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THE CRITICISM OF
" THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

by

Judith Ann Butler

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BUTLER, JUDITH ANN. The Criticism of The Red Badge of Courage. (1966) Directed by: Dr. James Ellis.

Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage was first published in 1894. From 1895 until 1900 critics in America and England debated whether Crane's novel was good art. Many of these early critics either praised the book in trite cliches or attacked it for the wrong reasons. None seemed to understand Crane's purpose or technique.

Crane died in 1900 and his war novel seemed to die with him, but from 1900 to 1950, The Red Badge was "rediscovered" twice. World War I, Thomas Beer's Stephen Crane (1923), Follett's twelve-volume edition of The Works of Stephen Crane (1925-27), and the recognition by American authors of the 1920's that Crane's art had kinship with their own caused the first revival of the book in the 1920's. Another world war and the reissue of Beer's biography (1941) resulted in resurgent interest in The Red Badge in the 1940's.

In 1950 John Berryman published Stephen Crane, the second Crane biography, which again brought The Red Badge to the attention of the reading public. The book was further popularized at this time because Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer produced a cinema version of the book.

Despite these repeated "rediscoveries," until the 1950's, critical scrutiny of The Red Badge had been nonexistent. This was changed with the publication of Robert W. Stallman's 1952 essay "Stephen Crane: A Revaluation." This essay promulgated the present-day explicatory and interpretive

controversy about the novel's structure, the meaning of the symbolism, and Henry Fleming's level of maturity.

INTRODUCTION

The novel *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) is a classic of American literature. It is a story of a young man, Henry Fleming, who goes to war in the Civil War. The novel is a study of the individual's experience of war, and of the psychological and moral growth that can result from it. The novel is a masterpiece of realism, and it is one of the most powerful and moving of all American novels. It is a story of a young man who goes to war, and who finds that he is not what he thought he was. He is a young man who is not a hero, and who is not a coward. He is a young man who is a man, and who is a man who is a man. The novel is a study of the individual's experience of war, and of the psychological and moral growth that can result from it. The novel is a masterpiece of realism, and it is one of the most powerful and moving of all American novels. It is a story of a young man who goes to war, and who finds that he is not what he thought he was. He is a young man who is not a hero, and who is not a coward. He is a young man who is a man, and who is a man who is a man.

The novel is a study of the individual's experience of war, and of the psychological and moral growth that can result from it. The novel is a masterpiece of realism, and it is one of the most powerful and moving of all American novels. It is a story of a young man who goes to war, and who finds that he is not what he thought he was. He is a young man who is not a hero, and who is not a coward. He is a young man who is a man, and who is a man who is a man.

INTRODUCTION

Stephen Crane, war correspondent, novelist, short-story writer, and poet, was only twenty-two when he wrote his first war book, The Red Badge of Courage. Crane's friend, Hamlin Garland, after reading the finished manuscript of The Red Badge, was so impressed that he helped Crane find an interested editor. S. S. McClure, who had just founded McClure's Magazine, read The Red Badge with enthusiasm. McClure, however, kept the novel for six months, neither accepting nor rejecting it. Finally, Crane retrieved the manuscript and sold it to Irving Bacheller's small syndicate, where it received its first publication in 1894. Crane immediately became American literature's "marvelous boy" of the decade, the admired of printers, old soldiers, editors, and reviewers, who felt as they read his novel, that bullets were whistling about and that they themselves were marching with the troops. Never in any American story had the presentation of war seemed so realistic.

Crane's novel was given widespread attention upon its publication, but after this early success, the book went unnoticed for twenty years. During the 1920's, The Red Badge gained the reputation of being an important American novel. Despite this, the book was hardly read throughout the 1930's and the 1940's. World War II brought about renewed interest

in this war story, but the recent multi-level criticism of The Red Badge was not initiated until the publication of Robert W. Stallman's controversial introduction to the Random House edition in 1951. Since that time critics have been sharply divided over questions of the novel's structure, the meaning of the symbolism, and Henry Fleming's level of maturity. This interpretive and explicatory controversy is still continuing.

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss the criticism of The Red Badge of Courage in America from 1895 until the present. This discussion will examine the book's early reviews and notices, the factors which caused the book to be rediscovered twice from 1900 to 1950, and the vast amount of recent criticism that has firmly established the novel as a major American classic.

CHAPTER I

EARLY CRITICISM OF THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

The Red Badge of Courage was first printed under Bacheller syndication in six installments of the Philadelphia Press, December 3-8, 1894. It was next condensed into three pages of the New York Press for December 9, 1894; this abridged version was published by the Bacheller Syndicate in newspapers all over the country, but critics failed to notice it. Months later, at the beginning of October, 1895, Crane's novel was published by Appleton. Periodicals throughout the country now recognized the novel, and the reviews that followed were generally good. The Chicago Post said the action of the story was splendid and all aglow with "color, movement, and vim." The Boston Transcript saw the book as more than an episode of the Civil War: "It is a tremendous grasping of the glory and carnage of all war . . . We have had many stories of the war; this stands absolutely alone." The battle descriptions were intensely real and the whole book was full of superb word paintings according to the Minneapolis Times. The San Francisco Chronicle thought it had no parallel except Tolstoy's Sevastopol. To The Outlook it ". . . was a bit of realism . . . not pleasant by any means, but the author seems to lay bare the very nerves of

his characters."¹

Even so eminent a critic as William Dean Howells wrote in Harper's Weekly that young Crane had conveyed the bewilderment of battle graphically and plausibly, although he thought Crane had not given as vivid a picture of battle as had other authors. Howells also found the book's dialect unconvincing: "I have not heard people speak with those contractions, though perhaps they do it."²

Howells's criticism, which questioned Crane's style, anticipated a further and harsher New York criticism. The Bookman called The Red Badge "a far cry from Maggie . . . so far that he [Crane] seems to have lost himself as well as his reader." Nancy Banks [the Bookman critic] charged that The Red Badge was "no story at all," only a study in morbid emotions and distorted external impressions. Furthermore, she inveighed against the book's symbolism: "As if further to confuse his intense work, Crane has given it a double meaning -- always dangerous and usually a fatal method in literature. The soldier may be either an individual or man universal: the battle either a battle of the

¹Excerpts from reviews collected in Stephen Crane: Letters, edited by R. W. Stallman and Lillian Gilkes (New York, 1960), p. 296.

²W. D. Howells, "Life and Letters," Harper's Weekly, XXXIX (November, 1895), 1013.

wilderness or a battle of life."³ Such a review could explain the book's slow sales in New York the first three months after its publication.

The novel appeared in London two months later than in the United States. The English periodicals and newspapers immediately hailed Crane's "remarkable production" for its extraordinary power that made previous descriptions of war seem like mere abstractions. With few exceptions, the English reviews of The Red Badge were adulatory. The Times called Crane the Rudyard Kipling of the American army; the Pall Mall Gazette found Crane's insight and power of realization to amount to genius; and the Daily Chronicle felt that nothing in the whole range of literature was so searching in its analysis of the average mind under the stress of battle.⁴ Typical of the reception of the novel was the review in the Guardian that called The Red Badge "a new departure Throughout we feel that the analysis is true to life, and that this is what a battle really means to a private soldier Another blow has been given to the glamour and false charm of war."⁵

³Nancy H. Banks, "The Novels of Two Journalists," Bookman, II (November, 1895), 218.

⁴Excerpts from reviews printed on the endpapers of the second printing of Heinemann's first English edition of The Red Badge of Courage (London, 1896).

⁵Guardian, January 25, 1896, p. 178.

Veteran soldier George Wyndham, a noted scholar, a political figure, and one of England's ablest critics, judged Crane's picture of war to be accurate and his technique admirable. He thought Crane's picture of war was more complete than Tolstoy's and more true than Zola's. Wyndham said Crane's vivid impressions, brilliant and detached images, gift for observation, and command of the imaginative phrase made him a "great artist, with something new to say, with a new way of saying it."⁶ This critique was to later influence American readers as was an anonymous English notice in the Saturday Review that said the book was more intense than Tolstoy, more sustained than Kipling, more imaginative than Zola, and more inspired than Merimee. Crane could best depict "how the sight and sounds, the terrible details of the drama of battle, affect the senses and soul of man."⁷ This same reviewer, like many of his contemporaries, was under the false impression that Crane himself had seen combat. "Whether Crane has had personal experience of the scenes he depicts we cannot say from the external evidence; but the extremely vivid touches of detail convince us that he has." Crane's realism, wrote this critic, "would be nothing short of a miracle" if the book were altogether a work of the

⁶ George Wyndham, "A Remarkable Book," New Review, XIV (January, 1896), 39.

