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## Studies in the Production of Historical Fiction: Considering Prestructure in The Red Badge of Courage

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STUDIES IN THE PRODUCTION OF HISTORICAL FICTION:  
CONSIDERING PRESTRUCTURE IN *THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE*

A Thesis Presented

by

JANIE E. GRAY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
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To the many who have supported me through years of academic pursuits, I thank you.

“Man’s flight through life is sustained by the power of his knowledge” – Austin D. Miller

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Air Force, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

ABSTRACT

STUDIES IN THE PRODUCTION OF HISTORICAL FICTION:  
CONSIDERING PRESTRUCTURE IN *THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE*

SEPTEMBER 2014

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The manner in which a literary work is produced by its author and received by its audience is significantly influenced by the existing prestructures of both the author and the audience. As evidence of this phenomena, this thesis presents a case study of the impact of prestructure on the summation of narrative frames which form Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage: An Episode of the American Civil War*.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Through history it has been the duty of those with the ability to record, by means of penmanship or otherwise, to practice historical scholarship, documenting significant events with as much accuracy as possible. Doing so serves to preserve the memory of an event, to pass on lessons learned, and perhaps to honor those who died. These are the obvious results of strict adherence to the practice of historical scholarship. But, should we have other desired outcomes for our recording, it becomes prudent to consider alternative methods of conveyance, to include fictional approaches. Endeavoring to form a better understanding of the process of producing historical fictions, this work first discusses pertinent theories by scholars Adrian Jones and Lennard Davis. Building on concepts presented by Jones and Davis, I posit that the manner in which a literary work is produced by its author and received by its audience is significantly influenced by the existing prestructures of both the author and the audience. As evidence of this phenomena, I present a case study of the impact of prestructure on the summation of narrative frames which form Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage: An Episode of the American Civil War*.

In 2007 Adrian Jones, an associate professor in the School of Humanities at La Trobe University, published an article titled "Reporting in Prose: Reconsidering Ways of Writing History." Therein he aims to "reassert the worth of the evocative in history," claiming influence by Martin Heidegger's existentialist phenomenology. Jones writes, "study [is] more about *dis-clos-ing*, or *letting learn*, than about thesis-framing or instructing ... of finding ways to evoke and provoke, rather than to foreclose" (312). In a



way, allowing those instructed to *let learn* enables emotional engagement with material. Such an outlook supports the idea of fictional prose as a recording mechanism as opposed to a tighter series of historical conventions. Jones matter-of-factly states, “prose puts things plainly: picturing, posturing, persuading” (313). He continues to argue that most any written form comprised of prose qualifies as a report. This definition, then, includes the forms of newspaper articles, short stories, and even the novel so long as the intent is to write a history and the formal elements are based in prose. Searching for further clarity in the matter of prose reporting, Jones asks a series of questions: “should a prose report define and encapsulate its subject; or rather, should it describe and evoke it? Put another way, should a report ‘say’ its subject—declaiming and declaring it—or should it ‘show’ it—allowing its subject to insinuate itself, accumulating and enveloping in the describing?” (313-14). From this series of inquiry, Jones derives two of the primary methods of recording history in prose: “Those ways [are to] anchor and fashion” (314). He distinguishes between the two, writing, “Take history’s ‘fashioning’ first. Things that happen are sequenced and patterned by their historian, set to orders of meaning. Then there’s history’s ‘anchoring’: the adding of evidence to the structures, sequences, and arguments suggested in the fashioning” (314). It is precisely this combination of structure and sequence with evidence which gives rise to the prose report.

Jones continues to explain of the prose report process that “These efforts [of fashioning and anchoring] curb as well as reconcile. The soaring imagination and individuality of the fictional element in history, the fashioning, is reconciled with the grounded, chastening mutuality of instruction” (Jones 314). It is the anchoring element in prose reporting which gives value to the genre of historical fiction among historical

texts. Conversely, it is the exclusion of fashioning and the sole reliance on anchoring as the governing element of historical reporting which has given rise to what Jones calls “capital ‘H’ History” (314). The industry of capital ‘H’ History is driven by the concepts of foreclosing designated information and demanding students engage in a manner which substantiates both their own and the industry professionals’ thesis-framing abilities, an approach which has its merits—pushing students to become logical thinkers—but which also presents a narrow view of the world, at times devoid of the humanity of a situation.

Jones points out that in this line of thinking, “Everything had to sum: meaning one thing, cohering as one thing” (319). He then turns to Heidegger, who argued that “that theses like these always ignored some things. They inevitably lost aspects of the things they purported to define; they lacked what Heidegger called ‘heedful understanding’ of the primordial, his sense of history’s true subject” (320). Perhaps, then, this bleeding over of a scientific approach into the humanities disciplines and into capital ‘H’ history is damaging. There may be more value in providing students with the opportunity to engage in a manner facilitated by the inclusion of some element of fiction, through the study of historical evidence by means of a narrative. Furthermore, Jones points out that students who experience education in this capital “H” History manner later “acquire other priorities. They often prefer histories that envelop in evoking-and-describing ways. There is food for thought here” (314). Such reactions may indeed be reflections of the fact that a thesis which a piece of historical scholarship might present will not be capable of approximating the complex and multifarious human experience. Herein lies the basis, even the necessity, for historical fiction and its included elements of fashioning and anchoring as a means of phenomenological encounter with past events.

In 1996 Lennard Davis published *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel*, wherein he discusses various aspects of the development and structure of novels. A particularly useful concept which Davis posits therein is that of “prestructure,” which he turns to Erving Goffman’s *Frame Analysis* to help clarify. Davis writes, “Goffman [says] that a unit of activity or action (what he calls a ‘strip,’ in keeping with his cinematic metaphor, and which we can regard as corresponding to units of plot) can never be seen or understood correctly outside of its context” (20). He carries on, “Two identical strips, for example, will have radically different meanings depending on the frame which surrounds each one. The sum of all the frames surrounding a work, including the social frames, amounts to what I have been calling the prestructure” (20). The necessity of recognizing the prestructure of a text is derived from the element’s function: “The importance of the prestructure is to create the boundaries which define, transform, and locate the plot elements of the novel” (24). To reiterate, the prestructure of the novel shapes the order and combination of frames in a text.

Building on Davis’s foundation, I find that the concept of prestructure may be divided into authorial prestructure and audience prestructure. By authorial prestructure, I most accurately refer to that which shapes the author’s understanding of his own work. Whereas Davis’s notion of prestructure describes the collection of frames which sum to form a work, my use of the phrase is more specifically directed toward the impact of the author’s individual position on the frames which he includes in producing a fictional work. An author’s prestructure might then include his own ideas, influences, experiences, and extends to include any steps he has taken toward educating himself on the subject matter of his fiction. The concept of audience prestructure is derived from

what Davis calls the phenomenology of reading, which is “such that the reader must split his perception so that there are two readers—the knowing, collusive reader who winks conspiratorially at . . . fabrications, and the gullible, belief-suspending reader” (23). The belief-suspending reader may, in theory, be able to escape his own prestructure, but certainly the collusive reader’s encounter with a given text is heavily influenced by his own prestructure. By nature, the audience prestructure, or the “frame of the reader’s belief,” has the potential to greatly shape the impact of any given text. Davis goes so far as to describe it as a “problematic frame which envelops the novelistic enterprise” because it is so powerful an influence on the reception of a novel (22). For example, “One may imagine several types of readers for the Defoean novel: the eighteenth-century reader who naively accepts the work as factual, the reader of the same period who is uncertain whether the work is true or false, and still another who knows that the work is a fabrication” (Davis 22). These same types of readers are, of course, neither limited to the eighteenth-century nor exclusive to readers of Defoe. “In addition, there is a more modern reader who has biographical and historical material available which suggests that Defoe’s novels were fictional” (22). It is the prestructure of each of these potential types of audience member which dictates the individual encounter between any given reader and a text. The tension between the authorial and the audience prestructures has the capacity to shape what is both knowingly and unknowingly present within a novel. I find the highly influential nature of prestructure on the production and reception of novels calls for further inquiry. Therefore, as I work to illuminate the impact of prestructure on historical fiction I now turn to consider Stephen Crane’s *Red Badge of Courage*, a text which is revered as one of the finest historical fictions of the nineteenth century.

