The Red Badge of Courage and Interpretive Conventions: Critical Response to a Maimed Text

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Now we know that Stephen Crane composed *The Red Badge of Courage* as an ironic tale of a young soldier's egotistical self-deceptions.\(^1\) Crane showed Henry Fleming to be as deluded in his attitude toward his heroic acts as he was in his earlier rationalizations about his running from battle. Throughout the story, the narrator consistently undercuts Henry's unfailing egotism, both his lack of concern for others and his belief in his own uniqueness (either as victim or prophet). Crane concluded his novel with a masterful ironic coda in which Henry's evaluation of his past conduct appears as just one more self-delusion. This is the *Red Badge* that Crane wrote. However, it is not the book that D. Appleton & Co. published in October 1895. A cut-down version of Crane's final manuscript, the text of the Appleton first edition was the result of wholesale expurgations but no extensive rewriting.

Appleton did not print several passages that can be found in the extant pages of Crane's manuscript as well as others that existed on pages now missing. Some of these deletions were made in the manuscript; for example, passages at the ends of chapters 7, 10, and 15 were crossed out in pencil or blue crayon, and all the pages of chapter 12 were removed. Other passages (such as those in chapters 16 and 25) were left uncanceled in the manuscript but were not published in the first edition.\(^2\) All this material was cut from the story at the insistence or suggestion of Crane's Appleton editor, Ripley Hitchcock.\(^3\) The result was a radically different story than the one Crane had originally written. Most readers of the Appleton *Red Badge* have interpreted it as a story of a young soldier's growth to maturity.

However, as I will show, there has been widespread disagreement among *Red Badge* critics about exactly how Henry grows in the Appleton text. A few dissenting critics have even denied that he develops at all.
Still other critics argue that Crane failed to bring *Red Badge* to any coherent conclusion. The reason for such interpretive chaos is the maimed state of the Appleton text. The deleted passages made the text of the Appleton first edition inconsistent and in places illogical. Recently, Hershel Parker proposed that critical attention should be directed toward a reconstruction of the manuscript. And Henry Binder has now demonstrated in detail that Crane's most complete intentions are realized more fully and more consistently in the manuscript than in the Appleton first edition. Binder is especially effective in showing the incoherence of the Appleton final chapter, the section which most critics use as crucial proof that Henry Fleming has undergone a change in character.

The maimed Appleton text is the basic form in which reviewers and later critics have read Crane's novel. If the Appleton text is illogical and inconsistent, how have "*Red Badge*" critics been able to make any sense of it, let alone call it an American classic?

I begin to answer this question in section I by focusing on literary conventions—recognized practices in handling subject matter and form—that make up the genre of the nineteenth-century war novel. In section II, I demonstrate how traditional literary conventions function as interpretive conventions—shared strategies for making sense of texts. That is, I show how critics employ conventions of genre and mode as well as authorial conventions particular to Crane's canon in order to interpret the expurgated Appleton text of *Red Badge*.

In its promotional flyer sent to book dealers, Appleton directed *Red Badge* into the stream of nineteenth-century war fiction: "For an equally searching and graphic analysis of the volunteer in battle, one is tempted to turn to certain pages of Tolstoy." Many contemporary reviewers agreed with such claims, and they put *Red Badge* squarely in the tradition of the realistic war novel when they specifically compared it to Tolstoy's *Sebastopol* and Zola's *La Désâcle*. In fact, conventions understood to belong to the war novel as a separate genre in prose fiction formed the background against which most contemporary and later reactions to *Red Badge* took place. A brief outline of these generic conventions will help to put Crane's story and the reactions to it in perspective.

The historical romance dominated war fiction during the first half of the nineteenth century. In most historical romances war was pictured as an idealized setting for attaining glory. Officers were given the roles of courageous heroes, and the common soldier was relegated to accepting
his patriotic duty and the authority of those over him. If any barbarity
tainted the battle descriptions, it was to show the enemy’s cruelty. These conventions of the historical romance persisted throughout the
nineteenth century. But after the Civil War many war novels appeared
that began modifying the conventions, one such change being the presenta-
tion of more realistic detail among the romantic idealizations.

