Journalistic Critique through Parody in Stephen Crane's "An Experiment in Misery"

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Abstract: This article considers Stephen Crane's 1894 *New York Press* publication "An Experiment in Misery" as both an example and critique of immersion-style "experiment" writing that was common at the time. Contrary to several interpretations, I view the sketch under the rubric of parody: a creative repurposing of an established genre with the goal of both celebrating the genre's strengths and exposing its weaknesses. This article first describes the ways in which Crane's text fits the genre then analyzes the ironic narrative distance that signals the presence of parody. The text ultimately offers a journalistic meta-critique by replicating and lampooning common acts of journalistic practice, such as the use of an exemplar to stand in for an entire class, the expectation that the lives of the poor can be easily observed, and the presumption that insight gained through experience could be adequately transmitted to a middle-class readership

From his classic war novel *The Red Badge of Courage* to his short stories, Stephen Crane's fiction is characterized by a fierce economy of style, an innovative use of imagery, and an iconoclastic take on narrative conceit. In addition to his fiction works, his journalism has likewise gained attention for its vividness, its fresh treatment of new themes, and its bold use of imagery to estrange everyday sensations and describe them anew for readers. However, despite the general acknowledgement of his artistic achievement, literary analysis has been unevenly applied to Crane's journalism as compared to his fiction, especially in terms of the use of parody. For example, in his monograph *Stephen Crane: From Parody to Realism*, Eric Solomon only briefly mentions Crane's journalism, and only to point out that it contains much more straightforward social critique than his fiction.[1] This particular blind

spot regarding Crane's nonfiction reflects the strict division between journalism and fiction common to many contemporary readings of Crane's work.

Viewing Crane's work from the perspective of literary journalism offers a way out of this limiting binary, while revealing a new interpretation of the artistic and social significance of his newspaper pieces. Rather than falling into either a "fact" or "fiction" category, Michael Robertson describes Crane's work as fitting into a more fluid "fact-fiction discourse" common in the 1890s.[2] Likewise, Thomas Connery notes that, although the turn of the century was characterized by the increasing separation between objective, fact-driven journalism and fictive storytelling, literary journalism offered a third option outside this dichotomy, one that "gave readers another version of reality, an interpretation of culture different from that of either most conventional journalism or most fiction that contained elements of both."[3] As a growing number of critical studies, historical accounts, and anthologies show, Crane's journalism is a foundational example of the creative potential to be found in this fluid space between fact and fiction.[4]

By acknowledging the amount of literary freedom accorded to Crane's journalism, we can more fully appreciate his use of parody. As a case study, I will examine Crane's 1894 *New York Press* piece "An Experiment in Misery" through this lens, though several other works would benefit from a similar treatment, including the companion sketch "An Experiment in Luxury," published a week later in the same journal.[5] I focus on "An Experiment in Misery" particularly because Crane keeps closer to the generic conceit of the "experiment" sketch so common in newspapers of the day, thus leading to a more nuanced and ultimately more successful parody. I argue that highlighting the generic context of the sketch and the basis for ironic parody reveals how "An Experiment in Misery" offers a meta-critique—that is, a critical assessment of journalistic technique conducted within the form itself.

"Experiments": Form and Parody

To summarize briefly, "An Experiment in Misery" follows the adventures of a youth who attempts to understand the perspective of tramps and hoboes by "passing" as one for an evening. The original publication in the *New York Press* contains a narrative frame that was later removed when Crane republished the piece in a short story collection.[6] The excised frame depicts the youth and an older, authoritative man—presumably his editor—as they stand contemplating a poor man. The youth expresses his desire to understand the tramp's "point of view," and the elder advises him that this can only be achieved through experience. Following this advice, the youth dons shabby clothing and sets out "to try to eat as the tramp may eat, and sleep as the

wanderers sleep."[7] After this introduction, the youth immediately falls into desperation and is heckled by neighborhood children. His attempt to get at the heart of the downtrodden experience leads him to a seven-cent boarding house and the company of a fellow tramp, dubbed "the assassin." After a nightmarish evening, the youth awakes to find himself at ease in his new world and conversant in both the dialect and customs of the destitute. He shares a final meal with the assassin, sits with him on a park bench, and ultimately perceives his fundamental isolation from the wealthier city residents, and even the city itself. In the subsequently removed closing frame, the youth once again meets with the elder, who asks whether the youth has been able to discover the point of view of the tramp. "I don't know that I did,...but at any rate I think mine own has undergone a considerable alteration."[8]

