REFLECTIONS ON CULTURAL ORIGINS: 
THE VISUAL LANDSCAPE OF THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

By

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This thesis examines the effect advances in the print industry and evolutions in the field of photography, which occurred just prior to the Civil War and throughout the Gilded Age, had on the public perception of war as evidenced in the pages of Stephen Crane’s seminal war novel. By juxtaposing passages from *The Red Badge of Courage* with specific illustrations and photographs from the Gilded Age, this study seeks to ascertain the origins of Crane’s vibrant imagery, and in so doing, effectively map the novel back upon the locus which gave it birth—the rich, visual media culture of New York City during the latter half of the 19th century. Focusing primarily on Civil War sketch artist drawings, Civil War photographs and contemporary images detailing instances of mechanical encroachment and social violence, I attempt to trace this pivotal transformation in public opinion to its roots in the popular press, particularly the highly mediated portrayals of war disseminated during this period and the voyeurism and spectatorship these violent and disturbing views inevitably engendered. The three chapters in this study highlight three disparate aspects of the visual landscape which figure prominently in either the novel’s descriptive passages or in its imagistic patterns. The confused and chaotic action sequences, which appear to be based on the drawings of Civil War sketch artists, form the premise of chapter one. Static depictions of death and destruction, which originate in the scrupulous labors of photographers like Alexander Gardner and his colleagues, function as the basis of chapter two, while metaphors of mechanization, animalism, anarchy, mob violence, and class conflict are addressed in chapter three’s examination of the media’s sensationalist discourse and biased representations. Thus, I maintain that Crane’s innovative literary aesthetic does not reflect war per se, but rather the Gilded Age’s mediated perception of war.
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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most striking attribute of Stephen Crane’s Civil War fiction is its vivid imagery and powerful use of description. Providing a revolutionary depiction of battle, *The Red Badge of Courage* reflects a wider cultural phenomenon distinguished by a transformation of public perceptions of war. Stemming primarily from evolutions in the production and distribution of print media, this alteration was characterized by a transference, whereby, through the mass circulation of images dedicated to military conflict, the chaos and hideousness of combat was symbolically transported from the battlefield to the living room. As Crane’s novel reflects, this newfound proximity to conflict gave birth to a strange vicariousness and an aberrant fascination as viewers and readers alike, mesmerized by the graphic images of violence and death which confronted them, sought to ascertain the true nature of war. *The Red Badge of Courage* reflects Crane’s ambitious attempt to translate this desire into words. Appealing to the Gilded Age’s appetite for spectacle, the novelist endeavors to craft an evocative and accurate portrait of war based, not on his personal experiences, but on the representations of conflict and strife found within the rich visual culture of New York City.

Though the broad and somewhat ambiguous term “visual culture” includes a multiplicity of media forms, for the purpose of this study, it will be limited to engravings disseminated by the pictorial press and photographs circulated in the form of stereograph cards, stereotipicon slides, and war albums. While these images encompassed a variety of content areas, this inquiry will focus primarily on Gilded Age portrayals of war and hostility, placing particular emphasis on the drawings of Civil War sketch artists and their
correlative engravings which were frequently reprinted in historical features such as the Century Magazine’s series “Battles and Leaders of the Civil War” (1884-7), the photographic archive of Civil War images which includes Alexander Gardner’s famous Sketchbook, and the contemporary portrayals of mechanical encroachment and social violence which dominated the pages of popular illustrated periodicals such as Harper’s and Frank Leslie’s Magazine. By juxtaposing passages from The Red Badge of Courage with specific illustrations and photographs from the Gilded Age, this study will seek to ascertain the origins of Crane’s vibrant imagery, and in so doing, effectively map the novel back upon the locus which gave it birth—the media culture of New York City during the latter half of the 19th century.

Since the novel’s publication in 1895, The Red Badge of Courage has been widely celebrated for its uniquely impressionistic quality. Acknowledged by many of Crane’s contemporaries such as Edward Garnett and Joseph Conrad, this stylistic device did much to establish the writer’s reputation in artistic and literary circles (Øverland 239). Neither was this acclaim limited to Crane’s particular historical moment, but rather it continued to be the subject of critical attention and applause throughout the next century. Thus, despite the fact that Crane’s literary appropriation and application of impressionistic technique is but one component of the novel’s literary style, it quickly became the dominant method for describing his literary aesthetic.

While both Robert Stallman in his book Stephen Crane: An Omnibus (1952) and Joseph J. Kwiat in his article “Stephen Crane and Painting” (1952) recognize the author’s indebtedness to the school of French impressionists, they appear content to assert vague attribution, failing to investigate the contrivance’s innovative application. Indeed, a full
analysis of Crane’s artistic approach would not be attempted until the 1960s, a decade which witnessed the publication of three seminal articles: Sergio Perosa’s “Naturalism and Impressionism in Stephen Crane’s Fiction” (1964), Orm Øverland’s “The Impressionism of Stephen Crane: A Study in Style and Technique” (1966), and Rodney Roger’s “Stephen Crane and Impressionism” (1969). While Perosa explores the author’s relationship with Hamlin Garland, a writer and friend of Crane’s who broached the subject of impressionism in *Crumbling Idols: Twelve Essays on Art Dealing Chiefly with Literature Painting and the Drama*, and examines the interconnection between naturalism and impressionism, Orm Øverland embarks on a detailed investigation of the motif as it appears in Crane’s fiction. Attempting to identify a “meaningful pattern,” the critic assesses the novel’s fragmented and episodic style, the author’s atypical use of color, association and descriptive patterns, and the narrator’s limited point of view (Øverland 280). Furthermore, Øverland analyzes the discontinuous and discrete nature of human perception as exemplified in the novel stating, “Crane singles out the first detail that catches the eye, the main impression at this one occasion, and lets it completely dominate the scene” (252). Though the elevation of the indistinct and ephemeral over the tangible and material appeals to the domain of sensory perception, it often results in distortion and confusion. Finally, Øverland stresses the “impressionist’s reluctance to analyze,” an omission also visible in Crane’s decision to render impressions in relative isolation. In the absence of a rationalizing consciousness, these transient glimpses of reality, like the paintings which preceded them, are presented to the reader bereft of a totalizing narrative (Øverland 264). Completely lacking an interpretive structure, these disparate impressions force readers to create a sense of coherence, which is then imposed
upon the scenes before them. In contrast to Øverland’s broad approach, Rodney Rogers chooses to focus specifically on Crane’s manipulation of viewpoint, which he asserts to be a reflection of impressionist ideology. Maintaining that “Crane modulates between dissimilar points of view in at least three distinct ways: by direct, literal statement; by manipulating narrative focus; and by employing…‘verbal disparity,’” Rogers argues that these constant fluctuations in perspective and the antithetical perspectives they produce equally express the transient and variable world conveyed by such French Impressionist works as Monet’s *Impression, Sunrise* (1872) and Degas’ *Dancer with a Bouquet of Flowers* (1878) (295). Thus having drawn attention to Crane’s rapid transitions, which often link radically different perspectives, the critic concludes that, “Crane’s artistic landscape, however true to reality, remains deceptive, fluxional, paradoxical, protean rather than procrustean—in short, impressionistic” (304).

James Nagel’s book *Stephen Crane and Literary Impressionism* (1980), a comprehensive investigation of the topic which functions as a capstone to this area of study, integrates and expands the ideas posited by Perosa, Øverland and Rogers. Consisting of five chapters, the examination ambitiously attempts to define literary impressionism, establish its place in the academic field, and assess the various forms which it assumes in the cannon of Crane’s work. In the first chapter, entitled “Backgrounds and Definitions,” Nagel explores the history of impressionistic painting and its relationship to literature and seeks to differentiate Literary Impressionism from Realism and Naturalism. In the second chapter, the critic embarks on a survey of Crane’s narrative methodology, which he maintains “present[s] an Impressionistic epistemology of a world in which the appearance of reality is constantly in flux, a kinetic world of light
and shadow, of sensory multiplicity, of confusion and uncertainty” (Nagel 84). The book’s third chapter is dedicated to impressionistic themes, specifically to “the empiricism, epistemology and evanescent reality” which characterize this literary mode (Nagel 113). In the fourth chapter, Nagel undertakes a technical analysis of Crane’s structure and imagery, and in the concluding section, he again returns to an examination of the overlapping and fluxional domains of Literary Impressionism, Realism and Naturalism.

While Impressionism was the predominant approach to Crane’s literary aesthetic between the novel’s publication in 1895 and the appearance of Nagel’s seminal text in 1980, some recent scholarship, fueled by the rapid growth of new historicism and an increased interest in cultural studies, has sought to locate Crane’s imagery in other forms of visual media specific to the novelist’s historical moment. A few studies which pursue this approach include Amy Kaplan’s article “The Spectacle of War in Crane’s Revision of History” (1986), Giorgio Mariani’s text Spectacular Narratives: Representations of Class and War in Crane and the American 1890s (1992), Bill Brown’s study The Material Unconscious (1996) and Rob Kroes’ essay “Crane and Brady: Parallels to the Civil War” (1998). Building on this foundation of research and interpretation, this study will investigate the visual terrain which gave birth to the novel’s vivid and varied imagery, focusing specifically on the dramatic drawings of Civil War sketch artists, the startling images captured by Civil War photographers and the popular engravings of social strife appearing in the pictorial press during the Gilded Age. Instead of merely identifying and analyzing Crane’s metaphors, these chapters will seek to contextualize the novel within the visual media culture of New York City in the 1890s and, having
identified the various influences which may have inspired Crane’s pictorial imagination, examine their impact on the novel’s development.

The three chapters in this study highlight three disparate aspects of the visual landscape which figure prominently in either the novel’s descriptive passages or in its imagistic patterns. The confused and chaotic action sequences, which appear to be based on the drawings of Civil War sketch artists, form the premise of chapter one. Static depictions of death and destruction, which originate in the scrupulous labors of photographers like Alexander Gardner and his colleagues, function as the basis of chapter two, while metaphors of mechanization, animalism, anarchy, mob violence, and class conflict are addressed in chapter three’s examination of the sensationalist discourse and biased representations by the popular press. In addition to their significant role in the novel, these visual mediums share two other attributes in common: all three render highly mediated depictions of reality, and all three derive their efficacy from the culture’s obsession with spectacle. Manipulated first by the artists and photographers who produced them and later by the copy editors and engravers who converted them into a publishable form, these images no longer portray reality per se but rather perceptions of reality, impressions which have been molded by the constructs of their society (see diagram in Appendix 1). Furthermore, by casting the viewer in the role of spectator, these images enabled members of the Gilded Age audience to exchange their monotonous existence for the thrills of the battlefield where they could look on death and experience danger without fear. The three chapters are arranged in chronological order based on the first appearance of the images discussed therein. Likewise, chapter one establishes the historical milieu—placing particular emphasis on evolutions in the print industry and the
growth of consumerism, nationalism, and militarism in the latter half of the 19th century—and introduces the ideas of mediation and spectacle which underlie the arguments of chapters two and three.

Consequently, chapter one will examine the effect advances in print culture which occurred just prior to the Civil War had on the public perception of war as evidenced in the pages of *The Red Badge of Courage*. Focusing specifically on the drawings of Civil War sketch artists, images reintroduced into the culture during the Gilded Age through popular weekly publications such as the *Century Magazine* series “Battles and Leaders of the Civil War” (1884-87), this chapter will seek to determine how these brutal and evocative pictures were adopted by Crane’s novel. A regression to the militaristic world of the 1860s, the resurgence of these graphic war sketches in the 1880/90s appears to have had a significant influence on the young author’s conception of war. Furthermore, when these spectacles of violence were reintegrated into the visual culture of late nineteenth century America, they were incorporated into the ideological paradigm of the 1880/90s, a model predicated on consumerism, escapism and spectatorship. Thus, in his attempts to craft a realistic portrayal of war, Crane appears to have relied not merely on the isolated drawings of the sketch artists but also on the cultural constructs of sport and spectacle which invariably accompanied them.

While the first chapter is concerned with the drawings of Civil War sketch artists and their correlating engravings, the second chapter will focus on Crane’s utilization of Civil War photography, particularly Alexander Gardner’s death studies. Though limited to static bodies, these images provided a powerful portrait of war, albeit a retrospective one given the fact that early cameras were not capable of capturing the motion of battle
but only the stillness of battle’s aftermath. To fully comprehend Crane’s appropriation of these images, however, the reader must analyze not only the photographs themselves, but the pastoral and sacred martyr myths which developed around them. In an attempt to mitigate the brutality of these violent and macabre scenes and assimilate the fractured and futile glimpses of reality they rendered into a coherent and purposeful totality, publishers and photographers assembled the images in ordered sets and catalogues and crafted a series of captions and vignettes, which effectively rewrote the messages conveyed by these traumatic photographs and transformed them into pro-Union propaganda. After briefly examining Gardner’s *Sketchbook of the Civil War*, a quintessential example of a photographic work which exhibits this mythologizing and euphemizing narrative, chapter two will explore Crane’s inversion and eventual rejection of this interpretive framework. Systematically dismantling this societal construct and excising the corpse of the soldier from it, the author of *The Red Badge* chooses to create a counter-narrative, wherein the brutal realities of the photographic image are rendered with accuracy and truth instead of euphemism or sanitizing artifice.

While chapters one and two analyze images from the 1860s which were reintroduced and reintegrated into the culture of the 1880/90s, chapter three inverts this paradigm revealing the process by which the illustrated press of the Gilded Age and the engravings it propagated, specifically those rendered in *Harper’s* and *Frank Leslie’s Magazine*, were projected back upon the tableau of the Civil War battlefield. Providing fertile soil for Crane’s pictorial imagination, these sensationalized images of metropolitan life and the often pejorative representational strategies associated with them tended to center around four primary areas of concern: the mechanization of society, as evidenced
by the growing power of machines, their dehumanizing effect on the individual, and the ever increasing incidences of mechanized violence; the sudden rise in urban poverty which occurred in the wake of America’s rapid industrialization and gave birth to a dangerous underworld rife with crime, ignorance, and savagery; the anarchy, chaos, and lawlessness visible in cases of mob violence; and the social stratification and class conflict which frequently erupted in violent melees between workers and federal troops acting in the interests of wealthy capitalists. Thus, *The Red Badge of Courage*, a novel which depicts the regiment as a machine, soldiers variously as automatons, savages and animals, the company of infantry as half-crazed mobs, and officers as powerful elites exploiting enlisted men, reflects the degree to which these images permeated the media culture of New York City and shaped the collective consciousness and perceptive framework of its citizenry.
Within the confines of *The Red Badge of Courage*, Crane draws a detailed portrait of an individual’s encounter with the violence and horror of modern warfare. Placing particular emphasis on the visible aspects of combat such as its chaos, carnage and kinetic energy, the author creates a visual banquet of sites and impressions which, since the novel’s publication in 1896, has been widely celebrated for its evocative, and what many readers have claimed, realistic depiction of the Civil War battlefield. Whether in the form of a frenzied charge across a corpse-strewn meadow, a blinding burst of a cannon shell, or a frantic flight from the lines, Crane repeatedly demonstrates a rare ability to capture motion and craft dynamic, episodic, action sequences which mesmerize the reader, captivating him/her with the promise of unveiling the true face of war.

Clearly, Crane’s audience, like the soldiers in the novel, desires an immediate experience with war, yet, one must question, if the author, a man born six years after the cessation of hostilities, is truly capable of fulfilling this desire. A close reading of the novel quickly reveals that Crane’s depiction of battle is far removed from the immediate and is instead a product of several layers of mediation and transformation. The reader of *The Red Badge* is not witnessing war per se, but rather the author’s perceptions of war, an acuity based primarily on the drawings of Civil War sketch artists which were then filtered and transformed by the media of the 1860s before being reintroduced into and reinterpreted by the popular culture of the 1880s and 1890s (see diagram in Appendix 1).
My rationale for making this claim rests on documented proof of Crane’s utilization of the illustrated *Century* magazines series “Battles and Leaders of the Civil War” and on an acknowledgement of the significance of Civil War sketches, which due to technological limitations in the 1860s, were the only form of media capable of rendering action scenes. Thus, the objective of this study is twofold: first, to examine the effect the archive of Civil War sketches, when imported into the highly martial and sports obsessed culture of the 1890s, had on the narrative structure of the *Red Badge*, and second, to interrogate the process by which the various levels of mediation which gave birth to the novel recast war as a spectator sport and the soldier as an insignificant entity forced to fluctuate between the roles of performer and voyeur. By repeatedly drawing the readers’ eye back to the loci of the battlefield, Crane effectively reinterprets war as the great spectacle, a definition much more applicable to the cultural milieu of the imperialistic nation of the 1890s than the war-torn land of the 1860s.

