

ANALYSIS

THE STYLE OF STEPHEN CRANE

(1871-1900)

“Why is he not immensely popular? With his strength, with his rapidity of action, with that amazing faculty of vision--why is he not? He has outline, he has colour, he has movement, with that he ought to go very far. But--will he? I sometimes think he won't. It is not an opinion--it is a feeling. I could not explain why he disappoints me--why my enthusiasm withers as soon as I close the book. While one reads, of course, he is not to be questioned. He is the master of his reader to the very last line--then--apparently for no reason at all--he seems to let go his hold.”

Joseph Conrad
Letter to Edward Garnett (1897)

“His success in England began with *The Red Badge of Courage*, which did, indeed, more completely than any other book has done for many years, take the reading public by storm. Its freshness of method, its vigor of imagination, its force of color and its essential freedom from many traditions that dominate this side of the Atlantic, came—in spite of the previous shock of Mr. Kipling—with a positive effect of impact. It was a new thing, in a new school....

“The Open Boat’ is to my mind, beyond all question, the crown of all his work. It has all the stark power of the earlier stories, with a new element of restraint; the color is as full and strong as ever, fuller and stronger, indeed; but those chromatic splashes that at times deafen and confuse in *The Red Badge*, those images that astonish rather than enlighten, are disciplined and controlled....It seems to me that, when at last the true proportions can be seen, Crane will be found to occupy a position singularly cardinal....Was ever a man before who wrote of battles so abundantly as he has done, and never had a word, never a word from first to last, of the purpose and justification of the war?...

He is the first expression of the opening mind of a new period, or, at least, the early emphatic phase of a new initiative—beginning, as a growing mind must needs begin, with the record of impressions, a record of a vigor and intensity beyond all precedent.”

H. G. Wells
“Stephen Crane: From an English Standpoint”
The North American Review CLXXI
(August 1900) 233-42

“Too much a realist to fall in with contemporary romancers, he was too much a poet to follow the course laid down by such systematic naturalists as Zola. Crane's voice was so individual that he did not come into the honor due him till another age, when it became evident that he had spoken with the voice of a generation later than his own....Modern American literature began with him.”

Carl Van Doren
The American Novel 1789-1939, 23rd edition
(1921; Macmillan 1940-68) 229, 231-33

“In his art he is unique. Its certainty, its justness, its peculiar perfection of power arrived at its birth, or at least that precise moment in its birth when other artists--and great artists too--were preparing themselves for the long and difficult conquest of their art. I cannot remember a parallel case in the literary history of fiction....His art is just in itself, rhythmical, self-poising as is the art of a perfect dancer. There are no false steps, no excesses. And, of course, his art is strictly limited. We would define him by saying he is the perfect artist and interpreter of the surfaces of life. And that explains why he so swiftly attained his peculiar power and what is the realm his art commands.”

Edward Garnett
Friday Nights
(Knopf 1922) 205

"*The Red Badge of Courage* came like a flash of lightning out of a clear winter sky; it was at once unprecedented and irresistible. Who was this astonishing young man?...More, it gave the whole movement of the nineties a sudden direction and a powerful impulse forward. At one stroke Realism was made its goal—not the old flabby, kittenish Realism of Howells's imitators, with its puerile labouring of trivialities, but the sterner, more searching Realism that got under the surface—the new Realism that was presently to flower in *McTeague*, and then in *Sister Carrie*, and then in a whole procession of books...

He had, so to speak, no literary small talk; he could not manage what the musicians call passage work. His superlative skill lay in the handling of isolated situations; he knew, too, how to analyze them with penetrating insight, but beyond that he was rather at a loss: He lacked the pedestrian talent for linking one situation to another. This weakness threw him naturally into the short story, and there he was instantly at home. The short story gave him all the room he needed—and no more.

Better, perhaps, than any other of his stories, 'The Blue Hotel' reveals his singular capacity at its best. The episode there related is obviously the last scene in a long drama: the life of a nobody. The short story in America owes more to him than he has got credit for. He loosened and extended its form, he quickened its tempo, and he greatly enriched its substance. The drive of a powerful originality was in him. He was, within his limits, one of the noblest artists that we have produced."

H. L. Mencken

Introduction

The Work of Stephen Crane X (Major Conflicts)

ed. Wilson Follett

(Knopf 1926) ix-xiii

"Crane was one of the first post-Impressionists....He began it before the French painters began it or at least as early as the first of them. He simply knew from the beginning how to handle detail. He estimated it at its true worth--made it serve his purposes and felt no further responsibility about it. I doubt whether he ever spent a laborious half-hour in doing his duty by detail--in enumerating, like an honest grubby auctioneer. If he saw one thing in a landscape that thrilled him, he put it on paper, but he never tried to make a faithful report of everything else within his field of vision, as if he were a conscientious salesman making out an expense account."

Willa Cather

Willa Cather On Writing

(1926; Knopf 1949) 69-70

"Mastery was achieved in a half-dozen short stories and novelettes, near mastery in three short novels and in innumerable sketches, but two more ambitious novels failed. His slim volumes of epigrammatic and symbolic verse give him a minor but significant place in American poetry....His tales, in theme and form, bear a striking resemblance to those of De Maupassant and he knew Flaubert early in *Salambo*, even though he resented its length. There is no doubt that he took direct inspiration from these French realists, and even more certainly from Zola, for *L'Assommoir* probably provided the plot for *Maggie*, and *La Debacle* bears a close resemblance to *The Red Badge of Courage*, though he denied ever having read it. His work shows the stamp of European Naturalism and contributed to the break of American literary history with the English tradition. With Zola he shared the philosophy of the roman experimental, with De Maupassant and Turgenev the sensory acuteness, the brevity, and the repressed intensity of Impressionistic art....

His reportorial art achieves its maturity in 'The Blue Hotel,' the scene of which is laid in a Nebraska town in midwinter. Crane, as 'the correspondent,' is gathered in by the cheerful Irish host as he steps from the train with a cowboy, a quiet Easterner, and a Swede. The tone of the action is set by the light blue of the hotel 'always screaming and howling in a way that made the dazzling winter landscape of Nebraska seem only a grey swampish hush.' The premonition of the Swede that he will be murdered is but the inner reflection of this screaming blue, the manifestation of Crane's own tense fear. His murder by the professional gambler is an act of necessity; the force which makes it inevitable is beyond any single person in the action....

The 'correspondent' again appears with three companions in 'The Open Boat,' this time the captain, the cook, and the oiler. A simple record of the actual wreck of a filibustering vessel off the coast of Florida, this story, Crane's masterpiece, achieves its effect by understatement. Its opening sentence, 'None of them knew the color of the sky,' exactly describes the negative mood of the men in the dinghy. The blue of the sea is salty, cotton-flannel gulls fly overhead, brown mats of seaweed float by to measure movement and distance, the black and white of trees and sand mark the near but unobtainable shore line, and when at last the carmine and gold of morning is painted on the waters, it seems that the impending fate of drowning within sight of help must come to them all. The lone death of the oiler, strongest of the group, is the culminating irony....In no other story does Crane understand his fear so clearly and state it so effectively. Yet here he is apparently recording merely an event which happened to him, without altering a fact or a sequence....He gave to the Naturalistic short story its characteristic form, later to be exploited by Hemingway, Steinbeck, and a host of others."

Robert E. Spiller
Literary History of the United States, 3rd edition
(Macmillan 1946-63) 1021-26

"There is no evidence in the poetry or outside it that he ever experimented in verse. Instinct told him to throw over metrical form, visions were in his head, and he wrote them down...As for 'anticipation': some of the later people probably learned from him (Pound mentioned him early, and it was Sandburg who introduced Sherwood Anderson to his verse)...I take the steady drift of our period toward greater and greater self-consciousness, an increasing absorption in style, to be what has obscured the nature of his work and delayed its appreciation....'War Is Kind' is perhaps his finest poem....But a considerable number of Stephen Crane's poems, once their range is found, will be remembered. They do not wear out and there is nothing else like them...His poetry has the inimitable sincerity of a frightened savage anxious to learn what his dream means. Moving from Crane's poetry to his prose, we recognize the same sincerity, the same bluntness, the same hallucinatory effect, the same enigmatic character, the same barbarity....Crane's work is a riot of irony of nearly every kind."

John Berryman
Stephen Crane
(William Sloane 1950; Meridian/The World 1962) 264, 274-77, 287

"He points the way for the Naturalists in *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*; he anticipates the 'stream-of-consciousness' writers in *The Red Badge of Courage*; his poems were years ahead of the Imagists....The poems may have been influenced by Emily Dickinson or Olive Schreiner, but to Amy Lowell they seemed more suggestive of the French symbolists and of certain Chinese and Japanese poets whom Crane certainly did not know."

Edward Wagenknecht
Cavalcade of the American Novel
(Holt 1952) 212-13

"Crane explicitly compared his own general literary intentions with the technical and philosophical implications of what the French Impressionists, as he conceived them, were attempting in color....One of Crane scholars generally mention his 'innate sensitivity to color' and even his reading in Goethe's theories on color while at Syracuse University....A novel, Crane explained... 'should be a succession of...clear, strong, sharply-outlined pictures, which pass before the reader like a panorama, leaving each its definite impression.'...He frankly admitted the limitations of the writer's art in 'War Memories': 'I bring this to you merely as an effect—an effect of mental light and shade, if you like; something done in thought similar to that which the French Impressionists do in colour; something meaningless and at the same time overwhelming, crushing, monstrous'."

Joseph J. Kwiat
"Stephen Crane and Painting"
American Quarterly IV
(Winter 1952) 331-38

"As a poet, Crane is an interesting link between Emily Dickinson and the Imagists of the 1910's. As a writer of fiction, he is important both as an early Naturalist [imprecise] and as an expert craftsman....*The*

Red Badge is an acute psychological study of the raw recruit in action. Technically, the book is comparable with James's mature work in that the story, though written in the third person, is managed consistently from the point of view of the distraught soldier.

Crane was above all else (and in a sense applicable to comparatively few American writers) the disinterested artist. He aimed at complete honesty of treatment. He wrote with economy, restraint, and a respect for point of view. He chose words precisely and created images which are colorful and Impressionistic. He was a master of irony. It was ironical that a nice girl like Maggie should have 'blossomed in a mud puddle.' It was ironical that the soldier, Henry Fleming, should have gained courage through an accidental knock on the head. Man's self-importance, to Crane, and his self-pity were ironical in a universe indifferent to man....

['The Open Boat'] is Crane at his best. Sustained point of view, restraint, ironical wit, poetic images and cadences, and Poe's virtue of totality--these are some of the characteristic qualities of Crane which make 'The Open Boat' one of the short masterpieces of modern American prose....In contrast with 'The Open Boat,' 'The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky' is short on irony but long on humor. The story seems to have explosive force, but the force ultimately fizzles. The intrusion of civilization (marriage) on the frontier suddenly changes all of the rules of the game. If there is a gain in law and order in the small plains town of the west, there is also a loss of robust vigor and wild fun. Although there is much that is hilarious about the passing of the old and the coming of the new in Yellow Sky, there is also something a little sad. In this story, Crane exploited his experiences on his 1895 travels into the American West, combining the blusteriness of frontier humor with traditional western materials."

