

WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

The Red Badge of Courage & Other Stories

STEPHEN CRANE



SELECTED STORIES

THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

An Episode of the American Civil War

AND OTHER STORIES

◆

Stephen Crane

Introduction by

LIONEL KELLY

The University of Reading

WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

This edition published 1995 by Wordsworth Editions Limited
8B East Street, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 9HJ
New Introduction and Notes added 2003

ISBN 1 85326 084 3

Text © Wordsworth Editions Limited 1995
Introduction and Notes © Lionel Kelly 2003

Wordsworth® is a registered trademark of
Wordsworth Editions Ltd

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3

All rights reserved. This publication may not be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or
transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise,
without the prior permission of the publishers.

Typeset by Antony Gray
Printed in Great Britain by
Mackays of Chatham, Chatham, Kent

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

General Advisor
KEITH CARABINE
Rutberford College
University of Kent at Canterbury

INTRODUCTION

I.

Crane's novel is subtitled 'An Episode of the American Civil War'. This suggests a work of documentary realism. This promise is fulfilled in the way the novel delivers a realistic representation of war through the experiences of some of its participants. Yet it is equally a triumph of the imagination both in the way its transmutes the sources Crane called on in the making of the novel, and in its rhetorical resources, a highly imaginative way of writing which overlays the realism of its subject matter and illuminates the ironies at the heart of Henry Fleming's experiences. The imaginative vigour of Crane's style is evident from the opening paragraph where atmospheric and pictorial elements combine in complementary images of a cold dawn of 'retiring fogs' revealing an army 'stretched out on the hills, resting', its passive condition rapidly turned to 'eagerness at the noise of rumours' (a

'rumour' is specified in the third paragraph, setting the action of the novel in motion). The army is described as a single entity whose eyes cast on the roads ahead are mirrored by the 'red, eyelike gleam of hostile camp-fires in the low brows of distant hills', enacting the shift from one army to its opponents. In addition, there is the scene of nature, which will play an important part in Henry's experiences. Here a river 'amber-tinted in the shadow of its banks, purled at the army's feet', where the pastoralism of 'amber-tinted' and 'purled' give way to the stream now 'of a sorrowful blackness', suggesting nature's despairing complicity in the human scene of warfare. I dwell on this opening paragraph to emphasize the affective power of Crane's treatment of his materials in this novel, and to suggest that for all his attention to the specifics of a particular battle site in the Civil War, the dominant impact of the novel comes through this imaginative mode of writing. From the opening paragraph we move to the local irony of 'a certain tall soldier developed virtues and went resolutely to wash a shirt', a scaling down in tone as Crane moves from the army as a single unit to the particularity of the individual soldier where the power of rumour signals his sense of self-importance as the bearer of news of incipient action, a passage moving us directly from the army resting to the army preparing for action. From here we are shortly introduced to Henry Fleming and it is telling how the opening account of him dwells on his lively imagination where the opposition between dreams (here a synonym for the imagination) and conscious reality is developed. His dreams of 'vague and bloody conflicts' thrill him 'with their sweep and fire', and seeing himself in many such struggles 'He had imagined peoples secure in the shadow of his eagle-eyed prowess', where 'eagle-eyed' comes from the lofty perspective of the imperial eagle as the monarch of hunting birds, called on for the eagle's status as an emblem of the United States traditionally depicted with olive branches of peace in one claw and thunderbolts in the other. The image of the eagle as a wrathful predator is recalled towards the end of the novel as Henry charges against the Confederate flag where his own company's flag and that of the enemy wing towards each other in an encounter 'of strange beaks and claws, as of eagles' (p. 113). Even though Henry understands that the present war may not be seen in Homeric terms when he reads of 'marches, sieges, conflicts' . . . 'His busy mind had drawn for him large pictures extravagant in colour, lurid with breathless deeds'. If the function of these sentences is to present a young man's histrionic dream of war and his own potentially heroic conduct in it, that presentation is offset by his republican belief that human history has

moved on since the days of 'heavy crowns and high castles', that men were better now 'or more timid. Secular and religious education had effaced the throat-grappling instinct, or else firm finance held in check the passions'. Against Henry's 'ardour and patriotism' his mother affects a contempt for the war and holds to the view that for Henry, the plough is more important than the sword. When faced with the news of his enlistment her response is scriptural in its briefly fatalistic acceptance – 'The Lord's will be done, Henry', and he is disappointed that she makes no reference to the venerable injunction traditionally made to the soldier as he leaves for war that he should return with his shield, or upon it. Instead, her concern for his welfare shows in her maternal attention to his clothes and her warnings about the immoral ways of soldiers.

