

Reinterpret the Red Badge of Courage from an Ecological Humanism Perspective

FENGLI HU

ABSTRACT

As a representative work of Stephen Crane, the Red Badge of Courage is written against the romantic color of glorifying war and praising heroes. In the work, Crane does not spend too much ink about the battle scene of war, instead pays more attention to the relationship between war and ecology. From the perspective of ecological humanism, Crane reinterprets the meaning of the war in the work, revealing the ruthless harm caused by the war to human natural ecology, social ecology and human existence, expressing his yearning for harmonious ecology between man and nature, and embodying his thought of ecological humanism.

INTRODUCTION

Ecological (ecological center) doctrine is a kind of thought different from human centrism. It believes that human beings should respect nature, and while seeking their own survival and development, they should follow the laws of natural ecology to realize the harmonious development of human society and natural environment. Since its rise in the West in the 1970s, ecologism has risen around the world. As an ecosystem-centered trend of thought, it reflected on and criticized modern humanism (Humanism) at the beginning of its birth, which makes its tension with the latter a hot topic in academia. Humanism's appeal for equality, freedom, fraternity and justice inspired ecologists, and the birth of ecologism extended these values to a larger field. Ecological criticism of humanism does not actually point to humanism overall, but only to its human centrist tendency.

Ecologism and humanism are completely opposed, but rather for and against humanism to some extent. Humanism is not passively accepting the criticism and choices of ecologism. On the contrary, it not only provides the original ideas and principles for ecologism, but also corrects some of its extreme tendencies. Ecological humanism is a new spirit of the time that combines humanism and naturalism, which contains both human dimension and nature dimension, advocating the symbiosis and common prosperity between man and nature, and there is a win-win situation between development and environmental protection. Human beings should incorporate their own survival into the great flood of natural life, on the premise of ensuring the long-term

Fengli Hu

College of Humanities, Liaoning Communication University, Liaoning110136, China

existence of life and promote the vigorous development of the life process, to regulate and adjust science and technology, develop and use science and technology, to effectively avoid the devastating destruction of science and technology to nature.

REINTERPRETATION OF THE WAR SCENES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ECOLOGICAL HUMANISM

The Birth of Ecological Humanism

Ecological humanism belongs to the branch of humanism. It rises in the contemporary era of frequent ecological crises. It starts with the ecological and environmental issues, develops a new relationship between man and nature, and re-establishes the position and role of man in nature. This theory is based on the severe reality of the fierce conflict between man and nature, absorbs the reasonable components of Eastern and Western cultural traditions, and takes promoting harmony and coevolution between man and nature as the primary task, which requires conforming to nature and maintaining the integrity and health of all life. Under the guidance of this new concept, human beings should start to restore the essential connection between man and nature and make unremitting efforts to promote the construction of socialist ecological civilization.

To interpret humanism with ecological connotation, we can find that not only people have value, but also nature, and the internal value of nature is not transferred from the subjective will of human beings, which is a self-evident basic belief, but also the premise for the development of all civilizations. Currently, man is no longer the only standard to measure all things, but nature provides a broader and profounder scale. Only by "measuring" the world on the natural scale can human beings obtain comprehensive and pure freedom. Therefore, respecting the values of nature as if respecting human rights and striving to internalize natural values into human values are the most essential requirement of ecological principles for humanism.

The Destruction to the Natural Ecology by the War

First, Crane reveals the destruction of the natural environment. Harmony between man and nature is one of the main views and core elements of Crane's work. The works mainly show that people, through the cruel war, do not give full respect to nature, constantly plunder resources, regard themselves as the master of everything, and the animals and plants in nature can be requisitioned at any time. In the novel, Klein very cleverly sets up some natural imagery, while combined with color, reveals how war destroys the human ecological environment. For example, in this novel, the author uses rich colors, animals, machines and other images to indicate human indifference to the natural environment, the brutal cruelty and non-utility of war. The massive description of the sky, the sun, forests, hills, plants, etc., on the surface, is the background of the novel, but actually forms a group of images, representing the calm natural universe, in sharp

contrast to the post-war mess. By this, Crane reveals the destruction of the natural ecology of human survival.

In addition, Crane also uses a lot of colors in the novel, comparing the battlefield filled with smoke with the quiet nature, clearly comparing the bloody red on the battlefield with the natural green of nature, and revealing the destruction of war to nature and the cruelty of war. In the novel, Crane repeatedly uses red to render the atmosphere of the war. For example, when Henry heard the "red drum noise" of the marching troops, he decided to run toward the "red noise" of the battle. For a moment, he thought, "The people scared all over were particularly happy. I wish I had a wound, a red badge of courage." This complements the title, deepening the irony of the meaningless war. Secondary, Crane in the novel uses many vivid metaphors to reveal the destruction of human natural ecology, for example, Crane compares the bullets that the soldiers shoot at the branches and leaves to countless axes which are cutting down trees in the forest, vividly showing the war like a ruthless axe, causing rampant persecution of the natural ecological environment.

The Destruction to the Human Soul by the War

Crane uses typical metaphors to reveal the damage of war to the human soul. In the novel, Henry Fleming's departure to the army causes great pain to his mother. Henry was about to leave home and join the army. His mother, learning of the news of his enlistment, was expressionless, with no response, but coldly said, God will decide! Then she continued milking, trying to pour him cold water and make him aware of the cruelty of reality. Another soldier on the battlefield, in order to realize his hero dream, risked his life in the battlefield, but finally frankly said the truth of his fear of death. The reason is that he is the pillar of the family, a group of children need feeding, and the old mother is waiting for him to support. These all clearly show the trauma that the war has brought to the hearts of the soldiers and their loved ones.

