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Private Fleming at Chancellorsville: "The Red Badge of Courage" and the Civil War

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became more cemented within popular culture, its continuing presence hints that naturalism and modernism have more in common than traditionally thought.

Despite the popularity of Horatio Alger stories and the nation's melting pot roots, people were genuinely scared of what they viewed as the great, unwashed masses destroying their little piece of paradise. The power of *Imagining the Primitive in Naturalist and Modernist Literature* is in its revelation of how writers relied on the idea of the primitive to evoke the era's fears and aspirations. Rossetti shows how the primitive enables writers across different eras to depict particular "qualities of American identity."

Rossetti makes an important contribution to the study of naturalist and modernist literature. By focusing on a character type, rather than a strictly defined era in literary history, she shows the fluidity of literary eras. She also provides a deeper understanding of how ideas of what it is to be an American transformed in the early twentieth century—ideas that continue to challenge us today. Unfortunately, the issues of immigration, class, and race still plague the nation. Reading Rossetti's fine book, one can gain valuable insight into how far we still have to travel down this road a century later.

—Bob Batchelor, University of South Florida

Private Fleming at Chancellorsville: The Red Badge of Courage and the Civil War, by Perry Lentz. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2006. viii + 359 pp. Cloth, \$39.95.

Private Fleming at Chancellorsville opens with Perry Lentz's ambitious aim to illustrate that Stephen Crane's extensive research for *The Red Badge of Courage* does far more than provide this fictional literary text with an accurate historical context: through impressionistic detail that echoes Henry Fleming's consciousness, Crane's carefully crafted source selection enables both author and audience to envision and experience the complexities of combat. By viewing Crane's work as an "historical project," readers can attain a heightened understanding of how the events at Chancellorsville shaped Private Fleming's story.

The structure of Lentz's book, which alternates between close readings of *Red Badge* and a careful analysis of the archival works influencing Crane's narrative, reflects an effort to negotiate between text and context. After using chapter one to orient his readers with "Crane's Fiction and

Crane's Research," Lentz plunges into a more specific discussion of "infantry combat in the Civil War," which characterizes chapter two on "the rifled musket." Lentz uses subsequent chapters to guide us through the literary landscape of "Private Fleming's Regiment." Through an equal emphasis on text and context, *Private Fleming at Chancellorsville* progresses by moving further into Crane's fictional aesthetic and into the imagination of his readers.

Lentz maps out an American battlefield that bridges Crane's literary present with the historical past upon which Henry Fleming's story depends. Examining this novel as an aesthetic work influenced by primary accounts, documents, and records, Lentz clearly explains his decision to use the Appleton edition of 1895, rather than to consult Henry Binder's 1983 emended version. Working with the earlier publication, which does not include the manuscript portion that Crane originally deleted, Lentz subtly and persuasively discredits the more speculative Hershel Parker approach which led Binder to reintegrate the original manuscript into the novel. Instead, Lentz selects the text that better enables readers to interpret the work as Crane may have intended. This editorial perspective on authorial intention converts a potentially problematic theoretical consideration into a well-documented one, which Lentz incorporates into his historically grounded thesis.

Perry Lentz's approach to *The Red Badge of Courage* offers a refreshing response to a commonly asked question: how can such a vivid illustration of war emerge from Crane, an author who had never endured armed conflict firsthand? Rather than idealize this novel's perspective on combat as a universally heroic experience, Lentz examines the infrequently studied second day of the Battle at Chancellorsville (May 3, 1863), an event resulting in the unexpected defeat of Union forces at the hands of Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. In addition to showing a close correlation between Crane's narrative and the *Official Records* upon which his novel draws, this historically unexpected defeat at Chancellorsville reveals a striking similarity between Private Fleming and the Army of the Potomac's Major General Joseph Hooker.

This unique study of Crane's novel contributes to a scholarly discourse that has generated surprisingly little critical attention to the documentation of characters and events at Chancellorsville. Situating *Red Badge* within this historically specific moment, Lentz differs significantly from those scholars who question the validity of Crane's Civil War research. By incorporating material from Couch's article in *Battles and Leads* and French's *Official Report*, *The Red Badge of Courage* establishes

an “historical basis for his fictional account of the 304th [New York Volunteer Infantry Regiment] in this battle.” The novel’s occasional discrepancies are not indications that Crane failed in his research; rather, Lentz says, these gaps intentionally reinforce Fleming’s faulty interpretations of combat.

