Redemption and Condemnation: Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter and Crane's The Red Badge of Courage

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction ................................................................. 2

II. Chapter One: The Scarlet Letter ........................................ 5
    A. Narrative ........................................................................ 6
    B. Psychological Examination of Hester ................................ 8
    C. Imagery ......................................................................... 12
    D. Philosophy ..................................................................... 19

III. Chapter Two: The Red Badge of Courage .............................. 24
    A. Narrative ........................................................................ 24
    B. Psychological Examination of Henry ................................. 27
    C. Imagery ......................................................................... 31
    D. Philosophy ..................................................................... 35

IV. Conclusion .......................................................................... 38

Works Cited ............................................................................. 42
I. Introduction

Both Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* have as their setting scenes appropriate to the American nineteenth century. For this reason, and because of the American origin of each of the authors, these two works contain many similarities in theme and style. They both discuss the nature and capabilities of man, using imagery and irony to strengthen their characterizations. The view of man that each presents, however, is quite different, resulting in a great contrast in the philosophical perspectives of the novels.

Stephen Crane wrote *The Red Badge of Courage* forty-five years after *The Scarlet Letter* was published, and it seems, therefore, probable that Crane had read Hawthorne's novel and patterned some of his style after Hawthorne. In spite of this speculation, it is a fact that many stylistic parallels exist between the two novels. The most dominant parallel is that of the blatant use of imagery in both novels. Both the scarlet letter and the red badge are symbols of identity for the protagonists, and both represent a fall from the ideal. Both authors also employ images of nature and symbols of good and evil in order to illuminate the protagonists' courses of action. The style of characterization that both author's use is also quite
similar. The authors trace their protagonists through not only their action and conversations, but also through the character's unvoiced cognitive thoughts.

Both novels are also rooted in a specific and identifiable historical setting. *The Scarlet Letter* is set in a Puritan colony in New England and follows the historical perceptions of the rigid Puritan codes. Hawthorne even purports his novel to be partially historical fact in "The Custom House" when he finds the scarlet letter, a supposedly authentic relic. Similarly, *The Red Badge of Courage* is set during the American Civil War and is supposed to present a realistic picture war, as well as present the story of Henry Fleming.

The thematic structure of the two novels also reveals interesting and important similarity. Both novels deal with a fall from the ideal and the course of action taken in response to this fall. They examine human nature—both its strengths and weaknesses, and reveal to the reader various flaws in both human morality and human societies. From this, both novels propose that several truths exist in society which man must confront. Through this confrontation, as revealed in the characterizations of the protagonists, the reader is able to gain a deeper understanding of the qualities of human nature.

Through this reflection on the nature of human capabilities, Crane and Hawthorne present a similar situation but interpret this conflict in divergent manners. Both authors present differing views of the capabilities of mankind. According to
Hawthorne, man is able to transcend and actualize a higher order through fall and redemption. Crane, on the other hand, views man as an imperfect being incapable of transcending limitations. The differences of perspective of the two novels corresponds to ideas associated with Romanticism and Realism, and through the characterization of the protagonists and the imagery associated with it, each author presents his own perspective on the situation of mankind.

In an attempt to come to a better understanding of this difference of perspective, I will analyze four specific qualities of each novel: (1) narrative, a brief account of the story of each novel; (2) psychological examination of the protagonists, an analysis of their fall and their response to this fall; (3) imagery, the images used to shed light on the protagonists' journeys; and (4) philosophy, the relation of the protagonists' outcomes to an overall view of mankind, focusing mainly on their parallels with Romanticism and Realism.
I. Chapter One: The Scarlet Letter

Hawthorne's imaginative romance is one of inner conflict and human transcendence. A human, but very tragic sin, changes the entire life of a woman in both the eyes of society and the eyes of herself. The stage for the novel is set in the introduction, "The Custom House," where Hawthorne discusses the union of the real and the imaginary as the transcendence into a higher existence. He talks of the floor of his study where he created this novel as being "a neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other."(35) He states that "Nothing is too small or too trifling to undergo this change, and acquire dignity thereby."(35) revealing his belief in transcendence and his purpose for the novel, to show the means by which one can overcome his/her limitations and thereby attain a higher spiritual perfection. Through his characterization of Hester and his use of images, Hawthorne is able to reveal the ways in which this strong spiritual force

enables one to succeed in the quest for contentment and perfection.

A. Narrative

The Scarlet Letter opens with Hester Prynne exiting through a prison door with the scarlet letter "A" adorning her bosom and with her child, Pearl, in her arms. As the story unfolds, the reader sees that Hester is accused of committing adultery, a great sin that is severely punished in Puritan society. Her partner in sin, the Puritan minister Arthur Dimmesdale, however, does not come forward to join in her punishment but instead tries to protect his position in society by hiding his guilt. Hester, refusing to reveal her lover's identity, is banished from society, while Dimmesdale gains the reputation of a "saint on earth."(132) Hester's long lost husband, Roger Chillingworth, who has been gone for several years, ironically chooses Hester's day of condemnation on the scaffold to return to the village. Chillingworth forces Hester to conceal his identity, and set on revenge, he uses the cover of a doctor to seek out Hester's transgresser. Dimmesdale's guilt is transformed into physical derision, and Chillingworth is entrusted with his care.

Chillingworth discovers the reason for Dimmesdale's failing health and directs all of his revengeful energy toward creating more suffering for Dimmesdale. Once a "wise and just man,"(150) Chillingworth is transformed by his hatred into a fiend.
feels it need to torment Hester, leaving the scarlet "A" on her bosom to avenge him. On the other hand, he continually torments Dimmesdale, adhering to the theory that physical ailments are a representation of a sore spot in the soul. In Dimmesdale's sleep, Chillingworth discovers an "A" impressed into Dimmesdale's chest, and at that moment he appears as Satan: "when a precious soul is lost to heaven and won into his kingdom." (12) He continues to torment Dimmesdale until Dimmesdale's confession by playing on Dimmesdale's inner guilt.

