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THE STRUCTURE OF "THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE"

ERIC SOLOMON

IN SPITE OF THE ABUNDANCE of war novels produced by two world conflicts, *The Red Badge of Courage* is still the masterwork of war fiction. Stephen Crane's novel is the first work in English fiction of any length purely dedicated to an artistic reproduction of war, and it has rarely been approached in scope or intensity since it was published in 1895.

Any judgment of the influence of *The Red Badge of Courage* on later war fiction would of necessity be conjectural. The circumstance that Ford Madox Ford and Ernest Hemingway worshipped at the Crane shrine does not in itself prove that *No More Parades* or *A Farewell to Arms* was directly affected by Crane's book. But the novel became part of the literary heritage of the twentieth century, and whether or not a war writer consciously recalls Crane's performance, the fact remains that *The Red Badge of Courage* is a touchstone for modern war fiction. Stephen Crane gave the war novel its classic form.

Crane, however, made no great innovation in style or subject matter. Realism, irony, detail, the emotional impact of combat—all these had appeared somewhere in earlier war fiction. The contribution of Stephen Crane to the genre of war fiction was twofold. First, he defined the form in his novel that deals with war and its effect upon the sensitive individual who is inextricably involved; war is treated as neither journalism nor autobiography nor dashing romance, but as a test of mind and spirit in a situation of great tension. Crane also constructed a book that still stands as the technical masterpiece in the field.

Crane accomplishes in the longer form of the novel what Ambrose Bierce attains in the short story. *The Red Badge of Courage* creates a single world, a unique atmosphere where war is the background and the foreground. Without resorting to the props of counter-plots dealing with romance and intrigue employed by every novelist who wrote of war from Scott to Kipling (with the possible exception of the Tolstoy of *Sevastopol*), Crane works within a tightly restricted area. Like the painters of the Italian Renaissance who conceived the *tondo*, a form that forced the artist to choose and manipulate his subject

matter to fit a small, circular canvas, Crane chooses to restrict his novel to war and its impact upon his hero. There is no mention of the causes or motives of the war or of any battle; Crane's war is universal, extricated from any specific historical situation. We may gain an impression of how a literary artist makes war his *tondo* by an analysis of the structure of *The Red Badge of Courage*. For Crane approached the subject of war as an artist, picking his materials for their fictional value. He was not reliving an experience, but creating one.

Two recent interpreters of Crane have given the novel intensive readings. Maxwell Geismar¹ sees the novel as a psychiatric case study that reflects Crane's childhood traumas and has mythopoeic overtones of pagan ritual and tribal law. Robert Wooster Stallman, in addition to his invaluable edition of *The Red Badge of Courage*² that restores all the variant passages from Crane's manuscript and the first edition, supplies a reading that understands the novel largely in terms of Christian allegory, as an expression of redemption through confession and absolution.³ In this study we shall examine *The Red Badge of Courage* as a war novel and concentrate on the form and techniques employed to recapture the essentials of war in a work of fiction.

Even the most sympathetic critics have been unable to call the book a unified whole. It has usually been passed off as an impressionistic novel. Edward Garnett speaks of the book as "a series of episodic scenes. . . . it was not constructed in any sense of the word;"⁴ H. L. Mencken thinks Crane "lacked the pedestrian talent for linking one situation to another."⁵

It is true that many of Crane's effects are gained by recourse to an impressionistic method, a technique used by previous war writers to convey the sense of a vast battle scene. His combat descriptions are

¹ Maxwell Geismar, "Stephen Crane: Halfway House," *Rebels and Ancestors* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), pp. 69-136.

² Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* in *Stephen Crane: An Omnibus*, ed. Robert Wooster Stallman (New York, 1952), pp. 225-372. All subsequent references to this edition will appear in the text.

