Henry Fleming’s Inner Conflicts in Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*

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Abstract

Stephen Crane is a famous novelist who puts his characters into the situation of war. One of the famous novels is *The Red Badge of Courage* in telling about war and psychological effects inside of it. The purpose of this research is finding internal conflicts in Henry Fleming as the main character in the novel. It is also finding the important of victory for Henry Fleming. It is not only the real victory in war but also the victory inside Henry Fleming to all internal conflicts. The methodology of this research is external method in which all references are taken from books and internet sources. Besides that, extrinsic approach is also being used especially about psychology of Henry Fleming. The result shows that Henry Fleming is a young boy who enlists the army because his imagination toward Greek epics. The winning in the Greek battleship makes him for being a hero in Civil War. He gains many conflicts inside of him as a soldier. He feels desperate in the battleship but all activities make him believe that he wants to conquer all his burdens. Finally, Henry Fleming can handle all the problems and he becomes the hero, a dream he wants to achieve.

Introduction

A literary work can be analyzed from two aspects, intrinsic and extrinsic. It depends on the readers themselves and every reader will have his own opinions in interpreting a literary work. From those aspects, the reader will discover the theme, setting, character, characterization, and even some elements which have relationship with the literary itself such as history, psychological effect, history, etc.

War seems to be a good way to change the world and war also provides inspiration for future generations not only in United States but also in other countries. One of the leading revolutionaries, Thomas Paines, gave statement that war is contributed to enlighten the world and diffuse a spirit of liberality among mankind. One of the greatest authors, Stephen Crane, enlightened the world by war that he created in his novel. The truth is he never involves in a real war, his imagination of war makes him a person who has joined in the battlefield. One of professors in San Fransisco State College, Maurice Bassan, considers Crane as a soldier than a writer.

*The Red Badge of Courage* is one of Crane’s novels. The story inside of it tells about a dream of Henry Fleming to be a hero in American Civil War in 1860 – 1864. The novel also tells us the experience of young private in the civil war that happened in American in 19th century. The main character, Henry Fleming, who enlists in the army inspired by Greek epics, feels much experience in the war. Besides fighting against his enemies, he also undergoes “the real war” inside his heart. He faces many conflicts during the battle and
events in the battle have changed him from “a boy” to “a man”. *The Red Badge of Courage* is also one of the greatest novels about war and psychological effects.

**THEORY AND RESEARCH METHOD**

**Psychologically of Henry Fleming**

Stephen Crane, one of the famous American authors, was born in Newark, New Jersey on November 1st, 1871. He was the youngest of 14 children, a son of Methodist minister who died when he was nine. He moved three times in the New York area when he was a child and one of the reasons was his ill health. His moving to many areas makes him telling about war, which is usually a soldier who moved many times.

Psychology is not only the science that learns about the mind but also the behavior. Finally in recent time psychology is described most as the science which learns both, human and animal’s behavior. The application of psychology is to observe the behavior of characters, both protagonist and antagonist. This is one of goals of psychology in literature. By using this science we can find out the personality, motivation, goals and even the life of each character in a story. According to Freud, personality has 3 parts structure: id, ego, and superego. All of those three parts of the psychic structure above are always in conflicts. It is because behavior often does not fulfill someone’s moral values. In The Red Badge of Courage, by using psychological science we can find that Henry Fleming has to undergo his initiation into life and achieve a moral victory over himself.

**Inner Conflicts of Henry Fleming**

As a boy who enlists in the army because of being inspired by Greek epics, Henry Fleming faces many conflicts before and during the battle. Stephen Crane has made the journey of Henry Fleming full of conflicts, as the psychological effects on war. The internal conflicts that come from the character’s mind become the main contemplation behind the story in this novel. Below, the writer would like to discuss some inner conflicts, such as conflict with bravery, prestige, and self-confidence.

**DISCUSSION**

**Inner conflict with bravery**

One of Fleming’s reasons for enlisting the army is that he wants to be a hero. The tale of Greek epics evokes his bravery and inspires him to find glory. Henry Fleming dreams of battle in all his life and this dream give him enough courage to fight and to join the battle. He regards battle as something that he should join, something full of courage, power where he can be a hero. He knows that the only way to prove his courage is to go into the battle where he can find blaze, blood, and danger. He even does not care of the kind of enemies that he will face. The most important thing is that he tries to prove himself that he will face the battle and he will not run from it.

Although he has this kind of thinking, Henry still feels that he might run from the battle. He knows that he seldom thinks about certain things in his life, for example career,
success, and prestige. So far, he has taken them for granted. He never challenges his own belief in getting success in his life. This confrontation becomes the first inner conflicts that he faces since he knows nothing about the real war. Suddenly a little panic arouses and he can’t let this problem flow easily. He has to give serious attention to it. He imagines of much glory in his vision; on the other hand he also knows that it can be impossible pictures. Approach-avoidant conflicts has aroused in his mind. He wants to achieve bravery and get much glory as he dreams about. On the other side, he tries to avoid it by thinking that he might run and knowing that it is only his imagination. He realizes that his main reason to enlist in the army is an effort to seek adventure and personal achievement.

