

# Comparison of the red badge of courage and the veteran



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The Red Badge of Courage and 1896 "The Veteran" perpetuate Henry's psychological isolation through a young soldier's inner monologue of the Civil War, paralleling the isolation both sides of the War Between the States feel and the isolation of America from the world after it reestablishes itself during the Progressive Era via the waves of renewed nationalist sentiment. Stephen Crane's utilization of multiple metaphors make an appearance in the novel and in the short story: Jim Conklin as romanticism of war, Henry Fleming's mother as disillusionment with war, a box as the army, slaves as soldiers, a wound as courage, a prophet as Henry, and a flower as confidence. These metaphors showcase a wide variety of axioms of during that particular zeitgeist: the hope that going into war will lead one to glory; the disappointment of going into war; the paranoia and fear that comes with war; the arduous life of a soldier and the misinformation present throughout; the deceitful and cunning means people use to earn fame; the arrogance permeating the atmosphere; and the eventual reappearance of America on the global stage..

An allusion to supernatural forces illustrates to us the clout of war and the terrestrial, claustrophobic, biblical, and supernatural imageries combine to show the isolationary power of war. The Red Badge of Courage begins with "a tall soldier" declaring that their regiment will 'move t' morrah-sure.' Later on, "the youth (Henry Fleming) discovered that his tall comrade had been the fast-flying messenger of a mistake." The tall soldier, Jim Conklin, serves as a metaphor for the romanticism and high hopes of glory and fame that many associate with war. His initial declaration that the regiment will finally march excites many of the soldiers as they feel tired of sitting around, and

the discovery that the the rumor was false disappoints the soldiers. The disappointment reflects the discouragement many soldiers feel after realizing that war stories glamorize and obscure the reality of it.

In regards to the zeitgeist, the metaphor of Jim Conklin as romanticism of war relates to the many, many soldiers that choose to enlist because they feel that they will receive fame, glory, and praise. However, once fighting many soldiers realize that their dreams may not be fulfilled, causing many to desert out of fear as they realize that in death they may not be identified and will receive no glory. Henry Fleming's mother serves as the binary metaphor. In her description, she seems to be characterized by her distaste for war: " But his mother had discouraged him. She had affected him to look with some contempt upon the quality of his war ardor and patriotism." His mother's hindrance in his beliefs temporarily blinds him from his ambition of enlisting in the war. Her disillusionment with war serves as a metaphor for the many naysayers that do not believe in romanticizing war or spreading false hopes about it, therefore this metaphor acts as the direct binary, or opposite, to the metaphor of Jim Conklin. This metaphor pertains a relevant meaning to the time period as it relates to the fear and anxiety many felt when the army drafts them, as they feel fearful about their fate.

Together, the contrasting metaphors of Jim Conklin as romanticism of war and Henry's mother as disillusionment with war paint the landscape of the Civil War as one with vastly contrasting viewpoints, including the two totally opposite sides of the war, the Confederacy and the Union and the opposite viewpoints within one side, those who face war in a stoic manner and those who flee due to fear. Henry first feels psychologically isolated from his fellow  
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soldiers due to his concerns regarding his fear of the battle, and whether they will run or not: “ His emotions made him feel strange in the presence of men who talked excitedly of a prospective battle as of a drama they were about to witness... He did not pass such thoughts without severe condemnation of himself... He was convicted by himself of many shameful crimes against the gods of traditions.” The phrase “ gods of traditions” alludes to supernatural forces, or deities watching their actions. The allusion to supernatural forces suggests the extreme clout of the decision he will make.

The allusion of gods as clout applies to the waves of newfound nationalist sentiment that many experience during the Progressive Era, which causes the civil, technical, scientific, and economic advancement of the United States. This era greatly advances the US as amazing leaps in science and technology occur. All the advancements made during the Progressive Era isolate the US due to its newfound place of clout in the world. The terrestrial imagery (“ river,” “ sky,” “ horse”) produces a desolate mood, as the adoption of an organic setting creates a feeling of being alone, as felt by Henry, paralleling the loneliness of the nation. The desolate mood relates to the zeitgeist as it accurately sums up the feelings of many Americans during the War Between the States. The War Between the States has a name in history as the deadliest battle America faces, due to the fact that it throws Americans versus one another, some on the side of the Union and some on the side of the Confederacy. Slavery, and the abolishment of it, can be known as the major premise over which the war occurs.