## CHAPTER II

### CRANE'S AUTHORIAL PRESTRUCTURE

Stephen Crane's seminal Civil War novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, follows the journey of a young soldier in the Union army whose romantic notions of war are quickly shattered as he becomes overwhelmed with fear in the face of battle. The young protagonist's journey to survive the war and regain a sense of self serves as the primary plot element for the duration of the novel. It is my intent in studying the production of this novel to explore Crane's authorial prestructure, particularly as it is linked to his personal background, and its resultant impact on his writing. Two questions are helpful in guiding this study: *Who* was Stephen Crane? And, *what* inspired *Red Badge*? In this work, I highlight likely historical influences on *The Red Badge of Courage*, including elements of Crane's biographical information and the impact on his popular Civil War novel. As I conduct this study it is my intention to bring forward a number of frames which shape the novel and open the discourse to include the author's personal connection with the text. In doing so I am able to access and develop a fuller understanding of the intricacies of the novel.

First let us consider Stephen Crane himself – *who* was he? As Malcolm Bradbury records in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Stephen was the youngest of fourteen children born to Jonathan Townley Crane and Mary Helen Peck Crane. He spent much of his youth in New York and released his first successful novel, *The Red Badge of Courage* in 1895. After the publication, and rapid success, of *Red Badge*, knowledge of Crane's background became desired by the general public; expository writers from the "The Sketch," a turn-of-the-century periodical, responded by

publishing a piece titled “Mr. Stephen Crane: The Author of “The Red Badge of Courage” in 1895. This piece reads almost as a modern-day tabloid would of a rising star, highlighting Crane’s successes in a near-slighting way; however, there are evident truths within this piece. That said, there is also value to be gained from acknowledging the tone used in describing Crane to the general public. Consider below:

Mr. Crane has been known for the past four or five years to a handful of people... he is but four-and-twenty now ... Although Mr. Crane attended a college and, later, a university, he graduated at neither, preferring baseball to study. Both of Mr. Crane’s parents are dead, and he lives with a brother on an estate of some 3500 acres in Hartwood, Sullivan County, New York. He dislikes to work now as much as he disliked to study when at college, and prefers horse-riding over the mountain roads to any other pleasure.

(154-55)

Indeed, it is difficult to read this article without acknowledging the manner of Crane’s portrayal for public consumption: this text depicts him as a frivolous young man who prefers baseball and horse-riding to work and study. While it is true Crane spent only one semester each between 1890 and 1891 at Lafayette College where he studied engineering and at Syracuse University where he is known more for playing baseball than for his academic prowess, this description’s obvious slanted approach leaves the audience without an entirely accurate description of the renowned author (Bradbury). Perhaps there was more public appeal in casting Crane as one who stumbled upon his genius rather than as one who studied to perfect his prose. That said, the interpretation of the author’s stark statement, “He dislikes to work now as much as he disliked to study when

at college” is entirely dependent on one’s definition of “work.” If work refers to labor on land or in a factory, than yes, Crane may not have liked work in that sense. However, Crane’s impressive literary repertoire speaks for itself – he certainly put in long hours producing his collection, and as such is the case, we now know Crane to be an author with extreme prowess.

To its credit, this publication offers us a rare glimpse of public perception of Crane when he wrote *Red Badge*: he was a fairly well educated man in his mid-twenties, but he had chosen, we assume, to depart from formal education on more than one occasion. Furthermore, it is common knowledge that Crane himself had not served as a soldier when he wrote his classic Civil War novel, but the understanding that he had suffered loss with the deaths of his parents adds to his authority to speak of loss itself, regardless of the circumstances surrounding that loss. It is additionally important to acknowledge what this descriptive text offers us regarding Crane’s socioeconomic status – not only had he completed grade school, but he had begun educational endeavors at more than one university. Moreover, his parents had left an estate of 3500 acres to him and his brother. Considering both his advanced education and his large land inheritance, we are able to determine that Crane was a member of the upper American social class. Furthermore, the knowledge that he lived on a sizeable estate and found pleasure in riding horses on mountain roads supports the inclusion of frames tending toward naturalism in *The Red Badge of Courage*. Consider this introductory passage in Crane’s novel: “The cold passed reluctantly from the earth, and the retiring fog revealed an army stretched out on the hills, resting. As the landscape changed from brown to green, the army awakened” (189). Indeed, this very scene, sans, soldiers, likely played out morning

after morning at Crane's family home in the hills of New York. Crane may very well have drawn from the views at his family home, effectively anchoring his novel in the hills of New York. Through reading both what is said and what is implied in this expository piece on Crane, we are granted a fuller understanding of his authorial prestructure, which is helpful in conducting meaningful analysis of the novel.

Moving forward, we begin to consider possible outside influences for production of *The Red Badge of Courage*, which Crane began drafting in the spring of 1893 (Bradbury). Common lore regarding *Red Badge* indicates Crane undertook the project on a dare to best Emile Zola's renowned 1892 war novel, *La Débâcle*, and that he anchored his fiction in what he knew from studies of the Battle of Chancellorsville, which took place in 1863, and the *Century's* "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War,"<sup>1</sup> but critics and historians such as Lyndon Pratt and Cecil Eby, Jr. were not satisfied with these assumptions. In considering possible origins of *Red Badge*, Pratt agrees that elements such as "the pontoon-bridges, the plank road, and the Rappahannock, obviously support the traditional view that Crane had Chancellorsville in mind" (8). While Pratt concedes "Chancellorsville contributed the general setting and rough plan of the novel," he also points out at least two of the novel's elements were perhaps more accurately modeled after Antietam: "the idea of Henry's panic and flight, and the heroism of the wounded color-bearer" (9). Interestingly, Pratt seems to be arguing in not so many words that Crane may have anchored his work in physical elements from Chancellorsville, but that some of his fashioning choices were influenced by events at Antietam. Pratt's analysis is particularly useful in that it identifies *Red Badge* as a novel which "may rather be

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<sup>1</sup> As annotated in the first footnote at the beginning of *The Red Badge of Courage*, edited by Joseph Katz.



regarded as a synthesis of more than one battle than a historical portrayal of a single engagement” (9). This ideological conception of alternative sources of inspiration for Crane’s novel marks a shift from earlier models which assumed Chancellorsville as the sole source for the novel, and in doing so opens the conversation to consider not only Antietam as an alternative source, but many other sources as well.

When studying influences on Crane’s novel, one of the most obvious aspects of the novel to consider is the source of Crane’s central metaphor, the red badge of courage itself. Abraham Feldman suggests it is derived from in Shakespeare’s *Henry VI: Part III*, wherein the seminal author writes: “murder’s crimson badge” (185). Cecil Eby, however, is suspect of this attribution, but supports the notion that Crane “borrowed rather than originated his metaphor” (49). Eby points out that the phrase “red badge of courage” was well known both during and after the Civil War. He writes, “For any Union veteran with service in Virginia, ‘red badge of courage’ would have brought to mind both the New Jersey general, Philip Kearny, and his famous ‘red badge’ division<sup>2</sup> of the Third Corps, Army of the Potomac” (49). Eby also points out that Stephen Crane’s brother William was considered an authority on the Civil War, suggesting both brothers certainly would have known of Kearny’s “red badge division” (205).

One of General Kearny’s sons, Thomas Kearny, and the General’s cousin, John Watts DePeyster, have each published records of their family legacy in the Civil War. Thomas Kearny records that General Kearny was the first of the Union commanders to use special badges to distinguish his men from others during battle (267). Similarly, DePester writes that General Kearny ordered his officers “to wear a red patch in shape of

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<sup>2</sup> Eby notes that the “red badge” division was also called the “red diamond” or “red patch” division.

a diamond on the crown or left side of their cap, while enlisted men were to wear theirs in front of the cap” (495). Depester also notes that the red patch became recognized within Union ranks as “a sign of good character and a badge of honor” (354). Again overlapping their accounts, Thomas Kearny indicates that the red diamond badge came to be understood as a mark of valor, even among the enemy. He tells of “a Union colonel buried with full military honors by the Confederates because of their respect for his red badge” (268).

Cecil Eby directs readers to consider that the Kearny red badge had such a large impact during the Civil War that in 1863 Kearny’s successor, General David Birney, designed a Kearny medal, the “Kearny Medal of Valor,” pictured on the right, to be awarded to officers, specifically “those soldiers who distinguished themselves by individual acts of heroism in battle” (206).



Figure 1: Kearny Medal of Valor.



Figure 2: Kearny Cross.

Similarly, the “Kearny Cross,” pictured on the left, was awarded to non-commissioned officers and privates for the same reasons.

