally chooses an expiative victim is figured in "The Blue Hotel" by the cessation of all card games, whether metaphorically conflictual or ironically "for fun." Girard marks this sacramental evolution as a decisive "passage from the aleatory to the specific," and at this juncture in the story, Scully's fuming wife and daughters, a "chorus of lamentation" (Ch.VI), make a classical, lustral appearance to comfort and purify survivor Johnnie for, games over at the Palace, peace is there restored. Victim designated and out the door, local problem solved. In *Violence and the Sacred*, moreover, Girard recounts the aftermath of such violence: "Two men come to blows; blood is spilt; both men are thus rendered impure. Their impurity is contagious, and anyone who remains in their presence risks becoming a party to their quarrel" (VS, 28). Fistfight concluded, no character at the Palace save its guide, old Pat Scully, has further *dealings* with the Swede. In Girard, "the community attempts to consolidate its fragile hold on things" by first "not repeat[ing] any action associated with the crisis" – cards, drinking, fighting and mimicry (postfight, in "reciprocal parody" Swede throws back in Cowboy's face, "Kill him, Kill him, Kill him!" Ch.VII) – and especially by "refrain[ing] from all mimicry and all contact with the former antagonists" (TH 20, 28). Crane abandons his site of violence with the alacrity of a primitive tribe fleeing contagious impurity: the Palace Hotel and Johnnie vanish from the tale, but awaiting Crane's Swede -- and humanity itself -- is Crane's painful depth, the inevitable, permanently blue home of the deep cosmos, one per each of those "unutterable midnights of the universe" ("The Veteran," last line) in which randomly tumbles our "space-lost bulb" of a reality.

We witness an alimentary conclusion to the ritual as two of its former game-opponents, Cowboy and Easterner, months later in springtime and far away on the Dakota line, having escaped romping purgatory, "return[ing] to life, . . . found a new community" (VS 28), digest what has happened and prepare to share a meal celebrating their renewal (as in

Christian communion, sacrificial victims were often eaten ceremoniously in “anthropophagous” ritual finale “so that their power is absorbed,” *TH* 79, 83).¹⁶

In retrospect, following the cathexis of ritualistic fireworks, like a symbolic god of disorder who has been ceremonially eliminated, stands Crane’s heroic but ephemeral Swede, “more foreign than native, a *visitor* come from an unknown world, . . . a polluted object whose living presence contaminates everything that comes into contact with it and whose death purges the community of its ills” (*VS* 95). He towers decisively above his alter-egos, all merely human, in a final complete characterization only once, and briefly, previously dramatized, when Crane’s marquee fictional surrogate Henry Fleming perishes in “The Veteran” (with secular anagogic fanfare, noted). Crane’s shamanistic transposition of destruction to this character “transforms the victim into something radically other than, and transcendent to, the community” (*TH* 78) – read *to Crane* through metaphoric dislocation. No major work followed “The Blue Hotel,” certainly nothing of its stature. It seems to be Crane’s ultimate, radiant deception, like resolutely though temporarily, satisfyingly playing the ace of trump at the game’s final trick.¹⁷ Death as here personified and ritually excised, a personal, secular *χριστόζ*, is bibliographically Stephen Crane’s outermost supranatural reach, and as far as we know his last.

Near the conclusion of *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard remarks the historicity of events akin to those depicted by Crane in “The Blue Hotel” and their relation to his thesis of mimetic ritual sacrifice. Paraphrasing Louis Gernet’s *Anthropologie de la Grèce antique* (Paris, 1968, pp. 326-27), Girard distinguishes between religious and secular capital punishment: “The second type, secular, . . . was accomplished with a minimum of formalities and is devoid of religious connotations. Its . . . rough and ready character remind[s] us of the frontier ‘justice’ of American Westerns. . . . [I]t was usually visited on criminals who had been caught in the act, and it was always ratified by the common accord of the community. . . . [T]he public nature of these acts would not have been enough to make the execution of the criminals possible if these criminals had not usually been foreigners; that is, individuals whose death entailed no risk of endless revenge within the community” (*VS* 299).

When Easterner and Cowboy marvel at the “light” sentence meted to Swede’s murderer, they reflect the community’s virtual acceptance of how

normal the killing of foreigners was. "I feel sorry for that gambler," Easterner says, to which Cowboy replies, "Oh, so do I. . . . He don't deserve none of it for killin' who he did" (Ch. IX). Theirs are comments by Crane regarding frontier "justice" that reveal his path to sacrifice. They reinforce Girard's three stages of ritual dynamism: 1) identification (all Americans connect unambiguously to immigrants), 2) differentiation based on those "absolute givens . . . incontestable facts" (*TH* 119), and 3) relieving elimination, with certainty -- of Indians, foreigners, criminals, infidels, the dispossessed and here, allegorically and strangest of all though most artfully, Death.