The basic conceit of this sketch would have come as no surprise to readers of the *Press* in 1894. Indeed, in the months before the publication of "An Experiment in Misery" there were already two stories published in the newspaper under the same pretext.[9] Although the "experiment" was a well-known form in newspaper reportage of the time, subsequent criticism of Crane's sketch has not always taken this into account. In the 1960s and '70s, it was common to see an emphasis on the stylistic and structural devices that Crane employs, but little consideration given to the context in which the story first appeared. These critical works helped increase awareness among literary scholars about the stylistic achievements of Crane's journalism and its exposure of social ills.[10] However, disregarding the historical context leaves these interpretations devoid of a sense that many of the devices that Crane uses to "reveal" the lives of the poor were so common as to appear clichéd to the readership at the time, and as I will argue, they actually function to critique the very aim of "exposing" the plight of the poor at all.[11]

In his analysis of the "experiment" form, Thomas Connery notes that there are several factors typical of this type of story, such as reluctance on journalists' part to expose themselves to living conditions of the poor.[12] As an example, the well-known reportage of Nellie Bly featured many of the same elements, particularly her foray into the Blackwell Island Insane Asylum that was originally published in the *World* and collected into a book in 1887. Similar to "An Experiment in Misery," Bly's account begins with a frame explaining her mission: a skeptical editor gives her the assignment.[13] Her strategy to get admitted to the insane asylum also involves dressing in shabby clothing and checking into a boarding house, where she then feigns insanity. In addition to her Blackwell Island reports, Bly also conducted several similar investigative pieces, including trying to get a job through an employment agency in order to expose the agency's manipulation of the jobless.[14] Such

repetition of form and conceit would indicate that these "experiments" were widely recognized among the newspaper readership.

The assertion that Crane was consciously replicating and critiquing the experiment form also finds support from his biography. Although "An Experiment in Misery" describes the youth's shock at the conditions of the streets and the boarding house, Crane had been familiar with these locations for some time already, making the youth's reaction likely to be little more than a generic conceit. Crane was not raised in a life of poverty; however, he spent much time in the years between 1891 and 1895 exploring the slums of the Bowery and the Tenderloin districts of New York City, living in strained conditions while working as a journalist.[15] According to R. W. Stallman's account, from 1891 he was living with friends in shared boarding houses and making frequent trips to the Bowery.[16] These experiences imply that while Crane was not without prospects himself, he was more familiar with the lives of the poor than "An Experiment in Misery" would lead readers to assume.

These factors suggest that Crane took a critical approach to the "experiment" form, and that the parody in "An Experiment in Misery" is not simply aimed at the "youth" or the poor, but rather the genre itself. For the purposes of this analysis, I would like to follow Linda Hutcheon's definition of parody as repetition of a codified form accompanied by critical distance. Hutcheon explains that in modern parody, critical distance is usually achieved through the tool of irony, which can be "double-directed" at both the new form and the old, rather than simply ridiculing the form being parodied.[17] In the case of Crane's journalism, the irony functions to mock both the investigator/journalist by portraying him as a naive young man, and also the form of "experiment" sketches by showing just how conducive that form can be for such naive explorations. By the designation of parody, I do not wish to imply that Crane intends to undermine the entire enterprise of investigative journalism, but rather to bring into relief practices that should not be taken for granted. As a reminder of parody's flexibility in this manner, Hutcheon notes that "this irony can be playful as well as belittling; it can be critically constructive as well as destructive."[18]

In "An Experiment in Misery," we first recognize the presence of this type of irony in the narrative frame. After the youth expresses his desire to take on the experiment, the text reads: "from those words begins this veracious narrative of an experiment in misery."[19] Such phrasing encapsulates the programmatic nature of the sketch. The frame continues, describing how "the youth went forth" [20] on his mission, a phrase that Trachtenberg notes is ironic, "directed at the hint of naive chivalric adventuresomeness in the youth."[21] From the very first lines of the piece, a reader of Crane's era would be aware

that the article closely conforms to formal expectations and jokingly acknowledges them as such. Further, this opening clues us in that the narrator has a different perspective on the events that follow than the youth does, implying a distance between narrator and investigator that is the primary vehicle for the piece's irony.

