

DEMYSTIFICATION AND REVELATION:
NATURE IN *THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE*

Chi Yuan-wen*

Ever since the publication of Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), many critics have dwelled upon the use of nature as a predominant metaphor in the novel. Most of these critical opinions focus on the duality of nature. Martha V. Y. Kim has observed, for example, in her recent thesis: "Metaphorically, then, two distinct ways of perceiving nature are developed in *The Red Badge*: on the one hand, nature is perceived as being benign and concerned for mankind; on the other, nature is perceived as indifferent to man and his problem."¹ So far as the study of the work is concerned, we can say that the former stands for a romantic concept of nature while the latter represents a naturalistic one. Basically, this viewpoint is correct in the sense that it is in accord with the protagonist Henry Fleming's war experiences at the first two stages of the novel. At first the youth perceives nature as the very source from which he can abundantly get compassion, comfort, solace and healing power, while at the same time he regards war as a show of personal prowess and

* Assistant Research Fellow, Institute of American Culture, Academia Sinica. The author particularly wishes to thank Dr. Rudolph Yen Chu, Dean of College of Liberal Arts, National Taiwan University, for his valuable remarks and suggestions.

¹ Martha V. Y. Kim, *The Style of Stephen Crane's "The Red Badge of Courage" and Other Works: A Linguistic Analysis*, Diss. Kent State University 1982 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1983), p. 63.

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glory.² However, his confidence in nature wavers as the war goes from bad to worse and nature unveils herself in the form of horror, threat, cruelty and even death. All of these climax in the forest-chapel scene: standing face to face with the corpse of a Federal private in the Arcadian bower of nature, Henry comes to know the cruel and gloomy side of nature.³

It is useful but limited in scope to apply the duality theory to interpreting the concept of nature in the novel. Like any other literary theories, this theory has its blindness and insight. As a matter of fact, this perspective of nature is valid and relevant to the work in question to the extent that it truthfully reflects the protagonist's perception of nature with regard to the war before he rejoins the regiment. But how about his view of nature from the moment of his rejoining onward unto the end of the novel? Does he still stick to his romantic concept? Or does he convert to a naturalistic view of nature as a result of his previous unpleasant experience with nature? True, the natural world remains the same, but the youth is transformed from a cowardly deserter into a brave defender of freedom on the battlefield. Therefore, my hypothesis is that Henry's concept of nature is likely to undergo a significant change after he leaves the fatal forest-chapel scene and makes up his mind to rejoin the regiment so as to take an active part in the combat. Hence, Henry must have a new perspective in looking at the world when he once again encounters nature at the end of the novel; or else there will appear an inconsistent and contradictory view of nature: Henry the coward and Henry the hero. It is really quite unconvincing. For this reason, there is sufficient *raison d'être* for the discussion of a third view of nature: a realistic perspective of nature which regards nature as "the diminished nature" short of divinity.⁴ To put it in another way, nature is what it is, no

² Chester L. Wolford, *The Anger of Stephen Crane: Fiction and the Epic Tradition* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), p. 73.

³ Maxwell Geismar, *Rebels and Ancestors: The American Novel, 1890-1915* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1953), pp. 82-89.

⁴ Morris Wei-hsin Tien, "Frost's Realistic Approach to Man and Nature," *American*

more no less. Man can make the most of nature so far as he is capable of affirming his own individuality in the universe. Thus the purpose of this paper is first to show the evolution of the concept of nature in the novel and then to demonstrate that the emergence of a realistic view of nature enables the protagonist to better know himself as well as to find his true identity; and finally to arrive at a tentative conclusion: that the relationship between the evolution of the concept of nature and the spiritual growth of the protagonist is closely interwoven.

Before going into the discussion of the novel itself, it seems necessary to delineate the basic structure of the story as regards the movement of the protagonist in the course of the novel.⁵ Structurally, the novel is divided into three parts which approximately correspond to the three stages of the protagonist's progress from romantic illusion, bitter suffering and disillusionment, to spiritual maturity. In the first stage (Chapters I-V), Henry aimlessly wanders through tedious military maneuvers and skirmishes, expecting battle scenes to satisfy his curiosity about the unknown war. He has not got himself involved in actual fighting as yet; he is at best a spectator of the war rather than a combatant: "He experienced the joy of man who at least finds leisure in which to look about him."⁶ At the second stage (Chapters VI-XII), Henry is so shock-ridden and dumbfounded at the outbreak of war on a large scale that he hurriedly flees to the forest in order to seek refuge and solace from nature. But nature fails him at the very juncture of his moral crisis. At the third stage (Chapters XIII-

Studies, 13, No. 2 (June 1983), 31-71. See also A. J. Cascardi, "Emerson on Nature: Philosophy beyond Kant," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance*, 30, No. 4 (1984), 202.

