

## Echoes of Stephen Crane in the Fiction of Ernest Hemingway

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The principal purpose of this paper is to discuss echoes of Stephen Crane in the fiction of Ernest Hemingway in reference to the actions of heroes in human predicaments. In most of his novels and short-stories, Hemingway deals with the moral problem of conduct in the predicaments. The moral problem involves the way in which his heroes behave in the face of danger. On this point, distinct echoes of Crane can be found in the fiction of Hemingway which has to do with fishing, hunting, skiing, bull-fighting, boxing, horse-racing, and war. Crane also looks at those ideas which Hemingway does, exploring great fear on battlefields and in a drifting boat with unabating eagerness in his works such as *The Red Badge of Courage*, "A Mystery of Heroism," "The Open Boat," and other stories. Here our chief attention will be focused on war-stories and sea-stories by these two American authors.

Let us begin with war-stories which lead the main characters into human predicaments in which they are forced to fight in the face of death. In their war-stories both writers examine such ideas as fear and cowardice, courage and heroism, and military glory through the actions of their heroes. War is an embodiment of this whirlwind world of disorder and confusion. Describing the horror of war, they ultimately agree on the irrationality of war. In the war-stories the heroes are deeply involved in kill-or-be-killed struggle and must control their fear of death. In such a crisis their actions are driven to alternate between fight and flight. In battle, none of the soldiers is allowed to act as an individual. Each of them should act as a part of his army.

We cannot deny that there is heroism on the battlefield. It is generally accepted that decorations are conferred on soldiers for their heroism or military glory. But Hemingway reveals the false values of military glory when his heroes are wounded or killed in battle. For example, Frederick Henry, the hero of *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) which is set in World War I (1914-18), sustains a severe wound in the leg when he is talking with three ambulance drivers in the dugout. Although he tells a war priest who comes to see him in the hospital that "that was an accident," people expect, as the orderly, Rinaldi does, that Henry has done some heroic act on the battle front. There is no denying the fact that he has sustained a severe wound, but the real cause of his wound makes little difference to the Italian army. Thus, Henry is awarded a silver medal as a token of military glory. Here Hemingway implies that the whole truth is buried in the fire on the battlefield, as in the confusion of life.

Frederick Henry is an American living for many years in Italy, and now a lieutenant in a medical unit with the Italian troops. He does not seem to be a very brave officer or loyal to his army. Before he sustains his severe wound, he gives a hint to an English-speaking soldier who does not want to go in the front line: "You get out and fall down by the road and get a bump on your head and I'll pick you up on your way back and take you to a hospital."<sup>1</sup> A little later, referring to the English-speaking soldier, "his helmet was off and his forehead was bleeding below the hair line. His nose was skinned and there was dust on the bloody patch and dust in his hair."<sup>2</sup>

The scene of this wound in *A Farewell to Arms* greatly impresses those who have read Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) which is set in the Civil War (1861-65), because the hero, Henry Fleming, sustains a wound on the head in the front line. Let us consider his state of mind and action on the battle front before and after he sustains his wound. His mind is occupied with vanity and

dreams of glory. But then, he wonders whether he will run or stand. Before the first battle begins, he feels that he cannot escape. He is stricken with terrible fear. The enemy's attack is turned back. When the second attack comes soon, he runs away from his post in blind panic.

However, the hero may repent unconsciously of his desertion from the battle lines. When he turns back toward the battlefield, he runs across a party of wounded soldiers and goes together with them in the procession. When he is asked by one of them: "Where did you get hurt?", he has no words to answer because he is not wounded. He wishes to have a wound, a "red badge of courage." After a while, he watches the whole army retreating in utter panic and tries to stop one of the soldiers to get information. Suddenly, the frightened soldier swings his rifle and smashes it down on Fleming's head. He sustains a wound from one of his comrades, not from the enemy.

Thus, the hero is wounded and staggers back to his regiment. Henry Fleming is now greeted as a hero. His wound is ironically a "red badge of courage," which "confers upon him a spurious glory."<sup>3</sup> In fact, he is wounded in an accident, but he does not reveal the whole truth of his wound to his comrades. In this way, Stephen Crane suggests that heroism accompanies vanity to a large extent. Through heroism in battle, he shows that war is not noble but ignoble.

Yet, this accident makes the hero's attitude toward his regiment greatly change—that is, it causes him to take action with a deep sense of soldierly brotherhood to his regiment. This sense of brotherhood encourages him to fight fearlessly and selflessly in the following battles, which bring him military courage on the battlefield. This sense is very significant for an individual to conduct himself as a social being. It impels Fleming to recognize that he should engage the enemy at the risk of losing his life as a part of his regiment.