Following the precedent of the Kearny red uniform badge, the Kearny medals were displayed on a ribbon red in color (206). The medal itself was called a “cross of valor,” and was engraved with “the Kearny motto,” *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*, which was borrowed from the Roman poet Horace (206).

As Eby points out, the similarity between Crane’s central metaphor and the influence of the Kearny badges and medals is not merely circumstantial. Kearny family

lore places Crane at “Belle Grove,” the Kearny estate, where on several occasions Crane would visit with John Watts Kearny, another of General Kearny’s sons (206). Thomas Kearny includes in his biography of the General a footnote which reads: “Crane born in Newark, while resident in Asbury Park and later before he became famous visited “Kearny Castle” [“Belle Grove”]. When his fame was achieved he again visited ... and told the symbolic meaning hidden under the title of his famous book” (267).

Unfortunately, there is no further information offered regarding this occurrence, but the implication is clear – that General Kearny’s biographers believe Crane’s red badge metaphor was inspired by the General’s Civil War legacy. Indeed, given this evidence it is likely the knowledge of the Kearney red badge shaped Crane’s authorial prestructure and is reflected in his decision to situate the red badge as a significant frame within his novel.

Following a different vein of research than Eby, Pratt looked to the Hudson River Institute in Claverack, New York where Crane enrolled in 1888 (Bradbury). School records reveal that during his few years at Claverack, Crane was heavily involved in the school’s battalion, acting as the Colonel’s adjutant at one point, and leading his company to victory in Washington’s Birthday “prize-drill,” a military drill precision competition (Pratt 2). Pratt notes, “It seems probable, in fact, that Crane’s success in the school battalion would, in itself, have tended toward keeping pleasantly alive his boyish interest in war” (2). Furthermore, while at Claverack, Crane studied under General John Bullock Van Petten, a professor of history and elocution (2). The General was regarded by his colleagues and students alike for his service as both a scholar and a soldier. General Van Petten’s biographical accounts indicate he fought in the Civil War as late as 1862, facing

the battles of Williamsburg, Fair Oaks, Allen's Farm, White Oak Swamp, Malvern Hill, and the Second Bull Run as a member of the 34<sup>th</sup> New York Volunteers, or Herkimer regiment (4). From his study of the General's war experiences and interactions with Crane, Pratt suggests "It seems altogether possible that *The Red Badge of Courage* owes more to General Van Petten than to any other single source of influence" (2). Pratt continues, "it seems certain that the elderly Van Petten, who had real war anecdotes to tell, was exactly the sort of man to whom Crane would have been responsive" (8). Furthermore, Pratt concludes, "The fact remains . . . that in the route of Van Petten's 34<sup>th</sup> New York regiment, one finds for the first time a definite episode basically analogous to the story of Henry Fleming's 304<sup>th</sup> New York regiment, and one which in all probability Crane had heard told" (10). Based on Pratt's evidence, the idea that Crane was, at least in part, modeling *Red Badge* after General Van Petten's experiences certainly stands within the realm of possibility.

Within the text of *Red Badge*, perhaps as a reflection of his own authorial prestructure Crane indicates influences acting in a capacity similar to General Van Petten impacted Henry Fleming's perception of war: "Various veterans had told him tales" (197). Crane's narrator continues:

Some talked of gray, bewhiskered hordes who were advancing with relentless curses and chewing tobacco with unspeakable valor; tremendous bodies of fierce soldiery who were sweeping along like the Huns. Others spoke of tattered and eternally hungry men who fire despondent powders. 'They'll charge through hell's fire an' brimstone t' git a holt on a haversack, an' sech stomachs ain't a-lastin' long,' he was told. From the

stories, the youth imagined the red, live bones sticking out through slits in the faded uniforms. (197)

However, Crane follows this passage with a moment of reflection in which Henry Fleming notes, “Still, he could not put a whole faith in veterans’ tales, for recruits were their prey. They talked much of smoke, fire, and blood, but he could not tell how much might be lies” (197). Henry’s blatant questioning of the veracity of these veterans’ tales compels us to consider the possibility that veterans’ tales alone were not the sole influences on Crane’s fashioning of his Civil War novel, which in turn raises the question of what other sources may have inspired Crane’s depiction of the war.

Further investigation of influences on Crane’s authorial position reveals an interview of the author conducted and published in 1895 by Willa Cather which suggests Crane’s family legacies had helped him craft his “imaginary” perceptions of war (Gullason 572). Cather’s account of the interview reads, “[Crane’s] ancestors had been soldiers, and he had been imagining war stories ever since he was out of knickerbockers, and in writing his first war story had simply gone over his imaginary campaigns and selected his favorite imaginary experiences” (Gullason 572-3). Indeed, we do find this boyhood imagination reflected in Crane’s description of his protagonist, Henry Fleming, of whom Crane writes: “He had, of course, dreamed of battles all his life—of vague and bloody conflicts that had thrilled him with their sweep and fire. In visions he had seen himself in many struggles” (192). Furthermore, Bradbury notes “Earlier Cranes fought in the American War of Independence and the Civil War; Stephen inherited, he said, a ‘rage of conflict’ he would put to good use” (Bradbury). It is, then, reasonable to speculate that

Crane's authorial prestructure was informed both by his own imagination and by his family legacies.

The possibility that Crane drew on family tales for inspiration for *Red Badge* is again substantiated by the fact that Crane's father Jonathan Townley Crane, who worked as a minister, also wrote about the Civil War, though in the form of essay rather than fiction. Jonathan Crane died when Stephen was only eight years old, but before his passing, he left his written legacy for Stephen to later discover (Gullason 573). Three of the elder Crane's essays contain particularly striking descriptions of various elements of the Civil War. First, consider this passage from *An Essay on Dancing*, by Jonathan Crane:

Recruiting officers of the most plausible manners are sent into the large towns, their faces beaming with smiles, and their persons glittering in uniform. The banner of the Union floats over their abode; ever and anon, the stirring sounds of martial music are heard there; and those of the recruits already enlisted, who are least likely to run away, are seen reclining about the door of the rendezvous, clothed in very blue coats, and girded with very white belts, and apparently in the enjoyment of great peace of mind. (38)

Here the elder Crane describes the public impression of the Army recruiters and young recruits. The recruiting officers are seductive, with their most plausible manners, their beaming smiles, and their glittering uniforms. They come with signs and banners, with strong and steady music, and they tempt young men to join their ranks, don their fantastically blue coats and striking white belts and to recline about the door with ease,

with peace of mind. In *The Red Badge of Courage*, Stephen Crane includes a similar passage as he describes the day Henry Fleming joined the army:

From his home he had gone to the seminary to bid adieu to many schoolmates. They had thronged about him with wonder and admiration. He ... had swelled with calm pride. He and some of his fellows who had donned blue were quite overwhelmed with privileges for all of one afternoon, and it had been a very delicious thing. They had strutted. (195)

It is possible that this passage stands as a continuation of the scene originally set by his father. In this scene Stephen directly approached a topic established in his father's writing, but changed the point of view. Rather than discuss how the recruiting process looked to the townspeople, Stephen depicted war-time recruiting from the perspective of a young soldier. Henry Fleming was not a bystander in the recruiting fair – no, he was among the throngs who were captured by the grandeur of the day. If never before and if never again after, for one afternoon these young boys were given cause to swell with pride in front of admiring schoolmates. It was, indeed, a very delicious thing. But as Jonathan Crane later pointed out in *An Essay on Dancing*, “it is only when mustered into actual service, that the dreaming soldier wakes to all the bliss of hard fare, stern discipline, toilsome marches, battles, wounds, and death” (38). This same sentiment is expressed by Stephen Crane's protagonist as he transitions from that illustrious recruitment day to the reality of unpleasant daily life of a soldier: Henry “sprang from the bunk and began to pace nervously to and fro. ‘Good Lord, what's th' matter with me?’” (198). This line shows Stephen Crane modeling after his father's ideas for both glamour of recruitment and the shock in the moment of reckoning: this is war.

