

Red badge of courage critical analysis

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Given the title, there is no wonder that the book revolves around the idea of courage—whether it is the desire for courage or ultimately achieving it. As the novel begins, Henry reflects on his definition of courage before he joined the army, where the idea of fighting on a battlefield seemed to be a struggle, yet somehow glorious. However, the youth and his comrades begin to doubt his romanticized versions of courage when they face battle for the few times. Soon, they find they are most courageous when they feel nothing except anger during battle. However, even this definition doesn't last. Wanting to find a lasting definition of what courage is, the youth begins to dream about wearing a red badge of courage, or a wound.

He even takes this one step further, also dreaming about a glorious death to give him courage. He seeks the definition from himself and soldiers around him up until the end, where he matures psychologically, and finally takes charge in battle. The author of this novel developed the psychological turmoil in the youth perfectly. He made sure, at any point in time, Henry's understanding of his views and morals could be compromised. He also made sure that the reader was aware of this, and how terrified he was of it happening.

However, what he lacked to clearly define is the ending. How Henry psychologically developed by the end of the book is often debated, where some critics say his mind matures and his thoughts are more realistic, whereas some critics believe he is as ignorant as he was at the beginning of the movie. Even how mature he has become is debated, just as how self-centered and smug he is. Some, like myself, believe that he is better off for the experience, but still isn't void of vanity and delusion. Stephen Crane's

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inability to define how he thought Henry grew from his situation is his only major fault.

Another idea often talked about is the thought of naturalism and how it relates to the story. Stephen Crane makes it clear early on that nature is indifferent to the battles. Nature's indifference is noticed right after the first battle, where he notices how pretty the sun looks over the treetops, and is surprised that nature hasn't changed, despite the amount of bloodshed on the battlefield. Soon after that, the youth comes across a corpse under a chapel-like glade in a forest, with the man's face covered in ants. He then comes back to camp after being hit on the side of the head, and find that Jim died, a matter entirely out of his hands. After Jim's death, he intended on making an heartfelt speech, but was cut off by the sun "pasted in the sky like a wafer.

" The symbols, together, create an idea about how nature feels about human affairs: nature neither knows nor cares about what happens to the human race. However, this idea is debated, as, at the end of the book, Henry feels a sense of overcoming what happens around him after he marches of the field after the last battle. He feels as if he overcomes the natural fear of entering battle he experienced the first few times in battle. This can be interpreted in two ways: Henry is still as delusional as he was when he first joined the army, feeling smug about emerging a Greeklime warhero, or, that the actions of humans aren't dictated entirely by nature, but, that humans and nature simply live together, one still carrying on even if the other is in turmoil.

However, I believe that either point can be argued as well as the other, another fault in the ending of this novel. The point of this novel was to show

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the psychology of a young man entering war for the first time and how he views what defines a man (which, in the case of Henry, is courage).

The definition of courage changes constantly throughout the whole book, and no true version of courage is ever chosen by Henry by the end of the novel. The constant questioning and self-doubt of oneself, coupled with the idea that nature dictates your actions creates great conflict and is an accurate representation of how harsh war can be. However, there is one weakness in the story that isn't consistent with the rest of the story: the ending. The ending is by far the most argued part of the book. The development of the character Henry is clear, however, how war shaped his idea of courage and himself is not clear and concise.

Another aspect of the ending that is at fault is how Henry views naturalism. Throughout the novel, he viewed naturalism as something that can't be helped, which ruined much of his view on the world. However, at the end of the novel, he somehow returns to how he was before the battle, a somewhat self-centered youth with twisted views. The lack of a concrete ending (in terms of how Henry turned out in the end) is in complete contrast to what Crane was trying to create before then. However, though the ending is flawed, the message Crane was trying to create is concrete: war is not something glorious and sweet, there is struggle involved.

Another thing he also tried to create was a sense that nature isn't influenced by human affairs. Through symbolism and long, vivid descriptions, he successfully illustrated his two points.