Meanwhile, Hester is forced to live in a society that continually pokes fingers at her sin and at the product of her sin, Pearl. Hester suffers through hours upon a scaffold, cold stares, and alienation. She is required to raise her daughter in a small house outside the village, and her only source of income comes from her work as a seamstress for unappreciative, condemning members of her society. Eventually, Hester realizes that the only way to overcome guilt is to confront it, and she turns her life into one of self-sufficiency, and ultimately respect.

After seeing the physical ailments caused by Dimmesdale's hidden guilt, Hester wishes him to confront and overcome it. Hester, Pearl, and Dimmesdale stand on the scaffold in the middle of the night as a prelude to Dimmesdale's public confession. When Dimmesdale finally decides that he must admit his guilt, Hester serves as his guardian angel, standing beside him for comfort. Dimmesdale ends his suffering by going into the village.
and admitting his guilt to all, triumphantly ending his life and destroying Chillingworth's hopes of a prolonged revenge.

Hawthorne uses a framing device to make his narrative appear historical and authentic. In his introduction, "The Custom House," he introduces the reader to the narrator, who supposedly has taken a job at the custom house. At this custom house, the narrator finds a fabric scarlet "A" and a roll of paper which contains many particulars regarding the life and conversations of Hester Prynne. From this the narrator builds his story.

Hawthorne closes the frame in the last chapter by revealing the fate of each of the characters. All of his strength and energy arising from his pursuit of revenge, Chillingworth grows weak and dies within a year of Dimmesdale's death. Chillingworth bequeaths a considerable amount of property to Pearl, and both Pearl and Hester move to England. Hester, however, returns and voluntarily begins wearing the scarlet letter on her bosom again. Although she has become a leper, she again lives on the outskirts of the village, choosing to be an outcast. When she dies several years later, she is buried next to Dimmesdale and their joint tombstone reads, "On a field, sable, the letter T. gules."(340)

B. Psychological Examination of Hester

Hester Prynne is a young woman who, not knowing whether her husband is dead or alive, committed adultery. Although this is
her sin, it is not really the source of evil which she confronts. Instead, the evil which she confronts is the Puritan society around her. She is forced to confront this evil and overcome it, but this can only happen when she comes to a self-realization, or self-acceptance.

Before Hester's sin, she is an accepted member of the Puritan society. However, after the authorities discover her adultery, she is treated harshly and made an example of to the rest of society. She is made to wear the scarlet letter "A" on her breast and to stand upon a scaffold in the middle of town so that everyone can stare at her and her illegitimate child. All of the members of the condemning society shun her, as well as gossip about her. When she enters the church, the preachers change their sermons to talk of Hester's sin and make her an example. Hester is merely human, but this evil hypocritical society chooses not to recognize this and forgive her mistake. Therefore, Hester has to confront this evil and learn a way to deal with it.

On her journey toward self-realization, Hester first experiences shame. She has her daily reminders of her sin, the scarlet letter and Pearl, which cause guilt to seep inside of her. She no longer sees herself in terms of the Puritan ideal, but instead has fallen and sees herself only as a sinner. Being made a martyr, she is cut off from society and sees herself as a terrible person unworthy of friendship.

With this view of herself, Hester travels even farther away
Along with this three-step process, Hester experiences a catharsis, a purgation of her emotions. Through shame and despair, her emotions of self-condemnation are purged, and through solitude, she begins to reason out her situation. She analyzes her situation, and employs a dialectical self-examination that resembles the Hegelian process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Through this self-analysis, she discovers her attributes and flaws, analyzes them, and then synthesizes them to come to a better understanding of her own spiritual nature. Thus, she attains insight into a higher reality.

Hester's character is also strengthened through her involvement with Dimmesdale and Chillingworth. Dimmesdale occupies an intermediary position between the forces of good and evil and both Hester and Chillingworth are struggling to win his soul. Representative of, and even bringing about, evil in this world, Chillingworth is trying to keep Dimmesdale buried in his sin, while Hester introduces and has him on a path toward redemption. Chillingworth is clearly Hester's counterpart, while Hester is the mediator between Dimmesdale and God. The last Dimmesdale to redeem himself when she says, "Heaven would show mercy, hadst thou but the strength to take advantage of it."(180) Thus, Hester becomes angelic. It is she who hears Dimmesdale's first confession of his guilt, and it is she who is present at his side during his public confession and death.

Dimmesdale serves as a foil for Hester's character. He,
too, is guilty of adultery, but he chooses to conceal his guilt rather than admit it. Although he retains the respect of his parishioners, his guilt is slowly killing him. In contrast to Hester, he is a weak, cowardly person who oscillates between a yearning for confession and redemption and a fear of public scandal and embarrassment. In exploring the tortuous effects of the "easy way out" that Dimmesdale has chosen for himself, the reader comes to appreciate more fully Hester's submission to her public punishment. Unlike Dimmesdale, she is able to remain true to herself, even while being viewed by her fellow man as the vilest of all beings.

C. Imagery

Hawthorne employs imagery effectively and artistically in The Scarlet Letter. The images that he associates with characters and ideas greatly enhance the coherence and continuity of the novel. But, perhaps most importantly, they serve to strengthen the characterizations and reinforce philosophical messages. In the course of the novel, Hawthorne uses both blatant symbols, such as the scarlet "A," and obscure images, such as the rose bush, to convey meaning. However, this novel reflects such an abundance and complexity of imagery that any discussion would suggest a disservice and injustice to Hawthorne's craftsmanship. Therefore, I will focus on those images that lend insight into Hester's character, her
confrontation, and her transcendence.