In these passages sketching Henry's call to arms he makes no mention of the causes of the Civil War, or of slavery in particular, nor does this feature significantly elsewhere in the novel. Indeed, when the notion of a 'cause' is mentioned, it is displaced as a binding entity by something else, as in Chapter 5 where we are told of Henry:

There was a consciousness always of the presence of his comrades about him. He felt the subtle battle brotherhood more potent even than the cause for which they were fighting. It was a mysterious fraternity born of the smoke and danger of death.' [p. 30]

One of the military devices traditionally used to engender this sense of 'battle brotherhood' was the display of regimental colours carried by the Colour-Sergeant into battle, and the novel concludes with the capture of the Confederate 'emblem' as Henry calls it. Historians of the Civil War have long held that most soldiers neither knew nor cared much about what they were fighting for, though this view is now contested by James M. McPherson¹ who, on the evidence of reading some 25,000 soldiers' letters and more than a hundred diaries concludes that the soldiers were intensely aware of the issues at stake and passionately concerned about them. In McPherson's view Confederates expressed patriotic motives for fighting and argued for the war on ideological issues such as liberty, constitutional rights and resistance to tyranny, whilst Union men voiced equally strong patriotism and many wrote of the war as a struggle to maintain liberty, democracy, majority rule, constitutional law and order, and survival of the Revolutionary legacy of republican government,

¹ James M. McPherson, *What They Fought For, 1861-1865*, Louisiana University Press, Baton Rouge 1995

whilst men on both sides were acutely aware of the importance of slavery in the conflict. In Crane's case, the absence of any specific reference to the causes of the war may be explained on two counts. The first is that these causes were well understood amongst his primary audience in the United States, and that the war was of relatively recent history. More importantly Crane's silence follows from the intensely interiorized view of Henry Fleming's experiences the novel provides, and the way it dwells on local actions rather than their larger causes. Although the novel is written from a third-person narrative point of view, it persistently reads like a first-person narration, a conflation of narrative perspectives that gives an extraordinary sense of immediacy to its telling mediated through Henry's consciousness.

One structural feature which contributes importantly to this sense of immediacy of experience is the brevity of the chapters which are generally no more than two to four pages each, with the expository opening chapter of eight pages being the longest by some measure. The pace of the narrative is determined by these short chapters, though there are occasions, such as in the three pages of Chapter 7, with Henry lost in the woods, where events seem protracted because of the way his physical and mental confusion is represented. In addition the chapters are developed in markedly short sentences and paragraphs, as in this example from Chapter 4, where the sentences tumble out in a kind of breathless precision, each however noting a specific event or effect:

A shell screaming like a storm banshee went over the huddled heads of the reserves. It landed in the grove, and exploding redly flung the brown earth. There was a little shower of pine needles.

Bullets began to whistle among the branches and nip at the trees. Twigs and leaves came sailing down. It was as if a thousand axes, wee and invisible, were being wielded. Many of the men were constantly dodging and ducking their heads.

The lieutenant of the youth's company was shot in the hand. He began to swear so wondrously that a nervous laugh went along the regimental line. The officer's profanity sounded conventional. It relieved the tightened sense of the new men. It was as if he had hit his fingers with a tack hammer at home. [p. 27]

Notice the representation of realistic detail through figurative means. The screaming shell is 'like a storm banshee' and when it hits the earth it explodes 'redly', followed by the brilliantly detailed note of effects in the 'little shower of pine needles'. The bullets are said to 'nip at the

trees', attributing a volitional agency to them, and 'sailing' instead of the more obvious 'falling' or 'floating' in the next sentence suggests a similar kind of deliberately calculated agency in the twigs and leaves. The effect of the lieutenant's cursing as he is shot in the hand engenders 'a nervous laugh' in the regimental line, a lowering of the tension which relieves the men, as though the event were like a domestic accident. Throughout this passage the detailing of specific incident is enhanced by figurative devices in a way entirely characteristic of the novel as a whole.