⁷ SatR, January 11, 1896, p. 44.

imagination, not based on personal experience.

Crane did not, of course, receive only critical eulogies in England; an early commentary in the National Observer was, at best, lukewarm. This critic found Crane's style occasionally affected. "The red sun pasted in the sky like a wafer" was a particularly offensive image, and the anonymity of the characters was confusing and meaningless.⁸ Despite such occasional chilly responses, the general tone of the English reviews of Crane's work was warm. Enough so that in January, 1896 the Scranton Tribune wrote that "The Red Badge of Courage has fascinated England. The critics are wild over it and the English edition has been purchased with avidity. Mr. Crane has letters from prominent English publishers asking for the English right of all his future productions."⁹ In mid-January, New York began to buy the novel because advertisements quoted the British reviews, people talked of them, and American critics fell resentfully or eagerly into line. During the next weeks publishers were unable to supply the demand for the book as it appeared on best-seller lists everywhere. By April it was generally admitted that Crane was a genius; and in ten months of 1896, The Red Badge went through thirteen editions in America.

⁸National Observer, January 11, 1896, p. 272.

⁹John Berryman, Stephen Crane (New York, 1950), p. 126.

As the book swept the country by storm, criticism increased. Harold Frederic called it "one of the deathless books to be read by a connoisseur of modern fiction."¹⁰ He thought the book was "revolutionary in construction" because nothing was known about the men and officers except what "staring through the eyes of Henry Fleming we are permitted to see." Frederic thought the young author had forcefully made the reader realize what Henry saw and heard as well as what he felt. "The picture of the trial itself seems to me never to have been painted as well before." While this established writer praised the novel and encouraged others to read it, General A. C. McClurg, an American Civil War veteran, published the most brutal attack yet against The Red Badge. To him the book was a vicious satire upon American soldiers and armies presented in a "mere riot of words" made up of "absurd similes, bad grammar, and forced and distorted use of adjectives," all of which showed an "entire lack of literary quality."¹¹ McClurg thought Crane's hero was "an ignorant and stupid country lad" who enlisted in the army with no motive or patriotic feeling. "His [Henry Fleming's] poor weak intellect" seemed to McClurg to be at once and

¹⁰Harold Frederic, "Stephen Crane's Triumph," New York Times, January 26, 1896, p. 22.

¹¹A. C. McClurg, "The Red Badge of Hysteria," Dial, April 16, 1896, pp. 226-229.

entirely overthrown by the confusion of the battlefield, with the result that "he acts throughout like a madman." Since the book was written by a lad of twenty-two [who was not born until six years after the war], veteran McClurg said it was the work of a "diseased imagination."

McClurg was particularly angry with the English reviewers who, he felt, praised Crane's novel only because of their anti-American bias. Sidney Brooks, an English journalist, in an article also published in the Dial, identified himself as one of the first English reviewers of The Red Badge. Brooks had thought the novel a remarkable performance and in his review had tried to provide evidence for his opinion. Now he found he had to defend himself against McClurg; in so doing, he proceeded to demolish many of McClurg's arguments. Brooks argued that McClurg had not regarded The Red Badge as literature and had failed to understand the universality of Crane's war novel.¹² Brooks also found the very passages that McClurg "blasted" to be among the finest bits of writing in the book.

Such debates continued until 1900 as critics tried to evaluate the novel by arguing whether or not Crane's book was good art. While the specifics are too lengthy to discuss in detail, certain generalizations about this early critical

¹²Sidney Brooks, "Mr. Stephen Crane and His Critics," Dial, May 16, 1896, pp. 297-298.

debate can be drawn. Some reviewers thought Crane had experienced battle, and they read the book as autobiography -- Henry Fleming representing Crane himself. Others knew he had not fought so they felt they must explain how an inexperienced boy could write such a novel; therefore, much attention was given to Crane's "sources." A few critics emphasized the comparison of The Red Badge to past war stories, including those by Bierce, Tolstoy, and Zola. On the whole, the bulk of this early criticism either praised the book in trite clichés or attacked it for the wrong reasons. The majority of the contemporary reviews showed a total lack of real analysis. Those critics who agreed that the book contained a story tried to summarize it; those who found no story, could only comment briefly on the language, characters, or the "emotions" described. None seemed to understand Crane's purpose or technique.

CHAPTER II

THE CRITICISM OF THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE BEFORE 1950

The Red Badge of Courage did have its hour of fame when it was published, and it continued to entertain and bewilder critics and the reading public for the next five years. But in 1900 Stephen Crane died, and his most famous work died with him. After Crane's death the book's popularity ceased; it was no longer read, discussed, or reviewed. There being no demand for the novel, it went out of print and remained so for the next fifteen years. After a while The Red Badge was to be found only in second-hand bookstores or on the shelves where some families kept yesterday's novels.

In 1917 Appleton, realizing Crane's war story could be any war and Henry Fleming could be any lad, reprinted the novel with an introduction by Guy Empey. Since Americans were now taking part in a world war, they could understand Henry's fear of battle as well as if not better than the preceding generation. They were firmly convinced of the realism of The Red Badge, the realism that went beyond the Civil War and applied to all wars. Many felt as Ford Madox Ford did when he wrote in Return to Yesterday: "When I was at the Front, on Kemmell Hill in 1916, I had . . . the curious experience of so reading myself into The Red Badge of Courage which is a

story of the American Civil War, that having to put the book down and go out of my tent at dawn, I could not understand why the men I saw about were in khaki and not in the Federal blue."¹³

The First World War did cause renewed interest in The Red Badge, but it was not until the twenties that the novel experienced its first revival. In 1923, Thomas Beer wrote Stephen Crane, A Study in American Letters, the first Crane biography. The book was well-received, and Mark Van Doren said it was the "sort which Crane might have written about himself had he had the inclination and had he known as much about himself as his biographer."¹⁴ Unfortunately, however, Stephen Crane was more entertaining than definitive; Beer had had access to Crane's contemporaries and he exploited them ably, but in actuality the book was a study of the times more than a biography of Crane. Beer's book lacked documentation and it left many facts (like dates and succession of events) unexplained. Still, it was the first study of Crane.

Beer's stylized biography was largely responsible for a revival of The Red Badge. Equally important was the publication of The Work of Stephen Crane (1925-1927), Wilson Follett's twelve volume edition containing everything Crane

¹³Ford Madox Ford, Return to Yesterday (London, 1924), p. 49.

¹⁴Mark Van Doren, Nation, January 19, 1924, p. 66.

had written. These volumes with introductions by Crane's friends and admirers, including creative writers and literary historians, helped to establish Crane's standing as an enduring writer and The Red Badge as an American classic.

The Red Badge was finally rediscovered at this time because several American authors (Cather, Anderson, Hemingway, and Hergersheimer) of the 1920's claimed artistic kinship with Crane. On re-reading The Red Badge, they were struck by the genius with which Crane treated a boy who went to war, who fell a victim of fear, and who recovered. Willa Cather, who had met Crane when he was traveling out West, said "The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer" was not exceptional with Crane. "He wrote like that when he was writing well."¹⁵ She thought he was the best writer of "description" because he was the "least describing." She explained this comment by saying Crane did not follow the movement of the troops literally in The Red Badge. "He knew the movement of the troops was the officers' business, not his." Sherwood Anderson regarded Crane as one of his favorite authors: "I can't remember when I first came across Crane, but I do remember an early enthusiasm for The Red Badge."¹⁶

¹⁵Willia Cather, "Introduction" to The Work of Stephen Crane, Volume IV.

¹⁶Howard Mumford Jones, Letters of Sherwood Anderson (Boston, 1953), p. 349.