A departure from all variations on the historical romance was the
realistic war novel, which made its appearance with Tolstoy’s *Sebastopol*
(1854-55; English translation, 1887). This kind of war story was an
antiromance in which neither war nor combatant was idealized. A falli-
ble antihero replaced the traditionally courageous hero of historical
romance. At the opening of a typical realistic war novel, the central
character was often vainglorious, and the traditional martial attitudes of
romance were sometimes parodied. Surrounded by the brutality of war-
fare, the “hero” showed himself afraid in battle and only later became
brave: he did not come to war with inborn courage but acquired it in the
heat of battle. The realistic war novel thus established a new generic plot
convention: growth from cowardice and inexperience to courage and
manhood. As Eric Solomon has observed, “By the time American
novelists began writing about the Civil War, a European tradition of
irony and realism, and a motif of the development, through war, from
innocence to maturity, had been established through the war fiction of
De Vigny, Stendhal, Zola, and Tolstoy.” It was in this tradition that
most reviewers and later critics placed *Red Badge*.

The Appleton text of *Red Badge* does seem to exhibit all of the con-
ventions that characterize the realistic war novel as typified by
*Sebastopol*. Henry Fleming is an enlisted man, whose romantic visions
of war (“a Greeklike struggle”) are soon dispelled in the actualities of
combat. At the outset he dreams of heroic accomplishments but then
feels grave doubts about his ability to act courageously in battle. As it
turns out, he stands and returns fire during the first attack only to flee in
terror during the second. Then after wandering for some time in the
woods, he is returned to his regiment by a stranger and fights
courageously the next day, becoming the company flag-bearer. In the
final chapter, Henry feels “a quiet manhood, nonassertive but of
sturdy and strong blood.”

Based on this reading of the Appleton text, most contemporary
reviewers saw *Red Badge* as a realistic war novel in the tradition of
Tolstoy, perhaps exceptional in its psychological realism or impres-
sionistic style but wholly traditional in its use of the convention of initia-
tion and growth in its young hero. However, the maimed state of the Ap-
pleton text did not allow reviewers and later critics to see the true
originality of what Crane had actually written. The manuscript version is
antiromantic, but it is also the ultimate extension of ironic realism in that
it rejects the convention of initiation. In the manuscript Henry experiences no growth, no movement from innocence to maturity or illusion to enlightenment. Certain passages not published in the Appleton first edition clearly indicate that Henry has learned nothing by the end of the novel. There were obvious precedents for the story told in the Appleton text within the tradition of the nineteenth-century war novel, but what Crane wrote in the manuscript transcends the tradition. The Appleton text appears to be an attempt to follow the traditional generic conventions of the realistic war novel, while the manuscript indicates that Crane’s original conception was truly unique, reacting against both the historical romance’s idealization of war and the realistic novel’s convention of successful initiation.

II

Based on readings of the Appleton text, a few reviewers and many twentieth-century critics have praised Crane for initiating or perfecting the use of such modes of writing as impressionism, ironic realism, deterministic naturalism, and modern symbolism. However, what interpretations of Red Badge do such evaluations assume? That is, what holistic sense of the Appleton text has been made by its enthusiastic interpreters?

The following discussion is limited to critical arguments that focus on Crane’s use of two generic conventions—growth of protagonist and attitude of narrator toward characters—because most holistic interpretations of Red Badge focus on Crane’s use (or misuse) of these conventions. In the course of the discussion, I will show how generic, modal, and authorial conventions constitute the interpretations of the Appleton text. That is, Red Badge criticism clearly illustrates how traditional literary conventions become interpretive conventions: to make sense of the expurgated Appleton text, critics have been forced to rely on conventions of past literary practice to supply the present meaning of an incoherent text.

Critics of Red Badge fall into one of three general categories: (1) those who, seeing few if any interpretive problems, make sense of the Appleton text by concluding that Henry grows and the narrator’s attitude toward him moves from ironic undercutting to various degrees of sympathetic approval; (2) those who cannot make sense of the text because of its apparent contradictions; and (3) those who make sense of the text by concluding that Henry experiences no growth and that the narrator’s attitude is consistently ironic.

