The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky Study Guide

The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky by Stephen Crane

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Having just gotten married in San Antonio, Jack Potter, town marshal of Yellow Sky, and the bride are aboard a train headed back to Yellow Sky, Jack's home town. Despite their elegant surroundings, both bride and groom are nervous about returning to Yellow Sky. While the bride is not used to such classy surroundings and is anticipating her life ahead of her, Jack is anxious about the reception that his marriage will receive from his community, particularly as he had not told them of his intentions when he left for San Antonio. When they arrive, they quickly rush toward Jack Potter's house, hoping that they are not seen.

Meanwhile, in Yellow Sky, six men are sitting in a bar, when a man rushes in, announcing that Scratchy Wilson, a local legend, has been on the drink again and is in one of his usual moods. While most of the locals in the bar are immediately aware of what was about to happen, there is one newcomer, a drummer, who asks the locals what is going on. They warn him that when Scratchy Wilson is drunk, there is sure to be some shooting, if not a gunfight. The only person who will engage in a gunfight with him is Jack Potter, the town marshal, and he was out of town at the moment. The door of the bar is locked and the men inside sit and wait.

The streets of Yellow Sky are quiet and empty as Scratchy Wilson patrols them, yelling out callous invitations to join him in a gunfight, as he grows repeatedly frustrated as his requests go unanswered. He approaches the door of the bar, and after taking a few pot shots at it, decides to shoot at the lazy dog at the door, making it run away in fear. He continues to take pot shots at the town, before deciding to take up the challenge with his old rival, Jack Potter.

Scratchy Wilson approaches Jack Potter's house and calls out his challenge, with no response. Still frustrated, he reloads his gun, and the bride and Jack Potter interrupt him. Scratchy points his gun at Jack, dissatisfied with Jack's answer that he did not have a gun on him. Jack announces that he had just gotten married, to the complete Scratchy's shock. The shock of the news in enough to turn Scratchy away from the gunfight, and he walks away, flabbergasted.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

A newly married couple is aboard a coach headed toward Yellow Sky. They both appear very nervous, glancing shyly and blushing at other passengers, but despite this, they are both very happy. The man asks his new wife if she had ever been in a parlor car before - she hadn't and was very impressed and somewhat overwhelmed with the whole experience. She is concerned about the money, but he says that the occasion requires the money to be spent.

He explains to her about trains, brimming with pride as if he were the owner. She is bedazzled by the elegance of the fittings, which in turn reflect their feelings about their marriage. The man was particularly happy, a Negro porter noted, looking upon them with an air of superiority that he subtly enforced upon the couple that did not seem to notice.

The man announces to his wife that they will be arriving in Yellow Sky at 3:42, and his wife glances at a pocket watch, which the man boastfully announces he bought from a friend in San Antonio, where they had gotten married. The time was now seventeen past twelve, his wife announces. They are also being observed by other passengers on the train, who also silently mock the simple naivety of the pair.

The bride and groom move to the dining cart where they are waited upon by neatly attired Negro waiters. Again, the waiters have superiority in their manner, and again it goes unnoticed by the couple. As they come closer and closer to Yellow Sky, the husband becomes more and more restless.

The groom's name is Jack Potter, the town marshal of Yellow Sky. He had gone to San Antonio to meet a girl, who he hastily married and was now taking back to his hometown, where he was a prominent and well-liked man in the close-knit community - a community who did not know that he was married and just whom he had taken for his wife. He did not know how the townspeople would react. He knew that if they had known his purpose for leaving, then his return would be greeted with a brass band. As the townsfolk were unaware of his reason for traveling, the Potter planned to take the quickest route to his house possible, so as not to be detected.

The bride picks up on his nerves and becomes anxious herself. He assures her that everything is ok, and they look tenderly at one another. Despite the scandal, they are in love. As the train pulls into the station, Jack notes that the platform is empty and he and his new wife disembark the train, quickly slinking away.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This chapter sets the scene of the action, explains the background and introduces two of the main characters. The author slowly builds the information given to the reader, first developing the relationship between the bride and groom and their surroundings before giving the groom's name and background. Lastly, the bride's background is explained, though she remains unnamed.The chapter also introduces the themes of the story, which are the ideas of love and marriage, social standing and changing society through characters and scenery.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Twenty-one minutes before the train pulled into Yellow Sky, six men were in the Weary Gentlemen bar. While these were mainly regulars, one, a drummer, was a newcomer, and talked a great deal. The rest of the town was quiet.

Suddenly, the drummer's chatter is interrupted by a man bursting through the doors of the bar. He announces that Scratchy Wilson is drunk and has turned loose on the town. The men in the bar react immediately, some exiting from the back door, others noticeably disturbed. The bartender locks and barricades the doors. The drummer is puzzled and is warned to stay away from the doors - there will be some shooting, if not a fight. The only person who will fight Scratchy is Jack Potter, and he is out of town. Scratchy is an excellent gunman, the last of an old gang who used to hang out near the town. When he is sober, he is one of the nicest guys in town, but when he is drunk, he is a terror. In the distance, the men hear some wild yelling and a gunshot as Scratchy approaches.

Chapter 2 Analysis

This chapter introduces the location where the action will occur - Yellow Sky. We see some of the local haunts and the local people as well as some of the regular goings-on in the town. The description of the quiet town rouses images of a typical Western film. The author uses the drummer, a newcomer to the town, to give the reader some insight into what is going on - without him, the regulars would have no need to discuss the situation, because it is a regular occurrence in the town.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Scratchy Wilson wears a maroon-colored flannel shirt and carried two long, heavy blue-black revolvers. He walks into the main street of Yellow Sky, his yelling ringing through the quiet, empty village that seems to stand completely still around him. Full of whiskey, he checked at all the doors and windows for anyone who would meet his challenge. But the only sounds to be heard in the town are those of his invitations for a gun fight. The longer he waits, the angrier he gets.

A dog lies dozing in front of the Weary Gentlemen bar and catches Scratchy's attention. The dog jumps up and starts growling at him, running for an alley as Scratchy yells. He shoots at it's the dog's feet, making the dog flee in fear. Scratchy just laughs.

Scratchy reaches the closed door of the bar, banging on it and demanding a drink. When his calls go unanswered, he nails some paper to the door with his knife; he steps back and shoots at it, barely missing. He then goes and shoots at the windows of people he knows. He is bored and is just playing with the town.

With no offer of a fight around, he decides to pursue his old antagonist, Jack Potter. He heads toward Potter's house, and on arrival, calls out a challenge to Jack. There is no answer, and so he calls several more times. He is frustrated by the house's silence.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In this chapter, we are introduced to the other main character in the story, Scratchy Wilson. Although described as a decent man when sober, the character that we are presented with is mean and vile. While the chapter shows a lot about Scratchy's character, it also says a lot about the town and develops the themes within the story - while being presented as an old Western story, there is no one around to challenge the villain.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The newly married couple continues to hurry toward Jack Potter's adobe, laughing occasionally but keeping their heads low to avoid attention. As they circle the last corner, they come face to face with Scratchy Wilson, who was reloading his gun. Upon seeing them, Scratchy quickly drops his revolver to the ground and pulls out another, aiming it at Jack.

Both Jack and his bride are shocked and remain silent and still. Scratchy accuses Jack of trying to sneak up on him, as he threatens to use his gun on him if he tries anything. Jack tries to convince Scratchy that he doesn't have a gun on him, telling him that he has just gotten married, and such an occasion doesn't call for a gun.

Scratchy is perplexed, as he seemingly for the first time, notices the bride. Jack confirms to Scratchy that this is his new wife and an awkward silence follows. Speaking slowly, Scratchy concedes that the gunfight is off, and Jack agrees, as it was not him that made the trouble to begin with. Scratchy, still shocked at Jack's marriage, walks away and the threat of a fight is over.

Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter brings together the two storylines, with Jack and his bride coming face to face with Scratchy Wilson. There are two important events in this chapter. The first is when Jack refuses to be involved in a gunfight with Scratchy, and the second is when the announcement of Jack's marriage shocks Scratchy so much that he no longer pursues the fight with Jack. While the end of the story resolves the issue of Scratchy threatening the town, the author leaves loose ends untied related to the marriage being announced. The reader is left to consider Scratchy's reaction and wonder if that is a fair reflection of the rest of the townsfolk.

Characters

Jack Potter

As town marshal of Yellow Sky, Jack Potter is a prominent and well-respected member of the small community. A man of the land, he is devoted to the members of this small western town, but at the same time, he enjoys the elegant decadence that can be found outside of it. Jack tends to make decisions with his heart rather than his head, but he is definitely aware of the social implications that his actions may bring. He hastily takes a bride that he thinks he is in love with, despite her lower class and the retribution his secret marriage to her may bring from the Yellow Sky community. He struggles with conflicting emotions - his happiness at his recent marriage and his remorse for disappointing the people of his town.

Jack has a certain knack for appearing cool under pressure, despite the panic he may feel inside. On the train to Yellow Sky, he retains a cool composure while being extremely anxious about the reception they will receive. Likewise, during his confrontation with Scratchy Wilson, he remains cool, calm and collected, which in the end, helps to quell the situation.

The Bride

The Bride is presented by the author as a lower class, unspectacular woman. She is not particularly young, and while she is not unattractive, she is not pretty either. In fact, the author never mentions her name, giving the impression that she is not even worth mentioning. The fact that her name is not mentioned also provides the implication that her true identity is not as important as is the fact that she is simply the woman whom Jack Potter has married. She is very aware of her class, and is in awe of the elegant surroundings on the train. She is not accustomed to being with people outside of her social class, not noticing the condescending glances being shot her way, and keeping her head down and blushing as other people take notice of her. Even her fancy clothes make her feel uncomfortable. While there are no real amiable qualities of the Bride, it must be assumed that she has some, if a reputable person such as Jack Potter is to fall in love with and risk retribution when he marries her. She appears to love Jack, and is prepared to serve him as his wife in their new life together.

Scratchy Wilson

The last of an old gang that used to hang out by the river near Yellow Sky, Scratchy Wilson was a gentle old man - until he started drinking. When he drinks, it is not an uncommon occurrence for him to rampage the town, shooting up empty windows and barred doors, all the time calling for a challenger in a typical Western gunfight. His common rival was Jack Potter, who had once shot him in the leg, and who would usually put an end to his fun. However, despite his rage, the apparent respect that the

rest of the town has for Jack Potter is evident when Scratchy finds out about the marriage - although whether his objection is to the secrecy of the marriage or to Jack's choice of bride is left up the reader.

The Drummer

A newcomer to the town of Yellow Sky, the Drummer is young, naïve, talkative and curious. On the announcement that Scratchy was again tormenting the town, his cocky confidence quickly turns into immature fear, and his curiosity as to what is going on is not fulfilled, despite being given information by the barkeeper. As a character however, he is of little significance, like the Bride not given a name, and is mainly used by the author to give the reader more insight into the situation through action rather than narration.

The Negro Waiters

Although technically being of a lower class than the couple on the train and their job being to wait on that couple, these men have an air of superiority about them and are subtly condescending in their manner toward the pair. They secretly mock the bride and groom, but at the same time are aware that they must keep their place and not allow the couple to become aware of the mockery. Yet, despite their apparent snobbery, the author makes clear their place in the social hierarchy, and simply uses their characters as a tool to demonstrate the changing social landscape.

The Townsfolk

Although only a handful is represented in the story, the people of Yellow Sky are shown to be loyal and friendly. At the same time, they are very prone to keeping to themselves and not being overly welcome to strangers - or for that matter, change, which is one of the reasons that Jack Potter is afraid of their reaction to his recent marriage. As they sit in the saloon quietly drinking whiskey, they appear as subdued and tired old men, particularly as they have no interest in answering Scratchy's call for a gunfight, instead relying on their trusty leader, Jack Potter, to bring the peace. This profile of the people of Yellow Sky is fundamental to the development of the themes, which are built around a sense of duty to these people.

Objects/Places

The Pullman

The train that Jack Potter and his new wife traveled in from San Antonio to Yellow Sky. The train is elegantly decorated, complete with waiters and porters.

The Weary Gentlemen Saloon

A common watering hole in Yellow Sky that Scratchy Wilson regularly has a shot at when on one of his rampages.

The Main Street of Yellow Sky

Scratchy Wilson's chosen platform for his shoot up and threats.

Jack Potter's Adobe House

The house built by Jack Potter, where he is rushing his new wife home to. Also the location of the confrontation between Scratchy and Jack.

The Silver Watch

A present from Jack to his new wife, which he purchased from a friend in San Antonio. It can be assumed that the watch is in celebration of their marriage, but can also be seen as a symbol of wealth.

Scratchy Wilson's rifles

The rifles that Scratchy uses to terrorize Yellow Sky.

Social Sensitivity

S tephen Crane's story of the Texas frontier town's marshal, Jack Potter, who goes to San Antonio to meet and marry a girl of questionable background (for him), is stricken by a guilty conscience, then returns with her only to find the town badman gunning for him, is justifiably considered one of his best short fictions. It also remains one of his most enduring stories. A number of interesting and cogent reasons for this might be advanced, to say nothing of individual reasons from appreciative readers over the past hundred years and more who have found in it a particular narrow feature of special appeal. First off, there are a number of strange, provocative, seemingly outof-place references and overstatements scattered throughout the narrative—aside from Crane's stilted and pretentious expressions that he might have picked up from reading popular (or pulp) Westerns.

As the train approaches Yellow Sky, Potter is fully aware that his marriage is so important a thing to the town that it can "only be exceeded by the burning of the new hotel." After Potter and his unnamed bride arrive in Yellow Sky, they come face to face with the town menace, the drinkcrazed Scratchy Wilson. The two of them have had a number of familiar encounters over the barrel of a gun, and while the townsfolk are accustomed to these confrontations, there is no telling how deadly any one of them in the future might turn out to be. Now, on this auspicious occasion, when Scratchy puts the marshal in his line of fire, the bride is described oddly. Her face goes "as yellow as old cloth" and she is "a slave to hideous rites, gazing at the apparitional snake." But Potter makes two announcements about himself to Scratchy: he is not carrying a gun, and he has just gotten married. These revelations blow Scratchy's mind. Stunned by the momentous news, which he can barely deal with, Scratchy yells "No!" and then, Crane writes, he is "like a creature allowed a glimpse of another world." Finally he manages to pose a kind of question to Potter. He supposes that now "it's all off." Potter replies that it is up to Scratchy to decide, since he (Potter) was not the one that started the trouble. Scratchy, after getting the message about Potter's new status and new attitude, decides that it is all off, and leaves the scene.

Aside from Crane's enigmatic wording, there is an array of social concerns that reveal the story's broad scope, and may help to explain its genuine appeal to a wide range of readers. First, there is the matter of one going "headlong over all the social hedges," i.e., violating society's tacitly understood behavior code, which includes the selection of appropriate associates, particularly a domestic partner. A number of tantalizing remarks by Crane reveal Potter's deliberate nonconformity in the matter of his choice of a life partner, and the trouble that his reckless behavior gets him into. The girl's common, "underclass" facial expression, as well as the impression she gives (on the train to Yellow Sky) of dutifully expecting to continue cooking, gives the impression that she is far from being the town marshal's social equal. Crane offers the reader enough of Potter's unhappy situation to fill in the supportive details and dispel the mystery of his dark mood and guilt over having "committed an extraordinary crime." Potter is stricken apparently by the realization that he married down, so to speak, allying himself with someone clearly beneath him: a choice that will not sit well with the townsfolk of Yellow

Sky, who might somehow feel embarrassed by her. This is not to say that Potter regrets his action, wishes (however faintly) that he could undo it, or fantasizes about a more suitable lady he might have chosen. He simply must face the consequences of his action in taking this particular woman for his wife, and the prospect of facing them is not a pleasant one.