Analysis

Deep within the individual, as within the religious and cultural systems that fashion the individual, something is hidden, and this is not merely the individual "sin" of modern religiosity or the "complexes" of psychoanalysis. It is invariably a corpse that as it rots spreads its "uncleanness" everywhere.

--René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, 165

Stephen Crane's generation, the first to come of age after God had been declared dead in "Nietzsche's deconstruction of transcendental subjectivity," was an unprecedented, modern "social order not thought to be dominated by a supernatural being" (*TH* 3). Unmolested, in a statement undoubtedly integral to "Realism," Crane's friend and mentor William Dean Howells deadpanned for *Harper's* in 1896, "We know for the present the force which could remove mountains is pretty much gone out of the world. Faith has ceased to be, but we have some lively hopes of electricity."¹⁸ In this milieu, propelled by his *passé* familial religious experience, Crane formed a consistent body of work that contains no deity; it is an imperishable oeuvre focused exclusively on dramatic human representations. In it, no god is accessibly blamed for human failings, metaphysical lashing out not possible. Nor was recourse available for ameliorative succor or moralistic direction. In 1895, while still on palinodic speaking terms with god, Crane wrote an explicit, outraged response to the Biblical threat that "the sins of the fathers shall be visited on the heads of the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Ex. 34:7):

Well, then, I hate Thee, unrighteous picture;

Wicked image, I hate Thee;
 So, strike with Thy vengeance
 The heads of those little men
 Who come blindly.
 It will be a brave thing.

The Black Riders XII (1895)

Like a shaman's, Crane's consequent performative artistic speech was participatory, not supplicative. Reflected glaringly by this antitheism, moreover, is Crane's narcissistic, momentarily enduring self. It appears thereby a microcosm of sacred community, which justifies application of Girard's diachronous, vertical¹⁹ analysis of "ethnological cultures," especially those enacting for purgative purposes consecrated ritual immolation. In "The Blue Hotel" Crane, operating in his godless, non-hieratic or ethnological-seeming, shamanistic environment, created for his now personalized, localized resolution an analogously receptive and humanly vulnerable scapegoat, a dummy-hand alien both genetically and socially whose sacrifice could, for the purpose of resolving disorder, as "conciliatory sign" representatively balance the missing external God, King, Father, Adversarial Twin or Enemy Other to be ritually expunged. Toward that conclusion, it is not necessary to postulate a functional equivalence between social violence and individual death, for as psychoanalyst Girard specified in *Violence and the Sacred*, "Death is nothing more than the worst form of violence that can befall a man" (32). Crane's moribund double is dramatically pre-fixated on violence; his victim's increasingly brutal life and conciliatory death function fleetingly to remove or at least temporarily reprieve an unwanted end, life's ultimate cruelty particularly for a twenty-five year-old of vast creative genius who is "cheated" out of half his lifetime. Far from being a "malevolent transference," furthermore, Crane's secular "victim possesses a life that is death and a death that is life" to him, "a sacralized victim who represents less a loss of life than a return to life"; he is perhaps even a harbinger of "the first outlines of religious transcendence" (*TH* 39, 41). A saintly dedication to Art may, after all, have been Crane's creed, *caritas* its implicit practice. Resigned to his artistic "life of labor and sorrow," he wrote, "I have lost all appetite for victory, as victory is defined by the mob. I will be glad if I can feel on my death-bed that my life has been just and kind according to my ability and that every particle of my little ridiculous stock of eloquence and wisdom has been applied for the benefit of my kind. . . . I do not confront it blithely. I confront it with desperate resolution."²⁰