Prior to exploring this query, however, one must first examine the transformational developments which occurred in the print culture prior to and throughout the Civil War. Perhaps the most significant change which stemmed from improvements in the printing process in the 1850s was the birth of the illustrated weekly. The first to appear on the scene was *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* (1855), a periodical which was quickly followed by *Harper’s Weekly* (1859) and the *New York Illustrated News* (1859) (Campbell 10). The circulation of these weeklies grew exponentially following the attack on Fort Sumter in response to increased demands of an inquisitive public, many of whom were not only curious as to the nature of war but desperate to know the details of the great battles in which their brothers, fathers and
friends were engaged. Due to the unwieldy nature of wet-plate cameras and inadequacies in the half tone processes, photography was limited to still-life pictures. Thus the majority of battle scenes appearing in the illustrated weeklies were the products of illustrators’ engravings based on the rough sketches of field artists (Catton 9). These “special artists,” who included Alfred R. Waud, Arthur Lumley, Theodore R. Davis, William T. Crane, Frank H. Schell, Edwin Forbes, Henri Lovie, William Waud and Winslow Homer, fulfilled a pivotal need in the culture by providing the public a glimpse of the battlefield (Campbell 13-4). Through the endeavors of these artists, the distance between soldier and civilian, which had been a significant factor in all prior military engagements, was drastically reduced. War was no longer an unknowable tragedy fought in a distant land, but rather a perceivable drama which could be visualized and comprehended. As the earliest military conflict to be closely recorded—both verbally and pictorially—by inexpensive, widely-circulated, highly-illustrated print media, the Civil War represents the first military campaign which was accessible to the common man.

Though evolutions in the printing processes of the 1860s were a significant influence on Crane’s portrait of war, they were not the only factor to affect its development. While the efforts of sketch artists provided the images which inspired many of the novel’s battle scenes, the cultural changes resulting from America’s rapid industrialization in the post-war years in conjunction with the rise of nationalism, the cultivation of a martial spirit, and the birth of spectator sports in the 1880s and 1890s were the forces largely responsible for transforming these sensory impressions into the spectacle of war as portrayed in *The Red Badge.*
The trend toward industrialization in the latter half of the nineteenth century marked the advent of American consumerism and drastically altered public opinions regarding the function of print media. As millions flocked to the cities in search of work—Chicago tripled in size between 1880 and 1900—American society shifted from an economy comprised predominantly of autonomous, rural individuals to one constituted largely of dependent, urban consumers. Giorgio Mariani comments on this radical inversion in his book *Spectacular Narratives* wherein he observes, “the dramatic industrial development of the decades following the Civil War marked a definitive shift away from an economy of production to one of consumption. In a new social formation where all men and women were to be addressed as potential consumers, reality had to be recreated in the mode of theatrical display, of *spectacle*” (8). The growth of the advertising industry, the rise of the department store, and the increasing popularity of mass entertainment comprised just a few harbingers of this modern society (Mariani 8).

Likewise, in *The Incorporation of America*, Alan Trachtenburg assesses the origination of mass spectatorship as a dominant means of perception:

> The most common, if most subtle, implication of transformed human relations [during the Gilded Age] appeared in the steady emergence of new modes of experience. In technologies of communication, vicarious experience began to erode direct physical experience of the world. Viewing and looking at representations, words and images, city people found themselves addressed more often as passive spectators than as active participants, consumers of images and sensations produced by others. (122)

A striking example of this transformation from direct participation toward vicarious passivity can be witnessed in the growth of the daily newspaper, particularly Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst’s *New York Journal*, two dailies notorious for their propagation of yellow journalism. Thriving on sensationalism,
these papers offered the reader a portal into an exciting, if slightly voyeuristic, world of crime, scandal, and intrigue. Regarding this departure from traditional journalistic modes, Trachtenburg states that the daily newspaper presented “the world as a spectacle of consumption” in which “surrogate or vicarious familiarity serve[s] only to reinforce strangeness” (125). The marketing and consumption of spectacle which was initially used to attract the public’s gaze toward advertisements and news headlines soon permeated the literary domain, wherein the search for extraordinary and exotic experience invariably led authors and publishers back to the quintessential spectacle—war. Indeed, the Civil War proved the ideal medium to capture the attention of the Gilded Age audience for it both appealed to veterans, who thrilled to relive what was for many the most exciting, if traumatic, years of their lives, and to the youth of the upcoming generation, for whom the war was a strange specter—at once both familiar and foreign.

Accordingly, the literature of the period endeavored to resurrect the lingering shade of the Civil War. While John Esten Cooke published highly romanticized portraits of war which invoked the cavalier mythos, Ambrose Bierce (Tales of Soldier and Civilian 1891) and Joseph Kirkland (The Captain of Company K 1891) provided more realistic, if somewhat morbid, depictions of battle. Likewise, factual accounts of the great struggle abounded; most notable were General Grant’s Personal Memoirs (1885-6), an enormous success which eventually became one of the most popular books of the Gilded Age, and the U.S. War Department’s 128 volume series War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (disseminated to libraries throughout the United States in 1882) (McConnell 168). Similarly, George Lemon’s National Tribune and numerous monthly magazines such as Century, Harper’s, and The Atlantic ran frequent
features examining and interpreting various battles (McConnell 168, Lentz 15). Perhaps the most famous of these war memorandum, however, was *Century Magazine’s* three years series entitled “Battles and Leaders of the Civil War” (1884-87) which provided both a pictorial and a written record of the struggle based on first hand accounts of soldiers and observations of war artists. Not only was this project a commercial success—doubling the magazine’s circulation and selling over 75,000 copies when it was published in book form in 1888—but, as the first attempt to assemble a cumulative pictorial history of the war, it had enormous historical value as well (Sears 12). While on one level this compilation of data and images preserved the memory of the war for future generations, it also fulfilled another purpose—that of providing city dwellers an escape from the monotony and passivity of urban life into the thrilling campaigns of an earlier age.

This revival of interest in the Civil War was further accelerated by the influence of veterans’ organizations and the martial and nationalistic atmosphere of the 1880s and 90s. While the years directly following the war were distinguished by an uncanny silence as veterans and civilians alike attempted to return to normality and appeared to consign all memory of the five-year struggle to the past, the last two decades of the nineteenth century were characterized by a retrospective gaze as the Civil War once again rose to the forefront of the nation’s collective consciousness. During this period, membership in veterans’ organizations peaked—for example, the Grand Army of the Republic, the largest of such associations, reached 400,000—and tributes to soldiers, both the surviving and the fallen, penetrated nearly every sphere of society and included “syrupy odes (“Cover Them Over with Beautiful Flowers”), war dramas (“The Drummer Boy of
Shiloh”), war lectures, war memoirs, Memorial Day orations and monuments erected by adoring towns” (McConnell 167). Similarly, veteran’s organizations provided a forum in which war illustrations could be displayed and discussed and sponsored military reunions which attracted thousands of participants by offering a temporary recreation of camp life (McConnell 206, 175).

This celebration of its martial history was paralleled by a burgeoning sense of nationalism as the United States sought opportunities to further its interests abroad. Though a visible emblem of the nation since the Revolutionary War, it was not until the close of the 19th century that the American flag was translated into an object of ritual and employed as a “symbol of abstract nationalism” (McConnell 230). Similarly, these years witnessed the conception and institution of the Pledge of Allegiance and the increased popularity of “The Star Spangled Banner.” The ramifications of this flourishing nationalism, which was invariably accompanied by an elevation of earlier military achievements, were particularly evident in the international arena and resulted in a number of foreign disputes. John Higham references the United States’ proclivity toward international entanglements during this formative period in its history in his essay “The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s” : “the sorrow and weariness left by the Civil War had passed; jingoism and a deliberate cultivation of the military virtues ensued. The United States picked quarrels with Italy, Chile, and Great Britain before it found a satisfactory target in the liberation of Cuba. A steady build-up of naval power accompanied these crises” (31).

While the popular press frequently aligned these international ventures and the conflicts arising from them with the Civil War, the variances between these disparate
military operations were numerous. The most significant disparity, for the purpose of this study, can be observed in the differing manners in which these conflicts were represented. While the former was fought by Americans on American soil, the latter exploits were conducted in distant lands against unknown adversaries. Whereas accurate and realistic reporting characterized the American Civil War, exaggeration, embellishment and the tendency to cast the opponent in the role of exotic other defined the latter endeavors—in essence, war had been transformed from a desperate struggle to maintain national unity, into a demonstration of military might for the appeasement of the masses at home who exhibited an insatiable appetite for spectacle.

A final cultural transformation which occurred during this era, and one that seems to have influenced Crane’s decision to represent war as a dramatic public display of violence, was the rapid growth of spectator sports, particularly football and boxing (Higham 28). In his expose of American culture, Trachtenburg describes this era as “the first age of modern mass-spectator sports, of professional and collegiate games witnessed in stadiums by thousands of seated onlookers” (123). For the purpose of this study, the growth and promotion of football is of particular interest. Renowned for its violence and ferocity—the intercollegiate season of 1905 witnessed eighteen deaths and over one hundred and fifty serious injuries—the football field was often aligned with the battlefield (Brown 291). Combat imagery was frequently employed by reporters to describe the sport which the Nation in 1905 condemned as a “public spectacle of brutality, for glory and gate-money” (Brown 127, 291). Yet, instead of repelling potential spectators, these critical reviews merely increased its popularity for, in some strange way, the violence of the game appears to have satisfied the need for spectacle while
simultaneously offering the glimpse of war which the public so desperately desired. Popular opinion regarding the game is perhaps best encapsulated by Crane himself, who in a letter to John Northern Hilliard, declared, “Of course, I have never been in a battle, but I believe that I got my sense of rage of conflict on the football field…”(Crane, Correspondence 322).

From within this evolutionary period in American history, The Red Badge of Courage would emerge in 1894. Composed primarily during the author’s three year residency in the bustling metropolis of New York City, a focal point of cultural transformation, the novel is, in many ways, a reflection of its turbulent social milieu. In particular, the reader will observe the protagonist’s proclivity to view images as objects of consumption, the narrator’s tendency to portray battle as spectacle or demonstration, and the author’s recurring references to sports/spectator imagery. While Crane’s reliance on the Century magazine series “Battles and Leaders” has been verified by Corwin Knapp Linson, a friend of Crane’s who owned the collection, and R. G. Vosburgh, a member of the Art Student’s League and roommate of the novelist, the influence of the other forces mentioned above, while perhaps more subtle, were nonetheless equally pervasive (Sorrentino and Wertheim 89).

From the opening pages of The Red Badge, the reader is immediately immersed in a world of pictures and picturing. For example, in his description of the youth’s bivouac, the narrator mentions that “a picture from an illustrated weekly was upon the log walls” (Crane 4). Similarly, Henry’s rationale for enlisting derives from romanticized portraits of war, which, while apparently based on illustrations from the weekly newspapers, have been embellished and glorified by the youth’s active imagination: “He had read of
marches, sieges, conflicts, and he had longed to see it all. His busy mind had drawn for him large pictures extravagant in color, lurid with breathless deeds...The newspapers, the gossip of the village, his own picturing, had aroused him to an uncheckable degree” (Crane 5). These notions of heroism and triumph on the field of battle are reinforced later in the novel when the narrator allows the reader access to Henry’s deluded fantasies:

Swift pictures of himself, apart, yet in himself, came to him—a blue desperate figure leading lurid charges with one knee forward and a broken blade high—a blue, determined figure standing before a crimson assault, getting calmly killed on a high place before the eyes of all...Indeed, he saw a picture of himself, dust-stained, haggard, panting, flying to the front at the proper moment to seize and throttle the dark, leering witch of calamity. (Crane 51) [emphasis mine here and in all subsequent quotations]

Akin to the images projected by the Edison Kinetograph, an early motion picture device which was a popular feature of penny-arcades in the 1890s, the merit of these “swift pictures” seems to rest in their entertainment value—a strange and somewhat troubling revelation (Haliburton 124).

While one might be tempted to argue that this inclination to view war as a series of idealized pictures is merely a means of displaying a new recruit’s inexperience and naïveté which will soon be replaced by the more realistic perspective of a participant, the reader will observe that this substitution never actually takes place. In fact, very little changes between the parade of images which pass before Henry’s inner eye at the beginning of the narrative and the procession of pictures which flash before his psyche in the wake of the first skirmish and again at the novel’s close. Having finally regained his regiment after his frenzied flight from battle the previous day, Henry, reviewing “the pictures he had seen,” feels “competent to return home and make the hearts of the people glow warm with stories of war” (Crane 69). Likewise, in the final chapter, the youth,
recollecting his behavior while under enemy fire, likens it to a grand pageant of military
achievement:

At last they marched before him clearly. From his present viewpoint he
was enabled to look upon them in spectator fashion and to criticize them
with some correctness, for his new condition had already defeated certain
sympathies. Regarding his procession of memory he felt gleeful and
unregretting, for in it his public deeds were paraded in great and shining
prominence. Those performances which had been witnessed by his
fellows marched now in wide purple and gold, having various defections.
They went gayly with music. It was a pleasure to watch these things.”
(Crane 102)

Clearly, Henry’s war experiences have had small effect on his conception of war or his
relationship to it. Even after having actively participated in two engagements, he still
views himself primarily as a spectator of his own “performances.”

When viewed in conjunction with the pictures/picturing motif, this inability to
move from the role of spectator to that of active participant may, in fact, be a reflection of
the author’s own experience with war or, in this case, his lack thereof. Having never
actually witnessed battle, Crane was completely reliant, from a visual point of view, on
the pictorial record of Civil War, and was therefore, inevitably relegated to the role of
spectator. For him, accessing war was indeed a process of picturing, and therefore, it
should come as no great surprise that his protagonist holds a similar view of reality.

While the fact that Crane spent countless hours in the studio of fellow artist
Corwin Knapp Linson poring over illustrated magazines detailing Civil War battles has
been well established, few have investigated the impact these pictures had on the
narrative of The Red Badge. In his reevaluation of Stephen Crane, Robert Stallman
writes, “Instead of panoramic views of a battlefield, Crane paints not the whole scene but
disconnected segments of it, which, accurately enough, is all that a participant in an
action or a spectator of a scene can possibly take into his view at any one moment” (Stallman 252). Of the visual material available to the author, the work of the Civil War sketch artists, much of which was reproduced in “Battles and Leaders,” is the medium which most closely resembles the style of disjointed snapshots described by Stallman. While photography also influenced the novel—a topic which will be addressed in a subsequent chapter—the drawings of sketch artists were the only form of media capable of capturing motion, and therefore would have provided the optimal resource for the young author desirous to look on war and display it.

Indeed, when the drawings of these war artists are juxtaposed with descriptive passages from *The Red Badge*, startling similarities begin to emerge. Prior to examining the pictures themselves, however, several parallels in subject and style should be noted. Unlike the artists of earlier wars, who were often hired post facto by wealthy patrons to paint romanticized battle scenes celebrating the heroic acts of gallant officers, this new generation of artists drew many of their pictures on site and focused primarily on the plight of the common soldier. Panoptic scenes were often replaced by narrower views limited to a single individual’s field of vision. In the place of heroic charges and glorious victories, these artists chose to depict the chaos and confusion of the battlefield. Rough and often lacking in detail, due to the turbulent conditions of their composition, these sketches nevertheless sought to achieve a degree of realism that was unprecedented in the genre of war paintings.