The overwhelming majority of Red Badge critics fall into the first category: they interpret the Appleton text according to the conventions
of the nineteenth-century realistic war novel and therefore see Henry as growing in the course of his war experience. However, there is an extremely wide divergence of opinion among these critics over the terms of his growth, whether from cowardice to bravery, innocence to experience, or ignorance to insight.

Those critics who believe that Henry grows from a cowardly civilian to a courageous soldier view *Red Badge* as a war story in its narrowest sense. Most contemporary reviewers belong to this group. For example, in the *Saturday Review* Sydney Brooks spoke of Henry Fleming as "a raw youth" who "develops into a tried and trustworthy soldier," and the reviewer for *The Bookman* saw in the novel "a genuine development of the untried civilian into the capable and daring soldier." In his 1925 preface to *Red Badge*, Joseph Conrad referred to Crane's "war book" and "the problem of courage," seeing Henry as a "symbol of all untried men." More recently, critics such as Lars Ahnebrink have written of Henry's "development into a real war hero" and about "the process of conquering fear" analyzed in the novel.

A more complex growth in Henry is posited by critics who interpret Henry as growing in experience from innocence to maturity but make no explicit reference to his gaining self-knowledge. In 1895 William Dean Howells called Henry a "tawdry-minded youth" and praised Crane's skill "in evolving from the youth's crude expectations and ambitions a quiet honesty and self-possession manlier and nobler than any heroism he had imagined." In a similar vein but decades later, V. S. Pritchett wrote about Henry as "a green young recruit" who "loses his romantic illusions and his innocence in battle and acquires a new identity, a hardened virtue." In 1945 R. B. Sewall interpreted the ending as a complete "moral victory" for Henry, whose "victory over fear" seems to have made up for his past sins (running from battle and deserting the tattered soldier). However, Sewall was also the first critic to voice objections to the ending of the Appleton text: he found Henry's final "state of complacency" to be "undeserved and arbitrary" in terms of "Henry's moral struggle as Crane has represented it."

Of recent comments on *Red Badge*, Donald Pizer's interpretation is the most interesting example from this group of critics who see growth in experience but not necessarily in self-knowledge. For Pizer, Henry "emerges at the end of the battle not entirely self-perceptive or firm-willed—Crane is too much the ironist for such a reversal—but rather as one who has encountered some of the strengths and some of the failings of himself and others." Pizer never specifically states that Henry gains an insight into himself; he only describes the youth's growth negatively—Henry *is not* the same as he was—and implies that the difference *may* be limited self-knowledge. Pizer surmises that "something has happened
to Fleming which Crane values and applauds," and then suggests that this "something" is partly Henry's movement from isolation to "oneness with his fellows." Whether Pizer thinks Henry himself actually realizes this is not clear: "Henry is still for the most part self-deceived at the close of the novel, but if he is not the 'man' he thinks he has become, he has at least shed some of the innocence of the child." Sensitive to irony as an authorial convention exhibited throughout Crane's canon, Pizer is careful not to claim too much for the story in the Appleton text; the ambiguities of his interpretation are to some extent the result of an intelligent critic reading a maimed text.

Also in the first category of critics who see growth in *Red Badge* are those who interpret Henry's change as an explicit movement from illusion to enlightenment. In 1925 Joseph Hergesheimer put it simply: *Red Badge* is the "story of the birth, in a boy, of a knowledge of himself and of self-command." There has been a great diversity of opinion about what precisely is Henry Fleming's self-insight. A contemporary reviewer saw Henry's "agony of fear" turning into a "recognition of the universality of suffering." In 1934 Harry Hartwick claimed that the youth "reaches the conclusion that the chief thing is to resign himself to his fate, to participate in Darwin's 'survival of the fittest,' to play 'follow the leader' with Nature, and to confront this mad, implacable world with 'intestinal fortitude' and a brave smile; in one word, to become a stoic." In 1951 R. W. Stallman spoke of a "spiritual change" in which Henry "confesses to himself the truth" about his previous pride and "puts on new garments of humility." Still later, Eric Solomon argued that "the standards by which Henry's development is measured are those of group loyalty rather than fear and courage." At the end of the novel, Henry's "self-interest and pride are not obliterated but transformed as he identifies himself as a member of his group." For Solomon, Henry "has learned the essence of man's duty to man, as well as the fact that life (like war) is not a romantic dream governed by absolutes, but a matter of compromises. . . . At least war has shown the young soldier his true self, and the acquisition of self-knowledge is no small accomplishment." This list of critics with different opinions on Henry Fleming's self-insight could easily be extended.