³ There are many attractive aspects to this theory. It does not seem reasonable, however, to go as far as Mr. Stallman does in reading the novel as a religious work. Where he rejoices to discover many religious connotations in passages Crane expurgated from his final manuscript, a differently oriented critic could hold that these passages were omitted precisely because Crane did not want to stress religion heavily in the final version. It is more difficult to accept Mr. Stallman's view of Jim Conklin as a Christ figure. Conklin's initials, his passion, and his death are part of the book's context, to be sure. But so are his violent cursing, his fist fight, his voracious appetite, and, most significant, his terror of death. Would a Christ figure (even one as perverted as Faulkner's Joe Christmas) be so afraid of what might happen to his body after his death? The inconsistency of Crane's religious symbolism which mixes Biblical and pagan phrases without any apparent order would seem to vitiate a theory of a controlled religious structure. It would be safer to say that there are religious overtones to Crane's novel.

⁴ Edward Garnett, "Stephen Crane and His Work," *Friday Nights* (New York, 1922), p. 208.

⁵ Henry L. Mencken, "Introduction," *The Work of Stephen Crane*, ed. Wilson Follett (New York, 1926), X, xii.

swiftly shifting impressions of action. Furthermore, he shows the influence of the impressionists in his dependence on color, the contrasts of light and shade. And his characters have a certain anonymity. Although Crane shows many of the realities of war, there is not as much careful detail in his novel as in De Forest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion*. It is possible to apply the term impressionistic to one aspect of *The Red Badge of Courage*; certainly intensity and expressiveness are stressed—but not necessarily at the expense of symmetry and neatness. For an example of a fully impressionistic war novel, we need only consider Andreief's *The Red Laugh*, where disjointed and blurred fragments of combat are joined together to give a vast vision of horror.

It is equally an oversimplification to think of Crane's book merely in terms of naturalistic fiction. There are, to be sure, certain naturalistic doctrines that Crane follows. Some details appear to be chosen for their shock effect, like the corpse Henry finds in the forest—a sight that makes the dead bodies in Bierce seem pleasant by comparison. But the presence of the corpse is not arbitrary. It fits into the youth-to-experience theme, teaching Henry to understand death as something ghastly—not noble. Henry's salvation comes from a newfound sense of dedication to life and beauty after he has understood the ugliness of death. When he finally risks his life in battle, after having viewed the disgusting corpse, he knows what death involves.

One aspect of naturalism that had already appeared in the war fiction of Bierce and Rudyard Kipling is the double process of animation of mechanical objects and depersonalization of human beings. Crane's novel is packed with parallels between the animal and human worlds. His picture of war shows the iron and steel weapons in the role of flesh-and-blood inhabitants of the combat world. Even the battle flag, normally a symbol, takes on a more human dimension here. The flag struggles to free itself from an agony and finally falls with a gesture of despair (257).

The machines are humanized, and an abstraction like war itself is described as a red animal. Men, for their part, become either animals or machines. It is interesting to note how consistently Crane avoids physical descriptions of his characters and uses animal imagery to tell how men look in war. The regiment seems like "one of those moving monsters" or "crawling reptiles" (240); men are pigs, worms, cows, rats, kittens, etc. Fear makes Henry look like "a jaded horse" (267), "a craven loon" (295). War seems so brutally deterministic to Crane that it robs man of the free will and intelligence that differentiate him from the animals. For this reason the use of animal imagery is fitting for the naturalistic interpretation of war. The images reflect the belief that combat is the most savage pattern of human existence.

Crane's vision is basically ironic, perhaps not as sardonic as that of Bierce, but certainly bitter. He understands war in the naturalistic sense of involving the loss of individual initiative and motivation. The fatalism of war seems for a time to crush Henry. He compares himself to a squirrel who automatically must run away from danger in order to obey the law of survival of the fittest (275). Nature is apparently allied with the superior, intangible force that rules the world of war. One of the most illuminating passages that Crane cut out of the final version of the novel represents war in naturalistic terminology. "From his pinnacle of wisdom, he regarded the armies as large collections of dupes. Nature's dupes who were killing each other to carry out some great scheme of life" (291). But when Henry succeeds in war, nature shines upon him benignly, and the book closes with a lyric description of the sun breaking through the clouds. Neither impressionism nor naturalism is the dominant mode for dealing with the world of war. We shall see that Henry's actions are those of a free individual.