Likewise, the characters in Crane’s novel represent the common man: a point emphasized by the author’s use of descriptive epithets—the “tall soldier,” “the loud soldier,” “the ragged soldier”—in the place of proper names. In regard to these
Stallman writes, “the persons in his fiction are not persons but just Everyman—the synthetic figures of a Morality Play or a medieval tapestry, the typical representatives of a group” (248). Additionally, the protagonist exhibits a severely limited scope of vision which is further obstructed by smoke and debris. The effects of this restricted point of view can be observed in Henry’s frustration with the seeming inefficiency of the army, his animosity toward the apparently inane orders of commanding officers, and his disoriented behavior under fire. Finally, *The Red Badge* resembles a drawing in the author’s attention to positioning and posture, two stylistic devices examined in detail by David Halliburton in *The Color of the Sky*: “Crane’s novel, it will be seen, is very much a positing affair, producing a wide range of positions, placements, loci, attitudes, poses and postures—a cartography whose coordinates provide a kind of infrastructure of the narrative. Which is not to say that the positing is static. Its function is to orient, and the orientation is itself dynamic” (Halliburton 117). Analogous to the work of the sketch artists, Crane’s descriptions stress placement and demeanor not for the purpose of spotlighting heroic scenes but rather in an effort to undermine the very ideology of heroism:

> There was a singular absence of heroic poses. The men bending and surging in their haste and rage were in every impossible attitude. The steel ramrods clanked and clanged with incessant din as the men pounded them furiously into hot rifle barrels. The flaps of the cartridge boxes were unfastened, and bobbed idiotically with each movement...The officers, at their intervals, rearward, neglected to stand in picturesque attitudes.” (Crane 29)

On Crane’s battlefield, mayhem reigns and affords little opportunity for heroics.

Although one-to-one correspondences between specific sketches and particular passages in the novel are difficult, if not impossible, to establish, many of Crane’s scenes
appear to have relied heavily on the pictorial archive. One such example can be found in his description of Henry’s first encounter with war:

The men dropped here and there like bundles. The captain of the youth’s company had been killed in an early part of the action. His body lay stretched out in the position of a tired man resting, but upon his face there was an astonished and sorrowful look, as if he thought some friend had done him an ill turn. The babbling man was grazed by a shot that made the blood stream widely down his face. He clapped both hands to his head. (Crane 29)

When the above quotation is aligned with Allen Redwood’s drawing, “Steuart’s Brigade at Culp’s Hill,” [Plate 1] the reader will note a number of parallels. From the “tired man resting” in the foreground to the soldier who has been grazed in the head on the right hand side, this picture, like Crane’s passage, individualizes each casualty and thereby conveys the human cost of war. In addition to personalizing loss, pictures such as these enable the reader/viewer to acquire a mental image of war without ever having experienced it. Though a dwindling number of readers in the 1890s would have actually heard the roar of battle or seen its carnage, all could relate to the imagery of bundles falling or men sleeping.

Another image which bears a striking similarity to Crane’s depiction of battle is William Sheppard’s drawing,
“Under Fire at Chancellorsville” [Plate 2]. This rendering, which depicts Union soldiers taking shelter behind dirt fortifications, presents a brutally realistic portrayal of war. On the left hand side of the drawing, exhausted soldiers seek refuge behind an earthen barricade while an irate officer upbraids a small group of men who have turned their backs on the battlefield. Absorbed in this mini-drama, the regiment fails to notice the tragedy occurring in its midst: on the right side of the canvas, their comrade reels to the ground after having been mortally wounded by an artillery shell. The detachment and lack of sensitivity displayed by the soldiers’ in this picture can easily be aligned with that exemplified by Henry and his comrades, who having grown accustomed to the “sputtering of muskets” and the continual boom of the cannons, “cuddle” into the damp trenches and, turning their backs on the theatre of war, quickly fall asleep (Crane 70). A corollary to the battle scenes which frame them, these moments of respite are equally important to the reader/viewer in that they enable him/her to observe the psychological damage wrought by war.

A third parallel can be observed in Crane’s depictions of batteries in action: “Through the trees he watched the black figures of the gunners as they worked swiftly and intently…Once he saw a tiny battery go dashing along the line of the horizon. The tiny riders were beating tiny horses” (Crane 30). The flurry of activity witnessed here is equally visible in Edwin Forbes’s rendering of gunners at Chancellorsville in “Meeting Jackson’s Flank Attack,” [Plate 3] and Walton Tabor’s portrait of a frantic battery gaining the field in
“Going into Action under Fire” [Plate 4]. Visualizing violent displays of motion and energy, these animated scenes convey the sense of exhilaration and urgency experienced by troops in battle.

In addition to communicating the thrill of battle, Crane equally seeks to reveal the terror felt by soldiers when confronted with their own mortality. This panic is clearly seen in chapter fourteen when the regiment is ordered to charge across an open field: “the men of the regiment, with their starting eyes and sweating faces, running madly, or falling, as if thrown headlong, to queer, heaped-up corpses…But there was a frenzy made from this furious rush. The men, pitching forward insanely, had burst into cheerings, moblike and barbaric, but tuned in strange keys that could arouse the dullard and the stoic” (Crane 82). Though the locale of Walton Taber’s illustration, “Union Charge through a Cornfield,” [Plate 5] differs from that described by Crane, the emotional landscape is much the same. In both depictions, havoc reigns as soldiers, blinded by their own fears, lunge forward recklessly across the broken and corpse strewn ground.

While some passages, such as the one provided above, employ multiple senses, others dwell primarily on the ocular, depicting war as an awesome yet awful display of graphic images. One such
moment occurs when a shell falls into the midst of the charging regiment: “The song of bullets was in the air and shells snarled among the treetops. One tumbled directly into the middle of a hurrying group and exploded in crimson fury. There was an instant’s spectacle of a man, almost over it, throwing up his hands to shield his eyes. Other men, punched by bullets, fell in grotesque agonies. The regiment left a coherent trail of bodies” (Crane 82). The horror evoked by this transitory vision is similarly realized in Henri Lovie’s sketch, “Battle of Munfordville, Kentucky,” [Plate 6] which mercilessly depicts the aftereffects of a shell’s explosion.

While death is an ever-present reality on the battlefield, the brutality of this picture, in which the soldiers’ bodies are blasted back upon the viewer, inevitably appalls the onlooker, whose gaze is both attracted and repelled by the scene’s violence. While such glimpses absorb the attention of the viewer, they equally arrest it. Crane manifests the hypnotic and stupefying power of the spectacle in the latter part of the novel when the regiment attempts to charge across an open field:

The men, halted, had opportunity to see some of their comrades dropping with moans and shrieks. A few lay under foot, still wailing. And now for an instant the men stood, their rifles slack in their hands, and watched the regiment dwindle. They appeared dazed and stupid. This spectacle seemed to paralyze them, overcome them with fatal fascination. They stared woodenly at the sights, and, lowering their eyes, looked from face to face. (Crane 83)
Overwhelmed by a barrage of terrifying impressions, these soldiers are completely incapacitated. The reader, by proxy, is similarly transfixed, captivated by the vibrant imagery of death.

These last two scenes reveal yet another resemblance between the pictorial representations of war and Crane’s descriptive renderings of combat in that both artist and author choose to portray war as spectacle. In regard to this tendency, Giogio Mariani writes,

What this representative strategy actually achieves is a recreation of war as pure spectacle, as exotic imagery to be consumed aesthetically. As contemporary reviewers were quick to notice, Crane’s style turned war into a real thing and placed the reader directly on the battleground in the midst of mad cries, explosions, smoke, raw violence, and bloodshed. That is, Crane recreated war, as far as that is possible verbally, as a cinematic or anyway sensory experience, as a combination of sense impressions which shock and nearly hypnotize the reader. (Mariani 158)

In the same way that the audience of the Gilded Age consumed the yellow journalism of Pulitzer and Hearst, it quickly availed itself of the vicarious experience of war provided by The Red Badge, partaking of the spectacle of battle in much the same way it devoured the popular entertainments of the day.

Given his reliance on the illustrations of Civil War sketch artists, it is not surprising that Crane would choose to emphasize the visual dimension of battle. Indeed, his prose is imbued with references to “seeing,” “looking,” “watching,” and “observing.” This attention to the optical is particularly evident in the soldiers’ desire to see war. As the new regiment prepares to enter the foray on the first day of battle, the narrator states, “The greater part of the untested men appeared quiet and absorbed. They were going to look at war, the red animal—war, the blood-swollen god” (Crane 20). Moreover, though Henry flees from the lines during the first engagement with the “zeal of an insane
sprinter,” he soon finds himself drawn back to the scene of battle: “A certain mothlike quality within him kept him in the vicinity of the battle. He had a great desire to see, and to get news” (Crane 52). The author’s propensity to employ a vocabulary of visual descriptors is manifested again later in the novel when, during a brief pause in the fighting, the youth once more assumes the position of observer: “He stood erect and tranquil, watching the attack begin against a part of the lines that made a blue curve along the side of an adjacent hill. His vision being unmolested by smoke from the rifles of his companions, he had opportunities to see parts of the hard fight” (Crane 93). Instead of decreasing as the soldiers are caught up within the melee and transformed from viewers into participants, the number of optic verbs only increases: “The youth, in his leapings, saw as through a mist, a picture of four or five men stretched upon the ground or writhing upon their knees…tottering among them was the rival color bearer, whom the youth saw had been bitten vitally by the bullets of the last formidable volley. He perceived the man fighting a last struggle” (Crane 99). The level of detail and degree of clarity contained within these observances lead one to question the reliability of the narrator. Are these truly the fleeting impressions of a soldier in the midst of battle or are they instead the calm reflections of a spectator?

The claim that the youth’s/narrator’s descriptions align more closely with the experience of the spectator than that of the soldier is substantiated by a number of passages throughout The Red Badge in which the soldier is cast in a spectatorial role. As the firing commences, Henry’s gaze is captured by the events unfolding before him: “A brigade ahead of them and on the right went into action…The youth, forgetting his neat plan of getting killed, gazed spell bound. His eyes grew wide and busy with the action of
the scene. His mouth was a little was open” (Crane 23). Likewise, by assuming the position of color bearer, the youth is freed from the responsibilities of a typical soldier and provided the opportunity to give full reign to his voyeuristic fantasies. In reference to his bizarre behavior, the narrator writes, “The youth, still the bearer of the colors, did not feel his idleness. *He was deeply absorbed as a spectator.* The crash and swing of the great drama made him lean forward, intent-eyed, his face working in small contortions. Sometimes he prattled, words coming unconsciously from his grotesque exclamations” (Crane 95). Neither is Henry the only character to be treated as a spectator; at several points in the novel, the entire regiment assumes this status. One such revelatory occurrence follows Henry’s maniacal performance on the field: “He turned then and, pausing with his rifle thrown half into position, looked at the blue line of his comrades. During this moment of leisure they seemed all to be engaged in staring with astonishment at him. *They had become spectators*” (Crane 76).

The recurrence of the spectatorship motif, whether in the form of Henry’s irrational desire to see battle or the regiment’s absurd attempts to comprehend war by gawking at the half-crazed behavior of a “war god,” reflects a larger theme of mediation which surfaces repeatedly throughout the novel. While the youth’s regiment does eventually have an immediate experience with war, the author/narrators decision to continue this stylistic device throughout and following their encounter with the “blood-swollen god,” seems to speak more to the factors surrounding the novel’s conception than to the soldiers’ degree of experience. In this case, the vicarious experience of the author, which was mediated both by sketch artists, who were themselves spectators, and by
illustrators/engravers, who often manipulated the artwork prior to publication, gives rise to a singular voyeurism on the part of the characters.

The audience/performance dichotomy is further developed through Crane’s references to “the blue demonstration,” an expressive term which, for the reader of the 1890s, would inevitably have evoked the memories of military pageantry such as the Grand Review, the Union Army’s triumphant parade through Washington in May of 1865 (Crane 11). Yet, a careful analysis of this motif will disclose that the author was not content merely to relegate the soldier to the role of spectator but rather complicated the position of these combatants by treating them as viewers one moment and actors the next. While in one passage he refers to the veteran regiment as an “audience,” in the next, he aligns the battlefield with a theatre and the soldiers with actors: “The men saw the ground vacant of fighters. It would have been an empty stage if it were not for a few corpses that lay thrown and twisted into fantastic shaped upon the sward” (Crane 26, 89).

In addition to comparing his characters to performers, the author often identifies them with competitors in sporting events. Containing a number of allusions to a variety of spectator sports, including track, wrestling, boxing, and football, the text repeatedly conflates the soldier and the athlete. For example, as the regiment prepares to charge across an open field, the men are compared to sprinters waiting for a signal (Crane 80). Similarly, as the youth hurries to the safety of the forest, the narrator likens him to a football payer (Crane 84). Finally, when the blue and gray regiments collide, they are said to have “exchanged blows in the manner of a pair of boxers” (Crane 88). Through this conflux of sports metaphors, Crane effectively reiterates the spectator/spectacle theme and reconstructs war as a vehicle of popular entertainment.
Thus, Crane’s book marks a radical metamorphosis in the genre of the war novel. With its emphasis on sport and spectacle, vicariousness and voyeurism, immediacy and mediation, *The Red Badge* persuasively re-visions history, transforming artistic depictions of the Civil War into the graphic display of violence desired by the audience of the 1890s. Through its rich and evocative visual imagery, the novel captivates its readers, transforming them, like the characters who reside within its pages, into spectators of the one great tragedy—war.
CHAPTER 2

PHOTOGRAPHIC REALISM AND THE CORPSE DISPLAYED

Since its publication in October of 1895, *The Red Badge of Courage* has been widely celebrated for its stark photographic realism, particularly its graphic images of battle’s aftermath. Highlighting the author’s attention to minute detail and the fragmented and episodic nature of the narrative, critics and scholars alike have commented on the distinctly photographic quality of the novel. For example, in his 1896 review, Harold Frederic likened the young author to “a Muybridge, with an instantaneous camera,” and in so doing, effectively aligned Crane’s innovative writing style with the photographic exploits of Eadweard Muybridge, an English-born photographer renowned for his stereoscopic photographs of animals in motion (119). By juxtaposing photographer and author, Frederic intimates that, just as Muybridge, through a series of sequential images taken at split-second intervals, was able to disclose the actual movements of a galloping horse, so Crane, through vibrant “photographic revelation,” is able to reveal the true face of war in all its terrible glory (119).

