Life at War and the Heroic Illusions Created to Cope with War: A Study of Stephen Crane and Tim O’Brien

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate School-Camden
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Graduate Program in Liberal Studies

written under the direction of
Professor Richard M. Drucker

and approved by

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Richard Drucker

Camden, New Jersey May 2011
Abstract of the Thesis

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This thesis will examine the fictional war novels, The Red Badge of Courage by
Stephen Crane and Going after Cacciato by Tim O’Brien. It will examine the heroic
illusions created by soldiers on the frontline as psychological coping mechanisms as a
means to escape the realities of war. It will also examine how Stephen Crane and Tim
O’Brien create protagonists and characters that struggle to understand the conflicts within
themselves as consequences of their developing point of view toward themselves, their
war comrades, and their society’s values and how each of these writers through observing
battlefield experience comes to question the meaning of war and its effects. Stephen
Crane and Tim O’Brien investigate the moral and cultural values of their respective
societies. Crane portrays the Victorian era O’Brien examines 1960’s America. Each novel
asks us to view their war with both irony and sympathy.
Introduction: The Civil War and the Vietnam War

The effects of war are not only brutal to the human body, but to the mind as well. Both during war and after people experience a host of physical and psychological effects. The men and women who are called upon to defend their countries enter their armies with both idealism and hope.

War is cruelty. There is no use trying to reform it. The crueler it is, the sooner it will be over.

--William Tecumah Sherman, (http://www.militaryquotes.com)

The American Civil War exploded in the spring of 1861 after decades of tensions between the northern and southern United States over issues including states’ rights versus federal authority, westward expansion, and slavery. When Republican Abraham Lincoln became president in 1860 seven states seceded from the Union to form the Confederate States of America. Four more followed after the first shots of the Civil War were fired (http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war). The American Civil War commenced in 1861 and lasted until 1865. Historic battles took place during those four years of brutal conflict between the states including battles at Bull Run (Manassas), Antietam, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and Vicksburg. The Civil War put neighbors at odds with each other and in some cases, brother against brother. By the time the war ended with the Confederate surrender in 1865, the Civil War proved to be the costliest war ever fought on American soil, with over 620,000 of 2.4 million soldiers killed, millions more injured, and the population and territory of the South devastated (http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war).
We should understand how the historical and economic context of the war is a backdrop for Stephen Crane’s characterization of the Civil War. The American Civil War had been pending for some time before Lincoln was elected president in 1860 and the people of the United States, particularly the Confederacy, were not prepared for the reality of life during wartime. This resulted in many civilians experiencing the effects of war just as keenly as the soldiers who fought in it.

The first sign that the war would be felt at home for all Americans, both North and South, was the disappearance of coinage at the onset of the war. U. S. coins were made from precious metals such as gold, silver, and copper and became scarce as fear heightened that the war would be long and expensive. It became a common practice to hoard coins, and for an economy that, for the most part, relied on coinage, without coinage commerce nearly ground to a halt.

During the Civil War, not having enough money was problematic both literally and figuratively in the North and in the South, but especially in the South. Northern blockades and attacks on railroads greatly hampered trade in the South making everyday items very difficult to obtain and inflation spiraled out of control. The price of staples such as flour, sugar, and coffee became astronomical in the South and at one point a barrel of flour cost $100.
As the blockades persisted it became obvious that the two regions needed each other. The Northerners often lacked sugar while sugarcane rooted in the canebrakes in the South because the South lacked able bodies to pick it. The Northern embargo on salt meant that the South had to produce its own salt. There were salt mines in the South, however, mining and transporting salt was extremely difficult and oftentimes impossible (http://www.thecivilwaromnibus.com/articles/62/hard-times-civilian-life-during-the-war/).

Those states that served as battleground states experienced looting of food and livestock by armies on both sides which left civilians both hungry and unable to produce food on their own land. With no livestock, no seed, and in many cases, not enough able bodies to plant and harvest, those who suffered the most particularly in regions where the war often was as closed as the nearest pasture were women, children, the disabled, and the elderly. Oftentimes homes and barns were burned to the ground by the occupying army after everything of value to the troops was looted (http://www.thecivilwaromnibus.com/articles/62/hard-times-civilian-life-during-the-war/). Those that lived in a battle zone did so in profound terror of living without food, shelter, and livestock that had been taken or destroyed and proved to be a lasting hardship on civilians as well as soldiers.

The result of the lack of food and even of salt in the South was both immediate and felt for years after the war. Illness and disease caused by malnutrition or ingesting insufficient amounts of key vitamins meant death for both soldiers and civilians and the harm caused by malnutrition did not dissipate when the war ended (http://www.thecivilwaromnibus.com/articles/62/hard-times-civilian-life-during-the-
war/). The lack of basic resources changed the way each section viewed itself, the war, and the possible outcomes. For both the North and South economic conditions made life unbearable.

While the privation of food was the most widespread and possibly worst of the sufferings inflicted on civilians during the Civil War, it was indeed not the only one. Clothing and shoes were as scarce as money to buy the materials to make them and the materials became either less valuable or disappeared altogether. People resorted to spinning and weaving their own cloth when they could get fibers to do so and fashioned shoes from shoe bark. Paper and candles became luxury items, and old wallpapers and pine knots were used when necessary (http://www.thecivilwaromnibus.com/articles/62/hard-times-civilian-life-during-the-war/).

The Confederacy could not have survived much longer than it did. It is believed that the terrible conditions experienced by most civilians in the South toward the end of the war, hastened Lee’s surrender. Those who were left at home were as tired of the fighting, the starvation, and living in fear as were the soldiers who marched to the battlefields (http://www.thecivilwarominbus.com/articles/62/hard-times-civilian-life-during-the-civil-war/).