In this facet of the times, the desolate mood takes on a new meaning when examining the reasoning behind the reluctance of the Confederacy to abolish slavery. This reluctance, or even stubborn refusal, can be explained by the deep-rooted, indoctrinated capitalism ingrained in the minds of the Americans. This indoctrinated capitalism causes them, but doesn't excuse them, to stay firm in their obstinacy of using slaves for profit. Profit that comes from the glory of returning from war comes with the price of fear, which Henry Fleming learns. Fear strikes Henry in the following scene: " But he instantly saw that it would be impossible for him to escape from the regiment. And there were iron laws of tradition and law on four sides. He was in a moving box." This metaphor of the army as a box shows Henry's paranoia and fear after joining the army and facing his first battle.

The metaphor of a box producing paranoia and fear reflects the zeitgeist of fear, particularly during the Civil War. This metaphor contains claustrophobic imagery (" box," " iron," " sides") that produce a paranoid and anxious mood. The fear seen from the metaphor and the mood applies to many different aspects of the war: the soldiers' fear for their lives, the Confederacy and Union's fear of losing to the other, the nation's collective fear of not surviving as a whole, and all the enslaved peoples' fear of slavery persisting. At the time, all these fears contribute to the overall paranoia permeating the atmosphere. The paranoia make many to act out in various ways. The people who feel afraid of losing their profit due to the abolishment of slavery cling to various falsehoods, such as that the Bible proclaims that Africans should be considered of lesser worth or that their race consists of genetically inferior beings as compared to the whites.

The enslaved people who fear for their lives being spent in shackles begin to take desperate measures to escape, or attempt to buy their way to freedom. Freedom can be taken for granted by those who have never experienced a lack of it, which can be seen in the following: “ The slaves toiling in the temple of this god began to feel rebellion at his harsh tasks.” The metaphor of soldiers as slaves utilizes an extreme scenario in order to describe the severe and arduous labor they must undergo. This metaphor describing extreme labor pertains to the Progressive Era as reform in workplaces exists as a major goal. Those advocating for the progressive Era believe that workplaces need reform as they have incredibly rigid rules for incredibly little profit on the part of the workers. The metaphor can be seen here as the extreme labor becomes recognized by those who wish to further the Progressive Era and wish to reform the issues. However, the terminology of “ slaves toiling” suggests a woeful lack of knowledge on the part of Henry, as his joining the military came about voluntarily while slavery came about forcefully and involuntarily on the part of the slaves.

This suggests that citizens of the time, even those anti-slavery, did not fully understand the toils and hardships of being a slave. In this way, the metaphor of slaves as soldiers has a dual purpose, that of expressing the intensely hazardous lifestyle of a soldier and that of showing the woefully misinformed lifestyles many lead during the time period. The first mention of the book’s namesake occurs in Chapter 9: “ He wished that he, too, had a wound, a red badge of courage.” This metaphor of a wound as courage expresses Henry’s innermost desire to be brave and shine in battle, for the glory he would receive for it all. This reflects the axiom of the zeitgeist that

glory and receiving credit for actions makes anything and everything worth it. This sheds light on the indoctrinated capitalism that has become so deeply rooted into the American culture at the 19th century, that Americans feel willing to undergo pain, suffering, and possibly even death to make a profit or gain recognition.

However, the “ red badge of courage” acts as an ironic metaphor as Henry wishes for a wound to prove his bravery although he ran from the battle. The irony of this metaphor reveals yet another angle to the meaning, as it divulges how Americans voluntarily commit heinous and deceitful acts for fame and glory. After seeing how awful the system has become, eradication of corruption in the government becomes a main goal of the Progressive Era. The Progressive Era seeks to overcome many of the problems created by the Gilded Age, a time period occurring directly before and slightly overlapping with the Progressive Era. The Gilded Age can be called as such due to the covering-up of the problems at the time, or gilding them. Congress during the Gilded Age can be considered rowdy, wild, and filled to the brim with corruption, all because the politicians wish for fame and glory, even through deceitful means, not realizing they will isolate themselves in the future due to their actions in the present. Therefore, the Progressive Era attempts to amend this, among other, issues of the Gilded Age.