In his introduction to Volume XI of The Work, Anderson related his fervor after first reading the Civil War story. He thought that Crane was a craftsman, and the stones he put "in the wall are still there . . . He was an explosion. It's about time people began to hear the explosion." Young Ernest Hemingway agreed. He thought the best American writers were James, Twain, and Crane, and he called The Red Badge "one of the finest books of our literature."¹⁷ Joseph Hergersheimer, in his introduction to The Red Badge in The Work said the book was "a story of inescapable fineness," and he was pleased to write a preface to a book that "had survived death." Hergersheimer thought the book was amazing for its "directness and candour," and vowed that "no book had ever been written with so much and such a literal transcription of general and particularized talk."¹⁸ The dialect, he wrote, was the actual living American language. To him, the book was poetry, "lyrical as well as epic," completely classic in its "movement, its pace and return."

Through the twenties the fame of The Red Badge increased, but it declined again during the thirties. In the forties the book was again rediscovered and for two of the same reasons as it had been twenty years before: Beer's biography was

¹⁷ Carlos Baker, Hemingway (Princeton, 1963), p. 179.

¹⁸ Joseph Hergersheimer, "Introduction" to The Work of Stephen Crane, Volume I.

reissued in Hanna, Crane and the Mauve Decade (1941); and the United States was again involved in a world war. The Red Badge of Courage Armed Services edition came out in 1945 and rapidly circulated among American soldiers everywhere. Another reason for this second resurgence of the book was the publication of an essay by H. G. Wells, "Stephen Crane from an English Standpoint" [which first appeared in the North American Review, August, 1900] in Edmund Wilson's Shock of Recognition.¹⁹ Wells's critique explained that Crane's place in American literature resulted mainly from the "freshness of method, vigor of imagination, force of color, and essential freedom" displayed in The Red Badge.

Critical re-examination of The Red Badge in the forties revealed that there was more in the book than just the story of a green recruit who loses his romantic illusions in battle. Instead, critics began to read the book as an example of (naturalism. For example, V. S. Pritchett wrote that "to Crane a battlefield is like a wounded animal. The convulsions of its body, its shudders, its cries and its occasional repose, are the spasmodic movements and dumb respites of the groups of soldiers."²⁰ Winifred Lynskey reiterated this idea by pointing

¹⁹Wilson complained that it was so difficult to find anything written about Crane, he had to use a forty year old English essay in his anthology.

²⁰V. S. Pritchett, The Living Novel (New York, 1947), p. 174.

out that the men, guns, and conflicts are "likened to savage or monstrous animals. A Confederate charge is like 'an onslaught of redoubtable dragons.' The Union men are 'morsels for the dragons,' and Henry waits in terror 'to be gobbled'."²¹ These critics said this brutish animal, the battle, was the naturalistic world, and Henry was guided by a naturalistic code of ethics, developed in the heat and pain of fighting.

By 1950 The Red Badge was accepted as a classic even-though critical scrutiny of the book had been slight. In 1950 John Berryman published Stephen Crane, a critical biography reworking Beer in theme and style. Berryman's work, filled with known or probable details of Crane's life, was accurate in summarizing his work and sensitive in the analysis of the man and his literary art. He unfortunately weakened his book in the last two chapters when he gave "Crane's art" a questionable Freudian interpretation. Nevertheless, this later Stephen Crane began the most significant revival of The Red Badge.

In 1951, taking advantage of the current war in Korea, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer produced a cinema version of The Red Badge of Courage, which probably popularized the book more than any other factor in the twentieth century. Screen writer and director John Huston wrote a screenplay which captured the youth's impressions of war exactly as Crane had described them.

²¹Winifred Lynskey, Expl, VIII (December, 1949), Item 8.

Audie Murphy, the most decorated soldier in World War II, was selected to play Henry Fleming. Bill Mauldin, the cartoonist, portrayed the loud soldier, and Andy Devine was the cheery soldier. An Introduction, read by James Whitmore, explained that the novel had been accepted by critics and the public alike as a classic story of war.²² Other than the omission of such phrases as "in God's name," "I swear t' Gawd," and "Hell to pay," the story was told in Crane's own words.

The youth's flight from his initial battle and his heroic deeds in later battle were realistically presented. Audiences were moved by the tall soldier running up to the hilltop to die and by the tattered man wandering downhill to his death. The film was realistic, well-done, and acclaimed favorably by the critics: "The Red Badge has been transferred to the screen with almost literal fidelity" (New York Times); "Huston has written and directed a stirring film in an understanding and close reproduction of the novel" (New York World-Telegram and Sun); "The Red Badge bids fair to become one of the classic American motion pictures" (Newsweek); "If Crane's Red Badge is considered a classic of American 19th century literature, Huston's adaptation of it for the screen may become the classic of American 20th century film making."

²²Lillian Ross, "Onward and Upward with the Arts," New Yorker, June 7, 1952, p. 33.

(Saturday Review of Literature).²³

The film was chosen as one of the best pictures of the year by several polls. It has remained popular since its release, particularly as a teaching aid in public schools, in college English classes, and as a "classic" shown at art theatres.²⁴

If John Huston popularized The Red Badge of Courage by adapting it to the screen, Robert Wooster Stallman promulgated the present-day explicatory and interpretive controversy about the book's structure and meaning in his essay, "Stephen Crane: A Revaluation." Part of this essay first appeared as the Introduction to the Modern Library edition of the book in 1951, but the entire essay was published for the first time in John W. Aldridge's Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction, Stallman blatantly announced that critical analysis of Crane's unique art was practically nonexistent: "Probably no American author, unless it is Mark Twain, stands today in more imperative need of critical revaluation."²⁵ Stallman said that every Crane critic concurred that The Red Badge was nothing more than a "series of episodic scenes . . . but not one critic has yet

²³Quoted by Lillian Ross in New Yorker, June 21, p. 56.

²⁴The original manuscript of the musical score together with photographs of the cast in costume are now on file in the Stephen Crane Collection of Syracuse University.

²⁵(New York, 1952), p. 263.

undertaken an analysis of Crane's work to see how the sequence of tableaux is constructed." Stallman tried to do just this by analyzing the parallels between Crane's impressionistic prose and impressionistic paintings, Crane's methods of creating symbols by the juxtaposition of characters with environments, animals, objects, and other characters, and the significance of the book's "spiritual symbolism". "A Revaluation" will not be discussed here because it will be closely examined later in this paper; but here it is necessary to understand that Stallman's essay prompted much of the modern criticism of The Red Badge.

Soon after this essay appeared, Stallman, in order to provide a revaluation of Crane's art and achievement, edited Stephen Crane: An Omnibus (1952), bringing together Crane's "best works" in a single volume with critical notes and introductions. Stallman claimed that he was publishing The Red Badge "complete from the original manuscripts for the first time in America," thereby providing a definitive edition of the book.²⁶

Before 1950 The Red Badge had been repeatedly "rediscovered," but since 1950 the book has been classified, without qualification, as a classic American novel. The immense wave

²⁶Stallman's claim that he first published The Red Badge "complete from the original manuscripts" is inaccurate. The Folio Society in London published such an edition a year before Stallman.

of modern Crane criticism that began in 1950 has clearly shown why this novel, which set new standards in descriptive writing, was both a best seller in the eighteen-nineties and a classic today.

Since 1950 there have been perhaps twenty-five significant critiques of *The Red Badge*. Even though there has been controversy and inconsistency, this modern criticism has been valuable. The problems to which this scholarship has addressed themselves are Crane's sources, the writing or technique used in the novel, and the meaning or relevance of the ideas presented in the book.

The question of Crane's sources for *The Red Badge* has continued to fascinate literary researchers ever since it has been known that Crane had been too young to participate in the Civil War for his novel described as realistically. Despite Crane's denial of any specific source beyond his own imagination and knowledge of football,²⁷ the search for the novel's inspirations goes on. The logic of the critics is simple: Crane wrote impressively about war but had not seen any; therefore, he must have borrowed from other literature,

²⁷In his biography of Crane, Berryman writes that Crane gained his knowledge of battle on the football field. He quoted Crane as saying, "The psychology is the same. The opposite team is an enemy tribe." (p. 79).