Jonathan Crane further pursued the realities and trauma of war in an essay he published in 1853, titled *The Right Way*: “Hard is the lot of the youthful hero, ... who, as the long columns of his comrades press past him in full pursuit of the flying foe, and their exultant shouts are borne backward on the wind, lies upon the field, far in the rear, bleeding and faint, with his sword still in his feeble grasp” (138). Such terrible pain eloquently framed—Jonathan Crane was nothing if not poignant in his descriptions of battlefield suffering. Perhaps it was images such as these which pervaded Stephen Crane’s mind, swaying him to craft his own characters with an innate desire to avoid battle’s pain. Rather than run full force into the fight, Stephen’s young soldier is much more inclined to flee than his father’s valiant youthful hero. In describing one of the skirmishes in which Henry’s regiment was engaged, Stephen’s narrator tells us: “A man near [Henry] who up to this time had been working feverishly at his rifle suddenly stopped and ran with howls” (229). His face which “had borne an expression of exalted courage ... was, at an instant, smitten abject. He blanched...” (229). Henry, having seen his comrade succumb to panic in the face of battlefield horrors, followed suit and bolted: “He, too, threw down his gun and fled. There was no shame in his face. He ran like a rabbit” (229). Both the senior and the junior Crane fixate on the psychological impact of war on the young soldier, a conclusion which is substantiated by both the previous and the following passages of Jonathan Crane’s, as well as by his son’s comprehensive collection of literary work.

Consider next this excerpt from Jonathan Crane’s *Arts of Intoxication*, written in 1870, paying particular attention to Crane’s analysis and description of psychological, and resultant physical, responses to the stresses of battle:



We are susceptible of excitement, a mounting tide of mental, emotional, and physical energy, which rises more or less gradually, and, when at its height, sweeps along with a power to which in our cooler moments we are strangers, and things at other times impossible are done with ease. The soldier, worn down by a long march, is so weary that he can hardly carry his weapons, but when the battle opens, with its exciting sights and sounds, its rapid evolutions, its fierce passions, his once languid frame becomes as steel for strength and endurance. (31)

Similarly, the concept of psychological stresses overwhelming the physical limitations of the body during war is featured in *Red Badge*. Such a moment is described during what critics call the turning point of Stephen's novel, as young Henry Fleming begins to overcome his previously paralyzing fear and don the persona of a fighting machine, of a soldier. Crane describes Henry's transformation, beginning with emphasis on Henry's weariness: "[He] should have time for physical recuperation. He was sore and stiff from his experiences. He had received his fill of all exertions, and he wished to rest" (281). For comparison, Crane offers a description of Henry's opposite: "those other men seemed never to grow weary; they were fighting with their old speed" (281). Those older men drew their energy from the fury of war, a source of strength into which Henry had not yet tapped. But, in the very next engagement, Henry overcomes his physical limitations, "his once languid frame becom[ing] steel for strength and endurance": "The flames bit [Henry], and the hot smoke broiled his skin. His rifle barrel grew so hot that ordinarily he could not have borne it upon his palms; but he kept on stuffing cartridges into it, and pounding them with his clanking, bending ramrod" (*Arts* 31, *Red* 283). This is Henry's

initial conversion to the warrior frame of mind. Rather than immediately fleeing or timidly observing, this time Henry engages, taking on the warrior persona which enables soldiers to accomplish the gruesome feats asked of them. In fact, Henry becomes so invested here that “he pulled his trigger with a fierce grunt, as if he were dealing a blow of the fist with all his strength” (283). This scene monumentally depicts Henry’s transformation – it is here that the youth learns what it is to “mingle in one of those great affairs on earth” (192). The psychological conquering of the physical is the addictive element of the soldier experience, a truth to which Crane’s access would have been limited, as he himself had never been to battle. That said, his prowess in expressing such a transformation must have been based in a deeper understanding of this phenomena than the young Crane likely possessed of his own accord, which substantiates the theory that Stephen Crane’s authorial prestructure was heavily influenced by his deceased father’s works. One may even go as far as claiming, as Thomas Gullason did, that Jonathan Crane “supplied his son with the tensions and moods of battle, with them, imagery and psychology,” adding significant authority to Stephen Crane’s ability to fashion poignant frames of war within *The Red Badge of Courage* (575).

Considering other possible sources of influence on Crane’s prestructure, there is a common critique that Crane’s work reads as if he was describing a painting. In fact, this is such a prominent feature of Crane’s work that Bradbury writes, “What distinguishes it is its remarkable and tense immediacy, and its point of vision: all is seen as a sequence of impressions and emotions, images and fragmentary pictures of action” (Bradbury). Crane’s affinity for art is no secret: there are accounts that he covered the walls of his college dorm room with paintings by American impressionists (Smith 238).

Furthermore, in the years leading up to his writing of *Red Badge* Crane worked and lived in an artists' studio, which was at one point called the "Art Students' League," at 143 East 23rd Street in New York's Bowery district (Bradbury). Considering this evidence, it is hardly far-fetched to accept Crane was exposed to selections of artwork which in turn shaped his authorial prestructure and offered inspiration for the fashioning which takes place in his historical fiction. In studying the possibility of influence of popular artwork on *The Red Badge of Courage* I chose to juxtapose passages from the text with works by Sanford Gifford and Winslow Homer. Gifford, who "built a reputation as a master of light and atmosphere," painted his Civil War collection while serving "as a national guardsman stationed in defense of Washington, D.C. and Baltimore in the summers of 1861-1863" (Avery). Similarly, Homer, who "is regarded by many as the greatest American painter of the nineteenth century," was also familiar with the war though his experience was more as observer than participant (Weinberg). Homer "was sent to the front in Virginia as an artist-correspondent for the ... illustrated journal, *Harper's Weekly*" (Weinberg). Both Gifford and Homer's works were so celebrated in their time that each man had two paintings chosen "to represent American art at the International Exposition in Paris in 1867" (Avery). These are precisely the types of artists with which a member of the Art Students' League would have been familiar. As such is the case, it is logical to conclude Crane would have been acquainted with their work. Moreover, based on striking similarities found in comparison of Crane's writing and Gifford's and Homer's paintings, I believe it is worth considering the possibility that select paintings by these artists informed Crane's authorial prestructure and served as inspiration for parts of Crane's Civil War novel.

First, let us study this 1863 piece by Sanford Gifford painted with oil on canvas:



Figure 3: *A Coming Storm*.

Keeping this image in mind, consider the following passage from Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*:

It rained. The procession of weary soldiers became a bedraggled train, despondent and muttering, marching with churning effort in a trough of liquid brown mud under a low, wretched sky. Yet the youth smiled, for he saw that the world was a world for him, though many discovered it to be made of sickness of battle. (318)

While there is no procession of weary soldiers depicted here, is it not possible this might resemble the view from a soldier's perspective at the beginning, or at the end, of a rain storm? Furthermore, beyond the words Crane has chosen Gifford's painting seems nearly identical to the moment Crane is attempting to convey in this passage: despite the "low, wretched sky," the youth smiled (318). This isn't a simple description of

disgruntled soldiers trudging through a muddy landscape; from the vantage point the narrator holds, there is a distinct juxtaposition of melancholy and the sublime occurring in this passage. Indeed, a similar moment is expressed in Gifford's piece. The contrast of the dark tones of the storm with the sunlight refracting off the deep colors of the foliage embodies the same sense Crane's words work to capture in this passage. Based on this comparison, it is plausible to conclude Crane's authorial prestructure was influenced by Gifford.

Another, and perhaps more striking, example of crossover between popular Civil War paintings and Stephen Crane's writing in *Red Badge* is found in the study of this 1866 oil on canvas piece by Winslow Homer:



Figure 4: *Prisoners from the Front*.

Of note, this piece was one of the two selections by Homer which was displayed at the 1867 International Exposition. Now consider, in conjunction with *Prisoners from the Front*, the following passage from *Red Badge*:

At one part of the line four men had been swooped upon, and they now sat as prisoners. Some blue men were about them in an eager and curious circle. The soldiers had trapped strange birds, and there was an examination. A flurry of fast questions was in the air ... [One] who was a boy in years, took his plight with great calmness and apparent good nature. He conversed with the men in blue, studying their faces with his bright and keen eyes. They spoke of battles and conditions. There was an acute interest in all their faces during this exchange of view points. It seemed a great satisfaction to hear voices from where all had been darkness and speculation. The third captive sat with a morose countenance. He preserved a stoical and cold attitude. To all advances he made one reply without variation, 'Ah, go t'hell!' The last of the four was always silent and, for the most part, kept his face turned in unmolested directions. From the views the youth received he seemed to be in a state of absolute dejection. Shame was upon him, and with it profound regret that he was, perhaps, no more to be counted in the ranks of his fellows. (313-14)

While the two works are not direct representations of each other, I find the similarities between these two pieces particularly striking – it is almost as if Crane were describing this very picture. There are four prisoners depicted in the foreground of Homer's painting, who had been taken prisoner just as in Crane's account. Faded into Homer's background, many men dressed in shades of blue accompanied by their horses surround the prisoners in what Crane calls "an eager and curious circle." In both accounts, the prisoners vary in age from the young boy to the crotchety elder. Crane writes of the discussion between the prisoners and their captor or guard, asking of battles and conditions, probing for accounts of matters potentially from Homer's *Front*, which certainly would have been of interest to the soldiers. Given the almost mirror-like quality between Homer's painting and Crane's writing, which again supports the conclusion that Crane's authorial prestructure was influenced by Homer's work, it becomes important to also acknowledge the unarguable differences between the two pieces. In Crane's version, one of the four characters is sitting, and one of the four kept his face turned from the discussion, as if shamed, whereas Homer's account paints all four of the prisoners as

engaging, at least visually, with their captor. Considering Crane's novel goes to great lengths to convey the brokenness of men that accompanies war, it seems fitting he chose to portray two of the men in more a docile manner than their stoic counterparts. These variances between Homer's and Crane's works indicate that while Homer's painting was influential, Crane's prestructure was formed by a collective of influences; he did not select narrative frames based solely on the work of others.

