

A SAMPLE CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF
“THE BLUE HOTEL” BY STEPHEN CRANE AND
“THE NIGGER OF THE ‘NARCISSUS’” BY JOSEPH CONRAD

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The purpose of the present paper is to show the striking similarities between “The Blue Hotel” by Stephen Crane and “The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’” by Joseph Conrad. There seems to exist a close dialogue between the two stories, published over a short period of time, in the late 1898 and 1897 respectively.

The relationship between Crane and Conrad begins in October 1897, shortly before the two publications, when the first was introduced to the latter by S. S. Pawling of the publishing company of William Heinemann (Beer 1923). Conrad records that towards the evening they “parted with just a handshake and a goodnight” no more – without making any arrangements for meeting again, as though we had lived in the same town from childhood and were sure to run across each other next day. It struck me [Conrad] directly I left him that we had not even exchanged addresses: but I was not uneasy. Sure enough, before the month was out there arrived a postcard /from Ravensbrook/ whether he might come to see us” (Stallman, Gilkes 1960). From the very first day they were bound to be friends.

Conrad continued to be Crane’s friend till Crane’s early death. Notably, as Crane’s letters testify, he would often present himself as an inferior writer, even though it was generally thought, and not quite groundlessly, that Conrad put the *seal of authority* on Crane’s writing. But still it must be noted that Conrad would often be interested to know Crane’s opinions of his own work. When “Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’” appeared in Henley’s *New Review* in 1897, Conrad, already familiar with *The Red Badge of Courage*, considered Crane as “eminently fit to pronounce judgement on my first consciously planned attempt to render the truth of a phase of life in the terms of my own temperament with all the sincerity of which I was capable” (Beer 1923: 211). Crane, having read the story serially in the *New Review*, wrote Conrad on November 11:

The book is simply great. The simple treatment of the death of Waite is too good, too terrible. I wanted to forget it at once. It caught me very hard. I felt ill over that red thread lining from the corner of the man's mouth to his chin. It was frightful with the weight of a real and present death. By such small means does the real writer suddenly flash out in the sky above those who are always doing rather well (Stallman, Gilkes 1960: 149-150).

Conrad was glad Crane liked the story, of which he informed Crane on the 16th. From the same letter it can be seen that Conrad did not expect mere flattery but was seriously interested in Crane's opinion on different aspects of "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'". Conrad writes:

I was anxious to know what you would think of the end [...]. I mean after the death. All that rigmarole about the burial and the ship's coming home seems to run away into a rat's tail – thin at the end. Well! It's too late now to bite my thumbs and tear my hair. When I feel depressed about it I say to myself: "Crane likes the damned thing" – and I am greatly consoled [...] I ask myself whether you meant half of what you said!" (Stallman, Gilkes 1960: 151)

Probably Crane did mean what he said about the Nigger because not much later he would defend Conrad against critical response to it. Late in December he quarrelled with Frederick over Conrad's work. Beer reports that Crane crashed his revolver down upon a dessert plate and yelled: "You and I and Kipling couldn't have written the Nigger!" (Beer 1923: 330) This incident followed an unsigned, unfavourable review of "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'" in the *Saturday Review*, written by Frederick. As "The Blue Hotel" shows, published in 1899 in a volume *The Monster and Other Stories*, Crane, consciously or not, employed Conrad's theme in writing his own story.

Of course Stephen Crane and Joseph Conrad are not linked by mere ideas for their works. In fact, Crane's artistic credo is not very different from that of Conrad. In a letter to John Northern Hilliard Crane writes that:

a man is born into the world with his own pair of eyes, and he is not at all responsible for his vision – he is merely responsible for the quality of personal honesty. To keep close to this personal honesty is my supreme ambition [...] A man is sure to fail at it, but there is something in the failure (Stallman, Gilkes 1960: 110).

The very same dictum forms part of Conrad's aesthetic credo.

Both Crane and Conrad aimed at conciliating objective reality with subjective vision; in both cases, the final meaning and the total effect as to be achieved by reproducing the process of perception and discovery; each "moment of vision" led to the revelation of a certain truth (Conrad 1897).