⁵ Cf. Thomas L. Raymond, *Stephen Crane* (Newark, N. J.: The Carteret Book Club, 1923), p. 24. The action of the story takes place in four days.

⁶ Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* in Volume I of *The Work of Stephen Crane*, ed. Wilson Follett (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), Chapter V, p. 68. All subsequent references to the novel will be to this edition and will be included parenthetically in the text.

XXIV), Henry returns to the regiment with a guilty conscience and sets out on his journey of redemption and initiation under the baptism of gunshot and shell.⁷ In what follows we will trace the evolution of the protagonist's concept of nature within this framework in terms of romantic, naturalistic and realistic perspectives.

I

A romantic concept of nature reflects Henry's state of mind at the first stage. For him, nature is mother nature incarnate which, as used in the romantic context, exists in the outer world in the form of "natural objects as mountains, woods, plants, waters, animals, rain, snow, stars, and the sun."⁸ It is aware of what man does and what he needs. Above all, it offers comfort and consolation when man suffers from any trouble, anguish, frustration and the like. It is, therefore, a refuge for the troubled soul in need of peace and rest. Jean Cazemajou puts this well when he writes:

Thus, one is tempted to say that Nature is simply a haven of peace in Crane's vision of the world, and many passages in *The Red Badge of Courage* seem to support this conclusion. Nature provides a wonderful backdrop for the hero's romantic regression into the bosom of the Mother of the Universe while he waits for his first battle to begin . . .⁹

⁷ For an analysis of the structure of the novel, see Eric Solomon, *Stephen Crane: From Parody to Realism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 77-78; John W. Rathbun, "Structure and Meaning in *The Red Badge of Courage*," *Ball State University Forum*, X (Winter, 1969), 8-16; rpt. in *The Red Badge of Courage*, ed. Sculley Bradley et al. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1976), pp. 323-33.

⁸ Yasuhiro Yoshizaki, *Faulkner's Theme of Nature* (Kyoto: Yamaguchi Shoten, 1982), p. 5.

⁹ Jean Cazemajou, "The Red Badge of Courage: The 'Religion of Peace' and the War Archetype," in *Stephen Crane in Transition: Centenary Essays*, ed. Joseph Katz (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1972), p. 58. For a representative illustration of this perspective, see also Norman Foerster, *Nature in American Literature: Studies in the Modern View of Nature* (1923; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1958), pp. 63-64, 101-10.

As a Union private newly recruited from the countryside, Henry tends to turn to nature for inspiration and consolation when he is bored by the chores and routine work of the regiment. However, with the shadow of impending war in his mind, he feels uneasy and panicky especially when the troops encamp for the night in disarray. Under these circumstances, he involuntarily goes out to nature in the dark, leaving noises, annoyance and disorder all behind him. Returning to the bosom of Mother Nature, Henry seems to have found there tranquility, solace and peace to soothe his moody spirits and restore his confidence. We can see this in the following passage:

He lay down in the grass. The blade pressed tenderly against his cheek. The moon had been lighted and was hung in a treetop. The liquid stillness of the night enveloping him made him feel vast pity for himself. There was a caress in the soft winds; and the whole mood of the darkness, he thought, was one of sympathy for himself in his distress. (I, pp. 41-42)

Nevertheless, the romantic concept of nature seems inadequate as set in the context of war. As a man with this turn of mind, Henry is prone to derive some feeling and emotion from nature which is nothing but his own mental projection. In that case, the liability of illusion and self-deception becomes inevitable. In *Rousseau and Romanticism*, Irving Babbitt has pointed out:

[The Romanticist] is simply communing with his own mood . . . The nature over which [he] is bent in such rapt contemplation plays the part of the pool in the legend of Narcissus. It renders back to him his own image. [He] transfuses himself into nature in much the same way that Pygmalion transfuses himself into his statue.¹⁰

¹⁰ Irving Babbitt, *Rousseau and Romanticism* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919), p. 302. For the development of the cult of nature in Western literature, see especially Babbitt's illuminating analysis in Chapter VIII "Romanticism and Nature," pp. 268-305.