Perhaps *The Red Badge of Courage* should be called an impressionistic-naturalistic novel—or vice-versa. Certainly Crane uses both manners throughout. The combination of a vivid, swift montage of combat impressions with a harsh, overwhelming, naturalistic picture of the individuals trapped in the war machine is Crane's method of fitting the combat world into fiction. The seminal quality of Crane's novel is more evident when one considers that Barbusse and Remarque, in writing of the incredible butchery of World War I, turn to a similar joining of impressionism for the overall battle picture and naturalism for the detail and characterization.

II

Robert Wooster Stallman comes closest to understanding the nature of the novel's structure. He describes *The Red Badge of Courage* as a series of fluctuations between hope and despair, a group of withdrawals and engagements.⁶ This is accurate, and we shall notice how Crane follows war's own pattern in his alterations between action and inaction.

There is evidence of much tighter control in Crane's war novel, however. Like the careful symmetry of *The Scarlet Letter*—which has scenes on the scaffold in chapters one, twelve, and twenty-four—so in the twenty-four chapters of *The Red Badge of Courage* there is a careful unfolding of plot; in the latter work there is a triple development.

⁶ Robert Wooster Stallman, "Stephen Crane: A Revaluation," *Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction*, selected by John W. Aldridge (New York, 1952), pp. 263-265.

The first section of the novel shows the dilemma of the youthful hero who feels, and then actually becomes, isolated from the group in war. Crane portrays the psychological journey of Henry Fleming from a foolish romantic pride, through the depths of fear, the first qualms of conscience, and a realization of his place in the military scheme—marked by his return to the regiment following the climactic wound he received in Chapter Twelve.

The same cycle is repeated, once he has rejoined his comrades. Now he interacts with the group as the regiment undergoes *its* test of fear and the recapture of confidence in combat. Finally, the regiment and Henry act as veterans in a successful skirmish. The *Bildungsroman* ends, on the scaffold, as it were, with the young man from the provinces altered and matured by war but still an ambiguous figure who has come to terms with the realities of the world through which he has made his picaresque way to knowledge. Like a lesser Melville, Crane deals with the ambiguities of character, and the battlefield, instead of a ship, is his world.

Henry Fleming's progression, on the most obvious level, is from fear to courage. Crane also extends the meaning of war and its impact upon the hero to a more involved moral nexus. Before he joins the army, Henry is a romantic dreamer, inspired by visions of a chivalric type of warfare in which he becomes a mighty hero. The immediate shock of training destroys any Homeric view of war, but Crane shows, in the book's only flashback out of the immediate war situation, the pre-war dreams of the youth. Like the child in Bierce's "Chickamauga," Henry has been brought up on books and pictures of battle. Crane fixes the pattern of the esthetic young man off to the wars—a figure that was to become a stereotype in the fiction of two world conflicts. Henry enlists in a haze of glorious aspiration that is undercut only by his mother's sober, sad advice. Through Henry's posturing, his ability to conjure a vague smile from a female student into an idealized vision of the girl he left behind him, Crane establishes the character of a sensitive, highly imaginative youth. As Herman Melville wrote, "All wars are boyish and are fought by boys." It is to be expected that Henry's illusions will die hard.

When the rumor of impending action reaches the waiting army, Henry withdraws to worry about the necessity of proving his courage, since he knows nothing about himself as far as war is concerned. He must prove himself in the heat of combat, in the destructive element. Just before the first engagement, Henry gives way to pure hysteria, believing that he is in a trap and being led to certain death. His feeling of persecution is replaced by a wild, animal rage, once the actual combat commences; when the first lull comes, Henry believes he has passed his test. The mercurial youth is in an ecstasy of self-satisfaction.

"So it was all over at last! The supreme trial had been passed. The red, formidable difficulties of war had been vanquished" (265).

The author, however, equates war to life, and the reality of battle is made to parallel the reality of human existence where the mere passing of one test does not remove the possibility of other tests being imposed. In war the process is speeded up. Under the shock of the enemy's second attack, Henry protests, gives in to panic, and finally flees in fear. He reaches his low point of cowardice here. From this point on his emotional movement is forward, to a rebirth of courage.