The Red Badge of Courage has been described as a work of prose pointillism,² and Crane's British contemporary H. G. Wells acutely observed that 'There is Whistler even more than there is Tolstoy in *The Red Badge of Courage*'. Whilst this reference to Tolstoy acknowledges the way early reviews of the novel compared it favourably to Tolstoy's epic *War and Peace* (1863-69), widely regarded as the exemplary European novel about war, the reference to Whistler recognizes a familiarity of technique between Crane's work and the paintings of his American contemporary James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903) whose riverscapes and portraits work through the subtle composition of colour harmonies. In these comparisons of writing with painting the notion of Crane's novel as a work of prose pointillism is most fertile in these comparisons, for like the pointillist paintings of Georges Seurat (1859-91) whose pictures are built up through dabs of colour rather than broad brushstrokes, the common greens and browns of the natural landscape are depicted by Crane as flecked with spots of other colours, predominantly red and blue, but also rose, orange, yellow, crimson, black, purple and gold. These colours have both a symbolic and realistic value in the novel. With the colour red for example, the 'red badge of courage' is the wound suffered by the soldier and is thus the symbol of his honour won in service for the cause, whilst at the level of realism red as the colour of blood is abundantly and naturally in evidence. Equally, blue is native to the novel's realism, as the colour of the Union soldiers' uniforms, and this leads Crane to write repeatedly of the Union army as 'a blue demonstration', a synecdochal image in which the multiplicity of Union soldiers is rendered as a singular effect. Or compare, for example, these

2 R. W. Stallman, 'Stephen Crane: A Revaluation' reprinted in *The Red Badge of Courage, Norton Critical Edition*, Second Edition, ed. Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty, and E. Hudson Long, revised by Donald Pizer, Norton, New York and London 1976; pp. 195-205

two contrasting uses of the colour red. In the opening of Chapter 5 Henry's reminiscence of a circus parade on a day in spring at home which fills a pause in the action as they wait for a further onslaught from the enemy is disrupted by the shout 'Here they come!', and we read 'The tall soldier, having prepared his rifle, produced a red handkerchief of some kind. He was engaged in knotting it about his throat with exquisite attention to its position, when the cry was repeated up and down the line in a muffled roar of sound.' (p. 29). The soldier's 'exquisite attention' to his red handkerchief is again a brilliantly observed piece of incidental realistic detail, as though the eye of the observer, like the tall soldier himself, is momentarily closed to the impending threat of action through this nice attention to dress. In the next chapter, with a lull in the fighting, we focus on Henry coming back to consciousness of himself:

For moments he had been scrutinising his person in a dazed way as if he had never before seen himself. Then he picked up his cap from the ground. He wriggled in his jacket to make a more comfortable fit, and kneeling relaced his shoe. He thoughtfully mopped his reeking features.

So it was all over at last! The supreme trial had been passed. The red formidable difficulties of war had been vanquished. [p. 34]

Here again we have that remarkable attention to personal detail as Henry recovers some equanimity after the terrors and confusion of battle, accompanied by the false sense that the rite of passage of the soldier in war has been accomplished. And then 'red' again, here the 'red formidable difficulties of war', where red is used as a *synecdoche* for war itself. The colour red and its tonal variant crimson certainly dominate in this pointillist manner, used either for acutely observed realistic detail or figuratively, as in these further examples. 'Here and there were flags, the red in the stripes dominating. They splashed bits of warm colour upon the dark lines of troops. (p. 33), the sight of which thrills Henry who sees these flags as 'like beautiful birds strangely undaunted in a storm'. Enemy shells exploding in the grass or among the leaves of the trees look 'to be strange war flowers bursting into fierce bloom' (p. 34), whilst later the sound of their approach is described as a 'crimson roar'. In Chapter 11, with its rich exploration of Henry's troubled conscience as he tries to work out how he may salve the 'sore badge of dishonour' he feels he will wear throughout his life for running from the battle, he still clings to those heroic pictures of himself with which he set out:

Swift pictures of himself, apart, yet in himself, came to him – a blue desperate figure leading lurid charges with one knee forward and a broken blade high – a blue, determined figure standing before a crimson and steel assault, getting calmly killed on a high place before the eyes of all. He thought of the magnificent pathos of his dead body. [p. 58]

Here again particular details are tellingly imagined, the 'one knee forward' and the 'broken blade high', its brokenness a sign of its use, yet still held high: and the blue of his uniform confronts 'a crimson and steel assault', signalling not the grey of the Confederate uniforms but the collective 'crimson' of their firearms. The irony of the final sentence requires no comment.