Among these critics, Edwin Cady provides one of the most perceptive discussions of the early ironic distance between the narrator and Henry. Cady shows how, as a civilian, Henry was a "perfect neo-romantic"; how the youth's romantic egotism is undercut by "ridicule and irony"; how false are both his "irresponsibility" for his acts on the one hand and his sense of a "prophetic role" on the other; and how nature "varies with his psychic states." However, Cady interprets Henry as gaining a certain understanding and modesty in the final sec-
tion of the Appleton text: “In the end he sees that he is neither a hero nor a villain, that he must assume the burdens of a mixed, embattled, impermanent, modest, yet prevailing humanity.” Cady makes some use of the manuscript; but he misjudges the importance of the deleted chapter 12 (where Henry in railing against the universe is most obviously a fool), and he entirely misses the interpretive significance of the excisions made in the last chapter.

Also among the critics who see Henry as growing through self-knowledge are some who mention problems they have in interpreting the ending of the Appleton text. For example, George Johnson wrote that Henry “supposedly learns to abide incongruity and find the world meaningful,” but he also noted a “dramatic falseness” in this “implicitly optimistic close.” Mordecai Marcus interpreted Henry as revolting against both his cowardly and fierce behavior and accepting “the perilous but unavoidable human lot.” However, Marcus also mentioned a “general weakening of interest and cohesion in the last eight chapters” and noted that the conclusion “jars slightly with some of the preceding narrative, especially with the ironic treatment of Henry,” the reasons being (in part) the “suddenness of Henry's insight” and “traces of irony in the final chapter.” Marcus then swept these problems aside when he confusingly argued that restoring the deleted passages would make the final chapter “quite ambiguous and would suggest that Crane regarded Henry ironically to the very end.” That is, Marcus first complained that the ending of the Appleton text was “slightly jarring” but then rejected the solution that would remedy that “jarring.”

Finally, within this large category of critics who interpret Henry as growing, there are some critics who see both growth and irony at the end of the Appleton text (what Pizer has called “purposeful ambivalence”). Whereas most of the critics I have discussed assume that once Henry grows the narrator’s attitude toward him changes, this last group interprets Henry as growing in some respect but emphasizes that the narrator preserves a degree of ironic distance to the end. For example, Larzer Ziff noted that “at the very close Crane makes Henry’s newly acquired cockiness so great that it becomes ambiguous when we remember his shortcomings and his rationalizations,” and J. C. Levenson remarked that “residual egotism makes the ending ambiguous.” Stanley Greenfield’s interpretation made the most frequently cited case for Crane’s having a “duality of view” at the conclusion of Red Badge. Greenfield argued that Henry grows in both attitude and behavior and that his final evaluation of his past conduct is not undercut. “There is no vain delusion about the past,” wrote Greenfield; but then he added, “As for the future—well, that is a different matter, highly ambiguous.” As ambiguous as these critics see the ending, they always interpret a degree of growth in Henry and should properly be viewed as among those critics
who make a sense of the Appleton text (indeed the intended ambiguity they find is the sense they make).

The first category of Crane critics was able to make sense of the Appleton text by interpreting Henry Fleming as growing in bravery, experience, or knowledge. A second category of critics could not make sense of the Appleton text and therefore concluded that Crane's artistic skills were limited and the writer's problems in Red Badge proved too much for him. One such dissenter, John Shroeder, argued that Crane's novel was "more confused than its critics have been willing to admit." He found "false directions and incoherencies" and called aspects of the book "diffuse and inchoate." Concerning the last chapter, Shroeder thought that Crane "had his own doubts about the validity of Henry's transformation." Giving a nonironic reading to the penultimate sentence, "He turned now with a lover's thirst to images of tranquil skies, fresh meadows, cool brooks—an existence of soft and eternal peace," Shroeder commented that "Crane seems to have forgotten everything that has gone before in his own book."