The entire first chapter of the novel is devoted entirely to imagery and sets the stage for both the imagery to follow and Hester's conflict. In this chapter, Hawthorne develops four major images: the prison and the prison door, the cemetery, and the weeds, and the rose bush. The prison is described as an "ugly edifice" (45), and the prison door through which Hester later emerges is described as "heavily timbered with oak, and studded with iron spikes." (45) Both descriptions convey the burdensome, negative quality of the prison. Both the prison and the cemetery are built on "virgin soil," (45) implying that the soil was pure and uncorrupted before society felt it necessary to allot portions of it for the use of these evils. Both the prison and the cemetery do in a sense represent evil, but each also suggests a different sort of evil. The cemetery represents the last great evil that man faces—death. This death, however, is a natural death, the returning of the physical body to the earth from which it came. In contrast, the prison door represents an artificial death, one imposed on the individual by society. A prison sentence does not kill the body, but it can destroy the soul. Thus, these two images provide the reader with the fact that a natural death exists and that a society imposed death, the kind that Hester is in danger of, also exists.

Between the prison door and the street is a patch of weeds, or "unsightly vegetation" (45) growing out of the "virgin soil." Dissimilarly, a rose bush grows out of the soil next to the
prison door. These two forms of vegetation growing from virgin soil create an interesting analogy for the reader. The weed—representing the negative, or evil, symbolizes to the reader that evil can grow out of the pure, and the rose bush which represents purity, or God, shows that what is thought to be bad (i.e., the prison, cemetery) may in actuality be good. The reader sees both of these ideas working within the novel in both Hester's character and Dimmesdale's. Dimmesdale is thought to be a humble and devoted minister, almost angelic; however, he is actually a hypocrite. Hester, on the other hand, is thought to be most vile, but in actuality she is a devoted Puritan who spends her life helping others.

When Hester first emerges from the prison door, she carries with her two constant reminders of her sin: the scarlet letter "A" and Pearl, or "the scarlet letter endowed with life."(20) In the opening chapters of the novel, both of these symbols represent Hester's adultery; but, Hawthorne transforms the meanings of both into something quite different by the end of the novel.

As her punishment for committing adultery, Hester is made to craft a scarlet "A" to wear on her bosom so that all who see her will be aware of her sin. The letter is purposely crude, most likely because of Hester's initial feelings of shame and her desire to punish herself. The letter stands between her and society as adults avoid her, children point fingers at the letter, and strangers inquire about the scarlet "A". The scarlet
letter, then, becomes the badge of Hester's identity. Even when Hester no longer feels shame enough to wear the "A" and throws it off, her own daughter refuses to recognize her without it and forces her to put it back on.

In the beginning of the story, the badge conveys Hester's identity to the reader solely as adulterous. The fact that the badge is red is significant in that red represents sin, which is what Hester is accused of committing. Because of this badge, Hester initially sees herself as a great sinner as well, as she wanted "to clasp the infant closely to her bosom, not so much by an impulse of motherly affection, as that she might thereby conceal a certain token, which was wrought or fastened into her dress." (51)

The meaning of the letter changes immensely as the novel unfolds, however, and in the next stage of Hester's transformation, the scarlet letter comes to represent ability. As the reader recalls, the "A" was crafted by Hester and showed that "she hath good skill at her needle." (51) The skill of her needlework becomes her livelihood, and the scarlet letter is the advertisement of her skill: "She bore on her breast, in the curiously embroidered letter, a specimen of her delicate skill of which the dames of a court might gladly have availed themselves." (75) Hester's handicraft becomes the fashion as she makes clothes for the governor, military men, ministers, and babies, as well as shrouds for the dead. Through Hester's needlework she is able to provide sustenance for herself and her
child, and is able to overcome the isolation of the symbol, thereby transforming the meaning of the "A" to ability as she becomes self-sufficient.

The strength that Hester finds through the wearing of this letter also helps her make this transformation. Hester is forced to overcome the scorn and misery inflicted on her by society and the "A"; and in doing so, she begins to believe that she is not alone in her sin. Sometimes she "felt an eye—a human eye—upon the ignominious brand, that seemed to give a momentary relief, as if half of her agony were shared." (76) Hester realizes that many others have committed the same sin and that she is the martyr for all of them, and that through this martyrdom she will become more saint-like.

It is for this reason that the badge becomes a symbol of Hester's redemption. Hester acts as an intermediary, or even as a Christ-figure, for the sinners, or all the people who inhabit the Puritan society, and on a larger scale God's domain. Also, the "A" being red recalls Christ's blood, the cleanser of sin. Hester works very hard to make restitution for her sin by making clothes for the poor and trying to help those in need. In the conclusion of the novel, Hester becomes the spiritual force that moves Dimmesdale to confess his sins. Consequently, the "A" transforms in meaning again when the "A" in the sky is interpreted by townspeople to mean angel, assisting the reader to see that the "A" on Hester's breast also comes to represent Hester's angelic qualities.
Pearl is also a symbol of Hester's sin. Pearl was born of evil, and Hester is apprehensive that something will be wrong with her because of it. The only problem that Pearl has, though, is that of being closely aligned with nature, rather than society, a quality which the Puritans scorn and even condemn. Pearl's name implies something of calm, white unimpassioned lustre, but Pearl's character is completely the opposite. She is ornery, uninhibited, and impulsive as she disobeys her mother and often has a "freakish. elfish cast"(99) in her eyes. Hence, Pearl is not named for her character, but instead is named for the price at which she came into the world, "purchased with all [Hester] had--her mother's only treasure."(99).

