The Red Badge of Courage Study Guide

The Red Badge of Courage by Stephen Crane

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Contents

Introduction

Stephen Crane's internationally acclaimed work, *The Red Badge of Courage*, was published in 1895. Unique in style and content, the novel explores the emotions of a young Civil War recruit named Henry Fleming. What is most remarkable about this classic is that the twenty-four-year-old author had never witnessed war in his life before writing this book. Crane's story developed to some degree out of his reading of war stories by Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy and the popular memoirs of Civil War veterans, yet he also deviated from these influences in his depiction of war's horror. Critics have noted that his portrait of war is an intensely psychological one, blending elements of naturalism, impressionism, and symbolism. Indeed, he broke away from his American realist contemporaries, including his mentor William Dean Howells, in his naturalistic treatment of man as an amoral creature in a deterministic world.

For this reason, critical reactions to the *The Red Badge of Courage* in 1895 were mixed: some disapproved of Crane's use of the vernacular□the common slang of everyday folk and soldiers□and the impressionistic technique. Crane also experimented with psychological realism, and his venture into the realm of the human psyche radically changed the common perception of the novel in America. As he faces combat for the first time, Henry experiences an intense array of emotions: courage, anxiety, self-confidence, fear, and egotistic zeal. Interestingly enough, the naturalistic flavor of the work operates against this serf-important ego. The individual is not of primary importance, as is evidenced time and again in the words of Henry's mother, fellow soldiers, and officers. Henry is often referred to quite impersonally as "the youth." The men, untried and untested, are treated like scared animals against the backdrop of inimitable Nature and War. Crane also used color imagery, both vibrant and subtle, to describe war. He describes a skirmish as sounding like a "crimson roar," for example, and writes of war as "the red animal." Crane's sense of color pervades the work; note his description of the sky, which remains "fairy blue" during the day, as if to underscore the indifference of nature to the carnage taking place.

Neglected for two decades after his death, Crane's work was rediscovered in the 1920s by poets and novelists, such as Amy Lowell and Sherwood Anderson, who recognized in his experiments with new subjects, themes, and forms something of the spirit of their own literary aims. In the 1950s, critical essays focused on his religious themes. Today, Crane's novel is widely read and appreciated for its amalgamation of artistic themes and techniques.

Author Biography

The youngest of fourteen children, Stephen Crane was born November 1, 1871, in Newark, New Jersey, to a Methodist minister, Jonathan Townley Crane, and Mary Helen (Peck) Crane. His interest in writing developed in part from his parents, who wrote articles of a religious nature, and from two of his brothers, who were journalists. Crane began his higher education in 1888 at Hudson River Institute and Claverack College, a military school where he developed an interest in Civil War studies and military training. Throughout his one-year college experience, he wrote for his brother Townley's news service and began a sketch of his famous first novel, *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* while still at Syracuse University. In 1891, he quit school to work full time as a reporter with Townley, and to live in the tenements of New York, where he gained firsthand knowledge of poverty.

In 1893, he privately published *Maggie* under a pseudonym, after several publishers rejected the work on the grounds that his description of slum realities would shock readers. He pioneered in writing naturalistic fiction and poetry: in *Maggie*, he wrote about a girl who becomes a prostitute and is driven to suicide by poverty and sweatshop labor. In *The Red Badge of Courage*, published in 1895, Crane stressed the irony of chance and examined man's weaknesses in the midst of impersonal forces. In this novel, which brought Crane fame, he limited his point of view to a common soldier in the Civil War and dramatized the protagonist's bewilderment and fear as he eventually overcomes his initial cowardice.

Crane also published the poetry collection *The Black Riders, and Other Lines* in 1895. This volume of free verse foreshadowed the work of the Imagist poets with its concise, vivid images. The religious poems in this volume□written about the same time as *The Red Badge*□reflect the anguish of Crane's spiritual crisis and preoccupation with questions of faith. His poetry and fiction describe man's alienation in a God-abandoned world of danger and violence. During this time, Crane continued to work as a journalist, traveling throughout the American West and Mexico for a news syndicate, and later he used these experiences as the basis for fictional works. Crane wrote four volumes of short stories, which include such notable works as "The Open Boat" and "The Monster." His free-verse poems in *War is Kind* (1899) demonstrated once again how Crane was a pathfinder for present-day poets devoted to experimental reform and non-sentimentality.

In 1879 Crane met Cora Taylor, the proprietor of a hotel, nightclub, and brothel. Together as common-law husband and wife, they moved to England where Crane formed literary friendships with Joseph Conrad, H.G. Wells, and Henry James. Shortly after this move, Crane left to report on the Spanish-American War for the New York *World*, an assignment he accepted, in part, to escape financial debts. Although Crane was ill when he returned to England, he continued writing fiction to satisfy his artistic needs and to earn money to pay his debts. One of these exercises was *Active Service*, which records his experiences as a war correspondent in the Greco-Turkish War. Critics often describe it as uneven and sprawling. By 1900, Crane's health had rapidly deteriorated due to a general disregard of his physical well-being. After several

respiratory attacks, he died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-eight in Badenweiler, Germany. His young life was a prolific one, transcended by his increasing fame as more and more readers recognized Crane's brilliant work. His *Collected Works* were published from 1925 to 1926 in twelve volumes, and in the 1950s in ten volumes.

Plot Summary

Overview

The Red Badge of Courage consists of twenty-four chapters which follow the protagonist, young Henry Fleming, through his experience as a Union Army private during the American Civil War. The book can be organized into three parts: Part One, consisting of Chapters I through VI, concerns Henry's state of mind before his first battle, and his initial war experiences, when he flees from battle; Part Two, consisting of Chapters VII through XIII, explores Henry's experiences away from his regiment; and Part Three, consisting of Chapters XIV through XXIV, focuses on Henry recovering his courage and returning to his regiment, his subsequent heroism, and his final sense of achieving manhood.

Part One

Chapters I through VI
Though published in 1895, *The Red Badge of Courage* takes place sometime during the American Civil War, which lasted from 1861 to 1865. The initial setting is the campsite of a regiment of the Union Army, fighting for the northern states. The soldiers can see the campfires of the Confederate Army, their enemy, which is fighting for the interests of the southern states. Most of the story is told from Henry's point of view, through his thoughts, memories, and perceptions. The scene opens with an argument about whether the regiment will finally move out after being in camp for several months. As Henry listens to this debate, he remembers his life back home, and his mother telling him how to behave on this first adventure off the farm: "Yer jest one little feller amongst a hull lot of others, and yeh've got to keep quiet and do what they tell yeh." Henry felt proud and daring when he left home to go to war, but now he wonders how he will do when confronted with the reality of battle. He seeks information from the tall soldier, Jim Conklin, who tells him that if everyone stands and fights, he will stay, but if everyone runs, he will run, too. This makes Henry feel better since he does not have to pretend to be more confident than his comrades.

When the regiment is ordered to move, Henry marches along, worrying about whether or not he will be brave. He studies his companions for clues to their feelings, but they sing and boast confidently. Henry becomes sullen and brooding, so that a loud soldier, Wilson, asks him what is troubling him. Henry cannot answer. As they draw close to the front line Henry feels curiosity about the battle-weary returning soldiers. He begins to fantasize that the officers are leading the soldiers into a trap. Henry is afraid to voice his fears and he feels deeply isolated. His regiment marches for days to get into position, sleeping and marching with no information, until one morning Henry is kicked awake by his commanding officer and hustled into battle.

Henry's regiment is positioned and repositioned without seeing battle, though they are frightened by retreating soldiers, dead bodies, and bullets whizzing overhead. Suddenly Henry sees the officers on their horses, and the enemy is upon them. He fires his rifle without thinking and suddenly breaks into a sweat, "a sensation that his eyeballs were about to crack like hot stones." He feels a "red rage" and fights boldly until the enemy is driven back. Henry feels joyful that he has stood up to the first test in battle, but when the enemy returns unexpectedly, Henry loses his nerve. When he sees others running, Henry runs, too. He loses all sense of direction and runs blindly in search of safety. As he runs he sees many different battle scenes, ending with the General who declares that the soldiers have held the enemy back. But Henry cannot share in the victory since he ran from the front lines.

Part Two

Chapters VII through XIII
Henry is full of conflicting feelings. On the one hand he feels like a criminal for running away, and on the other, he feels as though he has been cheated by fate of his glorious career as a brave soldier. He imagines how humiliated he will be if he returns to his regiment, and in a fit of rebellion and despair he sets off through the woods, away from the Union Army. He seeks solace in Nature, which he imagines to be a sympathetic woman "with a deep aversion to tragedy." As he goes deeper into the woods, Henry becomes more calm and rationalizes his escape. The deepening forest muffles the sound of the cannons.

At length he reaches a place where the high, arching boughs make a chapel. He softly pushes the green doors aside and enters. Pine needles make a gentle brown carpet. There is a religious half light.

Near the threshold he stops, horror-stricken at the sight of a body.

He is being looked at by a dead man who is seated with his back against a column-like tree. The corpse is dressed in a uniform that once had been blue, but was now faded to a melancholy shade of green. The corpse's eyes, which stared at Henry, had changed to the dull hue seen on the side of a dead fish. Its mouth was open and the normal red color had changed to an appalling yellow. Little ants ran over the gray skin of the corpse's face. One was trundling some sort of a bundle along his upper lip.

Henry gives a shriek as he confronts the corpse. He is momentarily turned to stone before it. He remains, staring into the corpse's liquid-looking eyes. The dead man and the living man exchange a long look.

Henry runs away, imagining that the dead man is pursuing him, and convinced that Nature has turned against him. As his wanderings bring him close to the front again, he hears a fierce battle going on and guesses that the scrimmage in which he took part earlier was just a prelude to the real battle, which is going on now. Henry encounters a

line of wounded soldiers leaving the front and falls in with them, fascinated by the soldiers' stories of the fighting. But when the Tattered Soldier asks him kindly, "Where yeh hit, ol' boy," Henry has no answer and runs away. He wishes he, too, had a "red badge of courage," a wound, that would prove that he had done his share. He runs into his old friend Jim Conklin, who is badly wounded and who dies in a field where Henry and the Tattered Soldier lead him so that the artillery will not run over his body. He abandons the Tattered Soldier in the same field to die, and wrestles with the shameful secret that he is a deserter.

Henry debates with himself about whether to return to his regiment, but is both terrified of the humiliation of being recognized as a deserter, and fearful that he cannot live up to the requirements of a soldier under fire. While he broods over his dilemma, a company of retreating soldiers sweeps past him, and Henry is once again terrified. As he tries to get information from them, he grabs a soldier who, also terrified, hits Henry on the head with his rifle. Henry is badly wounded, but manages to stagger on until he encounters a friendly person who walks him back to his regiment. His comrades had assumed that Henry had been killed, and now assume he has been wounded in battle, and so no explanations for his absence are necessary.

Part Three

Chapters XIV through XXIV
In the final section, Henry develops into a seasoned soldier. He is greatly relieved not to be exposed as a deserter and enters into the battle with a sincere desire to be brave. He saves the company flag from being captured by the enemy, and he exhorts his fellow soldiers to re-enter the battle at a critical moment. For this he is praised by his superior officers and seen to be a valiant soldier. Henry notices that he has become tranquil about the war, and is a reassuring presence to the untried men around him. In the final chapter, Henry feels "a quiet manhood, non-assertive but of sturdy and strong blood." He proceeds into the next round of battle as "a golden ray of sun came through the hosts of leaden rain clouds."

Chapter I

Chapter I Summary

There was a rumor passing through the encampment of Union soldiers, who began to tremble with eagerness; they would be going into battle tomorrow. A soldier had heard it from a friend, who heard it from a cavalryman, who had heard it from his brother who was an orderly at division headquarters. Reactions to the rumor were mixed. Some didn't believe it because they had been camped for so long. Some were anxious to go, anything to stop the boredom of staying in one place. However, there was one private who wanted to be alone with this news and his own thoughts of it.

Henry had imagined this day for quite awhile. He felt a little bit in awe of the fact that he would be engaged in possibly one of the most events of all time. As a boy, he had imagined himself a hero in wars but always thought that those days belonged to the past. This war in his own country seemed a bit surreal to him. He had tried to enlist many times but his mother had discouraged him. She didn't see this action as one of bravery and patriotism but one that would remove her son from the farm, where he could be put to much better use.

The newspaper accounts and the village gossip fueled his need to join the army. One night, as he lay in bed, he heard the church bells ringing the news of some major battle, and he enlisted the next day. His mother shed two tears when he reappeared at the farm dressed in his uniform and continued to milk the cow in front of her. He had hoped for a grander sendoff; something to remember this momentous occasion in his life. But his mother was a practical woman not given to flowery rhetoric. She had knitted him some socks; warned him about the company he should keep; and told him to stay away from liquor and read his Bible. That's how she told him goodbye. It wasn't quite the display he had hoped for but when he turned around to look at her one last time, she was on her knees praying and quivering among the peelings of the potatoes she had been paring.

Henry stopped at his old school to tell his schoolmates goodbye. He was particularly pleased when a dark-haired girl seemed to be sad at the news of his leaving. He also caught her looking at him as he left and vowed to keep that memory.

On the way to Washington, Henry's regiment feasted at each stop and received the attentions of young girls and old men alike and the young private was beginning to feel like a hero already. His term of service began with many monotonous months in camp and so when the rumor of going into battle came he had mixed feelings. The veterans told him tall tales to scare him but he didn't believe in all they told him because recruits were prime targets for their pranks.