James E. Miller, Jr.
The Literature of the United States 2, 3rd edition
(Scott, Foresman 1953-66) 637-38, 656

"His fiction seems to be shaped as much by poetic Impressionism as by Naturalism, for he devoted a great deal of study to the refinement of his spare but mannered style and the shaping of his colorful images....He was also recognized for his ironic free verses published in *The Black Riders* (1895) and *War Is Kind* (1899). In technique these poems were somewhat indebted to the writing of Emily Dickinson, to which Howells had introduced him, and, like her poetry, they anticipated the methods of the Imagists."

James D. Hart & Clarence Gohdes
America's Literature
(Holt 1955, 1966) 755-56

"He once remarked, 'It must be interesting to be shot.' He was drawn to war because it occasioned a sense of life at its highest pitch and challenged his own skill in conveying sensations precisely....He was a bridge in poetry between Emily Dickinson and the 'free-verse' poets. Howells had read Emily Dickinson's poems to him and he had written *The Black Riders*, suggested by them. The frequent ellipses and the economy of style of these bitter little verses were to leave their mark on the poetry of the future....He was interested in the types that fascinated Hemingway later in Key West and Cuba...Crane's touch...was invariably light and swift. To use one of his own phrases, he wrote with the 'pace of youth'."

Van Wyck Brooks & Otto L. Bettmann
Our Literary Heritage: A Pictorial History of the Writer in America
(Dutton 1956) 184-85

"Among the *avant-garde* writers of the 1890's, Crane was most clearly the herald of the twentieth-century revolution in literature...He made a clean break with the past in his selection of material, his craftsmanship, and his point of view. It was his nature to be experimental. At twenty he wrote *Maggie*, our first completely Naturalistic novel. By the age of twenty-four he had produced, in his earliest short stories and his masterpiece, *The Red Badge of Courage*, the first examples of modern American Impressionism. That year, in his collected poems, he was the first to respond to the radical genius of Emily Dickinson, and the result was a volume of Imagist Impressionism twenty years in advance of the official Imagists. He was in every respect phenomenal....

Crane's first two novels, and the short stories that he was already writing, were faithful to an expressed creed which, if it came more directly from good journalism than from close study of the European Naturalists, produced much the same results in practice. He was convinced that if a story is transcribed in its actuality, as it appeared to occur in life, it will convey its own emotional weight without sentimental heightening, moralizing, or even interpretive comment. This view coincided with what he knew of the objective method by which the French Naturalists achieved a correspondence between their style and their materials; and he was initially in agreement with the Naturalistic belief that the destiny of human beings, like the biological fate of other creatures, is so much determined by factors beyond the control of individual will or choice that ethical judgment or moral comment by the author is irrelevant or impertinent. His example, however, found little response until the next century, when Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson, Hemingway, Dos Passos, and many others were illustrating the same viewpoint."

Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty, E. Hudson Long, eds.
The American Tradition in Literature 2, 3rd edition
(Norton 1956-67) 940-42

"[His] work in the 1890's had entitled him to honor not only as one of the few masters of the short story but as the first of the moderns....Crane is one of those figures who are in danger of having a small body of their best work anthologized to death. He lived so fast and died so young that in spite of his extraordinary productiveness much of what he wrote was certain to be flawed. Of all his stories, only 'The Open Boat,' 'The Blue Hotel,' and 'The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky' are without weakness or soft spot, and from among these an anthologist must choose. Yet it is no disservice to a reader to give him one of these three, for all of them are superb....

For he had a picture-making eye (the quality that Bliss Perry said was the prime qualification of a short story writer) of an extraordinary kind. Everything in his stories is intensely, sometimes luridly, visualized: images glare from the page like things seen in a lightning flash. His prose has a nervous pace and a tension that we have come to think of as peculiarly modern-American; despite Crane's addiction to metaphor and Hemingway's avoidance of it, there is no modern closer to Crane in tone than Hemingway. Crane's power of evocation was extraordinary, and how much more concentrated and focused could one get than Crane gets in 'The Open Boat,' where the place hardly extends beyond the boat's gunwales, the time covers only the duration of the voyage, and the action is unbroken from the opening line that jolts us into the story in one of the most justly celebrated of beginnings; 'None of them knew the color of the sky'?

If Crane had had only his vivid Impressionism to contribute to the short story, he would be prominent in its history. But he had as well a mind that was somehow in circuit with that body of image and myth, call it racial memory or cultural inheritance or what you will, that lets his most innocent and external observation suggest, often most powerfully, something deeper. He was a symbolist apparently by accident, perhaps sometimes even unconsciously: he never gives the impression of having worked for his depth, as Hawthorne does. He stumbles upon his meanings; they rise from his soil like stones pushed up by frost. In his way, he was a great simplifier; his figures often have an almost surrealist exposure to space and eternity and the indifferent universe. But a great amplifier belongs in the short story if he belongs anywhere in literature; and Crane's Bohemianism and stoicism, his persistent irony, his nervous pace and suggestions of depth psychology have made him peculiarly impressive to modern readers. If he did not himself at once influence the course of the short story, he reflected a change in temper and tone and technique that was already in the air in the 1890's, and that after the interruption caused by a resurgence of sentimental romance in the early 1900's, and by World War I, was to become the characteristic modern tone."

Wallace Stegner
Introduction
Great American Short Stories
Wallace & May Stegner, eds.
(Dell 1957) 20-22

"I think the most important thing to say about Stephen Crane is that he is a great stylist. He puts language to poetic use, which is to use it reflexively and symbolically. While his concept of the soldier as

Everyman establishes the kinship of *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) with modern novels of war, and his naturalistic outlook in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), which initiated the trend of literary Naturalism in America, links him with modern novels of slum life, his importance remains, however, not in the fact that he brought new subject matter into fiction but rather in the fact that he was an innovator in techniques of fiction and a unique stylist. It is the same with Henry James and Joseph Conrad: in style and technique they transcended their age. 'Hew out a style,' said Henry James. 'It is by style we are saved.'

Crane stands in close kinship with Conrad and Henry James, the masters of the Impressionist school. All three aimed to create 'a direct impression of life.' Their credo is voiced by Conrad in his celebrated preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*: it is 'by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel--it is, before all, to make you see.' Their aim was to immerse the reader in the created experience so that its impact on him would occur simultaneously with the discovery of it by the characters themselves. Instead of panoramic views of a battlefield, Crane paints not the whole scene but disconnected segments of it--all that a participant in an action or a spectator of a scene can possibly take into his view at any one moment. Crane is a master at creating illusions of reality by means of a fixed point of vision.

'None of them knew the color of the sky'--that famous opening sentence of 'The Open Boat' (1897)--defines the restricted point of view of the four men in the wave-tossed dinghy. It establishes also the despair-hope mood of the men, and the final scene repeats the same contrast mood. The same device of double mood patterns *The Red Badge*....In 'The Open Boat' even the speech of the shipwrecked men is abrupt and composed of 'disjointed sentences.' Crane's style is itself composed of disjointed sentences, disconnected sense impressions, chromatic vignettes by which the reality of the experience is evoked in all its point-present immediacy....

Crane wrote with the intensity of a poet's emotion, the compressed emotion that bursts into symbol and paradox....Irony is Crane's chief technical instrument--it is the key to our understanding of the man and of his works. Paradox patterns all his best works and defines their kinship one to another....In 'The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky' (1898), Potter represents the idealistic world of spiritual values whose force lies in its innocence, and Wilson represents the non-imaginative world of crass realities. This same conflict, *the conflict between ideals and realities*, ruled Crane's struggle as artist and gave both his life and his art all their bitter ironies...

Modern American literature has its beginnings in Mark Twain and Stephen Crane. As for their acknowledged influence on Hemingway, *The Red Badge* looks back to *Huckleberry Finn*--both are patterned by ironic episodes--and forward to *A Farewell to Arms*. The leitmotifs central to all three novels are themes of death and deception or betrayal. In all three novels the education of the hero ends as it began, in self-deception. They are all three ritualistic, mythic, symbolic works dealing with heroes in quest of selfhood or self-identity....In *The Red Badge*, an Impressionistic painting notable for its bold innovations in technique and style, and in 'The Open Boat,' which fuses the Impressionistic Realism of *Maggie* and the symbolic Realism of *The Red Badge*, Crane established himself among the foremost engineers of the techniques of modern fiction."

R. W. Stallman
Foreward

The Red Badge of Courage and Selected Stories
(New American Library/Signet 1959) vii-x

"The narrative design of Crane's best fiction is defined by the tension between two ironically divergent points of view: the narrowing and deluding point of view of the actors and the enlarging and ruthlessly revealing point of view of the observer-narrator. To the men in the open boat the universe seems to have shrunk to the horizon and to have concentrated within its narrow limits all the malignant powers of creation; but the longer view of the narrator reveals this as a delusion born in the men's egotistic assumption that they occupy a central position in Nature's hostile regard....

For Crane again and again interprets the human situation in terms of the ironic tensions created in the contrast between man as he idealizes himself in his inner thought and emotion and man as he actualizes himself in the stress of experience. In the meaning evoked by the ironic projection of the deflated man

against the inflated man lies Crane's essential theme: the consequence of false pride, vanity, and blinding delusion....The movement of the tales is always toward the ironic delegation of 'the little man.' Despite his delusions of grandeur, he usually ends up in ignoble and humiliating defeat....Like Henry [Fleming], the correspondent comes to know that the best experience of his life is the object lesson in humility and self-sacrifice, that in a cold and indifferent cosmos, illusions of friendly or hostile Nature notwithstanding, the best values are realized in humble human performance."

James B. Colvert
"Structure and Theme in Stephen Crane's Fiction"
Modern Fiction Studies V (1959) 209-219

"We get near his essence in H. G. Wells's remark that Crane's writing suggested Whistler rather than Tolstoy; Wells is the only European critic to have kept in mind the distinguishing American character of Crane's work....*The Red Badge of Courage* is not simply one of the earliest Realistic novels about war written in Tolstoy's skeptical and anti-Romantic spirit; it is a poetic fable about the attempt of a young man to discover a real identity in battle....Crane, by an astonishing bound of imagination, has created battle as the simple and confused soldier sees it, but for reasons that are psychological, i.e., he is describing an interior battle, a battle of the spirit. The battle itself is compared at times with a mad religion...The desire of all the Crane heroes is to find an identity by belonging to something....

In his psychological observation and in his ear for speech Crane is one of the founders of American Realism as we have known it since his time. In him it moves towards the fabulous and poetic; occasionally it sprawls and becomes rhetorical—see the end of *Maggie*...Crane always sharpened the irony of his writing and rigorously censored what there was in him of the didactic....