Enlistment in the Civil War depended on the section, North or South, that the soldiers came from. In fact, many enlistees in the Civil War entered the war with fervent idealism that theirs was the just cause. Notions of heroism, duty, and a sense of obligation
motivated young men to join their respective armies. Crane’s Henry Fleming appears in
_The Red Badge of Courage_ as such a young man.

The longest military conflict in American history was the Vietnam War when
most Americans, especially our soldiers, envisioned themselves in better circumstances.
The Vietnam War resulted from the U. S. government’s Cold War-era policy to prevent
the spread of communism at home and abroad. The United States began sending financial
aid and military advisors to South Vietnam in the 1950’s in an effort to thwart a takeover
by the communist North Vietnamese, led by Ho Chi Minh. As troop levels and casualties
escalated throughout the 1960’s, the Vietnam War became increasingly unpopular on the
home front. Large-scale protests became commonplace and the war had a profound effect
on popular culture, and created a mutual distrust between the public and its leaders
(http://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war).

One of the greatest ironies in a war rich in ironies was that Washington had
moved toward a limited war in Vietnam. The Johnson administration wanted to fight this
war in “cold blood.” This meant that America would go to war in Vietnam with the
precision of a surgeon with little noticeable impact on domestic culture. A limited war
called for confined mobilization of resources, material and human, and would cause little
disruption in everyday life in America (http://vietnam.vassar.edu/overview/index.html).
After the arrival of the Cold War and an increase in nuclear weapons, a limited war made
sense to many strategic thinkers in and out of Washington. However, these goals were
never reached. The Vietnam War proved to have had a major impact on everyday life in
America, and forced the Johnson administration to weigh the domestic consequences of
its decisions every day. As the war marched on volunteers became less available for the
continuation to fight a protracted war and thus, the birth of the draft (http://vietnam.vassar.edu/overview/index.html).

As Americans soldiers continued to leave for Southeast Asia the death toll mounted, and the Johnson administration was confronted with the full weight of American anti-war sentiment. Protests erupted across the country on college campuses and in major cities initially, but by 1968 every corner of the country appeared to have felt the impact of the war (http://www.vietnam.vassar.edu/overview/index.html). At no time in American history was there such a public, unrestrained outcry against our involvement in a war.

Perhaps one of the most famous incidents in the anti-war movement was the police riot in Chicago during the 1968 Democratic National Convention. In August of 1968 hundreds of thousands of people converged in Chicago to protest American intervention in Vietnam and the leaders of the Democratic Party who continued to prosecute the war (http://vietnam.vassar.edu/overview/index.html).

Politically, the war's poor planning and "blank check" legislation led to Congress reviewing current terms of war, and passing new legislation to guarantee themselves a larger, and more clearly defined role in the planning of any future Vietnam-style conflicts (http://www.vietnam-war.ifo/history/history5.php). The War Powers Act of 1973 greatly curtailed the President's ability to commit troops to action without first obtaining Congressional approval. The use of the defoliation agent known as Agent Orange, designed to destroy the hiding places of the Viet Cong, has caused
many health maladies and birth defects to this day (http://www.vietnam-war.ifo/history/history5.php).

From a social point of view, the war was a key time in the lives of many younger Americans, especially the so-called baby boom generation. Protestor and soldier alike, the war created many strong opinions in regards to American foreign policy and the justness of war. As a result, the Vietnam was also significant in showing the degree that the public can influence government policy through mobilization and protest (http://www.vietnam-war.ifo/history/history5.php).

Service in the war, though initially unpopular, soon became respected even though the war itself was not. Past service in Vietnam became important to the election of many future American politicians. The fact that President Bill Clinton had avoided service was a major source of controversy during his election campaign, (http://www.vietnam-war.info/history/history5.php).

The United States began withdrawing its troops in 1973, and in 1975 the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon fell to North Vietnamese forces. When the Vietnam War ended it is estimated that over 58,000 American soldiers had perished (http://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war).
Stephen Crane’s and Tim O’Brien’s Writing Careers and War Experiences

He saw that it was an ironical thing for him to be running thus toward that which he had been at such pains to avoid

--Stephen Crane, (http://www.goodreads.com)

Stephen Crane, an American fiction writer and poet, was also a newspaper reporter. His novel, "The Red Badge of Courage," stands high among the world's most noteworthy books depicting warfare. After the Civil War, William Dean Howells, Henry James, and others established realism as the standard mode of American fiction. In the 1890s younger writers tried to enlarge the territory of realism with impressionist, symbolist, and even new naturalist approaches. Of these pioneers, Stephen Crane was one of the most successful and influential and was able to combine elements of all these techniques in his war novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*. Crane was exposed early to writing as a career: his mother wrote on religious topics and lectured for the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and his brother Townley worked as a newspaper reporter (http://www.bookrags.com/biography/stephen-crane/).

In 1888 Crane entered military school, where he made an impressive record on the drill field and the baseball diamond but not in the classroom. Without graduating he went to Lafayette College, then to Syracuse University. He flunked out, but whatever his academic record, his time had not been wasted: in his fraternity house Crane, aged 20, had written the first draft of *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, considered to be a pioneering naturalist work. Returning home to Asbury Park as a reporter under his brother for the *New York Tribune*, Crane attended Hamlin Garland's lectures on the realistic writers. Garland was interested in the young writer, read Crane’s manuscripts, and guided his
reading (http://www.bookrags.com/biography/stephen-crane/). In addition, as a newspaper reporter Crane realized the power of the newspaper and of the novel.

