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The Red Badge of Courage (1895)

Stephen Crane

(1871-1900)

“Mr. Stephen Crane, the author of *The Red Badge of Courage*...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

“Suddenly there was *The Red Badge of Courage* showing us, to our absolute conviction, how the normal, absolutely undistinguished, essentially civilian man from the street had behaved in a terrible and prolonged war--without distinction, without military qualities, without special courage, without even any profound apprehension of, or passion as to, the causes of the struggle in which, almost without will, he was engaged.... With *The Red Badge of Courage* in the nineties, we were provided with a map showing us our own hearts. If before that date we had been asked how we should behave in a war, we should no doubt have answered that we should behave like demigods, with all the marmoreal attributes of war memorials.

But, a minute after peeping into *The Red Badge* we knew that, at best, we should behave doggedly but with a weary non-comprehension, flinging away our chassepot rifles, our haversacks, and fleeing into the swamps of Shiloh.”

Ford Madox Ford
Portraits from Life
(Houghton 1937) 22-3

“*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, 23rd edition
(1921; Macmillan 1940-68) 230-31

“*Army Life in a Black Regiment* deserved to be remembered with Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*. [T. W.] Higginson later recognized at once the ‘extraordinary freshness and vigour’ of Crane, whom he described as second only to Tolstoy in his pictures of war.” [Higginson, a Union Colonel in the Civil War, was the editor who discovered Emily Dickinson.]

Van Wyck Brooks
New England Summer 1865-1915
(Dutton 1940) 131

“The original manuscript, containing an added 5,000 words (about 10 per cent of the entirety) deleted by the original publisher, was printed for the first time in 1982. This psychological study of a soldier’s reactions to warfare was written before Crane had ever seen a battle. His knowledge was at least partly derived from a popular anthology, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*. The unnamed battle of the novel has been identified as that at Chancellorsville.

Henry Fleming, generally called simply ‘the youth’ or ‘he,’ is an ordinary, inexperienced soldier, ‘an unknown quantity,’ torn between a ‘little panic-fear’ and ‘visions of broken-bladed glory’ as he faces his first battle. He begins with the state of mind of the raw recruit who is anxious to get into battle so that he may show his patriotism and prove himself a hero. He swaggers to keep up his spirits during the delay that precedes his suddenly being thrust into the slaughter. Then he is overcome by unthinking fear and runs from the field. He is ashamed when he joins the wounded, for he has not earned their ‘red badge of courage,’ and then he becomes enraged when he witnesses the horrid dance of death of his terribly maimed friend, Jim Conklin. Later, by chance, he gets a minor head wound in a confused struggle with one of the retreating infantrymen of his own army. The next day, when his pretense is accepted that the wound is the result of enemy gunfire, he suddenly begins to fight frantically, and then automatically seizes the regiment’s colors in the charge that reestablishes its reputation. He moves through this sultry nightmare with unconscious heroism, and emerges steady, quiet, and truly courageous.”

James D. Hart
The Oxford Companion to American Literature, 5th edition
(Oxford 1941-83)

“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
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

"Of the nineteenth-century American novelists, only Mark Twain and Stephen Crane seemed to have had something to say to [the Modernist American writers of the early 20th century]... To Crane they felt

indebted for his honest attempts to account for and describe the genuine emotions stimulated by battle--this chiefly from *The Red Badge of Courage*, though some of the stories of *Wounds in the Rain* (1900) would probably have come closer to their own intention. 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

"It was no wonder that Conrad loved *The Badge*; Henry is a true Conrad hero.... Crane's psychological way with an adventure story is Conrad's also, and his Impressionistic method of presentation; like *Lord Jim*, *The Badge* is something much more subtle than the conventional story of the man who first disgraces himself, then atones by his resolute handling of the second chance. 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's regeneration is brought about by the death of Jim Conklin, the friend whom Henry had known since childhood. He goes under various names. He is sometimes called the spectral soldier (his face is a pasty gray) and sometimes the tall soldier (he is taller than all other men), but there are unmistakable hints--in such descriptive details about him as his wound in the side, his torn body and his gory hand, and even in the initials of his name, Jim Conklin--that he is intended to represent Jesus Christ. [Nearly all critics disagree with this simplistic identification; see *Christ-evoking* figures]. We are told that there is 'a resemblance in him to a devotee of a mad religion,' and among his followers the doomed man stirs up

'thoughts of a solemn ceremony.' When he dies, the heavens signify his death--the red sun bleeds with the passion of his wounds: 'The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer.'