Now, going "headlong over all the social hedges" may or may not mean a serious breach of the social code, but Crane's heavy emphasis, amounting to gross exaggeration, on Potter's impropriety suggests something deeper than the mere social risk, or misjudgment, of marrying down. He feels "heinous" for having committed that crime, and moreover, "His friends could not forgive him." This may relate to the statement given above, to the effect that his marriage was such an important thing in Yellow Sky, "it could only be exceeded by the burning of the new hotel." The reason for this odd comparison seems close at hand: the burning of that hotel would leave the town at a very big disadvantage, for where else would travelers or visitors stay during their stopover, and where else could newcomers count on lodging until they got properly settled?

Moreover, if an important business establishment like the hotel were to burn, that would mean a considerable loss of revenue for the town. But the marshal's marriage, which would require the town' approval, might (in the event of a bad rating, as with a wife who would not fit in at all) oblige Potter to leave the town, while also causing Yellow Sky to be vulnerable to bad men and other disturbers of the peace. Hence, one may assume, this is the reason for Crane's curious revelations about the workings of the bridegroom's mind; as the train made its way to Yellow Sky, "Jack Potter was beginning to find the shadow of a deed weigh upon him like a leaden slab."

Closely related to the social concern about someone going "headlong over all the social hedges" is a social concern that, like the first, adds considerably to the story's suggestive, possibly disturbing, quality. This second concern involves the array of social and psychological hazards that one incurs by marrying in haste, regardless of whether the chosen partner will be socially acceptable within one's group. However in this case the bride's possible unacceptability is clearly a cause for worry by her husband.

"Face to face with this girl in San Antonio, and spurred by his sharp impulses, he had gone headlong over all the social hedges."

Since he had not consulted Yellow Sky first, about any aspect of his intention to wed, Potter "was now bringing his bride before an innocent and unsuspecting community."

Thus, there is no telling how the townsfolk will treat his wife on a personal level, or how she will react to them, and there is no telling how he himself will be treated, by the townsfolk or by his wife. While the story does not echo the familiar adage, "Marry in haste, repent at leisure," Potter's precipitate action proves very troubling to him nevertheless.

There are two reasons why these closely linked social concerns have a special significance in Crane's story, giving it a suggestive quality—perhaps even a disturbing quality—that is hard to pin down. One reason, obvious enough to many readers, is that so little information is given about the bride, notwithstanding the narrator's superficial descriptions and the bride's individual responses; clearly something important is left out of the story. As a result, there will be lively speculation about what the author was up to in the first place. The second reason is that there are elements in the story line that may be related, one way or another, to Crane's own life. This gives "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" that very special literary feature, "the quality of felt experience"—even if a disguise of sorts may be detected in the text.

A number of commentators and critics have pointed out a connection of sorts between Jack Potter's taking his bride and Crane's taking his own domestic consort.

But that insight, which needs to be examined more closely, is only one important key to the inner meaning of the story hidden within Crane's very frequently anthologized good vs. evil thriller, which was at the same time his spoof of wild West pop fiction, and his too-tender romance.

Though Crane does not directly suggest that the morals or the conduct of Jack Potter's bride could stand improvement, or that Potter is a raffish person accustomed to associating with low, vulgar characters, Crane himself by the time he wrote "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky"—near the end of his life—had long shown that he was a determined dropout from polite society.

For whatever psychological reasons, Crane's lifestyle proved markedly different from that of his parents and other relatives in a fairly prestigious family background. The last of an enormous brood, Crane was born to a prominent Methodist minister who occupied various pulpits in New York and New Jersey until his death in 1880, and to his wife, the daughter of a Methodist clergyman and the niece of a Methodist bishop.

His parents were active in the temperance movement. Crane's "Revolutionary War namesake," Stanley Wertheim and Paul Sorrentino point out in their documentary biography The Crane Log (1994), was a twoterm "delegate from New Jersey to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia." An indifferent and restless student, within a three-year period, 1888-91, Stephen Crane attended or rather spent some time at Claverack College (New York), Lafayette College (Pennsylvania), and Syracuse University (New York). Though college courses in general were not to his liking, baseball was, along with expressing himself on paper: writing sketches and stories, and trying his hand at news reporting. But Crane was not to be the familiar college-dropout figure lacking focus and self-knowledge.

Crane's maverick tendency was already evident during his brief sojourn at Claverack College. Some of his classmates there remembered Crane "as a contradictory personality," according to Linda H. Davis's Badge of Courage: The Life of Stephen Crane (1998). One considered Crane self-deprecatory and arrogant, while another felt he was a bit of a rebel, with very irregular habits: "a law unto himself." The wild streak of

uninhibited willfulness in his character, tinged with a suggestion of cautionary restraint, would apparently help shape a number of his story plots, for example what one finds in "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky."

Crane sought action and adventure—as a reporter, war correspondent, and fiction writer—in the Bowery, the wild West, Mexico, Cuba, Greece. He drank, no matter the temperance culture of his parents. As a young journalist he experimented briefly with living as a vagrant, "going forth to eat as the wanderer may eat, and sleep as the homeless sleep," surviving on and off the mean streets of New York, which yielded "An Experiment in Misery," printed in the New York Press in 1894. Though Crane was "far from sympathetic to the opium habit," his biographer Linda H. Davis writes, his newspaper sketch "Opium's Varied Dreams" for the McClure Syndicate "was evocative and precisely detailed, clearly suggesting that the writer had tried the drug."

Prone to taking risks in his personal relations with others, in fact living on the edge, he happened to show an affinity for certain individuals who might have caused great offense to his parents or certain other family members, had the facts been revealed. That is, women living a bohemian or even shadier existence—performing on the stage, indulging in transitory liaisons, or being involved in prostitution. In familiarizing himself with, and consorting with, females of easy virtue, Crane displayed a particular sympathy toward their precarious existence. Evidence of this may be seen in his groundbreaking novelette Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (1893) and in his contending (at considerable personal risk) with a hostile police officer bent on charging a possibly innocent chorus girl with solicitation of men.

What capped Crane's fairly brief but perfervid life as an amorist (he died at the age of twenty-eight) was his bonding relationship with a colorful, sexually uninhibited woman of the world who was some years older than he. A divorcee estranged from her second husband (an English aristocrat's son), she was Cora Taylor, "born into a respectable Boston family . . . related on her mother's Quaker side to the poet John Greenleaf Whittier" (according to Christopher Benfey's biography The Double Life of Stephen Crane). When she and Crane (about six years her junior) met and they took to each other, in Jacksonville, Florida, at the end of 1896, she was the proprietor of a flourishing house of assignation—or, according to Davis's Badge of Courage, Jacksonville's "finest bawdy house"—called Hotel de Dream. Before she was twenty, according to Davis, she lived with a lover and was employed as a hostess in a New York Tenderloin district gambling house.

After that and until she began her relationship with Crane, Cora entered into two marriages and a string of adulterous affairs.

