



The Creativity out of Insecurity and Uncertainty through the Perspective of Realism in Crane's The Red Badge of Courage

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I intend to discuss realism in Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*. Although it is purely a work of Crane's imagination, it is universally recognized as a greater work of art. The novel revolves mainly round the fear-inspired actions and deeply agitated mind of Henry Fleming, the protagonist of the novel. The novel deals with the theme of war and violence that leads to recognize the naturalistic view of the impact of the external forces on human destiny in which it leads to the concept of realism in life through war as a metaphor of life with its ambivalences, morality and alienation.

Keywords: Creativity, Realism, Insecurity, The Red Badge of courage

INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial, war has been depicted as glorious, heroic, adventurous and holy and the battlefield as the place where soldiers get the chance of displaying their valour, courage and chivalry. Soldiers' adventure on the battlefield has been glorified and compared with that of classical heroes of ancient Greece and Rome under the romantic luster. It is not a new phenomenon rather romantic vision, hollow ideals of patriotism, nationalism courage and several other imaginative visions have always been associated with depiction of war. Soldiers have been portrayed as brave, courageous and adventurous who are always ready to lay down their life for their country. The causes and reasons of the side that they are fighting for are greater for them than any other ideals. The morality, right and wrong on the battlefield is subjective and every side tries to justify its actions on its subjective ideals and notions which they think to be true and worth fighting and laying their lives down for. Enlisting to participate in the war as classical heroes, fighting in it with ghastly wounds, blood dripping from them, and coming back to home with the ardent wish of hero worship and admiration of the countrymen at home and many other similar visions have also been associated with the life of the romantic naive soldiers. But there lies a world of difference between imagining highly about war, sitting at home and experiencing it from inside the battlefield. The whole euphoria about adventure, courage and heroism about war on the battlefield ends in smoke the moment these romantic naive soldiers participate to fight in the war and confront the harsh realities of war. Crane's deep study of the works of war written about the American Civil War left him dissatisfied with the romantic portrayal of war. This dissatisfaction with the contemporary portrayal of war led him to write *The Red Badge of Courage* by (Crane, 1994). which is considered to be a landmark in the history of American realism and realistic portrayal of war. No war novels received such an astounding popularity as for the realistic depiction of war. *The Red Badge of Courage*, novel of the American Civil War by Stephen Crane, published in 1895 and considered to be his masterwork because of its perceptive depiction of warfare and of a soldier's psychological turmoil. Crane was 25 years old and had no personal experience of war when he wrote the novel, which he based partly on a popular anthology, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*. the first modern war novel because, uniquely for its time, it tells of the experience of war from the point of view of an ordinary soldier. Henry Fleming is eager to demonstrate his patriotism in a glorious battle, but when the slaughter starts, he is overwhelmed with fear and flees the battlefield. Ironically, he receives his "red badge of courage" when he is

slightly wounded by being struck on the head by a deserter. He witnesses a friend's gruesome death and becomes enraged at the injustice of war. The courage of common soldiers and the agonies of death cure him of his romantic notions. He returns to his regiment and continues to fight on with true courage and without illusions.

Realism

Realism, in its widest general sense, can be taken as a word which means portraying in literature, life as it is. Long before realism became a powerful movement in Europe literature, Dr. Johnson describes this new trend that starting by talking about the works of fiction with which the present generation seems more delighted, are such as exhibit life in its true state, diversified only by the accidents that daily happens in the world are influenced by those passions and qualities which are really to be found in conversing with mankind (Johnson, 1785). Later, in the nineteenth century, exponents of realism like Edmund Duranty and the Goncourt Brothers, and writers like Balzac and Stendhal, too, stressed the very same "life in its true state" and "passions and qualities which are reality to be found in conversing with mankind" as the essence of the realistic movement. Raymond Williams elaborates on the term realism in his essay "The Realism and the Contemporary Novel." The most common definition is in terms of an ordinary, contemporary, everyday reality, as opposed to traditionally heroic, romantic or legendary subjects. "In the highest realism, society is seen in fundamentally personal terms, and persons, through relationships, in fundamentally social terms. The integration is controlling, yet, of course, it is not to be achieved by an act of will. If it comes at all, it is a creative discovery and can perhaps only be recorded within the structure and substance of the realistic novel" (Williams, 1961). Etymologically, realism means things as the adjective real is derived from the Latin "res" meaning "thing". The first definition of real according to Dr. Johnson's dictionary is relating to things not persons. John Locke believed that one of the chief ends of language is to convey the knowledge of things. The term realistic, thus viewed, describes some kind of objectification which says that objects are to be defined not by their inherent qualities, or limits, but by their relation to a fixed observer governing a closed system ----a stance that was developed during the Renaissance period. It is connected to the intellectual and imaginative approach to reality that Galileo discusses in his Dialogue of the New Sciences and Descartes discusses in his Discourse on Method,