By the end of the narrative, Pearl has indeed come to be much more of a treasure to her mother than a reminder of her sin. Pearl is the only person that Hester has to talk to, and she is the only one who can show her any affection. Pearl gives Hester strength by questioning her about the letter, making Hester question herself. Also, she is the only link between Hester and the man she loved.

Born to both Hester and Dimmesdale, Pearl is the only true link between them, and she seems to know this. She often points to Dimmesdale's chest and asks why he covers his heart. She appears to understand the guilt which no one else can penetrate. In the middle of the night she stands between Hester and Dimmesdale on the scaffold, "the three form[ing] an electric chain."(140) Little Pearl is "herself a symbol, and the
connecting link between those two." (141) At Dimmesdale's confession and death, Pearl is again present to be the evidence of his sinning partnership with Hester.

Also portrayed strongly within the novel is the image of evil. Roger Chillingworth, Hester's husband, is a destroyer who becomes angry at his thwarted love. His sole desire becomes revenge. Hawthorne portrays him as a sort of witch or demon who wears dark clothing and digs up roots in the forest, the home of the Black Man. The Black Man is said to haunt the forest and carry a big book in which his followers write their names in blood. Subsequently, he sets his mark on their bosoms. One of his followers is Mistress Hibbens, an archetypal witch who brings people to the forest to meet the Black Man. All three of these characters are Satan images, the Black Man representing Satan himself, and the other two his demonic followers.

Hawthorne uses these demonic images to show the strength of the forces of evil. Hester, however, is able to rise above this evil in the course of her transcendence. She overcomes Chillingworth's evil by rebuking her promise to him and persuading Dimmesdale to confess, ending Chillingworth's path of revenge. Hester also overcomes the power of the Black Man and Mistress Hibbens through the love she has for her daughter. For example, when Mistress Hibbens tells Hester that the Black Man is expecting her to come to the forest, Hester replies "triumphantly," "Make my excuse to him, so please you! Had they taken [Pearl] away from me, I would willingly have gone with thee.
into the forest, and signed my name in the Black Man's book too, and that with my own blood."(107) Thus, Hester symbolically proves that the power of evil is not equal to the power of good.

Just as Hawthorne begins this novel strictly with images, he also ends it with images. The line, "On a field, sable, the letter A, gules,"(240) clearly expresses the allegorical meaning of the novel: virtue conquers vice, virtue being strength and vice being the giving over of oneself to another force. "On a field" refers to Dimmesdale being the battleground, or neutral territory, since "dale" means field; "sable" refers to the black evil of Chillingworth; the letter "A" refers to the angelic qualities of Hester; and "gules" is red, referring to the burning sin or vice. The reader sees Hester's conflict working in this statement; for, even though she fell from virtue initially, through her battle she was able to achieve a higher virtue or reality, proving that evil is present but it is overcome with good.

D. Philosophy

Two philosophical ideas seem to inform the thematic structure of The Scarlet Letter: Romanticism and transcendentalism. Romanticism deals with man's conflict between his ideal and reality and encompasses several general characteristics: "moral enthusiasm, faith in the value of individualism and intuitive perception, and a presumption that
the natural world is a source of goodness and man's society a source of corruption." (McMichael 563) All of these characteristics are exemplified in Hawthorne's novel.

The Scarlet Letter is clearly grounded in moral enthusiasm as the conflict of the novel is one of moralistic, religious beliefs. The Puritans strongly believe in obeying the Ten Commandments, most of which deal with moral behaviors. By committing adultery, both Hester and Dimmesdale break the moral Puritan codes, placing themselves at the mercy of the society.

How society deals with Hester also becomes a moral issue in the novel. The harsh, unforgiving treatment of Hester can be looked at as quite a moral evil. The Bible, which the Puritans supposedly believed in, says that those who repent will be forgiven, and that people should forgive others sins. "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." (Matthew 6:14,15) The Puritan society chose to recognize the commandment "Thou shall not commit adultery," (Exodus 20:14) but to ignore God's commandment for forgiveness. In the eyes of a Romantic, one sees the Puritan society as one of corruption and evil.

The value of the individual over society now comes strongly into play. Societies are artificial structures of which individuals are merely a part. Since societies are aligned with artifice, they are inherently corrupt. Nature, on the other hand, is created by God and is pure and inherently good. Thus,
by aligning oneself with nature, an individual can achieve goodness. This presents a conflict for the individual as Romanticism contends that man is both a part of Nature (purity) and a part of the Earthly (artifice). Since Nature represents the ideal, man is constantly trying to attain or actualize this ideal while being pulled back to the reality to which he has fallen and belongs.

Hester's character is tormented by this conflict for much of the novel. Her ideal is to be a good Puritan woman. Because of her sin, however, society will not allow her to attain this ideal. Her reality is that she is an evil sinner in the eyes of religion. Her ideal is punctured by the reality of sin or human nature. Hester works hard to overcome this reality through penitence and good works, but realizes that reality cannot be overcome.

Hester eventually reconciles her ideal with her reality and in doing so, she breaks from the Romantic vision and follows the path of transcendentalism. Transcendentalism is the belief that "human beings can intuitively transcend the limits of the senses and of logic and receive directly higher truths and greater knowledge denied to other mundane methods of knowing." (Holman 449) Without the help of others, Hester reconciles her ideal of the perfect Puritan woman with her reality of being a sinner. Through this reconciliation, Hester becomes a self-aware, self-sufficient individual and is able to attain a higher form of individualistic happiness. She falls symbolically because of her
sin, but arises to transcend the limitations of the human spirit.