After his communion with nature in the forest, Henry starts back towards the holocaust, fully realizing the irony involved in such a return to danger. He still retains his vague dreams of leading heroic charges, but once he has come back to his regiment—half way through the novel—the fear motif of *The Red Badge of Courage* is completed. For the remainder of the book the hero is sure of himself, even over-confident; and by the end of the story he has become a war devil, exulting in action, capturing a flag, and receiving praise from his superiors. Taken as simply a "psychological portrayal of fear,"⁷ the novel is not only ironic, it is amoral. The successful hero has only learned that he is not particularly cowardly. Incisive as his probing of the hero's neurotic fright is, Stephen Crane has much more to say about the influence of combat upon the inexperienced participant.

III

The essential quality of Crane's novel cannot be derived from the study of one man's response to war. War has presented, among other things, a highly developed social problem ever since the days of individual combat were over. The gradation of the army system and its rigid chain of command combine with the massive troop movements of modern warfare to make combat a reflection of a special society with its own precise rules of conformity. And as Mark Schorer has pointed out, any novel must find a form that will encompass both the individual and social experiences.⁸

It may not be immediately obvious that *The Red Badge of Courage* is more than the story of the young soldier who is Crane's hero and point-of-view character. The author does not try to describe his individuals fully. We do not even know the youth's whole name until Chapter Twelve. Taking Crane's novel on its own terms, we need

⁷ Stephen Crane, "Letter to John N. Hilliard," *The Academy*, LIX (August 11, 1900), 116.

⁸ Mark Schorer, "Foreword," *Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction* (New York, 1952), p. xviii.

not expect rounded figures, logically described, having past histories; neither should we overlook Henry Fleming's comrades in the war situation.

Henry comes into close contact with five other soldiers in his passage from apprenticeship to mastery. Of these, the tall soldier, Jim Conklin, is most important. Henry identifies with Conklin's calm attitude when faced with combat and attempts to accept his steadying advice. The death of Conklin has particular meaning to the hero; just as in Crane's story, "The Open Boat," the stronger personality does not survive the test. The loud soldier, Wilson, a foil to Henry's fears at the start, undergoes a similar, and even more rapid, growth to manhood through the ordeal. The attitude of the somewhat anonymous lieutenant, Hasbrouck, reflects the hero's place in the military society. When Henry is a coward, the officer strikes at him with a sword, but when the youth is fighting well, he and the lieutenant are filled with mutual admiration.

Two more figures, shadowy ones to be sure, but still vividly realized, provide a commentary on the soldier's progress. Direct opposites, the tattered soldier whom Henry leaves wandering blindly in a field, and the cheery stranger who guides Henry back to his regiment, signify respectively betrayal and comradeship. The interaction of the hero with these five characters and the regiment as a whole furnishes the fundamental theme of *The Red Badge of Courage*. The standards by which Henry's development is measured are those of group loyalty rather than fear and courage. Although the secondary characters are typed, and meant to be so, and not sharply individualized, they are still effectively presented.

The novel opens on the large picture of the entire fighting force. "The cold passed reluctantly from the earth and the retiring fogs revealed an army stretched out on the hills, resting" (226). As in a motion-picture opening, the scene gradually focuses on a particular group of soldiers—Conklin doing his washing, Wilson arguing violently, and then on Henry in a solitude of self-mistrust.

The key to Henry's development, and the essential meaning of war for him, comes in the flashback to his farewell from his mother. The importance of this scene is not in his mother's adjuration to do his duty bravely, nor in the general anti-romantic atmosphere of cows and socks, but in her words that remind the youth of his own insignificance in the larger scheme. " 'Yer jest one little feller amongst a hull lot of others, and yeh've got to keep quiet an' do what they tell yeh. I know how you are, Henry' " (231). She knows, but he must learn in battle what kind of a man he is.

Henry's vanity does not allow him to be a little fellow among a

whole lot of others except in the rare moments of rationalization when he comforts himself with the consideration that he is part of a vast blue demonstration. Because abstract judgment fails him in his fear, he is isolated. Crane stresses Henry's feeling of solitude. He has no one with whom to compare suspicions; he is different, "alone in space," "a mental outcast" (245). Both the calm competence of the tall soldier and the brash assurance of the loud soldier convince Henry that his is a unique weakness.

