

## *Henry James and Stephen Crane James, Crane, and Psychological Varieties of Fear and Terror*

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The paper deals with the psychological vanities of fear and terror presented in the short stories of James and Crane, stressing mainly James' *The Beast in the Jungle*, and Crane's "The Blue Hotel". It illustrates the massive handling of fear and terror, particularly as regards the closing agony and frustration of John Marcher and the death of the obsessed Swede, a stranger at Fort Romper, Nebraska.

Broadly speaking, the theme of James' fiction is the search of the individual for his identity. His characters test themselves through their encounter with the world, and thus learn their mistakes and their motives as well. Therefore, the typical James story is an attempt to imagine and analyze the whole complicated truth about a single situation<sup>(1)</sup>.

In "The Beast in the Jungle", the entire development is focused

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(1) Donald Henry and Lenthal Downs, Recent American Literature (New York: Barren's Educations Series Inc., 1973), p. 360.

to illustrate the main theme: John Marcher is waiting the worst of all imaginable things to happen to him. Hence, the beast in the jungle is the horrible fate awaiting John Marcher. All these fabrications are drawn out of his mind; however, the story shows very closely that he lives in an uninhabited and desolate wilderness, devoid of emotion and passion; therefore, his fear of the Beast is his fear of life itself, especially the dangers of life's passions, emotional entanglement and experiences<sup>(2)</sup>.

James shows in his story "The Beast in the Jungle" a man who is over-civilized, over-sensitive, and too timid to meet life on its terms, too proud to submit to passion and emotion:

*No passions had ever touched him, for this -was what passion meant; The sight that had just met his eyes named to him, as in letters of quick flame, something he had utterly missed, and what he had missed, made those things a train of fire, made them mark themselves in an anguish of inward<sup>(3)</sup> throbs.*

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(2) Charles G. Hoffman, *The Short Novels of Henry James* (New York: Bookman Associates. 1957), pp.99-100).

(3) Brooks, Lewis and Warren, eds., *American Literature*. Vol.11 (New York: St. Martin Press, 1973), p.1442.

John Marcher is obsessed with the question of his identity; not that he is seeking to determine just what kind of inner nature he has, but he believes that he is a very special being, destined for an unusual, if not indeed, a unique fate. And only tragedy can shatter his world to let him build a new one. However, Marcher is not a philosopher; he is, likewise, not a psychologist. Instead, he is possessed by a feeling that something much larger must be in store for him. Therefore, we need not go to abnormal psychology to realize that a mind can withdraw from the world outside and construct a dream - or a nightmare. The normal man who is seriously introspective, according to some psychologists, sometimes feels himself alone and preoccupied with his own isolated being<sup>(4)</sup>.

Each of the six sections of "The Beast in the Jungle" contains at least one dramatized scene to display the progressive stages of Marcher's obsession of fear. The scenes dramatize these stages through increasingly tense conversation between John Marcher and May Bartram, except the last scene in which Marcher faces the Beast alone after Bartram's death. Her death brings a sudden recognition; a change from a tormented questionnaire to a stoical acceptance: "Whatever had happened - well, had happened". In this new state of mind, Marcher begins to visit regularly May Bartram's grave. The wilderness of tombs has now

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(4)Walter F. Wright, The Madness of Art, (Lincoln, University of Nebraska, 1962), p. 193.

become the garden of death<sup>(5)</sup>.

As we see, the main point is not only Marcher's inability to do anything, but his inability to see anything except as he finally does see. And this, as mentioned before, is attributed to his over-sensitive nature which makes him too timid to face life on its terms. At the end of the story, we see layer after layer of his ignorance removed; the whole background of the emptiness of his life reflected, until he stands alone face to face before himself:

*This horror of waking - this was knowledge - knowledge under the breath of which the very tears in his eyes, seemed to freeze. Through them, he tried to fix it and hold it; he kept it before him so that he might feel the pain. That at last, belated and bitter had something of the task of life. But the bitterness suddenly sickened him, and it was as if, horribly, he saw in the truth, in the cruelty of his image, what had been appointed and done. He saw the Jungle of his life and saw the lurking Beast, then, while he looked, perceived it, and as by a stir of the air, huge and hideous<sup>(6)</sup>.*

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(5) Krishna Bolder Veinl, Technique in the Tales of Henry James (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), p.229.

(6) Brooks, Lewis, and Warren, eds., p. 1445.

The elements of fear and terror pervade also the whole story of Crane's "The Blue Hotel", and as a motivating force it determines the behavior of the two alien guests in the Nebraska hotel. Nevertheless, in considering these two characters more closely, the Swede's fear is primitive and obscure; it is not comprehended by either himself or the Nebraska with whom he comes into conflict. The terror inspired by the violent and dangerous (as he imagines) society into which he has precipitated himself serves to set him against this society and insulate him from human sympathy<sup>(7)</sup>.