He still hopes that he can turn back the time and he will go back to the place where he should belong. He has an internal conflict by denying his conscience. He realizes that he is never created as a soldier but the spirit of Greek epics arouses his bravery that he can be a soldier though he is still fighting with his mind. His inner conflict continuous when he feels jealous of his friend’s bravery. He feels like a mental outcast, the one who is separated from his regiment. He sees his own fear inside his mind, the fear of facing the reality that he will run from the battlefield. Fleming also stated that war seems like monster and he admitted that he would not be able to cope with this monster (Crane 1895:28).

His fear comes up every time Henry and his regiments pass into a new region. He feels that his death is getting closer and closer. He lets his fears of stupidity and incompetence attacks him because he is occupied with his problem of bravery. In his desperation, he can conclude that his stupidity is not a matter. He has a big problem, bigger than his stupidity i.e., his bravery. This conflict makes him desperate for being a soldier. Fleming’s opinion comes when he joined the army; he gave his life to his region. He knows his bravery will be tested when the time to fight comes. A monster which he is waiting for then appears. At the moment, Henry does not know what to do and he only has one thing in his mind, which is, run from the battlefield. He does not think of anything but running away to save himself from the monster. Fleming also stated that bravery is no longer an important thing anymore. In The Red Badge of Courage, Henry conflict includes in Double approach conflicts. He has to decide his action whether he runs or faces the battle. He chooses to save himself and runs from the battlefield. He is described as a man who has no power when he meets “the monster” but he runs finally when he is aware to find out hat it is a
danger from him to stay. He runs without looking back and he does not care when he knocks his shoulder against a tree. Henry knows that he must run as fast as he can.

In this run, Henry feels that he lives in despair. The spirit of bravery from the Greek warriors does not help him so much. The real war is far from the imagination of bravery. Henry feels that he is nothing at that time and nature has already become the witness of his cowardice. This fact is really in contrast to his imagination before. He feels like a fugitive. He has the feeling of a criminal who is guilty and ready to be punished but then he runs from all of those things. He knows that he is a coward in this situation and he is not as brave as he thinks. He is just a soldier who runs from his duty. He is nothing but a loser. However, he still thinks that it is not his own fault. It is a natural condition for a living creature to face the problems but it is also natural that a living creature runs from the problems if he cannot face it.

“He did not stand stolidly baring his furry belly to the missile, and die with an upward glance at the sympathetic heavens. On the contrary, he had fled as fast as his legs could carry him; and he was but an ordinary squirrel, too – doubtless no philosopher of his race” (Crane 1895:58)

Henry does not have a firm mind. When he thinks that a war is not a frightening thing, it is just a vague bravery. He fights because other soldiers do and it seems to be a natural response attack but he runs away when he sees other soldiers running. Fear has overcome and he wants nothing but escape and a desire to survive. He has forgotten about the spirit of bravery he learns from the Greek warriors. He wants nothing but to be alive.

**Inner Conflicts with Prestige**

Beside bravery Henry learns from the Greek warriors, another motivation that encourages Henry to join the army is prestige.

“He had long despaired of witnessing a Greek like struggle. Such would be no more, he had said. Men were better, or more timid. Secular and religious education had effaced the throat – grappling instinct, or else firm finance held in check the passions” (Crane 1895:12)

He has the opinion that he can get his prestige by enlisting in the army. His need for prestige causes a conflict in his mind after saying to his mother that he has enlisted in the army. He feels proud of his soldier’s clothes. On the other hand, he is also ashamed of his real purpose, that is to gain prestige. Henry’s friends have seen him with pride and admiration. At that time Henry feels that he has got what he wants, a prestige. On the other hand, he feels that he has made a big gap between him and them.

Henry believes in his success while he waits for the movement of the regiment. He knows that he will get his success together with his prestige when he fights bravely. Henry realizes he can get his prestige with the reality when he runs from the battle. Henry feels ashamed, angry, and pities for himself. Everything he wants to get including prestige is only his imagination.
“He turned away amazed and angry. He felt that he had been wronged...He began to pity himself acutely. He was ill used. He was trodden beneath the feet of an iron injustice. He had proceeded with wisdom and from the most righteous motives under heaven’s blue only to be frustrated by hateful circumstances” (Crane 1895:56-57)

He perceives a glory by having a wound, he can get his prestige as a brave soldier, who fights bravely and never runs from the battle, but the fact is he has ruined everything. He has fled from the battle, he has no self-confidence to face the battle. When he runs from the battlefield, he perceives that he has no chance to get his “red badge” Henry does not know what to do. He imagines that his friends in the regiment will keep watching him when they have the next battle.

