

# In the Desert

By Stephen Crane

In the desert  
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,  
Who, squatting upon the ground,  
Held his heart in his hands,  
And ate of it.  
I said, "Is it good, friend?"  
"It is bitter—bitter," he answered;

"But I like it  
"Because it is bitter,  
"And because it is my heart."

Source: Twentieth-Century American Poetry (2004)



Although Stephen Crane is best known for his classic Civil War novel *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) and a handful of extraordinary short stories, he also found time in a life cut short by tuberculosis and overwork to write poetry of striking originality. Collected in *The Black Riders and Other Lines* (1895) and *War is Kind* (1899), his spare, chiseled, free-verse treats the same theme and expresses the same sensibility his fiction does: the absurd fate of men floundering in an indifferent universe and a sardonic relish for the grim comedy of the spectacle.