For the remainder of his short life, Cora remained loyal to him, representing herself as Mrs. Crane, and even, like him, traveling to Greece as a war correspondent so that they might cover the Greco-Turkish War together. Almost all of their remaining time as a domestic couple was spent in England, where they socialized with such prominent authors as Joseph Conrad, H. G. Wells, and Henry James. A year or so after Crane's death in June of 1900, according to Wertheim and Sorrentino's The Crane Log, Cora

operated a house of prostitution and an annex to it in the Jacksonville area. But five years after Crane's death, Cora entered into a bigamous marriage with Hammond McNeil, who in 1907 shot to death a man he thought was her lover, following which Cora "fled to England to avoid testifying at the trial."

Benfey's comparison of the Crane-Cora Taylor union with that of Yellow Sky's marshal Jack Potter and the woman he brought home from San Antonio, while not entirely convincing, nevertheless contains enough of a challenge to appeal to Crane aficionados seeking connections between fiction and autobiography. In Benfey's view it "mirrors the disorientation of Crane and Cora, passing for man and wife, in England." He considers the town's name as a quite plausible one "for gas-lit, coal-clouded London. The bride is ... nameless, as Cora must remain in Crane's family and to his New York friends." But "disorientation" seems a curious word to describe the pair's mental condition, in their leased estate in Sussex. Linda H. Davis in her Crane biography Badge of Courage expresses the feeling that although Cora "was not the woman Stephen's friends would have chosen for him" she did not detract from the pleasure of his company. The pair's "English acquaintances generally accepted her as Stephen's wife"—some were unaware of their true relationship—"and appreciated her devotion to him and her kindness to them."

Given the importance of the twin social concerns of leaping over the social hedges and marrying in haste, in regard to Crane's tale of the bride's coming to Yellow Sky, a few additional remarks may be desirable.

Commentators disagree on whether or not Crane's description of the bride's features in the story match Cora's own features. But the nameless woman is portrayed as a reticent, submissive, mousey creature, whereas Cora, who had, like Crane, a prominent and quite respectable family background, yet had also gone "headlong over all the social hedges," was willful and extravagant: anything but meek and docile. Davis in Badge of Courage mentions, in regard to their brief (English) sojourn at Brede Place in Sussex, that their landlord's daughter considered Cora "the worst type of bossing American woman," even using the word "terror" to describe her. Still, there is something bothersome about Jack Potter's bride, neither pretty nor very young, with her "plain, underclass countenance . . . drawn in placid, almost emotionless lines," and wearing a blue cashmere dress adorned "with small reservations of velvet" and abounding with steel buttons . . . this woman embarrassed by her stiff, straight, and high puff sleeves, accustomed to cooking and dutifully expecting to continue cooking.

What is bothersome about the bride has been touched on above, but bears being repeated for further consideration. It is Jack Potter's feeling heinous, unforgivable, like a "traitor to the feelings of Yellow Sky," guilty of having "committed an extraordinary crime"—by going to San Antonio to meet and propose to "a girl he believed he loved," and by his intending to foist her on an innocent and unsuspecting community.

And the marshal's feeling that way is bothersome because a girl merely plain, a bit aged, and underclass, would not be likely to induce such pronounced guilt feelings in him, even if he did the proposing "like a man hidden in the dark," with a knife easy in his

hand "to sever any friendly duty, any form," as Crane puts it. The bride just may be a woman with a checkered past, or a woman of easy virtue, simply marrying out of her lower class state, determined to put her past forever behind her, and fearing she will not really fit in or be able to make it in Yellow Sky.

Two points may be mentioned here, to bolster the argument that there well may be something irregular, very far out in fact, about the new domestic relationship that is the essence of Crane's story. Potter's "knife easy in his hand to remove any friendly duty, any form" he might wish to maintain, with regard to the folks back in Yellow Sky, does not cut him loose from his law and order duties when he brings back his shadowy bride; the reader does not get the feeling that the bride will be scorned, spurned, or rejected—on the mere basis of her physical appearance or dress. Potter's intense disquiet and his guilty conscience may be the result of the knowledge—which he would desperately want to safeguard in his mind forever—that he obtained the woman from a place or from a set of circumstances so shocking and unforgivable to the townsfolk, if the truth got out, as to damn him forever in Yellow Sky and perhaps later in other communities where the news preceded him in his migrations.

Secondly, Crane's reference to the bride not being very young suggests (given the context) that she was somewhat older than Potter—else why would Crane have mentioned her advancing age? This in turn might mean that she was desperate or at least eager enough to quit San Antonio (things getting too "hot" there for her perhaps?), that she would marry and go off with a near stranger, someone she knew only slightly at best. If this string of ifs and maybes appears to stretch too thin, it should be kept in mind that Crane's Cora allowed herself to be transplanted too, by her man, and that while the bride was different from Cora in a number of ways, her being a cook was certainly no bar to social acceptability, nor was anything else about her that we are informed about such a bar. San Antonio seems a replacement of Jacksonville, Florida, in the domestic setting Crane created in his fictive self-examination; Potter's being so very bothered by his social duty suggests, finally, Crane's psychological projection and self-absolution.

The next two social issues are of a technical nature insofar as they bear on domestic relations within a cultural and historical setting. That is, they concern newlyweds and the embarrassment newlyweds were put to (given the time and place of the story) by the wedding audience and/or outsiders wanting to get in on the fun. The idea of a newly-married couple getting ready for bed and the delights of the wedding night, while no longer a big deal to a twentyfirst-century audience, was cause for ribald mirth to a late nineteenth-century audience, which had various ways of dealing with the couple—ranging from kidding to mocking to harassing. There are at least two reasons for this. First, there was the rigid Puritan morality of the period, and the reactive need of some people (generally, the younger folk) to rebel in whatever way, against the sexual restrictions and censorship imposed by society; second, there was the pattern, going back to ancient times, of folk practices and usages, involving some form of celebration, relating to the triad of sexual union, fertility, and new birth. In this connection, the combination of the wild revel (komos) and the domestic union of the sexes (gamos) may be traced back at least twenty-five hundred years, from ancient Greek comic-drama

performance, to the endings of the comedies of Shakespeare (with their festive wedding ceremonies), and on into all the more recent practices and adaptations.

Certainly a wedding party in the early twenty-first century might still send the "Just Married" couple off on a honeymoon, with showers of rice or a pair of old shoes tied to their car's rear bumper, and possibly a following of several cars with horns tooting to signal the event and its supposed aftermath. But in this story's frontier-town society in the 1890s, public scrutiny could make sensitive people painfully self-conscious where their affectionate behavior was concerned. And since observers might snicker, smirk, smile broadly, roll eyes, drop a suggestive remark, or even make a public show in the presence of a newly-married couple revealing their insecurity, Crane's bride and groom coming to Yellow Sky were involved in a pair of intensely embarrassing comic sequences that involved strangers infringing on their privacy: what might be called The Honeymooners and The Shivaree.

A number of commentators on "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" have apparently missed the point of Crane's references to certain folk traditions—particularly in the case of the spectacle provided by the honeymooners—and this has further obscured the significance of the story for some readers. In his Honeymooners sequence Crane makes use of a conventional situation which around the turn of the twentieth century needed no elaborate explanation. Such a matter, for example, as the bride's "blushes caused by the careless scrutiny of some passengers" when she entered the Pullman car would have been easily understood.

Well over half a century later, however, it seems to have puzzled a number of readers and commentators, despite a clear hint from the author himself. Crane refers to such matters as: the Negro porter, on the train, surveying the newly weds "from afar with an amused and superior grin," bullying them, subtly using "all the manners of the most unconquerable kind of snobbery," oppressing them; and some of the travelers covering "them with stares of derisive enjoyment." After that Crane caps the description of the scene as follows. "Historically there was supposed to be something infinitely humorous in their situation."

