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STEPHEN CRANE
THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

A SLICE OF LIFE

When Crane published *The Red Badge of Courage* in 1895, his second attempt at novel-writing met with triumphant success. His first novel or rather novelette, *Maggie : A Girl of the Streets*, dealt with the life of the underprivileged in their ordinary setting; it was published under a pseudonym with little or no success in 1893. With his Civil War story, Crane became famous almost overnight; at the time of publication he was chiefly a picturesque figure of the world of the press, the breeding-ground of many American literary talents.

Crane was born in Newark, New Jersey, on November 1st, 1871. He was the 14th child of Jonathan Townley Crane (D. D.), a clergyman who died in 1880 leaving the young Stephen under the care of his mother and elder brothers. Crane was brought up in a religious atmosphere but he did not follow in his father's footsteps and kept himself aloof from religion. However, he remained dominated by fundamental religious patterns and precepts – charity, fraternity, redemption and salvation which he kept at an earthly level.

In 1892, he became a free-lance journalist in New York after attending many schools and colleges where he evinced little taste for academic life. In New York he began his apprenticeship in bohemianism and learnt the value of careful on-the-spot study and observation of what he wanted to write about. His experience with life in the slums found expression in *Maggie*. In this novel, Crane showed himself to be impelled by the spirit of religious and social rebellion. Two years later the *RBC* saw print first in serial form and then as a book in New York and London where it was warmly received. Celebrity did not divest him of his feeling for the “underdog” for in that same year he ran into trouble with the metropolitan police force on account of a prostitute unjustly accused and bullied. Crane had to leave New York and accepted a commission to report the insurrection in Cuba against Spanish rule.

In 1897 he met Cora Howorth the proprietress of a house of ill fame. In spite of the scandal raised by such an association, they were to live together for the rest of his life. Crane deliberately sought experiences where he could pit himself against danger; he covered the Greco-Turkish War for the *New York Journal* and the *Westminster Gazette* and decided to stay on in England at the end of his commission. In 1898, he published “The Open Boat and Other Tales of Adventure”. In England he associated with such writers as Conrad, Wells, James etc., but soon got tired of country life

and itched for action again. He left England to report the Spanish-American conflict but this new experience seriously impaired his health. He was back in England one year after and turned out an impressive body of fiction to avoid bankruptcy (one volume of verse: *War is kind; Active Service*, etc.). Meanwhile his body and brain gradually weakened but he went on writing to the end. S. Crane died on June, 5, 1900, in Badenweiler (Germany) where Cora had taken him in the hope he would miraculously recover from tuberculosis.

COMPOSITION AND PUBLICATION

The novel was composed between April 1893 and the Fall of 1894; it relates a three day battle which took place at Chancellorsville (Va) from May 1st to May 3rd, 1863. The name is never mentioned in the story but critics and historians have been able to detect numerous allusions to the actual troop movements and setting. *The Red Badge of Courage* was 1st published in an abbreviated form as a newspaper serial in 1894. The text was shortened to 16 chapters out of 24. In June 1895 D. Appleton and Company agreed to publish the complete text and thus *The Red Badge of Courage* came out in book form on October 1st, 1895. From the start it became a bestseller owing to the favorable reviews published in the British press.

Legend has it that Crane wrote the *RBC* on the dare of a friend to do better than Zola's *La Débâcle*. This is a moot point; Crane never referred to such a wager though he stated in a letter: "I deliberately started in to do a potboiler [...] something that would take the boarding-school element - you know the kind. Well I got interested in the thing in spite of myself. [...] I had to do it my own way."

Though Crane was later to declare that he had got all his knowledge of war on the football pitch as a boy, he read all the factual material he could get about the Civil War before composing the *RBC*. The most obvious source was the important series of military reminiscences, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* used ever since it was published by all writers on the Civil War. Crane's history teacher at Claverack, General John B. Van Petten, a veteran, is often mentioned as a possible source of information on the conflict between the States. Crane had also read Civil War periodicals and studied Winslow Homer's drawings and Matthew Brady's photographs.

Crane's novel was published at a time when America was undergoing great changes. The most prominent feature on the intellectual landscape of the age was disillusion and Crane's *RBC* is a faithful reflection of that crisis of ideal, the failure to recover from which marks the end of an era as well as a century and the beginning of modernity. The *RBC* represents a deliberate departure from the conventions of the "genteel tradition" of culture (the expression was coined by the American philosopher George Santayana and has been used since the late 19th century to refer to a group of writers who had established literary, social and moral norms insisting on respect for forms and con-

ventions). Crane falls in with the conventions of his time and ruthlessly debunks all the traditional views about heroism or the popular glorification of military courage. As a Crane scholar said “Crane meant to smash icons” in writing the *RBC*. Emerson is often cited to define Crane's purpose in art: “Congratulate yourself if you have done something strange and extravagant and broken the monotony of a decorous age”. Although essentially American in his stance, Crane was also a rebel against many things American and the *RBC* may be considered as a tale of deflation aiming at the reduction of idealism.

STRUCTURE OF THE NOVEL

The novel consists of 24 chapters relating, as the original title for the novel pointed out – *Private Fleming : His Various Battles* –, the war experiences of a young boy leaving his mother's farm to enlist in the Union forces. The whole story mainly deals with the protagonist's evolution from a country boy to a veteran-like soldier. It is a chronicle of the boy's anxieties, moods and impressions as he progresses through the series of episodes making up the novel.

The formal structure of the book is rather simply Aristotelian. It has a beginning (Chapters I-IV) which gets the youth to real battle; a middle (Ch. V-XIII) which witnesses his runaway and return; and an end (Ch. XIV-XXIII) which displays his achievement of “heroism” at climax, followed by a certain understanding of it in a coda-like final chapter. The middle and end sections are replete with notations of Fleming's psychological responses to fear, stress and courage.

The narrative is conducted on two levels, the physical setting, the outer world where the action takes place, as opposed to the emotional plane or the mind of Henry Fleming. As the story is told from H. Fleming's point of view, the two planes are fused into one unified impression. The action can be divided into five parts:

1. Henry before the battle: Chapters I-IV
2. The youth sees real fighting: Chapters V-VI
3. Chapters VII-XI relate his flight
4. Chapters XII-XIV relate how H. F. got wounded and his return the regiment
5. Chapters XV-XXIII depict his achievement of heroism and are followed by a coda-like final chapter XXIV where H. F. reaches a certain degree of self-awareness.

The general pattern of the book is that of a journey of initiation or a spiritual journey reflecting the mental condition of one of the men in the ranks. Crane's aim – as stated before – was to carry out a detailed observation of “the nervous system under fire”.

A Summary:

Chapt. I-II: the first two chapters are merely introductory chapters presenting the main characters in an anonymous way. We make the acquaintance of “the tall soldier” (2) later to be given

his full identity, Jim Conklin (11); "the blatant soldier" (16), we do not learn his full name – Wilson – until later (18) and "a youthful private" or "the youth" whose name is also revealed later on (72). The young soldier hearing that the regiment is about to be sent into battle puts the central question: "How do you think the reg'ment'll do?" (11). Both the hero and the regiment are untried and thus will have to face the same fate.

Ch. III: The regiment crosses the river. Henry is "about to be measured" (23). He experiences mixed feelings: he sometimes feels trapped by the regiment ("he was in a moving box", 23); the landscape seems hostile to him but his curiosity about war is stronger than his fears. Yet after his first encounter with the "red animal" (25) and a dead soldier (24), the hero begins to realize that war is not kind and more like "a trap" (25). The loud soldier gives Henry a "little packet" of letters (29).

Ch. IV: Rumors of an imminent advance run through the ranks. H and his comrades witness the retreat ("stampede", "chaos") of a first wave of Union soldiers; H. resolves "to run better than the best of them" (33) if things turn out badly.

Ch. V: This is the first picture of an actual battle in the book ("We're in for it", 35) and the protagonist goes through his baptism of fire in a kind of "battle sleep" (37). H. "becomes not a man but a member" (36) and experiences a "subtle battle brotherhood" (36) though he is somewhat disappointed by "a singular absence of heroic poses" (37). H. is compared to a "pestered animal" and "a babe" (37). Indifference of Nature (40).