We can say that he becomes very much aware of the function of man as a member of society. Man cannot survive if he deserts his community.

This sense of brotherhood leads the heroes to fight bravely against their enemy in the face of death. For instance, in Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) which is set in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), the hero, Robert Jordan, is a young college instructor in the U. S. A. after living in Spain for ten years. Although he is an American volunteer in the war, he is actively immersed in the violence of war because he loves Spain and accepts the Spanish people as his community. His action in the face of death demonstrates a marvelous gallantry and soldierly attitude toward his duty. To put it another way, he faces death with peculiar courage and with a heroic deed in the last scene of this novel.

On the other hand, in *The Red Badge of Courage* Henry Fleming's comrade, Jim Conklin, does not protest at all against the orders but has "the air of a man who is about to exhibit a battle for the benefit of his friends,"<sup>4</sup> To Fleming's question: "Did you ever think you might run yourself, Jim?", Jim's answer is as follows: "If everybody was a-standin' and a-fightin', why, I'd stand and fight."<sup>5</sup> This passage suggests that Jim is fully aware of his position as a member of his regiment. It can be said that a deep sense of brotherhood to his troops encourages him to die heroically as a result of his mortal wound in the side. His heroic death may not bring him military glory, but he seems to embody true courage as a man as well as a soldier in the face of death.

On the contrary, desertion from the battle line is generally accepted as disgraceful conduct resulting from human timidity and cowardice. But, in *A Farewell to Arms* the desertion of Frederick Henry from the military police on the line should be considered in another way. He is arrested as a spy on a groundless suspicion after the dispersion of his own small ambulance group to which he has been bound. He

senses that there is lack of order and discipline in the Italian army. Instinctively, he deserts the Italian troops because he feels in his bones that he may be shot to death. "Frederick Henry has never recognized an obligation to the entire Italian army,"<sup>6</sup> James L. Roberts points out. This comment indicates that Henry is an American who is foreign to the Italian army with which he has no sense of brotherhood. And at the same time, his desertion suggests that he protests the lack of discipline in the troops.

Similarly, as we have seen, in *The Red Badge of Courage* Henry Fleming runs away from his post on the front line. His desertion may be interpreted as a result of his fear, which drives him to be timid and run away, but the author implies that Fleming is quite foreign to his regiment. The hero has not adapted himself to the new surroundings. Let us note the following passage: "He [Henry Fleming] could not put a whole faith in veterans' tales....They [the veterans] persistently yelled 'Fresh fish!' at him, and were in no wise to be trusted."<sup>7</sup>

This quotation suggests that Fleming lacks a sense of brotherhood and loyalty to his regiment. The hero is very critical of the words and actions of generals as well as of officers because he is not fully aware of his position as a part of his troops. In order to maintain military order in battle, the soldiers should obey orders from their superior officers without protest. But, Fleming has a strong consciousness of individual freedom even in the army. From another point of view, he feels that there are struggles against the enemy and against those Union officers whose attitude toward their men is very inhuman. Similarly, in *A Farewell to Arms* Frederick Henry, immediately before his desertion, probably feels that the struggles he engages in are not only against the enemy but against the Italian military police whose attitude toward their suspects is very cruel and inhuman as well.

Desertion from the battle lines, however, causes soldiers to feel

guilt-conscious, however hard they may try to justify their conduct to themselves. Although Hemingway suggests that Frederick Henry, after his escape to Switzerland with Catherine, his sweetheart, lives an idyllic and perfect life, we cannot help realizing that the hero is dissatisfied with this seemingly happy life. He is unable to enjoy his "separate peace" from the rest of the world. He is disturbed and troubled by the fact that he has run away from the battlefield of danger, because he cannot come into contact with danger as an individual.

On the other hand, Henry Fleming, after his desertion from his battle post, feels guilty for his early flight: "He [Henry Fleming] felt that he had been wronged,"<sup>8</sup> and "his eyes had the expression of those of a criminal who thinks his guilt and his punishment great."<sup>9</sup> Fleming tries to find comfort and justification for his early desertion in the realization that self-preservation is a basic natural law. But he is compelled to admit that his action has resulted from his timidity and cowardice. He realizes that his desertion causes the death of his comrades and the defeat of his unit, regiment, and army. In consequence, he feels the sting of conscience and a sense of sin, which does not leave him throughout the novel. His sense of guilt, especially, increases after he looks on the heroic death of his comrade, Jim Conklin, in the procession of wounded soldiers.