CHAPTER III

RECENT SCHOLARSHIP AND CRITICISM OF THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

Since 1950 there have been perhaps twenty-five significant critiques of The Red Badge. Even though there has been redundancy and inconclusiveness, this modern criticism has been valuable. The problems to which this scholarship and criticism have addressed themselves are Crane's sources, the method or technique used in the novel, and the meaning or substance of the ideas presented in the book.

I

The question of Crane's sources for The Red Badge has continued to fascinate literary researchers ever since it became known that Crane had been too young to participate in the Civil War his novel described so realistically. Despite Crane's denial of any specific source beyond his own imagination and knowledge of football,²⁷ the search for the novel's inspiration goes on. The logic of the critics is simple: Crane wrote impressively about war but had not seen any; therefore, he must have borrowed from other literature.

²⁷In his biography of Crane, Berryman wrote that Crane gained his knowledge of battle on the football field. He quoted Crane as saying, "The psychology is the same. The opposite team is an enemy tribe." (p. 78).

The early critics compared The Red Badge to Tolstoy's War and Peace and Sevastopol, Zola's Le Debarcle, and Stendhal's La Chartreuse de Parme. Later Thomas Beer, in the first Crane biography, did more than compare Crane to French and Russian authors. Beer wrote that Crane admired Zola's sincerity and honesty and that The Red Badge was undertaken because of a dare which Crane accepted to surpass Zola's depiction of war, Le Debarcle, which he read one afternoon during the winter of 1892-1893.²⁸ Also, according to Beer, Crane ranked Tolstoy as "the supreme living writer of our time . . .", and he liked War and Peace, although he resented its length and didacticism.

There was little mention of the influence of Zola and Tolstoy throughout the thirties and forties. But in 1950 Lars Ahnebrink explained that The Red Badge had many points in common with Tolstoy's war narratives. Ahnebrink noted that to both writers war was a meaningless slaughter; Tolstoy and Crane shared the view that what occurred on the battlefield had no connection with any previously determined plan; and these two novelists' type of soldier [Volodia in Sevastopol and Henry Fleming] was the same, an ordinary individual possessed of the usual shortcomings of the average man, whose emotions under fire were carefully analyzed.²⁹

²⁸Thomas Beer, Stephen Crane (New York, 1923), p. 97.

²⁹Lars Ahnebrink, The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction (Upsala and Cambridge, 1950), p. 96. See my further discussion of this study, below, p. 30.

This same year, 1950, R. W. Stallman disagreed with Ahnebrink and all the other critics who asserted Crane's debt to foreign sources. Stallman wrote that Crane found Tolstoy tiresome, that Crane never read Stendhal's La Chartreuse de Parme, and that Crane disliked Zola's statistical realism. Stallman admitted that Crane had read the French realists. Stallman continued, however, that since Crane was essentially an "uneducated man" whose reading was miscellaneous, desultory, and unguided, it was not logical that he would rely heavily on these European writers.³⁰

Despite Stallman's views, critics continued to relate Crane either directly or indirectly to Continental writers, particularly Zola. James Colvert, in an article in the mid-fifties, pointed out that Crane, in the summer of 1892, may have obtained an overall view of Le Debacle without ever reading the novel itself because a review of the book appeared in the issue of The Tribune³¹ which carried Crane's sketch "The Broken Down Van." Since the review was similar to an outline for The Red Badge, Colvert concluded that it might have guided Crane's choice of materials, method and point of view.³²

³⁰ Stallman, pp. 181-182.

³¹ New York Tribune, July 10, 1892, p. 14.

³² James B. Colvert, "The Red Badge of Courage and a Review of Zola's Le Debacle," MLN, LXXI (February, 1956), 99.

Modern Crane critics do not deny that Crane read Zola, Tolstoy, and Stendhal, but whether Crane was influenced by his French and Russian readings remains a matter of debate. Many critics seem to agree that most of these so-called foreign influences were nothing more than parallels.

Crane critics have listed other materials on which Crane might have relied for his novel's framework: The reminiscences of his brother, William, who was an expert on the strategy of Chancellorsville; Harper's History; Kipling's The Light That Failed;³³ Matthew Brady's Civil War photographs; and the works of Ambrose Bierce. Several nineteenth century American books have also been mentioned as possible sources for The Red Badge: Murford's The Coward: A Novel of Society and the Field in 1863 (1863); Armstrong's Red Tape and Pigeon-Hole Generals (1864); Hinnan's Corporal Si Klegg and His 'Pard' (1887); and Kirkland's The Captain of Company K (1891).³⁴ Indeed, there was a general and certainly sub-literary tradition of semi-fictional Civil War memorials behind Crane's tale. Again, Crane may have had these in mind when he wrote his book, but there is no reliable evidence that he had read any of these.

³³Scott C. Osborn in AL, XXIII (December, 1951), 362 pointed out the similarity between Crane's imagery, 'pasted like a wafer' and the imagery in The Light That Failed: 'The sun shone, a blood-red wafer, on the water.'

³⁴Cady, p. 116.

It is only known for sure that Crane studied some of the contemporary accounts of the Civil War in four volumes of the Century's Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, which were written almost exclusively by veterans.³⁵

Crane critics also list Crane's teacher, General Van Petten, among the most likely "sources" for The Red Badge. Lyndon U. Pratt in 1939 was the first to write that "in all probability" the reminiscences of the "Reverend General" John B. Van Petten influenced the mind of Crane while Crane was at Claverack College in 1888 and 1889. Pratt pointed out that Van Petten, as chaplain of the 34th New York Volunteers, "probably" had witnessed the rout of that regiment at Antietam, and that his later memories of that unhappy event "may" well have provided a source for the action in The Red Badge. Pratt concluded that Van Petten was exactly the sort of man to whom Crane would have been responsive.³⁶ Fifteen years later, Thomas F. O'Donnell wrote "it can now be asserted" that Van Petten did witness panic on a rather large scale on a Civil War battlefield, and as a history teacher, his accounts of that battle could have provided Crane with all the necessary details he needed for the panic scenes in The Red Badge.³⁷

³⁵Stallman, p. 184.

³⁶Lyndon U. Pratt, "A Possible Source for The Red Badge of Courage," AL, II (March, 1939), 1-10

³⁷Thomas F. O'Donnell, "John B. Van Petten: Stephen Crane's History Teacher," AL, XXVII (May, 1955), 196.

Another effort to establish the source for The Red Badge was made in 1953. In his introduction to John W. DeForest's Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty, Gordon S. Haight compared DeForest's photographically realistic Civil War scenes and what he called the "somewhat decadent impressionism" of The Red Badge. After pointing out that in a number of scenes in the older novel DeForest seems to have anticipated Crane by almost thirty years, Haight concluded that "there is no doubt that Crane knew DeForest's battle scenes."³⁸ Shortly thereafter, in another article, O'Donnell explained that any connection between Crane and DeForest resulted from the friendship of DeForest and Van Petten. These two men, according to O'Donnell, shared many adventures which Van Petten undoubtedly recalled later to his students, including Crane.³⁹

Thomas Gullason in 1957 wrote that too much emphasis was being placed on Crane's foreign and American literary sources. Gullason reiterated the known fact that Crane was impressed with the military feats of his forefathers and argued that this was Crane's primary inspiration. According to Gullason, Stephen's father, Jonathan Crane, was influenced

³⁸Gordon S. Haight, "Introduction," Miss Ravenel's Conversion, by DeForest (New York, 1955), pp. xv-xvii.

³⁹Thomas F. O'Donnell, "DeForest, Van Petten, and Stephen Crane," AL, XXVII (January, 1956), 580.

in his writings by his recollections of the recent Civil War and of the military achievements of earlier Cranes; later the elder Crane's accounts of war supplied his son with the tensions and moods of battle.⁴⁰

The next year Gullason claimed that Crane's aversion to Alfred Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade" helped to develop his anti-romantic attitude toward war. Crane was annoyed that Tennyson's poem exulted in a romantic emotionalism and presented only the glory and honor of a dedicated military force, completely neglecting the many domestic tragedies caused by the Crimean battle. Gullason concluded that in reacting against this poem, Crane was able to formulate a naturalistic philosophy of war replete with violence, grimness, and irony.⁴¹

Although there seems no end to the speculations about the source of the Civil War framework upon which Crane based The Red Badge, the sources of the central metaphor, the title itself, has been probed less frequently. In 1950, prior to the wave of modern Crane criticism, Abraham Feldman casually suggested that perhaps Crane was influenced by the phrase "murder's crimson badge" found in Shakespeare's Henry VI:

⁴⁰ Thomas A. Gullason, "New Sources for Crane's War Motif," MLN, LXXII (December, 1957), 575.