Crane always acknowledged the existence of larger albeit aleatory cosmic forces, and in the grand scheme of things, his was withal a comparatively “light sentence,” as his finally manned-up Easterner philosophically weighs in this scenario of duplication Crane’s three remaining years. Knowing the rotting outcome, however, his tortured wait, “The entire prelude,” he calls it, may have been for him “a tragedy greater than the tragedy of action” (Ch. VI). Crane was living at Brede Place when “The Blue Hotel” was published, in *The Monster and Other Stories* (1899), at a time when he was *throwing down* manuscripts and picking up bank drafts with rapidity, like a card player who shows his cards and hopefully collects tricks or rakes in pots (cf. epigraph, Crane to Reynolds, 1898). In 1926 H.L. Mencken spoke witness that Crane’s phenomenal celebrity after the publication of his “unprecedented and irresistible” *Red Badge of Courage* caused him to be “bombarded with orders” and “beset by the newspaper syndicates,” requests to which “more often than not he succumbed.” The result, in Mencken’s estimation, was “hurried and third-rate work,” but contradicting Mencken’s recollection and indicative of its salience, of all Crane’s works “The Blue Hotel” as far as we know consumed the most time to completion, perhaps but probably not coincidentally exactly the duration of his murdering gambler’s sentence, noted – this during a period when he was trying to pay down debts and support an overextended social lifestyle for himself and Cora, his common-law wife. (At one point near his tubercular finale, she had to be called home from shopping in *Paris* to attend to his health emergency.) Within about a year, penultimate photographs of emaciated Crane reveal obvious pain telegraphed by what can only be described as a grimace, and in the final one, identified so by Cora, he is sitting, rictus-mask for a face, legs crossed and supporting himself stiff-armed probably because of dire physical distress, the internal violence of metastatic tuberculosis emergent intestinally as a persistent rectal fistula. Conditions such as these can only have sharpened and darkened his “grim finality of mind,” as Alfred Kazin characterized Crane’s normal mental state, his anticipatory physical torment no doubt “greater than the tragedy of action,” the action of June, 1900. He died suffering severely and more deeply in debt than when he began. During his year-plus at Brede Place, he wrote relentlessly in order to lessen it; a time of overdriven work and entertaining, constituting a personal “escalation of the crisis” (TH 25) that are surmised to have accelerated his somatic deterioration and precipitated the end, that sweet and priceless end of torture. Identifying that end with his doomed Swede’s relieving plight is seen here to epitomize a temporary catharsis.

Acronymically, “The Blue Hotel” is TBH, or *TB* Hotel. Crane inarguably designed it so – teleologically or not (see note 7, below) -- as he did “The Black Riders” (*TB*-Riders), “The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky,” “The Open Boat” and *The Badge of Courage* (*TB*-Courage), his original title for “the war book.” These persistently recurrent titular irruptions of *TB*, all published within about five years of the end of Crane’s life, when by 1897 he had already in writing informed William Crane how to go about settling his estate, may of course be coincidental or at least, as was once said, *Freudian*.²¹ We may no longer have to wonder about the origin of Crane’s marvelous poetry in “the bugles of the tempest pealing”: it sounds now even more operatic than before. (“Bugles” *sans* article suffices.)

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Notes

¹ Crane understood the idea of valuable alignments or clusterings that cannot contain naturally "like" pairs – e.g. flushes, straights and straight flushes, poker's highest hands. Nor could he have missed the facts that natural pairs, like Pat and Johnnie Scully, are alike only nominally, that other groupings and circumstances "trump" even four of a kind or flushes; the not coincidental presence of Scully's wife and two daughters completes a flush of five Scullys, e.g., and Pat Scully's political sense of social fairness and business ethics are an alignment or organizing principle that overpowers his familial obligation, his genetic "likeness" to Johnnie and the other Scullys at the Palace Hotel. It is not beyond imagining that Crane's marvelous metaphor machine may even have conceived extraordinarily of Scully's wife and daughters, completing a five-card "hand," a quincunx of Scullys, as "hole cards."

² René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford UP 1987), cited throughout as *TH*; Crane's letter to Reynolds in R.W. Stallman, *Stephen Crane: an Omnibus* ([1947] London: Heinemann n.d.), pp. 677-78; High Five: R.F. Foster, *Foster's Complete Hoyle* (Philadelphia: Lippincott 1953), p. 286.

³ James Ellis, "The Game of High-Five in 'The Blue Hotel,'" *American Literature* Vol. 39, No. 3 (Nov. 1977) p. 440 (jstor.org/stable/2924995). So compelling thematically is the cards-gaming metaphor to "The Blue Hotel" that Ellis projects it, misconstruing the meeting of four men at Crane's anonymous climactic saloon as a card game interrupted by his Swede, while it is only an informal assembly of unspecified content.