Ch. VI: H. feels he has passed the test but when the enemy launches a 2nd attack "self-satisfaction" (40) gives way to self-preservation. This is a turning-point in the novel; when H. is cut off from the community which the regiment symbolizes, he feels alone and panics. He flees from the battlefield and pities his comrades as he runs ("Methodical idiots! Machine-like fools", 45).

Ch. VII: H.'s disappointment: "By heavens, they had won after all! The imbecile line had remained and become victors" (47). Feeling "self-pity" (48) and "animal-like rebellion" Henry "buries himself into a thick woods" (48) and in the chapel-like gloom of the forest there takes place the 2nd encounter with a dead man ("the dead man and the living exchanged a long look" 50). He believes that Nature can justify his running away (episode of the squirrel, 49).

Ch. VIII: H. meets "the spectral soldier" (54) who turns out to be Jim Conklin and "the tattered soldier" who plagues him with embarrassing questions ("Where yeh hit?" 56). The tattered soldier seems to be the embodiment of H's early idea of himself as a war hero. At this stage, Nature seems no longer comforting but hostile.

Ch. IX: Essentially concerned with the death of J. Conklin and its effect on Henry ("letters of guilt"/"He wished that he, too, had a red badge of courage", 57). Crane's realism is at its best in this

chapter which comes to a close with one of the most famous images in all American literature: "The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer".

Ch. X: H. deserts the tattered soldier who keeps "raising the ghost of shem" (64) and comes closer to the battlefield. H. envies the dead soldiers.

Ch. XI: The men eventually retreat, which Henry interprets as a vindication of "his superior powers of perception" (70) but he nonetheless feels excluded from "the procession of chosen beings" (67) and stigmatized by "the marks of his flight" (68), hence "self-hate" (69) = "he was their murderer" (71).

Ch. XII: During the helter-skelter retreat of his comrades, H. gets struck with a rifle-butt and finally gets a wound not from the enemy but ironically from one of his fellow soldiers who is also fleeing in a panic.

Ch. XIII: Traces H's journey back to his regiment. Appearance of "the cheerful soldier" who takes him back into the fold of the community. H. who lies: "I got separated from th' reg'ment" (80) is taken care of by Wilson.

Ch. XIV: H. wakes up to "an unexpected world" (85). Wilson has meanwhile undergone a most spectacular change: he is "no more a loud young soldier" (87).

Ch. XV: H toys with the idea of knocking his friend "on the head with the misguided packet" of letters but refrains from doing so ("It was a generous thing", 93). He builds up "a faith in himself" (92); "he had fled with discretion and dignity" and fancies himself "telling tales to listeners" (93).

Ch. XVI: H. assumes the rôle of Wilson, the former "loud soldier"; he rants and raves about the officers and the army and soon gains a measure of self-confidence. But the words of a "sarcastic man" turn him into "a modest person" again (97).

Ch. XVII: The enemy advances. H. in a state of frenzy fires his gun like an automaton; an officer has to stop him and his comrades look upon him as a "war-devil" (103). Yet his achievement is diminished by the fact that "he had not been aware of the process. He had slept and awakening, found himself a knight".

Ch. XVIII: A short pause. H and his friend on an eminence overhear a conversation between two officers who call the regiment "mule-drivers" (106).

Ch. XIX: Put on their mettle by this sarcasm, H and Wilson lead the charge and even take hold of the regiment's flag. H. eventually experiences "a temporary absence of selfishness" (110).

Ch. XX: The regiment hesitates and retreats ("the retreat was a march of shame to him", 115); the enemy is as confused as the attackers (118). H. takes a stand and his comrades eventually drive back the enemy. Enthusiasm: "And they were men" (119).

Ch. XXI: The veterans make fun of the "fresh fish" who "stopped about a hundred feet this side of a very pretty success" (122). H. and Wilson are congratulated for their gallantry, hence "the past held no pictures of error and disappointment" (125).

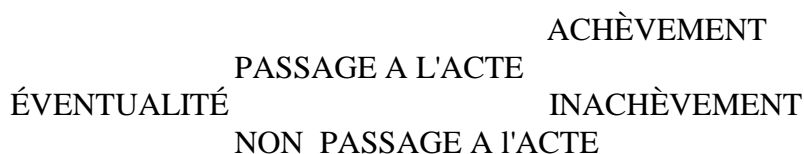
Ch. XXII: Self-confidence; H. bears the colors and resolves "not to budge whatever should happen" (129).

Ch. XXIII: H. and the other men charge "in a state of frenzy" (132). Wilson captures the enemy flag.

Ch. XXIV: Ironic overtones / the men must go back to where they started from; all the fighting has been to no avail. H's "brain emerges" (137) after a momentary eclipse. H. reviews "the delightful images of memory" (138), "puts the sin at a distance" (139) and feels "he was a man". By the end of the novel he seems to have acquired a new awareness of his own powers and limitations though Crane's irony makes it hard to form a definitive opinion on the hero's progress

Once brought down to its essentials the plot appears as a mere journey of initiation following the ternary pattern of any basic narrative process. Some sort of formalist approach could be applied to the story:

According to T. Todorov quoting Alan Dundes: "le processus narratif de base consiste dans une action qui se développe en 3 temps: état de départ, processus proprement dit, résultat" (p. 85). Claude Brémont dans son ouvrage *Logique du récit* substitue à cette séquence une triade assez voisine correspondant aux trois temps marquant le développement d'un processus: virtualité, passage à l'acte, achèvement. Il précise de plus que "dans cette triade, le terme postérieur implique l'antérieur: il ne peut y avoir achèvement s'il n'y a eu passage à l'acte, il ne peut y avoir passage à l'acte s'il n'y a eu virtualité. [...] Le schéma suivant résume ce jeu d'options:



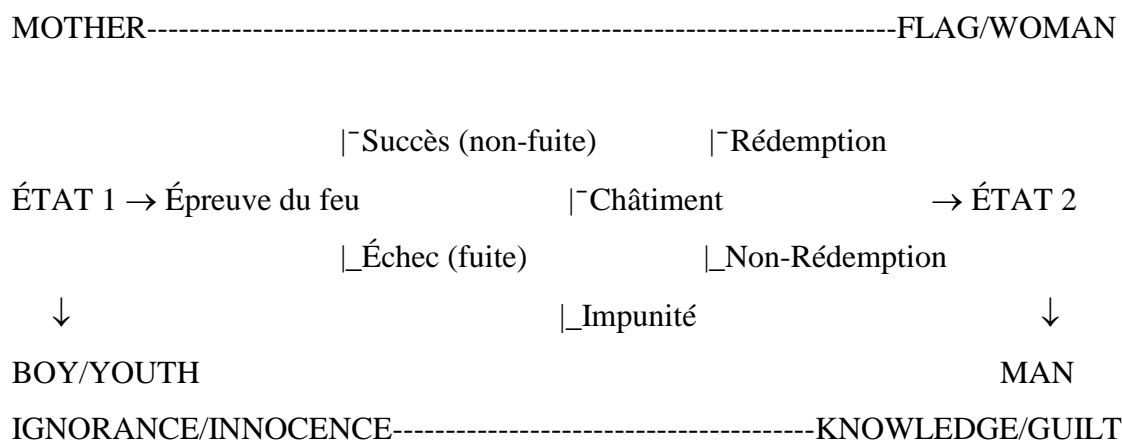
Ainsi, pour qu'un segment temporel quelconque (un événement, une relation, un comportement, etc.) puisse être donné *in extenso* dans un récit, il faut et il suffit que soient données les modalités de son origine, celles de son développement, celles de son achèvement. De plus il s'agit d'un processus orienté, d'une virtualité qui s'actualise et tend vers un certain terme connu d'avance. La séquence élémentaire, qui reproduit ce processus s'articulera typiquement en trois moments principaux, chacun donnant lieu à une alternative:

1° une situation qui ouvre la possibilité d'un comportement ou d'un événement (sous réserve que cette virtualité s'actualise);

2° le passage à l'acte de cette virtualité (par exemple le comportement qui répond à l'incitation contenue dans la situation "ouvrante");

3° l'aboutissement de cette action qui "clôt" le processus par un succès ou un échec.