While Henry paced in his tent, the thought suddenly came to him that he might run away from battle. Panic and fear filled him and he tried to imagine the hideous possibilities.

When his tent mates came in arguing the authenticity of the rumor, the private listened and finally asked whether they thought anybody would run. One of the men answered that usually someone does, especially it it's a first time. The private asked the older man if he had ever thought of running and the man told him that if the men around him started to run, he would probably run; but if they stood and fought, he would also stay. The young man felt some reassurance in the older man's words.

Chapter I Analysis

It's not clear what year it is, but we do know that the story takes place during the American Civil War and a young man named Henry has just joined the Union army. He has enlisted despite his mother's protests, partly out of patriotism, partly out of the romance of it. Now that the reality of a battle is imminent, he begins to question what he will do when faced with it. He challenges his personal character and motives and seems to be relieved when the older man says that there is a possibility that he himself could consider running in the heat of battle. This inner struggle of the young man is setting the stage for choices he has made and the choices yet to come.

Chapter II

Chapter II Summary

The next morning, the rumor of a battle proved to be untrue. Henry felt that his problem was not yet solved. He tried for days afterward to calculate whether or not he would run from battle and he just couldn't do it. He guessed that he would need the elements of blood, blaze and danger to fully figure into the equation.

Henry tried to measure himself by his comrades but they were giving off no airs of being scared. He tried to lead some into the discussion but no one would talk about it. Sometimes he thought they all must be heroes and sometimes all liars. He reproached himself by keeping his fears in the company of men who didn't seem to have any. He felt particular anger at the generals for making him wait to test himself.

Finally one morning the regiment was ordered to move and he thought that at last this would be his chance to prove himself. However, no battle ensued following hours and hours of marching. They made camp and settled in for the night. Henry wandered away from this comrades a little bit to lie down in the grass with his thoughts. He sure did miss being at home. He would give all the brass buttons on the continent to be milking the cows right now. He guessed he just wasn't born to be a soldier.

One of his comrades joined him and lit his pipe as they talked. He told Henry that he didn't mind all this marching if there was going to be a battle behind it but he hated to just be moved around for no purpose. He was excited about the prospect of an upcoming battle and he believed that Henry would do great things. Henry asked him how he knew he wouldn't run when the time came and the man said that that wasn't possible. He left Henry alone with his thoughts and this gap in their feelings made him feel more alone than ever. He returned to his tent and stared at the reflection of the fire on the wall of his tent until he fell asleep.

Chapter II Analysis

The rumored battle is not to take place but soon the regiment moves and the men are excited that something will happen soon, all except Henry. He has tried to work out his fear like a mathematical problem but he comes to the conclusion that it will take the fire and drama of an actual battle to test his mettle. He feels alone in his fear, too, as none of the other men talks about it or seems to be bothered by the potential carnage. He wonders if there might be something wrong with him because he is the only one who is concerned with the possibility of running. There is some foreshadowing when his comrade tells Henry that he knows he will do great things.

Chapter III

Chapter III Summary

Another day had come and gone and still no battle. The regiment was still on the move. The heat and fatigue were overwhelming and the men began to shed their knapsacks. Some left them where they fell and others tried to hide them, thinking they would be back for them soon. Relieved of their burdens, the regiment moved easier down the roads and the pine forests.

Early one morning, Henry was awakened by a kick in the leg and he found himself running down a road in a woods. His canteen banged helplessly on his leg as he tried to keep up with the other men. He heard sniper fire up ahead and knew that if he fell now he would surely be trampled to death. Therefore, he ran toward the noise and the gunfire, boxed in by his comrades on all sides. It occurred to him that the battalions were woven red and startling into the soft landscape which looked to be entirely the wrong place for a battlefield.

As they ran, the men encountered the body of a dead soldier, his eyes staring at the sky. All the men ran around him and it looked as if he were forging his own way even in his stillness. Henry would have liked to walk around and around the young man and look into his dead eyes and read the answer to the big question.

As he ran, Henry saw a house, imagined it full of enemy snipers and was sure that the generals had led them into a trap. He wondered how to best handle his perception and he fell back a bit until a lieutenant started beating him with a sword and telling him to keep up with the ranks. He sped up and secretly hated the lieutenant who had no appreciation for fine minds, being a mere brute.

The men were halted and began to build little hills out of anything they could find; anything for some protection from the sniper fire. This would go on all morning as they moved three times before they ate their noon meal. In the afternoon, the regiment went back to the same ground it had taken in the morning and Henry was no longer threatened by the landscape.

Henry's mind was still restless though and once he thought that it would be better to be killed directly and have his troubles ended. After all, death was nothing other than rest and he was amazed at himself that he could have given so much thought to the topic. When he dies, he will simply go to some other place where he would be understood. Men like the lieutenant would never understand someone like Henry with his profound and fine senses.

The skirmishes continue and a brigade to his right lunges forth with a roar. All of a sudden, he feels a hand upon his shoulder; it is one of his tent mates. He tells Henry

that this will be his first and last battle and he asked Henry to take a few things to his folks. He gave Henry a yellow envelope and walked away with death on his heels.

Chapter III Analysis

Henry is about to face his fear. However, oddly enough, it's not the fear of death. He almost seems to enjoy the thought of being transported to another place where his spirit will finally be understood. No, it's the fear of running away that plagues him. All day long, fate toys with him as the regiment moves forward and backward all day, not yet entering a battle, but close enough for Henry to see it. He's on the edge and still struggling with the strength of his courage. We begin to see sensitivity in him too as he encounters the dead soldier and wants to look into his eyes to get the answer to the Question: What is it like where you are now?

Chapter IV

Chapter IV Summary

Henry's brigade crouches among the trees at the edge of a grove and waits with their guns pointed ahead, trying to make out anything beyond the smoke. Some men came running out of the haze and the rumors and stories started to spread; the Rebels will be defeated in no time with the fighting that is going on here today. Then their tones change as a huge swarm of soldiers retreats with stragglers heading every which way. Bullets screamed over the heads of the men in the grove and their lieutenant took a bullet in his hand, carefully holding it away from his body so the blood wouldn't drip on his pants.

The men continued to swarm out from the battlefield amid catcalls and bullets whizzing by their heads. To the men in Henry's brigade, this was horror personified. Officers were swirling about on their horses, swinging their swords madly and cursing the twist of fate. The men fleeing from the battle didn't even see the men of Henry's regiment; all they could see was escape from the madness. Henry wondered what would happen if he were to wait to see the monster from which all these men were fleeing. He vowed to stay put to get a look and then he would probably run better than all of them did.

Chapter IV Analysis

This untested regiment is about to come face to face with the horrors of war, seen on the faces of their fellow soldiers. They are waiting in reserve and watching the battle on the sidelines and bantering with each other as news filters back about victories both personal and for the Union. Yet they are still on the fringe of death as they are on the fringe of the grove where they wait. Because they are untested they seem to have a calculated view of the proceedings. It is all clinical to them yet, as shown by the lieutenant whose wounded hand is held away from his body so his pants will not be stained with blood. His meager attempt at decorum shows his naiveté about the full scope of war that awaits him. Yet, Henry is beginning to show flickers of courage as he waits to see the enemy that is pushing all these men from the field. Instead of running with them, he stands and waits to look death in the eye. Only when he is satisfied with what he has seen will he run.

Chapter V

Chapter V Summary

While he waited, Henry thought that it felt like waiting for a parade to start when the circus had come to his village. A thousand colors swirled in his mind until someone cried out that the enemy was coming. The regiment readied themselves and their cartridges and watched as the brown wave of Confederate soldiers washed toward them. Henry had a moment of panic that his gun wasn't loaded; he couldn't remember doing it. Sweat rolled down his face and he wiped his eyes with his coat sleeve so that he could see ahead of him.

Then the Rebels were upon them. Henry began the process of shooting and reloading so methodically that he was like a machine, not a man. He was filled with a rage that made him want to rush forward and strangle with his bare hands. His anger was almost directed as much at the smoke that was choking him as much as the men coming to kill him. These men in brown uniforms were making low noises that came out in snarls, prayers and cheers. Henry was viewing the whole scene as if it were a dream.

One young man from the regiment had run at the first volley and he was being beaten by his lieutenant. The dazed private returned to the ranks but his hands were shaking so badly that the lieutenant had to help him load his gun. All around him, the men were dropping like felled trees. Some of the dead looked as if they were reclining for a nap but their faces betrayed the serene poses.

Finally, the gunshots slowed and the Rebels started to retreat. Henry thought he was going to suffocate in the foul, grimy air that remained. As he drank warm water from his canteen, he heard the word that they had held them back. As he surveyed the carnage around him, Henry's gaze moved to the blue sky and he marveled that nature had continued in her tranquility amidst this horror.

Chapter V Analysis

Henry's anticipation of battle becomes real as he experiences his first encounter with the enemy. He completely loses himself and any thought of running as he methodically fires his gun and struggles to breathe in the smoke and chaos. There is an inner rage that takes over and squelches the sensitive young man who worried about his fear and shame of running. His primal instincts to survive surpass anything else and that is what he does. The reader is shown the situation of one young man running from battle to prove that Henry's fears were not unfounded and not his alone. However, Henry protected his position and his honor by not faltering. Maybe now he'll know what he is capable of… a young man who can face his demons yet appreciate the tranquility of the blue sky over a field of carnage.

Chapter VI

Chapter VI Summary

Henry gradually composed himself and congratulated himself on passing this supreme test. The red horror of war had been conquered. He and his comrades engaged in small talk belying the relief that spread over all the men. Then the unimaginable happened. Someone cried out that the enemy was returning. Henry turned quickly and could see their flag bobbing and weaving through the smoke. The men groaned and resumed their positions.

The firing began again just like before, shearing off the grass and the leaves of the trees over their heads. Henry thought this line of Rebels was like a red and green dragon and he shut his eyes and waited to be gobbled up. Suddenly a man near him dropped his rifle and ran; followed quickly by another young man who had been fighting near him. Then more and more men began to run. Henry lost his bearings and swirled around in the chaos and he began to leap toward the rear of the line. With his coat flapping in the breeze, he ran and ran while the bullets zoomed overhead. He ran past a battery of gunners, a young man trying to rein in his frantic horse, and a brigade going to the relief of his own; he declared them all dead men in his mind and continued on.

At last, Henry came upon a general sitting astride a magnificent horse. He seemed to be irritated by the fluctuations in the scene playing out before him. He wanted to tell him that he thought it criminal to stay in one place and not stop this mass destruction. However, the general just watched the fates change the scene and the Union had pushed back the enemy. His obvious excitement made the horse jumpy and he kicked and swore at it, creating his own little world of joy right there on his horse.

Chapter VI Analysis

Henry thinks he is in the clear and has proven himself but that is short lived. The enemy returns almost immediately and soon he sees his almost certain death and he runs. He's not alone as there are men all around him who are dropping their weapons and retreating. Somehow, he thinks that if he runs fast enough, death won't get him but those around him who aren't running quite as fast.

Chapter VII

Chapter VII Summary

Amazingly, the Union had won the battle. Henry could hear their cheers from where he stood. He felt betrayed in some way. He had run to avoid annihilation and wasn't saving himself the same as saving a piece of the army? If every man stood to be martyred, there would be no army. It was clear to him that he had acted according to some master plan. He thought about his comrades who stood blindly and thought himself to be a superior thinker in these matters. He was angry with them yet also pitied them. He pitied himself too. He had acted out of wisdom and righteous motives yet he had been thwarted by these circumstances.

Henry walked through the woods in agony and despair, his guilt rising and the thought of his punishment pushing against his brain. After he had walked awhile, the sound of the guns disappeared and he found himself in a landscape that gave him reassurance. In the quiet of the woods, he found peace. He threw a pinecone at a squirrel that ran away chattering. He thought that nature was communing with him. Wasn't he also like this squirrel who refused to stand and watch a missile coming at him? Wasn't he in the right to have protected himself as well? He felt triumphant with this new insight.

Henry walked past a swamp and came up short at the horrible sight of a dead soldier leaning against a tree. His blue uniform had been faded to a light green. His eyes were like those of a dead fish and ants were crawling on his lips. Henry and the dead man exchanged a look for the longest time and he bolted when he was able to move his feet from this terrible sight. After a while, he paused to catch his breath and imagined he heard noises coming from the dead man's throat.

Henry was once again in despair. Nature had betrayed him. The message about the squirrel meant nothing now. The sight of the dead man with the ants crawling over his skin superseded everything and he knew that the first rule of nature applied; all life feeds on death, eating ravenously the hopes of the dead, and nature's processes were swift.

Chapter VII Analysis

Henry is amazed that his comrades were able to hold back the enemy after he and so many others had run. He tries to rationalize the fact that if he hadn't saved himself, then the army wouldn't be saved. He was one small part of an army made up of many parts, and he wondered what would happen to the army if all the small parts decided to hold fast and to be slaughtered. He thinks that he has superior perceptions regarding these matters and that the others have been foolish. In order to validate his actions, he looks for some signs in nature as he walks and seems to be satisfied with the explanation that even mere animals like the squirrel know enough not to stand in the way of destruction.

However, his positive mindset is short lived when he comes upon the body of the dead man and he knows that in the end death will win out and life will continue feeding off the remains.