Another dissatisfied critic, Richard Chase, wrote that themes of "spiritual death and rebirth" and of "advancing maturity" are "only sketchily there, if at all" in the Appleton text. Crane "seems half-hearted about carrying things through to the moral conclusion." According to Chase, Crane inclined toward dramatizing the discrepancy between Henry's illusion and actual fact but instead tried to draw a moral "in the vague and pretentious language of the last five paragraphs" (which Chase does not interpret ironically). James Colvert made a more detailed attack on the story told in the Appleton text:

Although the novel might appear to be a straightforward account of how a self-centered young man acquires, as a result of his war experiences, a measure of redeeming wisdom, the problems raised in the story are not clearly defined or resolved. As a consequence the ending is confused and unconvincing. We are told that Henry Fleming is a changed man, but we are not told how he is supposed to have met the conditions implicitly required of him in the first sixteen chapters. In the first part of the story Henry is the target of the narrator's relentless ironic criticism, scored for his delusions of grandeur, his assumption that he somehow merits a special place in the regard of the universe. And though Crane labors in the final chapter to convince us that his hero has rid himself of these delusions, the deterioration in the quality of the writing—the appearance of a tendency toward incoherence—shows that the task is too much for him. The tone shifts inappropriately, the irony is erratic and often misdirected, and the hero is permitted certain assumptions inconsistent with his previous characterization and Crane's established attitudes toward him.

Colvert left very little of Crane's artistry for us to respect.
Thus far in this section, I have tried to illustrate the interpretive chaos in *Red Badge* criticism by providing numerous examples of diverse interpretations as well as critical hesitations and confusions within individual readings. These interpretive problems are a direct result of the expurgations made in the Appleton text, expurgations that have allowed the text to mean many things to some critics and nothing to others. But if such critical chaos is due to a maimed text, how do we account for those critics who make a sense of the text in which Henry does not grow and the narrator’s attitude is consistently ironic? That is, if the problems in interpreting the Appleton text are caused by the missing passages, how can a small group of Crane critics not only interpret that text but, in fact, provide a sense that closely resembles what Crane originally presented in the manuscript? How did Charles Walcutt and John Berryman, the two best examples, interpret Henry as not growing and the narrator’s attitude as ironic toward Henry throughout?51

One demonstrable answer is by the critic’s use of modal conventions—stylistic and thematic conventions that convey a particular interpretation of experience.52 For a critic who claimed that the modal conventions of *Red Badge* were those of naturalism, the possibility of Henry’s self-betterment would be very remote indeed, since the youth would be viewed as a mere pawn of external and internal forces. Thus, in *American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream*, Walcutt argued that Crane is a naturalist who “makes us see Henry Fleming as an emotional puppet controlled by whatever sight he sees at the moment.” Guided by the modal conventions of naturalism, Walcutt decided that Henry “has not achieved a lasting wisdom or self-knowledge” and therefore fails to grow.53 But apparently the use of modal conventions is not sufficient in itself to determine an interpretation that sees Henry not growing at all: Pizer, for example, also invoked modal conventions in his interpretation.54 Nor are authorial conventions enough: Marston LaFrance was as sensitive as Berryman to ironic conventions throughout the Crane canon, yet he still interpreted Henry as attaining “authentic self-knowledge and a sense of manhood after long and fierce battles with his own moral weaknesses.”55