Crane was a brilliant Impressionist and has strong affinities with the Impressionist painters. As they sought to record infinitesimal particles of light, he sought to record the innumerable glints of significant natural and psychological detail in the prolonged battle scene of *The Red Badge of Courage*. It is a search sustained by a poetic fervour which usually subsides before it becomes rhetoric, and then rises again with a sealike motion as it meets the next incident. He is always simple and explicit, alert for the random irony."

V. S. Pritchett
Introduction
The Red Badge of Courage and Other Stories
(Oxford 1960) vii-xii

"The conventions of popular literature, with all their sensationalism and sentimentality, dominated Crane's experience...While his lively eye for contrasts between popular illusion and the way things happen might have freed him from the conventions he scorned, he neglected other ways of overcoming the limitations of his milieu. Having early and rightly concluded that direct observation was much more valuable than a fraudulent literary version of reality, he erroneously decided that books were only for the scholar's idle time. He lived hard and observed much, but read little. Within the circumscribed range of his experience, he was undoubtedly one of James's 'people on whom nothing is lost'; but his famous irony was the necessary instrument of an intelligence which had so little material on which to work....

A subversive irony is his most striking means of transcending the historic situation into which he was born. Crane's attack on popular culture is the most consistent and varied theme in all his work...The same thing may be said of all his best work, that it passes the test of high seriousness as well as technical virtuosity....If he scorned to preach like the moralizing authors of popular fiction, he nevertheless learned to shape the significance of the unsaid. If he lacked the recognizable techniques of the acknowledged masters, he developed literary methods of his own....

Concerning his technique, much that he did may be recognized as the reinvention of Jamesian devices: the foreshortening that compresses Maggie's downward career and death into a couple of pages, for example, or his concentrating and intensifying his drama by using the mind of a character as its register. But the pictorial quality of his work, a matter of both style and method, repays a closer look: it is the signature of Crane's imagination. His earliest work shows the knack for vivid phrase which he gradually

disciplined into a style. The prose which evolved from his apprenticeship is best described by analogy to painting: Hamlin Garland's enthusiasm for Monet and the Impressionists and Crane's own life with artist friends (whose studios he haunted and often camped in during his luckless New York years) both help account for the visual effects in his writing. Impressionism in painting developed from the Realistic tradition.

As Garland understood it, the new practice avoided a literalist rendering of the parts for the sake of catching a true impression of the whole: though Crane could as easily have learned about unity of effect from Poe, or from literary trial and error, Garland was useful in reconciling that aim with Howells' theories. But Crane's own understanding of the painters went deeper than that: He watched his friends record color and light more truthfully as they freed themselves from realistic conventions of seeing. Once, while with his brother in the country, he is reported to have said: 'Will, isn't that cloud green?...But they wouldn't believe it if I put it in a book'....

While he could vividly imagine his own response to almost any crucial situation, he was not strong at imagining other kinds of people. The figures in his tales seem to be individuated mainly by circumstances, and their character to be defined by a few primary emotions like fear and courage. Just as the author stands apart from traditional culture, they stand apart from traditional characters, for the nineteenth-century novel presented people as the rich compound of personal and social history, ideals and knowledge, as well as circumstances and temperament. Crane's bent for short fiction can be inferred from his being interested less in the structure of society than in the rendering of situation, less of the sum of character than in the response to a particular crisis. The archetypal event for him, whether experienced or imagined, is intense and isolated, the undergoing of an ultimate trial."

J. C. Levenson
Major Writers of America II
(Harcourt 1962) 383-85, 387-88, 391-94

"Though Stephen Crane did not begin his literary career as a poet, he felt that his best work was done in his volume of poems, *The Black Riders* (1895). He was fond of its 'ethical sense' which reflected his 'ideas of life as a whole'; specifically, the volume contained abstracts of the ideas in his fiction. But Crane probably realized that in his verse he sounded too much like a preacher reading sermons (he despised 'preaching' in art) and that he was too cryptic....The best features of his poetic technique were carried over into his fiction so that Crane is, as Carl Van Doren once stated, a 'kind of poet among storytellers'....

Crane rightly sense that he functioned best in short episodes and dramatic scenes, where he gained in concentration, in taut power, and in unity (the 'totality of effect or impression' [Poe]). Usually in his longer novels, especially *Active Service* and *The O'Ruddy*, Crane lost his sustained control, and his effects were sprawling and melodramatic. The reverse was true of *The Third Violet*, where many scenes in the novel 'were too compressed.' Crane has a perpetual warfare with the novel form. Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace* he considered too long, especially the latter, which he felt could have been done in 'one third of the time....It goes on and on like Texas.' Zola's novels bored him, particularly the length of *Nana*; and in a general summary of this work, he said: 'He hangs one thing to another and his story goes along but I find him pretty tiresome.' He was critical of the long novels of Mark Twain; he thought Thomas Hardy overtreated his materials, and that Henry James was too 'diffuse.' Even his own *Red Badge* Crane considered too long....

Ambrose Bierce's *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1891) excited him, and pointing specifically to 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge.' Crane said: 'Nothing better exists. That story contains everything'.... Finally, the largest single inspiration to Crane seems to have been Poe. Thomas Beer mentions that 'Crane liked Poe's rhythmic prose as a boy.' And in 1895, when Willa Cather met Crane in Lincoln, Nebraska, she found him 'reading a little volume of Poe that he carried in his pocket.'...

Like Chekhov, Crane continually thought in terms of 'staging' his fiction. A close study of 'The Open Boat,' among others, shows that Crane experimented and enriched his materials with the aid of dramatic techniques. For in this story, Crane was more anxious to render than to report; he was far more concerned at the dramatic, not the narrative level; and he focused on dialogue and on a series of crisis scenes and

episodes to achieve a remarkable sense of immediacy....His ideal in writing was to get as close to reality as possible, in the best Naturalistic fashion; to prove his point, he slept in a flophouse to get the atmosphere for 'An Experiment in Misery'....Crane's ironic-Impressionistic method in *Maggie*, and not the subject of prostitution, so bewildered the editors they missed his compassion completely. Mark Twain may have sounded the note of irony in American literature, but it was not modern like Crane's, whose abrupt, disconnected, flat statements and darting, rapier-like ironies seemed too arty and too hating. Crane had to wait until the 1920s before he could be understood at all on his own terms.

He was too modern in other ways: his Impressionism seemed to be an affectation and made no sense; his symbolism was ignored; his stories lacked the conventional plot; and his curse words were unacceptable (they were usually deleted by his American publishers). To illustrate the conservatism of the decade, one need only point to Frances Willard who censured Richard Gilder for allowing the word 'rape' in his *Century Magazine*. Later, Gilder, as Crane's own publisher, complained about 'swearing in fiction' as late as October 1896. Realism was making some headway in the 1890s, but Crane's art was too extreme even for his fellow Realists and literary fathers, Garland and Howells. When he confessed that his 'little creed of art' was 'identical with the one of Howells and Garland,' and that this 'readjustment of his point of view' was concluded in 1892, Crane was too radical and too progressive for them....Crane was almost single-handedly carrying on the real battle of Modernism in literature....

Crane continually revised and corrected some of his work. Yet Conrad, who watched Crane write, insisted that his friend did not need to rewrite. Crane's manner of writing poetry adds to this myth. Hamlin Garland recalled with amazement how Crane turned on his 'poetic spout' and produced complete poems at a moment's notice.... He worked in terms of episodes because he was anxious to dramatize or to sketch in a situation. Many of his stories are in fact called 'sketches' or 'scenes.' By using other devices from the other arts, like painting, Crane buried plot further and so enriched the form of the short story.

The technique of Impressionism he seems to have learned from his friends at the Art Students' League in New York; Hamlin Garland espoused the theories of French Impressionism as early as the 1880s; and there was available in English a book of sketches by French symbolists and Impressionists, *Pastels in Prose* (1890). A few of Crane's stories—"The Silver Pageant," 'Stories Told by an Artist,' and *The Third Violet*--reveal his attraction to art and the artist. Both Conrad and Garnett were convinced that Crane was the 'complete Impressionist.' Like Conrad, Crane was anxious to make one 'feel' and to make one 'see.' He wanted to convey the sensations produced on the sensibility of his characters, and like the Impressionist painters, he sketched the 'fluid play of light' on his heroes, as he interpreted aspects of their natures....

By using color imagery and color contrasts, Crane approximated the painter's attempt to merge objects with their surroundings and at the same time to capture the separateness and the fast-changing face of life. To Crane, the universe was abrupt, indefinite, and chaotic, and he caught this rhythm in the movement of his Impressionistic prose. A recent critic, Robert Hough, notes the influence of Goethe's *Theory of Colors* (1810). In one place, Crane had mentioned his interest in Goethe's theories. Crane, then, learned about the psychology of colors not only from Impressionism but also from Goethe, who demonstrated how colors created certain states of feeling, how they defined a situation, and how they helped to paint dramatic and panoramic effects. Most important, colors to Goethe and to Crane became useful as symbols: dull yellow was linked to decay and death; red to high tension; cold colors to darkness and violence....

In still another way, Crane lessened the value of a mechanical plot. As he painted striking yet isolated scenes, Crane made each episode become part of a moving picture, so that his art is properly linked with cinematic techniques. In 'The Blue Hotel' the Easterner's 'mind, like a film, took lasting impressions of three men--the iron-nerved master of the ceremony; the Swede, pale, motionless, terrible; and Johnnie, serene yet ferocious, brutish yet heroic.' Crane depended on rapid movement, on change, on gnarled and disconnected effects. His vision was scenic; and his lack of transitions suggested the chaos and dislocations in the life of his fictions. What Crane succeeded in doing, then, by imposing the various arts on the plot, was to prove that the short story could be a fluid and flexible medium of expression. By itself, plot hampered Crane....

[In his later fiction] his Impressionism is now subdued for better effect; he is more direct and more dependent on understatement. In fact, 'An Episode of War' and 'The Upturned Face' are amazing forecasts of Hemingway's style and subject. Crane captures the stark tragedies of war in 'The Price of the Harness,' 'An Episode of War,' and 'The Upturned Face.' With a maturer vision and a maturer style he strips his materials to the barest essentials and by this achieves a more powerful impact....Crane's most ambitious stories, and at the same time his greatest, are Greek--Greek in the sense of being like classical tragic drama. These stories include 'The Open Boat,' 'The Blue Hotel,' 'The Monster,' and 'Death and the Child.' All are struggles of endurance, where man tests himself and his meaning against his environment, chance, fate, and Nature.

Thomas A. Gullason, ed.
The Complete Short Stories & Sketches of Stephen Crane
(Doubleday 1963) 20-24, 31, 33-37, 42, 44-45

"Crane's motive was not to diagram conditions or assert universal truths but to produce a certain kind of composition, a vivid showbox of serial impressions in an appropriate style....Crane's work is artful, original, concentrated, indistractable sometimes to the point of a mesmerizing intensity. Nevertheless it lacks mass, moment, tenacity; it has not power of imposing itself beyond reversion on our fully extended consciousness of experience....Crane possesses as a writer an irresistible authority that is nevertheless transient, provisional....Everything convincing in Crane's work turns on visionary images which have, as they succeed one another, the hallucinatory serenity and intactness of dream images."