This second chapter will seek to establish the relationship between the photographic archive of Civil War images, the pastoral/sacred martyr narrative which developed around it, and the descriptions of death and debris littered throughout Crane’s novel. Though Roger Fenton, a British photographer, had taken several hundred pictures of the Crimean War (1853-6), the American Civil War marked the earliest large-scale effort to comprehensively document a military campaign using a photographic medium. Likewise,
the first time the human cost of war—visible in the Matthew Brady’s and Alexander Gardener’s depictions of corpses and mutilated bodies—had been exposed to the mechanical and indifferent eye of the camera. Confronted with these grisly images, pictures which would have been censored in all subsequent conflicts, Northern publishers and photographers felt compelled to create a narrative to justify these portraits of violence and carnage. By surrounding the disturbing views with scenes of rustic harmony and passages of pastoral prose, these individuals and their correlates in the Gilded Age sought to recreate the battlefield as a sacred landscape and elevate the dead Union soldier to the status of martyr. Similarly, by adding captions to these photographs, crafting extended metaphors and romanticized vignettes to accompany them, and assembling the photographs into organized collections, advocates of the Union were able to incorporate these images into a coherent narrative and, by subsuming the individual parts to the whole, divest the scenes of their horror. By employing the pastoral motif throughout the novel, Crane effectively recalls the pictographic record and its corresponding narrative only to highlight the latter’s inadequacy. Instead of conveying the content of the images in a muted and palatable form, as Gardner does in his Sketch Book, Crane chooses to depict them with unmitigated veracity. Against the backdrop of pastoral violation and renewal, the author fashions a tableau of death which is neither sacred nor glorious nor rational, but rather anguished, appalling and utterly incomprehensible. Thus, by translating these photographic renderings of the battlefield into a written text, Crane effectively resurrecpts the corpse of the Civil War soldier and reverses the trend toward effacement which a nation, eager to forget the tragedies of the past, had attempted to instate.
The years directly preceding the Civil War were a time of rapid technological development in the field of photography. In 1855, the traditional copper-based daguerreotype was replaced by the ambrotype (an image on glass), a medium which was quickly supplanted by the tintype (image on a thin piece of iron), and finally, displaced by the paper photograph in 1858/9 (Zeller 14-5). These evolutions in the development process resulted in a much higher degree of efficiency and economy. Likewise, the year 1860 saw the production and introduction of the first inexpensive stereoscope, a picture viewing device which superimposed two identical images in order to recreate the semblance of depth. This pioneering mechanism and the 3-D viewing experience it provided quickly gained popularity, especially following the introduction of the paper photograph which afforded the ideal medium for stereographic cards. The impact of this device can be observed firsthand in Oliver Wendell Holmes’ famous essay, “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph” (1859), wherein he declares,

Form is henceforth divorced from matter. In fact, matter as a visible object is of no great use any longer, except as the mould on which form is shaped...Matter in large masses must always be fixed and dear; form is cheap and transportable. We have got the fruit of creation now, and need not trouble ourselves with the core. Every conceivable object of Nature and Art will soon scale off its surface for us. (747)

Holmes further posits that, having discovered a means of capturing form and divorcing it from matter, the next generation would begin collecting these numerous forms or photographs and arranging them in massive libraries (“Stereoscope” 748). Finally, he closes his essay with the prophetic and, when viewed retrospectively, slightly ominous declaration that “the next European war will send us stereographs of battles...The time is perhaps at hand when a flash of light, as sudden and brief as that of the lightning which shows a whirling wheel standing stock still, shall preserve the very instant of the shock of
contact of the mighty armies that are even now gathering” (Holmes, “Stereoscope” 748). Little did Holmes know that it was not a European battleground that would become the next subject of the camera’s scrutiny, but a distinctively American conflict in which the bodies of dead American soldiers on American soil would be the objects of speculation.

The advent of hostilities in 1861 increased rather than decreased the public demand for photography as thousands of soldiers posed for portraits before setting off for the grand adventure of war. These *cartes-de-viste*, small pictures fixed to pieces of cardboard, were so popular that scholars estimate that large companies, such as New York’s E. and H.T. Anthony, may have “produced as many as 3,600 *cartes-de-viste* per day during the war” (Sweet 81). In addition to portraiture, many Civil War photographers, such as Matthew Brady, Alexander Gardner, Timothy O’Sullivan and George Bernard, hoped to create a photographic record of the war itself. Due to the constraints of wet plate photography, this ambitious project was primarily limited to static objects; hence, instead of rendering the battles themselves, the camera depicted their aftermaths—corpses, dead horses, broken war machines, and blackened ruins (Trachtenburg 72). Rather than fulfilling the part of on-site reporter, the photographer assumed the role of historian, piecing together the events of the past to form a holistic, albeit fragmented, account of battle. Anthony Lee, in his article entitled “The Image of War,” affirms the retrospective nature of photography during this era: “the camera pictured not events but instead only the sites and remains of events already passed; it registered, mostly by implication and imaginative reconstruction (and through the services of the letterpress), the marks of history; and it everywhere betrayed its own belatedness” (Lee 29). Despite the camera’s limitations, *Harper’s Magazine* and *Leslie’s*
Illustrated News did purchase some of the photographs which they subsequently used as the basis for woodblock engravings (Sweet 84). Battle scenes in the form of stereograph views and framed prints were also displayed in individual galleries and sold to the public at relatively low prices. Gardner’s catalog, “Photographic Incidents of War,” (1863) which contained 572 photographs, 407 of which were stereograph cards priced at fifty cents a piece, clearly speaks to the popular appeal of these images (Zeller 18). A final vehicle through which Civil War photographs were circulated was in the form of large, photographic books such as Gardner’s two-volume Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War (1866) and George Barnard’s Photographic Views of Sherman’s Campaign (1866). Since a means of mechanical reproduction had not yet been discovered, these photographic collections were composed entirely of positives and, consequently, were too expensive to be mass marketed.

Though the demand for Civil War photographs temporarily abated in the 1870s, it resurfaced in the 1880 and 90s as the public, having acquired a degree of distance from the tragedy, gazed on it with newfound curiosity and collectively sought to imbue it with an added layer of significance which would be applicable to the challenges confronting an imperialist nation. During this period, Hartford and Taylor, a large Connecticut-based firm, began marketing a collection of 225 stereograph cards depicting a variety of Civil War images. In addition to these views, the company sold sets of stereopticon slides which were accompanied by descriptive texts and projected on blank screens for large audiences (Zeller 18, Trachtenburg 77). Improvements in the printing process during the 1880s also ushered in the era of the printed photograph and allowed for the publication of The Memorial War Book (1890), a documentary text which included over two thousand
photographs (Zeller 19). Given the abundance of photographic material treating the Civil War available in New York City during the 1890s, and Crane’s sustained interest in images and texts dealing with the national struggle, one can only presume that the photographic archive—in the form of one or more of these media—made a distinct impression on the young author, an assumption supported by the text of *The Red Badge*.

The public’s fascination with images of conflict takes on new meaning when one considers that these were not merely views of campsites and empty battlefields but graphic pictures of bloody, bloated corpses and the stiffened carcasses of horses. A reflection of the culture’s desire for spectacle, this morbid curiosity can be traced back to Gardner’s ground-breaking coverage of the Antietam battlefield. The site of twenty-six thousand casualties in a single day, Antietam will forever be remembered as “the single bloodiest day in American history” (Williams 70). Moreover, this battle, which occurred on September 1, 1862, marked the first time the dead themselves were brought into focus. While the images which resulted shocked and appalled American audiences, they effectively captured the public’s attention and brought Gardner, and subsequently Brady, his employer at the time, a great deal of publicity and eventually a significant profit. Thus, the American people’s desire to comprehend death and mortality prevailed over their strict sense of propriety and their desire to respect the honored dead. This strange fixation is especially apparent in a *New York Times* article dated October 20, 1862 which explores the bizarre effect the Antietam pictures had on the citizens of the large metropolis:

> Of all the objects of horror, one would think the battle-field stand preeminent, that it should bear away the palm of repulsiveness. But on the contrary, there is a terrible fascination about it that draws one near these pictures, and makes him loth to leave them. You will see hushed, revered groups standing around these weird copies of carnage, bending down to

...
look in the pale faces of the dead, chained by the strange spell that dwells in the dead men’s eyes. (“Brady’s Photographs” 5)

These words are similarly echoed by Oliver Wendell Holmes in his essay “Doings of the Sunbeam” (1863), wherein he encourages those who desire to comprehend the severity of the calamity to gaze upon the images exhibited in Brady’s gallery: “Let him who wishes to know what war is look at this series of illustrations. These wrecks of manhood thrown together in careless heaps or ranged in ghastly rows for burial were alive but yesterday” (11). Drawing from his own impressions of Antietam—he witnessed the battleground in later October of 1862 while in search of his wounded son—Holmes continues, “It was so nearly like visiting the battlefield to look over these views, that all the emotions excited by the actual sight of the stained and sordid scene, strewed with rags and wrecks, came back to us” (“Doings” 12). With this statement, the writer acknowledges the disturbing voyeurism engendered by these macabre war photographs, which vividly recreate the battlefield post-conflict and place the viewer, not in the midst of the action, but in its wake, in a charnel house where the dead keep silent sentry.

The barrage of grisly war photographs, which began with Gardner’s work at Antietam and continued through the signing of the peace treaty at Appomattox, quickly inundated the nation’s visual culture and posed a significant dilemma for Northern publishers, photographers and writers who sought to garner support for the Union and validate the seemingly senseless slaughter. Fearing that the violence of the images when viewed in conjunction with the fragmentary nature of the photographic record would cause previously loyal citizens to question the Northern cause, these individuals sought to integrate the isolated photographs into a larger structure with a clearly defined telos which would then function regressively to imbue each image with a distinct sense of
purpose. To further this end, many stereograph views were sold in ordered sets “the
number and caption printed on the back linking the scene to an implied narrative of the
whole” (Trachtenburg 93). Likewise, war albums, such as Gardner’s *Sketch Book*, sought
to integrate the isolated prints into a totalizing structure. In regard to this trend, Alan
Trachtenburg, in his chapter “Images of War,” writes, “Viewed at random, images lose
their power to speak, except incoately, like the sense-defying experience of battle itself.
Organized into a catalogue or sequence, single images can be viewed as part of a
presumed pattern, an order, a historical totality” (88). Therefore, by carefully numbering
and arranging photographs, advocates of the Union attempted to find unity in
fragmentation and thereby exchange futility for fulfillment.

Crane’s portrayal of the corpse throughout *The Red Badge* appears in direct
contradiction to the ordered, logical progression of images proffered by collections of
stereographic cards and war albums. Though the narrative itself is carefully crafted, the
appearances of the dead seem to be aberrant and haphazard. Materializing suddenly
before Henry and the reader, these death studies have much the same effect as
photographs—rendering fragmented, incoate portraits of war’s wreckage. Engendering
feelings of shock and horror while simultaneously denying readers access to a historical
continuum, which might imply continuity and a subsequent theme of coherence, these
disjointed snapshots resist integration, existing instead as isolated depictions of mortality
which vanish as swiftly as they appeared.

In addition to organizing war views into ordered configurations, Northern
publishers and photographers sought to craft a narrative which would valorize the fallen
while simultaneously legitimizing the Union for which they so nobly gave their lives. In
order to achieve this end, a new rhetoric was developed in which the Northern dead were transformed into heroic martyrs who had selflessly surrendered everything, even their very lives, to preserve national unity. The *New York Times* article previously discussed entitled “Brady’s Photographs; Pictures of the Dead at Antietam” clearly reflects this attempt to portray the Union soldiers as sacrificial, Christ-like figures when it states, “Here lie men who have not hesitated to seal and stamp their conviction with their blood—men who have flung themselves into the great gulf of the unknown to teach the world that there are truths dearer that life, wrongs and shames more to be dreaded than death… reserved for him a crown which only heroes and martyrs are permitted to wear” (5). Holmes equally invokes this Biblical allusion when he declares, “Yet through such martyrdom comes our redemption” (“Doings” 12). An analysis of this emotive rhetoric and the theodicy to which it subscribes reveals that, in order to justify the Northern cause, these proponents of the Union attempted, not merely to sanctify the dead, but too manipulated their images in order to forge a coherent, if highly partisan, narrative. Literary critic Timothy Sweet addresses this issue when he states, “When the corpses of soldiers were textually or visually represented within the scene of the landscape, they became objects appropriated by the state no less than the land itself over which they fought. The dead soldier—Northern or Southern—was the sign of an individual whose autonomy was surrendered to the ideology of the Union” (105).

Another aspect of this cultural ideology, which flourished concurrent with the sacred martyr mythos, was the conception of the United States as a hallowed and sanctified land, a pastoral paradise of fertile fields, high mountains and rich valleys. In accordance with this theme, Civil War photographers began to mimic the work of
landscape artists, focusing on wide, panoptic views of the natural world. In reference to this trend, Sweet states, “Civil War photography appealed to the repository of naturalized ideological values contained in the American landscape aesthetic. These images predicted that the destiny of the Union was inscribed on the face of the land itself” (85).

By surrounding the images of the dead with benign depictions of the pastoral countryside, in its quiet harmony and natural beauty, Civil War photographers and publishers sought to diminish the brutal realities of war (Sweet 85). Likewise, by emphasizing the regenerative power of nature, the pastoral frame offered hope in the midst of death and destruction (Williams 71). Portrayed as a peaceful and restorative force, nature was frequently cast in opposition to the violence of modern warfare. Sympathetic to the soldiers’ plight, nature offers a compassionate balm to the living and a quiet resting place to the dead. These sentiments are particularly evident in the New York Times article mentioned previously, wherein the author affirms, “And if there be on earth one spot where the grass will grow greener than on another when the next Summer comes, where the leaves of Autumn will drop more lightly when they fall like a benediction upon a work completed and a promise fulfilled, it is these soldiers’ graves” (5). Thus, the pastoral aesthetic and the benevolent portrait of nature which accompanied it became an integral aspect of Civil War photography, demonstrating yet another attempt to justify war’s atrocity.

Once constructed, this narrative, which often took the form of captions, scripts and brief descriptive vignettes, was quickly applied to the disturbing war scenes displayed in spectrograph views, stereopticon slides and photographic albums. While text can imbue an image with greater meaning by “annexing movement or a sense of time to a
“frozen tableau,” as Jonathan Kamholtz asserts in his essay “Literature and Photography: The Captioned Vision vs. The Firm Mechanical Impression,” it is more frequently used to inscribe a photograph with ideological value. Though captions on Civil War pictures served both functions, they often placed emphasis on the latter. Kamholtz further contends that, “If captions attempt to transform photographs by adding the familiar fictions of text to the apparently unfamiliar fictions of picture, it is presumably because we distrust the raw, untransformed mechanical capacity of photography to capture the tangible, rather than the spiritual, idealized world” (Kamholtz 394). Aware of the damage their images could inflict if divorced from a larger narrative, photographers and publishers were careful to circumscribe the corpse with carefully composed rhetoric. In crafting these texts, however, they often re-wrote the pictures themselves, exchanging harsh truths for romanticized imagery and substituting accuracy and authenticity for sentimentality and euphemism. Bill Brown refers to this revisionist impulse when he states that “the memory image and the photographic image are always incommensurable: history must destroy the photograph because photography as such produces countermemory” (147). Though unable and/or unwilling to destroy these images, advocates of the Northern cause were quite successful in reinventing them.

Rejecting the impulse to rationalize or aestheticize the photographs of the dead by projecting a pacifying narrative upon them, Crane, within the pages of The Red Badge, deliberately returns to the detached image of the corpse, a decision which reflects an inherent mistrust of language itself. Andrew Delbanco addresses this undercurrent in Crane’s fiction in his essay “The American Stephen Crane: The Context of the Red Badge of Courage” wherein he maintains that the young author viewed language as “a
system of metaphoric deception” which “generates rather than records meaning” (69, 64). According to this belief, language is never completely neutral—partial and biased, text, whether in the form of captions or descriptive vignettes, functions as vehicle of propaganda frequently employed by hegemonic powers to manipulate and control popular opinion. Thus by eschewing the culturally constructed narrative, Crane attempts to shed “the controlling assumptions about the meaning of what he sees” and attain an “epistemological purity” which, if not completely neutral, would at least enable a more impartial and dispassionate depiction of war (Delbanco 72).

Yet, this endeavor itself is highly ironical, for while the novelist might seek to return to the unattended photograph, his creation must adopt the form of text and therefore be deemed untrustworthy by the argument posed above. Bound to language as a means of representation, the author has not replaced the linguistic with the pictorial but merely exchanged one narrative for another. This paradoxical attempt to divorce the image from the cultural mythology and the duplicitous language which upholds it, on the one hand, and antithetically, employ language to create a neutral and accurate depiction of war on the other, informs much of Crane’s novel. Prior to examining this contradiction, however, one must first explore the form that the euphemistic narrative, which Crane so adamantly sought to dismantle, assumed in post-Civil War America.

One photographic medium, which clearly exhibits both the organizational structure and the sacred martyr/pastoral landscape narrative delineated above, is Alexander Gardner’s *Photographic Sketch Book of the Civil War* (1866). A quintessential example of a photographic work which espouses the cultural constructions regarding war, heroism, and sacrifice, Gardner’s *Sketch Book* offers the ideal
counterpoint to Crane’s novel. After examining this album’s representation of war, this chapter will proceed to compare/contrast Gardner and Crane’s treatment of Civil War photography and the topos which surrounded it, focusing specifically on the latter’s manipulation and eventual rejection of the popular mythos.