The use of the third person further emphasizes the critical distance between narrator and character. The primary indication of this divergence in perspective is the presence of the epithet "youth" to describe the investigator-journalist.[22] While we might initially read this as a contrast to the "elder" editor figure, the term's continued use urges us to understand the character's "youth" in relation to the narrator's superior age and authority instead. Naturally, any bit of investigative reportage would involve a slightly wiser narrator describing the activities of his past self, but this feature is oddly emphasized in Crane's article. This is done humorously, I would argue, emphasizing what is to be assumed as the incredible amount of knowledge and experience gained by spending a single night in a boarding house.

These features set "An Experiment in Misery" apart from its notable contemporaries. For example, in *How the Other Half Lives*, published in 1890, one of the important bases for Jacob Riis's authority is the interweaving of personal experience into his sociohistorical description of the tenements. The pronoun "I" appears in anecdotal moments, such as when Riis accidentally sets fire to a house when taking a picture of beggars in Blind Man's Alley, only to find out that the walls of the tenement were too filthy to burn.[23] This anecdote is interjected into an otherwise impersonal account to serve as an example that illustrates the whole, as well as to give Riis the authority to speak on behalf of the beggars. The authority of these personal experiences relies on the fact that the narrator and the character are one, and that the experiences of the one directly inform the interpretations of the other. Similarly, in Nellie Bly's *Ten Days in a Mad-house*, there is very little distinction between the narrator and the character. We are privy to the character Bly's thoughts as she proceeds on her mission, but we do not receive additional commentary from a wiser narrator. Crane's account differs from these two notable and widely read examples in that he does not utilize the first person account to generate authority. For both Riis and Bly, experience serves as straightforward evidence that buttresses a larger claim about society or life. The distance achieved through Crane's ironic frame and third-person characterization of the youth would be damaging to the muckraking intentions of Riis and Bly. But what Crane sacrifices in authority, he gains in flexibility. His distanced, ironic narrator allows him to cast his eye not only on the destitute, but also on the journalist observing the destitute.

Journalistic Folly and Critique

In the 1910 collection *Types from City Streets*, journalist Hutchins Hapgood argues that people who have experienced the most extreme aspects of deprivation—or even refinement—inherently make better subjects than the vulgar and prevaricating middle classes: "People who have reached 'de limit' are full of rich material for literature. They have nothing to conceal."[24] As can be seen in Hapgood's writings, the lives and experiences of the poor were thought to be transparent and infinitely interpretable. In his essay "Literature in Low Life," Hapgood argues that "poor and uneducated persons, the law-abiding unfortunates and the criminal unfortunates alike, are more quickly, more completely, and more easily got at than the ordinary respectable man or woman."[25] This attitude that the poor are more transparent leads him to remark that "when a man seeks his stuff for writing from low life he is at least sure of one thing, namely, that what he sees is genuine. He will not be deceived."[26] One could certainly interpret this quote as a straightforward attitude toward the creative potential to be found in realistic depictions of the poor;[27] the fact that we still hold up several accounts of the destitute as exemplars of engaged journalism speaks to just that point. However, statements such as Hapgood's also serve to illuminate the biases that journalists can have toward the veracity of their own subjective practices. In other words, a journalist who "seeks his stuff. . . from low life" is unduly biased to believe that everything he sees—so long as it is low—is "genuine" and is an accurate reflection of an entire class of people.

In "An Experiment in Misery" the youth fulfills this stereotypical approach to investigative journalism among the poor. He assumes that one night spent in abject misery is enough to understand the "point of view" of the destitute, and much of his experience is colored by this expectation. The story opens with him seeking out the most typical of ways to get to know the other: by finding an extreme example that might epitomize the rest. Failing this, he goes on to find a community into which he can blend seamlessly. He eventually finds "aimless men strewn in front of saloons and lodging-houses, standing sadly, patiently, reminding one vaguely of the attitudes of chickens in a storm," and he responds by "align[ing] himself with these men, and turn[ing] slowly to occupy himself with the flowing life of the great street."[28] Instead of emotionally or psychologically "aligning" himself with the crowd, as would be his ultimate goal, he does so spatially. This spatial reorientation underscores the shallowness of this way of knowing the other. In fact, what he observes in the following paragraphs tells us more about his own expectations than it does the city, or certainly the lives of its inhabitants.