By the summer of 1893 Crane was well into what was to be his Civil War novel. As research he read Century magazine's series "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War" and, it is believed, traveled in Virginia to interview Confederate veterans. What he found missing from the history books was the actual sensation any single individual experiences in battle. This is what The Red Badge of Courage conveys. Just as Maggie represents every girl victimized by a slum environment, so Henry Fleming represents every recruit who reels through the noise and glare of war, isolated and at odds with the universe. Neither character had a name in Crane's first drafts: they are "every woman," "every man," epithets which describe characters who are buffeted by forces they neither control nor understand (http://www.bookrags.com/biography/stephen-crane/). Though there were delays--painful ones for then penniless Crane--this book became a notable success. A shortened version was serialized in the Philadelphia Press and hundreds of other newspapers in 1894. The instant critical and popular enthusiasm spread to England when the complete book was published the following year. A revised version of Maggie was issued along with an earlier novel about slum life, George's Mother, in 1896 (http://www.bookrags.com/biography/stephen-crane/). Many reviewers applauded Crane’s depiction of the harsh conditions of both slum life and war.

Crane covered the war between Greece and Turkey in 1898 for the Hearst newspapers. Crane, it appears, wanted to see if war was really as he had depicted it in Red Badge of Courage: it was. But the trip yielded mediocre war reportage and a bad

Crane’s writing has been described as realistic, symbolic, and impressionistic. An early admirer, Harold Frederic, writing in The New York Times in 1896, mentions that Crane moves quickly from detail to detail. Frederic also comments that scenes, images, and actions move impersonally and quickly. According to Frederic, because the reader “sees with (Fleming’s) eyes, and think(s) with his mind,” we fell and acknowledge the realism of this war experience (Lettis 104).
A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior, nor restrain men from doing things men have always done. If a story seems moral, do not believe it. If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been a victim of a very old and terrible lie. There is no rectitude whatsoever. There is no virtue. As a 1st rule of thumb, therefore, you can tell a true war story by its absolute and uncompromising allegiance to obscenity and evil.

--Tim Obrien, Biography “Tim O’Brien Author”

Tim O’Brien was born on October 1, 1946 in Austin, Minnesota. He is the oldest of three children born to an insurance salesman and an elementary school teacher. His father was a military veteran who fought at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Tim O’Brien was about nine when his family moved from Austin, Minnesota to Worthington, Minnesota. He earned his degree in political science from Macalester College in St. Paul, graduating summa cum laude, and planned to work in the State Department. His career plans were interrupted because he was drafted into the Army in August of 1968. Upon being drafted O’Brien gave serious consideration to dodging the draft by going to Canada to escape a war he did not believe in. He decided against going to Canada because he knew his family and friends would disapprove of him doing so. O’Brien would later call himself a coward for not following his first mind to dodge the draft notice by going to Canada.

Tim O’Brien was drafted into the Army in August of 1968 after graduating from Macalester College with a BA in political science. Upon being drafted O’Brien gave
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Tim O’Brien served in the Army from 1968 to 1970 and did one year as an infantryman in Vietnam. He chronicles this period of his life and his ambivalence about it in his memoir, *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up and Ship Me Home*. This memoir was based on articles he wrote for his hometown newspaper while he was stationed in Vietnam. O’Brien was part of the infamous, the so-called “unlucky” Americal division because of its participation in the My Lai massacre in 1968. However, he became a foot soldier in that division after the My Lai massacre (http://galenet.galegroup.cm.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu./serlet/LitRC?vern=3&QP=contia ...

Upon returning home from Vietnam in 1970 O’Brien went to graduate school at Harvard and garnered an internship at the *Washington Post*. He eventually left Harvard to embark on a career as a reporter for the *Washington Post*. A major influence on Tim O’Brien’s decision to become a writer was his experiences in the Vietnam conflict (http://galenet.galegroup.cm.proxy.libraries.rutgers.edu./serlet/LitRc?vern=3&QP=contia ...

Most of O’Brien’s writing is often described as metafiction or fiction that mixes fantasy and realism. It is his belief that storytelling truth is very often truer than the “real” truth. O’Brien also believes that people create and live their lives through memory and imagination (http://nvcc.edu/home/ataormina/novels/guides/authors/obrien.htm). The central theme in his books is one of courage which he equates with having moral integrity and the strength to take control of your life and do what you know to be ethically right. In all of Tim O’Brien’s books the characters deal with both the willingness to serve in Vietnam, but the unwillingness to die. His novels pose the question of which choice is the most decent and courageous (http://nvcc.edu/home/ataormina/novels/guides/authors/obrien.htm).
The Literary Genre of the War Story

The short story is formally defined as brief prose narrative to be distinguished from longer, more expansive narrative forms such as the novel, epic, saga, and romance. This genre is usually concerned with a single effect conveyed in a single significant episode or scene and involving a limited number of characters, sometimes only one. The form encourages economy of setting and concise narration; character is disclosed in action and dramatic encounter but seldom fully developed. A short novel may concentrate on the creation of mood rather than the telling of a story. In The Red Badge of Courage, Crane employs these elements to dramatize Henry Fleming’s psychological disorientation, moral conflict, and developing point of view in The Red Badge of Courage.

Simultaneously with the developments in the short story in the 19th century, realistic fiction in the United States and in the short story in particular was aspiring to the function of investigative journalism, reporting on unfamiliar, unattractive, or neglected aspects of the contemporary situation with scrupulous fidelity and realism. In France, Prosper Mérimée can be regarded as one of the pioneers of the short story of detached, dispassionate observation, a technique also employed in the stories of Guy de Maupassant, whose special skill was to capture a particularly illuminating and revealing moment, or slice of life, in the unremarkable, perhaps dreary or sordid lives of ordinary people.
continental fiction, both Maupassant and Mérimée created detached, ironic modes of narrations.