The reader sees Hester growing stronger as an individual throughout the novel. She is initially frightened by society and its scorn; but, as she comes to accept her own humanity, she realizes that, "The links that united her to the rest of human kind--links of flowers, or silk, or gold, or whatever the material--had all been broken." (146) She is a complete individual, part of the world but different from it, when she understands that, "The world's law [is] no law for her mind," (151) and she tells Dimmesdale that "There is happiness to be enjoyed! There is good to be done!" (181) Thus, she has transcended the limitations of the human essence, symbolized by her scarlet "A" which now means "angel."

Hester is able to achieve this transcendence because of her fall. It is only because she has fallen from the ideal that she is able to gain redemption, and it is only through this redemption that she is able to achieve a higher form of knowledge--self-realization. This pattern of fall, confession, penance, and redemption in order to gain a higher essence is not original with Hawthorne, as it is exemplified several times in the Bible. Adam and Eve must fall in order to prepare for Christ's redemption of man, and Job must fall from God in order to rise in his faithfulness and knowledge of Him. Thus, Hester's fall is symbolic of man's need to fall in order to rise. Man must fall in order to be redeemed; therefore, it is through the fall that man achieves happiness. The fall, then, is actually a
"felix culpa," or "happy sin" for without it redemption is unattainable.
III. Chapter Two: The Red Badge of Courage

Like Hawthorne's novel, The Red Badge of Courage is a novel of inner conflict. The result of the conflict in this novel, however, is self-condemnation rather than human transcendence. Through Henry Fleming's hallucinatory images, Crane is able to reveal the aspirations and the flaws of his character and of humankind in general. Unlike Hester, Henry is denied the opportunity to overcome his limitations, and he is condemned to a life of falsehood. Like the Scarlet Letter, this novel deals with a moral infraction, and Crane shows that moral capability depends upon a person's ability to see through the illusions brought about by pride and conceit. Hester overcomes her moral dilemma, but Henry remains incapable, becoming emotionally and spiritually condemned. In an attempt to show readers this common flaw of man and man's inability to overcome it, Crane reveals the path which leads Henry to his condemnation.

A. Narrative

The Red Badge of Courage opens to a calm sunrise with the night cold and fog passing from the earth to reveal a group of
Union soldiers who are resting. A tall soldier informs the group that they are going to move into battle, creating a ruckus among the group. A loud soldier calls this information "a thunderin' lie"(?) as he does not believe that the army will ever move.

Henry Fleming, a youthful private, listens intently to the discussion and then leaves to contemplate actually being in battle for the first time. Though Henry's reverie, the reader quickly learns of his fascination with the Greek and Roman heroes, his immature impression of war, and the motive behind his enlistment. Henry begins to wonder whether he will be brave in battle, or if he will run the other direction. He tries to find other soldiers who are as frightened as he is, but he is unable to break through the reserve which each soldier has built up for himself.

When the Army finally moves into battle, Henry feels himself in the middle of a giant machine, unable to retreat even if he wanted. He slowly loses his personal identity and becomes an anonymous member of this blue machine. Thus, Henry and his comrades repulse the first attack of the enemy. When the enemy attacks again, though, Henry has a vision of being deserted by his comrades, and he runs away.

After Henry has run aimlessly for some time, he realizes that there was not a general retreat and that, instead of his

comrades deserting him, he has deserted them. Henry tries to find consolation for his actions in nature. He throws a pine cone at a squirrel which runs away chattering with fear. From this, Henry concludes that his own flight was merely a part of his animal nature. He moves deeper into the woods until he comes upon a chapel-like bough of tree branches where he finds a ghastly corpse with small ants crawling on the face. He again runs in fear, this time imagining that nature is now hostile to him.

Finding himself closer to the battle, Henry meets up with a group of wounded soldiers who are marching away from the fighting. To Henry's surprise, one of the wounded men is the tall soldier, Jim Donklin, who is now near death. Jim remains strong in spirit, though, and runs off to a clump of bushes where he receives his death spasm. Henry also meets a tattered soldier who remarks how none of the boys on their side had run and what great fighters they are. Even though he is growing weak, the tattered soldier continually asks Henry about his wound. This frustrates Henry, and finally, although the tattered soldier is obviously dying, Henry leaves him alone in the field, walking aimlessly about muttering to himself.

Moving closer to the battlefield, Henry runs into a group of soldiers who are fleeing from the front in panic. When he tries to stop one of them to find out what is happening at the front, the man hits Henry on the head with the butt of his rifle. Henry stumbles around in a daze until a cheerful soldier comes along...
and leads him back to his regiment. Instead of admitting his cowardice to his comrades, Henry tells them that he was hit in the head by a bullet, and to his amazement, they believe him. The loud soldier Wilson, who has now become a reserved and responsible leader, takes care of his "wound" and becomes a close comrade.

The next day there is more fighting, and this time Henry stays and fights well. He becomes a leader for his regiment as he keeps the Union flag from falling into enemy hands and leads a charge on the enemy. Both he and Wilson are complimented on their daring and bravery during the battle, but Henry's thoughts soon return to his cowardly desertion the previous day, his desertion of the dying tattered soldier, and his fake "badge of courage."

B. Psychological Examination of Henry

Henry Fleming is a young farm boy who, fascinated with the idea of becoming a hero, enlists in the Union Army. In a flashback, Crane reveals Henry's immaturity before joining the battle. Henry spends much of his time reading about the Greek war heroes and he has an insatiable appetite for hearing of the "breathless deeds" of war. He spends much time dreaming of battles and imagining his heroic actions in them. He joins the army in order to experience first-hand these great battles that he envisions. In spite of his mother's common-sense argument
that "he was of vastly more importance on the farm than on the
field of battle."(6) He enlists—not for any great cause that he
wants to fight for— but to realize his heroic ideal.