This kind of pathetic fallacy can be seen in Henry's wishful vision of war. He supposes that war should contain "Homeric" heroics (I, p. 24) as well as "Greeklike struggles" (I, pp. 24, 29). He imagines himself as a man of extraordinary bravery and strength, capable of defeating the enemy at a stroke and achieving auspicious feats. But he knows this is wild fantasy when he is wide awake. Moreover, his knowledge of the war comes partly from the books, and partly from "the gossip of the village," "twisted news of a great battle" (I, p. 25). And the fact that the novel is written in the form of impressionism does suggest to some extent, the fallibility of the protagonist's perception of the world. As an impressionistic novel designed to represent the "inner reality of the world," it is narrated in the third-person, limited point of view.¹¹ Thus the reader comes to know what happens in the novel through the eyes of the protagonist who simply represents what comes to his mind at a particular moment. For that matter, Henry is prone to fall victim to delusion and self-deception, partly due to his romantic view of nature and partly due to his own questionable philosophy which leads him to see in the world what he wants to see.¹²

As we have mentioned before, Henry's vision of the world is distorted and preoccupied so that he perceives no reality at all. Indeed, fogs and smoke clouds pervade the whole book,

¹¹ James B. Colvert, Intro., *Great Short Works of Stephen Crane* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965), p. xv. Many critics have discussed the work in terms of impressionism: see also John Berryman, *Stephen Crane* (New York: William Sloane Associates Inc., 1950), pp. 68-69; James Nagel, *Stephen Crane and Literary Impressionism* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980); Kim, p. 30.

¹² In *Stephen Crane*, rev. ed. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), Edwin H. Cady says, "The voice is that of a third-person, 'objective' narrator—not a first-person, 'subjective' teller . . . But the point of view is located at almost the same place as if this were a first person narrative: it is just behind the eyes of 'the youth private.' The reader sees through Henry Fleming's eyes, and he is able to reflect backwards somewhat to record what goes on in Henry's mind But for the most part the reader is limited to seeing and hearing the life of the fiction as the narrator does; he can never 'go behind' into the mind of another character." p. 120.

blurring what is going on in the battlefield. The maneuvers of the troops often take place in thick fogs (I, p. 21; II, p. 40; XVI, pp. 139-40); the floating smoke can be seen everywhere (III, pp. 52, 55; IV, p. 57; V, p. 63; VI, pp. 73-74; XVII, p. 148; XVIII, p. 153; XX, p. 169; XXIII, p. 190); the mist over the plain blocks the vision of the troops (VII, p. 80; XI, p. 107; XIII, p. 124; XI, p. 127; XIX, p. 164). All of these symbolically render the reality of the world twisted. As James Nagel has argued, "The disparity between illusions and realities, in fact, accounts for the basic tone at the heart of the fiction!"¹³ In order to better understand his status in relation to the world, Henry must free himself from these barriers standing in his way.

The impending war now becomes a threat to Henry. Anxiety, fear and restlessness loom up through thick smoke clouds as a nightmare in his mind all the time. Hence, he thinks of the good old days back home.

He associates a constellation of ideas that he sees in nature with a constellation of ideas associated with home. In wishing to return home, it is not simply that Henry wishes to return to the womb; rather he wants to return to his situation prior to joining the army. . . . This is one of the instances in which Henry's feeble consciousness wishes to regress to a former state.¹⁴

In stead of dealing with the situation he faces at the present, Henry turns to escapism, indulging himself in nursing remembrances of things past. As a consequence of this, he recalls the routine work in the farm (II, p. 42) and the circus parade in his hometown (V, p. 62). When he ridiculously gets his "red badge of courage" by a blow from the butt of a rifle, he thinks of his favorite dishes and the merry time with his friends (XX, pp. 116-17). These recollections offer him some moments of relief at the interval of the war—the sun shining brightly through the clouds, the insects chirping in the grove,

¹³ Nagel, p. 92.

¹⁴ Donald B. Gibson, *The Fiction of Stephen Crane* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), p. 71.

and the birds darting to and fro in the sky with glee. At this point, he considers nature peaceful and friendly around him: "The landscape gave him assurance. A fair field holding life. It was the religion of peace. It would die if its timid eyes were compelled to see blood. He conceived Nature to be a woman with a deep aversion to tragedy" (VII, p. 82). However, he is soon to find himself deceived. This view of nature is, of course, too naive and simple-minded to confront realities of war—fear, death, massacre, uncertainty of fate. As Eric Solomon has observed, Henry is at best filled with a "foolish romantic pride" and he has more romantic impulse than sense.¹⁵ As soon as he plunges into the battlefield, he is forced to renounce his romantic view of nature.

II

Though Henry holds a romantic view of nature in the first stage of the story, he is by no means immune from doubt, misgiving and hesitation. It is true that human psychology is constantly in a state of flux and reflux, with one thought prevailing over the other or even with both mixing together at the same time. This is Henry's case for the time being: his romantic perspective of nature is, in one way or another, replaced by a naturalistic one.