According to Robert Scholes “realism is a matter of perception .The realist presents his impressions of the world of experience .A part of his vocabulary and other technical instruments, he shares with social scientists. The realist writer seeks always to give the reader a sense of the way things are.....The realist ‘s truth is a bit more general and typical than the reporter’s fact .It may also more vivid and memorable.” (Scholes & Sullivan, 1994). Engels defines realism as typical characters in typical situations. Here, the word “typical”, Lukacs reminds us , is not to be confused with what is frequently encountered: What makes a type, a type, is not its average quality ,not its Mere individual being however profoundly conceived ,what makes It a type is that in it all the humanly and social essential determinants are present on their highest level of development in the ultimate unfolding of the possibilities latent in them in extreme presentation of their extreme (Lukács & Bone, 1964). It should be noted that realism has witnessed a new turning in which distortion may play a role to reveal realism under the pressure of culture .Scholes and Kellogg point out how literary realism is getting modernized under the pressure from modern culture .The writer pursued the reality of the individual experience deeper and deeper into the subconscious or unconscious and consequently ,the common perceptual world recedes and the concept of the unique person dissolves ,and the writer finds himself in a region of myths ,dreams ,symbols and archetypes that demand “fictional” rather than “empirical “modes for their expression. The mimetic impulse towards the characterization of the inner life dissolves inevitably into mythic and expressionistic patterns upon reaching in the citadel of the psyche. On the other hand , if the writer persists in seeking to do justice to the common phenomenal world he finds himself today in competition with new media such as tape and motion pictures ,which can claim to do this more effectively. If the nineteenth century realism was ,in many ways ,an attempt to bring order out of chaos, the post –modernist attitude is almost the reverse of it. As the avant –garde composer ,John Cage spells out clearly: Our attention is to affirm this life ,not to bring order out of chaos ,nor to suggest improvements in creation ,but simply to wake up to the very life we’re living ,which is so excellent once one gets one’s mind and one’s desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord (Cage, 1961).

The New Realism

The theorists and practitioners of the new novel persisted in their search for ways to go beyond the stock of the inherited fictional techniques to convey their own perceptions of the new realities

,brought in by the incredible advancements in science and society .The fiction written by novelists like Robbe-Grillet(1989), Nathalie Sarraute ,and Michael Butor is generally considered as constituting the nouveau roman or new novel challenging the reputation and influence of writers like Sartre ,Camus and the French writers of the preceding generation .Nathalie Sarraute seems to think that there exists a human reality ,given once and for all ,which, writers , like scientists, explore one after the other ,thus creating from one generation to the next ,a mere shift of interest towards new sectors ,which then have to be explored as the old problems are solved .Thus it is Balzac and Stendhal analyzed the psychology of the character and , by the very same fact , generalized and depreciated it ,that later writers like Joyce and Proust didn't find any interest in such psychology ,and therefore turned to finer and subtler realities ,thus opening a way that the novelists of today must in turn strive to achieve . According to Robbe-Grillet (1989) ,there is no immutable reality in the human domain .On the contrary ,the essence of human reality is itself dynamic and it changes through history ;moreover, this , change is ,to an unequal degree, of course ,the work of all men and ,although writers play their part, it is neither an exclusive nor a preponderant one .The history and psychology of the character are becoming increasingly difficult to describe , nor because writers like Balzac ,Stendhal and Flaubert have already described them exhaustively ,but because we are living in a different society , in which the individual as such and ,implicitly , his biography and psychology ,have lost all their truly primordial importance ,and have fallen to the level of mere anecdote. The new novel, according to Robbe Grillet (1989) in his theory, that there is one in which the reader will find more of the gratification to be had from sham causality ,falsely certain description ,clear story.It repeats itself, modifies itself and contradicts itself ,without even accumulating enough bulk to constitute a past and thus a "story" in the traditional sense of the word .The reader is not offered easy satisfaction ,but a challenge to creative co-operation.In his *Les Gommés* ,rival versions of the same set of facts can co-exist without final reconciliation .In *La Jalousie*,the narrator is explicitly unconcerned with chronology ,perceiving on that here and now in which memory ,fantasy ,anticipation of the future ,may intrude though without sharp differentiation.