Chapter VIII

Chapter VIII Summary

It was now twilight time and Henry heard the clash of armies up ahead and started running toward it. He was mildly amused that he should now be running toward something that a while ago made him flee. However, he felt compelled to see what lie behind this huge noise and had the feeling that the skirmish he and his comrades had been in had been only a minor incident. He ran, stumbling into trees and tripping over brambles and at last came to a fence and crawled over to see the ground littered with the bodies of the dead and wounded.

He ran away from this killing field and came to a road where he joined a line of wounded soldiers. They had all kinds of injuries and they were telling their stories frantically to whoever would listen. He was joined by a tattered looking man who tried to befriend him. He tried to engage Henry into conversation by asking him if that hadn't been a hell of a fight. Henry was evasive and let the man continue. The man continued to talk about the battle and asked Henry repeatedly where he had been injured. All Henry could do was gaze down at his buttons and disappear into the crowd.

Chapter VIII Analysis

Henry feels compelled to face his fear once more and runs toward the sounds of the battle up ahead. He has learned that nature will have her way with you and when it is your time to die, you will die. You can't escape it by running. Therefore, he takes the offensive and looks it in the eye. By joining the group of wounded soldiers, maybe he thinks that he can redeem himself in some way; that at least he hadn't deserted completely. This may work, yet he is embarrassed when the tattered man asks about his wounds and Henry escapes his questions and scrutiny.

Chapter IX

Chapter IX Summary

Henry continues to walk with the other wounded soldiers away from the tattered man who had been questioning him. He walks the walk of a man who is not injured, but he cannot arouse suspicion in those around him. In a way, he is envious of these men who have their wounds, their red badges of courage.

He meets up with Jim Conklin, who had been in his regiment. Jim has been mortally wounded but he insists on walking with the others. Finally, an officer tells Henry to move him off the road because an approaching battery will run him over, besides he only has a short time to live anyway.

Henry convinces Jim to walk into a nearby field and he agrees as if he finally sees some purpose to the day's events. Then Jim begins to run and suddenly stops as if he has found the place he has been searching for. His body stiffens, he falls and Henry sees for the first time that his side wounds look as if wolves had been chewing on him. Henry rages to the sky and sees the sun pasted in the sky like a red wafer.

Chapter IX Analysis

Henry is envious of what these wounded soldiers possess. Each of them now carries a red badge of courage. All he can show is his guilt and remorse as he walks stiffly with the group of courageous men. Even though he has not been in the direct line of fire, death still stalks him in the shape of his friend Jim. He rages that Jim has died and it seems that he is now fueled with a new passion to defeat his friend's real foe: death itself.

Chapter X

Chapter X Summary

Henry continues to walk with the tattered man who by now is fading fast from his own wounds. Henry can't believe that he will see the specter of death so soon after Jim's death. The man talks about his children and how he knows that he will just drop down and die, not shake and quake like Jim had done. He warns Henry to take care of his wound because sometimes the inner ones that you don't see are the worst. Henry is still hiding the fact that he has not been wounded and tells the man that he doesn't want to talk about it anymore and tells the man goodbye. As he walks away, he looks back to see the tattered man walking aimlessly and talking to himself in a field.

Henry now wished he were dead. The simple questions from the tattered man had wounded him. He felt betrayed by fate which had piled misfortunes upon him. Most of all he rebelled at the fact that nature created wars because the normal process of living and dying could not produce enough deaths. Nature had invented war and glory as a way of seducing her victims and how she must smile when she saw these men come running.

To Henry, the armies were nature's dupes. They were under the impression that they were fighting for principles and honor, which they were on the surface. Really, they had been hoodwinked into carrying rifles and doing nature's work. He felt angry that he seemed to be the only man who could see this.

Chapter X Analysis

The advice from the tattered man seems to be some symbolism for Henry. He told him to take care of his inner wound because they can be more fatal than the surface ones. Little did he know that Henry was struggling with something buried so deep that no doctor could ever find it. Henry's sensitivity continues to plague him as well. His analysis that nature has invented war to do some of its own death work is very insightful and he imagines that no one else can see this. Maybe most men are quite willing to be dupes for power and glory. For Henry they loom only as a death trap which he hopes to avoid.

Chapter XI

Chapter XI Summary

The noise of the battle was growing louder and the woods and fields were dotted with the shapes of men. There were men and wagons everywhere Henry looked. In a way, he was comforted by this sight. If these men were leaving the battlefield then he was not so bad after all. He sat down to watch the snake-like movements of the line trying to avoid trees and other obstructions.

As Henry watched these men, he was overcome with jealousy. He felt that these men had been the chosen ones and he would have gladly traded places with one of them. He wished he knew what they knew so that he could be better. His mind drifted to images of himself dying a glorious death for all to see in the hopes that his guilt will be relieved in some small part. All he could do now was march again. He didn't know if he would find his own regiment but he could fight with any.

His body screamed out in thirst and in pain and in hunger. His vision became blurry and he found it difficult to see where he was walking. He had been so consumed with his emotions that he had ignored his physical self. He pushed on to see for himself the sight of the battle that he had evaded. He tried to rationalize that in a short while, his running would be a thing of the past to be forgotten. In addition, if the Union were to be defeated in this battle, his running would be justified. After all, he had fled early, showing great insight and perception. On the other hand, if the Union prevailed, he would be doomed forever to be condemned for his crime.

He wished again that we were dead and began to contrive a tale that he could take back with him to his regiment. He could not come up with anything that he felt was convincing and so, he resigned himself to be a source of ridicule from this day forward.

Chapter XI Analysis

Henry is like a moth driven to a flame. He desperately wants to see the thing that has driven him away. It's almost as if he wants to see first hand this monster that has created his self-derision so that he can see if it has been worth it. Will the guilt and ridicule be justified by the magnitude of the monster? He is a thinking, sensitive young man but war is no place for sensitivities, only courage or cowardice. Will he be able to redeem himself in some way as the story unfolds? It seems as if he desperately wants that to happen.

Chapter XII

Chapter XII Summary

It had always been clear to Henry that he was different from other men. Laws that applied to others had always been an assault to his sensibilities. He regarded his current sufferings as unprecedented, and he reasoned that nature would not blame him for his rebellion. After all, nature had created the methods and devices that allowed his retreat in the first place. He felt no need to bow to an approaching death; nature didn't like blind submission. His egotism made him feel safe for a little while.

Henry had grandiose thoughts that he was an angel who possessed a perfect existence and all the while mankind would call him a greased pig. So why should he try to reform mankind when they would never call him an angel and be happy to call him a greased pig? Most men are more than happy to believe the worst.

He searched in his mind for a place to put his despair. Who was ultimately responsible for it? Nature, he thought. It occurred to him that he had been deemed unfit and that he must be tossed aside to make room for others who would be more worthy. He mused about his own capacity for pity and wondered why nature couldn't extend that same thing to him. Admitting to himself now that he was powerless and at nature's mercy, he vowed to find a safe place. There was a code of freedom inside him that nothing could destroy and he imagined himself thwarting the fates; he knew that he could work his way out of this.

Chapter XII Analysis

Henry is trying to rationalize his behavior and he determines that he is a superior being with superior intellect so the same rules should not apply to him. He has always been different from those around him and this was just one more circumstance. He would like to change the world and the men in it, but he is only one person and thinks that the nature of mankind is to believe the worst and he can't begin to combat that. Yet he knows that nature is ultimately more powerful than any force with which he has come in contact and for a while, he is resigned to let nature take its course. However, there is a willful spirit inside him and if he can't change his fate, maybe he can just hide from it for a little while.

Chapter XIII

Chapter XIII Summary

Suddenly Henry saw the dark waves of men coming toward him as they swept out of the wood and fields. They were charging toward him like terrified beasts. The cannons were still blasting and he was horror-stricken as he watched them close in on him. The battle was lost and these men were running for their lives. He found himself caught up in the midst of them and began to run and ask questions about what had happened. No one answered him or even seemed to see him. Finally, he asked the man next to him to tell him what was happening and the man hit him on the head with the butt of his rifle. His head seemed to be full of lightning and thunder all at the same time and he fell to his knees. Finally, he got back on his feet and lurched forward, swooning and swaying in the midst of the retreating men.

Henry was surprised that his wound didn't pain him as much as he would have imagined but he still took care not to jolt himself too much. He was shuffling along carefully when a cheery old man offered him help. As they talked, the old man said that Henry's regiment, the 304th of New York, didn't engage that day… or maybe they did, it was a terrible day and there was nothing that you could be sure of. The forest they were walking in was abuzz with men walking in frantic circles but the old man guided him, and when they came to the place, he pointed out the location of Henry's regiment, wished him well and went on his way.

Chapter XIII Analysis

The war will not let Henry alone with his philosophies and comes screaming back at him in the shape of these retreating soldiers. When his questions get him a rifle butt to the head, we see a chance for him to redeem himself. The old man has delivered him safely back to his regiment and his wound will allow him entry back into their folds. He will have a reason to have been missing and a little bit of salve for his guilt, which up until now had been his only badge.

Chapter XIV

Chapter XIV Summary

As Henry approached his regiment in the dark, he could see the shapes of sleeping men all over the ground. His old friend Wilson was standing at sentry and was relieved to see that Henry was still alive. Henry had explained that he had been separated from the regiment, had been fighting on the right and he had received a gunshot wound to the head. Wilson immediately helped get him the medical attention he needed and Henry sat and stared into the fire a long time. He looked around and saw the weary faces of the men who were sleeping all around.

He was advised not to talk or holler to avoid any pressure to his head wounds. Wilson commended him for his bravery; a lesser man would have sought out a hospital long ago for such a wound. Wilson gave up his blankets for Henry and the young man lay down and fell asleep to the sounds of spattered musketry.

Chapter XIV Analysis

Henry returns to the safe environment of his comrades and receives medical attention for his head wound. He tells them that he has been shot and no one questions it because it does look like a bullet had grazed him. They are glad to see him again, but will they still welcome him when the cover of darkness is gone and daylight is shed on his story and his wound?

Chapter XV

Chapter XV Summary

When Henry woke up, he felt like he had been asleep for a thousand years. He looked around him and the bodies of the sleeping men were so still that for a few moments he thought he was surrounded by corpses. Then he came to his senses and recognized the motionless men as those of his regiment. A fire crackled close by and he could hear the bugle calls in camps all over the forested area.

He sat up slowly and tentatively touched the bandaged wound on his head. His friend asked him how he felt and he said that he was in pretty bad shape. His friend had hoped he would be better this morning and moved to check his bandage. Henry raged at his clumsiness and his friend backed off and suggested that he would feel better if he ate something.

As Henry watched his friend, he noticed a remarkable change in him since the days they were first together. He was no more a loud soldier but a young man of character and quiet concern. Henry felt that he could rely on him and this newfound confidence validated that his friend was very much like himself and he was very much relieved for this new dimension to their friendship.

As they talked over breakfast, Henry told him that Jim Conklin had died. His friend told him that many of the regiment had been scattered and were returning one by one, just as Henry had done. Henry was only half pleased. He had spent so much time grappling with the fates and the course of the universe and he felt betrayed by this revelation. It became clear to him that the other men had shared his same perception of annihilation and had bolted from the battle scene. He was not the only one with the superior intelligence to have reasoned this out and acted on it. Apparently, he was not a unique man after all. Since many of the men had had the same thoughts that he had, there could be nothing singular about his. Therefore, he buried his thoughts of his flight and returned fully to his regiment. All that was left was a tiny speck of guilt and his pride was returning full force.

Chapter XV Analysis

Henry has been wounded physically for sure, but he realizes an even deeper wound when he finds out that he was not alone in his act of fleeting from the battle. Clearly, there were others who shared his fear and his perspective on the situation and this puts him as an equal with those to whom he originally thought himself superior. So what was the point to all the ramblings in his head as he wrestled with the nature of things? His code and his sense of propriety demanded that he come up with some noble reason for his actions. Even though he didn't fully understand it yet, his soul would not allow him to consider himself to be just like everyone else. Maybe in the end, he realizes that it is the

same fears and passions that drive each man and in that sense you can never really flee.

Chapter XVI

Chapter XVI Summary

Henry's regiment was standing at order waiting for the command to march when he remembered his friend's yellow envelope still in his pocket. He started to say something to his friend but changed his mind, deciding not to deal this little blow of embarrassment. His friend had become much more sensitive lately and he didn't want to wound him in any way. In a way, his decision to not mention the envelope made him feel superior to his friend and gave him an air of patronizing good humor.

Now his thoughts turned to the agonies, mental and physical, of the previous day. He forgave himself for his mental ravings because they were all right for the time. Now out of the heat of battle, he reasoned that only the doomed and the damned could roar at nature. A man with a full stomach and self-respect would never consider it. His newfound contentment gave him no desire to set things straight about his own experience either. Today nature was fair and glorious, not the evil manipulator of yesterday.

He returned to his belief in the positive course of his life and he imagined telling his stories in the candlelight of parlors back home. He especially hoped that his mother and that dark haired girl would drink in his tales with the feminine ardor of believing the stories of loved ones who risked all on the field of battle.

Chapter XVI Analysis

Henry's sense of well being is returning slowly. Just days ago he might have teased his friend for giving him his personal effects in the yellow envelope when today the friend was still very much alive. He feels no need to hold this over his head, although his new benevolence has given him just a bit of a superior feeling. In the light of day, he knows that he was a victim of circumstance yesterday and this was not at all a judgment of his entire character. He once again finds himself in sync with nature and life is once again green and hopeful.