Heroism, or heroic deed, connotes great bravery or courage. Great courage is considered to be an attribute of heroes. Conversely, those who have no true courage cannot be called true heroes in the strict sense of the word. Courage is the quality of mind that enables men to control their fear in the face of danger. A true hero is ready and willing to risk and sacrifice his life in the face of death, as we have seen, just as Robert Jordan shows at the end of the novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. True heroism results from a selfless and fearless mind and action, and from personal confrontation with death with true courage. Jordan's death is true heroism because, knowing that he himself will be killed, he trains his gun on a sunlit clearing

into which Lieutenant Berrendo is leading his patrol in pursuit.

On the contrary, Frederick Henry is given a silver medal, which brings honor to him as a soldier. But this military decoration is a superficial glory because he has not shown soldierly gallantry but sustained his severe wound in the leg in an accident on the front line. No one can deny that his decoration is a false token of heroism. In this way, Hemingway questions the idea of martial glory which is supposed to be part of the military experience.

Stephen Crane reveals "all of the conventional views about heroism,"<sup>10</sup> suggesting that heroism always goes together with self-pride. In "A Mystery of Heroism," for example, private Fred Collins puts his life at risk under gunfire "under the pretext of procuring some water for his company; but in fact his action has been prompted by the desire to prove to himself that he is not 'afraid t' go."<sup>11</sup> Although he returns unscathed to his lines, the bucket of water he has brought lies on the ground empty while two lieutenants play over it. This scene symbolizes that his action does not spring from true courage but from superficial heroism. Similarly, after his return to his regiment, Henry Fleming fights desperately enough to be regarded as a "war devil." But it is not true courage; it is rather a blind fight befitting a beast that he demonstrates on the battlefield.

Crane suggests that true courage "worthy of esteem is silent, unobtrusive and more self-denying than self-assertive."<sup>12</sup> A good example of true heroism can be found in "The Veteran," a companion story of *The Red Badge of Courage*. This is because, having determined to "save two colts trapped in his burning barn, he [Henry] plunges into the flames, never to come out"<sup>13</sup> in the last scene of the story. His conduct proves a true courage grounded on cool, selfless determination.

Human beings reveal their real nature in the face of danger. When they are in imminent danger of death, they cannot but intuit-

tively choose the alternative actions between combat and desertion. In the ultimate situation, their actions frequently suggest that man is only an animal rather than a rational being. In the name of war, human beings have killed each other in the same way in which they slaughter animals. War is not noble but ignoble. In the disorder and confusion of the retreat, for instance, Frederick Henry is about to be killed not by the enemy but by his own troops. Similarly, Henry Fleming is wounded by one of his own comrades in the retreat.

Next, let us turn our attention to sea-stories in which the characters are destined to engage in a life-or-death struggle in Nature. This struggle implies that they make a constant effort to overcome their plight on the sea, amounting to human glory. Their survival--both physical and spiritual--connotes true bravery.

Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat" (1898) is a story of four men trying hard to reach the shore in a dinghy after a shipwreck. The setting of the sea is clearly involved with the actions of the men. The sea is shown to be a great impersonal force, indifferent to the men and their desperate efforts.<sup>14</sup>

It is clear that these four have a deep sense of brotherhood in a lifeboat that is tossed about in angry waves. Needless to say, they have to work hard together to survive the struggle against the rough sea. If one of them deserts his post in the boat, all of them will be sure to be drowned. Let us quote a passage from Stephen Crane regarding to the sense of brotherhood in the face of danger:

It would be difficult to describe the subtle brotherhood of men that was here established on the seas. No one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. But it dwelt in the boat, and each man felt it warm him. They were a captain, an oiler, a cook, and a correspondent, and they were friends--friends in a more curiously iron-bound degree than may be common.<sup>15</sup>



The men in a drifting boat seem to have a firmer friendship than soldiers do on the front line. In order to reach the shore alive, their friendship encourages them to row and row, bail out the boat over and over again, and swim and swim after they are thrown into the sea. "The boat is overturned and the oiler is killed. The other three set foot safely ashore."<sup>16</sup>

On the other side, in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), the hero, Santiago, fishes alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream. In the opening statement: "he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish,"<sup>17</sup> he is symbolic of a brave warrior travelling about in search of a worthy opponent for many months. Almost half of the whole story is concerned with moving scenes of confrontation between the old fisherman and a great fish. This confrontation symbolizes a single manly combat.

Now let us focus on how bravely the hero struggles to the best of his strength. The struggle begins at noon--that is, when he hooks the fish. The fish goes on pulling the boat with all its power for about twenty hours. It is an invisible but violent struggle on the sea. He is now cramped in the left hand because it has caught hold of the line against the strong pull of the huge fish. This is a glorious injury resulting from so many hours' confrontation in the face of danger.