Crane also models his fiction on the observationist perspectives of Prosper Mérimée and Maupassant as well as the reportage style of journalism. Critics observe that Crane develops the short fiction genre in ways that would appeal to his public.

The war novel is defined as a novel in which the primary action takes place in a field of armed combat, or in a domestic setting (or home front) where the characters are preoccupied with the preparation for, or recovery from war. It is sometimes referred to as military fiction (http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/War_novel). Tim O’Brien’s *Going after Cacciato* contains numerous elements which dramatize and problematize these military activities during Vietnam, especially the build-up of troops, the encampment, and the endless waiting for battle or leave.

The war novel’s roots lie in the epic poetry of the classical and medieval periods, especially Homer’s *The Iliad*, Virgil’s *The Aeneid*, the Old English saga *Beowulf*, and different versions of the legends of King Arthur. All of these epics were concerned with preserving the history of the conflicts between different societies, while providing an accessible narrative that could reinforce the collective memory of a people (http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/War_novel). Other important influences on the war novel included the tragedies of such classical dramatists as Euripides and Seneca, and in Renaissance dramas by Christopher Marlow, and Shakespeare. Shakespeare’s *Henry V* provided a model for how the history, tactics, and ethics of war could be combined in service of a national mythology.
Romances and satires in Early Modern Europe—Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* and Miguel de Cervanates’s *Don Quixote* also contain elements of military heroism, but comment ironically on the elements of vanity and pride inherent in military idealism. In terms of imagery and symbolism, many modern war novels (especially those supporting an anti-war perspective) take their cue from Dante’s depiction of Hell in *The Inferno*, John Milton’s account of the war in Heaven in *Paradise Lost*, or the Apocalypse as depicted in the *Book of Revelation*. Crane’s references to animality and O’Brien’s references to disease and disfigurement reflect a sense of these apocalyptic and ironic perspectives, as do their machine and jungle descriptions.

The prose fiction novel rose to prominence in the seventeenth century, the war novel began to develop its modern form, although any early novels featuring war were picaresque satires in which the soldier was a rakish rather than a realistic figure. Elements of the picaro persist in the modern characterizations in writers as diverse as Norman Mailer and Joseph Heller.

The war novel and the war short story both came of age during the nineteenth century at the same time Crane wrote *The Red Badge of Courage*. Works such a Stendhal’s *The Charterhouse of Parma*, featuring the Battle of Waterloo, Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, about the Napoleonic Wars in Russia, and Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*, about the American Civil War, established the conventions of the modern war novel. All of these works feature realistic depictions of major battles, visceral and bloody scenes of wartime horrors and atrocities, and insights into the nature
of heroism, cowardice, and morality during wartime
(http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/War_novel).

This tradition continued in World War II. The Vietnam War attracted a large
number of novelists. The first novel to explore the origins of the Vietnam War in the
French colonial atmosphere of the 1950’s was Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American*,
which deals with the ethics of war. Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* is a cycle of
Vietnam short stories that can be read like a novel. *The Sorrow of War* by Bao Ninh is a
very emotional account of the war from the Vietnamese perspective
(http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/War_novel).
Stephen Crane’s and Tim O’Brien’s novels are representative of the modern war novel genre. Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage* and Tim O’Brien’s *Going after Cacciato* are fictional war novels with real war settings. Crane uses the Civil War as his setting and O’Brien uses the Vietnam War. The protagonists in the novels are very similar in character and deal with similar effects of war. Both characters are young immature, youths who enter wars with idealistic views only to have their ideologies and personal perspectives about war challenged.

*The Red Badge of Courage* is about a young man, Henry Fleming, who enlists to fight in the Civil War against his mother’s wishes. Henry has romanticized the notion of war and fighting on the battlefield having being influenced by Greek classics such as the *Iliad*. But all of Henry’s ideas of war are challenged when he actually experiences war as an infantryman. The horror and brutalities of war sends Henry into psychological turmoil as he ponders a very vital question: run away as a coward and escape death, or stay and fight on the front lines as an honorable soldier. Henry believes in the war effort but he fears he lacks the courage to ignore his survival instinct. When faced with the reality of his battle Henry’s survival instincts takes precedence and he runs. However, he anguishes over his decision to flee from battle and returns to his unit and fights in his second battle. During Henry’s flight from his first battle he is inadvertently gets hit on the head by another fleeing soldier. This head wound is Henry’s little “red badge of courage” (battle wound) which gains him re-entry into his regiment with no questions asked. In his second encounter with front line battle Henry charges forth and fights fiercely. He even continues firing on the enemy after his comrades have ceased fire and when a color-bearer falls Henry picks up the flag and marches on. It is this action that gains Henry
praise from his fellow soldiers and his lieutenant. Henry doesn’t reveal how he actually
got the head wound because his cowardice would be discovered. Instead, he makes the
wound work in his favor and uses it to a step toward valor and heroism. His
psychological battle with himself is over. It took him from fear, to cowardice, and finally
maturity and understanding.

One interesting, yet not obvious detail in Stephen Crane’s The Red Badge of
Courage is the protagonist’s last name—“Fleming,” (Sadler, 372). Sadler notes that the
base word of “Fleme,” when used as an intransitive verb according to the Oxford English
Dictionary, means, “To flee, run away.” And “Fleming,” when used as a verbal
substantive, means “one who puts to flight,” (373). Sadler notes further the “Fleme”
when used as a transitional verb means “to cause to flee, put to flight; to drive away,
drive out, chase; hence to banish, exile; rarely, to reject (a proposal), (373). Accordingly,
Henry’s surname can be associated with acts both of cowardice and heroism, (Sadler,
373).