This grotesque image, the most notorious metaphor in American literature, has been much debated and roundly damned by Crane's critics (e.g., Pattee, Quinn, Cargill, and a dozen others) as downright bad writing, a false, melodramatic and nonfunctional figure. Joseph Hergesheimer, Willa Cather, and Conrad admired it [all novelists themselves], but no one ventured to explain it. The other camp took potshots at it without attempting to understand what it is really all about. It is, in fact, the key to the symbolism of the whole novel, particularly the religious symbolism which radiates outward from Jim Conklin. Like an image, it has to be related to the structure of meaning in which it functions; when lifted out of its context it is bound to seem artificial and irrelevant or, on the other hand, merely 'a superb piece of imagery.' I do not think it can be doubted that Crane intended to suggest here the sacrificial death celebrated in communion.

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

"The progressive movement of the hero, as in all myth, is that of separation, initiation, and return. Within this general framework, Crane plots his story with individual variation. Henry Fleming, a Youth, ventures forth from his known environment into a region of Naturalistic, if not super-Naturalistic wonder; he encounters the monstrous forces of war and death; he is transformed through a series of rites and revelations into a hero; he returns to identify this new self with the deeper communal forces of the group and to bestow the blessings of his findings on his fellow comrades.

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...

In the language of myth Henry's inability to face the monsters of battle in the 'light,' to identify himself with his comrades (both acts are, in a sense, identical), and thus to give up his individual self, which is sustained only in 'darkness' and in isolation, so that his full self can be realized in the light of communal identification symbolize a loss of spiritual, moral, and physical power, which only a rebirth of identify can solve. Only by being reborn can he come to understand that man's courage springs from the self-realization that he must participate harmoniously as a member of the group. Only then can he understand the 'deep forces' from which his individual energy and vitality spring. Thus, Henry's entombment in the forest is only preliminary to the resurrection that will follow....

How can he atone for his guilt? His wish that 'he, too, had a wound, a red badge of courage' is only preliminary to the fulfillment of atonement, just as in the rites of some primitive tribes or as in Christ's crucifixion on the cross, 'blood' plays an essential part in the act of atonement and in the process of transformation. If the Tattered Man's questioning reveals the need and nature of atonement, meeting the Tall Soldier shows the quality of character needed to make the sacrifice. Justifying the 'tall' of his name by his 'supreme unconcern' for battle, Conklin accepts his role as part of the group with coolness and humility. Because he realizes the insignificance of self, he has no fear of a threatening landscape....

As Henry and his comrade wrench the pole from the dead bearer, they both acquire an invincible wand of hope and power. Taking it roughly from his friend, Henry has, indeed, reached heroic proportions. In his role as hero, Henry stands 'erect and tranquil' in face of the great monster. Having 'rid himself of the red sickness of battle,' having overcome his fear of losing individual identity, he now despises the 'brass and bombast of his earlier gospels.' Because he is at-one with his comrades, he has acquired their 'daring spirit of a savage religion-mad,' their 'brute' strength to endure the violence of a violent world, the 'red blood and black of passion.' His individual strength is their collective strength, that strength of the totality which the flag symbolizes.... Following the general pattern of myth with peculiar individual variations, Crane has shown how the moral and spiritual strength of the individual springs from the group, and how, through the identification of self with group, the individual can be 'reborn in identity with the whole meaning of the universe'."

John E. Hart

"*The Red Badge of Courage* as Myth and Symbol"
University of Kansas City Review 19 (1953) 249-56

"Although Stephen Crane was later to observe war at first hand as a newspaper correspondent, when he first published *The Red Badge of Courage* as a serial in the Philadelphia Press in 1894 he had never visited a battlefield. When the work appeared as a book in 1895, Crane's reputation was almost immediately established: he was 24 years old. Although subsequent scholarship was to demonstrate that Crane had absorbed some published accounts of the Civil War, notably Colonel W. F. Hinman's *Corporal Si Klegg and his 'Pard'* (1887), most critics still regard *The Red Badge of Courage* as one of the most remarkable achievements of the imagination in American literature.