Gardner’s inclinations toward revisionism and romanticism, though subtle, are quickly recognized by the trained eye. Hinted at both in the book’s title and in the manner in which the photographer chooses to present his material, these cultural constructs figuratively blur the images in their attempts to incorporate them into a larger narrative. In her book, *Though the Negative*, Megan Rowley Williams reveals that, by labeling his work a “sketch book” rather than an album, Gardner purposefully recalls “the eighteenth-century tourist’s search for the picturesque and pastoral vistas to stimulate the imagination” (54). Dating back to the roving treks of the British Romantic writers, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, the term “sketch book” was frequently used to describe imaginative and creative endeavors instead of realistic or historical works (54). Similarly, the presentational style of Gardner’s book, which, in the original version, placed the written text on the page directly preceding the picture instead of on the page opposite it, invested the written word with equal if not greater importance than the photographic image (Young 54). Elizabeth Young comments on the effects of this stylistic decision in her essay “Verbal Battlefields,” wherein she asserts that by positioning the picture and the vignette on the rectos of consecutive pages, Gardner ensured that “each written text had to be viewed independently, opposite white space” (54). Though the photographer maintains in his preface that “Verbal representations of such places, or scenes, may or may not have the merit of accuracy, but photographic presentments of them will be
accepted by posterity with an undoubting faith,” he proceeds to contradict this statement by elevating the text in respect to the photograph. Furthermore, by placing the text before the image, instead of vice versa, the author is effectively creating a lens through which the reader is to view the picture and thereby inscribing it with a meaning it may or may not have originally contained.

The content of the *Sketch Book* equally reflects the contentious relationship between text and image, particularly evident in the stark contrast between Gardner’s descriptions of the sanctified dead and the photographic renderings of bloated bodies on the field. For instance, although the photograph of Culpeper, Va., [Plate 7] portrays little more than the white tents of an army encampment on the outskirts of a small southern town, Gardner uses the image as platform to promote the sacred martyr motif: “The altars of its churches are stained with heroic blood; all along its highways slumber those whose names can never pass away, and in the vacant camp-grounds cluster recollections fast blending into traditions that shall grow dearer as they grow old” (Gardner 48). Likewise, in his description of corpse-strewn fields of Gettysburg, a three-day battle which resulted in between forty-six and fifty-one thousands casualties, Gardner paints a sanitized and purposefully romanticized portrait of the fallen Union soldiers. Though he opens his elegy by acknowledging the anguished appearance of the bodies, he quickly abandons this candid approach and adopts another more in keeping with the times. He writes,

Some of the dead presented an aspect which showed that they had suffered severely just pervious to dissolution, but these were few in number
compared with those who wore a calm and resigned expression, as though they had passed away in the act of prayer. Others had smiles on their faces, and looked as if they were in the act of speaking. Some lay stretched on their backs, as if friendly hands had prepared them for burial. (Gardner 37)

While this vignette does present a comforting image of the dead resting peacefully in nature’s cathedral, it is a far cry from the brutally realistic and painful scene depicted in the accompanying photograph titled “Field Where General Reynolds Fell, Gettysburg, July, 1863” [Plate 8]. Here the viewer will not see soldiers lying serenely with peaceful expressions, akin to those observed in moments of deep religious fervor, but rather swollen bodies, stiffened with rigor mortis. In the place of order and tranquility, the onlooker will witness disheveled clothing, torn by the wounded soldiers themselves who sought to discover the severity of their wounds and by scavengers who rifled the dead men’s uniforms and pilfered anything of value. Neither are their positions restful, but rather twisted and contorted. Though Gardner is correct in claiming that “the picture conveys…the blank horror and reality of war,” he fails to notice that his text tells a different story.

To be fair, one should note that Gardner does retain a higher degree of accuracy in other places in the Sketch Book, particularly in his renderings of the Confederate dead whose sacrifice need not be vindicated for the photographer’s northern
audience. For example, in his description of “A Harvest of Death,” [Plate 9] he provides a much more realistic if somewhat troubling description of the Southern dead, which bears striking resemblance to the realistic attention to detail visible in Crane’s prose:

> And the distorted dead recall the ancient legends of men torn in pieces by the savage wantonness of fiends. Swept down without preparation, the shattered bodies fall in all conceivable positions. The rebels represented in the photograph are without shoes...Around is scattered the litter of the battle-field, accoutrements, ammunition, rags, cup and canteens, crackers, haversacks, &c., and letters. (Gardner 36)

Had Gardner stopped here, one might conclude that he was indeed remaining faithful to the bare facts of the photograph; however, following these forthright observations, he quickly shifts from role of reporter to that of moralist and attempts to impose a narrative on the scene: “Killed in the frantic efforts to break the steady lines of any army of patriots, whose heroism only excelled theirs in motive, they paid with life the price of their treason” (Gardner 36). Thus, by acknowledging the grotesque forms to be a penalty for the South’s disloyalty, Gardner attempts to justify the horror of the scene before him.

In addition to participating in the nationalistic mythos of the sacred martyr, Gardner also incorporates the pastoral narrative, compiling an archive of landscape scenes and often making nature itself the subject of the photograph (Sweet 122). For instance, in the vignette which accompanies his picture “Fortifications on Heights of Centreville, Va., [Plate 10] Gardner states that “The view from the crest of the works was very fine. To the east was a wide area of undulating country covered with dense woods, and with grassy hill-sides here and there smiling to each
other over the forests. Looking west the eyes rested on a fertile valley, watered by countless streams, dotted with farm-houses and herds” (5). Likewise, in the description which precedes his bucolic depiction of Burnside Bridge, Antietam, [Plate 11] the photographer focuses on the “bold bluffs, crowned with oaks and fringed with tangled bushes, [which] form a most delightful valley” and the “miniature river, broken here and there by tiny cascades, [which] hurries down to the Potomac” (Gardner 20). At first glance, these pastoral sketches and their correlating pictures seem out of place in a book dedicated to war. One would think that the soldier/corpse would be in the foreground and the land in the background, but this is clearly not the case. Of the five images in the Sketch Book dedicated to the battle of Antietam, three are of tranquil, rural scenes, one is of a signal tower, and one of Lincoln’s visit; ironically, none of Gardner’s famous images of the Antietam dead appear in this collection despite the fact that they were clearly at the photographer’s disposal. Though the reason for this conspicuous absence is unknown, one can speculate that Gardner, fearing that too many images of mangled corpses—both those at Antietam and those at Gettysburg—would overwhelm the reader, removed the offending photographs and replaced them with scenes of rural harmony.

While on one hand, these pastoral scenes function as buffers, absorbing the shock engendered by their more violent counterparts, they also allay the viewers’ anxiety by offering a means of renewal and restoration. Though Gardner frequently refers to the devastation wrought by war, he always append such statements with reassuring claims
confirming nature’s regenerative power. For instance, in his description of Culpepper, Virginia, the photographer writes, “Another year, and peace will have hidden the scars that now so sadly mar its beauty. Nature cannot be wholly defrauded of her blossoms, or prevented from drawing her mantle over the deserts that mankind may make” (Gardner 48). Though war might bring death and desolation, the tragedy will usher in “a future prosperity that shall prove more than compensation for troubles past” (Gardner 48).

In this pivotal period in America’s visual culture, when the camera or, as Holmes would call it, the “truthful sunbeam” revealed horrors heretofore unimagined by the unsuspecting civilian populace, and publishers and photographers alike hastened to construct a narrative to rationalize the travesty, a young writer earnestly attempted to perceive and comprehend war (Holmes, “Doings” 11). While the numerous similarities between Crane’s imagery and Gardner’s photographs have led several critics to surmise that the writer was, at some point, exposed to the *Sketch Book*, this hypothesis, though probable, cannot be absolutely confirmed. If not to the *Sketch Book* itself, one can nonetheless presume that Crane would have come into contact with the archive of Civil War photographs and their accompanying ideology in one form or another. Indeed, the sheer number of images circulating in the 1880s and 90s—not to mention the author’s meticulous research in the area—strongly supports the conclusion that these images, and the narrative which surrounded them, significantly influenced *The Red Badge of Courage*.

Prior to examining the correspondence between Crane’s imagery and the photographic representations of the dead, however, the reader should note the manner in which the author invokes and inverts the pastoral/sacred martyr mythos. The pastoral mode, which first evidences itself in the colorful landscapes depicted in the opening
pages of the novel, rises to the forefront of the drama when Henry flees into the forest following his desertion. As the exhausted youth stumbles through the dense foliage, Nature, though at first averse to the unanticipated incursion, appears to offer succor.

Crane writes, “This landscape gave him assurance. A fair field holding life. It was the religion of peace. It would die if its timid eyes were compelled to see blood. He conceived Nature to be a woman with a deep aversion to tragedy” (37) [emphasis mine here and in all subsequent quotations]. Exhibiting marked similarity to the treatment it receives in Gardner’s Sketch Book, Nature is portrayed here as a benign force, which empathizes with the human condition and seeks to comfort the youth. Furthermore, by declaring that Nature had “no ears” for the “rumble of death,” Crane seems to be implying that Nature is capable of overcoming war and providing a safe haven from the chaos and destruction of the battlefield (Crane 37).

The sacred martyr motif also makes an appearance in this sylvan scene. Though Crane employed a religious rhetoric earlier in the novel—in chapter three he refers to the “cathedral light of the forest” and the “aisles of the wood”—this trope becomes the primary means of description in chapter seven. In this passage, the author transforms the copse into a chapel bathed in a holy glow: “At length he reached a place where the high, arching boughs made a chapel. He softly pushed the green doors aside and entered. Pine needles were a gentle brown carpet. There was a religious half light” (Crane 38).

Clearly, this tranquil grove is sacred ground; a fitting resting place for the glorious and heroic martyrs described so poignantly by Gardner, Holmes and the editors of the New York Times.
But instead of a smiling soldier resting peacefully in his final sleep, Henry is confronted with a horrible “thing”—a moldering, partially decomposed corpse. In this encounter with gross reality, the youth and, consequently, the reader are stripped of all illusions regarding the sacred dead:

Near the threshold he stopped, horror-stricken at the sight of a thing. He was being looked at by a dead man who was seated with his back against a columnlike tree. The corpse was dressed in a uniform that once had been blue, but was now faded to a melancholy shade of green. The eyes, staring at the youth, had changed to the dull hue to be seen on the side of a dead fish. The mouth was open. Its red had changed to an appalling yellow. Over the gray skin of the face ran little ants. One was trundling some sort of a bundle along the upper lip. The youth gave a shriek as he confronted the thing. He was for moments turned to stone before it. He remained staring into the liquid looking eyes. The dead man and the living man exchanged a long look. (Crane 38)

In this startling moment of awakening, Crane reveals the truth about death in war—rendering it as neither glorious nor beautiful, but obscene and horrible. The corpse is not elevated to the position of saintly martyr but rather dehumanized and diminished to the status of “thing.”

The terror inspired by this image is exacerbated by Nature’s incipient hostility. As Henry, reeling from a sight too terrible to comprehend, stumbles backwards, Nature attempts to inhibit his flight—entangling him in its thick undergrowth and threatening to thrust him upon the corpse itself. Crane writes, “The branches pushing against him, threatened to throw him over upon it. His unguided feet, too, caught aggravatingly in brambles; and with it all he received a subtle suggestion to touch the corpse” (38). In opposition to its traditional function as an artifice to enclose, mute and mitigate images of death, Nature, in this scene, functions to intensify the confrontation, forcing the individual to face this intractable portrait of human mortality. Likewise, though the decay
of the corpse speaks to the regenerative power of nature, the rotting body is the antithesis of the uplifting depictions of natural renewal conveyed by Gardner and his contemporaries.

In this appalling scene, Crane succeeds in summoning and inverting the pastoral/sacred martyr narrative and thereby revealing its inadequacy to account for war’s savage reality. Having powerfully presented his argument, the author closes the scene with two final references to the cultural mythos which further demonstrate its insufficiency. When the youth finally breaks free from the loathsome chapel, his perspective of the natural world is radically different from that of the young man who entered the grove a few moments before. Though Nature holds out conciliating arms which attempt to prevent the youth from returning to the battleground, Henry, unable to forgive the recent treachery, rejects these gestures of accord: “After its previous hostility this new resistance of the forest filled him with fine bitterness. It seemed Nature could not be quite ready to kill him” (Crane 40). Clearly, Nature is no longer a benevolent being but a sinister force, a reminder of man’s corporeality and an agent of mortality. Though it may not choose to kill Henry at the present moment, the text implies that Nature will eventually—it is only a matter of time.

The youth’s escape is equally ensconced in the rhetoric of the sacred, though the tone it adopts is decidedly different from that which marked his entrance:

The trees began softly to sing a hymn of twilight. The sun sank until slanted bronze rays struck the forest. There was a lull in the noises of insects as if they had bowed their beaks and were making a devotional pause. There was silence save for the chanted chorus of the trees. Then, upon the stillness, there suddenly broke a tremendous clangor of sounds. A crimson roar came from the distance. (Crane 39)
In the same way that the corpse disrupted the semiotics of the hallowed copse, so the
sounds of war intrude upon the reverent quiet of the forest, revealing Nature’s inability to
prevent war’s incursion on her peaceful domain. Thus, by juxtaposing sacred and
profane and portraying Nature as an inimical entity, the author successfully invalidates
the telos and calls for an authentic depiction of war based not on the aestheticizing texts
of the culture but on the brutal realities of the photographic record.

Faithful to his own injunction, Crane purposefully creates a counter-narrative,
which, sundering itself from the conventions of the pastoral/sacred martyr mode, seeks to
fashion an accurate rendering of war by directly translating the photographic into the
textual. Appearing in relative isolation, the images are allowed to speak for themselves.
No attempt is made to rationalize or justify the travesties which confront the reader. The
caption and interpretative frame have been stripped away—only the corpse remains to
exchange a “long look” with the inquisitive eye.

This endeavor to excise the corpse from the mythology surrounding it is
particularly evident in Henry’s first encounter with death. Occurring relatively early in
the novel, this scene is rendered with scrupulous, even photographic, detail:

Once the line encountered the body of a dead soldier. He lay upon his
back staring at the sky. He was dressed in an awkward suit of yellowish
brown. The youth could see that the soles of his shoes had been worn to
the thinness of writing paper, and from a great rent in one the dead foot
projected piteously...The ranks opened covertly to avoid the corpse. The
invulnerable dead man forced a way for himself. The youth looked keenly
at the ashen face. The wind raised the tawny beard. It moved as if a hand
were stroking it. He vaguely desired to walk around and around the body
and stare; the impulse of the living to try to read in the dead eyes the
answer to the Question. (Crane 19)

Readers familiar with the archive of Civil War images would have quickly recognized the
similarity this description holds to Gardner’s and Brady’s photographs of individual
corpses. Due to the lack of restriction on the photographic arts during this time, photographers had complete creative license and often chose to depict bodies with upturned faces in order to maximize dramatic effect (many scenes were so arranged). Images of dead confederates at Spotsylvania [Plate 12] and Petersburg [Plate 13] provide two examples of these individualized death studies, which share several notable commonalities with Crane’s vignette. Both soldiers lie on their backs facing the blue firmament. The uniform and shoes of the Confederate in the Petersburg study show signs of wear and exposure to the elements, while the “tawny” beard and disconcerting stare of the corpse at Spotsylvania fill the viewer with dismay. The anxiety evoked by this passage is compounded by the narrator’s silence regarding the circumstances of the men’s death. Who were these soldiers? Did they die heroically? Was their sacrifice of value or in vain? These queries, which can be subsumed under “the Question” acknowledged by Crane, are all left unanswered. After rendering this evocative scene, the narrative quickly moves on, refusing to satisfy the reader’s curiosity.