⁴¹ Thomas A. Gullason, "Tennyson's Influence on Stephen Crane," N&Q, CCIII (April, 1958), 165.

Part II (Act III, scene 2, line 200).⁴² This "guess" was generally accepted for several years until Cecil Eby, in 1960, wrote that Crane's "impatient and often unsympathetic" reading tastes made it difficult to imagine his laboring through Shakespeare. Eby explained, and most critics now agree with him, that the title was a popular phrase in use during and after the Civil War resulting from the red shoulder patch worn by New Jersey's General Phil Kearney and his Third Corps.⁴³

It is not clear that Crane had to have literary or any other sources for the title, plot, and form of The Red Badge. Source hunters can only speculate. Nevertheless, what inspired a twenty-two-year-old boy with no military experience to write one of the most convincing accounts of an individual's reaction to battle and death is one of the major problems of the modern scholarship in regard to Crane's war novel.

II

Recent Crane criticism has also been concerned with the problem of the method or technique of The Red Badge. It has been variously asserted that Crane's way of imagining and constructing his war novel was realistic, naturalistic, impression-

⁴² Abraham Feldman, "Crane's Title from Shakespeare," American Note and Queries, VIII (March, 1950), 186.

⁴³ Cecil D. Eby, Jr., "The Source of Crane's Metaphor The Red Badge of Courage," AL, XXXII (May, 1960), 205.

istic, or symbolistic. It would make a difference if it could be demonstrated that one of these, or any other, was the method. One would then expect to interpret particular parts and the whole in certain ways, and one's reading and response would be affected accordingly. Edwin Cady, however, explains that "no unitary view is exclusively right. The very secret of the novel's power inheres in the inviolably organic uniqueness with which Crane adapted all four methods to his need."⁴⁴

The Red Badge appeared at a time when the Civil War was still treated primarily as the subject for romance. Crane, however, did not romanticize the War Between the States; instead he rendered the actualities of recruits under fire. Consequently, said the critics, Crane's method in The Red Badge was realism. Edwin Markhon described it thus: "Crane ripped away the gilt and glitter that had so long curtained the horror of war, and with a stern realism pictured for us the bloody grime of it all."^{45a} The realist, by definition, strives toward a simple fidelity to actuality, usually describing normal, average life in an accurate and truthful way. By this definition, The Red Badge is a realistic novel because it shows how the normal, absolutely undistinguished and essentially male civilian from the street behaves in a terrible war ---

⁴⁴Cady, p. 118.

^{45a}Max Herzberg, "Introduction," The Red Badge of Courage (New York, 1925), p. xviii.

without distinction, without military qualities, without special courage, without even any profound apprehension of the causes of the struggle in which he is engaged.

The descriptive passages in Crane's novel in particular are hailed by critics as the ultimate in realism. For example, two of the most frequently quoted examples of The Red Badge's realism are Crane's descriptions of the dead. One example, Henry's first view of a corpse, strips away the romantic façade the youth has associated with the war dead:

Once the line encountered the body of a dead soldier. He lay upon his back staring at the sky. He was dressed in an awkward suit of yellowish brown. The youth could see that the soles of his shoes had been worn to the thinness of writing paper, and from a great rent in one **the** dead foot projected piteously. And it was as if fate had betrayed the soldier. In death it exposed to his enemies that poverty which in life he had perhaps concealed from his friends.^{45b}

The other passage that critics frequently quote to illustrate Crane's realism is the description of the corpse in the forest Henry encounters after his flight from battle:

The corpse was dressed in a uniform that once had been blue, but now faded to a melancholy shade of green. The eyes, staring at the youth, had changed to the dull hue to be seen on the side of a dead fish. The mouth was open. Its red had changed to an appalling yellow. Over the gray skin of the face ran little ants. One was trundling some sort of a bundle along the upper lip. (p. 83)

Among the modern critics who read The Red Badge as a product of the realistic school is William McColly. He explains that the book's realism can be seen best by separating

^{45b}The Work of Stephen Crane, Vol. I, p. 50. Further references are from this text.

the dialogue from the exposition and analyzing the style of each.⁴⁶ McColly believes that the exposition is lofty, dramatic, and colorful, but it is in the dialogue that Crane gives a realistic picture of men at war. According to him, "the dialogue is dialectal, incoherent, banal, and profane." The officers may speak with less evidence of dialect than do the enlisted men, writes McColly, but that is the only difference. Through their dialogue, all reflect the social vices of teasing, boasting, and lying. Their philosophy is banal or trivial, and their insights sluggish and shallow. Their quotient of spirituality is zero: They never invoke the Deity except in blasphemy or profanity. Actually, McColly is only summing up previous conclusions: Rather than adhering to the usual belief that the Civil War and its soldiers were romantic and heroic, Crane described his soldiers as dull, scared, and unattractive. In so doing, this young writer felt he was presenting actual art, nearness to life, and personal honesty.

Indeed, Crane's descriptions of battle leave out all the pomp and circumstance of war and present the fight realistically, but the critics of Crane's own day wondered if Crane did not represent a "new realism."⁴⁷ Sixty years later,

⁴⁶William McColly, "Teaching The Red Badge of Courage," EJ, L (November, 1961), 535.

⁴⁷New York Tribune, January 20, 1897, and Rochester Post Express, February 22, 1897.

Edwin Cady maintains this same opinion. Cady explains that one does not have to read far into The Red Badge without discovering that it is very different from the traditional realistic novel. Cady writes that the extended and massive specification of detail with which the realist "seems to impose upon one an illusion of the world of the common vision was wholly missing." "Detail is not absent," he continues, "but it is comparatively sparingly deployed on a light, mobile structure; and it is used for intensive, not extensive effects."⁴⁸ Crane stood with the realists, according to Cady, but he stood historically in advance of them anticipating the future of the novel. For Cady the "new realism" Crane's contemporaries suggested was psychological realism, and The Red Badge was the first masterpiece of this genre. "To reflect . . . the mental condition of the men in the ranks, representing them especially with one youth, is . . . probably the intention of The Red Badge,"⁴⁹ claims Cady. He supports his claim by naming the psychological patterns Crane divined for Fleming's combat experience: Fear leads to panic, panic to guilt, guilt to rationalization and eventually to frustration and acquiescence. Later, resentment produces rage, and rage "battle sleep"; resolution, including the willingness to die, follows

⁴⁸Cady, p. 122.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 125.

and leads in turn to "heroism" and at last to shades of emotional realism and modesty. Cady concludes that this "psychologism" carries Crane beyond traditional realism.

The Red Badge was a great achievement in American realism, but also in this book an early and unique flowering of naturalism can be found. In America, naturalistic fiction became popular in the latter half of the 19th century. The naturalistic writer was one who let Nature take its course, accepted the universe of science, and cared only for things "as they are," rather than for things "as they have been," or "should be." Nature for the naturalist was a vast contrivance of wheels within wheels, and man was a "piece of fate" caught in the machinery of Nature. Man was the work of Nature; he existed in Nature and submitted himself to her laws. In contrast to the realist, the naturalist believed that man was fundamentally an animal without free will. To the naturalist man could be explained in terms of the external forces (the environment) or the internal drives (fear) which operated upon him.