Stephen Crane's fiction seems indeed to conform to the new principles of impressionistic writing which were being developed at the time in England by a group of writers including Conrad. The best definition of its aims can indeed be found

in Conrad's well-known preface to "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'". Fiction, Conrad wrote,

if it at all aspires to be art – appeals to temperament [...] Such an appeal to be effective must be an impression conveyed through the senses [...] All art, therefore, appeals primarily to the senses, and the artistic aim when expressing itself in written words must also make its appeal through the senses [...] It must strenuously aspire to the plasticity of sculpture, to the colour of painting, and to the magic suggestiveness of music – which is the art of all arts (Conrad 1897).

The writer's task is to render and convey to the reader the sense impressions, to capture the fleeting image of life in order to reveal its underlying secret.

In Crane, too, the truth of life is revealed in the "moment of vision" constantly repeated. If art, as Conrad maintained, could be defined as "a single minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe" (Conrad 1897), this was indeed Crane's achievement; Crane too was trying to bring to light the truth underlying its aspects, its form, its colours, its lights and shadows – as Conrad had required in the same preface.

Disregarding Conrad's opinion that Crane was "the only impressionist and only an impressionist" (Stallman, Gilkes 1960: 155), which, of course, would not be wholly true from the present perspective, it is still notable that they did share in their fiction a variety of artistic techniques, as will be seen from the present analysis.

"The Blue Hotel" by Stephen Crane and "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'" by Joseph Conrad are here compared on two different levels. On the one hand they display a similarity in their subject matter, and on the other, they show a similarity in their author's use of imagery. Let us begin with the latter.

The action of Crane's story largely takes place at a hotel which was painted in a light *blue*, "a shade that is on the legs of a kind of a heron, causing the bird to declare its position against any background" (Crane 1965 [1898]).¹ The colour blue of the hotel signifies *alienation, standing out from, insignificance* in the universe, which brings the men inside close to the seamen on board 'The Narcissus' who "as *common* mortals led their busy, *insignificant* lives" (Conrad 1967 [1897]).² The hotel is situated on a plain which reminds us of the sea in Conrad; outside there is a *raging storm*, parallel to the storm in "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'". As a matter of fact, in Crane, a storm is a *sea*, "a *turmoiling sea of snow*" (BH 183). Crane himself uses a number of nautical terms in his metaphors which prove this association fully justified. The Swede in Crane's story, "tightly gripping his valise, tacked across the face of the storm as if he carried *sails*" (BH 204). To leave the hotel means here to plunge "into the tempest as into a *sea*" (BH 197). Moreover, bearing in mind that in Crane a storm is a *turmoiling sea of snow*, it

¹ All quotations from "The Blue Hotel", marked henceforth BH, as in *Great Short Works of Stephen Crane* published by Harper and Row, Publishers, New York 1965. All italics mine.

² All quotations from "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'", marked henceforth NN, as in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' and other Tales* published by Oxford University Press, London 1967. All italics mine.

is notable that in Conrad “the white sails of ‘The Narcissus’ stood out in dazzling cones as of stainless *snow*” (NN 152), and the ship “struggled upwards over the *snowy ridges* of great running seas” (NN 55).