⁴ H.L. Mencken, "Introduction," *The Works of Stephen Crane*, ed. Wilson Follett ([1926] New York: Russell & Russell 1963), Vol. X, *xii*; John Berryman, *Stephen Crane: A Critical Biography* ([1950] London: Macmillan 1977), p. 214; Willa Cather: "When I knew Stephen Crane," *The Library* (Pittsburgh, June 23, 1900) I:1718; Crane to Crouse: *Stephen Crane's Love Letters to Nellie Crouse*, eds. Edwin H. Cady and Lester G. Wells (Syracuse University Press 1954), p. 52; Ellis, "The Game of High-Five in 'The Blue Hotel,'" pp. 440-441. Quotes from "The Blue Hotel": *Great Short Works of Stephen Crane*, Intro J. Colvert (New York: Harper & Row 1968), pp. 325-354; to facilitate reference, chapter headings rather than page numbers are used.

⁵ Crane's existential immediacy prompted his identification with *le Symbolisme*, one of the icons of which is his contemporary Paul Gauguin's naïve-seeming, thematic *What are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going?* (1895, Boston Museum of Fine Arts). Crane was as visually oriented and philosophical as Gauguin.

⁶ Beyond the scope of this paper is the possibility of viewing all of Crane's name-effaced fictive main characters as faceted self-representations. In Crane's phenomenological, demythified universe, such characterizations parallel Girard's description of godless Shamanism: "a theatrical performance in which one actor plays all the roles at once. The lead role . . . clearly that of commander in chief of the forces of Good . . ." (VS 286). In his brief studies at Syracuse and Lafayette, Crane may have been exposed to Shakespeare's metaphor

of authorial characterization in *Richard II*: "I cannot do it. Yet I'll hammer it out. / My brain I'll prove the female of my soul, / My soul the father, and these two beget / A generation of still-breeding thoughts, / And these same thoughts people this little world / In humors like the people of this world, / For no thought is contented. . . . Thus play I in one person many people" (V.5.5-11, 31). *The Tragedy of King Richard II*, ed. R.T. Petersson, (Yale UP 1964), pp.119-120. At Lafayette, where Francis A. March, America's first professor of English Literature taught from 1855-1906, one of the two courses Crane passed was Elocution, which may have required such recitation. March believed in "dwelling line by line and word by word" on Shakespeare. Information provided by Diane W. Shaw, Lafayette College Archivist, in personal communication.

⁷ R.W. Stallman, "Stephen Crane: A Revaluation," *Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction 1920-1951*, selected by John W. Aldridge (New York: Ronald Press 1952), p. 266.

⁸ For meanings ascribed to Crane's "idiosyncratic naming praxis" as performative speech acts, see Anthony Splendora, "Crane, the Train, and Pat Scully," *Stephen Crane Studies* Vol. 21, No. 3 (Spring-Fall 2012); and John Clendenning, "Prat Falls: A Revisionist Reading of 'The Clan of No-Name,'" *Stephen Crane Studies* Vol. 9, No. 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 2-8.

⁹ Anthony Giddens, "Modernism and Postmodernism," *New German Critique* Vol. 22 (1981), p. 15

¹⁰ Objectifying mind has historically viewed its somatic carrier, even its own workings, as foreign. Authorial alterity was personalized by Crane's contemporary Arthur Rimbaud, who confessed, "*Je est un autre*." Reflexive reification's pedigree begins in St. Francis reifying his materiality as "Brother Ass."

¹¹ A rotten melon's insides look exactly like human lungs in the advanced stages of tuberculosis.

¹² James B. Colvert viewed Crane's "little man" of *The Sullivan County Sketches* in precisely this light, as in effect an embryonic Swede: "The little man is fond of melodramatic, self-assertive postures and resounding oratory celebrating his courage and other virtues, a demeanor which masks an almost hysterical fear and dread of what he takes to be the dark powers of the [unknown]." Colvert, "Stephen Crane: Style as Invention" in *Stephen Crane in Transition: Centenary Essays*, ed. Joseph Katz (Northern Illinois UP 1972), p. 132.

¹³ In fullest articulation, Girard's theory of reparative mimetic sacrifice requires this extension, mapping Crane as surrogate victim – standing in diachronously for mankind not as a "little man" but as "little Man" -- while his Swede is a sacrificial victim, the one simultaneously dispatched. The surrogate victim (here Crane) "serves as a substitute for all the members of the community . . . protecting [them] from their respective violence" (VS 101-102). Caritas (nascent in Maggie as pathos or sympathy) is implicit in this universality; without it the "triumph of capitalism" America of Crane's late nineteenth century would have seemed merely a Darwinian gambling casino.