The creativity out of insecurity and uncertainty:

Stephen Crane who was born in 1871 had a very unhappy childhood. His father, a preacher, was known for his puritanical view of life. Stephen Crane had experienced insecurity and uncertainty

as a child and could not respond favorably to the moral idealism of his father. Later his acquaintance with the large number of immigrants in New York and his growing knowledge of their miserable existence had a lasting impact on his imagination and his literary works. Under the influence of Dean Howells' novel "A Hazard of New Fortunes". Crane completed *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* in 1893, his story about a poor helpless girl which he had begun at Syracuse. This was followed by *George's Mother* in 1896 and *The Third Violet* in 1897. *George's Mother* deals with the working class people while *The Third Violet* deals with the bohemian way of life. The American Civil War had proved to be a source of inspiration to creative writers of generation preceding Crane's. Crane (1994) perusal of works based on the Civil War and his dissatisfaction with them led him to the writing of *The Red Badge of Courage* in 1895.

Crane (1994) avowed intention behind writing this novel was to emphasize the element of feelings rather than cold facts. His experiences as a journalist found expression in another of his war-novels, *Active Service* in 1899. For the late 19th century and early 20th century writers, short story and the novel were not radically differentiated forms of writing. Maupassant, Balzac, Chekhov and other great writers practised both forms with equal mastery. Crane, like them, wrote novels as well as short stories. Among his short stories "The Open Boat", "An Episode of War", "A Mystery of Heroism", "The Blue Hotel" have high literary merit. (Lee, 1987). Crane's fiction particularly *The Red Badge of Courage*, has received much critical attention. Critics have responded to various aspects of his art, his approach to war, treatment of war as a metaphor for life, Naturalism and Impressionism, his colour-symbolism and style. Edwin H. Cady in his *Stephen Crane* analyses the influence of Crane's personal experiences on his art, his Naturalism and the role of irony and psychology in his works. He also offers critical comments on Crane's point of view and his Christian imagery and the psychological realism in *The Red Badge of Courage*. (Wogan, 1960). Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, some sections of *Active Service* and his stories like 'An Episode of War', 'A Mystery of Heroism', 'The Upraised Face' and 'The Open Boat' show how the forces of destruction strike awe and terror into the mind of man and how they condition his responses and also his existence. These works are replete with the disturbing accounts of the wounded and the dead with their shattered hopes and their sense of loss and entrapment. In *The Red Badge of Courage* Crane gives a deeply moving account of such horrors as embodied in the fate suffered by Jim Conklin, the tattered soldier and other anonymous ones. The treatment of Jim Conklin's death is highly suggestive. There is an unrelieved gloom and ominous halo about him and

his movements. He is terribly wounded, in Crane's words, "chewed by wolves". Desperate, he seeks Fleming's help in crossing the road. On reaching a safer place surrounded by shrubs, he enacts a poignant dance of death. Through emphasis on his weird gestures and staccato utterances, Crane tries to communicate his deep suffering and his acute pain (Wertheim, 1963). In the depiction of the scenes of war and fighting, Crane usually focuses on the wretchedness of human existence. He highlights their hunger, thirst and exhaustion, thus emphasizing their loss of human identity and dignity. The following passage from *The Red Badge of Courage* sufficiently illustrates these points . He discovered that he had a scorching thirst. His face was so dry and grimy that he thought he could feel his skin crackle. Each bone of his body had an ache in it and seemingly threatened to break with each movement, His feet were like two sores. Also his body was calling for food (Crane, 1895). Such painful experience, coupled with their acute awareness of their predicament, leads to gestures of protest In his war-fiction, Crane establishes the correspondence between the physical violence on the one hand and emotional violence on the other hand. This inter-relationship between external violence and the psychological violence is very well worked out in the behaviour of his protagonists like Fleming in *The Red Badge of Courage*, Fred Collins in 'A Mystery of Heroism' and the two officers in 'The Upturned Face'.