It is important to distinguish between Crane's imaginative use of the figurative resources of language and Henry's imagination as we encounter it in the first chapter and elsewhere, of which this last quoted passage is a further example. We are dealing here with the difference between the creative imagination of the novelist who calls on a wide range of rhetorical devices in the making of the novel, and Henry's delusive imaginings which underpin the structural irony central to the whole work. Henry's dream of heroic military deeds in action is soon put to the test and found wanting. He flees from the battlefield and the wound he eventually suffers comes not from engagement with the enemy, but from an irritable fellow-soldier, so that his 'red badge of courage', the sign of the wound that gives the novel its title, is then associated with his shame at his flight, and his right to that 'red badge' is delayed until the hectic finale of the novel. But whilst there is a difference in kind between Crane's inventive use of language in the novel and Henry's illusory imaginings, this difference becomes elided as the novel develops and Henry's visual imagination becomes increasingly like Crane's through the conflation of narrative perspective.

The novel is developed four phases, the first from Chapters 1 to 6 culminating in Henry's flight, the second from Chapters 7 to 12 with Henry's wanderings in the woods and amongst the retreating Union soldiers, Chapters 13 to 16 with his return to his regiment, and the final phase from Chapter 17 to the end. We should note that as Henry is commonly referred to as 'the youth' few of his fellow soldiers are given names but are identified simply as the tall soldier, the loud one, the braggart, the tattered soldier, and so on, and the same is true for the officers Henry encounters by and large. There is a certain propriety in

this for an army's foot-soldiers are commonly seen as an aggregate mass to be manoeuvred as necessary, and are therefore referred to by their regimental number or letter as in '304th New York' or 'G Company' for example. The few exceptions include Jim Conklin, whom we meet early in the novel and whose death Henry later witnesses, and Wilson, previously identified as the 'loud' soldier.

From his introduction in Chapter 3 through to the end of the novel there is a muted parallel between Henry and Wilson who provides a counterpointed example of another who does something he later comes to see as shameful and wants to repair. At the end of Chapter 3 he claims a premonition of his impending death in battle and asks Henry to take a packet of letters to deliver to his folks after his death, a scene that ends with Wilson making 'a quavering sob of pity for himself' (p. 25). On Henry's return to his regiment he is nursed with 'tenderness and care' by Wilson who has survived the battle Henry fled, in which half the regiment were lost, and has 'about him now a fine reliance. He showed a quiet belief in his purposes and his abilities. And this inward confidence evidently enabled him to be indifferent to little words of other men aimed at him.' (p. 73) Later when the shamefaced Wilson asks for the return of these letters Henry feels a sense of smug superiority in giving them up without comment. It makes him feel better about himself - 'he took unto himself considerable credit. It was a generous thing', and sees himself as an 'individual of extraordinary virtues'. Following this he is back again imagining the stories of war he will tell to listeners back at home, the 'central figure in blazing scenes' to the consternation of his mother and 'the young lady at the seminary' (p. 78). If Henry does not see that Wilson's case is comparable to his own that fits with the psychology of Crane's presentation of Henry's mood swings throughout the central chapters of the novel, shamed by his flight yet persistently bolstering his self-image with a variety of expedient arguments in defence of his action. At the end of Chapter 6 he hears a General shout that his unit has held the line of advancing Confederates, and Chapter 7 opens with 'The youth cringed as if discovered in a crime' and 'he felt he had been wronged'. His first argument is that in saving himself from inevitable annihilation he has done a good thing, has saved a piece of the army, and 'had proceeded according to very correct and commendable rules. His actions had been sagacious things. They had been full of strategy. They were the work of a master's legs.' He is full of self-pity, feels ill-used, one who had 'proceeded with wisdom and from the most righteous motives under heaven's blue only to be frustrated by hateful circumstances.' (p. 40)