In addition to the individual death study, Crane mimics the photographic record in his construction of landscapes of death, a further inversion of the pastoral mode. One of the first times this descriptive pattern is employed is directly following the Rebel charge on the Union line in the fifth chapter of the novel: “As the smoke slowly eddied away, the
youth saw that the charge had been repulsed... The waves had receded, leaving bits of dark *debris* upon the ground” (Crane 30). Though in this quotation Crane uses the broad term “debris” to convey the ruins of war, he is much more specific in other passages: “The little narrow roadway now lay lifeless. There were overturned wagons like sun-dried boulders. The bed of the former torrent was choked with the bodies of horses and splintered parts of war machines” (Crane 57). The attention to detail in this description clearly recalls photographs such as Gardner’s “Artillery Caisson” [Plate 14]. While the wreckage of war in the form of dead horses, corpses and shattered war machines comprises the foreground of several of Crane’s battle vistas, farmhouses and barns often compose the background such as in chapter twenty-two when the author describes “a house, calm and white” which stands composedly “amid bursting shells” (Crane 57). This type of landscape, which contrasts the debris of battle with images of rustic life, can be observed in several Civil War pictures including “View at Trostle’s Barn” [Plate 15] and “Trostle’s House” [Plate 16], two images from the battlefield of Gettysburg. The white house in the backdrop of the latter picture is of particular interest because of its correspondence to the white
farmhouse mentioned in Crane novel. Though this parallel might be mere coincidence, the number of white houses which appear throughout the various war albums—this color provided an excellent contrast to the gray tones of black and white photography—would seem to support the conclusion that this house is but another image borrowed from the archive of Civil War photographs. In examining these landscapes of death, however, the reader should note that Crane never identifies the battlefields he describes. This anonymity prevents the vicarious observer from connecting the devastating scenes with a mythologizing narrative, and in depriving the onlooker of this knowledge, imbues the landscape with a sense of futility.

Finally, Crane’s emphasis on position and posture recalls the repository of Civil War images, specifically Gardner’s death studies of Antietam. In the brief hiatus following the first attack, Henry notes, “Under foot there were a few ghastly forms motionless. They lay twisted in fantastic contortions. Arms were bent and heads were turned in incredible ways. It seemed that the dead men must have fallen from some great height to get into such positions. They looked to be dumped out upon the ground from the sky” (Crane 30). Similarly, in the midst of the second engagement the narrator describes the “bodies twisted in impossible shapes” (Crane 97). This disturbing imagery decidedly evokes the distorted forms apparent in “The Dead at Antietam” [Plate 17]. This attention to arrangement
again surfaces when Henry, having only recently escaped from the horrors of Nature’s chapel, stumbles upon a quiet assembly of the dead:

He came to a fence and clambered over it. On the far side, the ground was littered with clothes and guns. A newspaper, folded up, lay in the dirt. A dead soldier was stretched with his face hidden in his arm. Farther off there was a group of four or five corpses keeping mournful company. A hot sun had blazed upon the post. In this place the youth felt that he was an invader. This forgotten part of the battle ground was owned by the dead men, and he hurried, in the vague apprehension that one of the swollen forms would rise and tell him to begone. (Crane 40)

From the wooden fence, the clothes and guns strewing the ground, and the folded newspaper to the corpse whose face lies hidden from sight, this vignette exhibits a striking parallelism to Gardner’s photograph, “Confederate Soldiers by Fence on Hagerston Pike [Plate 18]. Yet physical detail is not the only element shared by these images; they are also alike in their presentational modes, for both are fractured portraits of reality. Abrupt and disjointed, they equally lack a totalizing, mythologizing narrative.

In each of the abovementioned instances, Crane seeks to confront the reader with graphic images of war completely bereft of a legitimizing or conciliating explanation. Having discovered the cultural mythos’ gross misappropriation, the author proceeds to ridicule, manipulate and eventually discard the ideological construct, choosing instead to furnish the unadulterated, unmoderated, photographic truth. Though, at first glance, the novel’s conclusion might appear to signal a return to the pastoral mode, the astute reader will observe a distinct sense of irony in the following passage: “So it came to pass that as he trudged from the place of blood and wrath his soul changed. He came from hot
plowshares to prospects of clover tranquility...Scars faded as flowers...He turned now with a lover’s thirst to images of tranquil skies, fresh meadows, cool brooks—an existence of soft and eternal peace” (Crane 104). While nature may indeed renew itself and erase the scars of war, the American people will never be able to completely forget the atrocities which have occurred on their soil. Though they might attempt to expunge or assuage the memory, the photographic record and subsequently Crane’ novel will, like a specter, continually return to haunt the survivors. Thus, by providing stark, photographic-like depictions of corpses rendered without caption or commentary in the form of an overarching, mythologizing narrative, *The Red Badge of Courage* highlights the inadequacy of the pastoral/sacred martyr ideology and portrays war as a completely incongruous, irrational struggle. Just as the Crane mockingly refers to the “coherent trail of bodies” left by the charging regiment, so he, throughout the pages of the novel, strives to demonstrate war’s total incomprehensibility (82).
In “Mr. Bink’s Day Off” (1894), a brief story from Crane’s *New York City Sketches*, the author represents urban dwellers as “warriors from the metropolis” and stalwartly declares that “the sense of city is battle” (66). Likewise, in his vignette entitled “When Everyone is Panic Stricken” (1884), Crane aligns a Bowery fire with a Civil War battlefield, comparing the approach of the fire engine to “the headlong sweep of a battery of artillery,” the reverberations of horses hooves to “the rush of infantry volleys” and the machine’s raucous ringing both to the “clangorous noise of war” and to “the sound of an army charging” (*NYCS* 100-1). Thus, the young author implies that war is not confined to the locus of the battlefield but is equally manifest in the urban milieu. Though the “enemy” may assume an array of different forms ranging from flaming infernos, criminal cohorts, debilitating poverty, disorderly mobs, or incendiary strikers, the sense of strife and conflict is the same. This conviction, in conjunction with Crane’s two year interim in New York City, a period lasting from October 1892 to December 1894 during which *The Red Badge of Courage* was composed, caused the author to turn to the city itself, a nucleus of turmoil, strife and social upheaval, as the inspiration for his war vision. While the novel is replete with urban metaphors, an exemplar being the author’s alignment of a sweating, exhausted soldier with a laborer at the foundry, this chapter will focus specifically on four particularly threatening images of metropolitan life: the machine and the mechanization it engendered, the savage underworld, the chaotic and volatile mob,
and the ever present reality of class conflict, particularly violent melees between strikers and state militias/national guard (Crane 30).

While several scholars have acknowledged the influence of the city on Crane’s novel, none have sought to trace his metaphors to their source in the pictorial press of New York City and the evocative images it disseminated. Two critics which have treated the topic with some depth are Amy Kaplan in her essay “The Spectacle of War in Crane’s Revision of History” and Robert Shulman in his article “The Red Badge of Courage and Social Violence: Crane’s Myth of America.” Drawing attention to Crane’s tendency to superimpose an urban rhetoric on the battlefield in which the army is compared to a train, regiments are transformed into mobs, and officers are reinvented as savvy politicians, Kaplan draws attention to Crane’s employment of “urban metaphors which overlay the countryside and leave only traces of the rural landscape” (89). Similarly, Shulman reflects that “the pervasive smoke, chaos, killing, irrationality and fear are appropriate metaphors for the burning, terror and killing, its undercurrents of anxiety and deep-rooted animosities, its widespread image of war and battle, and its intensifying sense of anarchy and breakdown” (12). While both scholars broadly attribute Crane’s pictorial imagination to the turbulent social milieu of New York City in the 1890s, neither seeks to pursue the specific origins of his imagery which appear to stem largely from the domain of the illustrated press, specifically weekly/monthly publications such as Harper’s and Frank Leslie’s Magazine which functioned as a supplement to author’s daily experiences.

This failure to provide attribution gives rise to the impression that these metaphors resulted primarily from Crane’s firsthand observations of city life. Though this conclusion holds some merit, it clearly falls short of the whole truth. While some of
Crane’s imagery can be traced to his personal experiences—one of which being his account of the flop house in “An Experiment in Misery,” an episode which bears a striking resemblance to his description of the sleeping soldiers in the fourteenth chapter of *The Red Badge*—many of his metaphors and descriptions appear to have been drawn directly from the pages of the pictorial press. Littered with portraits of violence, both mechanized and human, these magazines would have provided the inquisitive young novelist access to a different kind of war in which machines were preeminent, the lower classes were debased and dehumanized, and savage mobs were pitted against armed detachments of troops. Crane’s involvement with various printers and publishing houses and New York City’s status as “the home of the weekly pictorial press” lend further credence to this theory (Brown, *Beyond* 188). Therefore, this third chapter will examine the correspondence between images rendered by the pictorial press, specifically those depicting occurrences of mechanized or social violence, and correlating descriptions of hostility in *The Red Badge of Courage*, thus revealing that even Crane’s perceptions of his own social moment were highly mediated, and consequently, the “war” which he superimposes onto the tableau of the Civil War battlefield was not the reality of the Gilded Age per se but rather the sensationalized and prejudiced projections of the pictorial press.

While the advent of the machine age and the technological advances which accompanied it ushered in numerous improvements including exponential increases in productivity—between 1860 and 1900, steel production increased from thirteen to approximately five thousand tons and the gross domestic agricultural yield tripled—standardization of time and mechanical parts, and developments in transportation and
communication, these inventions and the societal transformations which they engendered were often met with fear and apprehension on the part of the populace (Trachtenburg 53, 56). Four charges repeatedly brought against the industrial revolution included the rampant growth of urban poverty which had accompanied the introduction of the factory system, the continuously mounting tension between capital and labor, the degradation and automation of human beings, and the numerous cases of mechanized violence.

While poverty levels in large cities had been an issue prior to this period, the massive migrations from rural areas to urban centers which occurred during these years in conjunction with the influx of immigrants from Ireland, Italy and Eastern Europe quickly exacerbated the problem. Likewise, the Machine Age, which Alan Trachtenburg has characterized as “the transference of technical knowledge from workers to machines, a process mediated by a new corps of trained engineers,” effectively eradicated the need for skilled labor (Trachtenburg 69). Due to these changes, the knowledge and skills that had granted manual laborers a degree of power in the past and allowed them to have a voice in the production process in the form of craft unions and workers’ guilds were rendered obsolete (Dubofsky 35). Suddenly vulnerable, the laboring classes found themselves completely at the mercy of powerful industrial magnates. Thus, workers were stripped of agency and transformed into little more than voiceless automatons, interchangeable parts that were easily replaceable. In response to this disenfranchisement, manual laborers were forced to employ the only means of defense left them, the strike.

Consequently, the machine became intrinsically tied to instances of violent social upheaval. In regard to this association, Alan Trachtenburg writes, “Each act of national celebration seemed to evoke its opposite. The 1877 railroad strike, the first instance of
machine smashing and class violence on a national scale, followed the 1876 Centennial Exposition, and the even fiercer Pullman strike of 1894 came fast on the heels of the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893” (39). In addition to strikes and lockouts, the redefinition of labor soon gave rise to other concerns regarding the increased power machines were obtaining and the blurring of the boundaries between man and machine. Finally, the numerous cases of “mechanized violence,” especially evident in the production of heavy-metals, textiles and chemicals, not to mention railroads which alone claimed the lives of 230 thousand workers between the years of 1890 and 1917, caused the image of the machine to be associated with death and mutilation (Trachtenburg 91).

While images of machinery in the Gilded Age abound, three drawings in particular reflect the anxieties of this turbulent period in history—fears which are equally evident in Crane’s novel. The first image, published in Frank Leslie’s Monthly Magazine in July 1883, exhibits the diminutive figure of a man surrounded by the machinery of a giant engine [Plate 19]. Though the article praises the wonders of technology which could enable such a colossal structure as the Brooklyn Bridge and the passenger cars which shuttle across it, the picture, while equally celebratory, also conveys a sense of apprehension. Dwarfed by his creation, the man appears to be completely subject to it. Similarly, the high degree of detail with which the engine room is rendered
compared to that devoted to the man implies that the machine is paramount, the human superfluous. The second image, which appeared in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* in July 1871, depicts the Sommeiller Boring Machine [Plate 20], a European invention used to tunnel through mountains. This illustration is of particular interest for its conflation of man and machine. Though the miners in the foreground are clearly depicted as autonomous units, the men in the background, specifically those around the borders and at the top of the sketch, appear to be merging with the machine. This assimilation, when viewed in conjunction with the machine’s function—to drill and pound its way through layers of solid rock—creates an unsettling image of invasive violence. Finally, the lack of facial definition, especially when contrasted with fastidious detail with which the Sommeiller machine is rendered, produces an impression of uniformity, interchangeability and standardization. Further illustrating the theme of mechanized violence, *Frank Leslie’s* 1868 portrayal of a fire engine explosion depicts the catastrophic consequences of machinery gone awry [Plate 21]. Though this picture recalls the events of an accident, it clearly speaks to machinery’s hazardous potential, particularly emphasizing the devastation it can wreak on the human body, a recurring theme throughout Crane’s fiction.

Though the machine makes an early appearance in Crane’s urban novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, it does not assume full symbolic value until *The Red Badge of Courage* at which point it resurfaces as a violent, pervasive force which entraps, transforms and ultimately slaughters the men of the
regiment. As the narrative progresses, Henry associates war more and more with machinery and mechanization. While the naive youth of the first chapter longs to witness “a Greeklike struggle,” in which heroic warriors overcome insurmountable odds and attain the victory through nothing other than their own personal charisma and valor, the experienced boy of the eighth chapter realizes that the “great man” has been replaced by the all-powerful machine: “The battle was like the grinding of an immense and terrible machine to him. Its complexities and powers, its grim processes, fascinated him. He must go and see it produce corpses” (Crane, *RBC* 40). According to this new paradigm, the soldier is no longer an independent individual capable of great deeds but an indistinguishable automaton, who must fulfill his function, insignificant as it may be. Having sacrificed his autonomy, the soldier becomes little more than an interchangeable part, a fragment of a larger whole. This transformation is powerfully manifest in the narrator’s account of Henry’s first engagement which occurs in the fifth chapter of the novel:

> Before he was ready to begin—before he had announced to himself that he was about to fight—he threw the obedient, well-balanced rifle into position and fired a first wild shot. *Directly he was working at his weapon like an automatic affair...He became not a man but a member.* He felt that something of which he was a part—a regiment, an army, a cause, or a country—was in crisis. He was welded into a common personality which was dominated by a single desire. For some moments he could not flee no more than a little finger can commit a revolution from the hand. (Crane, *RBC* 27) [Emphasis mine here and in all subsequent quotations]

In these lines, Henry’s humanity is stripped away and his individuality eclipsed by the collective good. Likewise, his actions are revealed to be not the outgrowths of heroic devotion but merely the products of instinctual, reflex. The sentiments expressed in this passage are reiterated a few pages later when the youth, following his desertion, reflects,
“He had fled, he told himself, because annihilation approached. He had done a good part in saving himself, who was a little piece of the army. He had considered the time…to be one in which it was the duty of every little piece to rescue itself if possible. Later the officers could fit the little pieces together again, and make a battle front” (Crane, RBC 36). By identifying Henry as a “little piece of the army,” the narrator is emphasizing the youth’s immateriality and powerlessness, an inconsequentiality which is particularly salient when juxtaposed against the Homeric heroes Henry evoked earlier.

Having drawn the analogy between war and mechanization, Crane continues to expand it by invoking a vocabulary of automation, a stylistic choice particularly evident in his descriptions of Henry’s regiment specifically and the Union Army in general. For example, in chapter eleven, the narrator states that “His [Henry’s] education had been that success for that mighty blue machine was certain; that it would make victories as a contrivance turns out buttons” (Crane, RBC 54). This quote recalls the dehumanizing world of the 19th century factory, in which workers performed the same menial task for hours on end, and by comparing costly victories to insignificant objects such as buttons, effectively diminishes the soldiers’ sacrifice. Furthermore, this passage reveals a new hierarchy of values in which the perpetuation of the machine is placed above the survival of the individual. Regardless of how many lives it requires, the machine must be preserved and, consequently, victories must be attained. Later in the novel, Crane again employs this mechanistic rhetoric, when he describes the youth’s confusion over the “machinery of orders that started the charge” (Crane, RBC 81). This bewilderment juxtaposed with the young man’s subsequent obedience symbolizes a loss of personal volition. Though the thought of leaving the safety of the forest to charge across an open
field under heavy enemy fire is incomprehensible to the youth, he nonetheless participates in the assault. Having once submitted his will to the caprices of the war machine, he has no choice but to obey its every whim. Crane utilizes this trope a third time when the regiment, unable to withstand the barrage of enemy fire, slowly begins to melt away. In the face of the men’s impotency, the narrator declares, “the regiment was a machine run down” (Crane, RBC 86). A strange response to the carnage and death which pervade the scene, this statement reveals just how far removed the men are from their own humanity.