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.

But more important than the proper label for the book is its meaning. *The Red Badge of Courage* is the story of Henry Fleming's initiation into the mysteries of maturity, his passage from youth to adulthood. As an awkward boy filled with self-doubts, he learns first, and to his despair, that he is capable of cowardice. When he subdues his panic and turns from flight, he discovers to his great surprise that he is capable of courageous action. But it is only after he is acclaimed a hero that genuine insight comes: cowardice and courage are compounded of remarkably similar ingredients--instinctual, compulsive acts that are in essence animalistic. Crane's use of animal imagery at key points throughout the novel subtly reinforces Henry's final illumination.

At the end of the novel, Henry Fleming is a man not because he has fought brilliantly and bravely, but because he has come to understand the complex nature of his own behavior. When his pride is diluted with humility, a humility that comes in remembering his own act of human betrayal (in his refusal to help the tattered man), he finally feels the 'quiet manhood' that is 'nonassertive but of sturdy and strong blood'."

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

"The works of Stephen Crane (1871-1900) are an early and unique flowering of pure Naturalism. [Most critics disagree.] It is Naturalism in a restricted and special sense, and it contains many non-Naturalistic elements, but it is nevertheless entirely consistent and coherent. It marks the first entry, in America, of a deterministic philosophy not confused with ethical motivation into the structure of the novel. Ethical judgment there is, in plenty.... Crane's Naturalism is to be found, first, in his attitude toward received values, which he continually assails through his Naturalistic method of showing that the traditional concepts of our social morality are shams and the motivations presumably controlled by them are pretenses; second, in his Impressionism, which fractures experiences into disordered sensation in a way that shatters the old moral 'order' along with the old orderly processes of reward and punishment; third, in his obvious interest in a scientific or deterministic accounting for events, although he does not pretend or attempt to be scientific in either the tone or the management of his fables....

Crane's Naturalism is descriptive: he does not pretend to set forth a proof, like a chemical demonstration, that what happened must have happened, inevitably. This is what Zola was forever saying he did, and it is for these pretensions of scientific demonstration and proof that he has been chided by later critics. Crane simply shows how a sequence of events takes place quite independently of the wills and judgments of the people involved.... *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), Crane's Civil War story, is the most controversial piece in his canon. It has been much discussed and most variously interpreted, and the interpretations range about as widely as they could. Is it a Christian story of redemption? [Stallman] Is it a demonstration that man is a beast with illusions? Or is it, between these extremes, the story of a man who goes through the fire, discovers himself, and with the self-knowledge that he is able to attain comes to terms with the problem of life insofar as an imperfect man can come to terms with an imperfect world?...

[The novel ends with] a climax of self-delusion. If there is any one point that has been made it is that Henry has never been able to evaluate his conduct. He may have been fearless for moments, but his motives were vain, selfish, ignorant, and childish. Mercifully, Crane does not follow him down through the more despicable levels of self-delusion that are sure to follow as he rewrites (as we have seen him planning to do) the story of his conduct to fit his childish specifications. He has been through some moments of hell, during which he has for moments risen above his limitations, but Crane seems plainly to be showing that he has not achieved a lasting wisdom or self-knowledge."

Charles C. Walcutt
American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream
(U Minnesota 1956) vii-viii, 66-67, 74-82

"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.' Walcutt, 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. No work of art is what it appears to be. Crane’s technique in word painting differentiates him from other Realists. He stands apart from the Zolaesque additive details of realists [Naturalists] 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’s realism and unconventional treatment of military subjects were favorably noted in early reviews. The insight into the feelings and fears of fighting men revealed in the book provided a new reading experience for a public unaccustomed to the revelation of the ‘seamy’ side of battle, the very human, ‘nonheroic’ aspects of men at war. Reviewers were quick to note and appreciate the frank treatment of human emotions under stress. ‘The story is not pleasant by any means,’ said the *Outlook* (December 21, 1895), ‘but the author seems to lay bare the very nerves of his character; practically, the book is a minute study of one man’s mind in the environment of war in all its horrible detail’....