Chapter XVII

Chapter XVII Summary

Henry's regiment was marching out to relieve another that had been lying too long in low wet trenches. As they assumed their positions, they could see the long stretch of cleared woods and see the flashes of rifle shots coming from the woods behind. The guns increased their activity with no let up and it began to rattle the men's nerves. They began to grouse and complain until they were silenced by an officer who told them to save their strength for the fighting coming up.

As they waited in line in the forest, a gust of the battle came sweeping over them where they lay. The front line shifted a little and then they waited in silence as you do in the moments before a storm. Then a single rifle shot rang out and others followed in rapid succession. The woods were filled with the crashes and clashes of war. Soon all the noises together seemed to make one continuous roar. The men steeled themselves against their fatigue and despair as they waited for the enemy. Some flinched but mostly they stood as still as men tied to stakes.

Chapter XVII Analysis

Henry's mental battle is sidelined temporarily as he and his regiment prepare to encounter the enemy. They are exhausted from the previous day's activities, yet they hold their positions. Are they now to be sacrificed and mowed down in their vulnerable states?

Chapter XVIII

Chapter XVIII Summary

Today, Henry was trapped by the advance of the enemy and he felt like a hunted animal. It was so different from yesterday's experience when he had fought and run and had many adventures. On this day, he had no time to think. Moreover, he was angry that he had not had sufficient time to recuperate from the previous day. He was exhausted and wanted a reprieve, but none was in sight.

Henry was particularly irritated that the enemy never seemed to tire, but there was nothing else to do but assume his battle position and wait. He felt that he and his comrades were being taunted and the fact that he had no way of taking vengeance yet made him think all sorts of dark thoughts. At that moment he would have given his life to see their faces contorted in fear.

Then the rifle shots rang out and it seemed to Henry that they were as animals engaged in a death match in a dark pit. He didn't realize how it had happened but Henry found himself now on his feet behind a little tree where he intended to stay. Deep in his heart, he felt that his regiment would be victorious and he felt the need to fight harder. The flames and the smoke swirled around him, the only thing he was sure of was the direction of the enemy and he continued to shoot at the changing forms in front of him. He was firing like a madman and at one point had to be called back to the line, as he was so engrossed in shooting that he didn't realize that he was standing out in front all alone.

From that point on, he was labeled as a war devil. It had been revealed to him that he was indeed a beast. That meant also that he had been a tremendous figure and in that, he had overcome obstacles that he had admitted only to himself. His lieutenant was particularly pleased with his intensity and the other men looked at him off and on with envy.

Chapter XVIII Analysis

This day pushes Henry to the limits of his physical capabilities and he is angry that he is being tested so soon after the trials of the day before. He is even angrier that he has had no time to reflect on yesterday and the day that stretches out before him now. Somewhere he finds the resolve and the energy and rallies to counter the madness around him. Maybe a man can run on blind rage. Maybe Henry is capable of that too. His initial thrill to the call of glory and patriotism has evolved into the less romantic will to survive.

Chapter XIX

Chapter XIX Summary

The fighting had stopped for now and things were quiet except for the random shots from some cannons. The cry of a wounded man could now be heard, and Henry and his friend rushed to give him aid. At first, they were afraid to go near him because of his screams but they persevered and determined that he needed water desperately. Henry and his friend took off to find a stream that someone thought was nearby but they had no such luck.

As they were slowly returning to their regiment, they caught the conversation of some officers on the road. As the two young men were unnoticed, they crouched down and listened hoping for some major secret that would someday be of historical importance. They heard the general say that he wanted to charge the enemy and wanted to know if the lieutenant had any regiment he could spare. To the surprise of Henry and his friend, the lieutenant offered up their own regiment saying that they fight like mule drivers. The general told him to get them ready but also cautioned him that many of them would not return.

Henry and his friend sped back to camp with their secret and told their lieutenant what they had overheard. The regiment was pleased that they would be charging and most of them rallied to their feet in anticipation. The officers began to push the men into a more organized unit in preparation of their orders. Henry and his friend stood at attention and shot each other knowing glances of the secret that they shared: not many of them would survive.

Chapter XIX Analysis

The time is near for Henry to prove what he really is… a man of sensitive perceptions or a war beast. There is pride when he hears the lieutenant speak of his regiment being strong as mule drivers and that pride seems to have blocked out the other part of that sentence… that many of them will not return from the charge. They're running on the energy derived from being singled out for their accomplishments and they want the chance to prove the general wrong.

Chapter XX

Chapter XX Summary

The regiment was unaware of the machinery behind the orders; all they knew was that they were charging toward an unseen enemy buried in clumps of trees that lay before them. Henry found himself in front of the line, his eyes riveted to that clump of trees. The Rebel yell could be heard coming out at them from all kinds of places. Then the song of bullets began felling men in grotesque agonies.

It seemed to Henry that he saw everything clearer at this moment. Every blade of grass was sharper and greener and he could even see the transparent vapor that hung in the air in sheets around him. He saw every rough edge of every tree and every face of every man he passed along his path. He was caught up now in the frenzy that pushed the unit forward. It was almost a delirium that is heedless to death and despair. The pace consumed too much of the men's energy and the unit began to slow down. They were approaching more cautiously now.

In this slow dream-like state, the men could see their comrades falling and shrieking. They seemed almost paralyzed by the scene and lingered in this strange silence until the voice of the lieutenant rang out and ordered them to move ahead. Therefore, they all resumed their fighting and their advance toward the enemy lines. Henry found himself next to the flag bearer and ran next to him, never taking his eyes off the glorious red, white and blue colors waving in front of him. At that moment, it seemed like a goddess urging him on and giving him hope. He felt protected by it and kept near it and the power he had given it.

In the next instant, the flag bearer was killed and he wrestled for a few moments to release the flagpole from the dead man's hands. When he looked back, the corpse swayed forward and fell.

Chapter XX Analysis

In this chapter, Henry feels more alive than he ever has. All his senses are heightened. He sees everything more vividly and hears every sound acutely. He is running on primal energy now. There is no time to think, only react. When he finds himself following the folds of the flag, maybe he is reminded of what brought him to this place to begin with. Maybe there will be some validation of all his physical and emotional torment. There is a sense that after he picks up the flag and carries it forward he will have found a renewed purpose and energy and will confidently continue his duty.

Chapter XXI

Chapter XXI Summary

Henry and his friend scuffled a bit over which one should carry the flag. They each were satisfied with the other's possession of it but they each also felt it necessary to offer to carry it, recognizing the greater risk to the one holding it.

The regiment halted in some trees for a short while and continued to be assaulted by rifle fire. They simply bowed their heads and accepted their fate. At the back of the unit, there were men who continued to show more spirit and fired irritably at the enemy. For the most part, though, the unit was a machine that had just run down.

As the smoke began to clear once more, Henry saw the horrible sight of the brown-suited enemy rushing at them at close range. Again, more smoke filled the air between them as the regiment did its work. Chaos and panic set in as the men lost their bearings. Even the bravest among them could be seen cowering behind some sort of cover or even just burying their faces in their hands to await their fate.

Henry walked into the middle of the fracas, planted the flag and stood firm, waiting for the worst. When the lieutenant yelled out that the enemy was coming at them again, Henry turned and saw the enemy so close that he could look into their eyes. Almost instantly, he lost sight of them as the smoke from the guns blinded him once more. The regiment took full advantage of having their enemy at close range and fought like wild animals.

Almost as quickly as they had appeared, the enemy was now gone. Henry looked out at what could have been an empty stage except for a few stragglers. Many of those in the regiment sprang out from behind their hiding places and danced for joy. For so long they had seemed like failures; these little battles did nothing but demonstrate that they couldn't fight very well. This sudden twist of fate had shown them that the impossible was indeed possible and they looked around seeing each other with new eyes.

Chapter XXI Analysis

Henry's new found respect for his friend exhibits in his wanting to allow him the honor of carrying the flag, while not wanting him to knowing that whoever carries it will be at greater risk during the battle. He has matured into allowing others the noble traits that before he thought he was the only one who possessed. It seems that they are to be tested once more. This fierce battle is the worst one yet and it has pushed all of them to their limits. Throughout it all, Henry holds his stance with the flag and comes out unscathed as the enemy retreats almost as quickly as it had appeared. Maybe sees that it is better to stand than to run, and that there is honor in standing up for your beliefs just as he stood up and held the flag in place. Sometimes facing your worst fear is the only way to make it disappear.

Chapter XXII

Chapter XXII Summary

Suddenly the regiment knew that they were safe. There was no firing that threatened them. In the distance, they heard colossal noises, but where they stood it was silent. As they moved back to their own lines, some of the men moved frantically as if to keep ahead of danger and the embarrassment of somehow being killed outside a battle situation. When they were safely entrenched again, they surveyed the ground that they had covered and found that it had not been much at all. That fact was validated when the officer who had called them mule drivers earlier in the day chastised their lieutenant for stopping short of a success.

The negative report rippled down the line and the men were incredulous about the officer's opinion of them. They had given all they had and that should have been enough. They were deeply wounded at the injustice of the comment. Their only consolation was in talking about what they would do to him if they ever got the chance. They were interrupted by a couple of men who rushed up to tell what they had overheard the colonel tell their lieutenant; that the two young men who had carried the flag were very good men and deserved to be major generals. Henry and his friend chided them for fibbing about it but secretly they exchanged a glance of joy and congratulations and instantly forgot all their indignations from just a few minutes before.

Chapter XXII Analysis

There are some people who are never satisfied with any effort and find others lacking all the time. That is where they get their power. They think that will spur people on but it only serves to kill spirit. That seems to be the officer's role. The men of the regiment know they have done their best in this battle and are satisfied with the work they have done today. Henry and his friend are particularly pleased that their efforts have been noticed today and that their bravery and conviction have been rewarded, if only in a small way. Sometimes those small personal victories hold the most significance. It makes the reader wonder if he will ride out the war in this little light of glory and if he will be able to sustain his convictions.

Chapter XXIII

Chapter XXIII Summary

Shockingly the woods once again poured forth more brown-suited soldiers. Henry felt a sense of self-confidence as he watched them dodge and weave to avoid the shells that were headed their way. Off to the side he saw two blue regiments engaged with two brown regiments and for a minute, they looked as if their fighting were over some personal matter, not a major battle in this war.

The fighting continued with maniacal frenzy. Everywhere he looked, there were wild rushes of men surging backward and then forward. His own regiment rushed out when their time came in a barbaric cry of pain and rage. Henry remained absorbed in watching the action as he was still in place bearing the flag. The enemy came so close to their line that their faces could be seen very clearly. Immediately the regiment began firing, not waiting for the order from the lieutenant. However, Henry remained fixed in his position. He had resolved not to budge no matter what happened.

Then the blue-suited men began to drop all around him. Some of the wounded tried to crawl away and others just lay where they had fallen. Henry could see that his friend was still alive as was the lieutenant although his yells came now with far less enthusiasm. The regiment was growing weaker and weaker.

Chapter XXIII Analysis

The men in Henry's regiment thought that they were safe but they have again been attacked. At first, Henry feels confidence in their being able to push the enemy back but the fighting is too close now and too many men are falling. The regiment is literally bleeding to death. Nevertheless, Henry is steadfast in his conviction no matter the circumstances. Maybe he will take on the role of an officer as the colonel had suggested earlier in the day.

Chapter XXIV

Chapter XXIV Summary

The colonel appeared out of nowhere and he was running along the back of the line with other officers following him. He was shouting that they had to charge. Their tone indicated that they anticipated some rebellion among the men but they found none, for they all knew that it would be certain death to stay in that place. Their only hope was to push the enemy away from a fence where they had dug in.

Henry moved to the front with the flag and urged his comrades to follow. He himself felt that at that moment he was capable of greatness, even a tremendous death. He thought of the bullets now only as things that could stop him from reaching his destination, nothing more. As he ran, he thought of the moment of contact between the two sides and the thought spurred him on to run even faster. The space between them disappeared.

Suddenly he realized that he was close to the flag of the enemy's regiment and that possessing it would be a true accomplishment. It would show to others that he had been in close combat and it would secure his reputation as being daring. He lunged forward to grab it but missed. Through the mist he saw that their flag bearer had been wounded and was near death but was still holding onto his flag. Henry's friend saw this scene as well, leaped at the man, and wrestled the flag from his dead grasp. When the men around them saw this, they broke out in whoops and hollers and threw whatever hats they had into the air.

After the men had celebrated sufficiently, they sat by the old fence that had shielded their enemy a few minutes ago and shot randomly at distant marks. Henry was content to lie in the tall grass and rest and look at the enemy flag held by his friend.

Chapter XXIV Analysis

Finally, the battle is over in this long day and Henry's regiment has taken some blows but has withstood the multiple assaults. It has been a day to try even the most veteran of soldiers but Henry has emerged victorious, his initial fears now a ghost left far behind. Not only has he conquered his fears, but also he is active in leading his fellow soldiers in the attack and in wanting to seize the Confederate flag. The fact that his friend has actually taken control of the flag is perfectly fine with him too. He has grown a new spirit of generosity and delights in his friend's conquest. During the course of this day, Henry has run the gamut of emotions from sensitive soul searching to leading battle charges. He has covered much ground, literally and figuratively, on this important day.

Chapter XXV

Chapter XXV Summary

Henry could see that there was movement among the men along the line and wondered what could possibly happen next. He and his friend just waited and watched until the regiment received its orders to retrace the path they had come. The men groaned and got up on their feet to tramp slowly across the field which they had run across not too long ago.