I can, however, point to another literary convention and its manifestation in *Red Badge* criticism—a convention of narrative consistency. One corollary of this narrative convention might be roughly stated: there will be no radical (unexplainable) change in the attitude of the narrator toward his protagonist.56 What Berryman and Walcutt have done in their interpretations of the Appleton text is to use this narrative convention to supply what “wasn’t there”: they merely extended to the conclusion the conventional contract established early in the novel. For
example, Berryman noted that a "pervasive irony is directed toward the youth—his self-importance, his self-pity, his self-loving war rage." As a result of this sense of the irony, at one point in his reading of the last chapter Berryman protested: "But then comes a sentence in which I simply do not believe." This sentence ("He turned now with a lover's thirst to images of tranquil skies, fresh meadows, cool brooks—an existence of soft and eternal peace."), one which Shroeder took so literally, is interpreted by Berryman on the basis of the ironic conventions of the earlier chapters. Walcutt was even more explicit about how his reading of the earlier sections determined his refusal to interpret Henry as growing in the final chapter: Henry's self-evaluation in the final section is "a climax of self-delusion. If there is any one point that has been made it is that Henry has never been able to evaluate his conduct."

This last account of how a small number of critics could interpret the maimed Appleton text ironically to its end also helps explain what happened with the critics who found the text incoherent: they simply refused to extend into the final chapter the interpretive conventions established early in the novel. For these dissatisfied critics, a generic convention which they assume Crane to be following (growth through war experience) was at odds with a convention developed early in the novel (ironic distance), and these critics resolved the inconsistency (which they had supplied in responding to a maimed text) by judging Crane's artistic skill at fault. But then what happened with the first category of critics, most of whom made a nonironic, "coherent" sense of the ending? We could simply say that they ignored relevant discrepancies in the story (relevant, that is, according to the terms of their own interpretations) which cannot be conventionally accounted for without the manuscript evidence. But we could also further surmise: because their attention was deflected by the length of the battle descriptions between the obvious early narrative irony and the last chapter, these critics were able to accept a radical change in the narrator's attitude toward Henry Fleming; and because of the traditional convention that outward battle heroism indicates internal maturation, they could accept Henry as growing.

In this way the interpretations of the Appleton text can all be accounted for by the ability (or inability) of critics to invoke narrative conventions. Only those critics who were most sensitive to the conventions Crane was employing could come close on the basis of the maimed Appleton text to a knowledge of Crane's originality in transcending the tradition of the realistic war novel. But even these critics could not fully appreciate Crane's achievement because significant scenes are irretrievable without the manuscript.
My concluding perspective on *Red Badge* criticism focuses on the convention of irony, an interpretive convention that has functioned in complex and subtle ways in attempts to make sense of the Appleton text. All *Red Badge* critics invoke an ironic convention to interpret the first part of the story. The largest number of critics then drop the convention by the last chapter as they interpret Henry as growing and the narrator’s attitude toward him as changing. Those that continue invoking the convention do so in three different ways. Some critics (Colvert, Chase, Shroeder) decide not to use the ironic convention consistently to the end, “seeing” residual irony only in places and interpreting Henry as achieving an undeserved or incoherent self-knowledge. Other critics (Greenfield, Ziff, Levenson) agree that Henry grows in the Appleton text, but by continuing to invoke the ironic convention consistently, they resolve potential textual problems through the use of a popular modern interpretive convention, the “discovery” of purposeful ambivalence: Crane intended growth and irony, a positive change in Henry with an apparent residue of continued self-delusion. Still other critics (Walcott, Berryman) use the ironic convention to eliminate any growth in Henry, resolving all potential textual problems by positing a consistent ironic attitude in the narrator which undercuts any apparent change in the main character.

My point here is that the maimed state of the Appleton ending necessitates critical choices in the use of interpretive conventions, choices that force critics to “write” their own texts that they call *The Red Badge of Courage*. One group writes a conventional realistic war novel of the nineteenth century; another constructs an inconsistent artistic failure; another makes a twentieth-century ironic tale of purposeful ambivalence; and still another creates a story that comes surprisingly close to the experimental novel that Crane actually intended.

**NOTES**


2 Most of the manuscript is preserved in the Stephen Crane Collection of the Clifton Waller Barrett Library at the University of Virginia, and four pages of the original chapter 12 are distributed among the Berg Collection at the New York Public Library, the Houghton Library at Harvard, and the Butler Library at Columbia. The final manuscript as well as an earlier draft are reproduced in *The Red Badge of Courage: A Facsimile Edition of the Manuscript*, ed. Fredson Bowers, Vol. II (Washington, D. C.: NCR/Microcard, 1972).
3 Binder, p. 12.