The Red Badge of Courage: The psychological perceptions of its protagonist

Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* which is a classic of its genre according to the critical consensus was inspired by the experience of American Civil war and the literary responses to it . when Crane was going through the reminiscences of the Civil War, he was struck by the fact that most of them were indifferent to the feelings experienced by the participants. The novel opens with the scene of the army resting on the hills waiting for the outbreak of fighting. The novel devotes considerable space to the depiction of conflicting thoughts# fears and apprehensions lurking in the mind of Henry Fleming. Actually, the more agonizing and painful battle is being fought in the battlefield of his mind. Then the emphatic announcement by the tall soldier that their unit will be ordered to move shortly for fighting accentuates the fears and apprehensions hidden in Fleming's mind. His greatest emotional problem at this point of time is that he might run away when exposed to fighting. He finds it so shameful that he can't communicate it to his friends. Henry Fleming is desperate to know the possible reactions of his friends to. the imminence of fighting. He employs indirect methods to fathom their minds and finds to his dismay that such fears are

farther from their consciousness. Thus, we find Henry Fleming facing a highly complicated . emotional situation. When the fighting breaks out# Fleming tries to assert his will-power and fights for a while. But when a soldier in his vicinity throws away his rifle and runs with a howl. Fleming readily follows his example and runs. (Gibson, 1968). Pursued by the fear of death he runs with the speed of a sprinter. While running blindly here and there he comes across scenes of fighting pursued by frenzied soldiers. Guns and batteries1 thunder loudly and officers galloping hurriedly scold and exhort the soldiers alternatively. The hectic 'fighting carried on by his friends and comrades presents a contrast to his own cowardly flight from the battlefield. At this stage, the novel takes up the examination of Fleming' s agitated mind. His mind is busy with justifying his behavior in terms of the principle of self-preservation. He also congratulates himself for his superior mental qualities. Crane writes "He, the enlightened man who looks afar in the dark had fled because of his superior perceptions and knowledge." (Crane, 1975). When the news of the successful resistance on the part of his comrades reaches his ears, he experiences a riot of emotions : anger toward his friends, sense of betrayal and self-pity. Unable to bear the presence of the conflicting thoughts in his mind and the maddening shots without, he seeks refuge in the woods. Nature puts on rather deceptive expression but Fleming interprets its motions and sounds subjectively. His mind responds to Nature incoherently. At one moment, he dreads it intensely and the next moment it seems to console him-like the squirrel who runs away the moment he throws a pine cone at it, thus, seeming to confirm to his anxious mind, the rationality of his flight. however, Nature administers a rude jolt to his consciousness. His encounter with the dead body dressed in blue uniform with gray and yellow colour dominating it fills him with fright and explodes his transitory faith in the beneficence of Nature. Then, he begins to run towards the battlefield. His path to the battlefield is littered with corpses. The atmosphere at the battlefield is characterized by clouds of smoke, painful cries and absurd gestures. In his meanderings, he comes across many wounded soldiers. Some of them abuse the officers for their mismanagement of war. (Wager, 1968).

This is followed by the episode of his encounter with the 'tattered soldier. The tattered soldier, wounded in the head and arm, walks beside Fleming and tries to befriend him sincerely. He narrates the tales of heroic fighting on the part of his comrades and portrays their heroic deeds in glowing terms, which, unknown to the tattered soldier, highlights Fleming1 s shameful conduct and worsens his mental condition. Quite innocently, he asks Fleming about his wounds. Unable to

bear the encounter any further, Fleming leaves him abruptly. Fleming now becomes intensely apprehensive of the discovery of his cowardly flight by his friends and comrades. He deeply envies the wounded ones for their wounds and wishes that he, too, had a wound - the red badge of courage. Here, we see a psychological transformation in the personality of Fleming. Fleming's backward journey to the battlefield from the sanctuary of Nature is full of deeply moving encounters, One of these is -with Jim Conklin, the tall soldier, who was the first to communicate the news of imminent fighting to Fleming and others. Realizing that the spectral soldier around him was Jim Conklin, wounded and death-like, Fleming gives out a cry mingled with sorrow and terror. Jim Conklin solicits his help in crossing the road to avoid rash vehicles. Then, he runs to a clump of bushes to die there in the manner of a solemn rite. (Wager, 1968).