There are some points of similarity in the characters and their situation in these two sea-stories, "The Open Boat" and *The Old Man and the Sea*. In the former, the four men are in the following difficult situation: "Of the four in the dinghy none had slept any time worth mentioning for two days and two nights previous to embarking in the dinghy, and in the excitement of clambering about the deck of a foundering ship they had also forgotten to eat heartily."<sup>18</sup> In the latter, the old fisherman, as we will see, keeps on engaging in a hard struggle against the great fish for almost two days and nights, also having little food or sleep in the boat. In

"The Open Boat," at night on the sea, the correspondent, one of the four, loses himself in deep thought in such a critical situation, as the old man does in *The Old Man and the Sea*.

The old fisherman's attitude or appearance reminds us of that of the captain in "The Open Boat." Each of them is very calm and composed in the face of danger. In other words, he has an air of keeping a cool head in any difficult situation. Both show their great skill in steering a small boat through high waves, although the injured captain, "this iron man," orders one of his men to steer the boat. The captain is injured in one of his hands, but he does not lose his courage to command his men in the boat. This attitude or appearance is like that of the old fisherman when his left hand is cramped.

In *The Old Man and the Sea*, on the third day, after almost forty-four hours of pulling the boat, the huge fish starts to circle. Then, between the old man and the great fish a true struggle takes place. This struggle finishes after several hours of their confrontation. The old man wins the victory. It is the biggest fish that he has ever seen. It is eighteen feet in full length, and weighs fifteen hundred pounds. It seems that there is a beautiful man against nature confrontation between worthy opponents who are matched in their fighting spirit, skill, and strength. It can be said that a person who excels in each of these three faculties never fails to win the victory.

And yet, another heavy struggle is in wait for the old man very soon. This is quite different from the first one because it is the fight to guard the marlin against a number of sharks. At first, he manages to throw back their repeated attacks in waves. But, in the end, a pack of sharks storm his marlin and devour it. Thus, his out-and-out struggle results in useless efforts.

But then, the hero's fighting spirit gets the better of such repeated attacks. Indeed, for about two and a half days and nights

he keeps on fighting against the sharks as he has done with the marlin, having little food or sleep. The old man shows an indomitable spirit for surmounting such a crisis, as the four men do in "The Open Boat" to survive the desperate struggle against that stormy sea.

Now, the old man kills the great marlin out of pride because he is a fisherman. This pride springs from a sense of being a professional who has had great experience and high standards in his "career" as a fisherman. This sense does not allow him to abandon the struggle against the huge fish. He does not want to be a coward such as a soldier who deserts his post on the battle front. In addition, like a brave warrior, he fought with all his strength to defend the marline he has caught with something like a sense of brotherhood. It does not matter to him whether or not he will win the victory over these fierce sharks.

In the closing scene of this story, the shape of a "great long white spine with a huge tail"<sup>19</sup> is very symbolical. This shape may lead us to hold two different views on the theme of this masterpiece. One is that the general public cannot reveal the identity of the shape. It carries a wrong association to them--a shark. This association implies that the whole truth of the hero's struggle for life on the sea is eternally buried in human misjudgment--as in the confusion of life. The other view is that this shape may give an impression that his struggle against the marlin has come to nothing. But, in reality, the hero recognizes the true value of life in his kill-or-be-killed confrontation. In the long run, God knows the old man's heroic deed in such a critical situation.

In conclusion, Ernest Hemingway depicts daily struggle for survival in his stories about fishing, hunting, skiing, bull-fighting, boxing, horse-racing, and war. Similarly, Stephen Crane describes various scenes of daily struggle in situations such as that on the battle front in *The Red Badge of Courage* and in a drifting boat

in "The Open Boat." Crane, dealing with life in battles and a drifting boat, takes a close look at great fear in every struggle in human predicaments.

#### NOTES

1. Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1963), p. 37.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
3. Jean Cazemajou, *Stephen Crane* (Minneapolis, Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1969), p. 18.
4. Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage and Selected Prose and Poetry* (New York, Holt Rinehart & Winston Inc., 1968), p. 420.
5. *Ibid.*, p.421.
6. James L. Roberts ed. *A Farewell to Arms: Notes* (Lincoln, Univ. of Nebraska, 1964), p. 33.
7. Crane, *Ibid.*, p. 418.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 453.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 454.
10. Cazemajou, *Ibid.*, p. 28.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
14. See Leon T. Dickenson, *A Guide to Literary Study* (New York, Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1959), p. 24.
15. Crane., *Ibid.*, pp. 274-75.
16. Cazemajou, *Ibid.*, p. 27.
17. Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 5.
18. Crane, *Ibid.*, p. 276.
19. Hemingway, *Ibid.*, p. 126.