5 Binder, p. 17.

6 The term “convention” means “shared practice” here. Put most simply then: Literary conventions are shared practices used by authors to portray experience in literature; and interpretive conventions are shared practices used by readers to make sense of literary texts. Cf. my discussion of Stanley Fish’s concept of “interpretive strategies” and Jonathan Culler’s theory of “reading conventions” in Steven Mailloux, “Reader-Response Criticism?” Genre, 10 (Fall 1977), 413-31.

7 See the bookseller’s order blank reproduced in the present issue.


11 Such was the case in John Esten Cooke’s Surry of Eagle’s-Nest: or, The Memoirs of a Staff-Officer Serving in Virginia, an 1866 romance which also contained another popular traditional convention, the romantic love interest. (See Miller, pp. 82-83.)

12 “Romanticism” and “realism” are relative terms placed along a spectrum with abstract stylization and idealization near one end and photographic realism near the other, the values along the spectrum being defined by conventional agreement. (Cf. the discussion of the “standard story” in Stanley E. Fish, “How To Do Things with Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism,” MLN, 91 [Oct. 1976], 1018-22.) Realism, like romanticism, is a modal convention. “But we often talk as though it is not a convention at all, as though it were a way of presenting a direct picture of a series of typical and lifelike experiences. As soon as we try to define it, however, we realize how many questions we are usually begging—how far we take for granted highly conventional and often highly complex features” (Douglas Hewitt, The Approach to Fiction [London: Longman, 1972], p. 47).


16 The most significant deletions included passages referring to Henry’s propensity for self-delusion portrayed in cosmic terms (final manuscript pp. 188, 191-92); the words that show Henry thinking that death was only “for others” (final manuscript p. 192); and the last Jimmie Rogers episode (final manuscript p. 187), which emphasizes Henry’s self-centeredness in contrast to Wilson’s concern for others. See Binder, section III.


20 Ahnebrink, p. 351.


25 Ibid., for example, pp. 26 and 30.

26 Ibid., pp. 28-29

27 Ibid., p. 30. Recognizing that “Fleming’s self-evaluations contrast ironically with his motives and actions throughout the novel,” Pizer also claims that “Fleming’s own sanguine view of himself at the close of the novel—that he is a man—cannot be taken at face value” (p. 28). Later, in his 1969 review of Crane scholarship, Pizer lists his own interpretation as one of those supporting the thesis that Henry “has gained from his experiences but he is nevertheless deluded in his understanding of what he has gained” (Pizer, “Stephen Crane,” p. 125).


32 Solomon, pp. 82, 87, 92.
33 Ibid., pp. 121, 121-22, 129, 127.
34 Ibid., pp. 125-26, 142.
35 Ibid., p. 129. Cady does recognize that this chapter "derided the naturalistic diagnosis of Fleming’s condition together with Henry’s Dreiser-like urge to proclaim its gospel"; but he claims that "since the relative slackness of the previous chapter makes it clear that discursive patches mar The Red Badge, it is not surprising that Crane suppressed his intended Chapter XII. He was right to do so. . . ."
36 Ibid., p. 141. See n. 16, above.
39 Ibid., pp. 194-95. Marcus wrote further that Crane’s “final problem was to make us accept some intellectual self-transcendence in Henry so that our sympathies—no matter how they have been tried—will remain with him. Crane’s success with this problem was, I think, only moderate" (p. 195). Cf. James W. Tuttleton, “The Imagery of The Red Badge of Courage,” MFS, 8 (Winter 1962-63), 415.
40 Marcus, p. 195.
44 Greenfield, p. 571.
45 Of course, critics in this second category ultimately do make a sense of the text (e.g., by saying that Crane couldn’t handle his materials or Crane didn’t know what he wanted), but this is a different level of interpretation than that on which the first and third categories of critics are working: that is, the second category cannot provide a coherent interpretation for the story and therefore tries to explain the lack of coherence by moving "beyond" the text to the artistry of its creator (overlooking the possibility of an expurgated text as an explanation) and judging that the artistic skill is defective. Thus, the second category of critics provides a diachronic explanation while the others provide a synchronic one.
47 Ibid., pp. 127, 128.
48 Ibid., p. 126.