As readers, we are struck by the will and fury of the blizzard. The effects of the blizzard are again similar to the effects of the violent storm in Conrad. Its power, like the power of Conrad’s sea, ridicules the wraths and pursuits of man, making him insignificant in the universe. In Crane, “the *huge arms* of the wind were making attempts [...] to embrace the *flakes* as they sped” (BH 103). Through a careful selection of words, a deep contrast is here achieved between the powerful *arms* of the wind and the feeble *flakes* at its mercy. Elsewhere we read that “the wind *tore* at the house and some *loose* thing beat regularly against the clap-boards” (BH 186). The word *tear* including the features: *rip* and *destroy* again emphasises the power of the wind which puts in motion something *loose*. The word *loose* in this context bring associations like *detached*, *insecure*, *unsteady*, which once again illustrates the relationship of inequality between the wind and its toys. A similar effect is evoked in Conrad where “a big, *foaming sea* came out of the mist; it made for the ship, *roaring wildly*, and in its rush it looked as *mischievous* and *decomposing* as a madman with an axe” (NN 63). A similar contrast can be seen here, in this case between the *powerful* sea and the *feeble* ship. The seamen “looked *wretched* and in a *hopeless* struggle, like *vermin fleeing* before a *flood*” (NN 64) as “the clouds closed up and the world again became a *raging, blind* darkness that *howled, flinging* at the *lonely* ship salt sprays and sleet” (NN 61). The simile: “the seamen [...] like *vermin fleeing* before a *flood*” and especially the juxtaposition *vermin* and *flood* shows that the chances in the struggle are unequal. Moreover, the contrast is brought out in the description of the world. The words *rage*, *howl*, and *fling*, including the features: *violence*, *yell* and *toss*, contrast with the word *lonely* implying *helpless*. Furthermore, both the wind in Crane and the storm in Conrad have a quality of *madness* about them. In Crane this quality shows itself, for example, in the phrase: “some loose thing *beat regularly* against the clap-boards” (BH 186). *Madness* is induced by the *repeatedness* and *purposelessness* of the activity. In Conrad “the ship *tossed about, shaken furiously*, like a *toy* in the hand of a *lunatic*” (NN 59). The quality is also marked by words like *rage* and *blind* containing the feature, and metaphors like the simile: “it looked [...] as a *madman with an axe*” (NN 63). In both cases *madness* is a prominent feature of the elements.

In both works the storm can hinder verbal communication. The cook aboard the ‘Narcissus’, propped by the water cask, “sat to leeward, and *yelled back abundantly*, but the seas were breaking in just then, and we *only caught snatches* that sounded like: “Providence” and “born again”” (NN 69). The wind in Crane “*tore the words* from Scully’s lips and *scattered* them far alee” (BH 198), and later we read that “the storm also *seized* the remainder of this sentence” (BH 198), and it was impossible “to *equal* the roar of the storm” (BH 197), and the residents of the hotel were forced to approach the blizzard outside with respect. In Conrad alike, “in all that crowd of cold and hungry men, *not a voice* was heard” (NN 67). The sailors “were *mute*, and in sombre thoughtfulness listened to the horrible im-

precations of the gale” (NN 67) as it was “*no good bein’ angry* with the winds of heaven” (NN 59).

The realities outside the hotel and aboard the ‘Narcissus’ are also reflected within the hotel and aboard the ship. The word *fort* present in the place name “Fort Romper” includes the semantic components: *warfare*, *strategy*, *defence*, *fighting*, *violence*, and as such, it hints right at the beginning of the story that the hotel is not going to be a quiet and cosy one, like no sailor can expect to find shelter in the confines of his cabin while there is a raging storm outside. In both Crane and Conrad an element of *tumult* is strongly present. In Conrad this fact could be fully illustrated and justified solely on the literal level but it is surprising that the inside of the hotel should not be free of *tumult*. And yet the stove inside the room of the hotel “was humming with *godlike violence*” (BH 182). In the room where Johnnie and the farmer are “*quarrelling*”, there is “*impatience*” and “*irritation*”, and with “a *loud flourish* of words Scully *destroyed* the game of cards” (BH 182). Crane’s language here is very intense, the words *quarrelling*, *impatience* and *irritation* bring associations of *strong emotion*, *anger*, *displeasure* and *antagonism*. A “*flourish*” alike contains the features *intense* and *dramatic*, and when Scully comes upon the scene he does not *stop* their gambling himself, but “*destroys*” the game and “*bustles*” his son upstairs (BH 182); both words contain *intense* and *dramatic*. *Destroy* again, seems to be a carefully chosen word which contains the features *force* and *power* – it implies complete destruction and excessive behaviour using more violence than is presumably needed. Expressions applicable to describe a war are frequent in the story, for example: “a plan seemed to *strike* him” (BH 189), “laughing *bravely*” (BH 182), “for a moment their glances crossed like *blades*” (BH 194). In Conrad, too, an atmosphere of tension is created, here on board the ship, and it lasts even while the sea is calm. Wait’s cough is described to be “*metallic*” and “*tremendously loud*”, resounding like “*explosions*” (NN 25) and his voice make “all the saucepans *ring*” (NN 100), and Mr Baker grunts in a manner “*bloodthirsty* and *innocuous*” (NN 38). Belfast is constantly ready for a *fight*, Donkin answers in “*hissing whispers*” (NN 47), doors *slam*, and men *snap* at one another. Towards the end of the story Donkin can feel “the *fatal antagonism* of all the surrounding existences” (NN 157), and has a desire “to *break*, to *crush*; to be *even* with everybody for everything; to *tear* the veil, *unmask*, *expose*, leave *no refuge*” (NN 157). Wait stands “*battling* single-handed with a *legion* of nameless terrors” (NN 125), the sails “keep on rattling like a *discharge of musketry*” (NN 131) and even a biscuit “flung at Jimmy’s head” strikes “with a *loud crack* the bulkhead beyond” bursting “like a *hand-grenade* into flying pieces” (NN 159). James Wait falls back on the pillow “as if *wounded mortally*” (NN 159). The use of expressions containing the features *tumult* and *military* in the two stories signal mutually that *life is a war*.

