

and want him elsewhere, out of their thoughts—is a sustained modern concept, and a coup.

Davis proposes two celebrated Western stories, "The Blue Hotel" and "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," as abiding works as well, but they may lack weight. The man, to be sure, could flat-out write. In "The Blue Hotel," there's a moment when the players in a card game prepare to step outdoors into a blizzard to fight, and when the door is flung open "some of the scarred and bedabbed cards were caught up from the floor and dashed helplessly against the farther wall. The men lowered their heads and plunged into the tempest as into a sea."

IN the spring of 1898, Crane went off to a last round of battles, the Spanish-American War. Repeatedly in combat, he was cool under fire and watched the Battle of San Juan Hill at close quarters while wearing a white raincoat. He was sneered at then by a rival celebrity journalist, Richard Harding Davis, but later Davis changed his mind and wrote that "in his devotion to duty, and also in his readiness at the exciting moments of life, Crane is quite as much of a soldier as the man whose courage he described." Crane's own prose from the field, one can't help noticing, had got quicker: "These Mauser projectiles sounded as if one string of a most delicate musical instrument had been touched by the wind into a long, faint note."

When the war ended, Crane weirdly disappeared in Havana for a few weeks; then he was glimpsed, very run-down, in cafés and on the street. He was in love again (no one ever found out the name of the woman), but also, one must guess, was not anxious to get home and look at what lay ahead. His tuberculosis had been diagnosed, and his unending debts—he and Cora had left their previous residence with the bailiffs snapping at their heels—continued when they improvidently rented Brede Place, a dilapidated Tudor-and-Elizabethan pile in East Sussex. Once Crane did get home, the dinners and social weekends and parties went on (Henry James bicycled over from Lamb House, in Rye, about once a week), and Crane wrote on incessantly, amid distractions, trying to get out from under: war stories, junior fiction for *Harper's Bazaar*, an abominable novel entitled "Active Service," pieces about the

Boer War, and frantic pleas to his London agent ("My Dear Pinker: I must have the money. I can't get on without it").

Linda Davis's strong suit is accrual, and her readers will feel a great attachment to Crane in her latter glimpses of him: the author rising from his writing desk to let his three dogs into his study, and then, a few minutes later, to let them out again; or H. G. Wells and Conrad and other guests, in their dressing gowns, playing a late-night impromptu concert with comb-and-toilet-paper instruments in the Brede Place pantry while Stephen conducts with a toasting fork. But she is clear about the kind of slave work he was doing at the same time, and at what miserable odds. "In four years," she writes near the end, "Crane had published five novels, two volumes of poetry, three big story collections, two books of war stories, and countless works of short fiction and reporting. And yet in three years he had earned just over \$1,200 for his entire American output." In the meantime, the English sales of "The Red Badge of Courage" had netted him twenty pounds, thanks to an unforgiving contract he had with an American publisher.

He suffered a lung hemorrhage just after Christmas in 1899—he had been staging a musical pageant at Brede Place—but went on working. He died the following June, at the age of twenty-eight. A. J. Liebling, in a piece that appeared in this magazine in August, 1961, wrote that Crane died "unwillingly, of the cause most common among American middle-class males—anxiety about money." It was the money and the skinflint publishers who killed him, Liebling said, just as they had nearly done in Dos-toyevsky. Liebling was an admirer of Crane's writing, for its clarity amid the fudgy general run of eighteen-nineties prose—Hamlin Garland, he asserted, "couldn't write for free seeds"—and he concluded that Crane's early death had deprived us of what might have been "the great correspondent that the First World War failed to produce."

Here, and here only, I depart from my wrathful old colleague. I cannot find it in me to wish Stephen Crane still at it in his fifties, caught in a more modern time and forced to write about death on an even more enormous scale. Anyway, he had already told us what a modern battle was like, long before he had to go to one. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

ONCE UPON THE RIVER LOVE, by Andrei Makine; translated from the French by Geoffrey Strachan (Arcade; \$24.95). Can a whole novel be about adolescent boys watching Jean-Paul Belmondo movies through a Siberian winter? Resoundingly, yes. One of the boys has been lamed by ice floes, and another is nearly raped, rendering him permanently pugilistic. The third is our narrator, seeking beauty in the taiga amid the coarseness of Soviet life, and finding it in friendship and French movies. His tale is suffused with the longing of an exile—less because the narrator has left Russia than because every adult is an exile from his youth.

THE RINGS OF SATURN, by W. G. Sebald (New Directions; \$23.95). The author turns his solitary walks (through Waterloo, Amsterdam, the coastal towns of England) into meditations of Borgesian range. A description of an abandoned bridge over the River Blyth occasions the story of the silk-obsessed Tz'u-hsi, Empress of China, which leads, in turn, to the sad end of the excitable poet Swinburne—"whose life was coterminous to the year with that of the Dowager Empress." By such slim threads Sebald weaves his tales together with a complexity and historical sweep that easily encompass both truth and fiction.

SPLIT: A COUNTERCULTURE CHILDHOOD, by Lisa Michaels (Houghton Mifflin; \$23). This account of being raised by sixties radicals may be the best argument for the left since Marx. The facts at first sound otherwise: tot at demo with Vietcong flag loses dad to prison for his antiwar activities, gets dragged around the country with mom's new boyfriend, etc. But the signal fact is that these parents, separated from and resentful of each other, treated their child with the same absolute attentiveness, respect, and unreserved sympathy that they had hoped everyone in the world could share.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF DIPLOMACY, by Jane C. Loeffler (Princeton Architectural Press; \$27.50). The recent bombings in Kenya and Tanzania have endowed this conscientious, illuminating study of the State Department's Cold War building boom with unfortunate topicality. Competing with the Russians, who stuck with Stalinist structures, the Americans opted for modernism; consequently, the book's illustrations are a somewhat damning panorama of yesterday's avant-garde. Since the 1983 bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, however, art has taken second place to security.

IN THE COUNTRY OF ILLNESS, by Robert Lipsyte (Knopf; \$24). Lipsyte, a veteran sportswriter and city columnist for the *Times*, is also a cancer patient. In his signature voice—clear-headed and astringent—he takes us where we least want to go (the examining room, the hospital ward), and he manages not merely to devise adult strategies of sanity but also to tell the story of almost dying (or surviving for now) with pitiless wit. Here is a narrator who doesn't beg for admiration but earns it all the same.