The youth sets out to expose a dark and punishing existence, and the power of his imagination makes the environment so. After the narrator "aligns himself" with the others, what he sees of the "flowing life of the great street" is not the life of humans, but rather an uncannily animated cityscape. In particular, he views the train station "which upon its leg-like pillars seemed to resemble some monstrous kind of crab squatting over the street. The quick fat puffings of the engines could be heard."[29] Further, the youth describes a saloon offering free soup and beer as a carnivorous, even cannibalistic, being with a "voracious air." The passage continues: "The swing doors, snapping to and fro like ravenous lips, made gratified smacks as the saloon gorged itself with plump men, eating with astounding and endless appetite, smiling in some indescribable manner as the men came in all directions like sacrifices to a heathenish superstition."[30] In these scenes, the youth's metaphorical description runs away with him. We see this specifically in the detail that describes the men as being "plump." Are we really to believe that these paupers are accurately described as plump? The power of the youth's metaphor overwhelms the narrative to give a misleading portrait of the clientele of a saloon that offers free soup to the poor. The fact that the dominant metaphor of environment-as-predator overpowers what might be more accurate descriptions of the men indicates the faultiness of the youth's "experience." His perceptions are colored both by his own expectations and his desire to weave a compelling narrative for his readers and himself. This trend is further emphasized as the youth seeks to fulfill the next part of his clichéd journey: the discovery of an exemplar—the epitome of deprivation that will stand in for the miseries of an entire class.

The use of a representative example is not uncommon in multiple forms of nonfiction writing. As James Clifford notes of the ethnographic style developing in this period and continuing until the 1960s, one of the major features is a "synechdochic rhetorical stance."[31] That is, ethnographers focused on specific themes and used them to illuminate the entire culture through example. Although, as Clifford notes, it took years for postmodern ethnography to challenge the underlying assumptions behind a synechdochic stance, we see beginnings of this critique in Crane's article. The critique is especially sharp when depicting the ways in which the youth is guided in selecting his example: he chooses one that coincides with preconceived expectations of what it means to be destitute. Rather naively, "he looked about him searching for an outcast of highest degree."[32]

As we might expect, the narrator of "An Experiment in Misery" mocks this tactic. At one point, the youth seeks out a man "whose wondrous seediness promised that he would have a knowledge of cheap lodging-houses."[33] By

using the word "wondrous," the narrator reflects and exaggerates the youth's pleasure in finding an example whose seediness meets—or even exceeds—his expectations. After this humorous reminder of the youth's expectations, we have the first description of his primary informant, henceforth known as "the assassin":

> His head was a fuddle of bushy hair and whiskers, from which his eyes peered with a guilty slant. In a close scrutiny it was possible to distinguish the cruel lines of a mouth which looked as if its lips had just closed with satisfaction over some tender and piteous morsel. He appeared like an assassin steeped in crimes performed awkwardly.[34]

This seemingly deft portrayal is undermined in the next sentence: "But at this time his voice was tuned to the coaxing key of an affectionate puppy."[35] And indeed, although the label "the assassin" sticks, it is clear that the first sketch based on physiognomy was entirely misleading. As we learn from the assassin's later rants in the light of day (if his words are to be trusted), he is harmless, most likely being guilty of nothing more than his own pauperism.

The assassin proves instrumental in introducing the youth to the primal scene of "experiment" reportage: the boarding house. We see the representative nature of the scene when an indescribable stench seems to rise from "the exhalations from a hundred pairs of reeking lips; the fumes from a thousand bygone debauches; the expression of a thousand present miseries."[36] The youth's encounter registers as so extreme that a single moment, sight, or smell can be multiplied outward to represent the suffering of all the masses. Thus his *one* encounter speaks to him of "a *hundred* pairs of reeking lips," which, to the youth, are capable of speaking for "a *thousand* present miseries" (emphasis mine). The figurative language in the scene suggests that the youth's mathematics is the result of his own imaginings, rather than a viable method for understanding the other. Rather than valorize the youth's ability to learn from experience, this scene exposes a faulty understanding of the generalizability of a single moment to speak for the lives of many.