At the second stage Henry perceives the other aspect of nature—cruelty, ruthlessness, apathy and indifference. Furthermore, nature presents a gloomy picture of the universe with unfathomable mystery within; it does not care a farthing about man's fate. Instead of getting solace, compassion and comfort from nature, man is likely to encounter disaster, danger, threat, or even death. Man becomes helpless and insignificant under these oppressive powers. Indeed, he is

¹⁵ Solomon, p. 77. See also Sergio Perosa, "Naturalism and Impressionism in Stephen Crane's Fiction," *Annali di Ca' Foscari*, III (1964), 119-142; rpt. in *Stephen Crane: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Maurice Bassan (Englewood, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp. 80-94.

stranded in "an oppressive universe looming as an impassive background to the ultimate puny action of even the best of men."¹⁶ Therefore, nature is not only a horrible wilderness but also the very hiding place of evils—a fact culminating in the forest-chapel bower. Man's fate, on these occasions, is to suffer whatever nature has in store for him.

Nature unveils its abominable truth as the war gets worse. Though Henry has encountered death before (in Chapter V the troops went a roundabout way to by-pass a corpse on the roadside), it never occurs to him that it may probably fall to his lot as well. Frightened by the casualties of his comrades in action, he is so stunned and horror-stricken that he cowers and deserts in a hurry to save his skin. Hence, he turns to nature in the hope of finding solace there. But nature seems unfriendly and hostile—the creepers catch against his legs and protest aloud about his flight. He tries to justify his ignoble behavior on the basis of the natural law as he watches a scared squirrel running for its life and a predatory bird preying upon fish. But all of these avail nothing for his fear of war and death continues unabated even though he escaped from the scene of slaughter.¹⁷ The war still haunts him as something like "the infernal mouths of [a] war god" (VI, p. 77), "[the] terrible machine" that produces corpses (VIII, p. 87), "the red animal", "the blood-swollen god" (XII, p. 112). What is worse; he accidentally stumbles into a forest-chapel bower in the heart of nature which turns out to be a morgue! What he beholds there is nothing but death itself—the thing he tries to avoid by all means.

¹⁶ Wolford, p. 10. For a survey of the naturalistic view of nature, see Frank Bergon, *Stephen Crane's Artistry* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp. 80-83; Gordon Milne, *Stephen Crane at Brede: An Anglo-American Literary Circle of the 1890's* (Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1980), p. 35; Cazemajou, *Stephen Crane* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1969), p. 18.

¹⁷ See Clarence Oliver Johnson, "A Methodist Clergyman—Of the Old Ambling-Nag, Saddle-Bag, Exhorting Kind": *Stephen Crane and His Methodist Heritage*, Diss. Oklahoma State University 1982 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1984), pp. 72-97, for a study of fear as a literary influence from Rev. George Peck, his grandfather on the maternal side.

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He was being looked at by a dead man who was seated with his back against a column-like tree. . . . The eyes, staring at the youth, had changed to the dull hue to be seen on the side of a dead fish. The mouth was open. Its red had changed to an appalling yellow. Over the gray skin of the face ran little ants. One was trundling some sort of bundle along the upper lip. (VII, p. 83)

Henry's escape from the forest-chapel bower puts an end to his romantic impulse. In his essay "Notes Toward an Analysis of *The Red Badge of Courage*," R. W. Stallman claims that "Henry's flight from the forest sanctuary represents his momentary rejections of womblike innocence; periodically he rejects Mother Nature with her sheltering arms and 'religion of peace.'"¹⁸ To be sure, he is too frightened to stay any longer in the forest. The forest here symbolizes the power of darkness, an incarnation of nature's maliciousness thwarting man's fate in an irrational universe. It is to be borne in mind that this episode is a turning point in Henry's experience with nature. Estranging himself from the troops, he wanders in the wilderness and gets caught in the forest. His vision of nature changes drastically when he beholds a forest-chapel bower which is nothing but a morgue. It is time for him to do an about-face philosophically speaking.

The death of the tall soldier Jim Conklin makes Henry revolt against nature. Jim was his friend since childhood. His death deepens Henry's sense of the futility of man's effort in an indifferent universe. No matter how hard he strives, his end seems predetermined and inescapable.¹⁹ Grieved and wronged as he feels now, he shakes his fists against the sun in defiance, "The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer" (IX, p. 98). It is absolutely blasphemous to compare the sun to a wafer. But

¹⁸ R. W. Stallman, "Notes Toward an Analysis of *The Red Badge of Courage*," in *The Houses That James Built and Other Literary Studies* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1977), p. 92.