Furthermore, in both stories, a dialogue on the theme of *game* is clearly observable. The arrival of the Swede at “The Blue Hotel” is followed by a game of cards. The game is foretold in the story by the word *romper* in the place name “Fort Romper” which includes the features *play* and *winning* as well as *boisterous* and *tumult*. At the game the Swede suddenly realises that he is being cheated. On this realisation he gradually begins to believe that he is going to be killed. At first

he merely remarks: "Oh, I see you are all against me" (BH 185) and finally quavers: "Gentlemen, I suppose I am going to be killed before I can leave this house!" (BH 186) James Wait as he enlists aboard the 'Narcissus' also enters a kind of game. He poses as a very ill person hoping to find a comfortable and quiet place for the time of the voyage. That he is only shamming ill we may suspect from the fact that he only coughs "when it best *suits* him" (NN 25), as one of the crew members observes, and that one of his first question concerning the organisation on the ship relates to food: "Is your cook a coloured gentleman?" (NN 25) Captain Allistoun tells Jimmy: "There's nothing the matter with you, but you choose to lie-up to please yourself" (NN 126). As at the beginning of the voyage he may have been only pretending to be terminally ill, halfway through the story he already believes that he is actually going to die before the ship reaches land, like Crane's Swede believes he is going to be killed before he can leave the hotel. Like in the case of the Swede, Jim accuses the other sailors of the intention to poison him: "*You would poison me!*" (NN 44) he shouts.

The Swede's and Jim Wait's deaths seem inevitable as they are signalled in the language of the two stories. In "The Blue Hotel" we read that the Swede has "two spots brightly *crimson*" (BH 188) on his cheeks to forewarn us that he is doomed to die, and there is a *red* light outside the saloon where he is eventually killed. Moreover, he has "*deathly* pale cheeks" (BH 188) and his teeth "showed like a *dead* man's" (BH 189). Scully declares Johnnie whipped in "the tone of the most simple and *deadly* announcements" (BH 201). And then we read that Johnnie "*buried* his face in his arms" (BH 201), and later they bore Johnnie away "as you would carry a *corpse*" (BH 202). There are also expressions implying ghostly and spiritual matters, such as: "he (The Swede) was like a *demoniac*" (BH 196) or "some loose thing beat regularly [...] like a *spirit* tapping" (BH 186). The Swede commenting on how he almost killed Johnnie says: "I *thumped the soul out* of the man" (BH 205). "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'" also contains the figure *death*. James Wait's first fit of coughing, symptoms of his illness, resounds in the fore-castle "like two explosions in a *vault*" (NN 25). Trapped in his cabin during the storm, Wait is heard "screaming and knocking below us with the hurry of a man prematurely shut up in a *coffin*" (NN 72). And the Wait was "as quiet as a *dead* man inside a *grave*" (NN 72) and the sailors were "like a lot of drunken men embarrassed with a stolen *corpse*" (NN 78). As they rescued Jimmy, the sun was setting, "an enormous, unclouded and *red*" (NN 81), and the sky had "the *purple* stain of the high land" (NN 102). The sailors, "like men standing above a *grave*" were "on the verge of tears" (NN 120). The image of death is also resident on the fore-castle itself: "The double row of berths yawned *black*, like *graves* tenanted by *uneasy corpses*" (NN 28), and there was "a leg hung over the edge very white and *lifeless*" (NN 28). The bodies of the crew were lost in the gloom of the berths "that resembled narrow niches for *coffins* in a whitewashed and lighted *mortuary*" (NN 14). Mr Baker in the dark, on all fours among the dormant men, resembles "some carnivorous animal prowling amongst the *corpses*" (NN 85), and his voice "seemed to break through a *deadly* spell" (NN 91). As Donkin emerges from the cabin in which Jimmy has expired, the image of the grave defines his first impression:

"Sleeping men, huddled under jackets, made on the lighted deck mounds that had the appearance of neglected *graves*" (NN 75). The fore-castle of the 'Narcissus' is once said to be "quiet as a *sepulchre*" (NN 31), and much later we see Singleton looming in the smoky fore-castle "like a statue of heroic size in the gloom of a *crypt*" (NN 135). Inanimate objects are also affected by the contagion, and the image takes on an image of violence and mutilation: "Hung up suits of oilskin swung out and in lively and disquieting like reckless ghosts of *decapitated* seamen dancing in a tempest" (NN 120). The expression "seamen dancing in a tempest" might further suggest that the sailors are involved in *danse macabre*. In "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'" the image of *death* is also becoming more vivid as the story develops; "In the evenings the cleared decks had a reposeful aspect, resembling the *autumn* of the earth" (NN 38), and then "on clear evenings the silent ship, under the cold sheen of the dead moon, took on a false aspect of passionless repose, resembling the *winter* of the earth" (NN 152).

Metaphors evoking religious associations are also present in both "The Blue Hotel" and "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'". Bearing in mind that the room inside the hotel is small, it is remarkable that Scully leads his guests through "the *portals*" (BH 182). The word *portals* would normally not be used in this context as it suggests an entrance of imposing appearance, as to a palace or a temple. As a matter of fact, later on we read that the room "seemed to be merely a proper *temple* for an enormous stove" (BH 182) which is in the centre. The similarity of the stove to an altar is striking. Crane explicitly calls the different procedures that the visitors go through "*ceremonies*" (BH 182), accentuating the features *ritual, religious, sacred*. In Conrad spiritual matters are signalled in the metaphors which generally does not possess such a degree of independence of the figure *death*, but very similar examples can also be found. The fore-castle of the 'Narcissus' is once "quiet as a *cathedral*" (NN 112) and the etiquette of the fore-castle required of the sailors "*ceremonious silence*" (NN 48). The sailors "spoke in low tones within the fo'c'sle as though it had been a *church*" (NN 43). Captain Allistoun rises at night "out of the darkness of the companion, such as a *phantom* above a grave" (NN 37). At the height of the storm a sudden gust catches the men in the rigging and pins "all up the shrouds the whole crawling line in attitudes of *crucifixion*" (NN 62).

There is also a striking similarity between the two stories in the image of *hell*. The room at The Blue Hotel should be heaven in the blizzard, but instead it seems indeed more like hell. Scully himself, with his pointed, stiff ears makes us think of Mephistopheles. He is presented to us as a master of strategy that can "work his *seductions* upon any man that he might see *wavering*, gripsack in hand" (BH 181), as if he were eager to seduce those who are likely to succumb to his temptation, the word *wavering* including the features *indecisive, irresolute, uncertain, uncommitted*. As Scully is "*conducting*" his guests through various procedures, expressions like "conferring *great favours*" (BH 182), "*benevolent*" (BH 182) and "*philanthropic impulse*" (BH 182) are used. Scully appears to be exaggeratedly benign, as if he were treacherously tempting his guests. The stove in the room, as if opposing this attempt, is humming with "*god-like* violence" (BH 182). Many words in the story speak of fire, adding to the image of hell, for example: they