Lost in the woods in a tangle of vines and creepers the noise of battle becomes more distant, the sun blazes forth and the 'landscape gave him assurance. A fair field holding life. It was the religion of peace.' The scene of nature consoles him and seems to empathise with his aversion to war, as though it 'would die if its timid eyes were compelled to see blood. He conceived Nature to be a woman with a deep aversion to tragedy' (p. 41). He believes the evidence of this is in the flight of a squirrel when he throws a pine cone at it, seeing its flight as a law of nature reinforcing his argument 'with proofs that lived where the sun shone'. Inevitably, in a work so imbued with irony his conviction 'that Nature was of his mind' is soon undone and in the 'religious half-light' of a chapel of arching boughs deep in the woods he comes upon the corpse of a soldier reposed against a tree, his blue uniform now 'faded to a melancholy shade of green' and his eyes 'changed to the dull hue to be seen on the side of a dead fish', black ants 'swarming greedily upon the grey face'. It is a brilliantly orchestrated scene, a moment of gothic horror in which the corpse becomes a kind of bleak parody of sculpted statuary within a chapel, rebutting Henry's idea of Nature's maternalism and her aversion to war as the 'trees about the portals of the chapel moved sougningly in a soft wind. A sad silence was upon the little guarding edifice.' (p. 42) In Chapter 11 as he joins the exodus of 'a crying mass of wagons, teams, and men' in retreat he feels he is no different from them and therefore 'not so bad after all', and that the most he could be charged with was a 'symmetrical act', that his flight was equal to the dangers he faced, the one balancing the other. This consoling argument is also short-lived as he sees 'a forward-going column of infantry' heading to 'the heart of the din' eager and proud to join battle, and the black weight of his shame returns as he regards this 'procession of chosen beings' (p. 57).

Henry's oscillations of mood between shame at his flight and his self-justifying arguments seem to come to a head in Chapter 15 where he feels Wilson's case has put his own circumstances in a much better light. He resolves to put his 'panting agonies of the past . . . out of his sight', convinces himself anew that he was 'the chosen of gods and doomed to greatness', and that 'he had fled with discretion and dignity'. From this point on as the novel enters its final phase Henry's agonies of introspection and self-analysis are temporarily displaced by his action on the battle-front, fighting like one possessed without regard for his safety and deaf to the orders to fall back. He is now looked upon 'as a war devil', praised by his lieutenant, and when he now thinks of himself sees 'he had been a barbarian, a beast', had

'fought like a pagan who defends his religion', and saw that it 'was fine, wild, and, in some ways, easy'. 'He had slept and, awakening, found himself a knight.' If there is a surviving irony about this chivalric identification in the way it maintains Henry's capacity to see himself in heroic images, he has achieved recognition amongst his peers in a scene which anticipates his own and Wilson's actions in the concluding sequences of the novel. Yet the lacerating 'phantom of the desertion in the fields' haunts him until the final pages and the 'recollection of the tattered man took all elation from the youth's veins' (p. 117). It is the tattered man who, in Chapter 10, mortally wounded himself, tries to take care of Henry whom he presumes is critically wounded and whose simple questions 'had been knife thrusts to him' and made him feel he 'could not keep his crime concealed in his bosom.' (p. 56). Henry finally recovers from this last tremor of shame through an inward assurance of 'quiet manhood, non-assertive but of sturdy and strong blood' for 'He had been to touch the great death, and found that, after all, it was but the great death. He was a man.' (p. 118). If the language here sounds a merely rhetorical affirmation of Henry's new-found manhood and his survival through a rite of passage it is justified by his valour in action, carrying his own regimental colours into battle and aiding Wilson in the capture of the Confederate colours.

The voices of the novel contribute substantially to its realism through the idiomatic vernacular speech amongst the men. But there is also a narrative voice whose idiom is persistently inventive. Consider this brief passage in Chapter 20 where Crane is describing how Henry's regiment is repulsed by the enemy as wounded comrades fall about him:

From another a shrill lamentation rang out filled with profane allusions to a general. Men ran hither and thither, seeking with their eyes roads of escape. With serene regularity, as if controlled by a schedule, bullets buffed into men. [p. 99]

It is the final sentence of this passage which is particularly compelling, first through the adjective 'serene', a word which looks wholly out of place in this context yet works to suggest the calm effortless regularity of the enemy's gunfire. Even more telling is the use of 'buffed' in the final phrase used as a synonym for more commonplace alternatives such as 'smashed' or 'thudded'. The dictionary defines 'buffed' as 'clad in buff, or 'coated or covered with buff, a leather made from buffalo hide, and one of the most common meanings of 'buff' is to polish. In fact there is an archaic meaning of the word, probably derived from Old French to mean 'a blow, stroke, bullet' and from this the terms