As a psychological study of the mind of a man under extreme tension and anxiety, the novel has few peers. The book stirred up critical warfare that still rages. Widely reviewed in England, it won for Crane the personal friendships of H. G. Wells and Henry James. Ernest Hemingway called *The Red Badge* ‘one of the finest books in our literature’.”

Max J. Herzberg & staff
The Reader’s Encyclopedia of American Literature
(Crowell 1962)

“War provided a neatly self-enclosing context within which Crane could work out his narratives of spiritual ordeal. The pattern did not change: storybook illusions of glory are the starting point, and yielding to the pressure of battle is an alternative as false as yielding to the moral numbness of misery, whether it be by giving in to fear and turning coward or by submitting to the frenzy of the kill and turning madman. Popular illusion is the characteristic of the once-born; but Crane, the unconscious heir of Jonathan Edwards on religious affections, also showed the delusive states that might pass as evidence of being twice-born...

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
(Harcourt 1962) 391, 394-95

"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. More recently, the effort to authenticate Crane's manuscript version of *The Red Badge of Courage* as the principal text of the novel has reinvigorated the examination of a number of large-scale issues bearing on the themes and form of the work."

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

"Bearing the symbol of his country's cause, Henry is unquestionably courageous, but the underlying causes of his deeds are neither noble nor humane. Throughout his life Crane deeply respected heroic action. His attitude was, as Daniel G. Hoffman has said, that it was 'among the very few means man has of achieving magnificence'; nevertheless, he considered courage the product of a complex of non-rational drives. The difference between the external act of courage and the internal process that leads up to that act created for Crane one of the supreme ironies of life.

The Red Badge has frequently been read as the story of how a young soldier achieves some sort of spiritual salvation. One critic sees Henry Fleming's 'growth toward moral maturity'; another, his 'redemption' through 'humility and loving-kindness.' His initiation has been called the successful search for 'spiritual and psychological order,' the discovery of a 'vision of pattern.' Some readings emphasize Henry's new sense of brotherhood and call the book the story of a young man's developing awareness of social responsibility.... The chief purpose of the novel is to objectify the nature of heroism through Henry Fleming. Through witnessing his actions and changing sensations we discover the emerging paradox of courage: human courage is by its nature subhuman; in order to be courageous, a man in time of physical strife must abandon the highest of his human faculties, reason and imagination, and act instinctively, even animalistically.

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....

In contrast to the thoughtful and romantic boy of the first part of the book, the young warrior of the last twelve chapters is capable of unreason, even self-abandon. At the first sight of the enemy, he 'forgot many personal matters and became greatly enraged.' He becomes a prideful animal, seeking the throat of the enemy with self-forgetfulness. The feelings of the imaginative young soldier, who once thought of war as a glorious Greek-like struggle, now are constantly described in terms of bestiality, unreason, and even insanity.... Otherwise, Henry remains essentially unchanged during the course of the novel. It is a mistake to think of him as having become rejuvenated through humility or in any way changed into a better person morally. He has simply adapted himself through experience to a new and dangerous environment. 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

"Throughout the book, it can be demonstrated, Crane consistently used the time, the place, and the actions of Chancellorsville as a factual framework within which to represent the perplexities of his young hero.... If we turn now to military history, we find that the evidence of place and time points directly to Chancellorsville. Only three actual place-names are used in the book: Washington, Richmond, and the Rappahannock River.... 1863 marked the turning-point in the Union fortunes; before Gettysburg the South had, as Wilson remarked in *The Red Badge*, licked the North 'about every clip.' After Gettysburg no Union soldier would have been likely to make such a statement; and Gettysburg was the next major battle after Chancellorsville.... No one called the battle of Chancellorsville in the book because no one would have known it was Chancellorsville. No impression is more powerful to the reader of Civil War reports and memoirs than that officers and men seldom knew where they were....