Warner Berthoff
The Ferment of Realism: American Literature, 1884-1919
(Free Press/Macmillan 1965) 227, 230, 233

"The two volumes of extremely unconventional verse that were published by Stephen Crane in the nineties, with their unrhymed lines of irregular lengths, their nihilistic fables and their laconic irony, were quite unlike anything else that had ever been written in America--or rather, they resembled nothing except, a little, certain other unconventional writers. Mr. Daniel G. Hoffman, the author of *The Poetry of Stephen Crane*, suggests that Crane as poet may have owed something to Ambrose Bierce's *Fantastic Fables* in prose. It has also been thought that Crane may have been influenced by some poems of Emily Dickinson's that are supposed to have been read to him by William Dean Howells. Mr. Hoffman can find only one line of Crane's which may betray a debt to Miss Dickinson: 'A man adrift on a slim spar' may echo her 'Two swimmers on a spar'."

Edmund Wilson
Patriotic Gore
(Oxford 1966) 500-01

"Because they eschew buffoonery and irreverence, Crane's parodies of Romantic and sensational fiction differ from the usual parodies produced by such vigorous anti-Romantics as Bret Harte, Mark Twain, and Frank Norris...Crane sliced away the traditional excrescences, and reclaimed what was of artistic value in the familiar genres by applying his own stark techniques of style and setting to such overwrought themes as heroism in battle or such sentimental themes as loss of innocence in the big city....

Crane throughout his work combined the comic with the serious. He often used a vocabulary of cliches that he restored to their original force, as he found new and deeper uses for the idiom, by refracting a serious view of life through traditional plots....Crane wrote parodies of every genre in which he worked, scoffing at the formulae of each while retaining its emotive power...His best short parodies take aim at the French novel, the stage melodrama, and the mystery story....Crane frequently managed to extract from the subliterate forms he parodied the archetypal or mythical story that underlay the stereotype. He reached below surface Realism toward a view of man's comic and terrible freedom of choice....

Crane's poetry, for the most part, was dedicated to the metaphysical problems raised by man's relation to his god. His fiction, on the other hand, portrayed man struggling to survive in his society....The controlling tone in Crane's fiction was humorous, ironic, darkly serious, experiential, self-conscious...Like [T. E.] Hulme, Crane believed in a dry hardness of art, and mocked the vague and eloquent. In the short,

almost elliptical quality of his best prose, Crane echoed the Imagist concept that one perfect image might be better than a lengthy work.”

Eric Solomon
Stephen Crane: From Parody to Realism
(Harvard 1966) 4-18

"Crane resembles no author so much as Henry James. Like James, Crane draws his readers into the life of his fiction by making them experience a sequence of sensations. By pretending to be, like his reader, merely a spectator of the life he dramatizes, he appears to pass on this life to the reader without distortion.... The intense concentration of Crane's fiction fulfilled James's notion of what American fiction should be--direct, subtle, brief, and concerned with the sensibility of man and so with the inner sense rather than the outward plot of the novel. It was no accident that when Crane moved to England he settled near Henry James and Joseph Conrad. For, as Ford Madox Ford said of these writers, 'the approach to life is the same with all...three: they show you that disillusionment is to be found alike at the tea-table, in the slum, and on the tented field'....And the Master...brought the dying twenty-seven-year-old author five manuscripts for his opinion....It is recorded on good authority that at a party Crane and James went off alone to discuss questions of style.

Jay Martin
Harvests of Change: American Literature 1865-1914
(Prentice-Hall 1967) 55, 65, 70

"Crane is difficult to label. In his own time he was called either an Impressionist or a decadent; but as later criticism sought a perspective on the literary nineties he was variously considered a Realist, a Naturalist, a symbolist, a parodist, and even a Romantic. But among the first entries in a notebook kept by his wife is a quotation that sounds like Crane is trying to explain himself: 'The true artist is the man who leaves pictures of his own time as they appear to him'....Always he strove to compress experience, to render much in little. His poems are curt dramas in form and situation, and his fiction depends ultimately on the episode, on brief actions that are complete in themselves. Even his novels are developed through a linked succession of essentially discrete moments....He draws upon the vernacular and occasionally the obscene as well. Popular songs, bawdy ballads, street expressions, popular religion, sportswriters jargon--he roams with deceptive ease through mass culture and high culture alike."

Joseph Katz, ed.
The Portable Stephen Crane
(Viking 1969) vii-ix, xviii, xx

"A group of writers (superficially called Naturalists)...pushed the exploration of American masculinity much farther. Dreiser, Norris, Garland, London, Stephen Crane, Richard Harding Davis, and David Graham Phillips were interested most of all in depicting men under conditions of intense struggle, whether in war, in the capitalist economic system, on the frontier, or anywhere else away from the constraints of female civilization. With these writers, the enormous rift that had opened up in the heart of American life in the early 1800s--the split that made the novel far more feminine than it had ever been before and in effect banished our rough American masculinity from polite fiction--began to close."

Alfred Harbegger
Gender, Fantasy, and Realism in American Literature
(Columbia U 1982) 65

"Crane's interest in environmental determinism links him to late-nineteenth-century Naturalistic writers like Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser, but he is untypical in avoiding their often heavy factual documentation; instead, he usually selects his facts scrupulously and defines his characters with sharply focused comments and images. Such compression and vivid imagery have led numerous critics to see in his writing a literary parallel to Impressionist painting. Crane is comparable to both Naturalists and Impressionists in his desire to shock readers with new and often disturbing ideas and perceptions....in nearly hallucinatory detail. His intuition enabled him to be among the first writers to describe the effect of the modern bullet upon the soldier's perception of space in landscape."

Donald Vanouse
The Heath Anthology of American Literature 2

CRITICS DISCUSS

The Red Badge of Courage (1895)

with emphasis on style

"Mr. Stephen Crane, the author of *The Red Badge of Courage* (London: Heinemann), is a great artist, with something new to say, and consequently, with a new way of saying it. His theme, indeed, is an old one, but old themes re-handled anew in the light of novel experience, are the stuff out of which masterpieces are made, and in *The Red Badge of Courage* Mr. Crane has surely contrived a masterpiece.... These colossal facts of the sense and the soul are the only colours in which the very image of war can be painted. Mr. Crane has composed his palette with these colours, and has painted a picture that challenges comparison with the most vivid scenes of Tolstoi's *la Guerre et la Paix* or of Zola's *la Debacle*. This is unstinted praise, but I feel bound to give it after reading the book twice and comparing it with Zola's Sedan and Tolstoi's account of Rostow's squadron for the first time under fire. Indeed, I think Mr. Crane's picture of war is more complete than Tolstoi's, more true than Zola's....

Even Zola has rarely surpassed the appalling realism of Jim Conklin's death in Chapter X....When Mr. Crane deals with things felt he gives a truer report than Zola....Mr. Crane, as an artist, achieves by his singleness of purpose a truer and completer picture of war than either Tolstoi, bent also upon proving the insignificance of heroes, or Zola, bent also upon prophesying the regeneration of France. That is much; but it is more that his work of art, when completed, chimes with the universal experience of mankind."

George Wyndham
"A Remarkable Book"
New Review 14 (January 1896) 32-40

"The deep artistic unity of *The Red Badge of Courage* is fused in its flaming, spiritual intensity, in the fiery ardor with which the shock of the Federal and Confederate armies is imaged. The torrential force and impetus, the check, sullen recoil and reforming of shattered regiments, and the renewed onslaught and obstinate resistance of brigades and divisions are visualized with extraordinary force and color. If the sordid grimness of carnage is partially screened, the feeling of war's cumulative rapacity, of its breaking pressure and fluctuating tension is caught with wonderful fervour and freshness of style."

Edward Garnett
Friday Nights
(Knopf 1922) 212-13

"Intense, brutal, bloody, *The Red Badge of Courage* vitalizes the smoke, noise, stench, dread, terror, agony, and death of the battlefield. Thrust into the horror, the reader identifies himself with Henry Fleming and feels with him the trepidation of fear and heroism. How a boy of twenty-two conceived the story and within a few days got it down on paper with such truthfulness to detail that no veteran soldier has ever been able to question its authenticity is one of the mysteries of artistic creation."

Vernon Loggins
I Hear America
(Crowell 1937) 26

"*The Red Badge*, which gave Crane an opportunity to bring his critical ideas to bear upon a matter which he thought had too long been treated with heroic nonsense, gave him also an opportunity to exercise a characteristic art. The soldier is a lens through which the whole battle may be seen, a sensorium upon which all its details may be registered. Being in fear of death, he is not a mere transparent lens, a mere

passive sensorium. The battle takes a mad shape within his consciousness. Since the action of the narrative is laid in his excited mind, it had no excuse for being over-perfunctory or languid. All is immediate, all is intense. The language may with good reason be heightened now and then to the pitch of poetry. And yet the thrill in the narrative does not rise from the language, so tactfully is it elevated. The action and the language fit one another in a clear integrity....The novel had an instantaneous success in both America and England... His prose, with its rapid, flashing movement and its bright, startling phrases, seemed a new note in fiction."

Carl Van Doren
The American Novel 1789-1939
(Macmillan 1940) 230-31

"Crane's hero is Everyman, the symbol made flesh upon which war plays its havoc and it is the deliberation of that intention which explains why the novel is so extraordinarily lacking, as H. L. Mencken puts it, in small talk. Scene follows scene in an accelerating rhythm of excitement, the hero becomes the ubiquitous man to whom, as Wyndham Lewis once wrote of the Hemingway man, things happen. With that cold, stricken fury that was so characteristic of Crane--all through the self-conscious deliberation of his work one can almost hear his nerves quiver--he impaled his hero on the ultimate issue, the ultimate pain and humiliation of war, where the whole universe, leering through the blindness and smoke of battle, became the incarnation of pure agony. The foreground was a series of commonplaces; the background was cosmological."

Alfred Kazin
On Native Grounds
(Reynal 1942) 71-2

"There was no real literature of our Civil War, excepting the forgotten *Miss Ravenell's Conversion* by J. W. DeForest, until Stephen Crane wrote *The Red Badge of Courage*. Crane wrote it before he had ever seen any war. But he had read the contemporary accounts, had heard the old soldiers, they were not so old then, talk, and above all he had seen Matthew Brady's wonderful photographs. Creating his story out of this material he wrote that great boy's dream of war that was to be truer to how war is than any war the boy who wrote it would ever live to see. It is one of the finest books of our literature. It is all as much of one piece as a great poem is....There is no better writing on war than there is in Tolstoy but it is so huge and overwhelming...Actually *War and Peace* would be greatly improved by cutting...some of the parts where Tolstoy tampered with the truth to make it fit his conclusions. The Crane book, though, could not be cut at all. I am sure he cut it all himself as he wrote it to the exact measure of the poem it is."