¹⁴ "Vanishing and disappearing": Crane to Ripley Hitchcock, 15 March 1896, in *The Correspondence of Stephen Crane*, eds. Stanley Wertheim and Paul Sorrentino (New York: Columbia UP 1988) I: 213; Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow trans. and ed., (New York: Pantheon 1984), pp. 102-103; Berryman, *Stephen Crane*, p. 58; Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, trans. Susanne K. Langer ([1946] New York: Dover 1953), p. 52 (emphasis added); "infinitely deferred": Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," p. 128, then "intransitively," p. 125 in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern, A Reader*, ed. Seán Burke (Edinburgh University Press 1995). Crane's prescience in constructing such a modern sociological-psychological formation should not startle: his world was post-Darwinian, Freudian, post-Nietzschean, and site of the golden age of

Anthropology; his prodigal engagement with it produced at least two immortal novels and two matchless short stories, plus a mass of highly interesting lesser work. He cannot be gain-said. For biographical support of Crane's aesthetic formations as alterities cf. Anthony Splendor, Book Review of Paul Sorrentino's *Stephen Crane: A Life of Fire* (2014), in *The Humanist* Vol. 75, No. 4 (July-August 2015) pp. 66-67

¹⁵ Sacrifice and violence initiate with differentiation. In literature, cf. Claggert's "choosing" Billy in Melville's *Billy Budd*: "Jemmy Legs is down on you," the Dansker matter-of-factly alerts innocent, Christ-like Billy; and Moby Dick's monstrous Ahab, progressively differentiated from his crew and the *Pequod's* Quaker owners, is not only motivated by one, but metaphorically redoubled with sundry forms of obsessive perversity/madness. In recent film, differentiation drives the plot of *Mystic River* (Warner Brothers 2003, from the novel by Dennis Lehane, 2000): Dave Boyle, estranged involuntarily from his mates when eleven years old, not only becomes in adulthood the focus of their suspicion and rage, but manifests the definitive arc of sacrificial victimology, even falsely, mortally confessing to their capital accusation.

⁹ Stallman objected to this denouement, citing it as his reason for not including "The Blue Hotel" among Crane's "best." Short-focused formalistically on the victim of ironic, simple murder as an absolute sign, for Stallman the story ends with Swede's final "grotesque" sensory registration. In semiotic terms, he mistook the ungrammatical (isolated) sign for the signified. But Crane obviously viewed narrative figuration itself as his signifier, meanings arising from it the signified, its facts sustaining extended analogy. R.W. Stallman, *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, pp 481-483. Another formalist, James T. Cox, saw "The Blue Hotel" composed "not as pieces" but "as connotatively associated parts of an elaborately contrived symbolic substructure" (i.e. allegory): Cox, "Stephen Crane as Symbolic Naturalist," *Modern Fiction Studies*, 3, No. 2 (Summer 1957), p. 148.

¹⁷ René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, pp. 37, 21, 24, 49, 79. Unanswered is an epistemological question: was Crane somehow dancing to postmodernist music as we now hear it? An analogy: As an undergraduate, I once raised in Leo Steinberg's forensic Art History class the possibility that someone might have asked Picasso directly what he was trying to accomplish with his revolutionary Modernist work, *Les Femmes d'Alger* in particular. Professor Steinberg patiently responded that Picasso would probably have said he was expressing himself using paint and canvas, but would certainly not have replied in terms of art-critical theory that arose *ex post facto*.

Quoted *infra* is René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP 1977), cited herein as VS.

¹⁸ Seán Burke, "Reconstructing the Author," *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern, A Reader*, Seán Burke, ed., (Edinburgh University Press 1995), xxv; Howells, *My Mark Twain: Reminiscences and Criticisms*, ed. Marilyn Austin Baldwin (Louisiana State UP 1967), p. 134.

¹⁹ vertical = infra-sociological-psychological, not synchronically, interpersonally horizontal-structural.

²⁰ Crane to Crouse, Jan., 1896, in *The Love Letters of Stephen Crane to Nellie Crouse*, eds. Edwin H. Cady and Lester G. Wells (Syracuse UP 1954), p. 43.

²¹ Mencken, "Introduction," *The Works of Stephen Crane*, Vol. X, x, xii; Alfred Kazin, "American Fin de Siècle," *On Native Grounds*, (Garden City: Doubleday 1955), p. 48; "settling his estate": Crane to William Crane, 29 October 1897, in Stallman, *Omnibus*, pp. 661-65.