51 Charles Child Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press), pp. 74-82, and John Berryman, “Stephen Crane: The Red Badge of Courage,” in The American Novel: From James Fenimore Cooper to William Faulkner, ed. Wallace Stegner (New York: Basic Books, 1965), pp. 86-96. Walcutt’s consistently ironic interpretation has been seconded by Jay Martin (Harvests of Change [Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967], pp. 64-65) and in part by Miller (p. 72) and Chase (p. xv), but “most critics have not accepted such an extreme view of Crane’s attitude toward Fleming” (Pizer, “Stephen Crane,” p. 124). Berryman’s interpretation might at first seem to be closer to that of Greenfield (intended ambiguity) or Colvert (unintentional confusion) than to Walcutt’s. Berryman admitted, “I do not know what Crane intended. Probably he intended to have his cake and eat it too—irony to the end, but heroism too” (p. 90). However, Berryman went on to tip the balance more toward irony: “It seems impossible not to conclude that the splendid burst of rhetoric with which the novel concludes is just that in part—a burst of rhetoric—and that Crane retained many of his reservations about his hero” (p. 91). Finally, the force of the hedging “in part” seems gone entirely when Berryman concluded that “we are left after all with ‘fool . . . ’” (p. 91), making Berryman’s interpretation approach close to Walcutt’s (as Miller recognized, p. 72).


53 Walcutt, pp. 79, 82.

54 Pizer, Realism and Naturalism, pp. 12-14, 24-32.


56 The form of this convention is generic in that it holds within the genre of the novel, but the specific content of the convention is developed during the reading of individual novels.

57 Berryman, p. 89.

58 Ibid., p. 91.

59 Walcutt, p. 81.

60 I am not trying to explain why a particular critic used one interpretive convention instead of another; such an explanation is beyond the scope of this essay. I am trying to describe how critics have been able to make sense of the Appleton text: through their use of traditional literary conventions as interpretive conventions.

61 See Binder, section III.

Most critics have ignored the manuscript in obedience to a regulative convention of Anglo-American New Criticism which pressured them to ignore all prepublication forms of a text. In particular, the Intentional Fallacy prescribed that the critic ignore authorial intention and view the published text in hand as sacrosanct. Almost all modern interpretations have reflected this restriction, even those not made directly under the dominance of the New Critical paradigm. Editors and textual scholars might have been expected to reconstruct the manuscript and read it closely. However, another regulative convention interfered, the concept that an author’s chronologically final intention should be the form of a work which is reprinted and interpreted. The classic statement of this theory is, of course, W. W. Greg’s “The Rationale of Copy-Text,” Studies in Bibliography, 3 (1950-51), 19-36. Recently, however, some textual theorists have begun formulating a more useful principle of author’s most complete intentions; see, for example, Herschel Parker, “Melville

62 Lost to the readers of the Appleton text are such scenes as those in the original chapter 12, where Crane masterfully undercuts Henry’s cosmic self-justifications. The power of the thoughts expressed in chapter 12 has encouraged some critics to underestimate the importance of the character expressing those thoughts—see O. W. Fryckstedt, “Henry Fleming’s Tupenny Fury: Cosmic Pessimism in Stephen Crane’s The Red Badge of Courage,” Studia Neophilologica, 33 (1961), 265-81. Also lost to Appleton readers is the final Jimmie Rogers scene (see n. 16, above). Thus Berryman could wonder why Crane’s deep concern for “Human Kindness” plays no part in the Appleton Red Badge (Berryman, pp. 90-91). In the manuscript, which contains the final Jimmie Rogers episode, concern for others (or lack of it) does play a part.

63 It is a short step from this claim to the theoretical stance that all interpreted texts are the result of interpretive conventions employed by readers and critics. Cf. Stanley E. Fish, “Interpreting the Variorum,” Critical Inquiry, 2 (Spring 1976), 481-85.