Henry is worried that his surname could become synonymous with coward if his
comrades ever find out that he fled from battle (Sadler, 373). As noted by R. W. Stallman
in his Ominbus, Henry’s surname is never mentioned until the end of Chapter 11 and that
this is the first time that the hero names himself and significantly, no one else has uttered
his last name either (Sadler, 373). Sadler states further that this delayed appearance of
Henry’s surname becomes even more significant we realize that Crane has deleted the
names of other characters in the final manuscript possibly because he intended to use the
name as a subtle device for delineating Henry’s psychological development in the novel,
and delayed introducing Henry’s surname in order to insure that it would receive special attention (Sadler, 373). Crane’s play of meanings is also a key to the instability of the hero’s position in the battle. Both short stories and novels about war contain similar elements, including plot, characterization, imagery, and intertextuality. For example, what Sadler proposes about Henry’s surname can be evidenced by looking at Chapter 11 in the novel. Henry first reveals his full name in an atmosphere of deep humiliation and disgrace. It is at the end of Chapter 11 that we learn that “he imagined the whole regiment saying: “Where is Henry Fleming: He run, didn’t he? ‘e? Oh, my!” (Crane, 59). One can deduce from this thought that Henry has come to terms with himself as coward who ran away but is more concerned about the “consequences of his fall,” (Crane, 58). Henry is worried about what others will think and say about him. His name could become “a slang phrase” if his fellow soldiers ever discover that he ran from battle (Sadler, 373). We also learn in Chapter 11 that Henry “recalled various persons who would be quite sure to leave him no peace about it. They would doubtless question him with sneers, and laugh at his stammering hesitation. In the next engagement they would try to keep watch of him to discover when he would run,” (Crane, 59).

According to Sadler, there are seven other references in The Red Badge of Courage, three of which are associated with cowardice and five associated with courage (376). Much less extensively discussed or noted by critics is the fact that O’Brien’s protagonist, Paul Berlin, also has a surname that would suggest (or used to) that he is a soldier divided against himself (Griffith, 1). Griffith is referencing the division of Berlin, Germany until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Additionally, the name Cacciato, part of the title of Tim O’Brien war novel, Going after Cacciato, means “the hunted” in
Italian, (http://www.wordreference.com/iten/cacciato). As the reader of *Going after Cacciato* will discover, Cacciato, the American soldier, becomes the prey of other American soldiers.

A debate over the meaning of *The Red Badge of Courage* has continued as long as debates about the Civil War. The central issue in this debate is whether Crane’s intention is for the reader to take the protagonist’s final assessment of himself straightforwardly or ironically (Schaefer, 104). Schaefer notes that on his first day of battle, Henry Fleming flees his regiment in terror and endures a variety of physical and emotional changes including being clubbed in the head by another panic-stricken soldier and fearing that his cowardice will be discovered by his fellow soldiers. Fleming fears the possibility of great shame and humiliation. But he returns to his unit the same evening of his flight and finds his comrades believe he was “separated” from them during the fighting and he was injured by enemy fire. We learn that on the second day of battle Henry fights fiercely and after being praised by his comrades and superior officers he finally deems himself a hero and a man (104). John J. McDermott is representative of the critics who argue that Crane wants the reader to perceive Henry as a hero and a man also viewing his actions on the second day of battle “a final pattern of courageous action” and thus “genuine Heroic,” (Schaefer, 104). However, Weihong Julia Zhu does not agree with McDermott. Zhu offers one of the most recent statements of the opposing view, arguing that Henry’s courage is “absurd” on several counts one being “vanity”—his desire to gain praise from his peers and superiors as opposed to the “righteous inducement” of true mental or moral force (Schaefer, 104). Zhu analyzes Fleming’s behavior from a psychological
perspective. Fleming’s egotism is cultural and designed to enhance himself in his own eyes and his comrades’ eyes.

Much of the negative critiques of Henry’s self-assessment focus on the nature of the courage he displays. For example, Howard Horsford suggests that Henry’s supposed bravery on the second day is ultimately no different from this flight on the first in that neither behavior stems from “conscious, willed intention.” Fleming’s flight results from fear, while his courage is the result of an equally involuntary upwelling of the opposite emotion, rage (Schaefer, 105). Perhaps both emotions are involuntary; however, Fleming is driven to achieve valor by accepting that the illusion of heroism is worthwhile.

However, support for the negative critiques of Crane’s depiction of Henry’s second day of battle is widespread. Clearly, Henry became vain and egotistical before and after the second day of fighting by judging himself only on the basis of what others can see rather than his own moral sense (Schaefer, 105). As such, the ending of *The Red Badge of Courage* can be read as ambiguous or ironic.

A number of critics such as Philip Beidler contend that the negative judgment of Henry is in the minds of the readers operating out of certain twentieth-century paradigms of courage rather than in the text itself. Beidler argues that the reader must keep in mind the nineteenth-century concepts of heroism, both romantic and idealistic and Darwinian or naturalistic, out of which Crane is writing. But even within twentieth century discourses of battlefield ethics and courage Henry’s action might be considered normal rather than deficient (Schaefer, 106).
Schaefer contends that Henry’s self-assessment as a hero is at least one of the four of Crane’s “mysteries of heroism” why men such as Henry Fleming and Fred Collins (From Crane’s “A Mystery of Heroism”) are willing to risk their lives for the sake of vanity; where the courage to perform a truly selfless act comes from; and, how Fleming can possibly see himself as a hero, and how Collins fails to do so (111). He bases his view on a close reading of *The Red Badge of Courage* that combines the separate insights of a number of other critics, and on the portrayal of heroics and manhood that Crane offers in “A Mystery of Heroism,”, the first Civil War story Crane wrote after *The Red Badge of Courage* (104). Schaefer’s ironic interpretation seems accurate as does his observation, but no single critic has probed the full depths of Crane’s interrogation of these subjects.