Nous pourrions proposer pour le *RBC* le schéma suivant – même s'il ne rend compte que d'un aspect de l'œuvre:



THE CHARACTERS

The characters in the *RBC* fall into 2 categories based on the opposition between the group or community on the one hand - say the Army and Regiment - and the individual or rank and file on the other. As Henry's mother tells him: "Yer jest one little feller amongst a hull lot of others..." (6)

The Army/The Regiment

The image of the "monster" is the most frequently associated with the army which is first described as a "crawling reptile" (15) and compared to "one of those moving monsters wending with many feet" (15). This "composite monster" (33) is given "eyes", "feet" (1) and "joints" (42). The army is indeed an anonymous mass of men, "a vast blue demonstration" (8), a kind of arrested or ordered chaos ready to turn loose at the 1st word of command. This accounts for the depiction of the regiment as a "mighty blue machine" (71) which of course works "mechanically" and sometimes "runs down" (116). This idea is also conveyed by the image of the box cropping up p. 23: "But he instantly saw that it would be impossible for him to escape from the regiment. It enclosed him. And there were iron laws of tradition and law on four sides. He was in a moving box". It is in its fold that Henry experiences a mysterious fraternity "the subtle battle brotherhood" that comes from sharing danger with other people (36):

"He suddenly lost concern for himself and forgot to look at a menacing fate. He became not a man but a member. He felt that something of which he was a part - a regiment, an army, a cause or a country - was in a crisis. He was welded into a common personality which was dominated by a single desire. For some moments he could not flee no more than a little finger can commit a revolution from a hand"

The annihilation of personality in the course of a trance-like submersion in the group-will is to be opposed to the image of separation or even amputation from the same group:

“If he had thought the regiment was about to be annihilated perhaps he could have amputated himself from it” (36)

“He felt that he was regarding a procession of chosen beings. The separation was a threat to him as if they had marched with weapons of flame and banners of sunlight. He could never be like them.” (67)

In fact, the regiment sometimes appears as a sort of mother-substitute (“His [the tattered soldier's] homely face was suffused with a light of love for the army which was to him all things beautiful and powerful” 56) and Henry's return to the regiment may be likened to a return to the womb (see ch. 13 last section).

THE PRIVATES

The *RBC* focuses only on 3 soldiers: Henry Fleming, Jim Conklin and Wilson. Although the theme of the novel is the baptism of fire of a Union private the tone is psychological rather than military. Its main characters are neither fully representative nor yet particularly individual and are, most of the time designated as figures in an allegory. Crane aims at a certain depersonalization of his characters they represent “Everyman”. He tried to turn the battle he described into a type and to that effect he erased all names in the process of revision so as to give an allegorical tone to his war tale. According to M. H. Abrams's *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, an allegory “is a narrative in which the agents and action, and sometimes setting as well, are contrived not only to make sense in themselves but also to signify a 2nd, correlated order of persons, things, concepts or events. There are two main types:

(1) Historical and political allegory, in which the characters and the action represent or allegorize, historical personages and events. [...]

(2) The allegory of ideas, in which the characters represent abstract concepts and the plot serves to communicate a doctrine or thesis. [...] A well-known example of allegory is Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) which personifies such abstract entities as virtues, vices, states of mind, and types of character. This book allegorizes the doctrines of Christian salvation by telling how Christian, warned by Evangelist, flees the City of Destruction and makes his way laboriously to the Celestial City; on his way he encounters such characters as Faithful, Hopeful and the Giant Despair and passes through places like the Slough of Despond, the Valley of the Shadow of Death and Vanity Fair.”

In its development the *RBC* bears strong resemblance to *The Pilgrim's Progress* from which it borrowed one of the oldest and most universal plots in literature: that of the Journey, by land or water. In the case of the *RBC* the pattern is that of a journey leading through various experiences to a moral or spiritual change. This explains why the personages are at first mere labels, archetypal

characters slowly acquiring some sort of identity. Thus the novel refers to “the youth” or “youthful private” (25); “the tall soldier”, (J.C 11); “the blatant soldier” (Wilson; 165; there also appears “a piratical private” (17); “a sarcastic man” (96) and lastly “the man of the cheery voice” (78) Our analysis will be limited to the first three ones.

HENRY FLEMING/THE YOUTH

When Henry Fleming, motivated by dreams of glory and stirred by voices of the past and visions of future deeds of bravery, enlists in the Union forces, he severs the bonds tying him to his mother and his rural life. Once in the army he is left to himself, stranded in a new environment where he must find new bearings: “Whatever he had learned of himself was here of no avail. He was an unknown quantity. He saw that he would again be obliged to experiment as he had in early youth. He must accumulate information of himself...” (9). From the outset, Henry is confronted with the question of self-knowledge; all he cares to know is whether he is the stuff that heroes are made from: “He was forced to admit that as far as war was concerned he knew nothing of himself” (9). Henry must in other words prove himself in his own eyes as well as in other people's and he sets about it accountant-fashion; he is forever trying to square accounts with himself and to prove by dint of calculations that he can't be a coward:

“For days he made ceaseless calculations, but they were all wondrously unsatisfactory. He found that he could establish nothing” (12)

“He reluctantly admitted that he could not sit still and with a mental slate and pencil derive an answer.” (13)

Henry is holding an eternal debate with himself and this excruciating self-examination bespeaks a Puritan conscience, beset with self-doubts and the uncertainty of Salvation: “the youth had been taught that a man becomes another thing in a battle. He saw salvation in such a change” (29). Fleming is afraid of being weighed in the balance and found wanting and ironically enough the more he compares himself with his comrades the more puzzled he is:

“The youth would have liked to have discovered another who suspected himself. A sympathetic comparison of mental notes would have been a joy to him. [...] All attempts failed to bring forth any statement which looked in any way like a confession to those doubts which he privately acknowledged in himself” (13)

Soon Henry comes to experience a feeling of seclusion: “He was a mental outcast” (20) and suffers from lack of understanding on the part of the others: “He would die; he would go to some place where he would be understood” (29). In fact Henry has only himself to blame; he is not kept apart, he does keep himself apart from the others. Characteristically, Henry turns the tables and rationalizes his situation by convincing himself that he is endowed with superior powers: “It was useless to expect appreciation of his profound and fine senses from such men as the lieutenant” (29)

or again: “He, the enlightened man who looks afar in the dark, had fled because of his superior perceptions and knowledge”.

This accounts for the repeated theme of Fleming's prophetic rôle towards his comrades and the world: “How could they kill him who was the chosen of gods and doomed to greatness?” (92). One is often under the impression that Henry suffers from delusions of grandeur and becomes a prey to his imaginings; Henry's imagination is both an asset and a liability; it sometimes goads him into a spurious sort of heroism:

“Swift pictures of himself apart, yet in himself, came to him - a blue desperate figure leading lurid charges with one knee forward and a broken blade high a blue determined figure standing before a crimson and steel assault, getting calmly killed on a high place before the eyes of all” (67-68)

or – on the contrary – paralyses him with groundless fears:

“A little panic-fear grew in his mind. As his imagination went forward to a fight, he saw hideous possibilities. He contemplated the lurking menaces of the future, and failed in an effort to see himself standing stoutly in the midst of them” (95).