When the regiment advances for its baptism of fire, Henry is a part of the group, albeit unwillingly. He feels himself carried along by a mob. The image Crane uses to signify Henry's attitude of helplessness is important. ". . . there were iron laws of tradition and law [sic] on four sides. He was in a moving box" (248). He is doing exactly what his mother warned him against, considering himself an important individual. He hates the lieutenant and believes that only he, Henry, knows that the entire regiment is being betrayed. In other words, the youth revolts against the iron laws of the war world, the traditions of obedience and humility in the ranks. Crane plays off Henry's condition of rage against Jim Conklin's faithful acceptance of the new environment. The other soldiers are shadowy figures in Henry's mind, since his ego has denied him the comforts of military friendships. He is too wrapped up in himself to realize that others are in the same condition of doubt and fear.

A sudden shift in emphasis takes place when the battle starts, as Henry rapidly adjusts to reality. Losing concern with himself for the moment, he becomes "not a man but a member," a part of a "common personality," a "mysterious fraternity" (261). Whereas in his isolation and doubt he was trapped in a moving box, now, by sinking his personality into the larger personality of the group, he regains control of himself. Crane describes Henry's combat activity with the same box image as before, but there is one important difference. Henry is now in charge. "He was like a carpenter who has made many boxes, making still another box . . ." (261).

Crane transfers the point of view from Henry to the regiment at this juncture. In the impressionistic battle scene, the focus is on "the men," "they," "a soldier" (263) while the regiment goes about its grim business. An integral part of Henry's development is the realization that even the regiment is not the only important participant in the battle. He understands that the fighting involves many regiments and momentarily grasps the idea of his own relative unimportance. But Crane is too acute a psychologist to conceive such a rapid character change and have Henry learn the soldier's hardest lesson easily. When the break in the combat comes, Henry reverts to his pride and

considers his rather petty action to have been magnificent. He must undergo a more serious test before he can reap the full benefits of his war experience.

The second attack is too much for him. Henry cannot comprehend the rules of war that are so irrational as to impose another test so soon. He deserts the group, and by this act he breaks all the rigid rules of war. The sight of the lieutenant, angrily dabbing at him with his sword, symbolizes for Henry his new role as an outcast. The youth is no longer, in the Conradian sense, one of them. He asks himself, "What manner of men were they anyhow?" (270), those fools who stayed behind to meet certain death.

The novel is not merely a portrait of fear; it is the portrait of a mind that learns to come to terms with itself and to live down an act of cowardice. Henry Fleming must become a man according to the rules war sets forth. Therefore, he must cast off the egoism that made him run, and gain a true perspective on his importance.

The book is often ironic, since his growth is neither particularly moral nor is it without fluctuations. Henry's failures and successes in war are those of a hero *manqué*, if we are to measure them by the usual Christian ethic. But *The Red Badge of Courage* is a war novel, and Henry Fleming should be judged by the ideals of a war world. The lesson Henry has to learn is basic to combat. The individual cannot depend on his personal reasoning powers. Henry's mind has seen the danger and he has fled, while his stupid comrades have stayed and shown courage. The beginning of wisdom comes with the comprehension that his own judgment is insufficient. He is in the position of a criminal because of his enlightened intellect. Henry feels the bitterness and rage of an outcast, a sensitive dreamer who, trapped between romance and reality, can make the best of neither world. Caught in a box of his own making, Henry faces the age-old problem of the individual at odds with society. He has not only indulged in an act of self-betrayal, he has thrown over his responsibilities to and for the others. He does not yet understand that his own salvation (physical and spiritual) must be the product of his dedication to universal salvation. Henry's story is not tragic, because, unlike Lord Jim, the young soldier manages to compensate for his anti-social action and work his way back to the fellowship of men which, in the world of war, is represented by the regiment. But the road back is not easy.

After his dark night of the soul passed in the forest where nature appears to second war's cruelty, Henry commences his return to the battle—to life or death. The physical isolation of the youth ends when he meets a line of wounded soldiers staggering towards the rear, soldiers coming out of the active world from which Henry had fled.

Henry joins the crowd, but he remains an outsider, for he has no wound. Crane reverses the symbolism of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* or "The Minister's Black Veil." Henry is distinguished by his *lack* of any mark. "He was continually casting sidelong glances to see if the men were contemplating the letters of guilt he felt burned into his brow. . . . He wished that he, too, had a wound, a red badge of courage" (282). Ironically enough, he desires to be marked by the red death he had feared. Honor, or the appearance of honor, is his new goal.