Tim O’Brien’s *Going after Cacciato* is about the Vietnam War and the role that memory and imagination as psychological processes that function to create a safe zone for a soldier in a war. The story is about a never seen young soldier named Cacciato who decides to lay down his rifle and go AWOL by walking from Vietnam to Paris through Asia for a peace talk. The events that ensue after Cacciato’s desertion are told from the protagonist’s Paul Berlin, point of view. Paul Berlin is also a young, frighten, and disillusioned soldier who is part of Cacciato’s squad that is in pursuit of him and is dealing with the some of the many psychological traumas that Crane’s Henry Fleming does, such as fear, courage, and a rationalization for why they are soldiers.

Tim O’Brien observes that soldiers react in what we can interpret as in the very same way in Vietnam in his book, *The Things They Carried*. In Chapter 1 O’Brien says:
They carried all the emotional baggage of men who might die. Grief, terror, love, longing, these were intangibles, but the tangibles had their own mass and specific gravity, they had tangible weight. They carried shameful memories. They carried the common secret of cowardice barely restrained, the instinct to run or freeze or hide, and in many respects this was the heaviest burden of all, for it could never be put down, it required perfect balance and perfect posture. They carried their reputations. They carried the soldier’s greatest fear, which was the fear of blushing. Men killed, and died, because they were embarrassed not to. It was that had brought them to the war in the first place, nothing positive, no dreams of glory or honor, just to avoid the blush of dishonor. They died so as not to die of embarrassment (20-21).

The characters in Tim O’Brien’s novels spend quite a bit of time contemplating courage. This is not an unusual subject for Vietnam stories says Martin Naparsteck in an interview with Tim O’Brien. But Naparsteck contends that O’Brien handles the subject differently than other writers. Naparsteck notes that one symbol that comes up a lot with others writers is John Wayne but noticed that O’Brien never mentions John Wayne in his works and does not write of courage as something that drew him to Vietnam. According to Naparsteck, O’Brien handles courage in a more realistic way (1991). O’Brien’s response to Naparsteck was that courage is a very complicated subject; that it is hard to know what to say. O’Brien responded that categorizing courage was easy. For example, there is moral courage versus physical courage but even that seems to be too simple (1991). Breaking courage down into categories of John Wayne and Socrates seems really artificial to O’Brien. To O’Brien, courage, like everything else, interpenetrates the entire fabric of a life. If you take a strand out and say this is courage and this is something else it violates a central humanness (1991).

In speaking of his own personal experience in Vietnam, O’Brien told Naparsteck that he hated the Vietnam War and did not want to go. He went on to say that he never longed or hoped to find out if he had the potential to charge a bunker like some of the
other guys did. O’Brien said he never really understood it, starting with his basic training. O’Brien still has a difficult time trying to understand why guys would want to die or risk the chance of dying. The point O’Brien was making is that his concerns are not those of other people and his writing probably reflects that (1991). During the interview, Naparsteck also noted that O’Brien’s characters, although greatly concerned about courage, do not reach any conclusions about it; that O’Brien does not state that one type of courage is better than another. O’Brien’s responded that the best literature is always explorative. He explained that it was almost like Platonic dialogue where you search for the answers but never find them. O’Brien said if you knew what courage is, if you had a great philosophical explication of courage, you would not write fiction, you would write philosophically. O’Brien argues that fiction is a way of testing possibilities and testing hypotheses, and not defining (1991). O’Brien told Naparsteck that more than anything the work is a way of him saying, yes, courage is clearly important in this character’s life; he thinks about its importance in circumstances; the work is a way of searching for courage, finding out what it is. According to O’Brien this is the case in Cacciato where there is a search for courage for him to walk away from the war as well as being a kind of search for what courage really is, or what is the courageous thing to do (1991).

O’Brien’s work has often been referred to as “magical realism,” a narrative technique where the line of distinction of what is real and what is fantasy is vague. Naparsteck asked O’Brien if he thought that Cacciato fit that description. O’Brien responded that he did not know. O’Brien’s regards the term as a shorthand way of saying something that is much more complicated than that. O’Brien also said that no writer wants to be grouped in any particular category (1991). He told Naparsteck that writing is
individualistic, a creative enterprise, and a writer wants to make an individual, creative statements that is unrelated to anything that has been said before or afterward but at the same time totally related not just to one thing, but to everything (1991). O’Brien defined “magical realism” as shorthand for imagination and memory and how they interlock, for what realism is, for what is real and not real (1991).

Naparsteck commented that observation post scenes in Cacciato seem almost directly essays but one of them talks about how to use the imagination. Paul Berlin is not really dreaming, he is wide awake and controlling what he is thinking about and what he thinks makes up half of the novel (1991). O’Brien responded that dreams are dangerous and that Berlin was indeed awake, only alone and staring and the beach and thinking. Berlin is imagining in a way anyone does on occasions (1991). O’Brien responded the same about the observation post scenes in Cacciato when interviewed by Eric Schroeder. He told Schroeder that we live in our heads a lot, especially during stressful and perilous situations. O’Brien emphasized that it is an escape mechanism as well as a way of dealing with reality (128). O’Brien also told Schroeder that half of Cacciato is in a naturalistic mode but he also treated fantasy as fully real. Early on in Cacciato O’Brien attempted to blur the distinction between what is real and what is imagined so that the reader thinks that all these things are actually happening (Schroeder, 128). An example he used to make his point is the falling into a tunnel. It is written as if it is actually happening. As O’Brien says, “Odd things happen. What’s this guy doing living in a tunnel?” (128). O’Brien told Schroeder that the reader feels the same sensation he does when he slips into a daydream and then out. The fantasy section is not treated in an Alice in
Wonderland-ish kind of way, as if fill with goblins, hobbits, and fantasy creatures, but very realistically, as straight declarative prose (128).