There certainly was, and it had nothing to do with Potter announcing the expected time of arrival in Yellow Sky or the splendor of the Pullman car the couple occupied, as one commentator has claimed. It is no secret that a number of stories appearing in that general period reveal an intense antipathy on the part of the newly married, brides especially, to being taken for honeymooners. A few examples follow. William Dean Howells's autobiographical novel Their Wedding Journey (1872), whose action is set in 1870, makes very much of the newlymarried Isabel March's determination not to have her status detected. Van Wyck Brooks in his Introduction to the Fawcett Premier Classics paperback edition (1960) of Their Wedding Journey writes: "Basil and Isabel March were a typical bridal pair, not least in their wish not to be taken for one."

A short story by Puck editor Henry Cuyler Bunner, "The Nice People" (1890), depicts a charming, likeable couple at an elegant summer resort on the Eastern seaboard, who act in so suspicious a manner that the proprietor thinks they are not married, and

confronts them in a humiliating manner, wishing to turn them out of his establishment. As the outraged couple are about to leave in disgrace, it is suddenly revealed that they really are married, but were acting nervous and confused, giving inconsistent answers to direct questions about their background, in a strenuous effort to hide the fact that they are actually on their honeymoon.

And in Henry James's The Turn of the Screw (1898), the governess relates as follows her difficult interview with Miles, the mysteriously abnormal child who has been put in her charge: "We continued silent while the maid was with us—as silent, it whimsically occurred to me, as some young couple who, on their wedding-journey, at the inn, feel shy in the presence of the waiter."

As for the Shivaree—a corruption of charivari—a cogent definition is provided by a British handbook, The Wordsworth Dictionary of Phrase & Fable (1994): "in the U.S.A.

[it] means the mocking serenade accorded to newly married people." Charivari, according to this handbook, is a French expression "for an uproar caused by banging pans and kettles and accompanied by hissing, shouting, etc., to express disapproval."

This fracas, resembling a cats' concert, began as "a common practice at weddings in medieval France, [and] was later used only as a derisive or satirical demonstration at unpopular weddings." (The American version of this custom applies here, needless to say.) Worried, guilt-ridden as he was by his (supposedly) unforgivable crime of not informing his friends in Yellow Sky about his sudden, surreptitious marriage to this questionable woman, Potter was also troubled somewhat by the anticipation of a clamorous shivaree waiting for him when he came back with his bride, and the town found out about it shortly after they got off the train.

Soon he would literally have to face the music: the shivaree music. As Crane puts it, "now the train was hurrying him toward a scene of amazement, glee, and reproach."

The town "had a kind of brass band, which played painfully, to the delight of the popu lace." Thinking about it, Potter "laughed without heart." "If the citizens could dream of his prospective arrival with his bride, they would parade the band at the station and escort them, amid cheers and laughing congratulations, to his adobe home." Potter resolved to "use all the devices of speed and plainscraft" to travel from the train depot to where he lived. Once inside "that safe citadel," the marshal might give out some kind "of vocal bulletin," but after that "not go among the citizens until they had time to wear off a little of their enthusiasm." Then, getting off the train, Potter and his bride "slunk rapidly away"; however, as they fled he noticed their luggage being unloaded and the station agent coming toward him on the run, gesticulating. Laughing and groaning at the initial "effect of his marital bliss" on the town, Potter gripped his wife and the pair escaped.

However, two more social issues, of a very different nature, yet connected with the Honeymooners and the Shivaree sequences in such a way as to reveal something

generally overlooked by readers, must be mentioned. Crane added to his lively Honeymooners and Shivaree elements a social issue concerned with law, justice, and human survival, as well as a social issue having to do with behavior, selfindulgence, and human safety. Thus, in the former instance, there is a dramatization of the continuing difficulty of attempting to maintain law and order in a frontier town: in Potter's periodic encounters with the rampaging, drunken Scratchy Wilson, who seems to be an actual deadly menace. And in the latter instance, there is the matter of the physical perils of two deadly temptations, drink and careless gunplay. Scratchy Wilson represents an unconvincing model of a potentially good man—when he is sober, according to the bartender of the local saloon, he is the "nicest fellow in town,"—but when he is drunk (by implication) there is no telling what he might do, what harm he might wreak. These four concerns will come to represent important elements of an obscure but meaningful pattern (to be described below), suggesting one of the most interesting aspects of Crane's story. As that pattern indicates, his prehensile mind (or creative imagination) worked on several levels simultaneously and covertly, revealing the broader reaches of his human spirit.

Another social issue involves geography as well as social factors: the distinction between the East and Easterners, and the West and Westerners. Commentators have made so much of this contrast in the story (one writer even regarded San Antonio as an Eastern city, vis-a-vis Yellow Sky in the West) that attention has been shifted away from events and their significance in a specific locale. While it was only natural for an adventure- and danger-seeker like Crane to leave his Eastern home-base area of New Jersey and New York and go in search of other action zones—the great American West, Mexico, Florida, Cuba, Greece, before taking up temporary residence in England, visiting Ireland, and finally, spending his final days in a German sanitarium—he retained a decided East-West split perspective. (In Crane's 1898 story "The Blue Hotel" there is a minor character named Mr. Blanc, who is usually referred to by the narrator as the Easterner.) As a result of this dichotomous view, Crane was led to make certain curious observations in drawing distinctions between the two entities. The story in fact opens with such a statement, which has greatly impressed some of the commentators.

The great Pullman was whirling onward with such dignity of motion that a glance from the window seemed simply to prove that the plains of Texas were pouring eastward. Vast flats of green grass, dull-hued spaces of mesquite and cactus, little groups of frame houses, woods of light and tender trees, all were sweeping into the east, sweeping over the horizon, a precipice.

The idea behind this optical illusion (as one commentator called it), in the annals of Crane criticism, is that the East is swallowing up the (wild) West, draining it of its substance, and pretty soon there will not be any West, or Western culture (i.e., civilization), as it has been known, left.

This idea of the predatory East taking in the once pristine and possibly even noble, West is reinforced, in those above-mentioned annals of criticism, by Crane's description of Scratchy Wilson's clothing. His "maroon-colored flannel shirt . . . had been purchased for the purposes of decoration, and made principally by some Jewish women on the

East Side of New York. . . ." Scratchy's "boots had red tops with gilded imprints, of the kind beloved in winter by little sledding boys on the hillsides of New England." These references have been interpreted as a slur on those particular Jewish women and "little sledding boys": two groups that seem to have been targeted by an accusatory Crane for invading and corrupting the West. But then, as if to challenge the idea that he is casting aspersions on the influence of the insidious East, while applauding the exemplary West and its ways, Crane makes a curious remark. At the end of the story, when Scratchy, told off in effect by Jack Potter, is so dumbfounded at the news of Potter's marriage that he simply leaves the scene, there is this authorial explanation. "He was not a student of chivalry; it was merely that in the presence of this foreign condition he was a simple child of the earlier plains. He picked up his starboard revolver, and, placing both weapons in their holsters, he went away."

This East-West dichotomy, such as it is and notwithstanding some arguable interpretations by commentators who perhaps focus too narrowly when reading Crane's text, is part of a number of dichotomies or dual perspectives throughout the story, as will be made clear in due course. The view shared by some of the above readers that the old West was succumbing to the East because a few Eastern-made clothing items turned up in Yellow Sky (which is located in the Southwest, rather than the West proper) must be set against the realization that many items of clothing and other types of manufacture in common use—such as the railroad itself—came from the industrial and commercial East, which was by no means independent of, or alien to, the rest of the "land of the free and the home of the brave."

Techniques

In this lively western yarn told in a third person, limited omniscient-observer style, and enhanced by certain autobiographical hints, Crane also uses a dual perspective to convey special meanings that might well be inaccessible or seriously obscured, if only a single line of thought were being projected for the reader. There are at least two instances of this dual perspective, each different from the other in format and purpose, but equal in that they are both necessary to the integrity of the story.