As if to emphasize his sin, Henry remains with the denizens of the strange world of wounded. He meets the tattered man, one of Crane's most brilliant portraits of a nameless figure. We know nothing about the tattered man except that he is wounded, and that he is a rather naïve and gentle soul. He is the antithesis of the young soldier in every way. The tattered man has been hit; he talks proudly of his regiment and its performance; he is humble and loves the army. In other words, he stands for the simple man who has done his duty and received his mark of honor. The tattered man represents society, and to the conscience-stricken Henry the wounded soldier is a reminder of guilt. Henry cannot remain with the tattered man when he asks the probing question, "'Where yeh hit, ol' boy?'" (281), that emphasizes the youth's isolation.

A greater shock is in store for Henry Fleming. After he leaves his tattered companion behind, he meets the spectral soldier—the tall soldier, Jim Conklin—transformed by a fatal wound. Henry's feeble wish for a little wound pales into the realm of bathos in comparison to Conklin's passion. The dying man's expression of sympathy and concern for Henry adds to the acute discomfort of the youth's position. In his walk through the valley of the shadow of death at Conklin's side, Henry's education advances. Conklin's death brings home to Henry the true nature of war, brutal and forbidding, more than the sight of an unknown corpse in the forest could do. The body of his friend stretched out before him, Henry curses the universe that allows such things to be. He shakes his fist at the battlefield and swears, but his insignificance in the larger scheme is indicated by Crane's most famous line, "The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer" (287).

Despite his genuine grief at Conklin's death, Henry is unable to accept responsibility for the tattered man, who has returned to pry at Henry's guilty secret, the crime "concealed in his bosom" (290). He deserts the tattered man a second time, and in denying him the young soldier commits his real sin. He breaks both a Christian and a military ethical rule ("Greater love hath no man. . . ."). Like his original act of cowardice, this desertion goes unpunished. If we are

to read the novel as a study in irony, there is no confusion; Henry is a sinner who succeeds in war without ever changing his ways. Crane's attitude towards his hero is ambiguous throughout the novel, however, and the betrayal of the tattered man is essential to Henry's growth to maturity. Although the tattered man himself says that "a man's first allegiance is to number one" (287), Henry realizes what he has done. His later heroism is a successful attempt to wipe out his cowardice. While he eventually rationalizes his betrayal, the memory of the tattered man blocks any real return to the egocentric immaturity that marked his character at the outset of the novel.

He heads back to the "furnace" (292) of combat, since the heat of that purgatory is clearly more desirable than the icy chill of solitude. His progress is halting. Henry is unable to throw off his romantic visions; he imagines his new self in a picturesque and sublime role as a leader of lurid charges. Once again the reality of war breaks his dreams apart, reality in the forms of physical exhaustion, thirst, and the memory of his cowardice. No longer a visionary, Henry can now make his way through the war world.

Crane's bitterness comes to the surface in this part of the novel. Henry is really worried about appearance. How can he pretend to be something he is not—a hero? It is when the self-centered youth is concerned with the difficulty of fabricating a lie effective enough to account for his disappearance that his full name is given for the first time by the author. The young soldier mentions it in apprehension of the name, "Henry Fleming," becoming a synonym for coward. Names and appearances are his only concern.

Henry Fleming's actions must be judged by the standards of war. While he is planning his lie (a sin, from a normal ethical viewpoint), fate, in the form of a hysterical soldier who clubs Henry out of the way, provides the wound that not only preserves the appearance of his integrity but also opens the way for his attainment of genuine honor. It is ironic, even cynical, for war to help Henry after he has broken the rules, and for the coward to pass as a hero. Two other points must be kept in mind, however. Crane constantly refers to his hero as "the youth," and despite his transgressions, Henry is still an innocent fumbling for the correct path, not a hardened sinner. Furthermore, he does not receive his wound in flight, but in the performance of an act of courage! Henry is struck down (by a coward) while inarticulately striving "to make a rallying speech, to sing a battle hymn" (300). He is in a position to suffer such a wound because he has originally fled from his regiment, but he is going against the current of retreating infantry, *towards* the battle, when he gains the red badge. The wound, then, may be seen as the result of heroism, not cowardice, and the irony is vitiated. Henry has escaped from his night-

mare of weakness before he is wounded. His own efforts have proved him not completely unworthy of the saving grace granted him by the fate of war.