Henry is actually stalemated by his imagination; the only way out is for him to take the plunge *i.e.* to find out in action what he cannot settle in his imagination: “He finally concluded that the only way to prove himself was to go into the blaze, and then figuratively to watch his legs and discover their merits and faults” (12)

After a trying period of waiting Henry sees action for the 1st time in his life; in the furnace of battles the youth loses all concern for himself and for a brief moment dismisses all his qualms: “He became not a man but a member” [...] “He felt the subtle battle brotherhood more potent even than the cause for which they were fighting.” (36). After his short brush with the enemy, the youth goes into an ecstasy of self-satisfaction; his appreciation of his own behaviour is out of proportion with the importance of the encounter:

“So it was all over at last! The supreme trial had been passed. The red, formidable difficulties of war had been vanquished. [...] He had the most delightful sensations of his life. Standing as if apart from himself, he viewed the last scene. He perceived that the man who had fought thus was magnificent.” (41)

His self-confidence however is short-lived; a second attack launched against his line causes his sudden panic and flight: “There was a revelation. He, too, threw down his gun and fled. There was no shame in his face. He ran like a rabbit. (41). As befits a country boy, Henry seeks refuge in Nature and even tries to enlist her sympathy:

“Nature had given him a sign. The squirrel, immediately upon recognizing danger, had taken to his legs without ado. [...] The youth wended, feeling that Nature was of his mind. She re-enforced his argument with proofs that lived where the sun shone”. (49)

The dialogue he carries on with his own conscience often contains overtones of legalistic chicanery: it is a constant search for excuses to justify his cowardly conduct:

“His actions had been sagacious things. They had been full of strategy. They were the work of a master's legs.” (48)

“He felt a great anger against his comrades. He knew it could be proved that they had been fools.” (48)

Fleming even goes to the length of wishing the army were defeated; that would provide him with “a means of escape from the consequences of his fall.” (71) The use of the term “fall” bears witness to the religious undertone of his experience and the protagonist's preoccupation with moral responsibility (“He denounced himself as a villain” [...] he was their [the soldiers'] murderer” 71) and personal redemption has led many critics to compare *The Red Badge of Courage* with Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. The same image lies at the core of the two novels; we find the “scarlet letter” on the one hand and reference to “a red badge” or “the letters of guilt [...] burned into [the hero's] brow” (57) on the other hand. Both novels deal with the discovery through sin, of true and authentic self, the isolation which is the consequence of that discovery, and the struggle to endure which is the consequence of that isolation. Henry knows “he will be compelled to doom himself to isolation” (71) because the community represents a possible danger from which he must take refuge (“The simple questions of the tattered man had been knife thrusts to him. They asserted a society that probes pitilessly at secrets until all is apparent” 65). The price Henry has to pay to be counted again in the ranks of his comrades is that of public acknowledgement of private sin. The price is too high and the youth will go on wandering about the battlefield.

The episode related in chapter 12 is one of the turning-points in Henry's progress. After being ironically awarded the red badge of courage he had been longing for Henry can return to his regiment and try to achieve salvation not through introspection or public confession but simply through action. From then on the story assumes the form of a journey of expiation. Henry is described as a daredevil fighting at the head of his unit during a charge and even catching hold of the colours of the regiment. Yet these deeds of bravery are motivated by his feeling of guilt and his spite over having been called a mule driver (106). Moreover his actions are performed in a sort of battle-frenzy which leaves little room for the expression of any conscious will and determination. War teaches Henry how to be brave but also blunts his moral sense; Henry becomes an efficient soldier but one may wonder if this is a desirable achievement for a country boy. Crane's irony also casts some doubts on the very value of Henry's heroism which appears not so much as a predictable possession – something one can just fight for – but as an impersonal gift thrust upon him by a capricious if not absurd Providence. Why was Henry, of all soldiers, spared and given the opportunity to “[...] rid himself of the red sickness of battle” (140) and to turn “with a lover's thirst to images of tranquil skies, fresh meadows, cool brooks — an existence of soft and eternal peace” ? There is

some irony in considering that the vistas opening up before Henry are little different from what they would have been had he stayed on his mother's farm. Is that to say that after so many tribulations Henry is back to where he started from ? One may think so. Fleming went off to war entertaining delusions about its very nature and his own capacity for heroism and ends up with a naive vision of harmony with nature. Henry has undoubtedly grown more mature but he can still fool himself about the cause of his wound or the fact that he has fled from battle as much as he fooled other people. ("He had performed his mistakes in the dark, so he was still a man" 91). The fundamental question at issue is the following: does Henry Fleming develop in the course of the novel ? A quotation from p. 139 will provide us with a valuable clue:

"Yet gradually he mustered force to put the sin at a distance. And at last his eyes seemed to open to some new ways. He found that he could look back upon the brass and bombast of his earlier gospels and see them truly. He was gleeful when he discovered that he now despised them. With this conviction came a store of assurance. He felt a quiet manhood, nonassertive but of sturdy and strong blood. He knew that he would no more quail before his guides wherever they should point. He had been to touch the great death. He was a man."

The youth in his baptism of fire has acquired self-knowledge and experience but a radical change has not taken place within him; he remains in his heroic pose at the close of the novel just as grotesque as the fearful "little man" he was at the beginning. As J. Cazemajou puts it in his study of the novel: "his itinerary led him not to eternal salvation but to a blissful impasse". Henry has become a man, true enough, but a man with a guilty conscience; "the ghost of his flight" and "the specter of reproach" born of the desertion of the "tattered man" in his sore need keep haunting Fleming. His manliness has been acquired at the expense of his humanity.

The Red Badge of Courage contains the account of a half-completed redemption. It is only in a satellite story entitled "The Veteran" that Henry drinks the bitter cup to the dregs and purges himself of his former lie by confessing his lack of courage on the battlefield. The other two characters the "tall soldier" and the "blatant soldier" are mere foils for Henry Fleming.

THE TALL SOLDIER

This character is doubtless one of the most controversial figures in the novel. A small critical warfare has been waged over his rôle and function and many interpretations have been put forward since the book saw print. One hardly expects to see the blustering, self-opinionated, smug news-monger of the introductory chapter turn into the tragic, poignant sacrificial victim of Chapters 8-9.

Two critics Robert W. Stallman and Daniel Hoffman contend that Jim Conklin whose initials are the same as those of Jesus Christ is intended to represent the Saviour whose death in a symbolic novel richly laden with Christian references somehow redeems Henry, the sinner. The key to the religious symbolism of the whole novel is according to the former the reference to "the red sun pasted in the sky like a wafer" (62). For Stallman, the "wafer" means the host, the round piece of

bread used in the celebration of the Eucharist, and thus Jim Conklin becomes a Christ-figure. The likeness is re-inforced by the fact the Jim's wounds conjure up the vision of the stigmata; he is wounded in the side ("the side looked as if it had been chewed by wolves," 62) and his hands are bloody ("His spare figure was erect; his bloody hands were quiet at his side," *Ibid.*). During the solemn ceremony of his death agony, Henry "partakes of the sacramental blood and body of Christ, and the process of his spiritual rebirth begins at the moment when the waferlike sun appears in the sky. It is a symbol of salvation through death" (*An Omnibus*, 200). It goes without saying that such a highly personal Christian-symbolist reading of the novel is far from being unanimously accepted by other Crane scholars. Edwin H. Cady, among others, regards Conklin as a mere "representation of the sacrificed soldier [...] occupying in the novel a place equivalent to that of the Unknown Soldier in the national pantheon." (140). His death simply provides Crane with a new occasion to expose the savagery of war and furnishes a dramatic counterpoint to Henry's absorption in his own personal problems.

Another interpreter of the novel, Jean Cazemajou rejects Stallman's thesis and suggests a more matter-of-fact reading. The "tall soldier" he argues, does not undergo any significant change as the story unfolds. Unlike Henry, Jim Conklin is not tormented by fears and self-doubts; he adjusts to his soldier's life with much philosophy:

"He accepted new environment and circumstance with great coolness, eating from his haversack at every opportunity. On the march he went along with the stride of a hunter, objecting to neither gait, nor distance." (28)

Even if Henry often looks to him for advice and guidance J. Conklin is no embodiment of the Redeemer. The French critic sees in this backwoodsman, led by instinct and immune to unpleasantness, a kind of ironic version of the traditional hero, some sort of natural man plunged into the furnace of war. Jim Conklin's messianic rôle is rather played down in Cazemajou's interpretation; J. Conklin's example has little impact on Henry's behaviour. Far from confessing his cowardice after Jim's death, Henry merely tries to conceal it from his comrades and the sight of the gruesome *danse macabre* of the spectral soldier triggers off in the youth a certain aggressiveness which is but fear or panic in a different guise. As for the wafer image, it is just an evocation of primitive rites to a blood thirsty God reminiscent of the Aztec religion.

Whatever the significance of "the tall soldier" may be, *The Red Badge of Courage* would lose much of its uniqueness without the haunting image of the "spectral soldier" stalking stonily to the "rendez-vous" where death is awaiting him.