The first involves a special subtext by means of which Crane appears to make a running commentary on Potter's marriage and his honeymoon-return to Yellow Sky.

Read closely the entire story takes on the appearance of an extended string of theatrical entertainment numbers, climaxed by the anticlimactic encounter with Scratchy, what might be called The Showdown That Was Not. This spoof of a gun battle between the marshal and the town badman (drunken or sober) highlights one of the staples of Western legend, fiction, and films. Perhaps more than other shoot-outs (over conflicting land claims or legal violations), it has for a very long time been a source of amusement for young boys wishing to simulate a quick-draw contest between the law and the outlaw, and a pastime for amateur performers and tourists (as well as some locals) at Western resort areas and amusement parks. In the summer of 1998 for example, a number of Wyoming towns offered such fare to anyone present in the late afternoon, at a particular site. In Cody, Wyoming, the advertisement for such an event, held in front of the Irma Hotel—once a sporty dance hall—read as follows: "Free Gun Fighters Shoot-Out, 6 p.m., Every Evening Except Sunday." The event featured a "drunken" badman exchanging bullets with a sheriff, with a gaudily dressed floozy running out of the Irma Hotel to stop the fray.

This terminal entertainment sequence in "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" is easy enough to identify as a burlesque element.

While the story's opening sequence—The Honeymooners—has been misinterpreted by a number of commentators (who have taken it too literally and too seriously), others have discerned its comic intent. But what lies within the story material between these two sequences, to highlight them as part of an underlying pattern, seems to have made little impression on the story's interpreters. That middle portion actually contains vaudeville and stage-farce material that in its own way furthers the action of the story proper, while also offering amusement to the perceptive reader. But Crane, in shifting the action (while the newlyweds' California express was approaching Yellow Sky) to the town's Weary Gentleman Saloon, sets the stage first. "Across the sandy street were some vivid green grass-plots, so wonderful in appearance, amid the sands that burned near them in a blazing sun, that they caused a doubt in the mind. They exactly resembled the grass mats used to represent lawns on the stage."

Here then, in the saloon, Crane presents a new bit of entertainment which, had it only been completed in his story, would have been suitable for a vaudeville skit on its own

merits. It was in effect a one-man show by an impromptu stand-up comic—a drummer (i.e., traveling salesman)—fasttalking and verbose, addressing a silent audience of three Texans and two Mexican sheep-herders. Leaning gracefully on the saloon bar, he told many stories "with the confidence of a bard who has come upon a new field."

The drummer's little entertainment number is cut short by a herald: a young man who rushes in and announces that Scratchy Wilson is on the loose again; in fact he is on a drunken rampage. This frenzied announcement of what will later be the grand finale turns out to be the prelude to another little skit involving some knockabout stage business plus a bit of comic wisecracking. Thus, the two Mexicans immediately exit, through the back door of the saloon. (It has been argued that Crane was a racist, but the complexities of Texas history, its connections with Mexico, and the resulting AngloHispanic relations insofar as they might have affected Crane, make that issue hard to resolve.) The drummer, frightened and confused now by such apparently customary goings-on, seems almost to be the butt of some in-group joke concocted to discomfit him as an outlander. A paraphrase of the dialogue resulting from his nervous, destabilized condition and the response it evokes, is as follows. There won't be a gunfight, will there? he asks. Don't know about that, he is told by one of the three Texans, but there'll be some mighty good shootin'. When the bartender forces this poor rattled newcomer to get down on the floor, behind the bar, he seems even more like the fall guy in this little comic routine about a Westernstyle welcome to a lorn city-slicker stranger.

Another skit follows: a solo performance by the drunk and disorderly Scratchy Wilson (which is reminiscent of the drunken hall-porter interlude in Macbeth). He is wildly out of control, spoiling for a fight. Scratchy is also burdened by Crane with a heavy load of cliches from pulp and pop Westerns and possibly the temperance tracts as well.

(His "face flamed in a rage begot of whisky . . ." and "the cords of his neck straightened and sank, straightened and sank, as passion moved him.") He torments a dog by shooting around it, tries vainly to get through the closed door of the Weary The Bride Conies to Yellow Sky Gentleman Saloon, and fusillades "the windows of his most intimate friend." This last statement is one of Crane's loose ends in the story, unless he intended Scratchy (whom the barkeep described as "about the last one of the old gang that used to hang out along the river here") to still have one or two close cronies tucked away somewhere.

Then Scratchy remembers his ancient antagonist, the marshal, and he decides to go to his home and "by bombardment" bring him out into the open for a fight.

Spectacle is all, here. Crane's language in this seriocomic approach to the hazards of frontier-town existence evokes the images and the feel of popular theater, including the vaudeville stage. The reader can almost see and hear the trained performers on the stage sets. Scratchy "was playing with this town; it was a toy for him." On his way to Potter's dwelling, Scratchy was "chanting Apache scalp-music." Once at the house, he howlingly challenges it but it "regarded him as might a great stone god," giving no sign. And, during the terminal sequence, at the confrontation of Potter and bride by Scratchy,

Crane inserts what is perhaps the strangest of all his show business references. It has to do with the bride's reaction to seeing Scratchy's gun pointing at her husband's chest. "As for the bride, her face had gone as yellow as old cloth. She was a slave to hideous rites, gazing at the apparitional snake." This calls up an image of a stage magician producing a snake from out of nowhere, as a female volunteer from the audience is frightened almost to death at the sight of the stunt, yet cannot tear her eyes away from the spectacle.

The second instance of the dual-perspective technique that Crane uses is something more than simply a distinction between the glory of the married state and the implied lack of it in the unmarried state—a distinction that is made quite clear in this story.

Specifically, Crane stresses the grandeur of the Pullman parlor car carrying bride and groom further West, as the outward and visible sign, the objective correlative, of their elevated existence. To their minds, the "surroundings reflected the glory of their marriage that morning in San Antonio; this was the environment of their new estate . . ."

What this stage set represented greatly impressed them. The fittings were dazzling; the velvet was figured in sea-green; the brass, silver, and glass all shone; "darkly brilliant as" an oil pool's surface gleamed the wood. At one end of the car a sturdy bronze "held a support for a separated chamber" (men's and women's rest rooms?); and olive and silver frescos decorated the ceiling.

Throughout most of this story of a marriage that is framed in theatrical entertainment routines, Potter will retain this dual perspective. That is, on the one hand, the profoundly impressive, temporary dwelling of their Pullman parlor car (no matter their embarrassment or their being condescended to by everybody) and its allowing them momentary respite from certain troubles waiting for them after they reach their destination. On the other hand, the pervasive effect of those troubles permeates the couple's thoughts during the train ride and after, and become actualized when Potter feels that he may be at the point of death. That is, after Potter admits to the crazed and trigger-happy Scratchy that he is not carrying a gun, he realizes that Scratchy might do almost anything, no matter how drastic. Potter stiffens and steadies himself. At this crucial point in the story, the two facets of Potter's dual perspective come into play at the same time: ". . . somewhere at the back of his mind a vision of the Pullman floated," retaining the velvet and all the shining and gleaming surfaces of the original visual experience— "all the glory of the marriage, the environment of the new estate."

Themes

Unconditional love

Crane presents the theme of love in the relationship between Jack Potter and the Bride. Although he mentions that Jack only thinks he is in love with her, the circumstances that surround their relationship and marriage can only leave one to assume that he must be in love with her to risk marrying her. Throughout the story, despite the circumstances, the two are found looking lovingly at each other, despite the predicament acting on these feelings have left them in. Despite his apparent loyalty to the town of Yellow Sky, Jack marries her without their permission or approval, and despite the reprisal he expects, is happy to take her back to Yellow Sky. Further, she is described as being considerably below his class, which can only leave us to assume that his motive for marrying her must be unconditional love and that beyond the story presented here is another love story that has already unfolded. By presenting the idea of love, the author is questioning whether love conquers all, including social boundaries and the sense of duty.