O’Brien emphasizes to Schroeder that there is more to than that. As he stated in the Naparsteck interview, it is how the memory and imagination interpenetrate, interlock (1991). Paul Berlin will be remembering men dying in the tunnel and his memories set off his imagination then, suddenly, he starts to imagine the trek to Paris has fallen into a tunnel. The way that memory and imagination is what is important to O’Brien. He also related to Schroeder that a person’s imagination is also a way of setting goals or objectives and figuring our purposes (Schroeder, 128).

According to O’Brien, Paul Berlin is engaged in the same process. Berlin is using his imagination to figure out whether he would be happy running from a war or not, if he would be happy living in exile. Would he find peace of mind and contentment, would he feel that he had betrayed his country, that his reputation has been undermined, his family? This imagined journey is Berlin’s way of asking himself the question, “Could I physically do it?” It is a test of how to behave and what to do (Schroeder, 128).

O’Brien says that the imagined journey after Cacciato is more than a way of escaping from the war in his head, it is also a way of asking the questions, “Should I go after Cacciato, really? Should I follow him off into the jungle toward Paris? Could I live with myself doing that?” He is using his imagination as a heuristic tool to a goal, something we can use to help set goals for ourselves. O’Brien goes on to say that we use the outcomes of our imaginings all the time in the real world (Schroeder, 129). The central theme of Cacciato, O’Brien told Schroeder, has to do with how we use our
imaginations to cope with situations around us, not just to deal with them psychologically but more importantly, to deal with them philosophically and morally (129).

Schroeder agreed with O’Bien that Cacciato is more about coming to peace with oneself and making decisions that make one a man than about war. Thus, it is significant that Cacciato and Paul Berlin are running to Paris because Paris was the center of the peace talks (136). He asked O’Brien if that had been a conscious choice and he responded that it was. O’Brien said that is why he largely chose Paris as a destination, that he wanted to end the book with a peace scene. He commented further that in every novel that has to be a central tension if the story is going to be any good. In Cacciato it has to do with how Berlin is going to resolve his philosophical dilemma. Is he going to run, or is he going to stay? What is he going to decide? (136)

Cacciato, says O’Brien, is one long decision; a sense of moral decision making so he chose Paris not only because the peace talks were in progress there but also for all kinds of metaphorical reasons—City of Light and Justice, the symbol of civilization, the Golden City, and because the Peace of Paris was signed there (Schroeder, 136). It seemed like the perfect site to O’Brien for many reasons. According to O’Brien, choosing Paris also made psychological sense. For guys like Cacciato or Paul Berlin it would be the obvious place to go. Neither one of them are highly intellectually types. They are naïve many ways and for a naïve person Paris is the obvious place (Schroeder, 136).

Patrick A. Smith also acknowledges that courage is a primary theme in Cacciato (75). In chapter 15, “Falling through a Hole in the Road to Paris,” Obrien challenges his protagonist's ability to continue the story. Berlin had already questioned his own courage
in the face of failure and death in the fourth “Observation Post.” The upshot of Berlin’s nighttime philosophizing is a contradiction that informs many, if not all, of his actions, argues Smith (75). In the beginning of chapter 15 the narrator informs you that:

The issue, of course, was courage. How to behave. Whether to flee or fight or seek an accommodation. The issue was how to act wisely in spite of fear. Spitting the deep-running biles: That was true courage. He believed this. And he believed the obvious corollary: The greater a man’s fear, the greater his potential courage (Cacciato, 80).

Smith argues that Berlin invokes the ideas of Doc Peret, the platoon’s resident philosopher, who assert that the center of courage is deep inside a person, a biological rather than psychological device that can be called upon in time of great stress (75). At the end of the novel Berlin tackles the subject of courage at great length but does not seem to find resolution other than to show his ability to finally admit his biggest fear during his tour in Vietnam, dying (75). Only when Berlin expresses his fears openly, then does the dream remain alive. The last two words in Cacciato, “Maybe so,” (336) are relevant not only in the context of Cacciato’s quest, but Berlin’s own quest, to become a more attentive, responsible soldier, to handle himself in battle, and to survive. In order to resolve any of the issues in question he like the other characters in the novel must be able to distinguish truth from fiction (Smith, 75).

Maria S. Bonn argues that Cacciato is not only about courage but more so a consideration of the courageousness of writing war stories (8). As he did in his book, If I Die in Combat, O’Brien again ponders the relationship between fiction and experience, this time in a more explicit and self-conscious manner; and he attempts to discover the kind of stories that we must tell for them to have a real efficacy in our lives (Bonn, 8).
Smith asserts that through *Cacciato*, O’Brien explores his own guilt at being grouped by association with the Americans who perpetrated the massacre at My Lai (although mentioned elsewhere by name in O’Brien’s fiction, the action remains nameless here), where O’Brien spent the majority of his time in-country. Benjamin Goluboff claims that only through the novel’s realist context does the subsequent fanciful chase of the novel’s title gain meaning (Smith, 63). O’Brien emphasizes the legacy of hatred and violence that Calley and his men left behind at My Lai, and Berlin’s escapist fantasy has as much to do with how he perceives the last six months of his tour of duty as it does his desire to leave Vietnam for the paradisiacal streets of Paris in search of Cacciato: “Paul Berlin’s Batangan Peninsula Observation Post stands on not only dangerous ground but also on terrain that recalls a shameful history,” Goluboff writes.” “The persistent return of “O’Brien’s narratives to Ba Lang An is a gesture of acknowledgement, perhaps of repentance for that history,” (Smith, 63). In other words, Smith is suggesting that *Cacciato* serves a coping mechanism for O’Brien.