The boarding house scene—and indeed the entire sketch—reaches a turning point when the youth is about to fall asleep and he listens to the wails of the other men in the room. The narrator's description includes examples of journalistic tendencies to adopt a synechdochic stance and to assume that the inner worlds of the poor are easily interpreted. The passage reads:

> The sound in its high piercing beginnings, that dwindled to final melancholy moans, expressed a red and grim tragedy of the unfathomable possibilities of the man's dreams. But to the youth these were not merely the shrieks of a vision-pierced man: they were an utterance of the meaning of the room and its occupants. It was to him the protest of the wretch who

> feels the touch of the imperturbable granite wheels, and who then cries with an impersonal eloquence, with a strength not from him, giving voice to the wail of a whole section, a class, a people. This, weaving into the young man's brain, and mingling with his views of the vast and sombre shadows that, like mighty black fingers, curled around the naked bodies, made the young man so that he did not sleep, but lay carving the biographies for these men from his meagre experience. At times the fellow in the corner howled in a writhing agony of his imaginations.[37]

Similar to the scene discussed above, this passage also emphasizes the youth's assumption that one example can stand in for the experience of an entire group. For instance, the scream is "an utterance of the meaning of the room and its occupants," not simply of the man's dreams. Further, his scream represents "the wail of a whole section, a class, a people." While the narrator offers no concrete evidence to suggest that cry of the dreaming man actually reflects class-consciousness, the youth nonetheless interprets it as so.

Further, the fact that the man's screams seem "an utterance of the meaning of the room and its occupants" shows that the youth is liable to interpret an isolated incident as full of meaning, thus conforming to the view that the lives of the destitute are easily discernable. We should not fail to read this in juxtaposition with what the narrator has told us about the "*unfathomable* possibilities of the man's dreams" (emphasis added). The youth is inferring meaning, in what Trachtenberg describes as an "ideological romance,"[38] even while we have been told that this is impossible. This is further emphasized when the youth "lay carving biographies for these men" based on the wailings of one man. At the same time, the narrator points out the inadequacy of the youth's knowledge for such a task, noting that these biographies come from his "*meagre* experience" (emphasis added)—a distinction that would not be clear to the youth himself.

As a final point, I would like to draw attention to the ambiguity of the last line, which can be read as the distanced narrator's critique of the youth's interpretive imaginings. It is unclear whether the man howls "in a writhing agony of his [own] imagination" or of the youth's imagination. The mere possibility that the unidentified—and invisible—man could be suffering under the weight of the youth's imaginings broaches the issue of the violence of representation. This echoes an earlier moment in the text, when the youth gazes upon a man sleeping with his eyes slightly opened. While the youth feels threatened by the man's gaze, the man himself is reduced under the youth's gaze to being "like a body stretched out expectant of the surgeon's knife."[39] Such descriptions suggest the unequal power dynamics at play in the youth's act of representation.

Knowledge Gained Yet Incommunicable?

After this pivotal scene the tone and manner of the story change, bringing critical complications. In the morning the youth awakens to find the horrors of the evening abated by the light of day. This marks an immediate transformation: he is now one of the destitute, well versed in their customs and expectations. He reconnects with the assassin and easily develops rapport, speaking in the same dialect as his guide. The tone of the narrator is lightly humorous, remarking on the youth's sudden proficiency in dialect and manner: "They spent a few moments in dexterous exchanges of phrases."[40] The youth even intuitively knows how to buy the assassin dinner without appearing to be charitable. This picture of mutual cultural understanding culminates when the two return to City Hall Park: "[T]he two wanderers sat down in the little circle of benches sanctified by traditions of their class. They huddled in their old garments, slumbrously conscious of the march of hours which for them had no meaning."[41] At this point in the narrative, it appears that the youth has ceased to interpret each of his observations according to his expectations and instead responds organically to the culture surrounding his new social position.