THE LOUD SOLDIER : WILSON

Wilson is a much less difficult character to deal with. His evolution from a bragging swash-buckler to a clear-sighted, modest combatant is almost the exact opposite of Henry's progress. In chapter 3 Wilson appears as a soldier spoiling for a fight:

“I don't mind marching, if there's going to be fighting at the end of it. What I hate is this getting moved here and moved there, with no good coming of it as far as I can see, excepting sore feet and damned short rations.” (185).

He evinces great confidence in himself: “[...] I'm not going to skedaddle. The man that bets on my running will lose his money that's all.” (19) Yet on hearing the first noises of battle, the loud soldier's confidence crumbles away and in a moment of weakness and self-pity he confesses his forebodings to Henry and entrusts him with a packet of letters: “It's my first and last battle, old boy. [...] I'm a gone coon this first time and-and I w-want you to take these here things-to-my-folks”. (29)

Unlike Henry, however, Wilson bears up well under the strain and passes his initiation successfully and acquires in the process of time a quiet manhood which Fleming is to attain only at the end of the battle:

“He was no more a loud young soldier. There was about him now a fine reliance. He showed a quiet belief in his purpose and his abilities. And this inward confidence evidently enabled him to be indifferent to little words of other men aimed at him” (87).

In the same way, the realisation of his own insignificance is sooner borne in upon him than is the case with Henry: “Apparently, the other had now climbed a peak of wisdom from which he could perceive himself as a very wee thing” 87). Such transformation is emphasized by the reference to the chasm separating Wilson's former self from his present condition (“He spoke as after a lapse of years” 88). In spite of the fact that Henry takes a kind of sadistic pleasure in his friend's embarrassment over getting back his letters, the two characters are drawn together and share the same experiences. They form one of those countless couples of males which are to be found in American Literature (Huck and Jim; George Milton and Lennie Small, etc.); their relations are always slightly tinged with homosexuality (cf. 83). Wilson's bombast and fiery spirits vanish for a time and when he is seen to make pacific motions with his arms and to assume the rôle of a peace-maker among his comrades (89) it comes as something of a surprise. But that peaceful mood does not last long and just like Henry Wilson is carried away by the battle-fury that seizes the regiment. His daring reaches a climax with the capture of the enemy's flag (“The youth's friend went over the obstruction in a tumbling heap and sprang at the flag as a panther at prey” 134). The admiration of their comrades after their courageous attitude under enemy fire kindles the same feeling of elation in both of them: “they knew that their faces were deeply flushing from thrills of pleasure. They exchanged a secret glance of joy and congratulation”. (125) Although they are running in opposite

directions Henry's and Wilson's itineraries lead up to the same ambiguities, for their heroism is nothing but the ordinary stock of courage among fighting men and is therefore of uncertain value or meaning. The ease with which they forget the conditions under which they acquired their courage diminishes them: "They speedily forgot many things. The past held no pictures of error and disappointment. They were very happy, and their hearts swelled with grateful affection for the colonel and the youthful lieutenant." (125)

As is often the case with Crane a strong ironic coloring can easily be detected here and he remains faithful to his intention never to point out any moral or lesson in his stories.

THEMES OF *THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE*

On the surface the *RBC* is a simple tale of warfare yet the scope of the story is greatly enlarged by the themes which run through the narrative and deepen its implications. This attempted survey of the themes underlying the novel is far from being comprehensive and will be limited to four of them, namely: the theme of War, the theme of Nature, the theme of the Sacred and the motif/theme of Vision.

1) *THE THEME OF WAR*

The novel describes not only the war waged by the Yankees and the Rebs but above all the "the self-combat of a youth" who must prove himself in battle. Henry the protagonist is involved in more than one battle; he fights against the enemy true enough, but as the original title for the book suggests, he also fights private battles with himself. In the author's own words: "Doubts and he were struggling." (68)

Henry's fight sometimes achieves cosmic reaches when he comes to feel that "he was engaged in combating the universe" (73) or again ("Yesterday, when he had imagined the universe to be against him, he had hated it" 100). Thus we have war at every level; even Nature proves to be a vast field of battle where one has to fight for survival and this is quite in keeping with Crane's deep-rooted conviction – which lies at the heart of all his fiction – that the essence of life is warfare. The *RBC* is holding no brief for war; Crane wanted not only to give an account of an actual battle but also to deal with war in the abstract *i.e.* to debunk the concept of war that had gained currency in his time. War was then considered as a kind of social phenomenon partaking of the Sacred, a ritual game with fixed rules and much glamour. Whether one was waging or depicting war decorum was always to be preserved. By constantly resorting to irony or the grotesque Crane exposes the seamy side of war and deglamorizes it. The soldiers don't even know why the war is fought; they are led into battle like a flock of sheep to the slaughterhouse, the leaders treat their men like animals. In short, the soldiers are just material that can be used without regard for their lives, mere cannon-fodder.

The main feature in this study of war is disillusionment; after two days' battle the men march back to their starting-place, all their sacrifices have been to no avail. War is meaningless even if it sometimes appears as a testing-ground of man's courage and stamina but it is not purposeless. Crane anticipated modern theories on the nature of war when he described it as a periodically organized wastage, a process meant to dispose of surplus goods and human lives; in a former version of the text Henry declared: "War, he said bitterly to the sky, was a makeshift created because ordinary processes would not furnish deaths enough" (Cady 128)

Despite these strictures, the narrative sometimes lifts war to the plane of the cosmic and the mythic: the battle sometimes appears as a re-enactment of Greek or Biblical struggles. Thus Crane reactivates the myth of Cadmos through references to Homeric struggles and images of dragons or of men springing fully armed from the earth: "The sun spread disclosing rays, and, one by one, regiments burst into view like armed men just born of the earth" (23).

The "red and green monster" looming up (43) bears close kinship to Appollyon the Biblical archetype described in *Revelations*. Yet, in spite of those references to bygone battles and heroic times, Henry's adventure ends neither in victory nor even in the sacrifice of his life; Henry's stature never exceeds that of a man. In fact, it might be argued that Henry develops into some sort of ironic anti-hero figure since the spirit of rebellion he evinces at the beginning of the story is by and by replaced by a more pliant disposition, a readiness to accept things as they are: "He knew that he would no more quail before his guides wherever they should point" (139). Linked to the theme of war are other attendant motifs such as the theme of courage; the theme of fear and last but not least the wound-motif. As these have already been dealt with, we'll just skip them here and proceed to a discussion of the other three.

2) THE THEME OF NATURE

Nature images pervade the narrative and a reference to Nature ends the book as one had begun it. Throughout the story, Nature appears as a kind of "objective correlative" of Henry's emotions. All that Henry can find in Nature is a reflection of his own psychological state continually wavering between enthusiasm and anxiety. Henry will be slow in realising the indifference or even hostility of Nature to Man. Meanwhile he constantly appeals to her for comfort, proofs and justifications of his behaviour: "This landscape gave him assurance. A fair field holding life. It was the religion of peace. [...] He conceived Nature to be a woman with a deep aversion to tragedy." (49) Yet even if Nature "is of his mind" or "gives him a sign", there is no affinity, let alone complicity, between Man and Nature. Whatever Henry learns from Nature at one moment is contradicted in the next by the selfsame Nature (cf. the squirrel and gleaming fish episode 50). Much as he should like to become a prophet of that "religion of peace" that Nature apparently advocates, Henry is forced to admit that he's a victim of false appearances – Nature does not care about Man's fate:

“As he gazed around him the youth felt in a flash of astonishment at the blue, pure sky and the sun gleamings on the trees and fields. It was surprising that Nature had gone tranquilly on with her golden process in the midst of so much devilment” (40)

This astonishing revelation culminates in Henry's realization of his own littleness and insignificance: “New eyes were given to him. And the most startling thing was to learn suddenly that he was sery insignificant” (107). Nature can do without man even if the opposite isn't true; this startling discovery is most vividly expressed by one of the characters in “The Open Boat” (*An Omnibus* 439):

“When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no bricks and no temples.”

Man is thus made the plaything of Nature; his actions are performed under the pressure of the natural environment and the physical forces surrounding him. Nature is no veiled entity holding any revelation for man; she does not manifest any divine Presence. In its midst man is just a pawn to multiple compulsions; this aspect justifies the reference to naturalism (a point we will discuss later on) which has been made in connection with Crane's novel.