In the early thirties, Harry Hartwick wrote that The Red Badge reflected naturalism because in it man is seen "as a helpless animal driven by instinct and imprisoned in a web of forces entirely deaf to the hopes or purposes of humanity."⁵⁰ Because clouds of smoke and gunfire blow Henry

⁵⁰Harry Hartwick, "The Red Badge of Nature," in The Foreground of American Fiction (New York, 1934), p. 25.

up and down the battlefield first in blind panic and then in wild bravery, like a tortured beast, divorced from intelligence and free will, wrote Hartwick, the boy reaches the conclusion that the chief thing is to resign himself to his fate, participate in Darwin's "survival of the fittest," play follow the leader with Nature, and become a stoic.⁵¹

Years later, in 1950, Lars Ahnebrink called The Red Badge a naturalistic novel "because of its candor, its treatment of men as dominated by instincts, its pictures of masses, and its pessimistic outlook." Ahnebrink believed the actual happenings on the battlefield were not the logical result of careful planning on behalf of the generals, but of uncomprehensible forces over which man had no control. The soldiers had little free will, and were pawns in the hands of forces they could not control.⁵²

The critics who read The Red Badge as a lesson in naturalism use Ahnebrink's argument: Man is up against uncontrollable forces. Henry Fleming is aware of the fact that his enlistment, for example, is no action determined by his own will. Just before his first battle, Henry thinks to himself:

But he instantly saw that it would be impossible for him to escape from the regiment. It enclosed him. And there were iron laws of tradition

⁵¹Ibid., p. 27

⁵²Ahnebrink, p. 96.

and law on four sides. He was in a moving box.

As he perceived this fact it occurred to him that he had never wished to come to the war. He had not enlisted of his free will. He had been dragged by the merciless government. And now they were taking him out to be slaughtered. (pp. 48-49)

Moreover, the disorder on the battlefield serves to emphasize the lack of free will on the part of the men fighting blindly and desperately:

"Good Gawd," the youth grumbled, "we're always being chased around like rats. It makes me sick. Nobody seems to know where we go or why we go. We just get fired around from pillar to post and get licked here and get licked there, and nobody knows what it's done for. It makes a man feel like a damn kitten in a bag. Now, I'd like to know what the eternal thunders we was marched into these woods for anyhow, unless it was to give the rebs a regular pot shot at us. We came in here and got our legs all tangled up in these cussed briars, and then we begin to fight and the rebs had an easy time of it . . ." (p. 144)

To the naturalist, finally, humanity means only animality. This is the ultimate reduction. The naturalist portrays man as an animal engaged in the endless and brutal struggle for survival. Some critics of The Red Badge point out that because Crane uses animal imagery so extensively in his war novel, he intended it to be a naturalistic novel. Mordecai and Erin Marcus, for example, have written that in the narrative, dialogue, and characters' thoughts, there are at least eighty figures of speech in the form of similes and metaphores employing animals and their characteristics.⁵³

⁵³Mordecai and Erin Marcus, "Animal Imagery in The Red Badge of Courage," MLN, LXXIV (February, 1951), 108.

The Marcuses believe the animal imagery describes the youth's feeling and actions as he passes through the stages of apprehension, terror, conquest of fear, and the acceptance of the human situations. Feeling he is unable to cope with the battle, Henry thinks he and his comrades will be "killed like pigs." He feels he can not warn his comrades because a wrong declaration would "turn him into a worm." On the night march, Henry's regiment is described as "dragons" and "wild horses," and Henry and his comrades are identified with "terriers" and "chicken." During the battle Henry becomes a "well-meaning cow" and in his eyes can be seen the look of a "jaded horse." Henry observes a fellow soldier who throws down his gun and runs "like a rabbit," whereupon Henry's fear makes him like "the proverbial chicken" which runs wildly to escape fear. After the youth overcomes his fear of battle and his attitudes about war changes, the animal imagery describing him changes. He and his regiment participate in a battle and are described as having fought like "hell-roosters" and "wild cats." Henry plunges at the enemy flag like a "mad horse." His comrades have "vicious wolf-like tempers" and Wilson springs "as a panther at prey."⁵⁴

It seems that no issue concerning The Red Badge goes unquestioned, and this is true of the above contention that

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 109.

the novel is naturalistic.

Lately, certain critics, particularly Max Westbrook, have thought Crane's novel not at all "cold-blooded determinism and naturalism." Westbrook supports his view by saying that the naturalist eschews certain artistic qualities, particularly style and imagery, and yet, Crane is praised for excellence in these qualities. The loyal naturalist, Westbrook also argues, denies the existence of conscience and presents man as an automaton; Fleming, however, is a rejection of both these concepts. Naturalism, according to Westbrook, includes a belief in intuition. But in the beginning of The Red Badge, Wilson, the loud soldier, was convinced he would not live. Since Wilson does live, this incorrect foreboding of death demonstrates little respect for intuitive knowledge.⁵⁵

Finally, Westbrook comments on what other critics had called Fleming's and Crane's "literal statement of naturalism," the incident in which a squirrel flees from a pine cone thrown by Fleming:

. . . There was the law, he said. Nature had given him [Fleming] a sign. The squirrel immediately upon recognizing danger, had taken to his legs without ado. He did not stand stolidly baring his furry belly to the missile, and die with an upward glance at the sympathetic heavens. On the contrary,

⁵⁵Max Westbrook, "Stephen Crane: The Pattern of Affirmation," NCF, XIV (December, 1959), 220.

he had fled as fast as his legs could carry him; and he was but an ordinary squirrel, too -- doubtless no philosopher of his race. The youth wended, feeling that Nature was of his mind. She re-enforced his argument with proofs that lived where the sun shone. (pp. 82-83)

Many critics say this is taken by the youth as nature's proof that this world is thoroughly naturalistic, but Westbrook thinks this passage reflects no more the literal theme of the novel, man against nature, than any of Fleming's other attempts to legitimize his flight from the battlefield. For Westbrook, Fleming's world is not strictly naturalistic, but a world where man is capable of directing his own life.

Then it can be said that The Red Badge contains objective realism as well as psychological realism. Also the book is an example of naturalism, yet it contains many non-naturalistic elements. This brings one to the moot question of Crane's impressionism in The Red Badge.

"Impressionism" was a potent and intensely controversial term in the 1890's. The term originated when certain French painters (Manet, Monet, Renoir) revolted from the conventional and academic conceptions of painting. Their special concern was with the use of light on their canvases. Suggesting the chief features of an object with a few strokes, they were more interested in atmosphere than in perspective or outline.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Thrall, Hibbard, and Holman, A Handbook to Literature, rev. ed. (New York, 1960), p. 238.

The movement had its counterpart in literature. The literary impressionist also stood for the liberation of the writer from tradition, formalism, ideality, and narrative. The word was early applied to Crane's work. In 1897 the Chicago Record observed that "Mr. Crane . . . is above all an impressionist."⁵⁷ In England, Joseph Conrad and Edward Garnett repeatedly praised Crane's impressionism.

In recent years Crane's impressionistic technique, involving the use of color, contrasts of light and dark shades, and smoke imagery, in The Red Badge has interested certain Crane scholars. They have argued that Crane must have learned much and adapted to his writing what he learned of French Impressionism, even though his artist roommate for a time in New York, Corwin Linson, denied this. When asked about Crane's use of color and whether he learned it from his studio associates, Linson replied, "No, I was the only painter among his early intimates. . . . The Impressionism of that day was to him an affectation."⁵⁸ Despite this, in 1950, Stallman wrote, "I do not think the influence of the studio on Crane can be denied."⁵⁹ Stallman thought Crane was much influenced by paintings because he knew the paintings of Albert Pinkham

⁵⁷Cady, p. 132.

⁵⁸Corwin Linson, My Stephen Crane (Syracuse, 1958), p. 46.

⁵⁹Stallman, p. 184.

Ryder, Monet, and Winslow Homer. Crane also studied Frederic Remington's drawings, Coffin's illustrations to Si Klegg, and the apprenticeship paintings of Linson and Crane's other fellow lodgers at the Art Students' League, wrote Stallman.