The closing of the sketch depicts the youth as he watches the well-dressed passersby, who pay him no notice: "They expressed to the young man his infinite distance from all that he valued. Social position, comfort, the pleasures of living, were unconquerable kingdoms. He felt a sudden awe."[42] The last line preceding the closing frame reads: "He confessed himself an outcast, and his eyes from under the lowered rim of his hat began to glance guiltily, wearing the criminal expression that comes with certain convictions."[43] Here the narrator describes most clearly the change that has occurred in the youth—namely, that he has learned something unforeseen, something that could not be accepted by the mainstream public that surrounds him and would judge him as a criminal. Although the narrator describes his expression from the outside, he fails to offer us insight into the thoughts that are occupying the youth's mind. When compared to the complete access to the youth's imaginations displayed in the nighttime scene, this is surprising indeed. Although we may not be as oblivious as the passersby who pay him no attention, the ending ultimately emphasizes that we must find the world of the destitute a likewise "unconquerable kingdom."

Many of the most perceptive readings of "An Experiment in Misery" focus on this "epiphany" scene as the pivotal point. Michael Robertson, for example, argues that the convictions the youth has are "ideas about social inequality that the larger society would consider criminal."[44] The youth's newly gained understanding of social inequality is the means to a profound transfor-

mation of self and, as Robertson argues, the sketch "is a fundamentally radical work that challenges belief in a stable identity."[45] In a nuanced reading that accounts for the sketch's journalistic context and critique, Alan Trachtenberg likewise takes these closing remarks at face value. He describes the convictions as the youth's knowledge that he is an outcast.[46] As in Robertson's interpretation, this knowledge leads the youth to a transformation wrought by experience.

A common trend in these interpretations is a tendency to read early portions of the sketch in light of the experience-induced epiphany depicted in the final City Hall Park scene. The ironic stance of the first half of the sketch thus leads to an uneasy tension. For example, Benedict Giamo notices Crane's ironic tone in the first section (in his overly ceremonious use of religious imagery in the saloon scene), but remarks, "[S]een in the light of his successive stages, [the irony] is perhaps a final remnant of his sense of distance and detachment, the lingering of his naturalistic interest in retaining the objective rendering of events."[47] We see in this train of thought the need to dispel the earlier sense of irony in order to allow a straightforward reading of the final scene.[48]

I, however, would like to propose a reading of the closing scene that stems from the parodic tone established in the first half of the sketch. This interpretation is supported by an acknowledgement that the reintegrated youth makes in the closing frame—one that is not explored by the critics discussed above. When asked if he could ascertain the "point of view" of the tramp, he replies "I don't know that I did. . . but at any rate I think mine own has undergone a considerable alteration."[49] The interpretations cited above do not address why the youth would either fail to understand his epiphany, or fail to communicate it to the elder by declaring, "I don't know."

Further, in order for us to accept the conclusion that the youth has actually undergone a transformation orchestrated by means of the strategies lampooned in the first section, we might have to accept that those strategies are, in fact, legitimate for acquiring some type of knowledge of the other. I resist such an interpretation, since I do not believe it in keeping with the ironic distance of the narrator. Instead, I propose that this passage—while indeed depicting the youth having undergone a transformation—still adheres to the same critique of the "experiment" form. I argue that there is a fundamental "if, then" structure underlying the second half of the story that goes as follows: *Even if the youth managed to understand the point of view of the other through immersion, then he would still be unable to explain it to his uninitiated, middle-class readership*. The narrator's strategy of zooming out and obscuring the youth's thoughts is not a gesture of respect for the youth's change in

subjectivity or hard-earned knowledge, but is rather a final critique of the method of experiment writing.

Ultimately, the stakes of such interpretation are high: even critics that recognize the strategic use of irony, such as Trachtenberg and Giamo, view Crane's experiment as a productive one. Trachtenberg writes: "[T]he experiment transforms the youth, and it is through that transformation that the life of the city's strangers becomes manifest."[50] Giamo writes: "Crane indicates the value placed upon direct experience and encounter as a source of knowledge for personal as well as cultural change."[51] While I do not wish to imply that Crane is ready to throw the baby out with the bathwater when it comes to "experiment" sketches, I am leery of suggestions that the youth has actually undergone the profound transformations described in the terms above, or that the reader learns anything about the destitute in the piece. The reader has much to learn, however, about what *not* to do when attempting to responsibly represent a marginalized other.