'buff and counterbuff' appear to have been technical terms in fencing and in boxing. It may be that Crane knew these meanings, hence the propriety of 'buffed' in this phrase. Yet it remains a striking usage whose intended effects are clearly aural, a word chosen to represent the oddly soft sound made when a bullet smacks into flesh, further evidence of the inventive power of Crane's language, a dominant feature of the novel's close-textured linguistic fertility within its overarching preoccupation with Henry's fortunes in this episode of civil war. And since I am here concerned here with aspects of narrative voice we should note how a play on 'voice' itself occurs as Crane describes the waning fire of Henry's regiment as a 'robust voice, that had come strangely from the thin ranks' now 'growing rapidly weak'.

Elsewhere the novel's voices register a variety of effects in examples of idiomatic direct speech as in the elisions of whole or parts of words in common discourse such "hollerin", "I could a' swore", "a reg'lar mess", and simple figurative expressions such as "Lost a piler men, they did. If an' ol' woman swep' up the' woods she'd git a dustpanful.". A degree of formality generally marks the language of the officers in contrast for example to the bantering comments of a battle-fatigued resting regiment who abuse Henry's company with insults, culminating in a shout of 'taunting mimicry: "Oh, mother, come quick an look at th' sojers!"' Rumour, of course, is spread by voices, and is used here to reflect the anxieties and questionings of the men whose manoeuvres throughout the battle are at the whim of their officers, strategic dispositions they are made to take and often find bewildering and appalling, and this leads to a persistently voiced contempt for their officers, Generals in particular. And we should note that the heedless assault on Confederate lines lead by Henry, Wilson and their company in the concluding scenes of the novel is fed by their rage at overhearing their regiment described by an officer as 'a lot 'a mule drivers. I can spare them best of any', as though they are expendable cannon-fodder. Finally, Crane ends the novel with 'a golden ray of sun' emerging through 'the hosts of leaden rain clouds', a prophecy of a coming peace rendered in a visual image of nature's order supervening over the affairs of men, and this is in keeping with the scriptural resonance of the order of words and the reference to ploughshares in this paragraph:

So that it came to pass that as he trudged from the place of blood and wrath his soul changed. He came from hot ploughshares to prospects of clover tranquility, and it was as if hot ploughshares were not. Scars faded as flowers.

a paragraph which echoes the prophet Isaiah's vision of the coming of Christ's kingdom on earth, when the nations 'shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more'. If Crane rebelled against the Methodist temper of his family and upbringing – his father was a noted preacher and a learned divine – his knowledge of the scriptures served him well in passages such as this which fits with the enterprise of national reconciliation explicit in the sources Crane used for information about the war in writing the novel.

2

Stephen Crane was born on November 1, 1871, six years after the end of the American Civil War which lasted from April 1861 to April 1865. I mention these dates because Crane's remarkable achievement in *The Red Badge of Courage* is to make the novel read like an authentic account of an actual soldier's experiences, whereas it is wholly imagined. In this it follows his practice in his first novel, *Maggie, a Girl of the Streets* (1893). The feeling the novel gives of the authenticity of Henry Fleming's experiences compels an interest in the sources Crane used in its making, and whether the events it describes are based on a particular battle. It is known that he read extensively in a series of memoirs of veterans from both Union and Confederate armies published under the title 'Battles and Leaders of the Civil War' in *The Century Magazine*, a series instigated by the editors of the magazine as a programme of reconciliation between the two sides to affirm belief in the idea of a newly united nation in the years after the Civil War. On the relationship of the events in the novel to an actual battle it is now widely accepted that Crane's model was the battle of Chancellorsville, a site some ten miles west of Fredericksburg, Virginia. The battle lasted from late April 1863 to May 6, and was a Confederate victory, despite the overwhelming superiority of numbers in the Union army. The Union commander, General Joseph Hooker was out-manoeuvred by General Robert E. Lee. Two documents underwrite this belief in Chancellorsville as Crane's model. In 1896 Crane published *The Little Regiment and Other Episodes of the American Civil War* including 'The Veteran', a story in which Henry Fleming tells his grandson and others of his flight from battle, and how he subsequently got used to fighting, and says 'That was at Chancellorsville'. Then in 1963, Harold R. Hungerford published an article on 'The Factual Framework of *The*