Full of empty figureheads and politicians, the characters of the Gilded Age manage to isolate themselves due to their belief in their own power, similarly to this passage: “ He thought it would prove, in a manner, that he had fled early because of his superior powers of perception. A serious prophet upon predicting a flood should be the first man to climb a tree. This would

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demonstrate that he was indeed a seer." This belief on the part of Henry demonstrates how he believes himself as better than the other soldiers due to his decision to flee the battle, which he perceives as an excellent choice. The metaphor of the prophet as Henry serves to show how Henry believes, arrogantly, that he has definitely made the right decision. Prophets can usually be regarded as being heralds of truth, and Henry holds himself in this esteem as well, tainting the passage with arrogance, which parallels the arrogance seen all throughout the zeitgeist: during the Civil War both the Confederacy and the Union believe themselves as correct, during the Gilded Age all the corrupt politicians believe themselves as correct, and during the Progressive Era both supporters and naysayers believe themselves as correct. The passage contains biblical imagery (" prophet," " flood," " seer") creating an authoritative mood.

This authoritative mood furthers the arrogance of the metaphor as it demonstrates how Henry feels obstinately confident in his cowardly decision. Once again, in regards to the time period, the authoritative mood parallels how everyone believes only in their point of view, managing to isolate themselves from one another through their various different veils on the world. The world sees America begin to blossom once more after the Civil War and the Progressive Era. A parallel of this occurs when: " There was a little flower of confidence growing within him... He had been out among the dragons... A stout heart often defied, and, defying, escaped." The metaphor of " a little flower" as confidence shows how Henry's faith in himself, when viewed without all his pompadour, does not amount to a great deal.

However, just like a budding seedling, his confidence in his own abilities



gradually increases. As previously stated, this metaphor of gradual increase parallels America's budding re-arrival to the global stage. The War Between the States shakes up America due to the fact that the war occurs between itself, making it the deadliest war in America, with the highest death toll of Americans.

This American on American infighting creates sentiments of hostility that reverberate throughout all of America, some still lasting to this day. This war manages to effectively isolate America from the rest of the world due to its inability to participate in global matters as it consists of two governments. After the war ends, and once the Progressive Era has begun, America manages to piece itself back together and rejoin as a major player on the global platform. On a global scale, no matter how united countries may seem, each still protects its own best interests, and therefore each always somewhat isolates and shrouds itself. This can be seen in the short story "The Veteran," a sequel to *The Red Badge of Courage*: "Old Fleming stared absentmindedly at the open doors... He rushed into the barn. When the roof fell in, a great funnel of smoke swarmed toward the sky, as if the old man's mighty spirit, released from its body- a little bottle-had swelled like the genie of fable." In this passage, "Old Fleming," or Henry Fleming, runs into a barn despite the fire to save two colts. In his final moments, Henry decides to attempt glory one last time despite knowing and understanding the dangers. The supernatural imagery ("genie," "smoke," "spirit") promotes a lonely mood. Henry's death, described in a surreal manner, truly and totally isolates him from the rest as it separates him from the bystanders, humans. The lonely mood can be considered contemporaneous to that time period as all

people of the time truly feel alone. The United States, during the War Between the States, isolates itself from the rest of itself and the North and South isolate themselves from each other. During the Progressive Era, newfound waves of nationalist sentiment spur America to isolate itself as a global superpower, as it looks out for its interests only. Countries, especially now in the 21st century, appear to be just self interested and unwilling to help unless a profit can be materialized. However, isolation in our time appears on a much, much smaller scale as well. As humans, social media barrages our daily lives and causes us to simply take interest in our own lives and how to better broadcast our lives to the world. This isolation deprives us of the real communication humans crave, and yet do not seek out. Isolation also exists in the form of greed, we can be willing to do almost anything in the name of self preservation, revealing the profound effect isolation has had on us.