As he marched, Henry had a chance to think and it took him a little while to shake off his battle mindset and return to normal. At last he was able to comprehend what he had experienced. He had come through a land of upheavals, a land filled with blood and passion, and he had survived. Then he moved on to his failures and his achievements of late. He was proud of his behavior on the battlefield today and pleased that his comrades saw him and knew him to be a man of courage. He delighted in the memories of those long minutes.

Henry realized that he was good, and he recalled the compliments showered on him by different officers during the day. Only briefly did his flight from the first skirmish cross his mind. He thought about his battle with the universe while he tried to reconcile his behavior. He blushed a bit in shame and hoped his comrades could not detect it.

Henry also thought about the tattered man who had broken away from the group and wandered into a field to die and he was ashamed that he didn't go after him. He brooded about it for a while and determined that this would bother him for the rest of his life. However, gradually he was able to get some perspective on it and decided that the event would simply serve as a balance to his egotism. He would make it a good part of himself and it would make him deal with care from now on. He would try to be a good man.

Henry had emerged from the struggles of this day with new eyes. He could see that sometimes the blows you were dealt were sometimes blessings in disguise. It was simply a masterful way of the universe correcting him. The day had put death and life in perspective for him and his soul changed.

Henry's brigade marched in the rain, fatigued and despondent, but he smiled to himself and anticipated the future because he had rid himself of the nightmare of battle. He was no longer a war beast, but a creature who would seek an existence of soft and eternal peace.

Chapter XXV Analysis

Henry's self-analysis at the end of this exhausting day shows a young man with much promise and maturity. He has learned a lifetime of lessons in this one day: he has fled,

yet returned; he has deserted a comrade, and lived to regret it; and he has led men into battle, and lived to tell about it. At the beginning, he thinks he is the only man in the group who has perceptions keen enough to sort through what is really happening. However, by the end of the story, he has matured enough to know that most of these men were feeling the same things he was. The only difference is maybe some maturity or perspective in how they all worked through it. He has made his peace with the universe too in realizing that it had not conspired to betray him, but to teach him. Henry's story is every soldier's story in the challenges and horrors he faced and ultimately overcame, and the reader is impressed by the distance he has come in such a remarkably short time. Maybe the universe has given him a few extra gifts after all.

Characters

Henry Fleming

Henry, the protagonist of the novel, is a naive, young farm boy from New York state whose dreams of glorious battle lead him to sign up in the Union Army against his mother's wishes. Though he gets his notion of war from books about Greek warriors, his initial confrontation with true war perplexes him. Upon entering battle and witnessing the confusion and panic of his regiment, he flees into the woods and feels like a coward. After he receives his "red badge of courage," a head wound, this shame begins to disappear, however. He realizes that there is no dishonor fleeing certain death. He becomes confident and is happy to be called a "wild cat" by the superior officer. Some critics view Henry's journey as his initiation into manhood. Others feel that he is turned away from the possibility of self-knowledge into self-serving egotism.

In terms of the first critical view, that Crane depicts a boy becoming a man, Henry's battle with the landscape mirrors his internal struggle with his vanity and immaturity. He grows in self-awareness by learning the true meaning of honor and courage, as the novel ends with his renewed faith in life. He achieves an epiphany, as demonstrated in his instinctive desire to grab the Union flag and run with it resolutely to join his men in battle. The conclusion, thus, shows Henry as a man, aware of his maturity, his soul changed. Crane paints nature in this last scene as benevolent, with images of clover, flowers, and the clouds parting to reveal the warmth and light of the sun. As far as the second perspective is concerned, Henry is selfishly involved in his own honor and self-preservation. He does not help his fellow soldiers but is more caught up in how he looks. An example of this theory is when the young boy deserts the tattered soldier as the dying soldier answers the young boy's questions on honor and cowardice.

What distinguishes *The Red Badge of Courage* from other war stories is the compelling chronicle of the inner emotions common to any new member of the infantry. Thus, Henry deals with doubt, fear, chaos, and confusion even during tense, death-filled moments.

Cheery Soldier

The Cheery Soldier, another soldier-companion known in terms of his physical traits, is Henry's unidentified, strangely lighthearted guide back to his regiment; this mysterious person has been seen by critics as an allegorical figure akin to the ancient gods and goddesses, who lent their help to the heroes of myth. It is during the climax of the book that this character appears. After Henry receives his red badge of courage, he feels lost in the maze of the forest, and is suddenly taken up by the Cheery Soldier. Somehow, he is able to thread "the tangled forest with a strange fortune." The stranger manages to avoid guards and patrols and, at the same time, carry on an almost incoherent monologue ("There was shootin' here an' shootin' there ...). When they reach the

campfire where Henry's regiment is resting for the night, the owner of the cheery voice bids him farewell and disappears into the night.

Jim Conklin

Basically, the characters in *The Red Badge of Courage* outside of Henry Fleming are foils (contrasts) to his character. Jim Conklin, the tall soldier, as he is described by Crane, is more realistic about war than Henry. He tells Henry: "You jest wait 'til tomorrow and you'll see one of the biggest battles ever was." Without illusions about war, Jim is not as impatient as Henry is to enter into the fray. When asked by Henry if any of the soldiers will run from battle, Jim answers that some will run, but most will stay and fight after they start shooting. If most of the company runs, says Jim, he will run too, but if most stay and fight, he will follow. Jim further points out that all the new recruits are untried in battle. Jim also enjoys being the center of attention when he spreads the rumor of troop movement and encounter with the enemy. He is mortally wounded in battle and tells Henry that the great fear he has is that he will fall down in the road and be run over by a wagon. He then races off into a field, repelling Henry's and the tattered soldier's attempts to help him. Jim dies a true hero.

Ma Fleming

The mother of Henry, simply known as Ma Fleming, offers homespun advice to her boy as he goes to war. She tells him that he will be one among many and to be quiet and do what he is told. She also adds, perhaps prophetically: "If so be a time comes when yeh have to be kilt or do a mean thing, why, Henry don't think of anything 'cept what's right ..." These cautionary statements, some critics believe, underscore Henry's romantic egocentric belief in his own indestructibility. Ma Heming is a hard-working, uneducated farm woman, who reluctantly lets her son go to war since she knows the reality of war. Fleming identifies nature as a female figure like his mother, who disapproves of the fighting and wants him to escape.

Lt. Hasbrouck

Most of the officers in this novel are viewed as arrogant and insensitive, but this lieutenant is depicted as an ideal military man encouraging his soldiers to behave correctly in battle and praising them for their bravery. He lauds Henry's and Wilson's particular bravery and valor when they fight and seize the flag.

Loud Soldier

See Wilson.

Officers

Most of the officers, including the general and colonel, in this novel are viewed as arrogant and insensitive. They refer to the recruits as "muledrivers." Lieutenant Hasbrouk differs in that he enourages his soldiers to behave correctly in battle and praises them for their bravery. He lauds Henry's and Wilson's particular bravery and valor when they fight and seize the flag.

Tall Soldier

See Jim Conklin.

Veterans

The group of experienced soldiers in the book provides a contrast to the young recruits. They refer to the newcomers as "fresh fish." These veterans tell tall tales and are tattered and torn in appearance. The fact that they are not particularly distinguishable as individuals□as are most of the recruits, too□indicates the utter cruelty of an impersonal war that takes lives without concern or compassion

Wilson

Known as the Loud Soldier, Wilson is a boastful new recruit anxious to fight and unable to admit the possibility of his cowardice in the initial confrontation with the enemy. After battle, however, he becomes strangely quiet and is no longer his usual bombastic self. He reveals his fears through his action of giving Henry a packet of letters for Wilson's family in case he does not return home. The battle clearly has a profound effect on him; he assists his fellow soldiers and takes a prominent position in later battles.

Themes

Naturalism

In *The Red Badge of Courage*, a novel about a young recruit's first encounter with real battle, Crane emphasizes the lack of free choice in human conduct. Chapter Four in particular highlights a common theme in Crane's work□the naturalistic belief in the indifference of nature. The theory of naturalism is a critical term applied to a method of literary composition that aims at a detached, scientific objectivity in the treatment of a natural man. It also holds to the theory of determinism and leans further towards pessimism, since man is controlled by his instincts or passions, or by his social and economic environment and circumstances. In any case, man is not free to choose. The theory emanates from the nineteenth-century concern for scientific thought, as exemplified in economic determinism (Karl Marx) and biological determinism (Charles Darwin). Darwinism was one of the popular social philosophies of Crane's day, and it stressed that, as in the animal world, only the stronger individuals survive.

Crane candidly reports the sordid and brutish actions of human conduct as well as the testing of human strength in the context of violence and struggle. Henry does not find solace in nature, but rather is deluded into feeling secure in an unfriendly context. As he moves deeper into the woods, away from the sounds of the guns and fighting, he comes upon a lovely spot, where the boughs of the trees form a chapel-like area with brown pine needles for the carpet. To his horror, he discovers a ghastly corpse with small ants crawling across its face, quite a shocking discovery in an otherwise sedate, peaceful scene. Henry cries out when he sees the corpse, then gazes at it intently before he gathers the strength to run away. As he flees, he is afraid that the dead man is somehow pursuing him. Finally, he stops to listen whether the corpse is calling after him. He views nature as an impersonal force able to go tranquilly on with its process like "a woman with a deep aversion to tragedy."

Coming of Age

"It is only by immersion in the flux of experience that man becomes disciplined and develops in character, conscience or soul," stated R.W. Stallman in his introduction to *The Red Badge of Courage*. The battle is where life's flux is strongest, hence the potential for change is greatest. "From the start Henry recognizes the necessity for change, but wars against it. But man must lose his soul in order to save it. The youth develops into the veteran," wrote Stallman. The book can be read as a story of the coming of age of Henry Fleming: his development from an innocent boy to a mature man. A novel that describes the development of a young character into a more aware adult is often called a bildungsroman. Henry encounters a hostile environment and is changed by the horror of the forest-chapel, where he comes into contact with a decomposing corpse, he is also changed by the awesome death of Jim Conklin and by the patient and selfless suffering of "the tattered man." Prompted by a naive sense of

patriotism and heroism to enlist, Henry is quickly disillusioned with the life of a common soldier. In the end, he grows in self-confidence and has a clearer grasp of reality.

Appearance vs. Reality

Henry Fleming has a romantic or egotistic illusion about his place in the world and about war. Crane traces the process of education by which the youth matures and changes his thoughts about reality. Man must believe that he is a rational creature whose mind can control and give significance to human conduct. Yet Crane demonstrates that man is at the mercy not only of his illusions and instincts but of superior social and cosmic forces. Rather than present to the reader the romantic, idealized notion of war, he presents its antithesis chaotic, brutal savagery. By contrast, the book and film *Gone With the Wind* represents a romanticized version of the Civil War.

Alienation and Loneliness

In *The Red Badge of Courage*, Henry Fleming often feels alone and isolated. The woods and the smoke separate the soldiers and contribute greatly to their feelings of panic during battle. Critic Robert Shulman, writing in *American Literature*, suggested that Crane had to "test the possibilities and failures of community, an understandable interest since for him the solitary self has limited resources and God and nature are both inaccessible as sources of sustaining power." War accentuates Fleming's feeling of isolation because he faces death so often. He encounters the dead Union soldier propped against a tree and stares at him until he feels the ghastly figure is staring at him. His companions Jim Conklin and "the tattered man" both die, leaving him saddened and confused.

Style

Point of View

The book is told in third-person from a young recruit's point of view and is a series of sensory impressions and dialogues between the soldiers. Henry Fleming, the main character, is anxious to understand what the other soldiers are feeling: Will they run during fire? Are they as scared as he? He misses his routine of milking the brindle cows at his family's farm. His comrades, Wilson, a vociferous solider who brags about "licking" the enemy, and Jim Conklin, who warns that there will be a big battle, serve to accentuate the young man's innocence. He is impatient to see action in battle, without really knowing what it is all about. When Henry asks the loud soldier if he will run from battle if he is scared, he answers, laughing at the boy, "I'll do my share of the fightin'." The actual skirmish kills half the regiment and gives Henry a head wound, ironically, by a fellow Union soldier. He is ashamed, however, that he ran from the ferocious gunfire and fears shame when returning to the troops. When his comrades believe his pretense that his wound was inflicted in battle, he becomes a renewed person and heroically seizes the Union flag from a dead soldier and advances to his personal victory.

Symbolism

Critics acknowledge Crane as an exceptional artist, with superb skills in imagery, metaphor, similes, and irony. He has even been referred to as a Symbolist in the tradition of the French poet Mallarme and the American author Edgar Allen Poe. The red badge□a soldier's wound□is the most obvious symbol in the book and the source of its greatest irony. While it is meant to be a sign of honor and courage, gamed from true action in war, Henry's red badge was given to him by accident by one of his own army and clearly not from brave battle. Henry lies about this and creates a pretense to his men that is accepted. Crane also used many nature symbols. For example, the images of flowers in bloom represent the transient, temporary nature of life. A metaphor (a figure of speech in which an object represents something else quite distinct from it) often cited by critics is the wafer-sun. Henry sees this upon his awareness of the reality of death, and it represents the communion wafer in an ecclesiastical service. It also suggests a flat, artificial "sun," glued onto a flat, imitation sky, thus diminishing Nature, eliminating Heaven, and enlarging the youth as the only observer.