Why, with the whole Civil War available, should Crane have chosen Chancellorsville? Surely, in the first place, because he knew a good deal about it. Perhaps he had learned from his brother, 'an expert in the strategy of Gettysburg and Chancellorsville' (Beer, p.47). More probably he had heard old soldiers talk about their war experiences while he was growing up. Many middle-aged men in Port Jervis had served in the 124th New York; Chancellorsville had been their first battle, and first impressions are likely to be the most vivid. It is hard to believe that men in an isolated small town could have resisted telling a hero-worshipping small boy about a great adventure in their lives. Moreover, Chancellorsville surely appealed to Crane's sense of the ironic and the colorful. The battle's great charges, its moments of heroism, went only to salvage a losing cause; the South lost the war and gained only time from Chancellorsville; the North, through an incredible series of blunders, lost a battle it had no business losing. The dead, as always, lost the most."

Harold R. Hungerford
"That Was at Chancellorsville":
The Factual Framework of *The Red Badge of Courage*"
American Literature 34 (1963) 520-31

"In a sense...*The Red Badge* is a faithful, though oblique, reflection of the era in which it was written; it expresses certain doubts about the meaning of individual virtue in a world that has become suddenly cruel and mechanical. For this very reason, however, 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 [demonstrating] 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)

"His work has not only brilliantly survived but was recognized instantly abroad--in England--as authentic; professional military men were surprised to learn that he was not one.... By leaving things out the author makes his general bid for our trust.... Some of the features of his style...his convulsive and also humorous irony...violent animism...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

"Stephen Crane, in *The Red Badge of Courage*, was influenced by Tolstoy's *Sevastopol*, though he had apparently not yet read *War and Peace*, and he may also have been influenced by DeForest. It had already been suspected that Crane had read *Miss Ravenel's Conversion*, and the probability has now been made stronger by a paper by Mr. Thomas F. O'Donnell of Syracuse University in the issue of *American Literature* of January, 1956—'DeForest, Van Petten, and Stephen Crane'—in which he shows that the Reverend John B. Van Petten, who was Crane's teacher of history at school, had been a fellow campaigner of DeForest's and is mentioned by him often in *A Volunteer's Adventures*. It is assumed—though there is no real evidence—that Van Petten would have talked to his students about his old friend DeForest's book."

Edmund Wilson
Patriotic Gore
(Oxford 1966) 684-85

"Crane...[translated] himself into Henry Fleming. Essentially *The Red Badge of Courage* is a study of the fears and illusions of Henry. He joins the army in the first place because of his pretentious illusions about his own worth. What he learns, however, is, as Crane repeatedly writes early in the tale, that he was 'merely a part of a vast blue demonstration.' All the evidences of war work against his romantic view of himself—the sight of dead soldiers, the way men in battle drop 'here and there like bundles,' the mass, collective life of the military, the death of Jim Conklin.... The battle-scenes of *The Red Badge*, of course, provide occasion for numerous portrayals of the man undifferentiated from the mass....

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

"While romantic novelists after the Civil War continued to retail a world ordered on traditions of morality, respectability, social justice, and courage--all the shibboleths of a civilization gone smugly genteel--Crane and many of his contemporaries were learning to mistrust what they had been taught...[as expressed in] *The Red Badge of Courage*. One reason for its popularity was the novelty of a war story told from a private's point of view. Wars in earlier fiction had been fought mainly by officers, gallants, and villains, not worthy men who moved against a background of massed troops. In this novel the higher ranks are themselves only part of the scenery. Perhaps those who had fought in the real war found that this viewpoint brought back to them a sense of what it had really been like: the constant threat of the unknown, the suppression of personality, and the self-doubts.

On a deeper level, there may have been reasons for the novel's popularity in Crane's treatment of the conflict between tradition and reality that disturbed post-bellum America. This was Henry Fleming's own private battle. He expected his war to be 'Greek-like struggles,' fanfare, and glory; he found instead that it was hurry-up-and-wait, filth, death, din, boredom, and chaos. Each of his high-blown speculations is punctured by a prosaic intrusion: by his mother's practical and homiletic farewell, by the dashing General's concern for a box of cigars. Henry's manhood will come when he learns that war is shapeless, that its irreducible nature is man's mortality. Although the last chapter says that Henry has indeed come to terms with this, its rhetoric suggests that he has only replaced his romantic notions with an equally romantic posture of battle-tempered experience. Later, in 'The Veteran' and other stories in which he appears, Henry does display the modest confidence which Crane saw in the heart of the man who has 'solved himself.'