3) THE THEME OF THE SACRED

Though the protagonist never seeks comfort in religion, the *RBC* can't be read outside a religious tradition. The narrative abounding in Biblical references and religious symbols describes the sufferings of an unquiet soul assailed by the classic doubt of the Calvinist: “Am I really among the elect ?” That question is of course transposed in different terms but one is struck by the parallelism between Henry's situation and his Puritan forebears':

“He felt that he was regarding a procession of chosen beings. The separation was as great to him as if they had marched with weapons of flame and banners of sunlight. He could never be like them. He could have wept in his longings.” (67)

This similarity is also reinforced by the fact that, since the Middle Ages, the spiritual life of man has often been likened to a pilgrimage or a battle (“[...] a man becomes another thing in a battle. He saw his salvation in such a change”. 29 / “[...] with a long wailful cry the dilapidated regiment surged forward and began its new journey!” 113)

As is seen in the last quotation the progress of the group parallels that of the solitary hero, H. Fleming. The *RBC* presents a new version of the Fall of man entrapped by his curiosity and vanity and a new process of Election through suffering and wounds. Henry's moral debate also points up his religious upbringing. His conscience is racked by remorse and he considers himself as a murderer because he deserted his friends and thus holds himself responsible for the death of his comrades:

“His mind pictured the soldiers who would place their defiant bodies before the spear of the yelling battle fiend and as he saw their dripping corpses on an imagined field he said that he was their murderer.” 71

Henry awaits retribution because if he sometimes finds some comfort in the fact that he did his misdeed in the dark (“He had performed his mistakes in the dark, so he was still a man.” 91), he knows in his heart of hearts that all his actions are performed under the gaze of a dreadful God whose attention nothing escapes. This supreme Judge is symbolized by the haunting memory of Henry's mother (“I don't want yeh to ever do anything, Henry that yeh would be ashamed to let me know about. Jest think as if I was a-watching yeh.” 6) and the collective consciousness of the regiment (“an encounter with the eyes of judges” 91).

Henry's experiences are essentially expressed in terms of vision and one might say quoting Emerson that in the *RBC* the hero undergoes “a general education of the eye”/“I”. The novel traces the protagonist's evolution from a certain way of world-watching to a more active stance; the visions of a naive, innocent eye will be replaced by those of a more conscious eye. Henry goes to war out of curiosity, because in the author's own words “he ha[s] longed to see it all.” (4) and he is stirred by visions of himself in heroic poses. The motif of the “eye” is stressed from the outset; the opening description of the novel sets going a train of images that will run through the narrative and stresses a fundamental opposition between “seeing” and “being seen”; the active and passive poles:

“From across the river the red eyes were still peering.” (14)

“The mournful current moved slowly on, and from the water, shaded black, some white bubble eyes looked at the men.” (23)

Henry is at first some sort of onlooker. After the short encounter with the enemy, he sees himself in a new light (41) and comes to believe he is endowed with superior powers of perception naturally translated in visual terms: “There was but one pair of eyes in the corps” (25)/“This would demonstrate that he was indeed a seer.” (70) This accounts for the prophetic rôle which he believes to be his. In the chapel-like forest the perspective changes; there is a reversal of situations: the onlooker is now looked at by somebody else: “He was being looked at by a dead man” (50) From now on Henry will have to face his comrades' probing eyes: “In imagination he felt the scrutiny of his companions as he painfully laboured through some lies” (68) / “Wherever he went in camp, he would encounter insolent and lingeringly-cruel stares.” (72) Quite characteristically, Henry puts all his fears out of sight and indulges in daydreaming and gratifying pictures of himself (69) where he is seen to advantage: “Swift pictures of himself, apart, yet in himself, came to him.[...] a blue determined figure [...] getting calmly killed on a high place before the eyes of all.” (68) Henry's hour of glory comes after his capture of the flag; he is then the cynosure of every eye: “[...] they seemed all to be engaged in staring with astonishment at him. They had become spectators.” (102): “He lay and

basked in the occasional stares of his comrades” (103). The roles are now reversed; the spectator has himself become an object of admiration; Henry is now looked upon as a hero.

By going through fire and water Henry gains a new awareness, undergoes a radical change which is of course expressed in a new angle of vision: “New eyes were given to him. And the most startling thing was to learn suddenly that he was very insignificant” (106).

The youth develops a new way of observing reality; he becomes a spectator again but can see everything in the right perspective, in its true light:

“From this present view point he was enabled to look upon them (his deeds, failures, achievements) in spectator fashion and to criticise them with some correctness, for his new condition had already defeated certain sympathies” (137)

So, the wheel has come full circle: “He found that he could look back upon the brass and bombast of his earlier gospels and see them truly.” (139)

Nevertheless the hero remains in the end as susceptible as ever to the lure of images and the circular structure of the novel is brought out by the last vision Henry deludes himself with: “He turned now with a lover's thirst to images of tranquil skies, fresh meadows, cool brooks—an existence of soft and eternal peace.”

IMAGES AND SYMBOLS IN *THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE*

One of the most original facets of Crane's war novel is its consistent use of manifold images and symbols which sometimes give this story the style of a prose poem. The overall tonality of the novel owes much of its uniqueness to the patterns of natural, religious or even mechanistic imagery created by the author. Our study will be limited to these three sets of images.

1. Nature and animal images

The protagonist's rural background is made manifest by the impressive number of scenes or similes referring to animals and forming a conventional bestiary by the side of a Christian demonology swarming with monsters directly borrowed from Greek or Biblical literatures. The *RBC* evinces a truly apocalyptic quality in the description of War which is compared to “a red animal” (75) “gulping [thousands of men] into its infernal mouth” (45). The two armies are, more often than not, associated with images of “monster” (14/33), “serpent” (15) and “dragons” (44); their encounter is likened to that of two panthers (“He conceived the two armies to be at each other panther fashion.” 51). The panther and the eagle seem to be the only two animals suggestive of some war-like qualities; the other animals appearing in the novel are more tame (mainly farm animals) and as a general rule carry different connotations: the soldiers are led into battle like “sheep” (108-111), “they are chased around like cats” (98), to protect themselves from the bullets “they dig at the ground like terriers” (26) and after charging like “terrified buffaloes” (72) they are eventually “killed like pigs”

(25). The hero's lack of courage – and stature – in the face of danger is suggested by comparisons referring to even smaller animals: the rabbit (43), the chicken (44) and the worm, the most despicable of all (“He would truly be a worm if any of his comrades should see him returning thus, the marks of his flight upon him.”, 68). Henry's companions are also likened to animals: Wilson to a “coon” (29) and then to a “panther” (134); Jim Conklin is once associated to the “lamb” during the death scene – a fitting symbol of peacefulness for the most philosophical of characters (“[...] the bloody and grim figure with its lamblike eyes” 55).

Most of these images illustrate the fact that war brings out the most primitive impulses and instincts in man and reduces him to the level of a beast (“he [the youth] had been an animal blistered and sweating in the heat and pain of war.” 140) or again, (103) “he had been a barbarian, a beast”. In the midst of the fight Henry experiences “an animal like rebellion” (48) and in a regressive response to fear and shame he develops “teeth and claws” to save his skin. Death is even described as an animal lurking within the soldiers; when Jim Conklin dies “it was as if an animal was within and was kicking and tumbling furiously to be free.” (61)

The flag, of all things pertaining to the army, is the only one to be endowed with positive connotations; it is evocative of a “bird” (40), of a “woman” (113) and of a “craved treasure of mythology” (133).

The same feminine qualities are sometimes attributed to Nature but this is not consistent throughout the novel as we've already seen. The main characteristic of Nature whether in the shape of the Sun or the Sky, the Forest or the Fields is indifference pure and simple. The only revelation in store for Henry when he yields to Nature's “beckoning signs” is that of a “charnel place” (85).