Animal Imagery

Crane's novel abounds in animal imagery. The campfires of the enemy are red eyes shining in the dark, like those of predatory animals. When the battle begins, Henry fights like a "pestered animal ... worried by dogs," and on the third day he plunges like "a mad horse" at the Confederate flag. Crane writes that the soldiers fight like "wild cats." Further, the regiments resemble black, serpent-like columns of regiments entering the

cover of night (this imagery is known as a simile, i.e, the writer's representation of unlike objects through use of "like" or "as" comparisons). The use of animal imagery helps convey the deterministic point of view of the literary naturalist, that men are caught like animals in a world they cannot control. In the chapters where Henry runs away in fear, he does so like a creature seeking his own self-preservation. He throws a pine cone at a squirrel, which runs frightened up a tree. The squirrel "did not stand stolidly baring his furry belly to the missile.... On the contrary, he had fled as fast as his legs could carry him...." Henry feels freed since "Nature had given him a sign."

Irony

Much has been written about the novel's irony, a literary technique that demonstrates a discrepancy between the appearance and reality of a situation. Crane presents different perspectives of a situation so that the reader must put together what is really true. The book's title is the supreme irony since Henry receives his wound from a crazed soldier who hits the boy on the head with a rifle butt after Henry has fled from a skirmish. The battle is also ironic, for after Henry's great display of bravery on the third day of battle, the army retreats and all the ground won at great cost is given up. Crane makes the sacrifices of war seem futile and the suffering not worth the cost. The moral, however, is implicit, for at the end of the novel, Henry feels a sense of pride as a full-fledged man. Some critics dispute the fact that there is a moral sense at all in this book. In any case, there is a sense that Henry has undergone some transformation.

Setting

The scenario of the battle is Chancellorsville, Virginia, near Richmond, and the time is probably 1863. The Battle of Chancellorsville that pitted 130,000 Union soldiers under General Joseph Hooker against 60,000 Confederates under General Robert E. Lee eventually resulted in a large defeat for the Union troops. Hooker crossed the Rappahannock River and advanced to attack the Rebels from behind Chancellorsville. Lee and Jackson split their troops and surprised Hooker. Union casualties in the Battle included 1,606 killed and 9,762 wounded, with nearly 6,000 missing Union generals were fired by Lincoln for not having a cohesive battle plan. In the novel, Henry Fleming runs into the woods for refuge from the fire. The woods becomes an ironic setting, since it offers neither salvation nor peace, but another look at death in the form of a partially decomposed corpse.

Historical Context

Memoirs of the Civil War

The war literature of the Civil War era glorified heroism and the courage of soldiers on both sides of the war. The numerous memoirs of war veterans influenced Crane, who had a lifelong obsession with war. He drew upon the common pattern of these chronicles for the major plot elements in *The Red Badge of Courage*: the sentimental expectation of the young recruit moved to enlist by patriotic rhetoric and heroic fantasies of war; the resistance of his parents to his enlistment; his anxiety over the apparent confusion and purposelessness of troop movements; his doubts about his personal courage; the dissipation of his heroic illusions in the first battle; his grumbling about the incompetency of generals; and other such motifs, incidents, and situations.

The editors of *Century Magazine* published *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, one of Crane's primary sources in writing *The Red Badge of Courage*. The editors hoped to foster mutual respect for both armies, focusing on the bonds forged by soldiers in the field rather than the horrors they endured. Crane's novel challenged these popular tales, which often featured heroes on the battlefield rewarded by the love of an awed heroine at home. In the book, Henry Fleming has similar romantic notions of warfare but they are dispelled when he encounters the grim reality of the battlefield. Crane felt that fiction should present a slice out of life. Many readers had a difficult time believing he had not yet experienced war firsthand, because he was so successful at depicting the war.

The battle he describes in *The Red Badge of Courage* is based on the Battle of Chancellorsville. Besides referring to the Rappahannock River and the city of Richmond, the author discusses the fact that Fleming's regiment passes Washington, D.C., before quartering on the Rappahannock. The setting, geographical terrain, and the references to the weather parallel historical facts. Essentially, the battle was fought in the wilderness a few miles west of Fredencksburg, Virginia. Although this provides the scenario for the book, precise identification of the battle location is clearly not a primary consideration for Crane.

The Progress of Civilization and Urban Poor

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, it was assumed that humankind was steadily progressing. Advancements in technology, rapid industrialization, and improved education made some people feel that humans□and in particular Americans□had evolved beyond the destruction and ignorance that had taken place in the past. Yet wars continued to be fought and, with the improvement of weapons technology, became bloodier and more deadly. Crane points out in his novel that though education and religion were supposed to have "civilized" men and "checked" their passions, war continued to rage, and violence had only increased. His words proved visionary when the United States engaged in an international conflict, the Spanish-American War, in

1898 (Crane covered the conflict as a war correspondent). Crane studied New York City street life, since he spent much of his early adult life living among its poor and "fringe element." He frequently kept company with prostitutes and street people, even disguising himself as a transient in order to leam how they lived and were treated by society. He was one of the first "literary bohemians," so-called because he cavorted with disreputable characters and chose unusual subjects for his fiction (many did not consider the lower classes to be a fitting topic for literary endeavors). Crane was able to use his city experiences in the novel by drawing on the grim parallels between poverty-stricken urban streets and bloody war zones. In the novel, he refers to the approaching army as a train and the soldiers as the spokes of the wheels.

The Spanish-American War

Crane was enraptured by war stories and often entered battle as a war correspondent. On February 15, 1898, the *Maine*, an American ship in Cuba, was blown up in Havana harbor, and by April, the United States was at war with Spain. Crane was working on a writing project at this time but decided to volunteer for service. He had already experienced the fear of war when he boarded a boat loaded with ammunition and arms for Cuba and escaped Spanish gunboats. Crane's ship, the *Commodore*, eventually sank off the Florida coast, but he was able to escape into a ten-foot dinghy. He fictionalized this event in his short story "The Open Boat."

There were several causes of the war. American investments in Cuba were being threatened by continual Cuban revolts against Spanish rule. The Ostend Manifesto, a declaration issued by the United States, stated that if Spain refused to cede Cuba to the United States, it would be justified in taking the island by force. Also, the United States had been channeling money and munitions to aid Cuba, an act that created ill-feeling between the Spanish and American governments. The growth of anti-Spanish sentiment was fueled by "yellow journalism" tactics used during a newspaper war between Joseph Pulitzer of the *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst of the *New York Journal*, which saw the publication of many stories and pictures of the ill-fated Cuban insurrection of 1895. These stories were designed to secure newspaper readers, but they were often exaggerated accounts.

The most tangible causes of the war were the destruction of the Maine, at a cost of 260 officers and crew, and the *New York Journal*'s famous masthead declaring, "Remember the Maine!", which roused the nation to action. Finally, President McKinley had to ask for a declaration of war against Spain. The war was easily won by the United States, and the Treaty of Paris in 1898 gave Cuba its independence. The United States became its protector, and the country also took possession of Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippine Islands. Further, the United States became a naval power and a leader in world affairs.

Critical Overview

After being serialized in magazines, *The Red Badge of Courage* was finally published in book form in the fall of 1895 to favorable reviews. George Wyndham, writing in the *New Review*, stated, "Mr. Crane has surely contrived a masterpiece." Stephen Crane's literary reputation was firmly established, and the twenty-four-year-old author's imaginative genius was hailed by critics and readers here and in England. As his letters of late 1895 and early 1896 suggest, Stephen Crane's literary situation was somewhat problematic, paradoxically because of the immense success of *The Red Badge of Courage*. It created something of a sensation in late 1895, and before the end of that year, Crane was a famous man, an international celebrity known on both sides of the Atlantic for his brilliant and uncompromisingly realistic portrayal of war. But he also spent money and suffered some notoriety as a bohemian and social radical. When the book was published, many readers disliked it, faulting its artificial style, far-fetched metaphors, and improper grammar and usage. His literary mentors, William Dean Howells and Hamlin Garland, thought the book less significant than his first novel, *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*, which was in the realistic mode, and more in line with their style.

Crane's fame spread after his death. His work enjoyed a particular revival of interest in the 1920s, the decade of social iconoclasts. Joseph Hergesheimer, writing in *The Work of Stephen Crane*, called the work "both a novel and a narrative," adding, "I have an idea, too, that as it is poetry, lyrical as well as epic; no one, certainly, can deny that it is completely classic in its movement, its pace and return." *The Red Badge* was so original that it created many imitations of its style, and its realistic view of war.

During the 1950s, there was heavy critical emphasis on the religious themes in the novel. Crane had grown up in a deeply religious environment since his father had been a Methodist minister and his mother a devout Christian who often contributed articles to religious publications. Thus, critics equated one of Crane's characters in his book, Jim Conklin, with Christ. In particular, critic R.W. Stallman believed *The Red Badge of Courage* to be laden with religious symbols. In an introduction to *The Red Badge of Courage*, he alludes to the famous "sun-like-a-wafer" image as being particularly relevant as a religious symbol. Most of the criticism since the 1950s, however, has taken a different course, that of exploring Crane's artistic technique which blended elements of symbolism, impressionism, and naturalism.

One critic who places Crane in the Naturalistic school is Charles Child Walcutt. In his book *American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream*, Walcutt remarked that Crane "makes us see Henry Fleming as an emotional puppet controlled by whatever sight he sees at the moment." He added that Henry reacts "in a blind rage that turns him into an animal" without moral sense when he returns to war after receiving a wound to his head. Other critics focus on Crane's use of color imagery or impressionism (the use of light and color to describe an event or feeling). Another school of critics views Crane's depiction of Henry Fleming as an overly egocentric individual. His frequent ideas of his powers in war seem grandiose, but that is typical of one so young; it is difficult to see

how he could tell his own war story otherwise. Crane himself was a young man when he wrote about Fleming, their ages just three to five years apart. This is a young man's novel about the meaning and the nature of being young. Therefore, the education of the naive, proud man is central to Crane's intent.

For the most part, critics agree that Crane disregarded plot and character delineation in his work and that he was unable to sustain longer works of fiction. However, with the proliferation of Crane scholarship during the past twenty years, his literary reputation has grown. One of the reasons why modern critics enjoy the novel is because it deals with a popular theme today: the isolated individual and his relationship to society. If human life has any meaning, man must look to it himself, Crane suggests, in a philosophy akin to today's existentialism. One critic, *American Literature* contributor Robert Shulman, observed that Crane's work shows him "responding to one of the deepest tendencies of his American society, its tendency to isolate individuals, to fragment selves and relations, and to substitute technological, contractual, and bureaucratic ties for those of human compassion and community." Critics contend that despite Crane's minor flaws, his artistry lies in his ability to convey a personal vision based on his own "quality of personal honesty" and that he pioneered a modern form of fiction that superceded the genteel realism of late nineteenth-century American literature.

Criticism

- In the following essay, Cumberland, an assistant professor at Seattle University, provides a general overview of the novel and notes how Crane broke with Romantic traditions of the time by refusing to idealize war.
- In the following excerpt, Breslin explains how Henry, though he at first flees from battle, matures into a soldier able to accept the "inevitability of death."
- In the following excerpt, Solomon claims that with The Red Badge of Courage, Crane revolutionized how modern war novels would be told.

Critical Essay #1

In the following essay, Cumberland, an assistant professor at Seattle University, provides a general overview of the novel and notes how Crane broke with Romantic traditions of the time by refusing to idealize war.

Stephen Crane's Civil War novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, is remarkable in two ways: it is a quintessential coming-of-age story, and it is written in a style so original that many consider it to be the first modern American novel. Though written thirty years after the Civil War, in 1895, by a young man who had never seen warfare, Crane captured not only the disorientation and chaos of the battlefield, but found completely original ways to describe a foot soldier's experience. And though *The Red Badge of Courage* is part of a long tradition of war narratives, which extends from Homer's *The Iliad* to Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Crane departed from that tradition by presenting war from the point of view of a single ignorant private. No effort is made to characterize war as noble, death as glorious, or soldiers as particularly brave or admirable. Instead, *The Red Badge of Courage* is a study of the interior life of a young man, Henry Fleming, who is in turn confused, terrified, humiliated, and, ultimately, matured by his exposure to pitched battle.

Crane's strategy in *The Red Badge of Courage* is to create a sense of chaos and helplessness by withholding from the reader information that the common soldier would not have known. Henry Fleming does not know where he is at any time. It seems to the characters, as to the reader, that Fleming and his fellow soldiers are being arbitrarily moved around in mysterious patterns that suit the generals but mean nothing to the soldiers in the ranks. Scholars have determined from internal evidence, however, that Crane set his story during the Battle of Chancellorsville which took place from May 2 to May 6,1863, near the little town of Chancellorsville, Virginia, and not far from Fredricksburg. Understanding something of that battle offers a useful perspective on Henry Fleming's odyssey to manhood, and on the settings in which each of his adventures takes place.

The Battle of Chancellorsville was fought between the Army of the Potomac, led by the Union general loseph Hooker, and the Confederate army led by Robert E. Lee. The town was near the Rappahannock River and surrounded by a pine scrub forest called "The Wilderness " A great deal of the fighting took place in this forest, which accounts for the setting of Henry Fleming's period of desertion, and for the cathedral-like clearing in the woods where he encounters the dead soldier. Many of the skirmishes and encounters between the two armies also took place on the fields between Fredricksburg and the Wilderness. This accounts for the battle scenes in which Henry finds himself running wildly at the enemy over an open plain.