Ernest Hemingway, ed.
Introduction (1942)
Men at War
(Berkley/Crown 1942-71) 9-10

"In *The Red Badge of Courage* Crane marks his artistic advance by moving easily from the description of the countryside, the advance and retreat of armies, the din of battle, and the color of the sky to the alternating hopes and fears of his boy soldier. Because he can now reveal both inward and outward forces, his determinism carries its own conviction, and Henry Fleming's realization that, 'He had been to touch the great death, and found that, after all, it was but the great death,' strikes to deeper levels of reality than does Maggie's suicide. From books, from the tactical lore of his brother William, and from conversations with veterans like his teacher at Claverack Academy, General Van Petten, he could now transcend the realism of Howells and Garland because the fear that Henry Fleming felt was in his own heart.

Even in these early stories Crane was far in advance of the psychological knowledge of his contemporaries. His understanding of the effects of environment and instinct on the individual anticipates the theories of the behaviorists, the social psychologists, and the psychoanalysis of a decade or more later. Henry James, the leading current exponent of the psychological novel, had accepted the theory of association, depicting an almost molecular movement of ideas, without defined motivation, on the clear plate of the mind. Crane probed deeper into the problem and, especially in his analysis of Henry Fleming, gives us the anatomy of fear.

Here is a naturalistic view of heroism unknown to the war romances of the time, with the possible exception of those of Bierce, but its bitterness was lost on most of its readers because the hero seemed to be following the usual formula and discovering his manhood by violent action. The story was a success, but it transcends itself by its dismaying revelation. With less plot than *Maggie* it avoids the pitfall of melodrama, but its mood is so intense and its imagery so overwrought that it is led to the brink of another. The reader who can, like Joseph Hergesheimer, feel a sudden revelation in the image, 'The sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer,' is prepared for its repressed violence of conception and style. True restraint was to come later."

Robert E. Spiller
Literary History of the United States, 3rd edition
(Macmillan 1946-63) 1022-23

"Even in his important Civil War novel, Crane had often been clumsily 'artistic' where Hemingway was rigidly faithful to his material. It is doing more than justice to Crane to compare the opening paragraph from *The Red Badge of Courage* with that of *A Farewell to Arms*. In each case we have a description of a war setting--a beginning of the war scene, with the natural detail serving symbolically to establish the tone of what follows."

Frederick J. Hoffman
The Modern Novel in America
(Regnery/Gateway 1951) 93-94

"And while it is not much of a novel, if by a novel you mean a complicated and highly organized narrative, no book was ever more successful in fusing the inner and the outer action to achieve an impression absolutely unified....Later his experiences and observations in Greece brought him the happy conviction that the book was 'all right,' but in themselves they produced no better novel than the inconsequential *Active Service* (1899)....That is why Crane failed as a reporter--in journalism and in fiction. He had to realize his material imaginatively. He could catch a whole aspect of the American scene in a paragraph: the melodrama theater in *Maggie*; evening in a small town in 'The Monster,' but he could not transcribe....His characters tend to be figures of allegory, as in an early D. W. Griffith film."

Edward Wagenknecht
Cavalcade of the American Novel
(Holt 1952) 214-15

"Crane's style has been likened to a unique instrument which no one after his death has ever been able to play. *The Red Badge of Courage* seems unprecedented and noncomparable....Crane stands also in close kinship to Conrad and Henry James, the masters of the impressionist school. All these writers aimed to create (to use Henry James's phrase) 'a direct impression of life.'...Crane's style is...composed of disjointed sentences, disconnected sense-impressions, chromatic vignettes by which the reality of the adventure is evoked in all its point-present immediacy. Crane anticipated the French Post-Impressionist painters. His style is, in brief, prose pointillism. It is composed of disconnected images, which, like the blobs of color in a French Impressionist painting, coalesce one with another, every word-group having a cross-reference relationship, every seemingly disconnected detail having interrelationship to the configured pattern of the whole. The intensity of a Crane tale is due to this patterned coalescence of disconnected things, everything at once fluid and precise....

A striking analogy is established between Crane's use of colors and the method employed by the Impressionists and the Neo-Impressionists or Divisionists, and it is as if he had known about their theory of contrasts and composed his own prose painting by the same principle. It is the principle, as defined by the scientist Chevreul in his *Laws of Simultaneous Contrast*, that 'Each plane of shade creates around itself a sort of aura of light, and each luminous plane creates around itself a zone of shade. In a similar way a coloured area communicates its complimentary to the neighboring colour, or heightens it if it is complimentary.' In almost every battle scene Crane paints in *The Red Badge of Courage*, the perspective is blurred by smoke or by the darkness of night....Crane paints in words exactly as the French Impressionists paint in pigments: both use pure colors and contrasts of colors....

Henry and the tattered soldier consecrate the death of the spectral soldier in 'a solemn ceremony.' Henry partakes of the sacramental blood and body of Christ, and the process of his spiritual rebirth begins at this moment when the wafer-like sun appears in the sky. It is a symbol of salvation through death. Henry, we are made to feel, recognizes in the lifeless sun his own lifeless conscience, his dead and as yet unregenerated selfhood or conscience, and that is why he blasphemes against it. His moral salvation and triumph are prepared for (1) by this ritual of purification and religious devotion and, at the very start of the book (2), by the ritual of absolution which Jim Conklin performs in the opening scene. It was the tall soldier who first 'developed virtues' and showed the boys how to cleanse a flag. The way is to wash it in the muddy river. Only by experiencing life, the muddy river, can the soul be cleansed. In 'The Open Boat' it is the black sea, and the whiteness of the waves as they pace to and fro in the moonlight, that signifies the spiritual purification which the men win from their contest against the terrible water."

R. W. Stallman

"Stephen Crane: A Reevaluation"

Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction, 1920-1951
ed. John W. Aldridge (Ronald Press 1952) 251-54, 262-69

"Whatever its 'realistic' style, much of the novel's meaning is revealed through the use of metaphor and symbol. The names of characters, for example, suggest both particular attributes and general qualities: the Tall Soldier, whose courage and confidence enable him to measure up to the vicissitudes of war and life; the Loud Soldier, the braggart, the over confident, whose personality is, like Henry's, transformed in war; the Tattered Soldier, whose clothes signify his lowly and exhausted plight; the Cheery Man, whose keenness and valor prevent his falling into despair. Likewise, the use of color helps to clarify and extend the meaning. Red, traditionally associated with blood and fire...The whole paraphernalia of myth, religious and sacrificial rites--the ceremonial dancing, the dragons with fiery eyes, the menacing landscape, the entombment, the sudden appearance of a guide, those symbols so profoundly familiar to the unconscious and so frightening to the conscious personality--give new dimensions of meaning to the novel."

John E. Hart

"*The Red Badge of Courage* as Myth and Symbol"

University of Kansas City Review 19 (1953) 249-56

"The easy label which has been applied repeatedly to Crane is 'naturalist.' And in many ways *The Red Badge of Courage* appears to be naturalistic. If an important ingredient of naturalism is the indifference of the universe to man's fate, the novel qualifies. From the opening words of the story ('The cold passed reluctantly from the earth') to the concluding sentence ('...a golden ray of sun came through the hosts of leaden rain clouds'), nature seems a hovering presence in the novel, even a leading character, but one that remains throughout only capriciously involved or indifferent. The fog, the rain, the sun--these may impede or advance action, but from an Olympian aloofness that suggests only an appalling cosmic irony.

More striking, perhaps, than the naturalistic elements in *The Red Badge of Courage* are the impressionistic, or symbolic, or poetic. By remaining fast at the side of one relatively insignificant soldier in a few relatively insignificant alarms, skirmishes, and battles, Crane is able to create a vivid impression of the entire war and all its battles. One of the secrets of Crane's achievement must lie in his style. For example, his opening paragraph flashes with the brilliance of an entire range of colors--brown, green, amber, black, red. The prose is so deeply engaged with the physicality of the world that the reader is irresistibly drawn in--to see, to hear, to feel."

James E. Miller, Jr.

The Literature of the United States 2, 3rd edition
(Scott, Foresman 1953-66) 667-68

"The majority of critics accept the point of view that the novel is a study in growth, whether that growth be spiritual, social, or philosophic. These critics 'concede' that the novel, especially in its earlier parts, has a strong naturalistic bias which tends to vitiate, most of them feel, its aesthetic integrity, though Berryman, a believer in Henry's ultimate heroism, asserts that it is the end of the novel that is deficient, since it fails to sustain the irony. Two critics, notably, depart from this opinion. Shroeder sees evidence of growth but feels it is inconsequential: he complains that the novel fails because Henry's heroism is largely accidental and

because the pretty picture at the end 'smacks too strongly of the youth's early impressions of the haunted forest; Crane seems to have forgotten everything that has gone before in his own book.' Walcott, on the other hand, claims that Henry, at the end of the novel, is back where he started from, naturalistic man still swelling with his ignorant self-importance. I submit that neither interpretation of the novel--the heroic, with or without qualifications, or the antiheroic--gives proper credit to Crane's aesthetic vision. For though earlier than 'The Open Boat' and 'The Blue Hotel,' *The Red Badge of Courage* exhibits the same interplay of deterministic and volitional forces as the two short stories, and the same pervasive irony binding the heroic and the anti-heroic themes....

According to Stallman, [Jim Conklin's] wound is supposed to be an unmistakable hint, among others, that Jim Conklin is Jesus Christ, but clearly it is part of the same eat-or-be-eaten concept that pervades 'The Open Boat' and that we find in the melon image in the description of the Swede's death.... Jim Conklin, for one, demonstrates that man has and makes ethical choices. Before the battle, he states that he will probably act like the other soldiers; but when many of them run, he nonetheless stands his ground. Wilson, too, feeling as the battle joins that it will be his death, does not run. And there is a decided growth in Henry's moral behavior as the novel progresses. From running away and rationalizing his cowardice as superior insight, Henry moves through a series of actions in which he does the right thing.... When the two friends grab the flag from the dead color-bearer, Henry pushes Wilson away to declare 'his willingness to further risk himself.' And in the final charge... Henry at these moments is more than an animal....

Ethical choice, then, is part of the novel's pattern: the moral act is admired. Yet Crane refuses to guarantee the effectiveness of moral behavior, even as he refuses in the two short stories. For there is the element of chance, finally, as in those stories, that makes the outcome unpredictable. Jim Conklin, for all his bravery, is killed. The tattered man, who watches with Henry Jim's death struggle and who is concerned over Henry's 'wound,' has acted morally, but he is dying and is, additionally, deserted for his pains. Wilson, on the other hand, who has also done the right thing, is rewarded by chance with life and praise; but Henry's immoral behavior, not only in running but later in lying about his head wound, is equally rewarded....