A vindication is very important for Henry Fleming. He perceives that he has to do something to keep his prestige so that his regiment will not consider him as a coward who has run from the battle. Moreover, if his regiment has that opinion, he has to make sure that he has a brilliant reason what makes him flees. This internal conflict makes Henry think that it is better for him to die. He wants to die soon, just like the other soldiers who have been killed in the battle. He perceives that those soldiers have been killed by lucky chances that come before they have opportunities to flee or before they are really tested as a soldier. To get killed like this will not make him lose his prestige as a soldier. At least, the society will respect him as a soldier who dies in the battlefield after fighting bravely. Once again Henry pities himself that he is not one of the dead.

At the time when he is wounded and taken care of by Wilson, Henry’s friend in his regime, he feels that he still has his prestige. His wound has kept his prestige saved. No one knows that it is just a fake wound. He gets it because Henry is hit with a rifle by a running soldier. His friends applauded him to be soldier with a serious wound on the head. Wilson, who has taken care of him, flatters Henry for the fight he has done. He sees Henry as a soldier who has fought bravely, separated from his regiments but comes back again, although he is injured. Responding to everything Wilson says, Henry just keeps silent and saying nothing because he knows that he never does that.

“Yeh don’t holler ner say nothin’, ’remarked his friend approvingly. ‘I know I’m blacksmith at takin’ keer’a sick folks, an’yeh never squeaked. Yer a good un, Henry. Most’ a man would a’ been in th’ hospital long ago. A shot in th’ head ain’t foolin’ business”. (Crane 1895:96)

He seems happy because he does not lose his self-esteem after running from the battle. On the other hand, his superego has said that his action is wrong. That is why he feels ashamed for what he has done, something he should not do as soldier.

**Inner Conflict with self-confidence**

As it is said in the previous chapter that Henry enlists in the army because of tales of great movements in Greek epics. He has enough self-confidence when he finally decides to enlist in the army. Although his mother has discouraged him because she knows that the right
place for Henry is on the farm. When he finally enlists in army, his mother does not say anything. She just said:

“The Lord’s will be done Henry, ‘she had finally replied, and had the continued to milk the brindle cow” (Crane 1895:12-13)

What seems to be self-confidence is gone when Henry thinks mathematically that he will run from the battle. It is natural for some persons to run away from the danger and Henry feels that he will be in danger when he is in the battle. This is what Henry and it arouses panic in his mind.

Henry sees many possibilities if the time for fighting comes. He will run or stay for the battle, but he feels that running from the battle will be the biggest possibility. In this case he loses his self-confidence. He realizes his self-confidence does not help him to overcome his panic for what will happen later in the battlefield. Henry runs to get closer when he hears the sound of the battle. His self-confidence comes up again at this time. It is ironical for him to get closer to something that he has avoided before. But, he tries to awaken his self-confidence again so that he can do the same as the other soldiers can, fight bravely.

Henry’s self-confidence seems important since it can influence him in deciding his action. When he hears voices of the battle, his self-confidence helps him to get closer to the battlefield although he has run from it before. Once again, Henry’s self-confidence awakes when he sees wounded soldiers and this is the condition that he really wants. His self-confidence helps him when he meets the tattered soldier and has conversation with him about the war which has just finished, although actually Henry feels ashamed of it.

In the next battle, Henry’s self-confidence rises again. He considers himself an experienced soldier. He has dealt with a frightening monster that he sees as a dragon and he can handle it. He has been through many obstacles and problems that he considers a burden. He regards his friends who have run from the battle as weak soldiers. Although he also runs from the battle he insists that he runs dignity. He feels that he is braver than the other soldiers. This time he feels big confident as he has ad his “red badge of courage”. Henry’s fight for the flag indicates his intention to show his confidence and bravery. He has won the inner conflict with his-self confidence that he feels at the first stage of his journey as a soldier, although he still focuses on his own pride and other individual achievements, not on the war itself as a greater phenomenon.

Conclusion

Henry Fleming is a protagonist in Stephen Crane’s The Red Badge of Courage. Here, he is a young boy who is influenced by the glory of Greek epics. He enlists in the army without considering many things but the tales of Greek warriors. He plunges into the battle by fantasies of adventure and heroism.

Henry as a picture of a man who lives in fantasy in the beginning. He never thinks about the fact that he is going to face. He only lives with his dreams and his imagination. However, he can overcome all of his obstacles and his problems. He has no fear and shame anymore. Despite his “red badge of courage”. Henry gets his own victory. He can gain his
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spirit of glory; he has renewed his understanding of war and his place in it. Finally, luck might help people in changing his life but the best action is when we try to deal with every obstacle in our lives as best as we can.

References