Lee's army was outnumbered by two to one, but his clever maneuvering gave the Rebel army the early advantage. Using his brilliant cavalry division, led by Stonewall Jackson, Lee forced the superior Federal troops into a desperate retreat on the first day of the

battle. Henry Fleming sees these retreating soldiers as he approaches the front and fantasizes that the generals are leading them into a trap. He was not far from the truth.

Unfortunately for Lee, Stonewall Jackson received the wound that killed him in this battle, and on the second day the Federals pushed the Rebels back in one of the few bayonet charges of the war. Instead of pressing his advantage, however, General Hooker ordered the Union Army to fall back, allowing Lee to reform his line and continue the fight for another two days. The dismay and distrust that Crane represents among the Federal foot soldiers was felt in real life by the Officers who served under Hooker. According to James M. McPherson in *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, upon receiving orders to retreat instead of advance, one of Hooker's officers reported that he believed his commanding officer to be "a whipped man." By the end of the encounter, Lee had triumphed over the Union Army and scored one of the most resounding triumphs of the war. President Lincoln, when told of Hooker's defeat despite his tremendous advantage, exclaimed, "My God! My God! What will the country say?"

Henry Fleming, as a Union soldier being ordered here and there during one of the great fiascoes of the Civil War, is neither irrational nor cowardly for his perception of the battle as insane chaos. Nor can he be blamed for his decision to leave the front, since everything he is asked to do seems pointless. *The Red Badge of Courage* is a study in what a rational person can do in an irrational situation. Ultimately Fleming realizes that he must face his fear and reservations for the sake of his reputation and for the sake of his comrades.

Stephen Crane (1871-1900) was writing in the last decade of the century, a period that has a distinctive quality in all aspects of the arts. Romanticism had dominated literary and visual arts for the first half of the nineteenth century, and the time was ripe for new ideas as the twentieth century approached.

The Romantic movement was represented in England by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron, and Shelley, and in America by the Transcendentalists (Emerson, Thoreau, and Fuller, among others) and by Walt Whitman. It was a movement characterized by three attributes: 1) free and natural expression, rather than the artificial formality of the eighteenth century; 2) the elevation of the common man as a subject of literature; and 3) the use of the natural landscape to reflect human passion and expressiveness. Two schools of thought emerged in mid-century as literature developed beyond Romanticism and then reacted against these trends in writing: Realism and Impressionism.

Realism is related to Romanticism in that it draws upon the life of the common man and woman for material and inspiration. But instead of idealizing the lives of common folk, the Realists focus on the brutal and ugly aspects of lower class people and their difficult and often sordid lives. Clearly Stephen Crane is writing in the Realistic manner, since his subjects are common men presented with all their problems and flaws. A romantic telling of this story would have emphasized courage, heroism, and glorious death rather than cowardice, fear, and rotten corpses. A romantic telling of this story might also have implied that the soldiers were dying in a glorious cause of which God approved, and that

their souls were going straight to heaven. Crane's realistic version of war offers the soldier no such comfort. In the realistic universe there is no God to make human folly seem sane. Henry Fleming is forced to confront the fact of death and the inevitability of his own death.

Another way in which Realism is related to but goes beyond Romanticism is in the use of nature. The Romantics projected their own imaginations onto the natural landscape, giving it magical powers. Realists, responding to Darwin's discovery of natural selection, saw nature in terms of the survival of the fittest. Part of Henry Fleming's maturing process requires that he accept the fact that predators□the enemy□are determined to kill him. He decides that it is better to be the predator and to kill his enemy than to allow the enemy to kill him.

Crane's writing style has also been described as Impressionism, a phenomenon in the literary world that responded to a corresponding impulse in the art world. French Impressionism was a school of painting that rejected Romanticism in the visual arts for the detached observation of nature. Impressionists tried to paint what they saw without adding content from their own emotions or imagination. Monet, Renoir, Cezanne, and Manet attempted to paint nature by breaking their observations down into pieces of light and showing each part independently from every other part. The same principle can be observed in *The Red Badge of Courage* because Crane describes Fleming's experiences almost as a collection of snapshots, without a coherent time sequence to give them meaning. Henry observes many things, but none of them hang together; no picture emerges that makes sense to him. Just as art critics had to learn how to understand Impressionism, Henry learns to find order in his apparently meaningless universe.

The Red Badge of Courage is a favorite text for intermediate and high school students because it is one of the great coming-of-age novels. How does a young person assume his or her place in the world of adult responsibilities? Every young person must confront the fear associated with being expected to take charge rather than to be taken care of. Sometimes the moment comes in a decision, as when Huckleberry Finn decides to help his friend Jim, even if he gets in trouble for supporting an escaped slave. Sometimes it comes in acceptance of the inevitable, as when Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind* recognizes that many people depend upon her resourcefulness for their survival. *The Red Badge of Courage* offers a powerful text on the internal struggle of one young person to accept the great□even unreasonable□responsibilities placed upon him that will transform him from a child to an adult. This is the primary thematic approach for younger students.

For older students, the historical and stylistic themes described in the sections above give a rich context to *The Red Badge of Courage*. In addition, one can also examine Crane's text for his rich use of symbolism. Even as the "red badge" in the title represents courage, or the courage it takes to suffer a bleeding wound, so Crane uses the landscape, the other soldiers, and an array of colors and images to represent Henry Fleming's inner state. One of the most fruitful methods to use in reading *The Red Badge of Courage* is to trace Crane's descriptions of the weather, the countryside,

animals, colors, sounds, or any other element one chooses, to Henry's state of mind. Crane always reflects his protagonist's feelings in some concrete object in the environment. One of the most famous images from this book, for instance, comes after Henry's friend Jim Conklin has just died: "The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer." The red color reflects Jim's death, while the flatness of the sun being "pasted" reflects Henry's sense of being numbed, flattened by his loss. The use of the word "wafer," however, suggests the euchanstic wafer, the body of Christ offered in communion, with all its connotations of sacrificial death and redemption.

Source: Sharon Cumberland, in an essay for *Novels for Students*, Gale, 1998.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Breslin explains how Henry, though he at first flees from battle, matures into a soldier able to accept the "inevitability of death."

The Red Badge of Courage is a familiar book, and its genre is in part familiar as well—the tale of initiation, the adventure story. Crane himself meant it to be a popular novel, a potboiler to bring in money while he worked on more serious projects. But the novel does differ, almost startlingly, from other treatments of the Civil War in the same period, not so much by what it includes as by what it leaves out. The most striking feature of *The Red Badge of Courage* is the absence of any social context in which the fighting takes place. One could almost say that Crane writes of war in the abstract. Such a treatment is sometimes met with in twentieth-century literature, but it was quite unorthodox in 1895. In particular, Crane's exclusion of the intense religious and moral atmosphere surrounding the Civil War, juxtaposed with an often-remarked abundance of religious terminology and imagery, makes *The Red Badge* point beyond itself in a way that its author perhaps did not consciously intend.

The excitement of warfare fascinated Crane, but he also seems to have understood, by the time he wrote *The Red Badge*, that impassive, matter-of-fact demeanor that had puzzled him in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* [edited by Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, 1887]. When one must be prepared to kill or to be killed in the course of a day's work, one cannot afford the luxury of introspection; presumably, any moral and psychological reservations about taking and risking life have been worked out beforehand, and if not, they must simply be laid aside. Like the surgeon, the soldier must disengage his imagination from what he is doing. The danger of this necessary detachment is an alienation of action from meaning. One can see this excessive detachment in the memoirs of the Civil War's most distinguished general, Ulysses S. Grant, who also had a civilian career of some importance.

Grant never wanted to enter the military in the first place, but went to West Point on his father's insistence. After his graduation, the Mexican War broke out, and his comments on it show a curious split between his private and soldierly morality:

Generally the officers were indifferent whether the annexation was consummated or not; but not so all of them. For myself, I was bitterly opposed to the measure, and to this day regard the war as one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation. It was an instance of a republic following the bad example of European monarchies, in not considering justice in their desire to acquire additional territory.

But he fought in the Mexican War, and he describes his battles with cold lucidity, scarcely bothering to reconcile his opinion with his participation. He spent the interlude between the Mexican War and the Civil War as a civilian, then returned to service because he supported the Union cause—but not for Lincoln's reasons. He thought secession legal, and his objection was merely that the South had resisted Constitutional

power instead of seceding years earlier when it had the chance. He did not believe that the country must be all slave or all free, though he changed his mind later, after the war.

Grant was an even-tempered soldier, a paragon of military professionalism. His accounts of battles read like military dispatches and, as Wilson points out, he avoids vivid descriptions of the havoc of war. The mature Henry Fleming, though not as stolid as Grant, has the same poker-faced detachment from his own feelings. It is his cowardice, rather than his aggression, that tempts him toward guilty introspection; but though the occasion is different, the response is the same. Henry must deliberately suspend the contemplative faculty. His success as a soldier depends not so much upon a moral or spiritual growth as upon a practical adjustment to the psychology of combat.

In the course of *The Red Badge of Courage*, Henry Fleming learns, essentially, what his mother had told him before his enlistment: "Don't go a-thinkin' you can lick the hull rebel army at the start, because yeh can't. Yer jest one little feller amongst a hull lot of others and yeh've got to keep quiet an' do what they tell yeh." This does not mean that he learns humility in the moral sense, but rather that he gains a practical sense of perspective which enables him to be a better soldier. His education is largely outside the realm of morality. The goal which prompted his enlistment, recognition, never changes. Even in the last charge, he is not interested in winning the battle as much as in being a hero:

The youth had resolved not to budge whatever should happen. Some arrows of scorn that had buned themselves in his heart, had generated strange and unspeakable hatreds. It was clear to him that his final and absolute revenge was to be achieved by his dead body lying, torn and guttering, upon the field. This was to be a poignant retaliation upon the officer who had said "mule driver," and later "mud digger " For in all the wild graspings of his mind for a unit responsible for his sufferings and commotions, he always seized upon the man who had dubbed him wrongly.

Henry enlists against the advice of his mother, who "had affected to look with some contempt upon the quality of his war ardor and patriotism." We share her doubts as Henry bids farewell to his schoolmates. He was nobody; now he is suddenly special, and this is what he wants. However, the gesture of enlistment commits him to action, and the rest of the story deals with his acceptance of the less pleasant aspects of soldiership.

In camp, young Fleming seems to think the whole world is concerned with one question: will he run? It is significant that Jim Conklin echoes his mother's advice, saying, "All yeh got t'do is t'sit down an' wait as quiet as yeh kin," and "it ain't likely they'll [the regiment] lick th' hull rebel army all-to-onct th' first time." He who thinks he can lick the whole rebel army also is responsible for the whole Union defeat if he does not. Henry's egotism places an enormous burden on his shoulders. In trying to set his mind at rest, he intuitively looks in the right direction: he tries to determine what the others are feeling; but it does not occur to him that no one else is any more likely to admit self-doubt than he is.

During the regiment's advance, the thing that most troubles Henry is that he doesn't know what to expect He cannot reason ahead. Already, there have been false rumors of battle. As the men cross the stream, he expects they will meet the enemy. They do not. His resolution is shaken, partially because he has too much "opportunity to reflect." Doubtless, the corpse which the regiment has just passed contributes to his faded spirits; it is his first encounter with death. He lingers, tempted by "the impulse of the living to try to read in dead eyes the answer to the Question." The question will be answered, most bitterly, by the eyes of another corpse in the forest "chapel."

Fleming is still decidedly puffed up with his own importance. He wants to cry out a warning to turn back, but:

He saw that even if the men were tottering with fear, they would laugh at his warning. They would jeer him and if practicable pelt him with missiles.

That they might ignore him never enters his mind. His self-engrossment also blinds him to the situation around him, a blindness dangerous in warfare. He is so busy feeling tragically responsible that he lags behind the march.

During the battle that follows, Henry tries various conventional ways of calming himself. He belittles death and affirms his patriotic solidarity. He convinces himself that death is "nothing but rest"; and later, he has "suddenly lost concern for himself," and feels lost in a larger identity, "a regiment, an army, a cause, or a country" that is "in a crisis." Although the collective identity remains vague throughout the book, the communal sense deepens as Henry matures. Henry also begins to think of himself as a craftsman at work□he begins to acquire some military professionalism.

Once again, it is surprise that upsets Henry's delicate balance. The enemy's counterattack is unexpected. Crane compares the resentment of Henry's regiment to a rebellion against a god: "The slaves toiling in the temple of this god began to feel rebellion at his harsh tasks." Clearly, this is a pagan rather than Christian deity. Shortly afterward Henry, seeing the first cowards depart, runs also. His fear is more intense once he runs, again because of uncertainty, for "Death about to thrust him between the shoulder blades was far more dreadful than death about to smite him between the eyes."

Fleeing into the woods to escape death, Henry finds death. Here he asks "the question," first of Nature, then of the corpse. The question may be phrased, roughly: Is there any hope of escape from death? At first, the peace of the forest and the nimble escape of the squirrel reassure him; but the animal pouncing on the fish in black water is an equally true example of natural law; and the corpse answers the question with a resounding, No. It is not, in this context, a particular corpse, but the image of Henry's fate and everyone else's. It is the shrine of the war god.

Olov Fryckstedt sees in this passage a satire on "the transcendentalist and romantic view that nature could give man direct answers to his petty problems." To this one might add that the Calvinists, with their argument of design in nature, also fall in the domain of

this satire. These two groups are the prime believers in the holy war, the "army of the Lord."