¹⁹ Olov W. Frychstedt, "Cosmic Pessimism in *The Red Badge of Courage*," in *Stephen Crane: A Collection of Critical Essays*, pp. 144-45. Stallman compares the death of the tall soldier to that of Jesus Christ, see Stallman, p. 94.

if we take into account the pang and despair befalling him, then we may find that this view of nature is just reflecting his altered mood. In "The Many Suns of *The Red Badge of Courage*," Edward Stone claims that the sun appears six times in the novel and its function varies according to the protagonist's various experiences in the war. It can be either the very source of life giving out light, warmth and joy to mankind, or one part of the hostile universe which has no feeling for human suffering and anguish.²⁰ The sun as a symbol here embodies nature's indifference and unconcern, instead. Interestingly enough, the shift of the symbolic role of the sun, in this connection, parallels Henry's perception of nature. Similarly, Henry's rage toward nature reminds the reader of a passage in the author's short story, "The Open Boat" (1897), in which the crew aboard a small boat struggle to row ashore in a wintry, roaring sea while a "high cold star" is the only word that nature speaks to them. One of the crew (the correspondent) cannot help exclaiming:

When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple. Any visible expressions of nature would surely be pelleted with his jeers.²¹

In addition, the tattered soldier, who acts as attorney general on behalf of society, repeatedly interrogates Henry as to what ails him in the procession of the wounded soldiers (VIII, p. 91; X, p. 102). His questions shame Henry so much that he feels extremely uneasy and embarrassed in his presence. He is indeed torn between good conscience and the prick of remorse. Subconsciously, he also wishes to be wounded so as to have an excuse for his desertion: "He wished that

²⁰ Edward Stone, "The Many Suns of *The Red Badge of Courage*," *American Literature*, 29, No. 3 (Nov. 1957), 322-26.

²¹ Crane, "The Open Boat," Volume XII of *The Work of Stephen Crane*, p. 51.

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he, too, had a wound, a red badge of courage" (IX, p. 92). Ironically, Henry gets his "red badge" by a blow from the rifle butt of a panic-stricken soldier rather than by the enemy's bullets. Walking with a retreating troop, he hysterically seizes a soldier to ask him what is going on.

"Let go me! Let go me!"

"Why-why-" stuttered the youth.

"Well, then!" bawled the man in a lurid rage. He adroitly and fiercely swung his rifle. It crushed upon the youth's head.

(XII, p. 114)

Like Hester's burning scarlet letter A on her breast, the red badge of courage—a symbol of shame and infamy—can be got rid of only through the proof of Henry's bravery and worthiness in the battlefield. To be sure, he is in a dilemma now. What should he do? There seems little choice for him except to turn his back on nature and rejoin the regiment.

In his pamphlet *Stephen Crane*, Cazemajou has observed, "Its main characters are most of the time designated as figures in an allegory . . . and the protagonist, usually referred to as 'the youth' in the early chapters, only acquires his full identity in Chapter XI."²² It is true that the reader is not informed of the full name of the protagonist until Chapter XI. However, if we have a close look at the context in which his full name is used, we may find that it occurs in the passage when Henry, worrying about his comrades' interrogation about absence, pictures in his own mind the jeer and scorn he is to be pelted with: "He imagined the whole regiment saying: 'Where's Henry Fleming? He run, didn't 'e? Oh, my!'" (XI, p. 111). Before this, he was simply named as "the youth," a nomenclature referring to general attributes rather than personality. If we reason out the argument to its logical extreme, we may say that Henry's self-criticism at this juncture of time makes him reflect on what he has achieved till now and what role he is to play in the time to come. That is the inception of his pursuit

²² Cazemajou, *Stephen Crane*, p. 18.

for true identity and moral integrity. And, as such, it is fitting for this episode to take place on the eve of his rejoining the regiment.

Like Virgil guiding the poet Dante through "Wood of Error" in *Purgatory*, the cheery man acts as mentor to come to Henry's aid in time, leading him to go through "the mazes of the tangled forest," "a vast hive" (XII, p. 119). Moreover, the cheery man's gentle manner and talk appease the youth's worry and confusion and make him feel at ease. If the tall soldier and the tattered soldier serve to stimulate and awake Henry from his moral lethargy, the cheery man leads him on the way to regeneration.

III

At the third stage Henry's view of nature is a realistic one in which nature tends to be neutralized and no longer affects the protagonist's vision of the world as it did in the foregoing stages.²³ The revelation of nature, if there be any, does come from the beholder's recognition of his identity and individuality secured in an incomprehensible yet liveable world rather than from a fixed set of ideas imposed by any dogma or doctrine. To be sure, he is to see nature as *what it is* rather than *what it should be*. The outside world is constantly on the move and never stabilizes. To try to understand nature through any preconceived idea or concept is liable to present a distorted image; rather, it can be perceived only through cognizance of the mind. As Wolford has put it: "[T]he events occurring in the world are chaotic, and that only some organizing faculty of the mind gives us the impression that things are ordered."²⁴ The end of nature is for man himself rather than an exercise of rigid abstraction. It thus follows that man should first overcome his own prejudice, bias and weakness within before he can conquer the indifference and harshness of

²³ Cf. Kim, pp. 54-55.