Conclusion

Thus, I argue that Stephen Crane's "An Experiment in Misery" offers a multipronged critique of common journalistic practices. In the first half of the story, the youth executes several clichéd moves toward understanding the destitute, such as developing rapport with an exemplar and generalizing the informant's experience to the entire social group, while the narrator ironically undermines these practices by hinting at their failure to represent the real situation (the "assassin" is completely harmless, the youth makes up class-struggle allegories based on his "meagre experience"). The strategy of critique shifts after the pivotal nighttime scene, though Crane's intentions do not. The story ends suggesting that the youth has finally learned something, while at the same time failing to communicate to the reader what that something actually is. This serves as a final critique on the project of not only understanding the lives of others, but also representing those lives to other readers.

While Crane's "An Experiment in Misery" is by no means a common example, I would argue that this type of narrative stance, which widens the gap between narrator and character, is a forerunner for a characteristic feature of the genre of literary journalism. By toying with the power of the third-person narrator, free indirect discourse, and strategic irony, Crane was able to craft a critique of journalism that can still be read as a part of the genre. While such works of meta-critique do not always offer positive suggestions for reform, they are a useful way of drawing attention to problems in an established field without completely alienating the readership. The distanced critical stance, while not always ironic in later examples of literary journalism, allows greater

room for ambiguity and polysemy, reflecting the moral and ethical complexity inherent in representing disadvantaged others.

If we return briefly to the discussion of the role of parody in the development of the genre, we can see why so many have looked to Crane when tracing a history of literary journalism. Hutcheon follows the Russian formalists in suggesting that parody is a powerful means not only of critiquing genre but reforming it through increased awareness. In her words, "[P]arody was seen [by the Formalists] as a dialectic substitution of formal elements whose functions have become mechanized or automatic. At this point, the elements are 'refunctionalized,' to use their term. A new form develops out of the old, without really destroying it."[52] Seen within this lens, Crane "refunctionalizes" those tired aspects of the "experiment" form in order to make a larger statement about the limitations of representing the other. In doing so, he creates a hybrid form capable of transmitting a subtler message about the politics inherent in portraying the lives of the destitute.

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Notes

1. Eric Solomon, *Stephen Crane: From Parody to Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 45.

2. Michael Robertson, *Stephen Crane, Journalism, and the Making of Modern American Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997): 5–6.

3. Thomas B. Connery, "A Third Way to Tell the Story: American Literary Journalism at the Turn of the Century," in *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Sims (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 6.

4. For example, Crane is included in the following anthologies of literary journalism, among others: Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda, eds., *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997); Thomas B. Connery, ed., *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre* (New York: Greenwood, 1992).

5. Like "An Experiment in Misery," "An Experiment in Luxury" parodies the

experience of a naive youth as he seeks to understand a different social class. "Luxury" specifically documents his mercurial shifts in mood and opinion in a manner similar to Henry Fleming in *The Red Badge of Courage*. Much of the piece is focused on mocking the wealthy, and by shifting the critique onto them, Crane exposes the one-sidedness of the voyeuristic "slumming" sketches so popular in newspapers of the time. Indeed, Robertson points out that the use of the "experiment" form to portray the wealthy was a novel approach at the time. Robertson, *Stephen Crane*, 102.

6. The most notable difference between the early *New York Press* version and the later version is the subtraction of the narrative frame discussed above. This change has had notable effects on the interpretation of the piece. For example, James Nagel notes that the removal of the "journalistic context" frame "gave the story much more of the sense of fiction." Nagel, "Structure and Theme in Crane's 'An Experiment in Misery,'" in *Studies in Short Fiction* 10, no. 2 (1973): 169. Similarly, Scott Penney remarks that "the editorial omission makes the character's predicament more psychologically tenuous. . . . By removing the original frame of the story, Crane removes its safety props and highlights the anxiety of the protagonist." Scott Penney, "The Veracious Narrative of 'An Experiment in Misery': Crane's Park Row and Bowery," *Stephen Crane Studies* 3, no. 1 (1994): 2. In general, most scholars consider the edited version superior because it leaves many thematic elements open to suggestion rather than directly stated, and it adds key metaphors, which contribute to the psychological effect of the youth's descent into poverty. For example, Alan Trachtenberg writes: "To intensify attention on the experience itself, and to indicate that the social drama of displacing one's normal perspective already is internalized in the action, Crane discarded the opening and closing frames when he republished the story in a collection of 1898. In his revision he also added to the opening paragraphs a number of physical details which reinforce and particularize the sense of misery." Alan Trachtenberg, "Experiments in Another Country: Stephen Crane's City Sketches," *Southern Review* 10, no. 2 (1974): 280–1.

