

ANALYSIS

“The Veteran” (1896)

Stephen Crane

(1871-1900)

This sequel to *The Red Badge of Courage*, published only a year later, is of interest for (1) depicting Henry Fleming as an old man; (2) confirming the themes of *The Red Badge*; and (3) establishing that the battle depicted in the novel “was at Chancellorsville.” In not mentioning the name of the battle in the novel, Crane was adhering to the Impressionist principle of limiting consciousness to what his protagonist would know, which increased the sense of timeless universality. Crane uses archetypal settings as consistently as Hawthorne and sets this piece in the pastoral countryside, or the heart. A representative Everyman with typical faults in *The Red Badge*, Henry is here revealed to have grown into an exceptional man, with virtues that Crane exalts in celebrating him as a true hero: He is humble, honest, brave and self-sacrificing.

Henry’s little grandson is named Jim, presumably after Jim Conklin, who is mentioned in juxtaposition. Little Jimmie is much like Henry once was in his “boyish idealism.” He is “horror-stricken” when his grandfather admits that he got scared in battle, “So I run!” Old Henry admits that Jim Conklin was braver than him—“as if he was born to it”—and his modesty reduces his own hard-earned courage to getting “used to it.” The barn fire in “The Veteran” is paralleled to the battle at Chancellorsville in a simile: “like the wild banner of deadly and triumphant foes.” The spirit of Henry triumphs. In his death scene in *The Red Badge* Jim Conklin is a Christ-evoking figure and in this sequel Crane parallels young Conklin to old Henry, who saves helpless animals from the burning barn—“his clothes bravely on fire”—rushing back into the flames again and again even with a smashed hip, plunging back in again for two colts even as the roof is about to crash down upon him.

Henry calls the other men boys, and he is the only man willing to sacrifice his life for others—for animals at that. In the end he is all heart and soul, in a state of transcendent consciousness, exclaiming as he rushes back into the fire, “The poor little things!” The last two sentences of the story are emotional, unusual for Crane, affirming at least by simile the existence of a soul that survives the body.

Michael Hollister (2015)