

Literary analysis: the red badge of courage



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Historical evolution of literary periods catalyzed significant shifts of schools of thoughts in literature over the centuries culminating into a wave Realism in the late 19th century. American Realism movement interconnects through a wide web of artistic representations transcending from absolute rejection of Romanticism in various fields of art and literature. In this new dimension, the conception of characters and subjects of literature are independent of secular and empirical rules imposing moral linguistic beliefs limiting the operational space of writers (Johanningsmeier 48). This literary analysis essay will interpret the text, "The Red Badge of Courage" to show stylistic devices and techniques of American realism as used in the texts written in the early years after the civil war objectively depict the true nature human nature as not being ideal. The analysis supports the sentiments of American realism are justifiable that romanticism is an illusion that should be rejected by art and literature. In its quest transform the mythical symbolism, idealistic attributes and supernatural characteristics unattainable by human characters in real life, realism objectively seeks to ontologically discover the truth and faithfully represent it without interpretation to alter its reality. George Parsons views the concept as, "Realism sets itself at work to consider characters and events which are apparently the most ordinary and uninteresting, to extract from these their full value and true meaning. It would apprehend in all particulars the connection between the familiar and the extraordinary, and the seen and unseen of human nature ("Realism in American Literature," n. d.)." The representation denotes a particular subject reflected in the real world such the middle class in America. The accuracy of the image is dependent on the memory of real experiences as they occurred and not the product of imagination.

The Red Badge of Courage by Stephen Crane retells the story of the civil war in through the eyes of an ordinary soldier. It creates a new spectrum of truth in literary realism period by using various styles, devices, and approaches to Realism literature (Levenson 161). The element of truth is evident in the text in the various scenes recounting major events of the war and movements. The writer narrates real experiences of soldiers. The author, in chapter four, describes a fierce exchange of fire between the armies when a lieutenant suffers a gunshot wound in hand. Tension grips the members of the squadron who fall into silence. In a quick development, the regiment just like in a real situation offers help by binding the wound. One of the key elements of America realism is an accurate representation of real life occurrences as shown in this section of the novel. The writer expresses genuine feelings of fear, tension, and despair of soldiers during the war. Pragmatism, one of the traditional forms of 'naturalism' that relates to realism in literature is evident in the text. In contrary to Romanticism which accords the characters ideal superhuman abilities, American realism also represents human weakness but in a manner that shows determinism to overcome them. Fleming realizes changes in the personality of Wilson as the war advanced. He undergoes a transformation from self-pride and satisfaction in his younger years into a mature soldier sourcing inspiration from his purpose and natural abilities in life which he uses self-empower himself.

The author uses ordinary people as the main characters of his work existing in pluralistic society. One of the philosophical viewpoints of realism in society is the concept of collectivity or belonging to a large group when faced with forces of nature such as war. In extreme sense of loss to these forces,

individualism easily creeps in to replace the sense of 'subtle sense of brotherhood.' However, echoes the sentiments of realism that human being is parts of larger organism of society, "a mysterious fraternity born of the smoke and danger of death"(p. 31) The presentation of the main character in a way that is unideal mirrors American Idealism in literary work. He chooses to desert his fellow band members at a critical moment when he senses defeat. "He, too, threw down his gun and fled. There was no shame in his face. He ran like a rabbit." The narrator, p. 37 Stephen Crane throughout the text does an excellent job using functional literary devices of realism to dramatize the fundamental truths of the civil war objectively. Literature is an authoritative source of pure comfort and consolation and riddling it with in certain conceptual schemes undermine its purpose of motivating a sense action and improvements. It should not be a tool for helping those facing challenges driven by social and economic changes but in reality is a vehicle to empower their will power to face them to the point of overcoming them. The Red Badge of Courage is a testimony of the important strength of realistic literature in educating society on ways of discovering their courage to conquer desperation and hopelessness. Precisely, realism, as expressed in the text, extracts the full of human strengths and weakness if objectively applied without embellishment.

Works Cited Johanningsmeier.

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