

How does Stephen Crane make the ending so powerful in "The Open Boat"?

Stephen Crane uses a wave of imagery contrasting between positive and negative to build hope and then reduce it. This wave of hope builds up a satisfying climax towards the end of the story. Crane uses a plethora of war imagery such as "pelleted" for a symbolic purpose. Crane uses a symbol such as the cigar or allusions to several other texts and poems such as the Bingen on the Rhine or Babes in the Wood as foreshadowing. He uses the theme of how unimportant the men were to fate and the shows the beauty in the of nature during dark times to show several emotions as the men start to accept that they might die.

The story starts off with waves with "hue of slate" and who's "edge was jagged". The author shows negative imagery. Slate is a greyish colour and is a hard rock which is often formed when volcanic lava cools down. By exposing the reader to hard rocks whose "edge was jagged" and sharp, Crane builds a sense of danger and foreboding. The foam was "racing down" from the "summit" is a metaphor which compares the foam to snow racing down from the top of the mountain. This is negative imagery because the foam parallels the snow creating the image of a devastating avalanche which could kill everyone on the mountain. The sense of danger is heightened when Crane narrates, after "successfully surmounting" one waves, another wave which was just as important was behind". The sibilance of "successfully surmounting" makes the narrator sound as if he is gasping for breath and is very tired. This is then starkly juxtaposed with "slate to emerald green" and "amber light". The "snarling of the crests" had become "tumbling snow". The change from a hard rock to a beautiful jewel and a hopeful light changes the mood and atmosphere very quickly and makes the readers hopeful for the men's survival. The personification of the crests, and giving the crests animalistic qualities increases the danger and creates suspense for the reader but the juxtaposition with "tumbling snow" shows how quickly the waves calmed down and became something of a luxury. This mimics how quickly fate can change which is echoed throughout the story. This makes it almost impossible for the reader to predict the ending of the story. The waves of hope build suspense which makes the ending all the more satisfying.

Crane uses several symbols as foreshadowing. He uses the symbolic cigars and a drink of water for many purposes. The crew had found eight cigars, four of which were wet but the other "four were perfectly scatheless" and they had "three dry matches". The crew only had three dry matches which makes the reader think that one person will get left behind. The person who was left behind could die. This foreshadows Billie's death but since "everybody took a drink of water", it shows that everyone would be safe as of now. Billie's death is foreshadowed in many ways. Billie only asked the correspondent to relieve him when he was at the "last stages of exhaustion", this shows that that Billie did most of the work on the boat and was a very hard worker. Furthermore, he worked in the engine room before the sinking of the Commodore. This has a build-up of exhaustion, foreshadowing that Billie might die of exhaustion. Billie is the only named character throughout the story. This draws attention to him in the story making it seem as he is a very important character and is the odd one out. This makes the reader think that he is the unlighted cigar and the one destined to die. This build-up makes the ending very powerful since the readers suspicions would be confirmed. He was the only person who drowned. His name is

mentioned as to pay respect for his hard-work, without which no one would have survived.

The monologue which alludes to fate and god is repeated throughout the story but it gets shorter every time it is repeated. It calls fate an “old-ninny woman” and an “old hen”. It calls to the “seven mad gods who rule the sea”. This monologue gets shorter every time which could show that the men are more and more likely to accept that they might die at sea. Throughout the story the men realize that fate was not an “old ninny-woman” but more as careless, “she did not seem cruel” “nor wise”. This is symbolic and important as the men realize that fate owes them nothing; fate is random and death is inevitable. Death is foreshadowed when the cook and the oiler are referred to as “babes of the sea” which is a “grotesque rendering of the old babes in the wood”. This alludes to the story Babes in the Wood in which unsuspecting children were lured into the forest and then killed. This allusion shows cook and oiler are both at risk of death. This cruel imagery of “grotesque rendering” is cruel and has a negative connotation. The oiler dies; the cook was saved by the captain. The cook was “bequeathed” by the oiler to the company of the shark. By using the word “bequeathed”, Crane implies that someone has or will die. This once again foreshadows the near death of the cook and the death of the oiler. The terrible, negative imagery of “water affected them as it affected mummies” is very powerful and strong as it mirrors the condition of the crew. The simile compares the men to mummies. The men just like mummies are dehydrated. Mummies were preserved by removing all liquids from the body and filling them with salt. The men are dehydrated just like the mummies and can only drink water from the salty sea water. Mummies are wrapped in bandages just like the men who are wearing now tattered, old clothes. By comparing the men to dead corpses, Crane emphasizes the deathly conditions the men are in. Towards the end, the correspondent is seen holding his chest with his left hand, this is symbolic since it alludes to the text Bingen on the Rhine where the soldier of the legion also holds up his left hand to his chest. This is seen as a symbol that the correspondent has accepted that he could die, and unlike before, he has understood fate and will not be angry if he drowns.

Stephen Crane makes the ending very powerful because of the immense build-up of danger, suspense and foreshadowing. Crane uses a lot of foreshadowing which predicts the near death of the cook and the death of the oiler. This keeps the audience in suspense until the ending which releases it. This makes the ending shocking as well as powerful. The entire story shows the journey of the men, from being hopeful to hopeless as they ride waves which makes it almost impossible for the readers to discern a definite ending. The characters are developed throughout the story, they see the crew feeling apprehension at the idea of death but by the end, they begin to accept that death is inevitable. All these features make the ending of the Open Boat a great one.