Courage

The idea of courage is shown in two conflicting instances and is shown in Jack Potter's character. The first instance is one of a lack of courage, when Jack does not tell the people of Yellow Sky about his marriage, not even by telegraph, and sneaks back into town with his bride. Ironically, the second is also shown through Jack's character when he stands up to Scratchy Wilson, despite having a gun pointed at his chest. These representations of courage tie into the idea of a sense of duty - firstly, Jack is afraid to bring his bride home as he has let the people of Yellow Sky down by not telling them about his marriage, and secondly, being the town marshal, it is his responsibility to stand up to Scratchy when he is threatening the town.

Social change

This is one of the main ideas running through the story and is portrayed in a couple of different ways. Firstly, there is the marriage of Jack Potter and the Bride. The Bride is of a lower class than Jack, and this is obvious to all they come across. Despite this, Jack, albeit worried about how they will be received, is happy to marry her and bring her back to his hometown. Secondly, the condescending attitude of the Negro waiters suggests a shift in the social hierarchy of the time. Finally, as Scratchy searches for an opponent, we see a change in accepted behavior. Whereas in a typical Western tale there would be plenty of roughnecks up for a gunfight, in this story, Scratchy is hard-pressed to find one, suggesting a shift the social landscape of the time.

Twenty-first century readers of "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," like its readers at the turn of the twentieth century, may well have widely differing views on essential themes,

depending on how literally or broadly they interpret the actual text. Some may feel that the woman of mystery and her unexpected influence in curbing male passions represents a theme, as would the impact of the industrial and commercial East upon the wild and woolly West, to say nothing of the wondrous transforming power of marriage or the anticipation of a crisis or showdown that must somehow be resolved.

Since most of these have already been discussed within different contexts, and in the remaining case—the wondrous transforming power of marriage—the subject requires a more suitable context than the present one, a different set of themes will be taken up. The three themes in this new group, though each is distinct from the other two, will be considered together, in terms of their dynamics and the way they interact among themselves. They are as follows: the individual in relation to society: insider as outsider, outsider as insider; role changes in relation to game playing; and a struggle for power.

Jack Potter when we first encounter him in the story is sorely troubled because he, the marshal of Yellow Sky, Texas, has placed himself outside the borders of what he considers his circle of friends and associates in the town, by withholding personal information from them. Potter's position as law officer of the town does not by itself guarantee him indefinite security of status in terms of a job or social standing. His realization that he may have forfeited his power in one area or both areas helps explain his feelings of disquiet and is also interwoven with his sense of self-reproach, or guilt. In this sense he is clearly the insider turned outsider. Potter's bride from San Antonio occupies an ambiguous position. As the wife of the marshal she could be expected to be on the inside, socially, but since she is an unknown quantity to the townsfolk, if negative information about her were to be made public, her status as an outsider would be reinforced, in effect doubled in significance.

On the train carrying the newlyweds to Yellow Sky, they have a Negro porter who in effect bullies them and subtly uses "the most unconquerable kind of snobbery," and a Negro waiter who attends them in the dining car, viewing them as would "a fatherly pilot" and deferentially patronizing them. Those two men are both examples of outsiders, socially, acting momentarily like insiders—toward insiders so insecure that they are not holding on to their earlier status. Finally, Scratchy Wilson, the resident outlaw who is a familiar fixture in Yellow Sky, is ipso facto both an insider and an outsider, but when the newlywed Potter disarms him with the weapon of his marriage and his disarmament, Scratchy ceases in effect to be an outsider, or even an insider for that matter—at least in terms of Yellow Sky society—simply by leaving the scene. By his withdrawal response to Potter's revelation Scratchy is hors de combat; and since he has placed himself out of the ongoing combat with Potter, such as it is, his role in the little war game, like Potter's role in it, has ended.

Beneath this interplay of status positions in Crane's story (who is in, who is out?), as discussed immediately above, lies something more important than tedious scorekeeping. The main plot of the narrative is about power and power shifts: role changes in relation to power-game playing, and the struggle to be on top of things. The contest for power between the marshal and the town badman is won by the marshal because of, and despite, the marshal's unwillingness to fight (the equivalent of an

apparent surrender), which exposes the cowardice and blustering pretense in the challenger: the hollow man, Scratchy. No objector to irony or reversal of intention, in his fictions, Crane enables the reader to consider this story's characters and their various interrelationships from different perspectives: social/occupational status, degree of authority or control or power over others, sustained willingness to play along or go along with an arbitrary code or game scenario, etc.

As already indicated above, Scratchy at the end of the story is described by Crane as being, in effect, on the level of a child.

It is interesting that the psychiatrist Dr.

Eric Borne, in his classic introduction to transactional psychology, Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships (1964), offers a point of view that illuminates Crane's curious remark about Scratchy.

Borne, in speaking of essential behavior and feeling patterns in people, begins with what he calls egostates. These are "psychological realities," rather than roles. The individual ego state is, practically speaking, "a system of feelings accompanied by a related set of behavior patterns." Every person, in Barnes' view, appears to possess a small number of these ego states, three choices to be exact. Thus at any particular time each human being within a social setting will display "a Parental, Adult or Child ego state, and . . . individuals can shift with varying degrees of readiness from one ego state to another." Not only does Crane refer to Scratchy as a child, but Potter, the adult figure in this transactional psychological situation, opens up to Scratchy something that clearly is for grownups only: marriage, putting away childish things such as guns, and assuming the responsibilities of a family man. As Crane puts it, "it was merely that in the presence of this foreign condition he was a simple child of the earlier plains."

Style

Point of view

The story is told in the third person, by an omniscient narrator, which allows the author to let the reader into the minds and thoughts of all characters. However, despite this, he does employ the use of seemingly otherwise meaningless characters such as the drummer to evoke discussion of Scratchy Wilson and Jack Potter, which provides for insight into the history and relationships that exist there.

Setting

A fictional town, Yellow Sky is a town associated with the idea of the 'Wild West,' complete with saloon and troublemakers ready for a gunfight. However, in this town, things are changing - the idea of the 'wild' West has calmed down and the only man who will rise to the challenge of a gunfight with the last of an old gang is the town marshal - and only because he feels he is obliged. The township of Yellow Sky has a close-knit community as well as regular events and episodes that the town folk have simply become used to, such as Scratchy challenging the entire town to a gunfight. The setting in this story is vital to the development of its themes, and if the same story were told against a different setting, the meaning would be dramatically altered.

Language and meaning

The language that Crane uses is flowery and prose-like, and it is rich with similes and vivid imagery. He leaves no detail to the imagination with long-winded, heavy descriptions. The language that he uses is formal and non-colloquial, making this text somewhat a difficult to grasp for the average reader without a dictionary handy, and without one, many of these full descriptions of the scenery and the action may go to waste on the everyday reader.

Structure

This short story is made up of four chapters, with the first three chapters following three different scenarios and the fourth bringing these all together for the climax of the story. The plot is primarily linear, with the only overlap being a matter of minutes as the trouble with Scratchy starts before Jack's train arrives so as to match up the meeting of Jack and Scratchy at Jack's house.