The novel as a literary response to the war:

His backward journey to the battlefield is nothing short of revelation. It is a journey which acquaints him fully with the horrors of war. He comes across a procession of the wounded and the dying. Gradually, some change comes over Fleming's mind. He starts valuing the wounds suffered by his friends and comrades and deeply resents his cowardly act. He is conditioned by the atmosphere of war. His encounter with one panick-stricken soldier marks a turning point in his life and career. While wandering about the battlefield/he comes across a scene of retreat. Everyone was running here and there. He catches hold of one frightened soldier to know what was happening. The panic-stricken# soldier is in no mood to be detained. He bangs a rifle on Fleming's head and runs on. Fleming earns his red badge of courage quite ironically. Now on, he irradiates hope and faith, quite contrary to his earlier conduct. Now, he thinks and acts like a war-devil. The relentless vigour and ardour shown by the enemy fill him with inordinate fury. He sees himself as a pursued animal. This realization unleashes terrible destructive energy and hatred within Fleming. In the next encounter, he fights like a devil, blinded by his intense hatred of the enemy. Crane writes "Once he, in his intent hate, was almost alone and was firing, when all those near him had ceased. He was so engrossed in his occupation that he was not 19 aware of a lull." (crane 1975). His friends begin to regard him as a war-devil. Fleming, too, exhibits intense joy and pride as a result of his heroic performance. He looks upon himself with pride. In the final round of the fighting, Fleming and his friend, Wilson, infuriated by the epithets of 'mule-drivers' and ' mud-diggers' used by the higher officers, summon all their energies and put up the best heroic effort as a fitting answer to

the affront hurled at them by the officers. Fleming and Wilson fight like maniacs, both of them are desperate to move forward and wrench the enemy-flag from its bearer. In the midst of the maddening sounds of guns and shells, agonised cries and moans, Fleming and Wilson move Closer to the bearer of the enemy-flag when he is wounded. 'Wilson, like a panther, jumps at the enemy-Flag and seizes it. Both the officers as well as the comrades applaud their heroic feats in glowing terms. Fleming has the consummation of his cherished desire. He feels at last that he is a man (Wager, 1968). The ending of the novel comes as an anti-climax to the narrative of strife. After a series of fierce fighting costing so much human blood, the regiment is ordered to retrace its way. Fleming is called upon to adjust mentally to the changed atmosphere. Scenes of his past-life begin to float through his consciousness. His desertion of the tattered soldier is a painful memory to him. On the whole# he feels proud of his past. The last scene of the novel shows Fleming making an abrupt transition from the battleful ways.to peaceful thoughts. He leaves behind his immediate past, its heat and exhaustion and turns to the future for peace and happiness.

CONCLUSION

War was portrayed romantically with all its romantic notions and trappings like glorious war, holy war, heroic war based on the false ideals of nationalism, courage, and patriotism ignoring the stark realities of war.The critical analysis of the thematic and stylistic features in the war-fiction of Crane establishes that his plot mainly consist of exciting interactions between external forces and his protagonists, between ruthless machines and men. The plots are largely preoccupied with the depiction of the individual and collective suffering, variegated emotional reactions and material and moral confusions following the violent encounters. The action mostly takes place in the midst of Nature and quite often Nature with its ambivalent attitudes, complicates the action in his work. Crane employs fatal wounds as a device for the development of his plot. He builds episodic plot linking together significant events concerning the lives of their protagonists .A deep analysis of the novel seem to give two distinct pictures of combat or war- the one at the start of war when the soldiers are very much hopeful, enthusiastic, idealistic, romantic and optimistic about the war and the other- at the conclusion of the war when the soldiers, having the first-hand experience of war, become disillusioned, and eventually realists. Their characters seem to go through a journey from romanticism to realism or innocence to experience.. As the time passed, it became quite obvious that Crane had found the style which he had long been seeking and that that suited his attitude and

temperament best. He really took enjoyment in portraying the incidence and events as they occurred without any embellishments. These incidents were portrayed realistically, giving people the exact idea what war is really like. Crane did not adorn or embellish the incidents on the battlefield rather he chose to present the realistic details that were considered by many to be indecent, irrelevant and unnecessary.

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