Man's behavior, then, as viewed in *The Red Badge of Courage*, is a combination of conditioned and volitional motivation. Man has a freedom of choice, and it is proper for him to choose the right way; at the same time, much of his apparent choice is, in reality, conditioned. But even acting morally or immorally does not guarantee one's fate, for the Universe is indifferent and chance too has scope to operate. Crane is interested, however, in more than man's public deeds. He probes in addition the state of mind of the heroic man... where Henry overhears the officer speak of his regiment 'as if he referred to a broom...' Crane's explicit statement that Henry learns here that he is very insignificant, leaves no room for doubt of the growth in Henry's insight and attitude. Indeed, by the time of the later scene, Henry is no longer worried about running away or pondering the question of death. Even when he reverts in the crises of action to illusions about himself and the nature of his accomplishments, his thoughts reveal the confidence that Jim, Wilson, and the tattered man had before him. To mention but one instance: when he is holding the colors, Henry resolves not to budge. 'It was clear to him that his final and absolute revenge was to be achieved by his dead body lying, torn and glittering, upon the field....'

There is irony in the end of the novel; in fact, if one examines the longer version in the earlier manuscript of *The Red Badge of Courage*, he can have no doubt that there is. For there are long passages there, later excised by Crane, which clearly reveal a delusion in Henry's thoughts.... These pretentious thoughts about his role in the universe, coupled with the image of Henry turning 'with a lover's thirst [to] an existence of soft and eternal peace' and the enigmatic last sentence, 'Over the river a golden ray of sun came through the hosts of leaden rain clouds,' reveal an irony similar to that in the endings of 'The Open Boat' and 'The Blue Hotel.'

But at what is this final irony directed? Not, as Walcott would have it, at Henry's evaluation of his conduct, but at the presumption in his false impressions of Nature and the Universe; at his philosophical self-confidence. Just as earlier Jim Conklin's, Wilson's, and the tattered man's supreme confidence in themselves had been held up to ironic scrutiny, so here is Henry's, only on a befittingly larger scale. But even as the minor characters' confidence has its approbation from Crane, even as in 'The Blue Hotel' man's

conceit was shown to be the very engine of life, so has Henry's. It seems to me that what Crane was trying to do in his revision was to eliminate the too obvious irony and redress the tonal balance of the novel."

Stanley B. Greenfield
"The Unmistakable Stephen Crane"
PMLA LXXIII (December 1958) 568-72

"Fluidity and change characterize *The Red Badge*. Theme and style are organically conceived, the theme of change conjoined with the fluid style by which it is evoked. The style, calculated to create impressions of confused motion and change, is deliberately disconnected and apparently disordered. Crane injects disjointed details, one non sequitur melting into another. Scenes and objects are felt as blurred; they appear under a haze or vapor or cloud. Yet everything has relationship and is manipulated into contrapuntal patterns of color and cross-references of meaning.

The Red Badge is a literary exercise in language, in the patterning of words and the counterpointing of themes and tropes and colors. 'Most of my prose writings,' said Crane, 'have been toward the goal partially described by that misunderstood and abused word, realism.' *The Red Badge of Courage*, appearing at a time when the war was still treated primarily as a subject for romance, was the first anti-romantic novel of the Civil War to attain widespread popularity. What a controversy *The Red Badge* stirred up; what critical warfare it ignited! The flash and blast, the shock and excitement, the sensation it produced, were at once 'unprecedented and irresistible.' It detonated on the public--to use Conrad's trope--with 'the impact and force of a twelve-inch shell charged with a very high explosive.' What caused the explosion, particularly among his more perceptive readers, was the explosive style of the book, Crane's own bombardment of similes, metaphors and colors.

The book was boomed by the reviewers as the most realistic war novel that had ever been written, and Crane won a reputation greater than any other American as a realistic writer on war; but Crane in essence is no realist--not even in 'The Open Boat.' Realism notes only the surface of things, Crane at his best was a symbolic artist. (Symbolism does not deny realism--it extends realism.) *The Red Badge* is not merely a fictional account of an episode of the Civil War--it is that and much more....Crane's technique in word painting differentiates him from other realists. He stands apart from the Zolaesque additive details of realists like Norris, Dreiser, Dos Passos, and Farrell. His impressionistic prose manifests close parallelism with French Impressionist paintings, which he knew well. His style, as I have elsewhere defined it, is prose pointillism."

R. W. Stallman
Foreward
The Red Badge of Courage and Selected Stories
(New American Library/Signet 1959) viii-ix

"Crane went beyond the paintings he knew and mixed realistic impressionism with expressive color and imagery. The columns of troops 'like two serpents crawling out of the cavern of the night,' the 'crimson roar' of battle, and even the red sun 'pasted in the sky like a wafer' are Henry Fleming's personal vision. The expressionistic technique seems less bizarre because the subjective coloring is not the only vividness in the objectively brilliant scene. And in the ending, when the young soldier has become a man, emotional vision and objective appearance come together in a final harmony--'Over the river a golden ray of sun came through the hosts of leaden rain clouds.'

"In his mastery of language Crane left Garland and even Howells far behind. The style of *The Red Badge*--impressionist and objective on the one hand, expressionist and subjective on the other--may have been an almost instinctive discovery, but its adaptation and reuse were a matter of conscious skill. Crane had worked out the proper medium for his irony....The author sees more than his characters without ever asserting that he knows more than they do. He lets their feelings and their vision conduct our responses along one line, while his own darting images may be reminding us of ironic perspectives and critical doubts."

J. C. Levenson
Major Writers of America II

"Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* is an acknowledged masterpiece of American literature, and Crane himself is one of our most closely examined late nineteenth-century authors. Whether read as an exciting war story, a psychological study of fear, an allegory of one's condition in an inhospitable world, or a reflection of Crane's own turbulent times, the novel has always had a large and involved audience....He has been discussed as naturalist, impressionist, symbolist, existentialist, and ironist, and each new emphasis has contributed to an understanding both of Crane's work and of our own preoccupations...."

Modern critical interest in Crane began in the early 1950s with John Berryman's biography and the editions and critical essays of R.W. Stallman. The problem of Henry's growth or maturity was central to this criticism, as was the related difficulty of identifying Crane's literary allegiances in the novel. 'Does Henry mature?' and 'Is Crane a naturalist, impressionist, or ironist?' were the questions many critics appeared to be answering. In addition, Crane's narrative voice, his symbolism, and the structure of the novel were offered as ways of discovering meaning....There has also been a turning away by some scholars from specific psychological themes and formalistic concerns toward approaches of a more broadly philosophical, historical, and social nature."

Donald Pizer, ed.
The Red Badge of Courage
(Norton Critical Edition 1962-94) vii-viii

"In developing and illustrating this paradoxical definition of courage, Crane used a simple structural arrangement. The novel is divided into two parts of twelve chapters each. The first twelve chapters tell of Henry Fleming's early insecurities about himself; his first battle, where he fights and then runs; his various adventures during his retreat; and finally his encounter with the fleeing soldier and then his wound. Chapter 13 begins with Henry's coming back to his own camp to begin anew, and the remainder of the book takes the reader through the battles of the next day, in which Henry fights with great courage....When the last battle is over, he is the same prideful youth, bragging on himself as he reviews his deeds of valor.... It is his body that is saved, not his soul. He is trained by war to realize, in contradiction of Christian ideals, that he must desert the mind and spirit and allow his physical being--even his animal self--to dominate."

William B. Dillingham
"Insensibility in *The Red Badge of Courage*"
College English XXV (December 1963) 194-98
American Literature 34 (1963) 520-31

"Crane's novel fails to typify the literary tastes of the nineties. Most Americans still regarded literature as an amusing diversion from life rather than an honest image of it....*The Red Badge of Courage* does not simply fail to meet such expectations, it deliberately flouts them; and we may fix one element of Crane's relation to his times by saying that he self-consciously tried to break all the rules of the Genteel Tradition. His inscription in a friend's copy of *Maggie* epitomizes his cockiness: 'This work is a mud-puddle, I am told on the best authority. Wade in and have a swim.'..."

His taste for violence, his choice of trapped and defeated characters rather than traditional heroes, and his refusal to soften their misery with hints of eternal reward typified the naturalistic program....Where he chiefly differed from the naturalists was in his abrupt metaphorical style and his radical conciseness. The ideal of naturalism was laborious documentation--to omit nothing from the demonstration of environment's sway over individuals. Crane, as Norris, put it, 'knew when to shut up.' His contemporaries recognized, and Crane freely acknowledged, that he was attempting in words what the Impressionists were doing with paint: to capture discrete moments in sudden flashes of illumination, to record life's impact on the senses before reason has intervened to give everything a familiar name. In pursuing his elegant and sometimes strained metaphors, Crane verges on self-conscious dandyism--another trait common to many writers of the nineties--but the general effect of his style is to make us undergo the experience of his characters with vivid immediacy. A power of this kind cannot be learned from any source, and ultimately we must conclude that the origin of Crane's art is his own genius."

Frederick C. Crews, ed.

The Red Badge of Courage
(Bobbs-Merrill 1964)

"Some of the features of his style...his convulsive and also humorous irony...its violent animism...its descriptive energy...like an abstract-expressionist painting...Pervasive irony is directed toward the youth--his self-importance, his self-pity, his self-loving war rage....It seems impossible not to conclude that the splendid burst of rhetoric with which the novel concludes is just that, in part--a burst of rhetoric--and that Crane retained many of his reservations about his hero....Then there is the famous passage about the wafer, long quoted as a war cry for modernism...

All the categorical terms that have been applied to Crane's art are slippery, but let me deny at once that he was a naturalist. The naturalists--Frank Norris, say, and Theodore Dreiser--are accumulative and ponderous. Crane's intense selectivity makes him almost utterly unlike them....The use of irony enters so deeply into most of Crane's finest work...that the simple term 'impressionist' will hardly do, and my uncertain feeling is that Crane is best thought of as a twentieth-century author. Authorities date modern American literature, some from *The Red Badge* in 1895, some from the reissue in the following year of *Maggie*....He was an impressionist: he dealt in the way things strike one, but also in the way things are.... The color of the style is celebrated; maybe he got it from a theory of Goethe's, but the style is also plain, plain. Short as it is, it is also unusually iterative; modern and simple, brazen with medieval imagery; animistic; dehuman, and mechanistic; attentive--brilliantly so--to sound....But the surest attribute of this style is its reserve, as its most celebrated is its color. Crane guarantees nothing. 'Doubtless' is a favorite word....Crane makes a sort of little bridge between Tolstoi--supreme--supreme?--and our very good writer Hemingway."

John Berryman
The American Novel
ed. Wallace Stegner
(Basic Books 1965) 86-96

"The significance and to some extent the excellence of a literary work can be measured by the volume of critical debate which it has provoked. By this gauge, Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* stands virtually unsurpassed among American novels. The critical issues have ranged from the meaning of Jim Conklin's death on the first day of battle to Crane's ironic or non-ironic intention on the second day when Henry Fleming presumably arrives at a quiet, unflinching manhood. Beyond these matters, a larger question of meaning has centered on whether Crane placed his youthful soldier in a world of naturalism, of Christian morality, or of primordial myth....the climax of the novel occurs when Henry suddenly has a revelation later on the second day and elects to replace the slain flagbearer....