²⁴ Wolford, p. 33.

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the physical world without. To put it in another way, man has to get rid of his egotism so as to have a true knowledge of self through which he can achieve spiritual growth and maturity. In order to learn and make the most of the revelation from nature, man must be capable of knowing himself and standing on his own feet, so that he may be sensible enough to recognize his own position and stance with regard to the world.²⁵

It is worth noting that Henry's first encounter with nature after his rejoining takes place directly after a fierce battle. Restless sleep, weary faces, torn trousers, dusty shoes—all of these are the reality of the war. He must adjust to his new status as a combatant rather than a spectator, insofar as he wants to turn over a new leaf in his life.

. . . the foliage moved softly. The leaves, with their faces turned toward the blaze, were coloured shifting hues of silver, often edged with red. Far off to the right, through a window in the forest, could be seen a handful of stars, lying like glittering pebbles on the black level of the night. (XIII, p. 124)

Compared with the description of nature quoted in the previous two sections, this passage represents nature in plain language rather than in a lurid and high-flown style. As the passage changes in style, so does the effect that follows, a fact that can be seen in the light of the protagonist's perception of nature. For example, the function of the symbol forest at the foregoing two stages possesses a binary quality, that is, it is either benevolent (as a heavenly bower) or fatally malicious (as a morgue of the dead). But it has multiple implications at this stage. Being the hiding place of the enemy, it threatens the troops with horror and death (XVI, pp. 141, 145; XVIII, p. 152; XIX, pp. 158, 161, 164; XXII, pp. 181-82); it is sinned against by the bombing and exploding of cannons (XVI, p. 144; XVII, p. 148; XVIII, pp. 152-53); it is a shelter for the wounded and worn-out soldiers (XVIII, p. 153; XIX, p. 160;

²⁵ Cf. Cascardi, p. 294; Wolford, pp. 132-33.

XXIV, p. 196); it is an aloof god in solitude (XXII, p. 182). Complex and complicated as it may be, nature can no longer be effectively perceived from a single, simplified point of view. The protean changes of nature are precarious and unpredictable whereas its revelation is comprehensive and inexhaustible. To hunt for meaning out of nature by mere supposition comes to no avail. The only way out seems to take it as it is, so that one may not be deluded. For the most part, the blue sky serves to rally and encourage the troops, but it also bears witness to the act of massacre which runs amuck (XXIII, p. 189). In accord with this, the troops proceed to come back to their campsite under a heavy and gloomy sky after their victory over the enemy (XXIV, p. 200). Since the scenes in the physical world cannot be changed at one's own will, what can be done is to change one's own idea and thought.

In order to survive in a world almost void of divine power, Henry must stand up to challenges. He has to prove his manliness as well as worthiness so as to be accepted by his comrades. Symbolically, the old private Henry is long dead. For example the corporal speaks of him: "Why, I thought you was [sic] dead four hours ago" (XIII, p. 121). Like a pilgrim heavy with a burden of sin and transgression on his back, the Union private Henry Fleming is setting out to undertake his journey of regeneration in "a retreating cosmos."²⁶ His task, first and foremost, is to get rid of his egotism. As we have mentioned before, his romantic view of nature twists his vision of the world. For him nature is benign and friendly when he gets on well, but nature becomes hostile and malicious when he fails to court its favor. This narrow perspective results in a wayward, self-centered personality: he is insensitive of and oblivious to others' feelings. He is, for example, stone-deaf to his mother's reaction to his enlistment. As one critic says, "Occurring in the first chapter, the 'Mrs. Fleming' episode serves to increase Henry's feelings of sin and guilt over his Homeric sense of selfish individuality which encompasses

²⁶ Maurice Bassan, Intro., *Stephen Crane: A Collection of Critical Essays*, pp. 8-9.

egoism, insensitivity, and the pursuit of personal glory at all costs—*areté*.”²⁷ Colvert diagnoses the flaw in Henry’s personality as “futile morality of sentimental self-aggrandizement.”²⁸ His *hubris* makes him feel superior to others. But what has he achieved till now? From the outset, he thought little of the loud soldier, Wilson, who was boastful, boisterous and timid. But he is a changed man now: he tends Henry’s wound, gets along well with his comrades, acts as a peace-maker, and, above all, becomes a brave and dutiful soldier. Henry looks mean and absurd in comparison with Wilson, who is now the standard against which his conduct is measured.²⁹ He is forced to renounce his exaggerations that he is “immensely superior to his friend [Wilson]” “the chosen of gods and doomed to greatness” (XV, pp. 135-36) as well as to do away with “all loud moods” to boast (XVI, p. 143).