Continuing to consider works of art which may have shaped Crane's authorial prestructure and accordingly influenced his fashioning of narrative frames, there are instances when Crane's work seems to interact with, though not necessarily mirror, paintings. Passages with vivid imagery such as the following substantiate this critique:

“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. Equipments hung on handy projections, and some tin dishes lay upon a small pile of firewood. A folded tent was serving as a roof. The sunlight, without, beating upon it, made it glow a light yellow shade. A small window shot an oblique square of whiter light upon the cluttered floor. The smoke from the fire at times neglected the clay chimney and wreathed into the room, and this flimsy chimney of clay and sticks made endless threats to set ablaze the whole establishment.” (192)

Arguably, in order to produce a description such as this, Crane would have built his portrayal from an existing subject. Though, without an image to pair this description with, it becomes difficult to determine whether the image Crane is modeling is a physical image recorded by some other artist, or whether it is one crafted in his own imagination. Interestingly, such a description reads almost as the inverse of this 1863 oil painting on canvas by Winslow Homer:

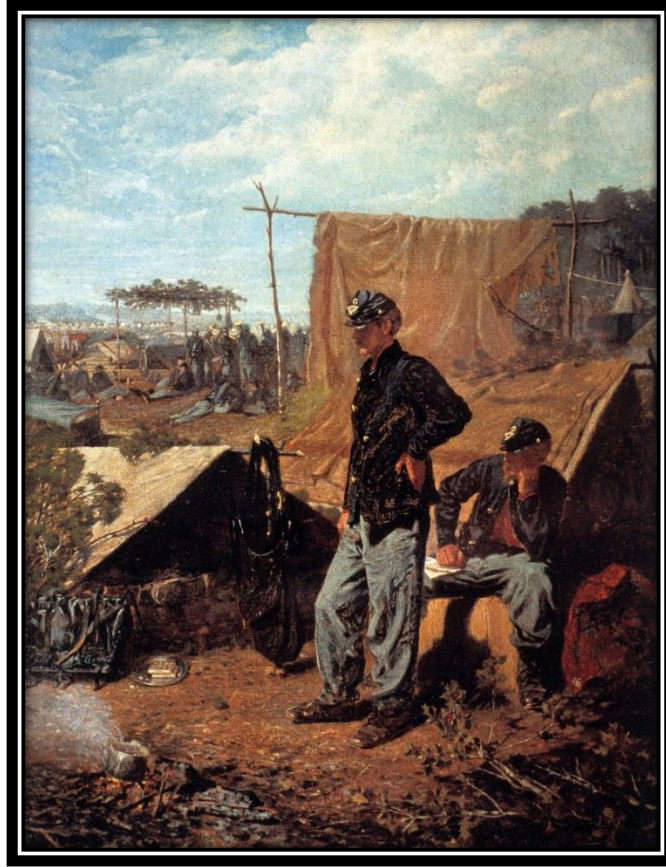


Figure 5: *Home Sweet Home*.

If we place ourselves within the painting, sitting inside one of the tents looking out, Crane's description may very well illustrate what we could have seen. Though it is not a direct representation, there does seem to be an inversion of position at play in an assumed conversation between Crane and Homer – a dialogue which occurs in a very similar manner to the instance discussed earlier when Crane opted to engage his father's scene, but from a different position within the frame. When we broaden the anticipated scope of influences to include less common sources we are able to see important patterns emerge, patterns which offer a more comprehensive understanding of the production of a given subject text. The repetition in representation of and interaction with outside sources leads us to conclude that in addition to thematic elements of Crane's prestructure which we



have previously discussed it seems that another element of Crane's authorial prestructure is a proclivity toward this interactive mode of writing.

If we continue to consider other modes which may have informed Crane's authorial prestructure, we are able to locate Crane among the literary impressionist movement because of the time period in which he worked. Bradbury writes, "Crane found himself famous, hailed as a great naturalist and literary innovator. Coinciding with the rise of impressionist naturalism, the book became a classic" (Bradbury). Regarding literary impressionism, Robert Caserio identifies the movement as "an offshoot of naturalism ... which treats 'science' skeptically but continues to focus on temperament and to evoke the human animal's immediate sensation of life" (Caserio). Furthermore, the Oxford English Dictionary regards the movement as "the method of painting (or describing) things so as to give their general tone and effect, or the broad impression which they produce at first sight, without elaboration of detail" ("impressionism"). This inclination to highlight elements of humanity rather than pursuing a more objective track is reminiscent of Heidegger's leaning toward expression of a heedful understanding of the primordial. As such, these impressionism techniques align quite well with Crane's practice of crafting historical fiction. Evidence of both the presence and the effectiveness of such elements of impressionist naturalism may be found through consideration of this excerpt from *The Red Badge of Courage*:

One morning, however, he found himself in the ranks of his prepared regiment. The men were whispering speculations and recounting the old rumors. In the gloom before the break of the day their uniforms glowed a deep purple hue. From across the river the red eyes were still peering. 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 patternlike, loomed the gigantic figure of the colonel on a gigantic horse. (203)

Examination of this passage reveals that Crane selectively identifies impressions of colors from the scene – purple, red, yellow, and black – and highlights what we know to be archetypal elements of naturalism – river, sky, sun, and life forms. The manner in which Crane connects and recreates these elements is strikingly poetic.

Crane's work in *The Red Badge of Courage* was so acclaimed it landed him a place among famed literary impressionists such as Henry James, Joseph Conrad, and Ford Maddox Ford, each of whom is recognized for his work "to introduce continental techniques in the art of fiction into English writing" (Saunders). Of these famous writers, Max Saunders writes in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, "Contemporaries regarded them as a literary network, as, increasingly, have modern biographers and critics who highlight interactions between the writers, and have explored the concept of literary impressionism as the most fitting conceptual framework to place their collective work" (Saunders). Regarding what it is to write in the literary impressionist tradition, Conrad wrote, "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you *see*" – a maxim which has "been read as a manifesto for impressionism in fiction" (Saunders). Conrad continued as a voice of literary impressionism, and in particular, championed Crane's work as paramount to the movement. In 1897, Conrad wrote to Crane: "You are a complete impressionist. The illusions of life come out of your hand without a flaw" (Saunders). In that same year, Conrad famously described Crane as such: "His eye is

very individual and his expression satisfies me artistically. He certainly is *the* impressionist and his temperament is curiously unique... He is *the only* impressionist and *only* an impressionist” (Saunders). This particular critique tends to inspire Crane’s critics and irritate his defenders, who claim he was much more than “*only* an impressionist,” yet Conrad’s words remain important in their firm identification of Crane among, and perhaps at the forefront, of the turn of the century literary impressionist movement (Smith 237). Certainly such prowess in the impressionist vein serves as justification for identifying impressionism ideals as a part of Crane’s authorial prestructure.