Among the modern critics who agree with Stallman by drawing parallels between Crane's prose technique in The Red Badge and impressionistic painting is Claudia C. Wogan. She explains in her 1960 study that the impressionistic artist viewed the world as a series of intense but disconnected "pictures." Crane, she says, draws battle this way because the narrative structure of The Red Badge is a series of fragmentary scenes described in terms of color.⁶⁰ Wogan states that color words appear 235 times in The Red Badge, and color is used realistically, metaphorically, and symbolically with the result that Crane painted with words as the French Impressionists painted with pigments. Wogan points out that in the book, there exist both the realistic use of color (the blue of the sky, the blue and gray of uniforms, the black of night, and the red of blood) and the traditional connotations of certain colors (green and brown representing the world of nature, the black and gray representing evil, hatred, death and passion). But, because Crane assigns to words more than one association, she continues, it is difficult to pinpoint

⁶⁰Claudia C. Wogan, "Crane's Use of Color in The Red Badge of Courage," MFS, VI (Summer, 1960), 169.

all of Crane's connotations. For example, there are the many uses of the color "red": The "red eyes" of the enemy; "the red animal, War"; "red cheers"; the red sun "pasted in the sky like a wafer"; a "woman, red and white"; "red letters of curious revenge"; "crimson oaths"; "red sickness of battle"; campfires were "red, peculiar blossoms"; and flags that flew like "crimson foam." In many instances the use of this color, as with others, is both realistic and symbolic. A battle described as "a sketch in gray and Red" gives the image of red blood and gray uniforms, but it also connotes the passion and confusion of war mingled with death (gray).⁶¹

The impressionistic painter usually used bright colors, but these colors were subdued as if a mist or fog had settled over the canvas to repress the brightness. In these paintings dark smoke or masses of mist and vapor are surrounded by a luminous zone or conversely specks of prismatic color are enclosed by a zone of shade. Similarly, in almost every battle scene in The Red Badge the perspective is blurred by smoke. William Joseph Free⁶² points out that smoke anticipates battle: The first sign of battle is smoke from skirmishers' rifles which floats "in little balls, white and compact." Preparing for battle, the men look across the field

⁶¹Ibid., p. 157.

⁶²William Joseph Free, "Smoke Imagery in The Red Badge of Courage," CLAJ, VII (1964), 149-151.

and see that "the opposing infantry's lines were defined by the gray walls and fringes of smoke." Smoke, continues Free, is the dominant image recurring throughout battle: The battle itself is a chaos of "billowing smoke . . . filled with horizontal flashes"; and the smoke lingers as battle's foul after-taste. Even after Henry's flight from battle, traces of smoke remind him of war's presence. In the woods into which he escapes "a yellow fog lay wallowing on the treetops." Thus, Crane's use of smoke in his novel provides another parallel between the book's prose and impressionistic painting.

As has been pointed out, the critical debate over Crane's technique or method has been varied. Critics have tried to categorize The Red Badge as realism, naturalism, and impressionism. The most intense and academic criticism of The Red Badge, however, has been provoked by the novel's symbolism.

III

Since the publication in 1951 of Robert W. Stallman's introduction to the Modern Library edition of The Red Badge, there has raged a critical debate regarding Crane's "symbolism" in the novel. Stallman's analysis of Jim Conklin as a Christ figure and Henry Fleming's growth as a religious redemption has divided critics of the book into two camps. Those critics who agree with the Stallman school of Crane criticism think

that religious imagery is the center of the novel and that Henry Fleming changes as a result of his experience. The critics who refute Stallman locate the values of the novel in an ethical context or they maintain that Fleming undergoes no significant change.

Stallman⁶³ contends that the theme of The Red Badge is that man's salvation lies in spiritual growth. Henry must undergo a spiritual change before he can become a useful human being, Stallman says. In the beginning, Henry is a vain farm boy who enlists only for the excitement and adventure he associates with battle. When his romantic dreams begin to crumble, he flees. Henry's cowardice must be overcome. His pride and self-vindication must be replaced by humility and loving kindness for his fellow man. He must be redeemed. The basis of Stallman's interpretation is his analysis of the metaphor, "The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer," which concludes the chapter [IX] during which Henry witnesses the death of Jim Conklin. For Stallman the "wafer" referred to is the Communion wafer. "I do not think it can be doubted that Crane intended to suggest here the sacrificial death celebrated in communion,"⁶⁴ writes Stallman. From this he argues that Jim Conklin who dies just preceding Crane's

⁶³Stallman, pp. 191-201.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 200.

introduction of the image is Christ, or a Christ-figure. Conklin has been wounded in the side, he has a torn body and a gory hand, he is "a devotee of a mad religion," and the initials of his name, J. C., are the same as Christ's.

The process of Henry's spiritual rebirth begins at the moment when the "wafer-like sun" appears in the sky. The book then becomes for Stallman and his followers a "chronicle of redemption." Their contention is that as a result of the sacrificial death of Jim Conklin, Fleming is somehow redeemed.

Maxwell Geismar, writing in 1953, says that after the "chapel scene" in which Henry encounters the corpse of a dead soldier, the narrative is based on the classic theme of sin and retribution. He agrees with Stallman that the "red sun" metaphor refers "of course" to the flesh and the blood of the martyred God, or the bleeding Son.⁶⁵ But Geismar goes on to say that since Henry's "psychological" wound results in his "tribal acceptance," assuring him security within the codes and conventions of society, law, and honor, The Red Badge is ultimately a study in social appearance or approval rather than a full study of conscience as Stallman has contended. The enemy, Geismar concludes, is still a society that probes at an individual's secrets and proclaims "those things which

⁶⁵Maxwell Geismar, Rebels and Ancestors (Boston, 1951), p. 84.

are willed to be forever hidden."⁶⁶

In his study of The Red Badge, John Hart sides with Stallman by seeing a change in Fleming. But like Geismar, he does not rely completely on the religious imagery in his interpretation of the novel: Hart is concerned more with Henry's "transformation" than he is with Christian imagery. Hart agrees with Stallman that in the beginning Henry's concern is not for his comrades, but for himself. However, his "rebirth," he says, comes from understanding that Man's courage springs from the self-realization that he must participate as a "member" rather^{than} as an "individual." Henry encounters war and death and is transformed through a series of rites and revelations into a hero. He returns from these events, Hart says, to identify his new self with the "deeper communal forces" of the group.⁶⁷ Henry's encountering the corpse in the forest, his meeting the tattered man, his witnessing Jim's death, and his receiving the wound, show Henry that the discovery of self is essential to building a bolder, fuller, human life.

Eric Solomon's study of The Red Badge in the late fifties is in accord with that done previously by Hart. Solomon

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 200.

⁶⁷John Hart, "The Red Badge of Courage as Myth and Symbol," University of Kansas City Review, XIX (Summer, 1953), 249.

sees the youth's dilemma as that of being isolated from the group.⁶⁸ Crane, he observes, portrays the psychological journey of Fleming from romantic pride, through the depths of fear and the first qualms of conscience, to the realization, after receiving his wound, of his place in the military scheme. This same cycle is repeated as Henry interacts with the group as the regiment undergoes its test of fire. Solomon concludes that the development of Fleming's inner life is paralleled by that of the regiment. Both mature. Furthermore, Henry learns that life, like war, is not a romantic dream, but a matter of compromises. Henry views his life in a "fresh framework, and he takes full responsibility [Solomon writes] for his life by comprehending the nature of obedience and action."⁶⁹

In his 1959 article on The Red Badge's imagery, James Cox explains that by his ironic resemblances of Conklin to Christ, "Crane was perhaps saying that in this world Jesus Christ is a grim joke." Cox supports this claim by extending the interpretation of Conklin as Christ by calling attention to a resemblance between the two that Stallman had missed.⁷⁰ Cox says that when Conklin falls, his "body seemed to bounce

⁶⁸Eric Solomon, "The Structure of The Red Badge of Courage," MFS, V (Autumn, 1959), 200-234.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 224.

⁷⁰James T. Cox, "The Imagery of The Red Badge of Courage," MFS, V (Autumn, 1959), 209-219.

a little way from the earth" (p. 98). It is clear why, as Henry rushes to the fallen body, he discovers that "the teeth showed in a laugh" (p. 98). It is because this real death makes of Christ's death an absurdity with His Ascension to Heaven. The only ascension here is a grotesque bounce "a little way from the earth." The source and seal of this death appears in the sky in the shape of a wafer, which symbolized, according to Cox, that there will be no miraculous transubstantiation from this mangled and meaningless corpse. Rather, it is a reminder of a corpse encountered earlier which was being eaten by ants. The "red animal, war" and the "ant" will be the unholy communicants that devour this quite untransubstantiated and unrisen body which is left "laughing there in the grass," laughing at the appalling joke Fleming's religious education has entrusted upon him in its promise of eternal life.⁷¹

Many modern Crane critics then see The Red Badge as a study in growth, whether that growth be spiritual, social, or philosophic. Since 1950, however, there have been almost as many studies whose purport is to show that Henry does not change or if he does it is not so marked as the Stallman "school" professes.