As a witness of ferocity and brutality committed on the battlefield, Henry comes up with an awareness of man’s isolation and helplessness in the universe, so much so that he can not but confront the predicament. Desertion is beyond the question, for it worsens the situation rather than offering a solution. Fear, like Nemesis, never ceases haunting him when he flees (VI, p. 75). The only way out seems to cast his lot at the mercy of Mars. On the other hand, the unimportance and insignificance of life throw him into confusion, too. The general speaks of Henry’s regiment as “mule-drivers” to be sacrificed sooner or later and the soldiers as a “broom” to sweep the enemy out of the woods (XVI, p. 155). Human dignity and individuality are ravaged insofar man is used as a pawn in the clutch of the war. Solomon has argued that “One of the great philosophical difficulties broached by war is the conflict between the belief in one’s own importance and the realization

²⁷ Wolford, p. 45.

²⁸ Colvert, “Introduction,” p. x.

²⁹ At first Wilson gave a little packet to Henry on the eve of a battle, telling him where to deliver it if he were killed in action (III, p. 56). Later on, Henry intended to use it as a weapon to stop Wilson’s interrogation about his absence (XV, pp. 134-35).

that the life of a single infantryman may be worthless in comparison to the overall battle plan."³⁰ The effacement of individuality is after all an undeniable fact in the time of emergency; none can do anything about it. For that matter, the individual should identify intimately with the group so as to be strong enough to withstand threats and attacks whatsoever. In "The Open Boat" the crew are able to survive the most perilous and formidable billows with an implicit "subtle brotherhood of man" growing among them. And Henry is strengthened physically and mentally when he is En-Masse with his comrades.³¹ Disposing of his egotism, superiority and self-glorification, Henry is one with the troops.

Henry's courage and strength are put to test in actual combats from now on. The first battle after his rejoining the regiment does not go off without a hitch: thick fogs make "[t]his part of the world . . . a strange, battleful existence" (XVI, p. 139), the tall trees block their vision, so much so that the whole troops begin complaining of whether or not the commander's judgment is right. Fatigued and weary as he is, Henry remains firm in his determination and never yields an inch and, with the reminder of shame still on his head (XVII, p. 147), he knows what he should do. It is, after all, now or never. He stands foremost among the troops, rallying his comrades to make a counterattack against the enemy. He even risks his life to wrest the flag from the dying sergeant. This act contributes much to redeeming his former wrong-doings, as, for that matter, it serves to dispel the shadow of infamy and ignobleness from his mind. That the colonel of his regiment extols his virtue of bravery builds up Henry's reputation as a hero in the ranks and this assuredness, endearing as it seems to him, helps to fulfill his pursuit of spiritual growth and maturity.³²

³⁰ Solomon, p. 87.

³¹ Crane, "The Open Boat," p. 36.

³² The controversy over the question whether or not the novel is a *Bildungsroman* has been open to heated disputes among critics. If it is, then it follows that Henry acquires full identity at the end of the novel; if not, he is a hero

The above analysis demonstrates Henry's progress from a cowardly private to a true-born soldier. That is his *rite de passage*, as it might be argued. And so be it. With this understanding, we may find it is not impossible to argue with Gibson when he remarks:

[W]hen he is strong enough to face the possibility of his own destruction, he will no longer identify with nature, will not see nature as an antagonistic force because he will have freed himself from nature's domain. . . . After Chapter XV . . . the youth no longer sees nature as being kind and benevolent until the very last chapter where confusion once again rears its ignoble head. . . .³³

The re-appearance of nature at the end of the novel has nothing to do with "confusion"; rather, it evinces the emergence of a realistic view of nature as a result of demystification. Nature turns out to be something implicit yet discernible.³⁴

The story begins with the troops encamping along the riverside. The river as the source and fountain of life is symbolically rich in meanings. At the interval of a certain battle, Henry goes with Wilson to look for the river in the hope of "throwing his heated body on to the stream and, soaking there, drink[ing] quarts" (XVIII, p. 153). But he fails to find any

manqué. As for the pros, see especially Bernard Weisberger, "*The Red Badge of Courage*," in *Twelve Original Essays on Great American Novels*, ed. Charles Shapiro (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1958), pp. 99-110; Thomas Goethals, Intro., *The Red Badge of Courage*, by Stephen Crane (New York: Collier Books, 1962), pp. 7-12; Perosa, pp. 87-88; Kim, pp. 74-77. However, there are some opposite critical opinions on this point. In *Stephen Crane*, Cazemajou has claimed that "[A] radical change has not taken place within him: he remains, as his heroic pose at the end, just as grotesque as the fearful 'little man' he was at the beginning," p. 20. As for the cons, see also Colvert, "Stephen Crane's Magic Mountain," in *Stephen Crane: A Collection of Critical Essays*, p. 95; Solomon, p. 85; Johnson, p. 84. Be that as it may, the former opinion seems to have carried the day.