“burnished themselves fiery red” (BH 182), the old farmer frequently addresses “a glowing commonplace to the strangers” (BH 183). Other expressions of the same nature include the following: “ain’t he bold as blazes” (BH 190), “he kept his glance burning with hatred” (BH 190), the Swede “fizzed like a fire-wheel” (BH 193), “as if Scully was going to flame out over the matter” (BH 194). The Easterner says: “but he (the Swede) thinks that he’s right in the middle of hell” (BH 191). Crane’s characters can hear “the wail of the snow as it was flung to its grave in the south” (BH 201). It is remarkable that the ship in Conrad is subject to an attack of the icy wind that is coming from the south, the ship “piling up the South Latitude” (NN 54); the ‘Narcissus’ is approaching the Horn Cape which for many seamen throughout history has become their grave, the place itself given the attributes of hell. Furthermore, Aboard the ‘Narcissus’ there were “sweet scents, a smell of sulphur” red tongues of flames licking a white mist” (NN 122), and the cook exclaims: “Don’t you see the everlasting fire!” (NN 123). At night, the ship “with every sail and every rope distinct and black in the centre of a fiery outburst (was) like a charred ship enclosed in a globe of fire” (NN 110). Jimmy himself is often seen as a devil, “with gleaming eyes” (NN 111), making himself “invisible in the midst of an intense darkness” (NN 111). After the first encounter with the nigger the cook would often say: “The poor fellow had scared me. I thought I had seen the devil” (NN 26). Otherwise he is seen to be a devil’s victim; when Donkin looked at him “he saw him long, lean, dried up, as though all his flesh had shrivelled on his bones in the heat of a white furnace” (NN 156, cf. stove in Crane). A furnace might operate here as a traditional furnishing of hell. Other examples adding to the image of hell include: “the glare of the steaming fore-castle” (NN 21), “a spark of human pity glimmered yet through the infernal fog of his supreme conceit” (NN 21), “lamps [...] shone with a glow like ghosts of some evil moons” (NN 21).

There is also a close dialogue between the two stories on the theme of captivity. In Crane Scully is described as very dominating and compelling. “Scully practically made them prisoners” (BH 182). Expressions containing the feature are frequent in the story; “I think you are tongue-tied” (BH 188), “but he had the step of one hung in chains” (BH 189). Crane continues: “it would be the height of brutality to try to escape” (BH 182) – the word “escape” meaning “get free” at the end of this line further reinforces the prisoner image. In the next line Crane depicts the way the four men walk heavily in a line to towards the hotel: “they trudged off [...] in the wake of the eager little Irishman” (BH 182). To trudge is to walk like prisoners, for example, and in fact: “Scully performed the marvel of catching three men” (182). In Conrad alike, the sailors are said to be “life-long prisoners of the sea” (NN 12). James Wait is made a prisoner in his cabin during a storm and then he is forbidden to enter the fore-castle by Captain Allistoun. On the other hand, virtually all members of the crew are in various extent Wait’s prisoners, as they find Jimmy “blocking” (NN 50) the way – the word “block” contains the semantic features: barrier, blockade, hindrance. The figure is also present in relation to the inanimate world, for example: “The lamps [...] shone on the end of lofty standards with a glow blinding and frigid like captive ghosts” (NN 21).

As can be seen from the above analysis the two works in question are both

marked for the presence of *tumult, violence, oppression, death, hell, captivity and game*, the features which evoke an atmosphere of awe and fear. In both cases the struggle is first of all that of the central characters of the two works. Conrad’s Nigger and Crane’s Swede share a number of features and seem to play a similar function.

