



DARKER DIMENSIONS OF WAR: A STUDY OF STEPHEN CRANE'S *THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE*

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ABSTRACT

Courageous and loyal troops distinguish the Romantic era. Stephen Crane contends that genuine soldiers do not necessarily possess bravery. The setting of *The Red Badge of Courage* is the American Civil War. It focuses on Henry Fleming, the central character, who undergoes a sense of fear and anxiety upon encountering the enemy on the battlefield. He lacks perfection as a hero due to his persistent self-doubt. He harbours aspirations of attaining the magnificence of being a soldier but swiftly realises that warfare is characterised by disorder rather than grandeur. There has been a persistent notion that combat is a romanticized display of heroism. However, in his book, Crane effectively refutes these misconceptions. Crane demonstrates the realism of conflict by contrasting romanticized ideas of fighting with its realities.

Keywords: Civil war, chaos, bravery, realism, and youngsters.

Introduction

Stephen Crane (1871-1900) was an American author, poet, and journalist best known for his unique and realistic representations of combat and war. His most important work, *The Red Badge of Courage*, published in 1895, is considered a foundational work in the category of War literature. His writing job took him to cover battles such as the Greco-Turkish War and the Spanish-American War, providing him with first-hand experiences that inspired his thoughts on war. He is highly acclaimed for his ability to provide a deep understanding of the human mind, realistically depict reality, and employ groundbreaking storytelling methods, establishing himself as an important personality in American literature during the late 19th century.

Discussion

The realism literary movement thrived from 1865 to 1900, following the American Civil War. It exhibits a stark contrast to its forerunner, Romanticism. According to William Harmon and Hugh Holman, “Where romanticists transcend the immediate to find the ideal, and naturalists plumb the actual or superficial to find the scientific laws that control its actions, realizes center their attention to a remarkable degree on the immediate, the

here and now, the specific action, and the verifiable consequence.

Crane portrays the book with a particular emphasis on the genuine aspects of life. Crane utilizes the literary technique of realism in the novel to portray a young man's initial experience in warfare. A realistic portrayal of a conflict is a literary or creative depiction of war that highlights the cultural setting in which it takes place. The soldiers and citizens depicted in this picture of conflict are intended to be portrayed realistically and accurately. The book showcases depictions of the psychological and physical anguish experienced by troops, along with the impact of war on communities and families. Additionally, it portrays the bitter context of the battle, encompassing prejudices and biases, and highlights how warfare intensifies these tensions. “*The Red Badge of Courage* has a distinctive style, often described as naturalistic, realistic, impressionistic or a mixture of the three” (Kent 125).

The protagonist of the novel is Henry Fleming. In the opening, he is an immature and inexperienced soldier in the army, brimming with romantic notions about warfare and fame. He undergoes a significant transformation throughout the narrative, resulting in many alterations to his character. Initially, he is portrayed as a



youthful individual who struggles to reconcile his romanticized notions of warfare with its harsh and cruel actuality.

To quote:

Absurd ideas took hold of him. He thought that he did not relish the landscape. It threatened him. A coldness swept over his back, and his trousers indeed felt that they were not fit for his legs at all (Crane 47).

Subsequently, Henry conquers his apprehension regarding the conflict and reflects upon his courage, which he perceives as a source of disgrace. Furthermore, he raises doubts about the authenticity of the battle and ponders the value of engaging in it. Despite his mother's opposition, he enlisted in the military early. He harbours aspirations of attaining the magnificence of being a soldier but soon realises that warfare is characterised by disorder rather than grandeur. Crane's portrayal of war as a mechanism that alters and controls all aspects and individuals effectively demonstrates the profound sorrow of war throughout the entire work.

Identity is a recurring theme throughout the narrative, with debates occurring in various battle scenes. Crane asserts that an individual's distinctiveness is subordinated amid a conflict in favor of

collective identity. The young soldier transforms warfare, transitioning from an individual to an integral part of the military apparatus. Under these circumstances, the soldier comprehends that safeguarding the entire battalion takes precedence above ensuring their safety. It is clearly stated in the following:

Directly, he was working at his weapon, as if it were an automatic affair. He suddenly lost concern for himself and forgot to look at a menacing fate. He became not a man but a member... He was welded into a common personality which was dominated into a common personality which was dominated by a single desire (Crane 33).

Fleming sees war as a model from the very beginning of his writing. He perceives warfare as a method of acquiring renown and achieving heroism. He quickly becomes aware of the true essence of war as he witnesses the carnage and destruction in his surroundings. All of his beliefs regarding battle are proven to be incorrect. He contends that the principles governing human existence are ineffectual in times of strife. War is neither glamorous nor facile. He acquires additional proficiencies as a soldier to thrive in combat situations.

Civil War, Chaos, Bravery, Realism, and Youngsters.

Courage is the ability to confront and overcome one's concerns. Henry, a farm resident, harbors aspirations of becoming a war hero and possesses an idealized perception of bravery. Being a soldier in the Union Army during the American Civil War exposed him to warfare, which altered his perception of courage. His initial definition of courage is the willingness to confront and participate in war. He is confident that he will achieve great military valour once he joins the military. He lacks awareness of his ability to cope with the pressures of fighting until he arrives at the camp. He perceives the conflict as a means to assess his courage and see if he satisfies his criteria for mediocrity. The monarch was incapable of escaping the dispute in this approximate calculation.

Henry is astounded by the realities he faces when actively participating in an authentic conflict. He traverses the battlefield with the agility and speed of a rabbit. Nevertheless, he does not exhibit any signs of shame. He questions himself concerning the previous notion of courage. He is torn since, on one side, he experiences guilt for fleeing. Conversely, he contends that he made a prudent choice.

Upon the commencement of the regiment, Henry promptly advances toward the battlefield, employing the

rationale that it is preferable to exhibit cowardice rather than face certain death. He notices that the lieutenant lacks the same anxiety as him, although Henry is trembling so intensely that he cannot load his gun. As anticipated, he is also incapable of standing up and escaping. It is depicted in,

...since he had turned his back upon the fights, his fears greatly increased. Deaths about to strike him between the shoulders were much more awful than death about to him between the eyes. When he thought of it later, he thought it was better to view the terror than to hear it (Crane 43).

Henry comes to the awareness that his fear of the unknown is more powerful than any other cause of anxiety he could identify in the journey of war. The American novelist Stephen Crane has achieved worldwide renown due to the publication of *The Red Badge of Courage*. Critics deemed Crane's novel autobiographical, highlighting his status as a Civil War soldier. The novel's examination of the psychological impact of war and its use of a naturalistic prose style led readers and critics to form this perception. He called it a "psychological portrayal of fear" (Davis 65). After the conclusion of the Six Years War, Crane was born. The novel is a purely fictitious



construct. American and British critics praised its literary style. Stanley Wertheim trusts it to be “unquestionably the most realistic novel about the American Civil War” (17).

Conclusion:

This book is universally recognized as a seminal piece of American literature and is hailed as one of the most exceptional war novels ever penned. The portrayal of warfare and its profound effect on troops has deeply connected with audiences for more than a century, and it remains a subject of analysis and examination for both academics and learners. It has been labelled as a realistic novel because it focuses mostly on the American Civil War. This book explores troops' psychological issues and military encounters amidst political and cultural turmoil.

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