Lentz argues that *The Red Badge of Courage* draws upon these ironies to expose and reject two closely connected myths about the philosophical and psychological responses to battle: 1) the events at Chancellorsville show nature to be more indifferent than malign, resulting in a universe of chaotic detachment from human struggles; 2) Henry Fleming’s actions on the battlefield merely reinforce his egocentric illusions, which have not been stripped away by the raw experience of war. Lentz consolidates these two claims into one when he explains that Crane questions the “military myth” that combat leads soldiers to mature through their heightened understanding of individual patterns and universal rhythms. Although he revisits these themes throughout *Private Fleming at Chancellorsville*, Lentz depicts Crane’s shattering of this mythology most clearly in chapter ten, “*The Red Badge of Courage* and War,” and in his eleventh chapter on “Literature as Mousetrap: The Reader Caught.”

Because Crane’s audience views combat and the world through Private Fleming’s limited, fragmented, and chaotic hallucinations, the novel initially deceives its readers by subjecting them to the same idealistic notions that Henry has about battle, bravery, and human development. Lentz says that, in contrast to the more traditional Western war hero, Crane’s protagonist undergoes an unconventional maturation process: rather than “‘transform’ a ‘callow youth’ into a ‘man’” of wisdom and humility, the events at Chancellorsville, as the novel depicts them, affirm and even inflate Henry’s grandiosity. Once readers discover that *Red Badge* has ironically thwarted their expectations of Fleming as a hero humbled by war, they begin to see how the novel liberates Crane’s audience from these myths about combat.

By debunking this military mythology, Lentz differs from those critics who view Henry’s maturation as a humbling battlefield experience. Rather than focus on how war gives Crane’s protagonist wisdom about his impending mortality, *Private Fleming at Chancellorsville* shows that the preoccupation with soldierly status blinds him to the possibilities of loss and death. Henry’s initial cowardice, which causes him to flee the battlefield when his survival instincts triumph over his fearlessness, is transformed into a self-centered “solipsism.” Although Lentz’s book never mentions her words, *Private Fleming at Chancellorsville* builds upon Mrs.

Fleming's earlier prediction that her son will be "jest one little feller amongst a hull lot of others." Just as Mrs. Fleming understands a truth about war that her son can never quite grasp, so also are the eyes of Crane's readers (some of whom, like Henry's mother and the author himself, have never experienced armed conflict) opened to Private Fleming's "childish vanities."

Perry Lentz succeeds most at illustrating how dramatic irony results in *The Red Badge of Courage* from these failed recognitions. Where his book falls short, however, is in its treatment of Crane's naturalism, which comes far too late in the text. Although he mentions Crane's impressionistic style almost immediately, Lentz does not address naturalist discourse until his eleventh chapter where he distinguishes *Red Badge* from other works by making the generalization that "the rest of the Naturalists aspired to the flat style of scientific investigation." By foregrounding his compelling close readings with an earlier discussion of this literary movement, Lentz could have more effectively positioned this war narrative in relation to or against the naturalist discourse of survival. In spite of this gap, *Private Fleming at Chancellorsville* adds factual color to *The Red Badge of Courage*, while shedding light on Stephen Crane's aesthetic by awakening readers to those literary and historical ironies sprinkled throughout this novel.

—Cara Elana Erdheim, Fordham University

Stephen Crane Remembered, ed. Paul Sorrentino. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006. xiii + 385 pp. Cloth, \$57.50.

Paul Sorrentino points out in the introduction to *Stephen Crane Remembered* that Thomas Beer's 1923 biography of Crane has obscured the truth of the author's life for more than eighty years: not only did Beer fabricate facts, details, and primary source materials, but his *Stephen Crane: A Study in American Letters* also seems to have shaded the memories of those who knew Crane and who recorded their stories after 1923. Sorrentino's new book continues the arduous task of undoing the damage Beer inflicted on the reputation and the history of an important literary figure.

Stephen Crane Remembered is a collection of reminiscences written by those who knew Crane well and, in some cases, by famous literary figures who only briefly encountered him. Many of the biographical vignettes have been published elsewhere previously, but Sorrentino's organization

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