John Shroeder, in 1950, saw evidence in the book of a change in Henry, but argued that it was inconsequential. He

⁷¹Ibid., p. 218.

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 impression of the haunted forest." Shroeder writes that at the ending of the novel "Crane seems to have forgotten everything that has gone before in his own book."⁷²

In his noted rebuttal⁷³ of the extravagant extension of the symbolic interpretation used by modern critics, Philip Rahv attacks Stallman: "Stallman unnerves one with his literal passion for up-to-date notions in criticism." Rahv's charge is based on the fact that Stallman interprets the "red sun" metaphor to be "the key to the symbolism of the whole novel" when in reality it is only a single image rather than a recurrent and dominant motif that establishes the narrative progression of Crane's book as a whole. Commenting on the metaphor, Rahv explains that "Crane liked to speak of himself as an impressionist, and as a stylist he was above all concerned with getting away from the morbidly genteel narrative language of his time"; therefore, Rahv concludes that this "daring colloquialism" must have appealed to him on the well-known avant garde principle of "make it new." For Rahv the

⁷²John Shroeder, "Stephen Crane Embattled," University of Kansas City Review, XVII (Winter, 1950), 126.

⁷³Philip Rahv, "Fiction and the Criticism of Fiction," KR, XVIII (Spring, 1959), 280.

novel is actually "about" war and its impact on human beings moved by pride, bravado, fear, anxiety, and sudden panic; and it is symbolic only so far as it spans out to the world at large "by transcending its immediate occasions and fixed, exclusive meanings."⁷⁴

Stanley Greenfield, complaining about "symbolic" critics and particularly about Stallman, writes: "His [Stallman's] method and interpretation I find very disturbing."⁷⁵ Greenfield quotes Stallman's analysis [in An Omnibus] of the events in the opening chapter. Stallman is describing the scene in which the army receives Conklin's rumor that the army is going into action:

But Jim Conklin's prophecy of hope meets with disbelief. "It's a lie!" shouts the loud soldier. "I don't believe this derved old army's ever going to move." No disciples rally round the red and gold flag of the herald. A furious altercation ensues; the skeptics think it just another tall tale. Meanwhile Henry in his hut engages in a spiritual debate with himself: Whether to believe or disbelieve the word of his friend, the tall soldier. It is the gospel truth, but Henry is one of the doubting apostles.

The italicizing is Greenfield's own to support his claim that Stallman's use of religious phrasing in his analysis predisposes the reader toward an interpretation of spiritual redemption.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Stanley B. Greenfield, "The Unmistakeable Stephen Crane," PMLA, LXXIII (December, 1958), 262.

Greenfield also challenges Stallman's remarks [Omnibus, p. 223] that Henry curses the sun after the death of Conklin. This he says is not accurate because Henry is blaspheming against the battlefield and war, not the sun. Greenfield explains that: "That the shift in point of view from Henry to an observer ("He seemed about . . .") suggest that Henry is not even aware of the sun."⁷⁶ Greenfield interprets The Red Badge as a work infused with an irony which neatly balances two major views of human life: ethical motivation and behavior as opposed to deterministic and naturalistic actions. The heroic ideal, as illustrated through Fleming, is largely the product of instinctive responses to biological and traditional forces. However, man does have the will and ability to reflect, and though these do not guarantee that he can effect his own destiny, they enable him to become responsible to some degree for the honesty of his personal vision. Greenfield's conclusions are valuable, in so much as they reconcile Crane's determinism and the manifest value he attaches to individual insight and moral behavior.

Charles Walcutt⁷⁷ cannot see as does Greenfield that Henry undergoes a spiritual or any other kind of growth. Walcutt claims that Henry at the end of the novel is back where he started--naturalistic man still ruled by ignorant self-

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Walcutt, pp. 66-86.

importance. It is Walcutt's contention that if Henry's thoughts about his manhood in the context of the whole novel are taken, it would seem that his motives "always have been and still are vain," and that he has never been able to evaluate his conduct. At the end of the novel, therefore, Walcutt says Henry is still deluded about himself.⁷⁸

Continuing the critical debate concerning Henry's development, Norman Friedman's critique⁷⁹ of The Red Badge further refutes Stallman's claim that Conklin's death brings about Henry's redemption. Friedman says there is no evidence that Conklin's death generates Henry's heroic resolve or initiates him into manhood because after this death scene Henry deserts the tattered man, which is just as cowardly an act as his flight from battle. Friedman contends that Fleming undergoes no change of character, if character means that which translates moral values into actions. The change he does undergo is one of thought, in his conception of himself in relation to war as an experience. This change in thought, Friedman says, is brought about by a succession of experiences in which Henry is first an ambivalent participant, then a cowardly witness, and finally a courageous participant. Friedman believes that as far as the book's plot is concerned, there are

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 81-82.

⁷⁹Norman Friedman, "Criticism of the Novel," Antioch Review, XVIII (1958), 343-370.

no incidents which show "the formation and subsequent pursuit of decisions and choices." True, at the end of the book, Henry is a "man", but only in the sense that he has seen war and learned what he is capable of doing. But Henry has not, according to Friedman, found more noble resolves or strengthened his will in reaching more noble purposes.⁸⁰

This controversy over Crane's meaning in the novel will no doubt continue. Lately, the trend seems counter to Stallman's evaluation as the key to the entire book. As Cady explains, there is textually no evidence that Fleming is so influenced by Conklin's death as Stallman claims. After Jim dies, Henry mentions Conklin only once, informing Wilson of Jim's death, and they mourn briefly in the fashion of combat soldiers in the midst of death, ". . . poor cuss!" Furthermore, after Henry witnesses Jim's death, he abandons the dying tattered man. Because of this second act of cowardice, it would hardly seem that Henry is completely "redeemed" by Conklin's death.

There still remains the critical question of Henry Fleming's development or lack of development. James Colvert's 1959 critique⁸¹ tries to bring together the two camps of critics that argue this point. Colvert notes that in the beginning

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 360.

⁸¹ James B. Colvert, "Structure and Theme in Crane's Fiction," MFS, V (Autumn, 1959), 199-208.

Fleming is unable to distinguish between his heroic dreams and hopes and the actual conditions of war. Then follows a period of confusion and doubt as reality begins to intrude upon his dream world. Next, writes Colvert, he goes through a period of desperate but futile struggle to preserve, through deceit and rationalization, his pseudo-heroic image of himself and the world. In the end he solves his problem when he learns to see the world in its true light, when he is finally able to bring his subjectivity into harmony with the reality which his experience in battle makes clear to him. These four stages in the novel, concludes Colvert, reveal that Fleming does grow toward moral maturity even though absolute maturity has not yet been achieved.⁸²

Max Westbrook⁸³ agrees with James Colvert that Henry develops spiritually and matures despite his romantic ideas about war at the end of the book. Westbrook points out that Fleming begins and ends with a romantic concept of courage. His first version, grounded in daydreams, books, and newspaper headlines, is unrealistic. The mature version, grounded in objective reality, is judicious and realistic. Therefore, in accord with Colvert, Westbrook explains that Fleming's struggle is to merge his consciousness with objective reality.

⁸²Ibid., p. 205.

⁸³Max Westbrook, "Stephen Crane and the Personal Universal," MFS, VII (Winter, 1963), 351-360.

This comes only by his experiencing battle and realizing his place in the scheme of the universe.

Despite the arguments of Colvert and Westbrook, it would be rash indeed to suggest that there exists no need for further criticism of The Red Badge. It would seem, however, that as of today the critics since 1950 have established the major guidelines by which this novel may profitably be studied. The further result of this recent criticism has been finally to establish Crane's novel as an American literary classic. It would seem unlikely that The Red Badge of Courage will ever again need be rediscovered.

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