In any case, 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

“The most important book that lies behind *The Red Badge* is Tolstoy’s *Sebastopol*, which came into Crane’s hands early and impressed him profoundly. It provided him a norm for realism in an account of war.... Writing about the summer of 1888, when Crane was seventeen years old, Thomas Beer reported: ‘And a Canadian lady, nameless in the record, gave him a paper bound copy of Count Tolstoy’s *Sevastopol*’... According to Beer, Crane as a nineteen-year-old college student was ready to declare Tolstoy the ‘world’s foremost writer,’ and yet he apparently did not read *Kreutzer Sonata*, *War and Peace*, or *Anna Karenina* until well after finishing *The Red Badge*, and when he did read them, he expressed reservations about each of these works and tempered his enthusiasm accordingly....

In *Sebastopol* the controlling purposes of characters do not shape the action, but their collective authority as registers of experience brings out the objective ironies that are centers of meaning within the larger and seemingly incomprehensible world. As the fragmentary clarifications fall into a pattern, they suggest an implicit plot of discovery in which the young narrator arrives at his first decisive encounter with death.... Tolstoy for all practical purposes defined the kinds of irony that were to be characteristic of Crane’s writing about war: in the story of the older brother there is the ironic distance between delusion and fact, and in the story of the younger there is the ironic distance between character and event. Perhaps even more important than the lessons in irony is Tolstoy’s ultimate nihilistic report on what war felt like.”

J. C. Levenson

“Tolstoy’s *Sebastopol* and *The Red Badge of Courage*”
Introduction, *The Red Badge of Courage* (U Virginia 1975) xl-xlvi
Vol. 2, *The Works of Stephen Crane*, ed. Fredson Bowers

“The point of view Crane employed in *The Red Badge* is basically that of a limited third-person narrator whose access to data is restricted to the mind of the protagonist, Henry Fleming, to his sensory apprehension and associated thoughts and feelings. 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 1980) 52-61, 87-92

"Fiction about the Civil War in the 1880s reinforced the theme of reconciliation by using romantic subplots to frame the battle scenes. In the traditional genre of the historical romance, heroism on the battlefield was rewarded by the love of the heroine at home; the plots often revolved around a love affair between a Union soldier and a Southern girl or around the division and reunion of kinsmen fighting on opposing sides.... American Naturalists such as Crane, Norris, and London...explored the atavistic qualities of modern life and often universalized war as a metaphor for the social Darwinian struggle [while] the historical Romance, which appealed to a similar ethos, underwent a popular revival on both sides of the Atlantic. Sir Walter Scott's novels were reprinted and acclaimed not for their historicity but for their depiction of vigorous and virile action...

It is fitting that one of the best-sellers during the Spanish-American War was a novel about the Civil War, *The Song of the Rappahannock*, a book that rewrites *The Red Badge of Courage* by explicitly claiming that recruits did not act like Crane's hero. This novel, by Seymour Dodd, recapitulates those revisions of the Civil War we have traced through the 1880s and 1890s, which present not a 'civil war' at all but a war that expunges internal conflicts.... In *The Red Badge of Courage*, Crane not only contributes to the contemporary abstraction of the Civil War from its historical context but also takes the further step of

challenging those popular tales that recontextualize the war. 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 superceded 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....

Crane represents Henry's battle experience as the return to a premodern era, as the exploration of an uncivilized frontier, and as the recovery of a primitive self in a dreamlike preconscious state. Crane's language becomes enmeshed in the rhetoric of strenuousness that it parodies as his narrative discovers the primitive and revives the martial ideal on the Civil War battlefield of the 1890s.... By naming Henry [in Chapter 11] for the first time in the novel, the narrator mocks the epic tradition that immortalizes the name of the hero by recounting his struggle with a foe.... Crane not only outlined a hero and a narrative strategy to be fleshed out by American writers from Ernest Hemingway to Norman Mailer, but his revision of the Civil War also shaped both the experience and the representation of those remote wars that American writers have pursued throughout the twentieth century. It is Crane's anticipation of the modern spectacle of war, more than his historical veracity, that allowed Hemingway to write in 1942 that *The Red Badge of Courage* was the only enduring 'real literature of our Civil War'."