Crane's final chapter fails to support the reading of Henry either as a seasoned military man or as a mythical hero dominated by altruistic concern for his people. Nor does one discover here the concluding scene in a Christian drama of spiritual growth and change: Henry's private vision suggests the late nineteenth-century universe not of Tolstoy but of Mark Twain. At the end, the novel and its central character turn away from the problems of courage and cowardice, from delirium, battle sleep, and the chaos of human warfare....The landscape images the separate 'golden' peace which Henry has arrived at through his fantasized election as flagbearer, while the 'leaden rain clouds' of war exist for Union soldiers less fortunate. Henry's final stance suggests both a return to himself and a farm boy's private reunion with a world of beneficent nature, a separate existence of security and peace in the midst of war."

Kermit Vanderbilt & Daniel Weiss
"Rifleman to Flagbearer:
Henry Fleming's Separate Peace in *The Red Badge of Courage*"
Modern Fiction Studies XI (Winter 1965-66) 371-80

"Henry deludes himself by seeing the real romantically. Self-assured by his temporary assertion of anger and passion, he at last convinces himself that 'he would no more quail before death, and found that, after all, it was but the great death. He was a man.' Henry has learned only how to explain away death, whereas the true gentlemen, Crane told Nellie Crouse, 'knows how to stand steady when they see cocked revolvers

and death comes down and sits of the back of the chair and waits.' Henry never learns this in *The Red Badge of Courage*. As in *Maggie* and *George's Mother*, Crane satirizes the traditional novel of initiation. He proves better than any earlier writer Melville's axiom: 'All wars are boyish and are fought by boys'."

Jay Martin
Harvests of Change: American Literature 1865-1914
(Prentice-Hall 1967) 63, 65

"No other classic American novelist has so masterfully rendered the immediacy of consciousness, the impingement of data on the mind, the creative activity of the perceiving mind in respect to that data, the tricks and hiatuses and sudden shifts in direction that an ordinary mind is capable of. None, furthermore, has created an experiencing consciousness with so little analytical guidance to the main changes of direction in it and yet with what feels like so high a degree of meaningful unconscious or semi-conscious logic informing those changes....

To lecture to undergraduates on *The Red Badge*...it is hard not to feel that a certain naive liberalism is brought into play by the novel for a good many readers. War is an abomination, Henry Fleming adjusts himself wholeheartedly to war, therefore the mental processes involved cannot be very creditable ones--thus, one suspects, the unspoken argument runs....The novel...[is] a brilliant study of psychological disintegration as a direct result of certain ethical over-intensities, and Henry's abandonment of the tattered soldier in particular... is produced directly by his crippling sense of guilt and dread of exposure. It is from those feelings too that he becomes liberated with what seem to me unquestionably beneficial consequences...The change that in fact occurs can surely be summed up in a preliminary way by saying that a man--or at least much more of a whole one--is precisely what Henry has become; and when Crane writes of his comrades that...they gazed around them with looks of uplifted pride...there seems no reason to think that he is speaking ironically....

He has succeeded in writing with unforgettable vividness about the atrocious in a way that yet makes it simply a part of life and not an indictment of it, or an indictment of 'man,' or any sort of indictment at all. In its psychological richness and its truly religious openness, *The Red Badge* is not only one of the most remarkable of American novels, it is one whose wisdoms seem especially valuable among the philosophical confusions of the present time. In exploring war as a closed situation in which an intellectual cannot escape from the moral claims of events merely by willing it--escape by focusing only on the kinds of events that feed his vanities--Crane has helped to show up the fashionable nihilisms of today as the effete and schizophrenic things that they are."

John Fraser
"Crime and Forgiveness: *The Red Badge* in Time of War"
Criticism 9 (1967) 243-56

"Some veterans found both the lesson and the technique of *The Red Badge of Courage* subversive. They were correct. The symbol of bravery with which Henry hopes to hide his cowardice comes from a blow dealt by a hysterical soldier rushing, as Henry had, to the rear. But, ironically, it becomes the 'little red badge of courage' that serves as the basis for his reclamation. In defiance of the mythos of war, a kind of battle-mad courage parallels and grows out of battle-mad cowardice, and only chance dictates to which a man will succumb."

Joseph Katz, ed.
The Portable Stephen Crane
(Viking 1969) vii, xiv-xv

"In typical Impressionistic manner, Henry's experiences are discontinuous and fragmented and result in a novel composed of brief units. These scenes do not always relate directly to juxtaposed episodes, nor do they always develop the same themes. Furthermore, Henry's view of the battle is severely limited. He knows nothing of the strategy of the battle; he frequently cannot interpret the events around him because his information is obscured by darkness, smoke, or the noise of cannons; rumors spread quickly throughout his regiment, heightening the fear and anxiety of the men. Often, preoccupied by introspection, Henry's mind distorts the data it receives, transforming men into monsters, and artillery shells into shrieking

demons that leer at him. In short, Henry's view of things is limited, unreliable, and distorted, and yet a projection of the working of his mind becomes a dramatically realistic depiction of how war might appear to an ordinary private engaged in a battle in the American Civil War....

Indeed, even thirty years after its initial publication, *The Red Badge* must have seemed most remarkable, for no third-person novel in American literature previously published had so severely limited its point of view.... Although there are a few passages with an intrusive narrative presence, and a few other complicating devices involving temporal dislocations, the central device of the novel is the rendering of action and thought as they occur in Henry's mind, revealing not the whole of the battle, nor even the broad significance of it, but rather the meaning of this experience to him. The immediacy of the dramatic action is a product of the rendering of the sensory data of Henry's mind; the psychological penetration results from the mingling of experience with association, distortion, fantasy, and memory. A further implication...is that the world presented to Henry is beyond his control, beyond even his comprehension....

As soon as Henry Fleming is introduced, the center of intelligence becomes his: 'There was a youthful private...' Wilson, who functions in some ways as Henry's alter-ego in the second half of the novel, has experienced his perceptual initiation by Chapter 14. Henry's does not come until Chapter 18....Now that he sees himself as one with his fellows, as an individual no more significant than any other, within the impersonal machinations of war, he develops the capacity to comprehend his environment: 'His mind took mechanical but firm impressions...' In visual terms, there is no doubt that Henry has undergone significant development: he has relinquished his dreams of 'Greek-like struggles' as well as his fear, which had become 'the red sickness of battle,' in favor of a more mature and balanced picture of himself as part of humanity....

The reader, like the viewer of an Impressionistic painting, is presented with an array of sensational details from a scene: the colors, sounds, feelings of a given experience....But the predominant sensory emphasis is on vision, so much so that Harold Frederic, himself a skilled novelist, called *The Red Badge* a 'battle painting' in his review in the *New York Times* in 1896....Paradoxically, most of the passages labeled pictures by the narrator constitute internal rather than external renderings. In general, when Henry is confused and under stress, his mind seeks resolution through imaginative portraits...of himself, apart, yet in himself...one function of narrative picturing is the projection of Henry's internal fantasy, creating visual correlatives for his heroic striving and compensatory fears of cowardice and death. So it is with Henry's 'visions' and 'pictures' in the opening chapters and his 'dreams' throughout the novel....

One of his central problems throughout the novel is that he cannot perceive enough to construct a reliable interpretation of his situation...Significantly, Henry's distortions are consistent until Chapter 18, when he experiences a dramatic epiphany and 'new eyes were given to him.' Previously he had been capable of almost surrealistic projections, as when he imagines that the artillery shells arching over him have 'rows of cruel teeth that grinned at him'...After his moment of recognition, in which he perceives his insignificance and loses much of his fear, there are no such distortions. It is then that he can see his earlier errors of interpretation...He is still subject to sensory restriction and obscuring, as when a scene becomes 'a wild blur' as he dashes across a field, but he no longer creates monsters out of shadows....

In an important sense, *The Red Badge* is a novel of the growth of Henry's visual capacities. The narrative method, alternating from objective apprehensions presented in the manner of a motion picture camera to the subjective rendering of his distortions, emotions, fantasies and memories, is the single most innovative device in the novel....the Impressionistic method...dominates the novel. It should be noted, however, that there is more variation of narrative logic than has generally been acknowledged. There is even one passage of direct thought as in stream-of-consciousness: 'Methodical idiots! Machine-like fools!' Here, in an intensely emotional moment, the intervening narrative consciousness disappears to render Henry's thoughts precisely as they occur....

Despite these variations, the basic method of the 'showing' of *The Red Badge of Courage* is Impressionistic and consists of the sensations and thoughts of a private engaged in a battle he does not comprehend and cannot even clearly see. The drama of the novel is epistemological, a matter of perception, distortion, and realization which finally culminates in Chapter 18 with Henry's epiphany. The genius of the

novel is its use of a narrative method that underscores the perceptual themes, that forces the reader to participate in the empirical limitations of the central character, and that creates a psychological reality on a level never before achieved in the American novel....This methodology stresses the limitation of sensory perceptions and the reduced reliability of interpretations of experience. The meaning of data is often as much a product of interpretation as it is of physical reality....The mode of unreliable narration describes almost exactly Crane's means of presenting Henry Fleming's heroic view of himself, the plains rushing eastward in 'The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky,' and Maggie's view of Pete as a knight. The close identification of the narrator's mind with a character has many unreliable manifestations in *The Red Badge*....

The result of this mode in *The Red Badge* is a continuous pattern of distorted judgments by Henry projected faithfully by the narrator. In general, these statements reveal the extent to which Henry's mind, driven by doubt and shame, reconstructs the data of reality to create a context in which his actions can be seen in their most positive light....The narrator does not suggest the bias of Henry's view; the reader, seeing Henry's interpretation in context, must supply the countering qualification of Henry's delusions. The novel is replete with ironic assertions that point to Henry's immaturity, innocence, and distorted self-view. Indeed, they build throughout the novel to a moment just before Henry's epiphany in Chapter 18, at which point they reach their most profound delusion: 'He had been a tremendous figure, no doubt...a knight.' After his epiphany, the narrative irony ceases. What the handling of this device suggests for Impressionism is that irony is a function of distance, of knowledge, of point of view; given the same data that Henry himself receives, the reader's interpretation is impossible to reconcile with Henry's. The resulting tension, both of interpretive distance, becomes one of the dominating factors in the novel.

Metaphors of perception generate the fundamental theme of *The Red Badge* in terms that explicitly link the novel to the development of literary Impressionism in America. From the beginning of the novel Henry's most significant problem is his inability to formulate and sustain a realistic conception of himself and the conditions of war. Severely limited in experience, his mind resorts to fantasies of glory based on his reading about classic battles, and these conceptions compete for dominance with his fears of cowardice and death, his uncertainties about himself, his dread of the unknown. This mental conflict finds appropriate expression in his illusions of himself, restricted vision, and eventual perceptual growth....

