



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

A TRANSITION FROM COWARDNESS TO COURAGE: AN ANALYSIS OF STEPHEN CRANE'S NOVEL *THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE*

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DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.12.1.196](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.12.1.196)



Article info

Article Received:25/01/2024

Article Accepted: 28/02/2024

Published online:10/03/2024

Abstract

This article focuses its attention on the fear and cowardness of the character Henry Fleming from the novel *The Red Badge of Courage* written by Stephen Crane. This novel is about a soldier who feared facing his enemy on the battlefield. The decision he made at the end of the novel, became a stepping stone in his life. His life shows that fear will chase us until we try to stop it. Because, it is us who decide when and how we want to overcome a difficulty. Stephen Crane, the central character in this book, is a soldier who came into this service with a fantasy thought about the heroic figures in the battlefield. But all his perception collapsed after seeing the furious atmosphere of the battlefield. We can take this novel as an example of a person's change from a cowardly man towards a courageous man who dares to face his problems or enemies. Henry Fleming is an example of a person who steps out from the comfort zone in order to achieve the goal, that victory continues in his life as a motivation. From a man who feared to face the blood, finally changed into a person who won victory of courage. His wound he experienced on the battlefield shows his real power. That self confidence of him shows that those who dare to face oneself fear are the real heroes. This study analyzes the cowardness in one person, and the formula to overcome and convert that fear into courage, through the main character of the novel, Henry Fleming.

Keywords: Courage, Battlefield, Soldier, War, Fear, Badge, Failure

Introduction

War field is a place where everything looks so serious. Fear, curiosity, anxiety, consciousness, unconsciousness, greed, unity, courage, cowardness etc. are the emotions that we feel in a Warfield. In this novel, the central character, Henry Fleming, is experiencing all these emotions while standing in the battlefield. Even though he is a person who

stepped on this field of service, with a mind full of fantastical imagery of a heroic soldier figure, he fell into anxiety and fear after knowing about the confrontation of war and the enemies. He entered into this job with a lot of curiosity. He didn't even hear his mother's disapproval towards this job. But, the moment he heard about the war became the moment he himself fell into fear. Because of anxiety

he decided to check what his co-workers were thinking about the war. But, all of them were much more confident and curious than him, and that made him go crazy. With fear and an unstable mind he met with the enemies, but instead of facing them he ran away from the field without looking back. And, how he overcame this situation makes the essence of the story. The second published book of Stephen Crane is, *The Red Badge of Courage*. This book has given the title of the first modern war novel. Henry Fleming is a person who loves to be a soldier which resembles the soldiers of Greek epics. But, in real life he faced the opposite.

About the author

The author of the novel *The Red Badge of Courage*, Stephen Crane (1871-1900) was an American novelist, short story writer, and poet. He wrote works based on the realist tradition. As per critics, he is considered as one of the most innovative writers of his age. He had written numerous papers by the time he was sixteen. Stephen's father is a Methodist minister. He is the youngest of fourteen children. His first work in the American literary field is his contribution. Without battlefield experience, he wrote many novels, for that, he received international acclaim in 1895. He wrote this novel by taking the American civil war as the setting. It is a classical American literature which depicts the psychological imbalance and fear in the furious atmosphere of a battlefield. The psychological condition and the problems of soldiers is portrayed bravely in this novel.

Stephen Crane is considered as an important figure in the field of American literature. Even though he took a break in his career, critics took an interest in reviewing and analyzing his works. Stephen Crane's work is filled with intensity, courage, irony, dialect, and a strong thought. Themes are fear, self discovery, crisis, isolation within society etc. Recognized as one of the greatest classic pieces of American literature is *The Red Badge of Courage*. In addition, Stephen Crane is well-known for his poetry, short tales, and journalism. Some of his famous works are *The Open Boat*, *The Blue Hotel*, *The Monster*, *The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky*, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, *The Red*

Badge of Courage, *The Black Riders*, and *Other Lines* etc. Among twentieth century writers his works made a huge impression.

Red Badge of Courage

A troop of Union soldiers is seated next to a riverbank in the novel's opening scene. They were camped there for the past two weeks. A tall soldier in the troop spread a rumor that the army will soon meet their enemy, for that they will soon start marching. The main character of the novel, Henry Fleming, feared and doubted his own courage to meet with the enemy. The narrator tells that Henry is a man who joined the army with a fantastical imagery of being a soldier. Henry wanted to become a soldier that we see in a Greek epic. Next day, the regiment started to march. They spent several days walking and tenting at any place to stay. Like that, they travel for many days and finally get to hear the roar of their enemies and the setting of a battlefield gets ready soon. At that field, Henry realizes and fears that he can't run even if he wants to. He feels himself like a machine which is damaged, he feels like becoming motionless. Finally the union regiment defeated their enemy and celebrated their victory.