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

"Crane called *The Red Badge of Courage, An Episode of the American Civil War* a potboiler aimed at the mass audience that had rejected *Maggie*. But readers today call it a major work of Impressionistic Realism, among other honorific terms. It is the first war novel to dispense with romantic heroics. It is also the first great novel of war by an American, and a masterpiece about the initiation and testing of youth, in all war, not just in the Civil War.

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. One of Crane's biographers argued that fear was the predominant emotion of Crane's life. Frequently, instinctive fear and crisis circumstances clash to produce violent resolutions in his characters' lives.

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. The fallacies of human perception and illusion often prove fatal for Crane's characters, as they do for Ambrose Bierce's soldiers. As humans, his characters are mocked by natural and human forces. Reacting as animals, some fight savagely to survive....

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

"Of all fictions, *The Red Badge of Courage* is without question preeminent. In the almost one hundred years since its publication in 1895 it has incontrovertibly established itself as the greatest Civil War novel and one of the great war novels of world literature. It still seems miraculous that the novel could have been written by a twenty-four-year-old author who had not even been born until six years after Appomattox.... 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*"

Classics of Civil War Fiction, eds. David Madden & Peggy Bach
(U Mississippi 1991) 44-62

CONTROVERSY OVER TEXT

"During the last several years, Hershel Parker and his former student Henry Binder have argued vigorously that *The Red Badge of Courage* which we have been reading since 1895 is a defective text. Crane, they believe, was forced by his editor Ripley Hitchcock to eliminate from the version accepted by D. Appleton & Co. an entire chapter as well as a number of important passages--particularly from the close of the novel--in which he underlined with biting irony the fatuousness and wrong-headedness of Henry Fleming. It is therefore the original and uncut version rather than the censored version of *The Red Badge*, Parker and Binder maintain, which we should be reading. In response to this contention Parker arranged for the uncut version of *The Red Badge* to be included in the prestigious, widely used, and in general textually responsible Norton Anthology of American Literature and Binder has published the version in a separate volume....

There is no direct external evidence that Crane cut *The Red Badge* under pressure from Hitchcock.... I wish...to demonstrate that Crane's intent from the first was toward the expression of the ambivalent nature of Henry's maturation under fire and that his revision and cutting were toward the refinement of this intent.... Henry's experiences in *The Red Badge of Courage* appear to confirm, in their symbolic analogue to an awakening at dawn and a concluding ray of sunshine after battle, the great nineteenth-century faith in the human capacity for growth and development through a self-absorbed projection into life. But the novel

also contains an equally powerful edge of 'modern' doubts about the capacity of man to achieve wisdom, doubts expressed in the 'modern' form of an ironic undercutting through voice and structure of the protagonist's belief that the traditional abstraction of courage is real and can be gained. It is thus an irony of a different kind that in seeking to universalize his story, to have it be not a depiction of a specific battle but an expression of a permanent human condition, Crane in fact also brought his account of Henry Fleming closer to the specific state of mind of his own historical moment--to the uncertainties about the possibility for growth and self-knowledge which had begun to gnaw at the American consciousness in his own time.

The Red Badge of Courage therefore plays seemingly contradictory roles in relation to the career of its author on the one hand and its historical moment on the other. In relation to Crane's career, the novel lies between Crane's deeply pessimistic view of man's blindness in *Maggie* and his far more affirmative sense in his later novellas of man's capacity to grow in insight and moral courage through experience.... *The Red Badge of Courage* is not a work flawed in its ambivalences. Rather, as its first two paragraphs suggest, it holds them in meaningful suspension to reflect what in the end is perhaps the modern temper in its essence--not so much a reaffirmation of faith or an announcement of the triumph of doubt as a desire to explore the interaction between these two permanent conditions of man."

Donald Pizer

"*The Red Badge of Courage: Text, Theme, and Form*"
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Michael Hollister (2015)