



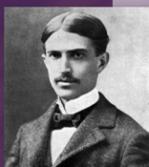
Crane, who is much better known for his Naturalist fiction, especially *The Red Badge of Courage* and *The Open Boat*, also wrote a few volumes of poetry, which were not well received during his life. Most of his poetry was untitled and individual poems became known by their first lines. He draws on themes of death, war, and sin in many of them, but this one, "Should the Wide World Roll Away," combines existentialist gloom with love.

Beginning with a conditional, *Should*, Crane describes a fearful (non)existence of unending darkness and horror, empty of God and any physical aspects like gravity or light. The anaphora of *nor* emphasizes the desolation the poet feels about this nihilistic apocalypse. The only rhymes are the internal *man/stand* and *be/me*, but the poem also contains a few instances of alliteration, antithesis, and assonance.

Next is another conditional term, *Would*; it reinforces the insecurity that surrounds the poem and leads to the final qualifier, *If*. This word brings the reader to the climax of the poem: how the poet could withstand this emptiness.

The final two lines completely negate the forces of death and disaster. These lines claim that the power achieved through love can overcome the end of the Universe. This horrid world the poet predicts can be endured because his lover could protect him from it. They would fall for an infinitely long time, but they would be together. The final portion contradicts the horrific potential of the beginning, showing that love is stronger than death.

The only word in the whole poem that can be considered positive is *white*, symbolic of purity, yet Crane has constructed a poem that is, unabashedly, upbeat.



Stephen Crane
(1871-1900)

Stephen Crane's work continues to fascinate readers because, in addition to the power of what he said or the situations and characters he created, the philosophy expressed in his novels and, especially, in his poetry is entirely modern.

Should the Wide World Roll Away

BY STEPHEN CRANE

Should the wide world roll away,
Leaving black terror,
Limitless night,
Nor God, nor man, nor place to stand
Would be to me essential,
If thou and thy white arms were there,

And the fall

to doom

a long

way.