The wounded Henry is again part of the fellowship of armed men. "The owner of the cheery voice" (304), who plays Mr. Strongheart in Henry's progress, guides the dazed youth through the forest wasteland back to the regiment. The gratuitous support of the cheery man is in direct contrast to Henry's earlier refusal to accompany the tattered man. The first twelve chapters of the novel come to an end with Henry outlined in the reflection of his regiment's campfires. The return to the company, which in war fiction has stood for homecoming from Kipling's "The Man Who Was" to Jones's *From Here to Eternity*, marks the completion of Henry Fleming's isolation and the start of the conquest of glory for himself and the regiment.

The hero of Crane's war novel has not yet learned what the author is in a later story to call "virtue in war." His relief at the arrival back into the "low-arched hall" (310) of the forest (a suggestion perhaps of the mead hall of the Old English epics, the symbol of the fellowship of strong warriors) is intense. He views the sleeping company with complacency because to all appearances he is one of them, since he performed his mistakes in the dark. In the second part of the novel Henry will come to understand war and his own nature. For the present, it is enough to go to sleep with his fellows. "He gave a long sigh, snuggled down into his blanket, and in a moment was like his comrades" (312).

IV

Only Joseph Conrad, of the multitude of Crane's critics, grasps the essential duality of *The Red Badge of Courage*. Conrad seems to realize that Henry Fleming and the regiment are in the same position. "In order that the revelation should be complete, the young soldier has to be deprived of the moral support which he would have found in a tried body of men matured in achievement to the consciousness of its worth."⁹ Conrad pinpoints the idea that the maturation process does not affect the hero alone. "Apart from the imaginative analysis of his own temperament tried by the emotions of a battlefield, Stephen Crane dealt in his book with the psychology of the mass. . ."¹⁰ The remainder of the novel treats the group that Henry has rejoined.

Although Crane's narrative technique still enforces the use of Henry as the point-of-view character, the youth is attentive to others

⁹ Joseph Conrad, "His War Book," *Tales of Hearsay and Last Essays* (London, 1955), p. 121.

¹⁰ Joseph Conrad, "Introduction," Thomas Beer, *Stephen Crane* (New York, 1923), p. 3.

as well as himself. Wilson, the former loud soldier, has been altered by his day of combat from a blatant, self-confident boy to a calm, quietly self-reliant soldier who is proud of the regiment. In order to perfect his relationship with Wilson and the other soldiers, Henry must try to understand their sources of fear and courage.

When the regiment goes into action on the second day, Crane focuses on the whole body, giving equal space to anonymous soldiers' complaints, the lieutenant's anger, and the serious determination of Wilson and Henry. The young soldier sinks himself completely into the business of battle and transfers his doubts and dreams into a savage hate of the enemy. If Crane indicated the importance of Henry's wound by giving his full name for the first time, here he emphasizes the youth's continuing growth as a human being by describing him physically. As Henry thinks less of himself, he becomes more of an individual in the pages of the novel. He fights well in this battle and becomes a hero in the eyes of his regiment.

The personal insignificance that Henry discovered applied to himself in the first section of the novel, now appears to fit the regiment which Crane describes in terms similar to those he earlier utilized for the young soldier. "The world was fully interested in other matters. Apparently, the regiment had its small affair to itself" (337).

Henry and the regiment undergo another severe exposure to fire in their first charge. Crane describes the mass movement brilliantly, transferring the attention from the youth to the men, and back. The crucial episode is the same for all of them, "a temporary but sublime absence of selfishness" (339).

The regiment falters in the confusion of the attack; the men go through Henry's former mental turmoil. "Here, crouching and cowering behind some trees, the men clung with desperation . . . the whole affair seemed incomprehensible to many of them" (340-341). The advance is saved by the courage and leadership of three men: the lieutenant, Wilson, and Henry. They lead the regiment forward, and symbolically Henry takes over as flag-bearer, participating in the combat in the absolute center of the group, the one position that more than any other represents the mass spirit. When the regiment is forced to retreat, Henry feels *their* shame as acutely as he felt *his* earlier. (Formerly he was selfish enough to pray for the army's defeat so his cowardice might go unnoticed). He harangues his comrades, striving to save the regiment's reputation.