Henry wakes from his motionless situation and frighteningly looks for the enemies to confirm they are gone. He consoles himself by telling me that I made a good decision by doing nothing. And try to satisfy himself by telling that his regiment is not even won, so that those who fight were fools. But, suddenly their troops general announced that they won against the enemy through fighting. By hearing this, Henry is filled with guilt and ashamed of his cowardice. But, he again tries to convince his heart by saying he did great by saving his own life. Henry walks through the forest, where he finds many corpses of his own troop members. He found dead bodies of the members down the road. He became jealous of them by thinking about their courage. He thought they all found victory, by perusing courage through serving and dying for the country.

He met a tattered man, he was wounded but managed to tell that his troop didn't run, and Henry saw the power of pride glittering in his eyes. Tattered man asked Henry to show his wound, which made Henry much uncomfortable and tried to go

away from there. Then he met with wounded Jim Conklin. Henry promised him the care, but Jim runs into the bunch of bushes with pride in his eyes. Henry and a tattered man saw him dying there. Henry and the tattered man walk through the forest. Henry heard a noise of combat, he again filled with fear. At this time, the tattered man again asked about his wound. This made him much uncomfortable and which made him abandon the tattered man in the forest, which leads to his death. Henry walks near to the battlefield to watch what is happening there. He sees his regiment is again fighting courageously towards the enemy. He tried to stop a soldier, to enquire about it, but the fear of war made him hit on Henry with his rifle. Which made a flow of blood in Henry's head, by seeing it another soldier made him get his troop safe. Finally, Henry reunited with his group. His friend Wilson became so happy by seeing him alive.

Next day, his troops again went to the battlefield. This time, Henry fought with the enemy courageously. By seeing that, his lieutenant appreciated him by saying a thousand Henry is enough for him to meet success in the war. In charge, Henry takes the flag and carries it by representing his regiment. Another soldier of their troops tells them that Henry and Wilson are the best fighters in their troop. From that day, their group went for more combat and Henry stood in the front carrying the flag. Henry and Wilson won in several battles. But, being in the success atmosphere, he feels ashamed of his previous behavior on the battlefield. He feels guilty for abandoning the tattered man in the forest. But, by putting all that guilt aside, he realizes that he has improved very much and overcomes the fear of the red sickness of war. He felt peace within himself and felt like a man with courage to face any problem.

Towards Courage

In order to write a book about the conflict he imagined, Stephen Crane, the author of *The Red Badge of Courage*, made this decision. The novel is about the civil war in America that happened between 1861 to 1865. Even though he didn't face a war, he got an idea about the real soul and situation of a war, which is written down in his novel. His

imagination about the war makes him a part of the war, he himself experienced the real fear, anxiety and courageousness of the battlefield. He imagined the life of soldiers in war, using the setting of the United States civil war. He created a soldier who wishes to serve in the army, in order to become a fighter, who resembles the soldiers of Greek epic. This character undergoes fear, tension, cowardness and the relief from all these through courageousness. In the title the red badge is reflecting the image of a wound of courage. He compares a wound to a badge, that is literally the reflection of courage and bravery.

The main character, Henry Fleming, felt ashamed that he ran away from the battlefield. He felt himself to be wounded, because he believed the wound from the battlefield shows bravery and courage. So, he felt like he had one like his co-workers. Henry felt guilty for not having any, it shows that he is a coward. His cowardness and the feeling of guilt only got erased after two more wars. The story ends with the growing desire of Henry Fleming to face an adventure in the battlefield. After many calculations, he decided to confront his enemy by removing all the unwanted stain of fear from his mind. By removing that stain, he is actually removing the cowardice within his heart. He decides to return to his home. He confronted his enemy with courage and won the battle without getting wounded. This situation gave him confidence and proved to him that being brave or courageous is not dependent upon getting the mark of wound from the battlefield.

Conclusion

Henry Fleming underwent a behavioral shift as a result of his repeated attempts to step outside of his comfort zone, which helped him transition from cowardice to courage. At the end of the study, it came into the frame that the red badge is not strictly reflecting the bravery or courage of a person, but we can achieve it by stepping out from the fear of oneself within ourselves. This is demonstrated by Henry Fleming's trip in Stephen Crane's book *The Red Badge of Courage*.

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