When Henry faces the real battle, however, he falls, like
Hester, from his heroic ideal. When rumors of battle are flying,
Henry becomes preoccupied with the thought that he might turn
cowardly and run. After the first interlude of fighting, though,
Henry decides that the "supreme trial had been passed;"(37) and
he "went into an ecstasy of self-satisfaction."(37) He now sees
himself "with those ideals which he had considered as far beyond
him."(37) But when the officers suddenly announced another
attack by the enemy, Henry looks at the Confederates as "machines
of steel."(38) In his fear, he imagines that his comrades are
turning and leaving him alone to battle the enemy. He yells in
fear, and "in the great clamor, he was like a proverbial
chicken."(39) After running far enough away from the battle to
alleviate his feelings of panic, he realizes that the regiment
had not retreated but instead had held the enemy. Henry then
"cringed as if discovered in a crime."(43) He realizes that his
flight was one of cowardice, not of necessity.

Henry walks in the forest, trying to reconcile his ideal
with his crime. At first, he tries to justify his actions to
himself. He tells himself that he fled only because annihilation
approached. He feels he did "a good part in saving himself, who
was a little piece of the army."(43) After all, if none of the
little pieces survived, he thinks, who would fight the next
battle? He throws a pine cone at a squirrel in a tree who runs in fear. He concludes that he is but an ordinary squirrel following the laws of nature. Henry's attempted justifications fail him, though, as he realizes that annihilation was not inevitable. His eyes now "had the expression of those of a criminal who thinks his guilt and punishment great."(44) He wonders what the crude remarks of his comrades will be when he returns to camp as a certified coward.

When he joins the group of wounded men, his feelings of guilt increase: "He was continually casting sidelong glances to see if the men were contemplating the letters of guilt he felt burned into his brow."(51) Henry envies the peculiarly happy wounded soldiers who represent his heroic ideal, and he wishes that he too had a wound, a red badge of courage. As the tattered man asks him questions about where his wound is, he realizes that he cannot be like them. He had fled, and "his late companion's chance persistency made him feel that he could not keep his crime concealed in his bosom."(59) He feels so much shame that he wishes that he were dead.

At this point, the reader sees that Henry is beginning his path toward redemption. Like Hester, he feels shame and despair for his cowardly sin, but unlike Hester, his travel toward redemption ends with the assault to his head--his red badge of courage. This badge allows him back into the camaraderie of his regiment, but it also allows him to abandon his quest for transcendence. Paralleling Dimmesdale, he lies in order to
maintain his secret of cowardice, and in doing so, aggravates his real self-perceptions. His small lie to others evolves into a gnawing, aching self-deception; for, he now sees himself superior to Wilson, who had shown his fear of death by giving Henry an envelope to send to his family, and he speaks to Wilson in a condescending manner. Henry continues to get carried away with his lie as he harangues his officers: "Don't we fight like the devil? Don't we do all that men can?"(85) Henry's lie to himself is suddenly pierced, however, when a sarcastic man remarks, "Mebbe yeh think yeh fit th' hull battle yesterday, Fleming."(86) He again sees the reality of the previous day, but he continues to take refuge in the secrecy of his sin. The red badge of courage now becomes the red badge of shame through which he is able to add more shame to his original cowardice.

In the next day's battle, Henry fights and fights well. Much to his surprise, his comrades now regard him as "a war devil,"(92) and the lieutenant is delighted with him and remarks, "By heavens, if I had ten thousand wild cats like you I could tear the stomach outa this war in less than a week!"(92) He becomes the leader of the charge and the carrier of the flag. He has suddenly transcended into a hero. After the battle, however, both Henry and the reader see that his transcendence is not realized. He recalls his public deeds which "marshed now in purple and gold,"(123) but nevertheless, as he recalls the respectful comments of his fellows, the ghost of his flight appears to him:
A specter of reproach came to him. There loomed the dogging memory of the tattered soldier—he who, gored by bullets and faint for blood, had fretted concerning an imagined wound in another; he who had loosed his last of strength and intellect for the tall soldier; he who, blind with weariness and pain, had been deserted in the field. (124)

Henry knows that he is not a true hero, and he cannot enjoy his successes because of his hidden guilt. Even though he is seen by others as the embodiment of the heroic ideal, he would never be able to see himself this way. By concealing his guilt, he condemned himself to be trapped with his own shame forever, for as "the light in his soul flickered with shame,"(124) his "vision of cruelty brooded over him," and "it clung near him always and darkened his view of these deeds in purple and gold."(124)

C. Imagery

Stephen Crane is often regarded as an impressionist, one who represents characters, scenes and moods as he visualizes them at a particular moment rather than as they are in reality. His visualizations go far beyond mere impressionism, however. Like Hawthorne and most other writers, he describes these things in a specific way for a particular purpose. He may represent an image of an object or a person in such a way as to make it represent an abstraction such as a philosophical idea, or in such a way as to give universal meaning to an experience or emotion. In The Red Badge of Courage, Crane uses this method of imagery in many different ways and on many different levels.
Similar to *The Scarlet Letter*, Crane's choice of titles is the overwhelming symbol in the novel. At the first allusion to the red badge of courage, the reader learns it to be a wound which identifies its possessor as courageous. For Henry Fleming, though, it means much more. Red represents both blood, as in the blood of Christ, and sin, as in the fires of Hell. For both the tall and the tattered soldiers the red badge is a symbol of redemption, but for Henry it becomes a symbol of his continued sin. With the badge, he is able to rationalize and subsequently dismiss his shame rather than confront it. Gaining the badge is a turning point for Henry. Before obtaining the badge Henry faces his shame, but knows that he will be viewed as a coward by his comrades. With the badge, Henry is identified by his comrades as a courageous warrior, and he turns away from his possible transcendence.