As he moves into the key epiphanic episode, Chapter 18, his perceptual difficulties at first continue, his view 'blurred by the hurling smoke of the line.' But in the rush of activity, Henry's perspective is suddenly transformed and he undergoes a maturing of self-awareness: Henry feels that 'he had been made aged. New eyes were given to him.' And the most startling thing was to learn suddenly that he was very insignificant. Henry's 'recognition' improves his perception literally and figuratively. As the battle begins anew, his ability to perceive his environment is markedly improved....Although it is significant that Henry has achieved a new level of insight, in accord with the psychological reality of the novel, perceptual growth is neither total nor invariable....

He has gained control of his fear; he has come to know and accept death: 'He was a man.' In the most telling comment in the novel, 'it came to pass that as he trudged from the place of blood and wrath, his soul changed.' Henry's epiphany has not been simply a matter of understanding battle; it has fundamentally altered him as a human being. As a result, the concluding image creates optimism: 'Over the river a golden ray of sun came through the hosts of leaden rain clouds.'

The story of Henry Fleming's growth in *The Red Badge of Courage* is no chronicle of confrontation with Deterministic forces, as a Naturalistic reading would require, nor even a Realistic account of combat. Rather, it is a record of Henry's progressive intensification of vision to a moment of epiphany in which he sees his world and himself in a larger perspective. The novel is basically a story of psychological adjustment to reality in which Henry achieves a reconciliation of his romantic visions with his new awareness. He does not suddenly perceive all truth for all time...But the novel does document an epistemological process in which a young boy makes gains in self-knowledge, in his ability to perceive his environment, and in his attempts to achieve a balance that keeps thought and emotion in constructive proportion. Even so, for Henry the 'truth' is ultimately tentative, relativistic, solipsistic, but as close to reality as a single human being, insignificant yet egoistic, can ever come in an Impressionistic novel."

James Nagel
"Impressionism in *The Red Badge of Courage*"
Stephen Crane and Literary Impressionism
(Pennsylvania State U 1980) 52-61, 87-92

"As Eric Solomon has established, parody provides a central narrative strategy in all of Crane's writing. His war novel does more than parody either generic conventions or historical novels about the Civil War; it specifically parodies those narrative forms used to reinterpret the Civil War....Throughout the first chapter, the narrator...evokes contemporary narratives of the Civil War and of the chivalric romance to test their applicability to his own story that lies ahead. The second paragraph of the novel mocks the revival of the medieval romance by using chivalric rhetoric to describe the mundane activity of a soldier doing his laundry....The third paragraph of the novel suggests the social function of these chivalric stories for readers at the end of the century. The rumors of 'a brilliant campaign' draw an audience of soldiers away from 'a negro teamster who had been dancing upon a cracker-box.' In the 1880s, tales of chivalric exploits similarly superseded the older narrative of emancipation... In addition to rejecting these narratives of emancipation and domesticity, Crane parodies the memoirs of veterans that were so popular in the 1880s."

Amy Kaplan
"The Spectacle of War in Crane's Revision of History"
New Essays on "The Red Badge of Courage," ed. Lee Clark Mitchell
(Cambridge U 1986) 77-108

"The relative brevity of Crane's chapters, sentences, and scenes is a corollary of his emphasis on the flash of astonishment, itself an aspect of his stress on sudden contrasts and shifts. His unit of composition, in other words, may be said to contribute as much to his impressionism and his expressionism as his use of colors or physical details. The small unit registers an immediate sharp imprint in a way that longer units (such as the sentences in Faulkner) do not. The moment of astonishment, by deepening this imprint, produces tableaux of wonder...Crane weaves these moments of astonishment into a complex rhythm.... Astonishment can become an all-absorbing, almost hypnotic state..."

In analyzing Crane's image [of the wafer], Osborn points to the old practice of sealing envelopes with a wafer of wax. Stallman responds that the sealant was glue (in which case we have pasted glue). More importantly, of course, Stallman identifies Crane's image as the wafer of Communion, setting off a chain of reactions, negative in the main, that may never end....first-stage cuts in the manuscript involve interior monologues in which Henry inveighs against various cosmic powers such as nature and fate and God.... These passages are hard on Henry. Chapter 12 portrays an egotist who will justify his ways at any cost and the conclusion suggests that while the private has made some progress he may not be much better tomorrow than he is today. In the last analysis, excluding Chapter 12 from the published text may not detract much, however, from the reader's experience. The chapter is more abstract than is usual in Crane and also more static. Though it does tell us something about the protagonist, we probably know him well enough from the pages that were not held back from publication. The issue, finally, is one of degree; how much if at all does the chapter improve the novel? In my judgment it does not improve it enough to warrant inclusion....

While it is possible that the soul of Henry Fleming changed in the manner indicated, the context makes it not only improbable but highly improbable; any other assumption undercuts the irony, which the sentences that follow carefully reinforce...There remains the problem of the 'third' ending: 'Over the river a golden ray of sun came through the hosts of leaden rain clouds.' This crowd-pleaser may have resulted from the Appleton editor's desire for something more positive than what Crane had already provided. But the positioning of the sentence, coming as it does after the last long paragraph, makes it easy enough to discount. By tracing the process of Henry's thinking, the concluding sentence of that paragraph offers a helpfully proleptic view of the last sentence of all. It says that this youth is a dreamer whose eyes are at least partly open."

David Halliburton
"Eternal Fact and Mere Locality: *The Red Badge of Courage*"
The Color of the Sky: A Study of Stephen Crane
(Cambridge U 1989) 113-15, 127-33, 138-44

"The novel is an early example of psychological realism under conditions of fear and violence. Using the omniscient point of view, Crane offers external, objective views of the uncertain, changing circumstances of battle, alternating with internal views of the youth's sensations and perceptions--a detailed process of stimulus and response....Many of Crane's own experiences were deliberate experiments, and so were the situations in which he entangled his characters. The techniques he used to depict them were also experiments, for he had no faith in literary conventions....Superior to most fiction written by men who actually fought in the Civil War, *Red Badge* is an example of the supremacy of the imagination over actuality, a triumph of art over reportage. Paradoxically, an experiment in chaos is best rendered in a style that is very carefully controlled. Crane's patterning of words, his impressionistic use of sensory imagery, his counterpointing of characters and scenes, and the brevity of the novel create a unity of effect rarely found in fiction, except for Henry James'."

David Madden, ed.
8 Classic American Novels
(Harcourt 1990) 886

"The art, in a word, was what made the book new, or we could say young, at the same time that it reorganized the vision of war, one of the oldest subjects to attract the narrative efforts of humanity....The stark originality of *The Red Badge* continues to remain by far the most striking aspect of the book....Small wonder that it would be classed as a work of realism, since it seemed true to what we now imagine is the reality of war. Or that it would be seen as naturalistic, since that classification places it in an up-to-date relationship with the sequence of literary movements that followed realism. Or that it would be called impressionistic, since that designation places it in graphic relation to the art of its time....We can see at the very outset that the book is neither fully naturalistic nor impressionistic, neither deterministic nor subjective but involved in both worlds...What is uppermost in the representation is the ordinariness of the participants. They have no real distinction, yet if their foolishness and pretensions are exposed by the narration, they are not belittled. The informal, unschooled ordinariness of these soldiers is the very stamp of Crane's realism....

Just as Crane's sounds of war veer always between curses and roars, his colors are boldly primary. The brown and green of the opening paragraph set the tone. There we see the process of nature revealed not in gradual but bold change. And we see that process again startlingly shown in the description of the dead soldier in the green forest chapel....Even more telling are the 'crimson splotches' that, in Henry's mind, constitute the wars on the pages of history. Then there is the red god of battle. Rage, like new blood, is red, though like old blood it can also be black. Flames of musketry are seen as yellow tongues. This flash and splash of color is seen in the red badge itself that Henry wishes for when he enters the column of wounded men; and later, angry at being called a mule driver, he pictures 'red letters of revenge' to be written to the insulting officer....His sentences....have the strength of line and form that we see in a Cézanne painting.... All the qualities of sound, color, and deformity are concentrated, at almost the exact center of the book, in the description of Jim Conklin's death....Robert Wooster Stallman took the wafer to refer to communion and Jim Conklin--with his initials, his wound in the side, and the tattered soldier's accompanying passionate cry, 'God'--to be the Christ. Stallman has been sufficiently flogged for his interpretation....

The delirium that encounters despair and death is, then, the sublime absence of selfishness. Here the novel hovers at the threshold of ennobling Henry's 'heroism' and we might well be lulled into seeing the narrative, which is so much in the convention of the *bildungsroman*, as a register of Henry Fleming's moral growth toward maturity. The book's conclusion, with the regiment retiring from the battlefield and Henry once more luxuriating in a feeling of accomplishment, can be seen to reinforce such a vision of growth. Nearing its end, the narrative boldly asserts, 'He was a man.' Yet to conclude moral growth and maturity from this sentence is to displace the iron irony of the narrative with blatant sentimentality. Although Crane cut some passages from the concluding chapter which expose the same complacent self-satisfaction, there is sufficient irony remaining to indicate that his asserted manhood is no more secured that it was after his first battle when the narrative asserted the same thing. He is really no better or worse than he was then nor is there evidence he is better or worse than all the men who were killed or who survived...Crane did better to keep him alive, letting all that selfishness, which had been for a moment sublimely absent, return in the form of pride."

James Cox
"On Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*"

Crane is the most painterly American fiction writer, the purest Impressionist and one of the most unique stylists, in a class with James, Hemingway and Faulkner. He is one of those whose style and techniques are studied by other writers. According to the novelist Ford Madox Ford, "His influence on his time, and the short space of time that has succeeded his day, was so tremendous that if today you read *Maggie*, it is as if you heard a number of echoes, so many have his imitators been; and you can say as much of *The Red Badge*. That is simply because his methods have become the standard for dealing with war scenes or slum life." Ernest Hemingway named Crane as one of the three best American writers among his predecessors, along with James and Twain. The influence of Crane on Hemingway is most evident in "An Episode of War" (1899). In his free verse Crane also anticipated Imagism, the movement in early Modernist poetry led by Ezra Pound.

Like Hemingway, as a reporter Crane learned to write effective short declarative sentences. As it evolved, his prose style became a dynamic blend: (1) His irony detaches perspective and appeals to intellect. (2) His Naturalist themes likewise detach the reader with a cosmic perspective, a focus on deterministic forces and a tendency to see characters as specimens, frequently comparing humans to animals. Irony and deterministic themes detach while (3) Impressionist techniques immerse the reader in the action like a participant and (4) the rhetoric affirming the heroism of exemplars inspires a belief in free will and "the sublime absence of selfishness." The unique dynamism of Crane's prose style derives from the tension between distancing irony and Naturalist themes on the one hand, and the vicarious experience induced by Impressionism and exemplary heroic conduct on the other.

Michael Hollister (2015)