The real point of the scene for Henry, though, is an acceptance of the reality and inevitability of death. War, for Crane, is a heightened instance of the indifferent, Darwinistic universe which, for [Theodore] Dreiser (or the Crane of *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets*) found its symbol in the modern city. Henry, by enlisting, has committed himself to live by the laws of such a universe. When all roads lead to death, there is nothing to run from and nothing to run to. If there is no escape, one must simply make the best of the situation. When Henry's reverie is interrupted by the sound of fighting, he begins running back toward the battle.

The forest chapel scene gives Henry the laws of his reality, but it is no spur to his conscience, which alas remains impenitent. His re-entry into the war is not accomplished by penitence, but by perspective:

It suddenly occurred to the youth that the fight in which he had been was, after all, but perfunctory popping....
Reflecting, he saw a sort of humor in the point of view of himself and his fellows during the late encounter. They had taken themselves and the enemy very seriously and had imagined that they were enshrining their reputations for ever in the hearts of their countrymen, while, as to fact, the affair would appear in printed reports under a meek and immaterial title.

Before Henry reaches his regiment, he falls in with the wounded, and there ensues a scene which would draw guilt from anyone with talent for that emotion. First a soldier queries him about his non-existent wound; again he tries to escape but, as before, runs from bad to worse. He finds his old friend, Jim Conklin, dying a hideous death. Henry's reaction to all this is not guilt but anger:

The youth turned, with sudden, livid rage, toward the battlefield. He shook his fist. He seemed about to deliver a Philippic.

"Hell□"

The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer.

Whether he shakes his fist at the battlefield, as appears, or at the sky, as Stallman claims the manuscript proves, he does not shake it at himself.

Bashed over the head with a rifle, Fleming discovers a pragmatism upon returning to his regiment. If no one can tell the difference between a drubbing and a war wound, then none exists, according to William James; and Fleming cheerfully accepts the verdict. It is important to realize that Crane does not condemn him for this, that indeed, from this point on, Henry fights as admirably as any man who did not run; and that a confession might have destroyed his confidence. Courage and conscience, as Grant's memoirs show, need not influence each other.

All the while, Henry continues to value his own standing more than victory. He says that he has "never lost his greed for a victory," but admits, "in a half-apologetic manner to his conscience," that "a defeat for the army this time might mean many favorable things for him." If everyone retreats, his own cowardice will not stand out by contrast. He has gained a certain poise when he returns. He shakes off the terrible fantasy suggested by the thought of the wounded sleeping around him at dawn. He is less easily overcome by appearances, and he ceases his railing at circumstances. Yet, as a passage deleted from the final version makes explicit, his confidence is just as self-centered as his fear:

But he was now, in a measure, a successful man, and he could no longer tolerate in himself a spirit of fellowship for poets. He abandoned them. Their songs about black landscape were of no importance to him, since his new eyes said that his landscape was not black. People who called landscape black were idiots.

At about this time, Henry convinces himself of something which, though it puts him at ease in battle, is directly contrary to fact: that he is somehow "chosen of gods and doomed to greatness." This feeling expands to almost mystical delusions of invulnerability later on. A heightened awareness reminiscent of Farquar's in Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" is accompanied by:

a mad enthusiasm that, it seemed, would be incapable of checking itself before granite and brass. There was the delirium that encounters despair and death, and is heedless and blind to the odds. It is a temporary but sublime absence of selfishness.

Crane obviously admires this courage, even though it does not belong to a man but merely possesses him sporadically, and even though it is grounded in illusion. The same Henry Fleming, moments after his "temporary but sublime absence of selfishness," has a tug-of-war with his companion for the regimental flag.

At the very end of the story, Henry is on the verge of guilt, but casts it out. He had run not because he was a coward, but because he was caught in "the wild mistakes and ravings of a novice who did not comprehend." Not only that, he rationalizes, his sin "would make a sobering balance. It would become a good part of him." In *The Veteran*, Crane portrays Henry Fleming as an old man still impenitent and still, to his death, genuinely courageous.

It is, I believe, Henry's impenitence, combined with a real physical courage, that is responsible for the irony of *The Red Badge of Courage*. (One feels that Crane himself was only half-conscious of the implications of his treatment, but the irony, however it came there, is in the book.) Crane's whole life testifies to his admiration for courage, and Henry Fleming unquestionably has it. But we want more from our heroes than courage: we want them to be great souls. Crane is telling us not only that courage can exist without a great soul but, further, that brave men often cannot afford great souls. We have nurtured the myth that all our wars have been fought, with great reluctance, on grounds of principle or conscience, and we do not like to be told otherwise. Crane's potboiler proves to be a more subversive book than his slum tales that shocked so many readers of the 1890s.

Source: Paul Breslin, *"Courage and Convention: The Red Badge of Courage,"* in *The Yale Review*, December, 1976, pp. 209-22.

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Solomon claims that with The Red Badge of Courage, Crane revolutionized how modern war novels would be told.

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 two-fold. 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.

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 [in "Foreword," *Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction*] any novel must find a form that will encompass both the individual and social experiences.

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 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 wandenng 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." 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.'" 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." 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." 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." 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...."

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" 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?" 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 manque, if we are to measure them by the usual Christian ethic. But *The Red Badge of Courage* is awar 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 antisocial 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." 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 naive 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?'," 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."

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." 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'," 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" 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." 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 nightmare 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," 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" 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."

Source: Eric Solomon, "The Structure of *The Red Badge of Courage*," in *Modern Fiction Studies*, Autumn, 1959, pp. 220-34.

Adaptations

The Red Badge of Courage was adapted as a film by John Huston, starring Audie Murphy, Bill Mauldin, and Andy Devine, Universal, 1951; available from MCA/Universal Home Video.

The Red Badge of Courage also appears on an educational video, with a number of different interpretations of Crane's masterpiece; produced by Thomas S. Klise Company.

There is an abridged recording of the book, narrated by actor Richard Crenna, and published by Listen for Pleasure, Downsview, Ontario, 1985. Two audio cassettes, 120 minutes, and Dolby processed.

The sound recording of the complete, unabridged version of *The Red Badge of Courage*, narrated by Frank Muller, is available from Recorded Books, Charlotte Hall, MD, 1981. Three audio cassettes, 270 minutes.

A sound recording with a lecture by Warren French on *The Red Badge of Courage*, published by Everett/Edwards, Deland, FL, 1972. One audio cassette, 38 minutes.

Topics for Further Study

Compare the attitudes of individual soldiers in Crane's battle scenes in *The Red Badge of Courage* with the attitude of individual Southern soldiers in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*.

Research the literary tenets of naturalism, realism, and existentialism in books by French and Russian authors as well as American.

Study the Battle of Chancellorsville and compare it to the fictional rendition of this battle in *The Red Badge of Courage*.

Compare and Contrast

1860s: The Southern cotton states, in a pro-secession move to protect their slave-based economy, formed The Confederate States of America. When the Civil War ended, the Industrial Revolution began in the U.S., and "King Cotton" was replaced by the growth of manufacturing in the South.

1890s: With increased industrialization, labor strikes, such as the 1892 Homestead Steel strike and the 1894 Pullman railroad strike, erupted; a financial depression takes place between 1892 and 1894.

Today: Labor strikes continue in transportation, civil service, and other sectors; financial insecurities exist among employees in downsizing corporations. The federal government must reduce a multi-billion dollar deficit, yet the stock market continues its strong performance.

1860s: The American Civil War pits brother against brother, Southerner against Northerner. About 90,000 Confederate and 93,000 Union soldiers died, more men, in proportion to population, than the British and French lost in World War I.

1890s: The sinking of the Maine ignites the Spanish-American War of 1898, which is won by the United States.

Today: The U.S. is experiencing a period of peace and relative prosperity. The Cold War with the Soviet Union has ended, and the U.S. is not at war with any country.

1860s: Cannons, rifles and revolvers, and swords and bayonets are an army's primary weapons during the Civil War.

1890s: Naval power becomes increasingly important in warfare. Battleships and armored cruisers help the United States win the Spanish-American War.

Today: Computers, satellites, stealth technology, and laser-guided weapons have changed the face of war. Several countries have nuclear capabilities.

What Do I Read Next?

All Quiet on the Western Front by Erich Maria Remarque concerns a young German infantryman's experience in World War I.

The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger relates in first-person the story of a adolescent in New York City and his ironic, and comic, views of life.

Gone With the Wind by Margaret Mitchell tells the saga of a young woman's life during the Civil War and Reconstruction periods in the South.

Homage to Catalonia by George Orwell is a British soldier's firsthand account of the Spanish Civil War, during which he fought with the Republicans against fascism.

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Donald Pizer, "Nineteenth-Century American Naturalism: An Essay in Definition," *Bucknell University Review*, Fall, 1965.

Robert Shulman, "Community, Perception, and the Development of Stephen Crane From 'The Red Badge' to 'The Open Boat'," in *American Literature*, Vol. 50, No. 3, November, 1978, pp. 441-60.

R.W. Stallman, "Introduction" in *The Red Badge of Courage: An Episode of the American Civil War*, by Stephen Crane, The Modern Library, 1951, pp. v-xxxvii.

R.W. Stallman, *Stephen Crane, an Omnibus*, New York: 1952.

Charles Child Walcutt, "Stephen Crane: Naturalist and Impressionist," in his *American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1956, pp. 66-86.

Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the literature of the American Civil War*, 1962 New York: Norton, 1994.

George Wyndham, "A Remarkable Book," in *New Review*, Vol. XIV, No. 80, January, 1896, pp. 30-40.

Further Reading

Maurice Bassan, editor, *Stephen Crane: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Prentice-Hall, 1967.
This collection is notable for its reprint of essays by other famous authors of Crane's period who report on his personality ("When I Knew Stephen Crane" by Willa Cather) and the sensational effect of the publication of *The Red Badge of Courage* ("His War Book" by Joseph Conrad). This collection also contains the famous essay "Crane's Art" by poet John Berryman and many other useful discussions of Crane's place in American and world literature.

Thomas Beer, *Stephen Crane: A Study in American Letters*, Knopf, 1923.
Beer's work was the first biography about Crane. Though later scholars have found some factual errors in the book, it is still considered an important work.

Frank Bergon, in his *Stephen Crane's Artistry*, Columbia University Press, 1975.
Bergon analyzes the aspects of Crane's use of dreams and dream images in his literature. He offers a complete characterization of Crane's style.

John Berryman, in his *Stephen Crane: A Critical Biography*, Sloane, 1950.
A biography of Crane notable for being written by one of the important poets of the post World War II era, whose insights into Crane and his work have not yet been superseded by more scholarly biographies

John Berryman, *Stephen Crane: A Critical Biography*, Farrar, Straus, 1982.
This biography examines symbolism in Crane's work, with an interesting chapter on his Freudian themes.

Harold Bloom, editor, *Modern Critical Interpretations: The Red Badge of Courage*, Chelsea House, 1987.
A collection of critical essays containing discussions of psychology, literary impressionism, and the heroic ideal in *The Red Badge of Courage*. Sophisticated but important theory for a more contemporary, postmodern understanding of Crane's novel.

Edwin H. Cady, in his *Stephen Crane*, revised edition, Twayne, 1980.
This is a balanced critical biography.

Richard Chase, *The Red Badge of Courage and Other Writings*, Houghton, 1960.
A critical view of Crane's contribution as a naturalist writer. Chase contests Stallman's view that Crane is a symbolist.

James B. Colvert, "Stephen Crane," in *Concise Dictionary of American Literary Biography: Realism, Naturalism, and Local Color*, 1865-1917 Gale, 1988, pp. 88-109.
Colvert presents an in-depth survey of Crane's major works, and adds perspective to the author's similarity to Rudyard Kipling.

Lois Hill, *Poems and Songs of the Civil War*, Gramercy Books, 1990.
A very useful collection of the popular songs and poems that common soldiers like Henry Fleming would have sung and cherished. Songs such as "Lorena," "The Vacant Chair," and "The Bonnie Blue Flag" and poems such as Whitman's "Bivoac on a Mountainside" and Melville's "Running the Batteries" give the real flavor of the war□often sentimental□that Crane was trying to capture.

James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, Ballentine Books, 1988.
This is the only one-volume treatment of the entire Civil War, and by all accounts, one of the best. It contains a detailed discussion of the Battle of Chancellorsville, which is the setting of *The Red Badge of Courage*.

David Madden and Peggy Bach, *Classics of Civil War Fiction*, University Press of Mississippi, 1991.
James Cox's essay on *The Red Badge of Courage* places it in the context of other Civil

War novels such as Mary Johnston's *The Long Roll*, Ellen Glasgow's *The Battle-Ground*, and John Peale Bishop's *Many Thousands Gone*.

Richard M. Weatherford, editor, *Stephen Crane: The Critical Heritage*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973.
Contains thirty-two reviews of *The Red Badge of Courage* from 1894 through 1898, showing the critical reception of Crane's work in America and England. While some critics were slow to recognize Crane's genius, others were able to see it instantly, and to relate it to the Impressionism movement that was dominating the art world at that time.

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Novels For Students

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book
The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's "For Students" Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other

characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria
The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years.
Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas.

From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized
Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.

- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on
events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name.
- Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch"
would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.

- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).
- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features
NfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Dev-ereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students
When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed.

When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

"Night." Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.
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Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition," Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. "Richard Wright: "Wearing the Mask," in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69□83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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