Another a dominant image throughout the novel, Nature is used to represent Henry's state of mind. The images of nature are most significant during Henry's flight. In the beginning of his flight, Nature represents peace and calm to Henry: "The insects were making rhythmical noises," and "a bird flew on light-hearted wing."(44) In the forest, it seems to Henry that "Nature had no ears."(44) Henry feels that Nature knows nothing of the war around it and is merely a "fair field holding life."(45) He is able to find comfort in the laws of Nature as enacted by the squirrel. At this point, Henry sees only good in Nature.
In contrast, Crane also shows Henry the evil in Nature. Underneath a chapel-like bough of trees, Henry discovers the remains of a fellow Union soldier with little black ants crawling over the gray skin. Through this image, Henry and the reader see that Nature can also be the giver of death. Henry now perceives the forest as evil, as "trees, confronting him, stretched out their arms and forbade him to pass."(47)

It is significant that Henry does not try to reconcile these two qualities of Nature. Instead, he sees Nature as either solely good or solely evil, much the same as he sees himself. Rather than reconciling the two within himself, he thinks of himself at times as someone good and at other times as someone sinful. By employing the images of good and evil in Nature, Crane is able to make this view of Henry stronger.

Another strong image within the novel is that of the flag in the last battle. The flag represents glory and unity; and, when Henry becomes the carrier of the flag, he becomes a part of both of these. By carrying the flag, Henry is able to look further away from individualism and, in turn, to identify himself with the Union Army. He stops thinking of himself as a young farm boy, and he thinks of himself as more of a soldier. This allows him to obtain more glory in the eyes of both himself and others. The flag also becomes a badge for Henry, as it is the way that his officers identify and compliment him.

Similarly, Crane identifies to the reader different characteristics of Henry's personality through the symbolic
qualities of other characters. He does this in part by calling many of the characters by a particular aspect of their personalities which he is emphasizing. The tall soldier represents pride and courage, the qualities of Henry's ideal. When Henry is worried about what he will do in battle, the tall soldier is unconcerned and modestly figures that he will do all right. He personifies great courage in his last minutes as he accepts his agonizing wound and death calmly and bravely. In this way, he represents what Henry can now never achieve.

In contrast, the loud soldier is represented as almost an extension of Henry. Throughout the novel, this soldier reflects briefly many of the attitudes of Henry. For example, before the first battle, he has the traditional illusions of war as courageous battles, and he vows that he will never run from them. Just before the first battle begins, though, he shows his fear, the same fear that Henry is feeling. Although his fear is mild compared to Henry's, he feels great shame because of it. In contrast to Henry, however, he is able to transcend his initial panic because of his courage to confront and to evaluate honestly his shortcoming. In the end, both fight equally bravely and well.

Likewise, the tattered soldier reflects Henry's early attitude toward war. He listens eagerly to the sergeant's lurid tales of war, "his mouth agape in yoke fashion."(50) Badly wounded in two places, he seems to be the embodiment of Henry's ideal of the wounded veteran. In fact, as the "tattered man,
fooled with dust, blood and powder stain from hair to shoes,"(49) trudges along beside him, Henry wishes that he too had a wound, a red badge of courage. This also causes the tattered soldier to be a reproach to Henry who is not wounded. His casual but searching questions about Henry's wounds cause Henry to desert his idealized self in the field when he is about to die, giving Henry another reason for self-condemnation.

Crane ends the novel with images of both Henry's glory and his shame. Henry looks at his recent battle deeds with "shining prominence,"(123) and envisions his success in the majestic colors of purple and gold. He spends some time "viewing the gilded images of memory";(123) but suddenly, he realizes that these images are gilded. He then thinks of his shame, conjuring up the images of ghosts and flames in his mind. By showing these contrasting images, Crane conveys directly and unequivocally to the reader that Henry, unlike Hester, has still not reconciled his ideal of bravery and heroism with the reality of his situation.

D. Philosophy

In his novel, Crane contrasts the philosophies of Romanticism and Realism. Unlike Romanticism which is the reconciliation of the ideal with reality, Realism attempts to present life as it actually is rather than tinge it with ideals. Realism is not concerned with a reconciliation between the ideal
and reality because the ideal does not matter—it does not exist. It is also not concerned with transcendence, because according to the realist, a person is not able to transcend reality but is influenced and immersed by it. In contrast to the life of Hester, one is a part of his or her reality and cannot rise above it.

Crane employs a realist point of view in preventing Henry from harmonizing his ideal with reality. His ideal is to be a great war hero like the Greek warriors that he has read about. He wants to possess bravery, honor, and glory. As he goes into battle, however, he is overcome by reality. Crane makes him see his true self, a self that is full of fear and cowardice. As he turns and runs from the battle, he falls dramatically from his ideal. He sees his fall and experiences great shame for his actions. As he struggles with his feelings, he begins to follow the path toward redemption; but, by giving him his red badge, Crane allows Henry a way to escape this path and never allows him the opportunity to reconcile his conflict.