In 1980, in response to the veterans of the Vietnam War and the militancy of the antiwar movement, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) acknowledged the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The diagnosis of PTSD was then included in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders). The feminist movement was influential in this development as well due to their advocacy for a diagnosis in recognition of the trauma of rape (http://www.helpstartshere.org/current-trends/veterans-affairs-current-trends-about-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd-and-brain-injury-in-iraqs-war-veterans.html).
The DSM IV-R (2000), in short, describes PTSD as the “re-experiencing of an extremely traumatic event that the person has experienced or witnessed, accompanied by symptoms of increased arousal (such as sleep disturbance, irritability, hypervigilance, difficulty concentrating) and by avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing,” (http://www.helpstartshere.org/current-trends/veterans-affairs-current-trends-about-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd-and-brain-injury-in-iraqs-war-veterans.html).

After the Vietnam War ended, at least 30 percent of Vietnam combat veterans suffered from PTSD: flashbacks to horrible near-death situations were common. A study conducted in 2003 involved 6,200 soldiers who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan several months before. Research was conducted by a team of social scientists at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (http://www.helpstartshere.org/current-trends/veterans-affairs-current-trends-about-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd-and-brain-injury-in-iraqs-war-veterans.html). The results of that study indicated that one in six of the veteran exhibited symptoms of PTSD, major depression, or anxiety; 12 percent had symptoms of PTSD alone. (These figures are an underestimate as the developing trauma rose in proportion to the number of instances of combat in which the soldier had engaged (http://www.helpstartshere.org/current-trends/veterans-affairs-current-trends-about-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd-and-brain-injury-in-iraqs-war-veterans.html).

A more recent Post-Development Health Reassessment that is administered to all service members revealed that 38 percent of regular soldiers and 31 percent of Marines report psychological symptoms. Among members of the National Guard, the figure rises to 49 percent. Those who had served repeated deployments were at extremely high risk of problems and the toll on their family members was great
The exact rate of PTSD in women veterans is unknown. Studies conducted after the Gulf War concluded that female service members were more likely than their male counterparts to develop PTSD. This is consistent with the 2 to 1 ratio of female to male PTSD sufferers in the general population. According to the Pentagon Task Force report, males with psychological symptoms from battle, however, are three times more likely to be diagnosed as suffering from PTSD (http://www.helpstartshere.org/current-trends/veterans-affairs-current-trends-about-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd-and-brain-injury-in-iraqs-war-veterans.html). One explanation for this may be cultural expectations that make it difficult for society and mental health providers to recognize women as combatants. Also, there is a tendency to diagnose women a shaving depression, anxiety, and borderline personality disorder instead of combat-related PTSD (http://www.helpstartshere.org/current-trends/veterans-affairs-current-trends-about-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd-and-brain-injury-in-iraqs-war-veterans.html).

There are several reasons why a more severe impact to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars is expected than to previous wars. (1) The experience of combat, engagement in gun battles, and handling the bodies of dead comrades is a constant in these wars, (2) the experience of killing people at close range is a frequent occurrence, (3) extended lengths of service with only short period of rest and recuperation in between are taking a psychological toll on soldiers; and (4) many of the injuries in these wars are to the brain (http://www.helpstartshere.org/current-trends/veterans-affairs-current-trends-about-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd-and-brain-injury-in-iraqs-war-veterans.html).
In wars prior to Vietnam and its official recognition as a clinical condition, PTSD was called “battle fatigue” or “shell shock” (http://articles.sfgate.com/200506-22/news/17378506_1_ptsd-post-traumatic-stress-disorde...).
Conclusion

Stephen Crane had never fought in a war and was born six years after the Civil War but the intensity of the war still echoed in American culture when he wrote *The Red Badge of Courage*. Over 600,000 men lost their lives in the Civil War, making the violence of it unprecedented. Crane, unlike his contemporaries writing about the war, does not examine large-scale socio-political conflicts between the Union and Confederate states. His novel gives the very limited viewpoints of infantrymen in a fictitious Union regiment.

Tim O’Brien’s novel, *Going after Cacciato*, won the National Book Award at the time its publication in 1978 and literary critics still seem to be captivated by the book. The novel is one of the few novels that tell a true war story. Obrien, like Crane, does not focus on socio-political issues of war in his novels. In *Going after Cacciato* O’Brien focuses on the psychological analysis of the effects war has on the protagonist in the novel.

Both Henry Fleming in *The Red Badge of Courage* and Paul Berlin in *Going after Cacciato* struggle with the identical issues of courage and fear, what is morally right and wrong. Both characters enter their war with a sense of romanticism and idealism only to have their view of war crushed by the realities of war. Crane and O’Brien combine fantasy and fiction, by having Fleming and Berlin use their imagination to create fantasies as a coping mechanism to cope with the realities of war and, if only momentarily, escape from them. Paul Berlin, like Henry Fleming, uses his imagination as
a way of coping with his emotions and as an escape from his situation, one that neither one of them really wanted to be in but had to be in.

The *Red Badge of Courage* and *Going after Cacciato* are both highly acclaimed fictional works of war that delve into the psychological effects of war and how experiencing its realities can cause one to question one’s individual philosophical views of life and how to survive in extreme situations. One novel was authored by a man who had never seen battle and the other by an experienced soldier. Both novels reflect and question the cultural and personal values of their society’s attitudes toward war, conflict, courage, heroism, and ultimately how to live an ethical life.

These stories also pose another question, “Can stories save us?” As the last line in Tim O’Brien’s *Going after Cacciato* reads, “Maybe so.” Tim O’Brien is living proof of that possibility. He is still here and writing stories that may have helped save him, although still coping with the psychological issues of the Vietnam War.
Works Cited