In addition to portraying war as a mechanism that undermines personal autonomy and divests soldiers of their individuality, Crane repeatedly emphasizes the shifting demarcations between man and machine and the latter’s potential for violence. While the men in the novel are continuously dehumanized, the machines are imbued with human attributes. This personification is especially palpable in the fourth chapter when Henry flees from the lines in terror. Maintaining that the Confederate soldiers are “machines of steel” which have been “wound up perhaps to fight until sundown,” he sympathizes with the feebleminded men who have remained behind: “The youth pitied them as he ran. Methodical idiots! Machine-like fools! ... Too, he felt pity for the guns, standing, six good comrades, in a bold row” (Crane, RBC 33, 34). In this indictment, the distance between soldier and machine is bridged. Both entities are treated as “comrades” and the plight of both is a cause for compassion, notwithstanding the fact that the latter is an inanimate object. A similar employment of personification can be observed a few paragraphs later when Crane again attempts to humanize the artillery stating, “The cannon with their noses poked slantingly at the ground grunted and grumbled like stout men, brave but with
objections to the hurry” (RBC 35). While the machine’s appropriation of the soldiers’ humanity is a subtle undercurrent, other forms of mechanical violence directed against mankind are far more overt. Having already acknowledged that the war machine’s primary function is to “produce corpses,” Henry, surveying the stream of wounded soldiers, contends that “the torn bodies expressed the awful machinery in which the men had been entangled” (Crane, RBC 41). For the Gilded Age audience, this description would doubtlessly have evoked images of industrial violence. Living in a cultural moment in which such “accidents”—disastrous occurrences often resulting from inadequate or negligible safety standards—were commonplace, these individuals could easily have envisioned the terrible consequences which would result if machines were ever purposefully directed against humanity. A final image of “mechanized violence” can be seen in chapter seventeen when Henry, waiting for the onslaught of Confederate soldiers, clutches his rifle nervously and wishes that “it was an engine of annihilating power” (Crane, RBC 75). This quotation aligns the steam engine, the symbol of the Machine Age, with the image of mass destruction, a conflation which seems to contain a subtle allusion to Sir Hiram Maxim’s 1884 infamous invention—the machine gun, an automation frequently featured in the New York Times and other daily periodicals.

Paralleling the growth of these concerns, the rise of urban poverty, which corresponded with the advent of Machine Age and the ensuing industrialization, produced a distinct sense of unease among middle and upper class Americans. As the rift between have’s and have not’s continued to widen, the bourgeoisie, who composed the primary readership of Harper’s and Frank Leslie’s, sought to differentiate themselves from the slum dwellers, many of whom were impoverished immigrants and refugees. In
order to achieve this end, a series of contrasts was developed in which middle class Americans were portrayed as upright, moral vanguards of culture whereas the poor, unfortunates who inhabited the city’s dilapidated tenements were depicted as ignorant, slovenly, and immoral individuals who had little respect for law, order or virtue (Brown, Beyond 80, Mariani 38). This tendency to demonize the other was fueled by the animosity felt by many members of the working classes who believed that immigrants, a work force often employed as strikebreakers, were stealing their jobs. Though unfair, this charge was supported by fact for, as Trachtenburg reveals, “by 1870 one out of every three industrial workers was an immigrant” (88).

To highlight this divide, publishers frequently portrayed slum dwellers as degenerate forms, uncivilized masses who had regressed into brute savagery. Giorgio Mariani addresses these representational strategies in his chapter “Peeping at the Other Half: The Ideological Structures of Slum Literature,” wherein he affirms that between 1870 and 1900 the popular press often delineated the urban poor as “dangerous classes [which were]… separated from the respectable ones not only by the lack of wealth and morality, but by virtue of their bestial looks…In short, very much like savages, slum dwellers were described as people with no culture of their own, but rather as uncivilized—which generally meant bestial—people” (47). Clearly reflecting the influence of Darwin’s seminal book Origin of Species (1859), illustrated magazines began propagating texts and engravings which depicted the inhabitants of the urban underworld as animalistic entities, who had not yet attained the level of evolutionary development attained by their more sophisticated and virtuous neighbors. Regarding this proclivity, Mariani writes, “animal imagery is often deployed…when describing slum
dwellers. Street urchins are referred to as ‘street’ or ‘dock rats,’ ‘dogs,’ or ‘cockroaches.’ The tenements are ‘unfit to be the kennels of dogs,’ and yet the poor are so accustomed to the filth and vermin that the reformers find them ‘reluctant’ to leave their dirty surroundings” (47). This inflammatory rhetoric was likewise employed to explain the savagery and bloodshed which characterized the slums, and in accordance with this paradigm, signified a further retrogression into barbarism and animalistic violence.

Three images published in *Frank Leslie’s Magazine* which illustrate the bestiality and degeneracy among the urban crowds are “The Dog pit at Kit Burns’ during a fight” (1866), “New York City.—Among the Poor—A summer evening scene at the Five Points” (1873), and “New York City.—Russian Jews at Castle Garden—A Scene in the early morning” (1882). The first engraving [Plate 22] portrays the lurid spectacle of a dog fight. Of particular interest, however, are not the dogs, which are spotlighted in the center of the sketch, but rather the men who compose the peripheries. An uncouth, riotous horde, these reprobates epitomize the depravity and animalism most feared by the bourgeoisie. Similarly, the stooped posture, claw-like hands and contorted features of the dog trainers more closely resemble the beasts they are watching than their human counterparts. While the second picture [Plate 23], which details a summer evening in the slums,
initially appears to be a more positive portrayal of the poor, especially in the depiction of the matronly figure at the left, the attitude and carriage of the men in the drawing quickly qualify and undermine this optimism. While the first sits slumped against the wall in an alcohol induced stupor, the second stares defiantly out at the viewers daring them to challenge his authority. In his commentary on this specific picture, Joshua Brown, author of *Behind the Lines*, draws attention to the latter individual’s facial features which, according to Darwin, recalled his ape-like progenitors:

his heavy brows, small nose, prominent cheekbones, broad upper lip, wide mouth, and jutting jaw defied the physiognomic ideal. The brutish face and posture, not to mention the slovenly dress and clay pipe, were familiar to readers of *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*: the subject was a variation of the simianized type of the low Irish immigrant that, ranging between carefree and vicious, had populated urban imagery since the 1840s famine migration. (91)

This illustration is but one of hundreds which attempted to classify the urban poor, and immigrants in particular, as a class of sub-humans. Two other refugee groups which were consistently denigrated and dehumanized were the Italians and the Eastern European Jews (Brown, *Beyond* 193). While an article published in *Frank Leslie’s* on August 22, 1885, likens the Italian immigrants to “a herd of human cattle,” a similarly racist piece printed on August 5, 1882 emphasizes the physical squalor and moral depravity of the foreign-born subalterns: “The scenes in the enclosure of which the refugees had taken possession were often more offensive, men women, and children being huddled promiscuously together, many of them disgustingly filthy and one apparently having much regard for the
restraints of morality” (Qtd. in Brown, Beyond 193,195). The image which accompanied this vignette [Plate 24] equally reflects crowded and filthy conditions in which these immigrants were forced to abide.

The abundance of animal imagery in both The New York City Sketches and The Red Badge of Courage seems to support the assumption that Crane had recourse to these popular modes of representation. In his story “A Christmas Dinner Won in Battle” (1895), for example, the young author draws attention to the “barbaric hymn” of the workers, which he likens to “a pagan chant of savage battle and death” (NYCS 122). Furthermore, in this tale, the author paints a surprisingly harsh, almost sub-human portrait of the immigrant workers, whom he describes as “floundering in the mud and raving, bloodthirsty, pitiless and mad as starved wolves” (Crane, NYCS 122). He again utilizes this animalistic vocabulary in “The Men in the Storm” (1894), a short story describing a group of destitute men waiting outside a charitable house in a storm hoping to get beds for five cents a piece. As the snowstorm worsens, the men huddle together “like sheep”; however, when the door to the lodging house opens, they fight with animal-like fury to gain entrance, each fearing to be left in the cold.

Before embarking on the a discussion of such imagery in The Red Badge, however, one must briefly address the question of why Crane would attempt to integrate the provocative rhetoric of the slums into his fictional account of the Civil War. Perhaps, the most convincing rationale for this transference can be found in popular notions of terror and its effect on human behavior. Though the locales of the battlefield and the slum differ in many ways, they bear one striking similarity—both are governed by fear. When confronted with their own mortality, whether in the form of enemy fire, starvation,
or blank despair, humans, panic-stricken, retreat into utter savagery. Thus, ironically, in the quest to preserve human life, man is transformed into an animal. This indefinable terror combined with the feeling of impotence which arises when the soldier/slum dweller is confronted with a deterministic system is the nexus which unites the Bowery with the battlefield.

This rhetoric rises to the forefront early in the novel when the regiment engages in its first skirmish. Choked by smoke and petrified by the fantastical demons which surround them, the soldiers begin to display strange beast-like behavior: “Many of the men were making low-toned noises with their mouths, and these subdued cheers, snarls, imprecations, prayers, made a wild, barbaric song that went as an undercurrent of sound, strange and chantlike with the resounding chords of a war march” (Crane, *RBC* 28). This quotation reveals that the “war atmosphere” takes a toll both physically, in “a blistering sweat, a sensation that his eyeballs were about to crack like hot stones [and]…a burning roar [which] filled the ears,” and psychologically, as men, incapable of confronting the horrors which surround them, regress into a primal, sub-human state (Crane 29). Likewise, after Henry, half-crazed by battle frenzy, fights wildly and is deemed a “war god” by his comrades, he is suddenly confronted with the realization that he has been “a barbarian, a beast” (Crane 76). This degeneracy is the untold story of war. Though brave and heroic deeds would be recounted for awed listeners, the tale of this savagery would not grace American parlors until Crane’s radical and, in many ways, controversial novel shattered the silence.

In addition to utilizing terms such as “barbarian,” “savage,” and “beast,” Crane appropriates the animal imagery originally applied to slum dwellers. In an array of
descriptive similes, the author compares the soldiers successively to pigs, terriers, rabbits, rats, jackasses, dogs, sheep, and panthers (Crane, *RBC* 20, 21, 33, 73, 73, 76, 80, 99). Similarly, he likens the fleeing regiment to a herd of “terrified buffalo,” and the charging youth to “a mad horse” (Crane, *RBC* 54, 99). Corresponding to these metaphors, Crane exploits a number of verbs which usually connote animal activities, a few of which include the words “gallop,” “pounce,” and “howl” (*RBC* 55/84, 73, 95). The frequency with which these terms surface in the text—Mordecai and Erin Marcus allege that Crane used over “eighty figures of speech employing animals or their characteristics”—supports the conclusion that this device was no mere coincidence, but rather a deliberate decision (108). Further highlighting the craftsmanship behind this choice, these critics emphasize the fact that all associations with domestic animals, by far the most frequent type of metaphor used, are applied to enlisted men; officers are not included in this grouping. Though unverifiable, this differentiation could speak to the author’s acceptance of the hierarchical social structure and the stratification and classification it begot. By portraying enlisted men as dumb, domesticated animals which need to be trained and guided by a coterie of educated, knowledgeable officers, Crane appears to be supporting the guardian model of society in which a small group of educated elites makes all judicial and legislative decisions.

The careful reader will observe that the animal imagery increases as the soldiers approach the fray. When confronted with danger, these men quickly resort to brutish violence. In chapter seventeen, for example, the narrator compares the warring soldiers to “animals tossed for a death struggle into a dark pit” (Crane, *RBC* 75). A second occurrence of this regression can be observed in chapter twenty-three when Crane
describes the charging regiment in terms which more closely resemble the dog-fight portrayed in *Frank Leslie’s* illustration than the proceedings of a “civilized” battle: “They in blue showed their teeth; their eyes shone all white. They launched themselves as at the throats of those who stood resisting” (Crane, *RBC* 99). The animalistic hatred exhibited by the soldiers in this moment is equally visible in an earlier quote in which the author aligns the protagonist’s frustration at being unable to physically engage his opponent with that experienced by a domesticated animal harassed by dogs: “He developed the acute exasperation of a pestered animal, a well-meaning cow worried by dogs…He wished to rush forward and strangle with his fingers…His impotency appeared to him, and made his rage into that of a driven beast” (Crane, *RBC* 29). When viewed jointly, these descriptors paint a rather unflattering portrait of the soldier, who seems to share more in common with the horses which pull the artillery carts than the warriors of heroic legend, and makes the final lines of the novel an apt conclusion to the discourse: “He had been an animal blistered and sweating in the heat and pain of war” (Crane, *RBC* 104).

While mechanization and urban poverty were frequent features of the illustrated news, the topic which elicited by far the most press coverage throughout the Gilded Age was the vast number of violent confrontations between mobs of angry strikers and armed detachments of troops. A response to the multitude of transformations precipitated by America’s rapid industrialization—a few of which included the redefinition of the fundamental categories of capital and labor—these brutal collisions and their subsequent representations in the illustrated weeklies appear to have been pivotal factors in the formation of Crane’s conception of war (Trachtenburg 80). In regard to the social
upheaval which defined the last three decades of the 19th century, Melvyn Dubofsky writes,

Students of history must pause and wonder at the roll call of costly late nineteenth-century industrial conflicts: the Molly Maguires of anthracite coal district notoriety; the railroad strikes and riots of 1877; the Haymarket affair of 1886, and its panic-ridden aftermath; the Homestead and Coeur d'Alene conflicts of 1892, in which armed troops ultimately subdued militant strikers and the Pullman railroad boycott of 1894, in which the full weight of the federal government was pitted against striking workers (Dubofsky 39)

These conflicts, which can be differentiated from previous labor disputes both in the frequency of their occurrence and in the severity their violence, resulted in increased military intervention in labor issues and harsher governmental policies toward labor unions and strikes. Based on data acquired from the federal Bureau of Labor statistics, Dubofsky asserts that “between 1881 and 1890...9,668 strikes and lockouts occurred, [and] in 1886 alone, 1,432 strikes and 140 lockouts involved some 610,024 workers” (38). Similarly, the brutality with which the strikes were suppressed is almost unfathomable to the modern American. The Great Railroad strike of 1877, for example, resulted in over a hundred casualties, while the Haymarket affair, a tragic event in which a bomb was thrown into a group of policeman killing eight, marked one of the many instances during this period in which an armed detachment of police/militia/infantry would open fire on a crowd of unarmed citizens.

This pervasive violence gave rise to what Terry Mulcaire calls a “language of martial industrialism” wherein the mob and the police/state militia/federal troops were depicted as warring factions (57). This rhetoric was particularly evident in the popular press which frequently utilized terms such as “war,” “battle,” and “battlefields” to describe the struggle between labor and capital. Newspaper headlines dated to the period
clearly display the predominance of this martial vocabulary. One *New York Times* article, for example, gives an account of “A Day of Rioting. Bloody Work at Homestead. Twenty Killed in Battle Between Strikers and Pinkerton Men” (July 7, 1892) while another reports on “A Battle Between Miners. Men Shot and a Mill Blown up in Coeur D’Alene Region” (July 12, 1892). Likewise, a column in the *Washington Post* dated to July 7, 1894 predicts that “war of the bloodiest kind in Chicago is imminent, and before tomorrow goes by the railroad lines and yards may be turned into battle fields strewn with hundreds of dead and wounded” (Qtd. in Mariani 100). Once introduced into the illustrated press, this “martial language” was translated into a series of etchings and engravings which, despite being somewhat sensationalized, rendered a powerful portrait of mob warfare. Though Crane may not have personally witnessed labor riots or directly observed armed encounters between Pinkertons and strikers, he would undoubtedly have been exposed to the stirring rhetoric and the dramatic images it produced.