*Red Badge of Courage*³, to show how Crane used the time, place, and actions of that battle in his novel, based on Hungerford's research in historical records and other documents. However, this natural desire to place the scene of the novel within an specific historical framework is held by some commentators to be alien to Crane's concerns, which are not focussed on the Civil War in general, or its causes, but with a brief episode within it which lasts but a few days. Amy Kaplan for example in an instructive reading of the novel argues that 'Crane divorces the Civil War from its historical context by conspicuously avoiding the political, military, and geographical coordinates of the 1860s' and 'reduces both history and the historical novel to what its main character thinks of as "crimson blotches on the pages of the past"'.⁴ She reads the novel in the context of 'the heightened militarism in America and Europe at the end of the nineteenth century' which she claims shapes Crane's novel as much as does 'the historical memory of the Civil War', and sees *The Red Badge of Courage* as a critique of the contemporary militarization of American culture, a critique developed through Crane's recreation of war as 'an exotic spectacle that must be viewed by a spectator and conveyed to an audience'.

The history of the novel's composition and publication is a complicated story, and one that feeds surviving scholarly disputes about the textual authority of different editions. It was first published serially, through the agency of a newspaper syndicate, in the *Philadelphia Press* in December 1894, in a considerably shortened version of Crane's manuscript. Shortly afterwards it was syndicated in this form in newspapers across the United States. It made Crane's reputation. It was then published in book form by D. Appleton & Company of New York on October 5, 1895, restored to its full length though with substantial cuts from the text of the original manuscript. In 1982 Henry Binder published a new edition of the novel for Norton, based on Binder's textual arguments for restoring those cuts made from the manuscript for the Appleton edition. What is at issue in these arguments about rival editions is the view they take of the consistency of Crane's irony. Adherents of the Binder edition hold that the Appleton text produces a frequently incoherent narrative in regard to the ironic

3 Harold R. Hungerford, '“That Was at Chancellorsville”: The Factual Framework of *The Red Badge of Courage*', *American Literature*, Vol. 34, 1963

4 Amy Kaplan, 'The Spectacle of War in Crane's Revision of History' in *New Essays on The Red Badge of Courage*, edited by Lee Clark Mitchell, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York 1986; pp. 77-108

depiction of Henry's self-delusions, and see the final chapter as particularly incoherent. In this view Crane's central purpose is held to be a thoroughgoing ironic presentation of Henry Fleming as an egotistic idealist whose response to the realities of war reveals the shallowness of his ideals. In this reading the final paragraphs can only be read as further examples of Henry's overweening sense of himself, and the religious vocabulary employed at the end becomes a further expression of authorial irony. It will be clear from my introduction that I do not share this view. This edition follows the Appleton text, with the silent correction of several typographical errors.

The high regard in which *The Red Badge of Courage* has been held since its first publication was established in the early reviews, most notably by George Wyndham, a Member of Parliament who had formerly served in action in the Coldstream Guards. Reviewing the first British edition in the *New Review* in January 1896 he compares it with Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and Emile Zola's *The Debacle*, and concludes that Crane has created 'a truer and completer picture of war than either Tolstoy . . . or Zola', and argued that Crane 'recognized all life for a battle and this earth for a vessel lost in space'.⁵ A fitter comparison than either *War and Peace* or *The Debacle* would be with the early chapters of Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma* (1839) and the testing of its young hero's courage on the battlefields of Waterloo, though it is unlikely that Crane had read it. In his warm tribute to Crane, Joseph Conrad wrote that 'He knew little of literature, either of his own country or of any other, but he was himself a wonderful artist in words whenever he took a pen into his hand.'⁶ *The Red Badge of Courage* is strictly incomparable though Crane's impact on later novelists is clearly evident in the war novels and short stories of his compatriot Ernest Hemingway. It survives as the pre-eminent novel about the American Civil War, a subject that has occupied American novelists more than any other single national event. The one dissenting voice belongs to Crane himself, for he came to feel its success as a burden and impediment to his further career as a writer. In two letters dated January 27, 1896, but a few months after its book publication, Crane writes that he does not think the novel 'to be any great shakes',

5 George Wyndham, 'A Remarkable Book' reprinted in *Critical Essays on Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage*, edited by Donald Pizer, G. K. Hall, Boston 1990; pp. 20-9

6 Joseph Conrad, *Notes on Life and Letters*, Dent, London & Toronto 1921; pp. 67-71