*The Red Badge of Courage* remains renowned for several reasons. Crane’s ability to seamlessly weave several frames together into a single text results in an incredibly complex work. In describing Crane’s prowess, Solomon writes:

The nineteenth century did not produce a more realistic fictional account of the ordinary business of war. Most authors tell the reader how war was carried on; Crane made the reader feel it. He writes of the soldier’s simple needs—food, sleep, ammunition. He shows the digging and the sweat that go into every battle. The deliberation of a rifleman taking aim and the quick impatience of a surgeon bandaging a wound are clearly etched. (76-77)

It is moments such as these, the discussions of simple needs, which capture Crane’s readers. In part, we may also attribute the novel’s success to its capturing of the emotional truth of battle. Pratt wrote that *Red Badge* is distinct precisely because, “honest treatments of such disasters do not abound either in pictures or in writings dealing the Civil War” (9). Perhaps, then, it is this devotion to honesty which sets

Crane's novel apart. Archives reveal Crane himself wrote in a letter to a friend "man is born into the world with his own pair of eyes and he is not at all responsible for his vision—he is merely responsible for his quality of personal honesty" (Barryman 4). Crane's unwavering honesty in his perception allows for what Pratt calls the "unheroic treatment of the panic-stricken youth," the notable characterization which plays a large role in setting *Red Badge* apart from other pieces within the genre (9). Considering these truths, we may glean from the construction of *The Red Badge of Courage* that Crane's authorial prestructure led to a mode of fashioning which favored honest, simple human accounts of war.

As we conclude our study of Crane's authorial prestructure, let us examine this poem titled "War is Kind" from Crane's 1899 collection by the same name:

Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind.  
Because your lover threw wild hands toward the sky  
And the affrighted steed ran on alone,  
Do not weep.  
War is kind.

Hoarse, booming drums of the regiment,  
Little souls who thirst for fight,  
These men were born to drill and die.  
The unexplained glory flies above them,  
Great is the battle-god, great, and his kingdom—  
A field where a thousand corpses lie.

Do not weep, babe, for war is kind.  
Because your father tumbled in the yellow trenches,  
Raged at his breast, gulped and died,  
Do not weep.  
War is kind.

Swift blazing flag of the regiment,  
Eagle crest of red and gold,  
These men were born to drill and die.  
Point for them the virtue of slaughter,

Make plain to them the excellence of killing,  
And a field where a thousand corpses lie.

Mother whose heart hung humble as a button,  
On the bright splendid shroud of your son,  
Do not weep.  
War is kind.

In this poem we find numerous elements similar to those Crane included in *The Red Badge of Courage*. There are obvious overtones of sarcasm and irony, and comparative use of metaphor and simile. Note the Victorian tendencies toward seminal observations: “virtue of slaughter,” “excellence of killing,” “unexplained glory,” and “great is the battle god.” Crane uses the same symbol of the unit colors, the “swift blazing flag of the regiment,” the same method of landscape observation in which he names the “trenches” and the “field,” and the same overt observations of the colors yellow, red, and gold. He discusses the impact of war on a family, invoking the lover, the father, and the son. In a striking and simple manner Crane describes a soldier’s death: the father “raged at his chest, gulped and died.” He pays attention to sounds, describing “Hoarse, booming drums.” Crane’s point of view oscillates between a wide-spectrum view in which he speaks to the families of soldiers and an up-close perspective from deep in the trenches, operating in much the same manner as his narrator does in *Red Badge*. He employs careful and potent repetitions of the phrases: “do not weep,” “war is kind,” “these men were born to drill and die,” and “a field where a thousand corpses lie,” which is a possible Civil War allusion. Finally, the poem considers war as something which draws men in, “little souls who thirst for fight,” just as the young boys fantasize about what it is to be a soldier in the beginning of *The Red Badge of Courage*. From this study we may conclude that authorial prestructure has a distinct impact on the fashioning of works

produced by the same author. Undoubtedly, Crane's individual prestructure is strongly reflected here, despite variances in form and the fact that this work was written a few years after the publication of *Red Badge*. Considering the evidence presented thus far, I am confident in stating that authorial prestructure is highly influential on the frames included in *The Red Badge of Courage*.

## CHAPTER III

### AUDIENCE PRESTRUCTURE

Much like there are two sides to every coin, *The Red Badge of Courage* in its entirety is the summation of frames influenced by *both* authorial and audience prestructure. Thus far we have discussed at length the influence of authorial prestructure on the text; now, we will now turn our attention to consider the role of audience prestructure. Earlier, I defined audience prestructure as the frame of the reader's belief which dictates the individual encounter between any given reader and a text. That said, because of the extreme capacity for variance in the human experience the scope of analysis necessary to determine and describe all possible encounters between readers and *The Red Badge of Courage* is incredibly vast. Such a boundless study would prove extremely tedious and frankly impractical. Therefore, I have determined to point my study of audience prestructure in the direction of the audience implied in Crane's text. Whereas it was useful to incorporate external elements in the study of Crane's authorial prestructure, the same approach will not prove as effective in the study of the prestructure of the implied audience due to the fact that this audience is derived from and defined within the text itself. Precisely because the provisions for the implied audience are determined by the novel, I believe close study of the text will prove enlightening in discovering the prestructure of Crane's implied audience.

As I proceed I will primarily examine the cast of minor characters in *The Red Badge of Courage*. In his 2013 book, *The Antinomies of Realism*, Frederic Jameson writes, "the collective war story turns on the interaction of various character types apparently gathered at random" (235). Though Jameson wrote this over a century after

Crane published, it seems Crane acted according to this or a similar guiding principle and crafted a set of supporting characters who seem to exist on the borders of insignificance, yet who provide the driving energy of his novel. In fact, it can be said that the interplay between characters gives the quintessential Civil War novel its poignancy. War is, after all, an act engaged in by more than one party. In the case of *The Red Badge of Courage*, the protagonist's development from a timid youth to a brave soldier, the growth for which the novel is most famous, is enabled by the network of minor characters who exist alongside him within the pages of the text. I posit that through analysis of Crane's cast of minor characters and the nuances they bring to the text we will be able to develop an accurate understanding of the intended prestructure of Crane's implied audience.

There are three main subdivisions among the minor characters in *The Red Badge of Courage*. The most obvious of these are the soldiers who comprise the military structure that surrounds the protagonist, whom I identify as members of the *warscape*. Included in this group are all characters who are identified according to a rank. First, the generals, whom the protagonist describes as intolerably slow and incompetent: "the generals did not know what they were about," "The generals were stupids," "The generals were idiots" (209). Next, the lieutenant, toward whom Henry harbors a similar opinion: "he hated the lieutenant, who had no appreciation of fine minds. He was a mere brute" (209). Then the corporal, who looked after Henry: "He linked his arm in the youth's and drew him forward. 'Come on, Henry. I'll take keer 'a yeh'" (256). Finally, the collection of privates, which is the rank assigned to the protagonist and several of his comrades, and who are in most cases simply acknowledged as this soldier or that soldier:



the tall soldier, the loud soldier, the cheery soldier, and the tattered soldier, each embodying a different personality within the ranks.

The second significant group of characters are those whose presence does little to enhance the warscape, but whose inclusion allows Crane to address cultural matters of the time, including issues and of race and gender. I identify these characters as members of the *socialscape*. Such characters include the protagonist's mother and the Negro teamster. Notably, it is through the hyper-structural system of the military that Crane strips traditional matters of class from his text. Jameson writes, "The experience is the national one, of universal conscription as the ... occasion in which men from different social classes are thrown together (235). Upon entrance to a conscripted army, the members leave their old class identities behind, assuming new military ranks. Granted, at the time of the Civil War, social class and corresponding wealth and education were highly influential in assigning military ranks; whereas most members of the lower social classes were directed into the low enlisted ranks, wealthier persons were able to purchase a commission and serve in the officer corps. That said, despite the opportunity for simplification in this matter, as the result of including those characters belonging to the socialscape social issues are not wholly absent from Crane's novel. In his choice to include characters in the socialscape who bring matters of gender and race to the text, Crane is asserting his implied audience possess an informed perspective of the reconstruction era, from which these characters originate.

In addition to the first two groups of characters, the third group simply functions to fill the landscape. It is relatively impossible to construct a believable portrayal of a national war without offering at least the illusion of thousands involved. Such characters

are often described as operating on the margins of a given frame. For example, in the beginning of the novel Crane specifically introduces the tall soldier and the loud soldier, but also notes that “Many of the men engaged in a spirited debate” (191). Character inclusions in this manner easily double or triple the perceived population in a scene, though all but two of the soldiers remain both nameless and faceless. Given that landscape characters are a formal necessity who function more as part of the setting than as individuals it is less likely that audience members will engage in a meaningful way with these characters. Therefore, while I will spend significant time discussing characters belonging to the warscape and the socialscape, I will not pursue further study of the landscape characters in *The Red Badge of Courage*.