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The first impression we get of the Swede and Wait is that they are both gentlemen, refined in manners, but also arrogant towards those who do not meet their requirements of being exactly as they want them to be. Both appear hypersensitive to the imagined dangers around them. The Swede, separated from his environment in the same way as The Blue Hotel stands alone in the blizzard, is obsessed with the imagined dangers of the West. Similarly, James Wait, standing outside the fraternity of seamen (the fact is emphasised by his illness and the colour of his skin) feels himself to be a victim among the sailors who are presented as “the crowd”, “the dark group of mustered men”. In both cases individuality is projected onto socially stable groups, threatening to disintegrate them as a whole. Wait’s refusal to be autonomic, industrious and undivided on board the ship results in tension between him and the majority and so does the Swede’s individualism. In Conrad, Belfast admits that for half a penny he would “knock his ugly black head off” (NN 44), and Singleton sneers: “Are you dying? Well get on with your dying [...], don’t raise a blamed fuss with us over that job. We can’t help you” (NN 49). When Wait is sent back to his cabin by Captain Allistoun, a “burst of laughter followed him... [...]” It was too funny. All hands laughed (NN 52). In Crane, Johnnie says of Wait: “I wish pop would throw him out” (BH 191) and the cowboy says; “I hope we don’t git snowed in, because then we’d have to stand this here man bein’ around with us all the time. That wouldn’t be no good” (BH 191), and Johnnie adds: “It’s awfully funny” (BH 191). In both cases individuality causes miscommunication; in Conrad “nobody could tell what would please our incomprehensible invalid” (NN 46), and in Crane Scully sums up the Swede’s behaviour with the statement: “It’s a muddle” (BH 188), while the cowboy was in a state of “deep stupefaction” (BH 185).

Both the Swede in Crane and James Wait in Conrad are afraid of death that, to their minds, is to become their fate. Ironically, they both get what they were asking for when they least expect it, already feeling safe. The Swede is knived when he feels at home at the radiant bar. In the saloon he subconsciously continues to behave as if he was asking for trouble; for example, he does not agree with the bartender that “the bad night” is bad (BH 205), and at the guests’ polite refusal to have a drink with him he “ruffled out his chest like a rooster” (BH 207). The tone of his voice at this refusal also signals his attitude: “Well, he exploded, it seems I can’t get anybody to drink with me in this town” (BH 207). This vast generalisation here is a clear sign of provocation. As a result the Swede is killed by the gambler, falling “with a cry of supreme astonishment” (BH 207), as if utterly unconscious of his provocation. “The corpse of the Swede, alone in the saloon, had its eyes fixed upon a dreadful legend that dwelt atop of the cash-machine:

"This registers the amount of your purchase"" (BH 208). Similarly, when James Wait begins to feel at home as the ship approaches land, as he thinks of oysters cooked by his girlfriend just the way as he likes, he is virtually killed by Donkin. Before his death Wait feels "untired, calm, and safely withdrawn within himself beyond the reach of every grave incertitude" (NN 157). In this line the features "rest" and "peace" are invoked, but they can hardly be interpreted to describe life on earth, they are rather attributes of death. In the next line Conrad writes that "there was something of the immutable quality of *eternity* in the slow moments of his *complete restfulness*" (NN 157). The word *eternity* signals the *life beyond*, the meaning being reinforced by the phrase *complete restfulness*.

Both Crane and Conrad thematise in their works the subject of split psychological realities. The Swede's and James Wait's struggle in a hostile surrounding is opposed by the subconscious desire to give in. Moreover, both characters are faced with a dual vision of the world. What they believe to be true is opposed to what they actually perceive. The discrepancy between pre-conceived and the actual leaves the characters in a maze, fighting single-handedly to defend the original conceits of their minds.

And finally, in both works the question of responsibility for an individual is raised. In Crane, the men at The Blue Hotel fail to live up to this responsibility and so the Swede must die, and in Conrad, the sailors, obeying the rules of the sea, can hardly accept those of Wait's. But still, in both cases, the groups are not indifferent to the fate of the individuals and are led to reflect on their attitudes in contact with the Swede and Wait.

It is remarkable that these two stories, written on two different continents, should be so strikingly convergent in their imagery and subject matter, as can be observed from the above sample analysis. Other links have been mentioned by critics – personally, I would mention Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900) and Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) as particularly interesting – *but nowhere else is the convergence more conspicuous than in the works discussed above.*

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