From this tumultuous milieu, two types of pictures emerged—those emphasizing the anarchy of the mob and those displaying cases of military intervention in the form of armed suppression. Within the first category can be found images such as the *Harper’s Weekly* engraving “Driving the RIoter’s from Turner Hall,” (August 18, 1877) and the *Frank Leslie* sketch “Illinois.—The street-railway troubles in
Chicago—the police charging a mob of strikers and ‘hoodlums’ on Centre Street, North Side” (October 20, 1888). Though vastly different in their point of view—the first [Plate 25] offers a panoramic tableau of mass chaos, while the second [Plate 26] renders a narrowly focused portrait of a small group of rioters—both images convey the same sense of confusion, violence and anarchy. Within these pictures, lawlessness and mayhem reign, and fear is rampant. Appearing in direct opposition to the order and respect for authority espoused by the middle and upper classes, these images were purposefully designed to manipulate the emotions of their audience. Furthermore, the severe economic depression of 1893-94 in conjunction with the social upheaval generated by the Pullman strike would have brought concerns regarding the spread of anarchy and mob violence to the forefront of the public consciousness at the exact time Crane sat down to write *The Red Badge* (Shulman 7).

Appearing in stark contrast to the pandemonium of the previous two engravings, the orderly formations of the troops appearing in *Frank Leslie’s* etching of “The Great Strike—The Sixth Maryland Regiment Fighting its way through Baltimore” (August 11, 1877) and *Harper’s* illustration of “National Guardsman firing into the mob at Loomis and Forty-ninth streets” (July 21, 1894) signal the return of law and the banishment of chaos. Though the modern reader might be horrified at these unpardonable displays of violence directed against American citizens, readers of the Gilded Age would have viewed these demonstrations of martial force
as imperative steps toward the restoration of order, a necessary albeit costly endeavor. While the former image [Plate 27] portrays a large detachment of soldiers, organized in neat rows, firing into a disorderly mass of rioters, the latter [Plate 28] exhibits a disciplined group of soldiers engaged in a coordinated attack upon an unruly mob. In both images, formation and regimentation, symbols of systemization and legitimacy, are highlighted. If total anarchy is to be avoided, disciple must be imposed. The baser instincts of the rabble must be restrained. Indeed, the sense of martial order and regimentation in these images is so palpable that, were it not for the urban landscape—composed by telephone wires and city streets in Leslie’s sketch and by a railroad car and a crane in Harper’s—one might believe one had been transported to an actual battlefield.

The themes conveyed in these images take textual form in the pages of The Red Badge of Courage, evidenced most clearly in Crane’s portrayal of the tumultuous “mob” of soldiers and in his depictions of class conflict visible in the strained relations between officers and enlisted men. The author likens groups of soldiers to “mobs” numerous times throughout the novel comparing the regiment to “a moblike body of men who galloped like wild horses,” in one instance, and declaring that “the mob of men was bleeding” in another (Crane, RBC 25, 43). Likewise, this term is employed in chapter three to describe the thoughts which pass through Henry’s mind as he is swept along by the hurried movements of the regiment: “He was bewildered. As he ran with his comrades he strenuously tried to think, but all he knew was that if he fell down those
comrades behind would tread upon him...He felt carried along by a mob” (Crane, RBC 18). Having lost the opportunity for contemplation, the youth stumbles mindlessly toward the place of death. In the same way that the actions of riotous mobs appeared to arise from spontaneous impulse rather than premeditated intention, so Henry is forced to abandon rational thought and act from base instinct. Not only do the soldiers think like a mob, however, they also sound and act like one. In chapter fourteen, the narrator declares that “the men, pitching forward insanely, had burst into cheers, moblike and barbaric,” and in chapter twenty-three, he states that “the mob of blue men hurled themselves on the dangerous group of rifles” (Crane, RBC 82, 98). To the outside observer, the idea of charging into the throes of enemy fire or giving voice to savage shouts seems completely irrational and absurd. Yet, one must be reminded that these baffling performances are not the outgrowths of a composed and coherent mind, but the confused and incoherent products of a war-maddened mob. Henry’s frenetic display of violence, in which he continues to load and fire long after the enemy has cleared the field, is one such spectacle of irrationality. In addition to manifesting itself in the inexplicable behavior of the men, this “anarchic violence” can also be seen in the confusion and chaos of the battlefield (Shulman 7). Several times throughout the novel the regiment loses itself in the smoke, and in one instance, the men even believe they are being fired upon by their own troops. Similarly, the unexpected appearances of the enemy, which seems to materialize without warning from the grey clouds of rifle smoke, inspire fear and panic. The hysteria the soldiers’ experience when confronted with this bedlam would have resonated well with an audience who likewise feared the consequences of a loss of control and a yielding to anarchy.
The specter of class warfare so vividly rendered by *Harper's* and *Frank Leslie's* magazines is equally apparent in *The Red Badge of Courage.* Though the social strife which defined the Gilded Age is typically portrayed as a clash between capital and labor, it can also be interpreted as a class conflict in which poor, dependent workers were pitted against wealthy, powerful capitalists. Once translated into the war novel, this strife can be seen in the fierce antagonism which exists between officers and enlisted men. In regard to this discord within the ranks of the Union Army, Amy Kaplan writes, “He [Crane] also finds a social structure that is ridden with class tensions between officers and privates. Indeed, the novel represents more verbal expressions of hostility and physical acts of violence between members of the Union army then against enemy troops” (89). Though Kaplan’s claim might at first seem suspect, a glance at the text reveals the truth of her words. While militant encounters with the enemy are, until the final pages of the novel, isolated, brief and impersonal, those between enlisted men and officers are frequent, detailed, and distinctly personal.

In several places throughout the text, readers witness officers abusing soldiers both verbally and physically. For example, when the lieutenant observes Henry slacken his pace prior to battle, he beats him back into line with his sword (Crane, *RBC* 20). Likewise, when a terrified soldier flees from the lines in the first engagement, the reader observes the lieutenant “seize him by the collar and pummel him” before driving him “back to the ranks with blows” (Crane, *RBC* 29). This hostility gives rise to anger and bitterness on the part of the enlisted men. Granted access to Henry’s thoughts, the reader discovers that the youth hates the lieutenant and “would like to thrash the general” (Crane, *RBC* 20, 35). This frustration again evidences itself when the troops are reprimanded by
their colonel for failing to take the enemy position: “Presently, however, they began to believe that in truth their efforts had been called light. The youth could see this conviction weigh on the entire regiment until the men were like cuffed and cursed animals, but withal rebellious” (Crane, RBC 92).

Finally, this class violence can be observed in the calloused indifference with which officers treat the sacrifices of their men. This apathy is particularly evident in chapter eighteen when Henry and Wilson accidentally overhear a conversation between several officers. Upon being asked what troops he can spare, one of the men declares, “there’s th’ 304th. They fight like a lot of mule drivers” (Crane, RBC 79). After the general soberly comments that few of the “mule drivers” will return, the officer shouts a brief reply and rides away smiling. Throughout this exchange, Henry is shocked by the officer’s coldness and insensitivity: “The officer spoke of the regiment as if he referred to a broom. Some part of the woods needed sweeping, perhaps, and he merely indicated a broom in a tone properly indifferent to its fate” (Crane, RBC 79). Far from inspiring confidence, this indifference occasions an acute sense of insignificance and injustice.

When viewed in isolation, these passages might appear to advocate a platform disparaging of powerful, authoritarian figures, yet other quotations contradict this reading. To be fully comprehended, these excerpts must be examined from the perspective of the Gilded Age reader. From his/her point of view, officers represented educated elites who enforced strict discipline and regulation to maintain order and effectiveness within the ranks. Possessing a higher degree of knowledge regarding battle situations and exhibiting greater composure under fire, these individuals were responsible for preserving a semblance of order at all costs—even if it meant mistreating their own men. In their eyes,
blind terror and its counterpart, chaos, must be stifled immediately if an effective force is to be maintained. With this in mind, the reader will discover that many of the officers’ indiscretions are actually committed for the good of the regiment. For example, when the lieutenant beats the straggling youth back into line, he is merely attempting to keep the men together and maintain formation. Likewise, when he “grapples” with the youth and attempts to “drag” him on the assault by force, it is only because he realizes the inherent danger of the regiment’s present position (Crane, *RBC* 84). Thus, *The Red Badge* appears to promote a paradoxical platform in which abusive behavior on the part of officers is neither sanctioned nor condoned, but merely permitted out of necessity. Guardians of law and order, the officers in the novel—much like the strike-breaking forces displayed in the pages of the illustrated press—perform an imperative, albeit unduly violent, function. However, by choosing to display this requisite violence through the eyes of an enlisted soldier, a recipient of martial abuse, instead of from the rationalizing perspective of an officer, Crane produces an extremely subversive and ironical rendering of this dilemma.

By juxtaposed engravings from *Harper’s* and *Frank Leslie’s Magazine* with correlating passages from *The Red Badge of Courage*, this chapter has attempted to demonstrate that a large percentage of the novel’s imagery originated in the vibrant visual culture of New York City, specifically in the metropolis’ powerful pictorial press and the representational strategies it employed. Moreover, believing the violence and upheaval of his own age to be a lens through which he might access the chaotic landscape of the Civil War battlefield, Crane appears to have sought out experiences, whether direct or vicarious, which granted him exposure to the turmoil and strife engendered by
mechanization and industrialization, and which enabled him to map a terrain of fear and aggression which could then be projected back upon the military tableau of the 1860s. Thus, while alleging to represent the Civil War, *The Red Badge of Courage* actually renders the tumultuous and highly mediated milieu of New York City during the Gilded Age.
CONCLUSION

By examining three different types of source material and aligning particular images from the Gilded Age with excerpts from *The Red Badge of Courage*, these chapters have sought to locate Crane’s literary aesthetic in the variegated terrain of New York City’s visual media culture in the latter half of the 19th century. This study has sought to establish the novel’s intense “intermediality,” a term coined by Bill Brown to connote the text’s interaction with an array of media forms including drawings, engravings and photographs, and to reveal the means by which advances in the photography and the printing process provided civilians access to a domain which had heretofore been closed to them and greatly affected popular perceptions of war (143). Though highly mediated, these images were still able to elicit powerful emotional responses from viewers, and consequently, could be seen as an instrument of propaganda capable of dramatically altering public attitudes toward war. Already an issue in Crane’s lifetime, the media’s ability to control public opinion through the manipulation of images rose to the fore of the national consciousness during the First World War and ushered in an era of strict government censorship.

The heterogeneous and fragmentary quality of the author’s source material and the vicarious nature of the experience it provided are manifested in the novel through a distinct sense of removal, a fractured view of reality, and a wide range of descriptive metaphors. Crane’s fastidious attention to detail and his tendency to place his reader in the position of observer/spectator instead of in the role of active participant speaks to the author’s distance from the events he describes and emphasizes his reliance on secondary
experience attained through the medium of engravings and/or photographs. Similarly, though the work’s disjointed and episodic character is frequently attributed to the influence of the Impressionist painters, this analysis would seem to imply that the fragmented and desultory reality proffered by *The Red Badge* could equally be the product of the myriad of images which were carefully interwoven into the novel’s visual fabric. Likewise, the disparate nature of Crane’s source material could be responsible for the diverse, incongruous and often even contradictory character of his imagery, which in one passage compares the soldier to a mindless automaton and in the next to a raging animal.

The influence of the illustrated press is not limited to the novelist’s innovative style, however, but also affects the book’s content, particularly the persuasions and ideological constructs promoted therein. In his attempt to portray war realistically, Crane appears to have assimilated many of the representations of war and conflict found within the pages of the pictorial press, and in so doing, created a novel which critiques not war itself but rather the Gilded Age’s perception of war. Thus, Crane’s novel functions as a cultural “snapshot” revealing the increased accessibility of war during this period and the transformations in public opinion engendered by this newfound awareness. These decades marked the first time war images had been made available to the public on a large scale. Though paintings of famous battle scenes had been commissioned prior to this point, their audience was limited to those members of the affluent classes who could afford such costly artworks. Meanwhile, civilian members of the lower and middle classes—ignorant of war’s true nature—were encouraged to accept romanticized descriptions of war which celebrated the heroism of the nation’s martyrs and
conveniently ignored the atrocities and terrors which accompanied these “valiant” endeavors. Evolutions in photography and printing and the mass circulation of images which they enabled revolutionized this model allowing the common man to perceive “war,” albeit in mediated glimpses.

As the novel reflects, the sudden availability of war images during the Gilded Age gave rise to three pivotal transformations in the public’s perception of war. First, war itself, which for many 19th century Americans had been a distant and foreign concept prior to the advent of hostilities in 1861, was recast as spectacle and transmuted from a serious and lofty venture to a degraded form of entertainment whose sole purpose was the diversion of the masses. The symbiotic dialogue of realism and euphemism which evolved around these graphic images constitutes the second paradigm shift. While the decision to present these violent scenes to the public would seem to signal an attempt to demythologize war, the euphemistic and rationalizing rhetoric which surrounded them simultaneously sought to undermine this attempt. Thus the fundamental conflict between text and image was born—a seminal controversy which has continued to haunt illustrated newspapers and magazines to the present day. The third transition sparked by the appearance of war images in the popular press was that of attributed meaning. Though some pictures were viewed in relative isolation, many others were placed alongside images/texts describing contemporary incidences of violence. For example, during the early 1890s, a feature recalling a Civil War battle might easily have appeared in the same issue of Harper’s as a story detailing a violent melee between strikers and Pinkertons. Having little experience with war, the Gilded Age audience frequently overlaid one set of images upon another and projected the events of their own cultural moment upon the
locus of the battlefield. This transference has carried through to the present day in which media depictions of recent conflicts are often colored by the current events surrounding them. Indeed, these conflations are often fostered by the media which meticulously arranges images and stories to produce a desired effect.

The changes in public opinion precipitated by the illustrated press’ reconstruction of war take literary form in Crane’s novel and again in the controversial works of World War I authors such as Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos. Evidencing a literary aesthetic in many ways akin to that espoused by Crane, the imagery and tone manifested in these “anti-war” narratives mirrors the new conception of war advanced in The Red Badge. While the inter-chapters of Hemingway’s In Our Time (1925) offer an extremely fragmented and disillusioned portrait of the war punctuated by disturbing, photographic scenes of death and disorder, Dos Passos Three Soldiers (1921) creates a starkly realistic visual landscape defined by images of mechanical violence and class conflict. The debt these writers owe to Crane is revealing of the pivotal role The Red Badge played in the development of the war literature genre.

The subversive opinions articulated in these novels reveal the extent to which the public perception of war had altered over the previous fifty years. While these sentiments were by no means the dominant view, their very expression not to mention publication clearly speaks to the transformative power of the image, which rapidly demythologized war and often created anti-war sentiment. Perhaps the most persuasive argument for the war image’s destructive potential, however, is found in the strict government censorship enforced during World War I. Though prior to this point decisions regarding what images and/or texts could be published had been relegated
entirely to the media, these years marked increased government intervention and regulation. Fearing that violent images of bloodied and dying soldiers lying by the hundreds in the mud-filled trenches would undermine the war effort, British, French and American governments banned civilian photographers and correspondents from approaching the front (Lewinski 63). Likewise, the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918 forbade the publication of anything which would inspire insubordination or disloyalty. Authorities were determined that no Alexander Gardners would capture the faces of dead Americans in this war, nor would any Stephen Cranes record the events of this tragedy.

While these measures did not completely inhibit pictures from being taken—many photographs were snapped by soldiers and anonymous civilians—or entirely stifle seditious rhetoric, they were quite successful in temporarily preventing these images and texts from reaching the popular press. The moment these measures were lifted, however, the failure of this artifice was quickly revealed. Though the images of conflict had been temporarily suppressed, they could not be entirely silenced. Having once been allowed access to the theatre of war, the public would never be satisfied with prohibition and concealment. Neither could the popular conception of war be returned to an earlier, romanticized state. The public would know war, in all its grim reality. Thus, Crane’s novel marks a watershed moment in the media’s transformation of war and highlights the pivotal role the illustrated press played in this process.
APPENDIX 1

Levels of Mediation in *The Red Badge*


SCHOLASTIC VITA

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