As we move forward to consideration of two of the more notable warscape characters, we will start our inquiry at the beginning of the novel with the character who is first introduced and to whom the author gives the first lines of dialogue in a novel. In the case of *The Red Badge of Courage*, both positions are granted to “a certain tall soldier,” who in his opening action “developed virtues and went resolutely to wash a shirt” (190). Prior to the tall soldier’s individual movement, Crane described the army as a single entity: “the retiring fog revealed an army stretched out on the hills, resting”; “the army awakened, and began to tremble with eagerness”; “It cast its eyes upon the roads”; “A river ... purred at the army’s feet” (189). Tellingly, it is the development of virtue which enables one man to separate from the masses, to reclaim a sense of individuality in his pursuit of cleanliness, an action which supports the function of his human body. When he returns from washing his shirt in the river, the tall soldier initiates the first conversation of the novel: “We’re goin’ t’ move t’ morrah—sure ... We’re goin’ ‘way up

the river, cut across, an' come around in behind 'em" (190-91). In these few lines, the tall soldier voices many wartime tropes: waiting for reliable information, speculation of the future, and supposition of strategy. In introducing these lines, Crane propagates another military trope, gossip among the ranks: "[the tall soldier] was swelled with a tale he had heard from a reliable friend, who had heard it from a truthful cavalryman, who had heard it from his trustworthy brother" (190). Placing such typical human behaviors on the forefront of the novel "suggests a way of translating warfare and its specialized personnel back into more familiar peacetime and civilian realities amenable to the techniques of the more conventional realist novel" rather than incorporating "abstract theoretical debates on strategy and tactics ... [such as] the influence of Clausewitz ... [and his] famous maxim of war as the continuation of politics by other means" (Jameson 239). This prominent positioning of noncombatant realities even within the warscape frame is indicative that despite the fact *Red Badge* is a military-themed novel, it is more accurately a novel aimed at representing the human experience.

Crane scholar Eric Solomon weighs in on the discussion of characterization of the novel in his 1959 article titled "The Structure of The Red Badge of Courage," wherein he calls the tall soldier the most important of the *warscape* soldiers with whom the protagonist interacts: "Henry identifies with Conklin's calm attitude when faced with combat and attempts to accept his steady advice. The death of Conklin has particular meaning to the hero" (2). The importance of the relationship between these two cannot be denied. It is through his encounter with the tall soldier that the audience first meets the protagonist: "There was a youthful private who listened with eager ears to the words of the tall soldier... The youth was in a little trance of astonishment" (192). He was

enamored by the tall soldier, and indeed, witnessing his death was a traumatic experience for Henry:

There was silence... the chest of the doomed soldier began to heave with a strained motion ... This spectacle of gradual strangulation made the youth writhe... The youth had watched, spellbound, this ceremony at the place of meeting. His face had twisted into an expression of every agony he had imagined for his friend... As the flap of [Conklin's] blue jacket fell away from the body, he could see that the side looked as if it had been chewed by wolves... "Hell—" (246)

From the outset of the novel, the tall soldier had represented a strong personality, one which Henry had admired, but as Solomon notes, "the stronger personality does not survive the test" (2). Henry was rattled. "The dying man's expression of sympathy and concern for Henry add[ed] to the acute discomfort of the youth's position ... Conklin's death [brought] home to Henry the true nature of war, brutal and forbidding, more than the sight of an unknown corpse in the forest could do" (Solomon 2). Indeed, the character whose presence and subsequent absence exposes to the protagonist the true nature of war must be considered highly influential. The tall soldier's presence conveys that Crane anticipated his implied audience's prestructure would enable them to recognize and empathize with the humanity in his characters.

Another notable one of the supporting characters in the warscape is the cheery soldier. He only makes one appearance, with his character-space spanning a mere two pages of text. The cheery soldier is heard but not seen, calling out to Henry, "At last he heard a cheery voice near his shoulder: 'Yeh seem t' be in a pretty bad way, boy?'"

(258). Henry grunted in response. “The owner of the cheery voice took him firmly by the arm. ‘Well,’ he said, with a round laugh, ‘I’m goin’ your way. Th’ hull gang is goin’ your way. An’ I guess I kin give yeh a lift’” (258). While he accompanies Henry back to his regiment, the two engage in a long conversation, where “the man questioned the youth and assisted him with the replies like one manipulating the mind of a child” (258). Indeed, the coaxing on behalf of the cheery soldier and the reluctance to engage on the part of the protagonist are reflected in how the author expresses the discourse: “What reg’ment do yeh b’long teh? Eh? What’s that? Th’ 304th N’York? Why, what corps is that in? Oh, is it? Why, I thought they wasn’t engaged t’-day” (258). While the cheery soldier is certainly speaking to Henry, in Henry’s recollection of the discourse he locates himself as removed. His memory of the discussion with the cheery soldier resembles a jumbled mess. There are no formal pauses indicated by paragraph breaks, and there is no indication that Henry engages with any sort of profundity. In fact, the cheery soldier makes so little of an impact on the protagonist – on the surface level, anyhow – that when the pair arrives at Henry’s regiment, the narrator describes the cheery soldier’s departure as such: “A warm and strong hand clasped the youth’s languid fingers for an instant, and then he heard a cheerful and audacious whistling as the man strode away. As he who had so befriended him was thus passing out of his life, it suddenly occurred to the youth that he had not once seen his face” (259). Eric Solomon notes that the cheery soldier, who “gratuitous[ly] support[s]” and guides Henry back to his regiment” (3). Despite Henry’s marginal acknowledgment of the cheery soldier, it is the cheery soldier who best represents the sense of camaraderie amongst the troops. The cheery soldier’s presence in

the novel best indicates that Crane expected his implied audience to recognize the sense of community which the soldier embodies.

Thus far, we have discussed characters belonging to the *warscape* collection; however, now we turn our attention to those characters belonging to the *socialscape*. The two standout characters within this category are the “negro teamster” found at the beginning of the novel and the protagonist’s mother, who only exists within the protagonist’s memories of her. Both are situated about the war, before the war, but for the purposes of this text, not within the war. First, consider the “negro teamster,” who serves a quite different purpose than the cast of soldier characters. Rather than reinforce soldier stereotypes, he speaks to a wider social issue. Crane writes, “A negro teamster who had been dancing upon a cracker box with the hilarious encouragement of twoscore soldiers was deserted. He sat mournfully down. Smoke drifted lazily from a multitude of quaint chimneys” (191). The only appearance by a Negro character in the text occurs here, where he is performing, in a way reminiscent of black-faced minstrelsy. We must also note that once the attention of the group of soldier shifts away from the unnamed Negro man toward wild speculations of battle plans, his final action in the novel is to simply sit down and fade from the plot. Only one other allusion to the Negro presence exists in the text: “Wallowing in the filth, they were in an astonishingly short time resmudged. They surpassed in stain and dirt all their previous appearances. Moving to and fro with strained exertion, jabbering the while, they were, with their swaying bodies, black faces, and globing eyes, like strange and ugly fiends jigging heavily in the smoke” (308). Here again we find a quick image of black-faced minstrelsy, and here again the image is dismissed after a brief moment. The allusion, however, carries on for a short

time longer as Crane describes the battle-driven actions of the lieutenant in the same scene: “Strings of expletives he swung lashlike over the backs of his men” (308).

Clearly, an image is presented of a master ruling over his slaves, but as rapidly as the image enters the text, so too is it set aside. In this way, Crane is acknowledging the role of race issues in the Civil War in the very beginning of the novel. That said, the relative subtlety with which Crane invokes images of American slave culture indicates that Crane’s implied audience would have had enough of an awareness of these matters to recognize with little prompting the allusion present here.

As we continue to study characters whose presence in the novel serves to inform the prestructure of the implied audience we consider Henry’s mother, who again exists within a very limited character space spanning only three pages of the text and is situated within her son’s memory. In a sense, she never actually exists within the text; she predates it. Readers are introduced to Henry’s mother, who is not granted an identity beyond that of her association with her son, as he reflects on his experience of entering soldier ranks. When Henry first speaks of the possibility of his enlistment, he recalls his mother “had discouraged him . . . giv[ing] him many hundreds of reasons why he was of vastly more importance on the farm than on the field of battle” (193). When he again initiates the conversation, “Ma, I’m going to enlist,” she told him frankly, “don’t you be a fool” (194). The following morning, Henry went ahead and enlisted against her advice. When he returned home and told his mother, she was silent for a moment and then simply said, “The Lord’s will be done, Henry” (194). These words reveal at first her dismissal of her son’s silly boyhood fantasy, and then transition to reflect her acceptance of his choice, and her religious-based appeal to the predetermined nature of the situation: Henry

was destined to join the army, and there was nothing left for her to do but support him. This is one of the few moments when Crane allows for the entrance of Christian notions into his text. Therefore, we may conclude that Henry's mother's role functions as evidence that the implied audience maintains as a part of their prestructure a secure enough understanding of Christianity that their interaction with this frame requires no further facilitation than a simple invocation.

