

look closely at the text using William K Spofford's article "Stephen Crane's 'The Open Boat': Fact or Fiction?". Spofford's article does a wonderful job of combing through Crane's earlier prose and poetry to find similarities between the literary devices he used in works pre-dating his shipwreck experience and the short story, identifying similar phraseology, themes, and motifs utilized in "The Open Boat" as in poetry and stories like *The Red Badge of Courage* and "The Reluctant Voyagers". Some examples that he shares include Crane's deliberation on the relationship between man and indifferent nature or fate, brotherly comradery and affection, and descriptions of the sky during a cold night and the colors of the dawn on the sea.

A recurring theme in "The Open Boat", and throughout Crane's writing, is the perception of nature (or the universe or fate) being indifferent to man. As an example of this theme cropping up in work predating "The Open Boat", Spofford quotes a poem published by Crane in 1899. "A man said to the universe:/ 'Sir, I exist!'/ 'However,' replied the universe,/ 'The fact has not created in me/ A sense of obligation.'" Spofford compares this verse to the moment in "The Open Boat" when the correspondent realizes that "nature does not regard him as important, and

temples” to a scene in *The Red Badge of Courage* when Henry stands beside Jim Conkline’s body and shakes his fist, starts to rage against nature but, as Spofford says, “realize[s] that such

gold, green and blue together to describe sea water, or, in the case of “The Pace of Youth”, light on lake water. Spofford argues that these recurring images in Crane’s work may suggest that they were not images Crane and his ship-mates actually saw and experienced during their thirty hours in a dinghy on the open sea, but instead that they were images Crane had deliberated often before the experience.

This multitude of examples Spofford provides of Crane reusing phrases, themes, and ideas illustrates how the themes that the story explores may have been on Crane’s mind long before the shipwreck. Spofford also suggests that the shipwreck gave Crane this vehicle to bring these ideas together with descriptions and motifs he had already tried his hand at using. He invites the consideration of whether those tried descriptions were real to his experience, or if they were a product of his habits as a writer, and I think that is a very interesting question. Although there is not really a way for us to ever know for sure how much of the account is style and how much is factual, for myself, I am curious if the descriptions and themes in “The Open Boat” could not be both true to Crane’s experience *and* a product of his writerly arsenal. a.

As we pay extraordinary attention to our thoughts by saying them--or by writing them--we gain opportunities to see better and be better.

I wish for Crane's sake that he had not experienced the trauma of a shipwreck, but because he did, I am glad that he was such a talented and thoughtful writer whose practice and extraordinary attention equipped him to write "The Open Boat", a short story which we may not be able to verify as being completely historically accurate, but I still trust to be, in many ways, true.

Works Cited

- Colvert, James B. "STYLE AND MEANING IN STEPHEN CRANE: The Open Boat." *Texas Studies in English*, vol. 37, 1958, pp. 34–45. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/23207797. Accessed 15 Apr. 2020.
- Crane, Stephen. "The Open Boat." *The Norton Anthology of American Literature: Volume II*, edited by Robert S. Levine, W. W. Norton & Company, 2017, pp. 614-630.
- Green, John. "I am an artist." *vlogbrothers*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkRny4xkYZE>. Accessed 8 April 2020.
- Spofford, William K. "Stephen Crane's 'The Open Boat': Fact or Fiction?" *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1979, pp. 316–321. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/27745902. Accessed 27 Feb. 2020.