The regiment turns and drives the enemy back; it passes its test. Henry is free from doubt and fear because he has committed himself to the larger unit. By losing himself in the mass, he has found himself. To the same extent, the regiment has conquered its panic and

irresolution. "The impetus of enthusiasm was theirs again. They gazed about them with looks of uplifted pride, feeling new trust in the grim, always confident, weapons in their hands. And they were men" (348).

The final stage of development in war for Henry and the regiment involves the learning of the veterans' virtues—calmness and workman-like efficiency. The young soldier is an observer in the last attack, a tiny player in a huge, impressionistic drama. Before, as a coward, he was the god-like center of a tiny stage; now, as a good soldier, he is absorbed into the regimental chorus. Henry loses all sense of individuality. "He did not know that he breathed; that the flag hung silently over him, so absorbed was he" (357).

Crane makes much of the fact that when the regiment is pinned down by enemy fire, Henry—the veteran—knows that the only thing to do is to return to the attack. To hang back would mean annihilation; to retreat would build up the enemy's spirit. Henry has assimilated the rules of war. Now his thoughts and emotional responses are the proper ones, forgetful of self in the face of duty. His companions, too, respond automatically to the necessities of battle, the facts of military life. The climax of *The Red Badge of Courage* comes as the regiment and its flag-bearer, without regard to vanities, charge once more and victoriously overrun the enemy's position. They have all passed the test.

The last chapter of the novel is an artfully contrived anticlimax. The regiment marches on; the author's attention is again directed to his hero. Henry has proved his courage; he has even been singled out for praise by the colonel. "He had dwelt in a land of strange, squalling upheavals and had come forth. He had been where there was red of blood and black of passion, and he was escaped" (365). Were the novel to end here on this note of rejoicing and pride, an ironic reading of the book would be justified. Henry would be a mock hero, a Jonathan Wild. Henry cannot forget the tattered soldier, however, whom Crane characterizes in lyrically sentimental language, ". . . he who, gored by bullets and faint for blood, had fretted concerning an imagined wound in another . . . he who, blind with weariness and pain, had been deserted in the field" (367). Again Henry considers himself a moral leper. He is filled with concern lest his comrades realize his secret sin.

Crane cancelled the passage that explains Henry's final rationalization of the betrayal, but these omitted words help to explain the moral construction of the book. "At last, he concluded that he saw in it quaint uses. He exclaimed that its importance in the aftertime would be great to him if it even succeeded in hindering the workings

of his egotism. . . . He would have upon him often the consciousness of a great mistake. And he would be taught to deal gently and with care. He would be a man" (369).

These last words, a repetition of those applied earlier to the regiment, show that Henry has matured as an individual and a member of society. Henry has learned the nature of fear and battle. "He had been to touch the great death, and found that, after all, it was but the great death" (369). More important, he has learned the essence of man's duty to man, as well as the fact that life (like war) is not a romantic dream but a matter of compromises. Perhaps there is an element of irony, since he has not become a "good" man, but he has done a "good" act—in the terms of the war world—by displaying courage and self-abnegation in the final skirmish. At least war has shown the young soldier his real self, and the acquisition of self-knowledge is no small accomplishment. Henry has become a new man who views life in a fresh framework, aimed not towards glory but a job to be done. Glory is pleasant but irrelevant. In the final scenes of *The Red Badge of Courage*, Henry takes full responsibility for his life; he is no longer an automaton. His properly disciplined ego comprehends the nature of obedience and action. And the development of his inner life is paralleled by that of the regiment.

The novel ends with a sweeping peroration, hailing Henry as a part of the procession of weary soldiers, a part of the regiment that has proved itself worthy of the army just as he has proved himself an individual worthy of inclusion in the group. They have all succeeded in the war which telescopes such a tremendous amount of experience into a brief moment. "Over the river a golden ray of sun came through the hosts of leaden rain clouds" (370).