Finally, we will consider one more character, the tattered man, whose presence serves to inform our understanding of the implied audience's prestructure. He is described as a soldier "fouled with dust, blood and powder stain from hair to shoes, who trudged quietly at the youth's side" in the procession of injured soldiers (Crane 240). Crane describes the tattered man as eager and humble, noting that "his lean features wore an expression of awe and admiration" as he listened to a bearded sergeant regale the troops with his war stories as the procession of the injured marched along. The tattered man "was like a listener in a country store to wondrous tales told among the sugar barrels. He eyed the story-teller with unspeakable wonder. His mouth was agape in a yoke fashion" (240). The sergeant, whose masculine nature is as prominent as his beard, initiates a significant dichotomy between himself and the tattered man when he sardonically comments on the man's open mouth: "Be keerful, honey, you'll be a-ketchin' flies," (240). The key word here is "honey"; how often do you hear one man refer to another as "honey," especially in the mid-nineteenth century? These words clearly had an impact on the tattered man, who "shrank back abashed" (240). Shortly thereafter, the tattered man fell into step beside Henry and "in a different way [tried] to make him a friend" (240). The manner in which Crane describes the protagonist's



impression of the tattered man is striking: “His voice was gentle as a girl’s voice and his eyes were pleading” (240). The rapid succession of feminine descriptors used to label a soldier who was believed to be male may be indicative of another social issue implicit in the Civil War – male and female gender roles. What if the tattered man is really a woman in disguise? In this way, the tattered (wo)man functions both as a member of the *warscape*, which we readily identify by her soldier status, and as a member of the *socialscape* by fact of her perhaps misrepresented gender.

It is well documented that women fought in the war alongside their male counterparts. But because both the Union and Confederate armies forbade women from enlisting, women soldiers “assumed masculine names, disguised themselves as men, and hid the fact they were female” (Blanton). In 1888, seven years before the publication of *The Red Badge of Courage*, Mary Livermore who served as a nurse in the Union Army during the Civil War wrote:

Some one has stated the number of women soldiers known to the service as little less than four hundred. I cannot vouch for the correctness of this estimate, but I am convinced that a larger number of women disguised themselves and enlisted in the service, for one cause or other, than was dreamed of. Entrenched in secrecy, and regarded as men, they were sometimes revealed as women, by accident or casualty. (119-20)

What if the tattered (wo)man’s reaction of shrinking back in response to being called out by the sergeant was not stimulated by embarrassment, but rather motivated by a need to not draw attention to herself? The tattered (wo)man had two wounds, “one in the head, bound with a blood-soaked rag” (240). Certainly, the possibility exists that she could not

risk getting within close proximity of medical personal to change the dressing on her wound for fear they would discover her hidden gender.

If indeed the tattered man is a woman, and the evidence suggests this might well be the case, she is the second notable female character in the novel, and the audience acknowledgment of her becomes all the more important. Shamed by the fact that the tattered (wo)man bore a battle wound and he did not, Henry “turned away suddenly and slid through the crowd ... The tattered man looked after him in astonishment” (241). Shortly thereafter, the tattered (wo)man re-enters the scene, joining Henry as he looked after his friend Jim Conklin, the tall soldier, with whom he had been reunited among the ranks of the wounded. In a fit of madness, Jim leaves the procession, racing into a field; “The youth and the tattered soldier followed” (245). In the field, Jim’s “form stiffened and straightened ... He was invaded by a creeping strangeness that slowly enveloped him” and he died as the youth and the tattered (wo)man watched. Moments later, “The youth, awakened by the tattered soldier’s tone, looked quickly up. He saw that he was swinging uncertainly on his legs and that his face had turned to a shade of blue” (247). Fearfully, he cried, “Good Lord! ... you ain’t goin’t t’ – not you, too!” (247). Despite his earlier instinct to flee from the tattered (wo)man, here Henry demonstrates a clear attachment to her. And yet, just two pages later he snaps at her, “Oh, don’t bother me!” and leaves her for a final time: “The youth went on. Turning at a distance he saw the tattered man wandering about helplessly in the field” (249, 250). Henry’s propensity to disregard the tattered (wo)man seems to be a defining characteristic of their relationship, indicating that Crane intended for the (wo)man to operate on the margins of the socialscape rather than as a central character. However, the following passage serves as

evidence that the tattered (wo)man serves a much larger purpose in the novel than we might be inclined to presume: “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. . . . He admitted that he could not defend himself against this agency. It was not within the power of vigilance.” (250). Beyond the overt irony in their relationship – each feels as if his cause for shame is greater than the others – the tattered (wo)man is a critical member of a larger social discussion occurring by proxy within the character spaces of *The Red Badge of Courage*. Does Henry feel particularly sensitive toward her because of gender differences? Is this what makes him defenseless against her agency, the reason it is not in his power to treat her as if he would any other soldier? The capacity to acknowledge and engage in this discussion of gender roles in the nineteenth century is dependent on a prestructure which allows the implied audience to recognize first the possibility of and then the likelihood of gender misrepresentation among the soldiers.

The presence of the two feminine characters in Crane’s novel, one clear and the other convoluted, points to one of the most notable elements of the characterization within *The Red Badge of Courage*. Jameson writes, “The crucial thing about this collective system is that it is itself the abstraction of something else” (235). He continues to identify a possible “something else” as the emergence of the form of “what we may call a pre-feminist world” where “certainly the absence of women is a significant structural part of the form” (235). In later iterations of the pre-feminist form, Jameson says, “women will be admitted as yet another variation on the male character types” (235). Indeed, the two feminine characters in Crane’s novel function in this manner. The mother exists only within the male protagonist’s memory, thereby a variation on the main

character himself. Similarly, the tattered (wo)man performs as a male soldier, but her apparent female gender necessitates she is also a variation of maleness. We must acknowledge that the male protagonist intentionally distances himself from both of these characters, leaving his mother at home to join the army and abandoning the tattered (wo)man in a field, a decision which he was haunted by through the remainder of the novel. Even at the close, “He saw his vivid error, and he was afraid that it would stand before him all his life ... scrutinizing each detail of the scene with the tattered soldier ... Yet gradually he mustered force to put the sin at a distance” (Crane 318). Despite the protagonist’s literal attempts to remove feminine elements from his battlefield experiences, Crane’s purposeful inclusion of the characters who embody such elements substantiates the conclusion that *The Red Badge of Courage* exists as what Jameson calls a pre-feminist text, an identification which is likely to resonate with those audience members whose prestructure is informed by an awareness of gender issues.

Where existentialism is predicated on the emergence of one single character as the center of the plot, it is an understanding of the protagonist as more of a unifying factor and recognition of the minor characters as significant vehicles which enables authorial commentary on issues beyond the scope of a single character. Furthermore, enhanced consideration of the supporting character-scape enables meaningful categorization with which readers identifying with various prestructures may engage the text. It is through the study of the minor characters in *The Red Badge of Courage* that we are able to identify characteristics of the prestructure of Crane’s implied audience. Through the tall soldier, we find an understanding of humanity, something that is all too often removed from the experience of the soldier. The cheery soldier’s actions highlight the importance

of camaraderie and community within the ranks. The negro teamster demands an awareness of racial tensions in nineteenth century America. The role of Christianity in the novel is exhibited through Henry's mother. And the tattered (wo)man insists we consider the complications arising from gender roles in the Civil War. While there is certainly room for further study in this matter, I believe the work presented here outlines a reasonable understanding of the prestructure of Crane's implied audience. Moving to conclude this study, let us consider these final words which Crane wrote in a letter describing his authorial position: "Preaching is fatal to art in literature. I try to give to readers a slice out of life; and if there is any moral or lesson in it I do not point it out. I let the reader find it for himself. As Emerson said, 'there should be a long logic beneath the story, but it should be kept carefully out of sight'" (534). Indeed, this study demonstrates *The Red Badge Courage* functions as the summation of a complex series of prestructure-influenced frames.

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