7. Stephen Crane, "An Experiment in Misery," in *The Portable Stephen Crane,* ed. Joseph Katz (New York: Penguin, 1969), 154.

8. Ibid., 165.

9. Robertson, *Stephen Crane*, 96.

10. For example, Maurice Bassan argues for appreciating how metaphor and structure are closely entwined in the story, working not only to "define clearly Crane's emotional attitude toward his subject, but to commit the reader himself to an act of identification and sympathy." In his interpretation, the purpose of this identification is a straightforward appeal on the part of the suffering poor. Maurice Bassan, "The Design of Stephen Crane's Bowery 'Experiment,'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 1, no. 2 (1964): 130. Likewise, James Nagel sees the purpose of this piece as the exposure of the ills of society, showing how the environment contributes to the state of the oppressed social classes. James Nagel, "Structure and Theme," 169–174.

11. Although later critics of "An Experiment in Misery," such as Alan Trachtenberg and Scott Penney, have noted this context and interpreted the story within

it, even discussing the presence of journalistic meta-critique, they shy away from labeling the entire work a parody, instead reading the closing scenes and the youth's transformation in earnest.

12. Thomas B. Connery, *Journalism and Realism: Rendering American Life* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 167.

13. Nellie Bly, *Ten Days in a Mad-house* (1887; repr., Cedar Lake, MI: Feather Trail, 2009), 6.

14. Ibid., 77–83.

15. David M. Fine, "Abraham Cahan, Stephen Crane and the Romantic Tenement Tale of the Nineties," *American Studies* 14, no. 1 (1973): 96.

16. R. W. Stallman, *Stephen Crane: A Biography* (New York: George Braziler, 1968), 68–9.

17. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 31–2. We see this type of parody in Crane's fictional works as well. For example, Crane's 1893 novel *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* inverts several of the classic themes of naturalistic city novels so popular in Crane's era. His more successful novel, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), likewise parodies the war novels of the day, which relied on the themes of heroism and romance.

18. Ibid., 32.

19. Crane, "Experiment," 154.

20. Ibid.

21. Trachtenberg, "Experiments," 281.

22. This is will remind readers of Henry Fleming in *The Red Badge of Courage*, who is referred to as the "youth" for the majority of the book. Both uses of "the youth" hint at the naïveté of the protagonist, since the forms lampooned—the war novel and the experiment sketch—emphasize the bravery and savvy of their central characters: the war hero and the intrepid journalist.

23. Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, ed. Lorenzo Domínguez (1890; repr., New York: Chelenzo Ink, 2012), 26.

24. Hutchins Hapgood, *Types from City Streets* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1910), 22.

25. Ibid., 14–5.

26. Ibid., 24.

27. Connery, *Journalism and Realism*, 166–7.

28. Crane, "Experiment," 153.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., 156.

31. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 31.

32. Crane, "Experiment," 153.

33. Ibid., 156.

34. Ibid., 157.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., 158.

37. Ibid., 160–1.
38. Trachtenberg, "Experiments," 283.
39. Crane, "Experiment," 160.
40. Ibid., 163.
41. Ibid., 165.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Robertson, *Stephen Crane*, 101.
46. Trachtenberg, "Experiments," 284.
47. Benedict Giamo, *On the Bowery: Confronting Homelessness in American Society* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 95.
48. Such a dual structure is in fact a common feature of Crane's fiction, indicating that the irony may not be a "residue" but rather a constitutive element in the meaning of the text. This change in tone brings to mind Eric Solomon's discussion of the dual structure of *The Red Badge of Courage*. Solomon argues that the first half of the novel is parody aimed at exposing romanticized and clichéd war narratives. The second half, however, is realism aimed at expressing the truth of a situation once cliché has been swept away. Solomon refers to this as "the author's basic approach to fiction: the movement from parody to realism." Solomon, *Stephen Crane*, 74–7.
49. Crane, "Experiment," 165.
50. Trachtenberg, "Experiments," 284.
51. Giamo, *On the Bowery*, 100.
52. Hutcheon, *Theory of Parody*, 35–6.