Quotes

"The man's face was reddened from many days in the wind and sun, a direct result of his new black clothes was that his brick-colored hands were constantly performing in a most conscious fashion." Chapter 1

"The blushes caused by the careless scrutiny of some passengers as she had entered the car were strange to see upon this plain, underclass countenance, which was drawn in placid, almost emotionless lines." Chapter 1

"To the minds of the pair, their surroundings reflected the glory of their marriage that morning in San Antonio." Chapter 1

"He subtly used all the manners of the most unconquerable kind of snobbery." Chapter 1

"He was now brining his bride before an innocent and unsuspecting community." Chapter 1

"Face to face with this girl in San Antonio and spurred by his sharp impulse, he had gone headlong over all the social hedges." Chapter 1

"It could only be exceeded by the burning of the new hotel." Chapter 1

"They looked at each other with eyes softly aglow." Chapter 1

"But the information had obviously made such a cleft in every skull in the room that the drummer was obliged to see its importance. All had instantly become solemn." Chapter 2

"It was as if the surrounding stillness had formed the arch of a tomb over him." Chapter 3

"The calm adobes preserved their demeanor at the passing of this small thing in the middle of the street." Chapter 3

"The man was playing with this town. It was a toy for him." Chapter 3

"Sometimes they laughed together, shamefacedly and low." Chapter 3

"She was a slave to hideous rites, gazing at the apparitional snake." Chapter 4

"He was stiffening and steadying, but yet somewhere at the back of his mind a vision of the Pullman floated; the sea-green figured velvet, the shining brass, silver, and glass, the wood that gleamed as darkly brilliant as the surface of a pool of oil - all the glory of the marriage, the environment of the new estate" Chapter 4

"Seemingly for the first time, he saw the drooping, drowning woman at the other man's side." Chapter 4

"He was like a creature allowed a glimpse of another world." Chapter 4

Topics for Discussion

Do you think that it was the shock of Jack's marriage or the woman that he had married that stopped Scratchy Wilson from taking his challenge any further?

Throughout the story, the information that we are given about the bride is subtle and at times ambiguous. Interpreting this information, discuss her as a character.

Discuss how Crane suggests a shift in society throughout the story.

Do you think that Scratchy Wilson's reaction to Jack's marriage reflects the feelings of the rest of the town? Outline how you think the story might have continued when the rest of the town found out.

Discuss Crane's use of imagery throughout the story. What does it add to the narrative?

Discuss the character of the drummer - what is his relevance to the story?

Do you think that Jack is in love with the Bride? Back up your answer using the characterization and themes presented in the story.

Literary Precedents

Because "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" appears so intensely personal, for all the reasons given or suggested above, it is difficult to cite a fictional work that might easily be tagged as a literary precedent.

Michael W. Schaefer comments on this point, in his chapter on the story, in The Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Stephen Crane (1996). Given the rich body of biographical material to be dealt with, Schaefer writes, "few critics have" made the effort to dig up literary sources for this story. The most obvious ones might perhaps more properly be termed sub-literary—the host of dime-novel Westerns that were so popular in Crane's day, the conventions of which regarding showdowns between bloodthirsty badmen and noble, straight-shooting marshals he deftly subverts here.

Related Titles

Out of the five other important Western tales in the Crane canon with which "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" may be grouped—"Five White Mice," "One DashHorses," "A Man and Some Others," "The Blue Hotel," and "Moonlight on the Snow"— "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" may be closely linked only with the last named.

"Moonlight on the Snow," which was published in 1900, two years after the publication of "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," includes in its cast of characters the marshal and the drunken badman of the latter story.

Jack Potter is described as "a famous town marshal of Yellow Sky, but now the sheriff of the county." Scratchy Wilson, described as "once a no less famous desperado," is his assistant. Not long before Tom Larpent, the operator of the largest gambling house in the notoriously evil town of Warpost, is to be hanged for shooting a man, Potter and Wilson arrive in town.

Potter explains that Larpent is wanted in Yellow Sky, on a charge of grand larceny, and they have come to take him there. With only the slightest difficulty, and only token resistance, they take Larpent away from the rope and the town of dreadful reputation, Warpost.

For all its entertainment value as a grand program of vaudeville and sideshow sequences, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" is graced with a seriousness and a haunting quality of elusive meaning. In this sense it is quite unlike "Moonlight on the Snow," which may appear to some readers as a story of convenience: another Western concoction written for the eager print media by the very needy and very ill Stephen Crane in his last months. The image of Tom Larpent may linger—with a rope around his neck, he bows, looking "handsome and distinguished and—a devil, a devil as cold as moonlight upon the ice"—but not much else does.

The issue of the passing of the wild, perhaps even wicked, West as it gives way to a kinder, gentler land, the civilizing East, which commentators on "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" have made so much of (as indicated earlier in this paper), is picked up in this story. Once again the reader is reminded that Crane is a deadpan satirist and mimic, prone to using cliches, stereotypes, and familiarities of plot episodes to spin out his yarns. In "Moonlight on the Snow," a venerable old man and his family also come into town, but in a coach, before Larpent is to be hanged. Crane explains the significance of the appearance of the white-haired gentleman (the new parson, as it turns out), "a beautiful young lady, and two little girls clasping hands" as "the rough West stood in naked immorality before the eyes of the gentle East." When these newcomers discover what will be done to Larpent, they are stunned and incapacitated.

ADAPTATIONS requirements of the plot, is depicted as a kind of nonentity, rather than as a The 1952 movie "Face to Face," directed person to be reckoned with?

by John Brahm, and with Bretaigne Windust, 4. Crane's "Bride" story contains a numJames Mason, Michael Pate, Robert Pres-ber of nuances of meaning, hints of ton, and Marjorie Steele, is a two-part film references to outside material, and other comprising Joseph Conrad's The Secret Sharer evidence of hidden agenda elements. and Crane's "The Bride Comes to Yellow What do you make of the guilt that Sky." Leonard Maltin in his 1999 Movie & Potter feels, which affects his bride also?

Video Guide gave it two and a half stars, and Aside from the references to guilt, what wrote (on "The Bride Comes to Yellow other odd references have you been Sky" portion): "bland with Preston bring-struck by in this story? Explain.

ing bride Steele out West."

5. What was your reaction to the great showdown that never took place, at the end of the story? Did you regard it as a IDEAS FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS cop-out on Crane's part, as a credible event or nonevent, as a deliberate satire Stephen Crane's short story "The Bride or burlesque on the wild West, or someComes to Yellow Sky" has for many years thing else? Comment, with a well thoughtcontinued to appeal to the imaginations of out reason for your response.

literary critics and other readers, because of its puzzling allusions and references, what 6. How important in your view is the seem to be its emotional excesses, and its distinction Crane makes between the colorful and diversified subject matter. Thus East and the West? What factors does there are many interesting topics to discuss, he cite to point out the cultural differa number of which are given below. ences between these geographic regions?

7. What does Crane, at the very end of the 1. On first reading "The Bride Comes to story, mean when he says that Scratchy Yellow Sky," did you sense something Wilson "was not a student of chivalry" strange or puzzling about the plot and but that "in the presence of this foreign Crane's handling of it? Explain. condition he was a simple child of the earlier plains"?

2. Why, in your opinion and based on your reading, has Crane's "Bride" story 8. If you were to recommend "The Bride remained important to literary scholars Comes to Yellow Sky" as a good read to as well as teachers and students in a young reader or a mature older reader, American literature classes? What are on what solid basis would you recomsome of the story elements that might mend it? If you were not to recommend fix the tale in the reader's mind, or at this story, why not? Explain.

least leave a lingering impression?

9. After reading this story and consider3. What factors, in your view, might have ing these topics for discussion, what motivated Crane to make the marshal's questions or issues do you feel should bride such an ordinary, drab, low-profile still be taken up, in order to help clarify figure, who despite the prominence important but neglected aspects of the given her by the story's title and by the story? Try to justify your suggestions.

10. After reflecting on a wide variety of aspects of "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," what in your opinion is its main organizing idea or principle? Explain.

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