2. Religious imagery

As a P. K. (preacher's kid) brought up in a religious atmosphere, Stephen Crane commanded an impressive stock of religious and Biblical references. As J. Cazemajou points out in his short but thought-provoking study of Stephen Crane:

He was deeply conscious of man's littleness and of God's overbearing power. Man's wandering on the earth were pictured by him as those of a lonely pilgrim in a pathless universe. Crane's phraseology comes directly from the Bible, the sermons, and the hymns which had shaped his language during his youth. The topography of his stories where hills, mountains, rivers, and meadows appear under symbolie suns or moons is, to a large extent, an abstraction fraught with religious or moral significance. [...] In Crane's best work the imagery of the journey of initiation occupies a central position and reaches a climactic stage with some experience of conversion. He did not accept, it is true, the traditional interpretation of the riddle of the universe offered by the Methodist church. Nevertheless he constantly used a Christian terminology, and the thoughts of sin inspired his characters with guilty fears and stirred up within them such frequent debates with a troubled conscience that it is impossible to study his achievement outside a religious tradition (37)

This goes a long way toward explaining the following images:

— Nature = Church

The narrator mentions “the cathedral light of the forest” (26) then its “aisles” (27); “a mystic gloom” (14) enshrouds the landscape; the trees begin “softly to sing a hymn of twilight” (51); the hush after the battle becomes “solemn and churchlike” (127) and “the high arching boughs made a chapel [...] where there was a religious half-light (50).

— Henry's experiences = a spiritual itinerary

Henry is “bowed down by the weight of a great problem” (14) later he is crushed by “the black weight of his woe” (67). The change that war is going to bring about in him is tantamount to salvation (“He saw his salvation in such a change” 27). The reader often comes across such telling words as: “revelation” (43) “guilt” (139); “sin” (Ibid.) “retribution” (91); “letters of guilt” (57); “shame” (64); “crime” (65); “ceremony” (61); “chosen beings” (67); “prophet” (70) and so on.

— War = A blood-swollen God

“The wargod” (45) is one of the central figures in the *RBC* and the soldiers often appear as “devotee(s) of a mad religion, blood-sucking, muscle-wrenching, bone-crushing” (60).

The list could be lengthened at will; it is however abundantly clear that the religious vein is one of the most important in the novel. It is worth noting yet that there is no revelation in *The RBC*, no “epiphany” in its usual sense of a manifestation of God's presence in the world.

3. Mechanistic images

The *RBC* is a faithful, though oblique, reflection of the era in which it was written; it expresses certain doubts about the meaning of individual virtue in a world that has suddenly become cruel and mechanical. The Civil War brought about in both armies “a substitution of mechanical soldierly efficiency for an imaginary chivalric prowess” (Crews, XVIII). This evolution is made manifest by the numerous mechanistic images interspersed in the narrative; there is first the image of the “box” (23), then the “din of battle” is compared to “the roar of an oncoming train” (29); the enemy is described in terms of “machines of steel. It was very gloomy struggling against such affairs, wound up perhaps to fight until sundown” (43). One sometimes gets the impression that war is described as if it were a huge factory; this is apparent (127): [...] an interminable roar developed. To those in the midst of it it became a din fitted to the universe. It was the whirring and thumping of gigantic machinery.” Or again p. 53: “The battle was like the grinding of an immense and terrible machine to him. Its complexities and powers, its grim processes, fascinated him. He must go close and see it produce corpses.”

Even the bullets buff into the soldiers “with serene regularity, as if controlled by a schedule” (117), In “the furnace roar of battle” men are turned into “methodical idiots ! Machine-like fools !” (45) and the regiment after the first flush of enthusiasm is like “a machine run down” (116). All these images contribute to a thorough debunking of war which no longer appears kind and lovely.

STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

The *RBC* is notable for its bold innovations in technique and the fact that its method is all and none. Never before had a war tale been told in this way; as a consequence, Crane's art has stirred up endless debates about whether the author was a realist, a naturalist or an impressionist. All possible labels have, at one time or another, been stamped upon Crane as an artist; we'll use them as so many valuable clues in appraising Crane's style and technique.

Point of view

According to the famous critic Percy Lubbock (*The Craft of Fiction*) "point of view" means "the relation in which the narrator stands to the story". In the *RBC*, the narrator's point of view is through Fleming's eyes i.e. the reader sees what and as Henry does though he is never invited to identify wholly with him. In fact, the narrative in the novel is conducted in a paradoxical way because if the voice we hear is that of some sort of third-person objective narrator, the point of view is located at almost the same place as if this were a first-person narrative: just behind the eyes of Henry Fleming. The description of the hut on page 3 is a case in point:

"He lay down on a wide bunk that stretched across the end of the room. In the other end, cracker boxes were made to serve as furniture. They were grouped about the fireplace. A picture from an illustrated weekly was upon the log walls and three rifles were paralleled on pegs."

The scene is described as if Henry were taking it in whereas the panorama depicted in the opening section of the novel is attributable to a detached narrator standing a godlike position above the landscape:

"The cold passed reluctantly from the earth, and the retiring fogs revealed an army stretched out on the hills, resting. As the landscape changed from brown to green, the army awakened, and began to tremble with eagerness at the noise of rumors... etc." (1)

The reader, however, is not just shown things from the outside as they impinge upon the senses of an unknown observer; he sometimes goes "behind the scenes" and even penetrates into the inner life of the protagonist:

"A little panic-fear grew in his mind. As his imagination went forward to a fight, he saw hideous possibilities. He contemplated the lurking menaces of the future, and failed in an effort to see himself standing stoutly in the midst of them. He recalled his visions of broken-bladed glory, but in the shadow of the impending tumult he suspected them to be impossible pictures." (9)

Here the character is interiorized; the author allows himself the liberty of knowing and revealing what the hero is thinking and feeling. This is quite in keeping with the author's intention to study the reactions of "a nervous system under fire".

Another interesting and arresting aspect of Crane's utilization of point of view is his "cinematic" technique. Crane sometimes handles point of view as if it were a movie camera thus anticipating the devices of this new art form. A certain number of particular effects can be best described

in terms of shooting (camera-work) e.g. after the panning shot setting the stage for future action (beginning of the novel) we have a close-up (Henry is picked out in the mass of soldiers p. 2: "There was a youthful private, etc.") and then a flashback when the story shifts from the present to an earlier part of the story (parting scene with Henry's mother, 4). Numerous examples are to be found throughout the narrative.

The above remarks refer to the narrator's point of view but a second point of view functions in the narrative: the author's (four points of view interact in a novel: the author's, the narrator's, the character's or characters" and last but not least the reader's; their importance varies from one novel to another). The author's point of view manifests itself in the use of irony which constantly betrays an ambiguous presence. Who are the following appreciations ascribable to ?:

"The music of the trampling feet, the sharp voices, the clanking arms of the column near him made him soar on the red wings of war. *For a few moments he was sublime.*" (68)

"He drew back his lips and whistled through his teeth when his fingers came in contact with the splashed blood and the *rare* wound," (81)

"And for this he took unto himself considerable credit. *It was a generous thing,*" (93)

As one of Crane critics rightly points out: "Irony is not an ideal but a tactic. It's a way of taking the world slantwise, on the flank" (Cady, 90) in order to better expose its weaknesses and its flaws. Crane's irony was the basis of his technique; he levelled it at all abstract conventions and pomposities; at God, then at Man and at the Nation. There are of course, several types of irony but according to M. H. Abrams (*A Glossary of Literary Terms*): "In most of the diverse critical uses of the term "irony", there remains the root sense of dissimulation, or of a difference between what is asserted and what is actually the case". The duplicity of meaning is the central feature of irony The *RBC* sometimes exhibits structural irony *i.e.* uses a naive hero or narrator "whose invincible simplicity leads him to persist in putting an interpretation on affairs which the knowing reader—who penetrates to and shares, the implicit point of view of the authorial presence behind the naive person—just as persistently is able to alter and correct." Cf. page 64:

"Yeh look pretty peek-ed yerself," said the tattered man at last. "I bet yeh "ve got a worsen one than yeh think. Ye'd better take keer of yer burt. It don't do t'let sech things go. It might be inside mostly, an" them plays thunder. Where is it located ?"

The reader knows at this stage that the hero has escaped unscathed and does not deserve such eager care.