³³ Gibson, p. 77.

³⁴ Cf. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essays on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1978), p. 148. The text is as follows: "Nature is alive inside man . . ."

streams. Obviously, the delay is not so much due to any faults on his part as to the fact that he is to prove his manliness in action as he does two chapters later. After that he drinks to his heart's content to quench his scorching thirst and calm down his agitated soul (XXI, p. 176). Metaphorically, he acquires his regeneration and spiritual growth through the catharsis and ablution of pure water. That the troops come back to their campsite on the riverside adds an artistic finish to the plot of the novel—a beautiful full circle which embraces both the beginning and the end. This reminds the reader of a serene scene in Psalm "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters" (23: 2, King James Version).

IV

In *The Red Badge of Courage* the concept of nature is indeed constantly on the move; it is a three-fold view of nature with romantic, naturalistic and realistic perspectives. The duality of nature summarizes the first two stages which are distinct and easy to discern, though their borderline is not categorically clear-cut. As for the realistic view of nature, most critics either leave it unexplained or just deal with it briefly. For that matter, the reader may otherwise find himself puzzled by a passage like this at the end of the novel:

It remained. The procession of weary soldiers became a bedraggled train, despondent and muttering, marching with churning effort in a trough of liquid brown mud under a low, wretched sky. Yet the youth smiled, for he saw that the world was a world for him, though many discovered it to be made of oaths and walkingsticks. (XXIV, pp. 199-200)

In fact, the lessons he learns from war experiences (humility, courage, perseverance and so on) shape the realistic view of nature which is not so amorphous and ambivalent as it seems to be.³⁵ And the fact that Henry appears a changed man illus-

³⁵ Yoshizaki, p. 40.

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trates the evolution of his concept of nature in the last analysis. In sum, to see nature in *The Red Badge of Courage* in this light is to begin to appreciate the artefact Stephen Crane constructed; just as one of his early admirers said, "There is a studied commonplaceness about the vivid talk and the character, which seems nature itself."³⁶

³⁶ Charles. D. Warner, "Editor's Study," *Harper's Magazine*, XCII (May 1896), 961-62; rpt. in *Stephen Crane: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Richard M. Weatherford (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 150.

解密與啓示：英勇紅徽章中的自然

紀元文

摘要

自從史蒂芬·葛倫的**英勇紅徽章**（一八九五年）出版以來，許多批評家論及本小說所使用的自然隱喻。最普遍的觀點是討論小說中自然的二元性。本文嘗試以主人翁亨利·佛萊銘的戰爭經驗，來詮釋小說中自然觀的變遷。

第一階段（前五章）亨利對戰爭持着浪漫的看法。他認為大自然充滿啓示，對人類是仁慈、友善的，能够予人慰藉與安適。然而當戰爭逐漸趨於白熱化，恐懼與死亡的陰影籠罩戰場，他的信心開始動搖了。及至置身於槍林彈雨，生死僅一線之隔的血戰中，目睹戰爭殘酷、慘烈的景象，亨利的自然觀顯然發生巨大的轉變，「林間教堂」一幕他面對着一具南軍腐爛的屍體。死亡如復仇女神一般，如影隨形，使亨利無所遁形。此時他體驗到自然的無情、殘忍，對人類的命運漠不關心，是為第二階段自然主義的自然觀。良心的鞭答迫使亨利重返行伍。袍澤對他的關懷呵護在在令他愧咎五內。他領悟到兄弟情誼是人類在冷漠、無情的宇宙中唯一的自處之道。在這種情形之下，第三層次的自然觀——寫實主義的自然觀——乃應運而生。此時自然趨於中性化；自然的目的是人而不是抽象的概念。人要有自知與自主的能力，才能從外在世界得到啓示與意義，肯定自我，確立自己的人格與身分。

綜觀以上分析，在**英勇紅徽章**的小說世界中，自然觀的變遷與主人翁的精神成長呈現一種互動的關係，環節相扣，如響斯應。這也是葛倫在本書中獨特的藝術設計，無怪乎這位天不假年的作家被譽為美國自然主義小說的先驅之一。