Henry uses the badge as a crutch and abandons his travel toward redemption. He falls further away from his ideal when he leaves the tattered soldier in the field and when he lies to his comrades. Crane now shows Henry how overcome by the reality of his situation that there is no longer any escape. When Henry is finally successful in battle, he must still think of himself with shame because of his lies. He still sustains his idealist beliefs, but he realizes that he can never be a part of this.
ideal. Without admitting his guilt, he can not rise above this shame. Thus, he is condemned to be a part of his shameful reality forever.

This condemnation is typical of Crane's view of mankind. Unlike Hawthorne who demonstrates the potentiality of man to discover and actualize an order associated with redemption, Crane presents an unsympathetic picture of human existence. Using imagery, Crane describes man in terms of an animal-like existence. The army is described as moving insects, and the individual soldiers are described as "huge crawling reptiles" (15) and "long serpents" (15). Even the corpse with ants crawling on it is said to look like a dead fish. Henry is also depicted as having animal-like qualities when Crane states, "He was but an ordinary squirrel, too." (15) Even though Henry is compared to the innocent squirrel, he cannot have the same peaceful nature as the squirrel. Unlike animals, who are unable to think and to lie and to feel shame, Henry knows the great agony of falsehood. He knows the sins that he has committed, and with this knowledge, he is destined to merely survive rather than achieve contentment. Thus, unlike the scarlet letter which eventually represents redemption, the red badge signifies the terrible conflict and potential crisis inherent in the human situation.
IV. Conclusion

As can be seen, similarities and contrasts bind and separate Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*. The narrative frameworks of the two novels are comparable in that they both evolve around the inner conflict of the two protagonists; yet, they differ in the final outcome of the conflicts. Hester commits the sin of adultery, and not only does she have to overcome her own feelings of unworthiness, but society’s ridicule as well. After struggling with her feelings of guilt for not living up to her Puritan ideal and her feelings of justification for having acted out of pure love, she reconciles the two and so transcends into a life of contentment. Henry, on the other hand does not find this contentment. After running from battle, an act that is considered a sin in both the eyes of society and his own eyes, he, too, struggles with feelings of guilt and justification. Henry, however, takes the easy way out by lying about his sin, similar to the actions of Dimmesdale. For this reason, he, like Dimmesdale before his confession, must live a life of self-condemnation.

Both authors build their narrative around historical events, making the conflicts seem more life-like, and thus, more
significant. Likewise, both novels take place in relatively the same time period; but the world which each of the authors constructs is quite different. Hawthorne describes a world in which man is able to lead a meaningful and contented life. In this world, sin is inevitable; but, man has the means to overcome this reality by realizing his own capabilities and strength of spirit. Through this realization, man is assured of redemption. For this reason, Hester is able to reconcile her conflict and to attain self-fulfillment.

Crane, on the other hand, constructs a world where man is condemned by his sins to a life of constant torment. Crane suggests that man is similar to an animal in his actions, but is condemned by his ability to reason. Through reason, man is able to set up ideals which do not exist. Man's spirit impels him to aspire to these ideals, and when they are not attained, man's thoughts of his failure become an instrument of torment. Because of reason, man is unable to see the reality behind his actions, and thus is too ashamed to admit his actions to others. Similar to an animal, Henry follows his instinct to protect himself when he flees from battle. His reason, however, labels his actions as cowardly, and his reason condemns him to live with his shame for eternity.

The authors both employ a vast amount of imagery to support their world-views, and they use it in a similar fashion. The most dominant parallel in their use of imagery is their titles. The scarlet letter and the red badge of courage are both badges
of identification for the protagonists. Both represent sin in their use of the color red; yet, by the end of the novels, the badges have deeper meanings. The scarlet letter changes in meaning as Hester goes through the stages of her self-awareness. At the beginning of the novel, it represents her sin of adultery; but, by the end of the novel it represents her angelic qualities and her ability to overcome her conflict. Thus, it becomes a true representation of her character. The red badge of courage, however, begins as a symbol of bravery and honor, but slowly transforms into a symbol of shame. As Henry looks at the soldiers with red badges, war wounds, he sees courage and pride. Through his lie about his own wound, another fall from the ideal, the badge becomes a symbol of his shame and identifies him as a coward.

Likewise, the mode of irony is employed in each novel, serving to strengthen both the characterizations of the protagonists and the plight of human nature. Hawthorne's novelironically supports the redemptive quality of man's nature, as Hester, seen as a condemned sinner by her fellow human beings, becomes angelic. The "A," which originally signifies an adulterer, suddenly represents an angel when it is seen in the sky. By applying this upward turn to Hester's character, Hawthorne demonstrates man's capability to rise above his conflict into a higher plane of being. Crane employs his irony in an opposite manner. By the title of the novel, the reader is led to believe that the red badge represents courage.
Nevertheless, the reader's expectations are not realized, for by the end of the novel the meaning of the symbol is reversed. The red badge no longer symbolizes the good in man but, instead, comes to represent Henry's cowardice, deceit, and shame, the qualities of human nature which condemn him to a life of pain and torment.

In sum, both novels are written during the same time period, and both authors use similar literary techniques. Further, both novels treat of man's fall from his ideal and his subsequent and consequent response to it. Nevertheless, both novels present different views of human capabilities, thereby enabling the authors to indicate two main themes relevant to man's earthly situation and natural spiritual aspirations. In both cases, the ideal does not exist. But, according to Hawthorne, man can attain a higher reality through the aspiration to, fall from, and reconciliation with this ideal. Crane, on the other hand, demonstrates that man is only tormented by the aspiration to, and fall from, the ideal and he is therefore deprived of any opportunity of reconciling his earthly existence and his quest for dignity and respect. But, for both Crane and Hawthorne, the traditional view of man's dual nature remains part of the human situation that inflicts the reality of suffering, but proposes the possibilities of redemption.
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