Cosmic irony is naturally at work in the *RBC*; it involves a situation "in which God, destiny, or the universal process, is represented as though deliberately manipulating events to frustrate and mock the protagonist." p. 83). Cf. 47:

The youth cringed as if discovered in a crime. By heavens, they had won after all ! The imbecile line had remained and become victors. He could hear the cheering [...] He turned away amazed and angry. He felt that he had been wronged. [...] It seemed that the blind ignorance and stupidity of

those little pieces had betrayed him. He had been overturned and crushed by their lack of sense in holding the position, when intelligent deliberation would have convinced them that it was impossible

Irony is inherent in the very structure of the narrative since at the end of the story after three-days' battle the army must recross the river from where the attack was launched at the beginning. The whole tumult has resulted in no gain of ground for the Union forces: "I bet we're goin't'git along out of this an'back over th'river,' said he." p. 136

As is customary with Crane, man is involved in an absurd and tragic situation which highlights his insignificance and the ridiculousness of his efforts.

Impressionism

Although J. Conrad defined criticism as "very much a matter of vocabulary very consciously used", one is hard put to it to give a satisfactory definition of the terms "impressionism" and "impressionistic". It's nevertheless a fact that the epithet "impressionistic" was often applied to Crane's work in the author's lifetime. The term comes from the French impressionist painters who rebelled against the conventions and the official conservatism of their time. They determined to paint things as they appeared to the painter at the moment, not as they are commonly thought or known to be. Such tendency was of course at variance with the tenets of realism for realism demanded responsibility to the common view whereas impressionism demanded responsibility only to what the unique eye of the painter saw. As one critic pointed out "the emphasis on the importance of vision is perhaps the only common denominator between this style of painting and Crane's art" (Cady). The credo of literary impressionists is, if we are to believe Conrad, "by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel — it is, before all, to make you see." The best account of the so-called impressionistic technique of the author has been given by the critic Robert H. Stallman whom I'll quote extensively:

Crane's style is prose pointillism. It is composed of disconnected images, which coalesce like the blobs of colour in French impressionist paintings, every word-group having a cross-referenee relationship, every seemingly disconnected detail having interrelationship to the configured whole. The intensity of a Crane work is owing to this patterned coalescence of disconnected things, everything at once fluid and precise. A striking analogy is established between Crane's use of colors and the method employed by the impressionists and the neo-impressionists or divisionists, and it is as if he had known about their theory of contrasts and had composed his own prose paintings by the same principle. [...] Crane's perspectives, almost without exception, are fashioned by contrasts — black masses juxtaposed against brightness, colored light set against gray mists. At dawn the army glows with a purple hue, and "In the eastern sky there was a yellow patch like a rug laid for the feet of the coming sun; and against it, black and pattern-like, loomed the gigantic figure of the colonel on a gigantic horse"(239). (*An Omnibus* p. 185-86).

Crane's striving after effects of light and shade and his concern for the effect of light on color are evidenced by the way he uses adjectives (or nouns used adjectivally). Crane actually paints with words and adjectives just as artists paint with pigments and this brings about most astounding

effects and associations. Thus “red”, “blue”, “black” and “yellow” are the dominant hues of the novel: the regiment is “a vast blue demonstration” (8); the youth must confront “the red formidable difficulties of war” (41); he labours under “the black weight of his woe” (67) or is carried away “on the red wings of war” (68) then he walks “into the purple darkness” (76) before traversing “red regions” (134) resonant with “crimson oaths” (138). Some descriptions are saturated with visual impressions:

There was a great gleaming of yellow and patent leather about the saddle and bridle, The quiet man astride looked mouse-colored upon such a splendid charger. (46)

The clouds were tinged an earthlike yellow in the sunrays and in the shadow were a sorry blue. The flag was sometimes eaten and lost in this mass of vapour, but more often it projected sun-touched, resplendent. (42)

The reader also comes across a few examples of synaesthesia (association of sensations of different kinds; description of one kind of sensation in terms of another; color is attributed to sounds, odor to colors, sound to odors, and so on): “shells exploding redly” (31)/“a crimson roar” (51)/“red cheers” (53)

Pathetic fallacy

Another feature of Crane's style – a possible outgrowth of his interest in vision – is the use of pathetic fallacy or ascription of human traits to inanimate nature. There's in Crane's work a strong tendency towards personification or anthropomorphism. The narrative teems with notations giving a dynamising, anthropomorphic quality to the object described. Here are a few telling examples:

“The guns squatted in a row like savage chiefs. They argued with abrupt violence.” (40)

“The cannon with their noses poked slantingly at the ground grunted and grumbled like stout men, brave but with objections to hurry.” (46)

“Trees confronting him, stretched out their arms and forbade him to pass” (52)

“Some lazy and ignorant smoke curled slowly.” (118)

The youth listens to “the courageous words of the artillery and the spiteful sentences of the musketry” (53); the waggons are compared to “fat sheep” (66) and the bugles “call to each other like brazen gamecocks.” (86).

Crane rarely aims at giving the reader a direct transcript of experience; reality is always pervaded by a strong subjective coloring which gives it unexpected and sometimes disquieting dimensions.

Realism and naturalism

There now remains for us to examine, however briefly, the realistic and naturalistic interpretations of Crane's work. Realism is perhaps of all the terms applied to Crane, the most suitable. In a letter to the editor of *Leslie's Weekly* Crane wrote that:

“I decided that the nearer a writer gets to life the greater he becomes as an artist, and most of my prose writings have been toward the goal partially described by that misunderstood and abused word, realism.”

What is meant by realism ? According to M. H. Abrams it is a special literary manner aiming at giving:

“the illusion that it reflects life as it seems to the common reader. [...] The realist, in other words, is deliberately selective in his material and prefers the average, the commonplace, and the everyday over the rarer aspects of the contemporary scene. His characters therefore, are usually of the middle class or (less frequently) the working-class people without highly exceptional endowments, who live through ordinary experiences of childhood, adolescence, love, marriage, parenthood, infidelity, and death; who find life rather dull and often unhappy, though it may be brightened by touches of beauty and joy; but who may, under special circumstances, display something akin to heroism.”

The *RBC* is obviously not consistently realistic yet one cannot read far into it without discovering a few distinctly realistic touches whether it is in the depiction of life in the army with its constant drilling and reviewing or in the emphasis on the commonplace and unglamorous actions. Realism is also to be found in the style of the book when S. Crane reproduces the language heard at the time with its numerous elisions and colloquial or even corrupt expressions:

“What's up, Jim?”

'Th' army's goin' t'move.'

'Ah, what yeh talkin' about ? How yeh know it is ?'

'Well, yeh kin b'lieve me er not, jest as yeh like,. I don't care a hang.'”(2)

This is quite different from the style used for the narrative and the descriptions; this second style is characterized by its original figures of speech, its use of adjectives and its impressionistic technique (see examples in the above section). In fact, Crane's work manages a transition from traditional realism (with the extended and massive specification of detail with which the realist seeks to impose upon one an illusion of life) to an increasingly psychological realism. The emphasis on detail is characteristic of the realistic method of writing as was demonstrated by R. Jakobson in *Fundamentals of Language* (77-78): “Following the path of contiguous relationships, the realistic author metonymically digresses from the plot to atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time.” Crane's originality however lies in the fact that he held realism to be a matter of seeing, a question of vision. The novelist, he wrote, “must be true to himself and to things as he sees them.”

What about Crane's alleged naturalism ? Naturalism is “a mode of fiction that was developed by a school of writers in accordance with a special philosophical thesis. This thesis, a product of post-Darwinian biology in the mid-nineteenth century, held that man belongs entirely in the order of nature and does not have a soul or any other connection with a religious or spiritual world beyond

nature; that man is therefore merely a higher-order animal whose character and fortunes are determined by two kinds of natural forces, heredity and environment.” (Abrams, 142)

True, Crane makes use of animal imagery (especially to describe Henry Fleming's panic syndrome) but he ignores the last two factors mentioned in the above definition. The only naturalistic element studied by Crane is aggressive behaviour and a certain form of primitiveness but his utilization of such material is quite different from Zola's, Crane's naturalism is more descriptive than illustrative and conjures up a moral landscape where the preternatural prevails.

The least one can say at the close of this survey of the many and various responses The *RBC* has aroused in critics is that the novel is much more complex than one would imagine at first glance. Such a multiplicity of widely diverging critical appreciations points to one obvious conclusion, namely, that “in art, in life, in thought, [Crane] remained an experimenter, a seeker of rare, wonderful gifts, an apprentice sorcerer.” (Cady, 46).

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