The fear of the correspondent is more subtle and complicated; it is rooted in an acute perception of his relation to man and nature. For this reason, it does not insulate him from his kind, as does the Swede's terror, but rather provides a basis for a projection of consciousness which enables him to identify himself with other individuals and thus to experience a compassionate understanding of his fellows at the time he fears them in combination. He, in contrast to the other characters, recognizes that man is alien, both in nature and society. Knowing the truth of the Swede's charge of dishonesty, he does not, for fear of consequences, dare to expose it during the crisis preceding the fight when the antagonists are in the grip of primitive emotions. However, he accepts his society in the hotel and comes to terms with it

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(7) Walter Scutter, "From Fear and Pity in The Blue Hotel" *American Quarterly*, Spring 1952, p.74.

as the Swede cannot<sup>(8)</sup>.

In the opening scenes of "The Blue Hotel", the Swede is possessed by fear, certain he is to be killed. The amazing point is that Crane's Swede gains confidence through the exhilaration of whiskey and his beauty of Johnnie, and these influences, I think, pave the way for his death. For example, the grim comment of the cash register over his corpse, "This registers the amount of your purchase," indicates his killing to have been the unavoidable effect of events begun that night.

The death of the Swede acquire its terror from the fact that no one is responsible for it. The callousness of society and of nature to human life makes his murder as impersonal as that of Hemingway's Ole Anderson, whose assassins do not even know him<sup>(9)</sup>. The men in "The Blue Hotel" and the Pollywog club are characterized not by malice or revengefulness, but by mere indifference. Each responds to the Swede's queer behaviour according to the normal inclination of his nature: Old Scully is business-minded his son is irascible; the cowboy is boisterous and stupid; the Easterner cautious; and the gambler aloof. Therefore, as we see, none of the killers has motive or knowledge. The Swede, whose sole knowledge or sole acquaintance with the West has been through cheap novels; expects to be killed. Hence, the others

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(8) Ibid., pp.78-79.

(9) J. A. Ward, "The Blue Hotel and the Killers", College English Association. CEA. Sept. 1959, pp.1-4.

scorn his position. But how are we to view the Easterner's final word? How to reconcile it with the "First ending?" Here is his speech:

*Johnnie was cheating. I saw him. I know it. I saw him. And I refused to stand up and be a man. I let the Swede fight it out alone. And you, you were simply puffing around the place and waiting to fight. And then Old Scully himself! We are all in it! This poor gambler isn 't even a noun. He is a kind of an adverb.<sup>(10)</sup>*

Up to this point, Crane has very effectively demonstrated the folly of man's existence in this malevolently indifferent universe, and the folly of his moral pretensions. Here, he shows man's fallibility in interpreting his existence, for the Easterner's speech is swollen with self-importance and self-truth. What could the Easterner have done by standing up for the Swede that the Swede had not done for himself by whipping Johnnie? Even if Old Scully had not given the Swede whisky and thus made him belligerent, his fear might have led to the same end<sup>(11)</sup>.

As for the final conclusion, Crane has a comment on the event:

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(10) Brook, Lewis and Warren, eds., p. 1684.

(11) Stemlg B. Greenfield, "From the Unmistakable" Stephen Crane, Modern Language Association of American PMLA, Dec. 1958, pp.565-566.

*Every sin is the result of a collaboration. We, five of us, have collaborated in the murder of this Swede. Usually there are from a dozen to forty women really involved in every murder, but in this case, it seems to be only Firemen — You, I, Johnnie, Old Scully; and that Fool, the fortunate gambler who came merely as a culmination, and gets all the punishment<sup>(12)</sup>.*

"gentlemen", he says at one point, "I suppose I am going to be skilled before I leave this house!" This expression shows that he is a stranger in a world which gives his scale of values no meaning beyond a limited and imperfect social context. However, Crane's final emphasis is on society's responsibility for the fate of the individual<sup>(13)</sup>.

To sum up, Henry James in "The Beast in the Jungle" has analyzed the human self represented by John Marcher, who is obsessed by fear; something bad is waiting for him. In fact, he is afraid of himself, of his being as a human being. This search for identity culminates at the end in the death of May Bartrom, which gives him a sudden recognition, a charge from a tormented inquirer to a stoical acceptor.

As for Crane's "The Blue Hotel" he gives us almost a similar story, but with different dimensions. The Swede is also obsessed by fear that he will be killed; nevertheless, Crane, here, stresses the responsibility of the indifferent society for the fate of the individual.

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(12) Brooks, Lewis and Warren, eds., p. 1985.

(13) Charles Child Walscutt, *American Literary Naturalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), pp. 72-75.

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## ملخص

هنري جيمس وستيفن كرين والحالات النفسية

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تناول البحث تحليلاً نقدياً لقصتين قصيرتين، الأولى للكاتب هنري جيمس "الوحش في الغابة"، والثانية للكاتب ستيفن كرين "الفندق الأزرق". وكلتا القصتين تقدم أشكالاً عديدة من الخوف النفسي والرعب الذي يسيطر على كلا البطلين في القصتين، كما أن البحث يسلط الضوء على أعماق النفس البشرية بما فيها من أسرار وغموض.

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