In addition to individual harm, war destroys interpersonal harmony. The soldiers came to the war with a lofty hero dream, but because of the slow progress of the war, the troop had not advanced for a long time, so the soldiers could not participate in the real fight. Due to some wrong offensive news, frequent fights between the soldiers occur. The relationship between the officers and the soldiers also became rigid, as the officers either blindly commanded or arbitrarily beat and scolded the ordinary soldiers, causing chaos in the army. The most serious consequence is that the soldiers, through the destruction of the war, gradually lost the pursuit of the dream, became confused, and even did not know how to highlight the siege of survival. Henry on the battlefield feared that war would change his original dream but had to try to follow the pace of war and society. Henry, in barracks life, suffering this inner conflict and constantly struggling, once again reflects that the war brought people's spiritual damage. By setting up such a cruel war environment, Crane is trying to enable the readers to clearly see the changes of human nature in a dangerous environment. At the beginning of the battle in the novel, Henry had already begun to shake up his original hero dream. He was tired of the boredom of war, saw through the cruelty of war, and began to miss his family, mother

and the girl in his dream. Through his delicate psychological description of the protagonist, Klein cleverly reveals the great damage that war causes to the human spirit and mind.

The Degradation to Human Value by the War

War has also degraded the inner value of human beings. If the existence of reason, his inner value has two meanings: on the one hand, the purpose of existence. That is to say, no one should be the means of others to achieve their goal, absolutely not allowing to show mercy, and should be a respected individual. On the other hand, human rationality can promote the germination of the deep inner kind consciousness. However, in the novel, war greatly destroys the existence value of human beings. Soldiers represented by Henry were seen as a means of their purpose, far from the purpose itself. They were only a small part of the war machine or called a "mule driver" or anything else minimal and were never regarded as being of intrinsic value. As an animal, man belongs to the world; but, as a man, he belongs to an existence with a right and corresponding free will. The two essentially distinguish people from all other beings. In the novel, the lives of the soldiers are completely ignored, no one understands their feelings, even the most basic right of existence as human beings are deprived, and the lives of the soldiers are completely regarded as a means to achieve the purpose of war.

Crane employs the technique of comparison in the novel to compare Henry's good expectations of war with the cruel reality, clearly highlighting the indifference of war and the destruction of human value. The novel's constant description of the dead bodies of soldiers in the war constantly reveals the war satisfies or once satisfied the aggressive instinct of human beings, but it also satisfies the desire for plunder, destruction, and cruel discipline and despotism. The departure of those soldiers is meaningless, just a means for others to achieve their desires and goals. The absurd and meaningless existence of war forces the soldiers to lose their minds and dehumanize them. There is no human nature on the battlefield, nor is there the value of human existence. Therefore, through the Red Badge of Courage, Crane shows us the degradation of human value in the war. There is only one excuse to conduct war, through which we can live in peaceful ecology.

RESULTS

Expectations of a Harmonious Ecology from the Communication Between Humans and Nature

Because Crane was once labeled as naturalist, the novel the Red Badge of Courage is also naturally interpreted from a naturalistic point of view by some scholars, but through the interpretation of the protagonist Henry's psychological description, the novel also fully embodies Crane's ecological humanism thought. Although the author describes the cruel war scene and the destruction to human ecological civilization by the war, the focus still concentrates on the struggle between soldiers and nature, the unity and heroic

struggle of soldiers, and Human beings can finally overcome nature, get out of the siege of war, and achieve the harmonious coexistence between man and nature. In the novel, Crane objectively describes nature's indifference to humans, as well as man's indifference to natural ecology in the war. However, he did not deny the possibility of human's communication with nature. Patrick K Dooley commented: " Crane's attitude towards human behavior evolves as he lives in an open and natural situation... humans or individuals of any other species are neither helped nor stopped, and nature is neutral and unbiased against the results."

Expectations of a Harmonious Ecology from the Inner Feelings of the Hero Henry

In the *Red Badge of Courage*, Crane on the one hand reveals human's ruthless destruction to natural ecology and social ecology from the perspective of ecological humanism, and on the other hand also expresses his expectation for harmonious ecology through the inner feelings of the hero Henry. In the bitter battlefield, Henry Fleming was always able to discover good things and scenes, through which he expressed his expectations for a better life. At night, the exuberant campfire of the army flushed the faces of the soldiers, and the red flame implied the life and vitality lurking in the group. Another example, in the second chapter, Henry Fleming lies on the grass, in this quiet moment with nature, he began to miss his mother, his hometown, and recalled the fun of his hometown. In the twelfth chapter, Henry Fleming recalled the harmonious life with his mother and his partner at home, once again demonstrating his attention to the human social ecology and his concern for the value of human existence.

Expectations of a Harmonious Ecology from the Description of the Peaceful Atmosphere

Crane spent more ink to reveal the damage to the human ecological environment by the war to remind people that war is meaningless and ruthlessly destroys the beautiful human living environment. But he also expressed his confidence in the integration of humans into the natural environment. At the end of the novel, Crane writes: " The youth laughed because he found the world was created for him, though many find it composed of curses and ghosts. He had already got rid of the nasty blood of the war, and the violent devil was something of the past.... Now he turned to his love for the quiet sky, fresh grass, cool and peaceful stream—gentle and peaceful life." Through such a description of quiet atmosphere and such an interpretation of soothing psychology, Crane cleverly expressed to the readers his beautiful expectation for a harmonious ecology, his attention to the human social ecology, and his concern for the value of human existence.

CONCLUSION

In short, in this novel, Crane subverts and deconstructs the meaning of war, with profound implications. By emphasizing that man and nature are not opposed, but a unity

with harmony, Crane further expresses his expectation for a harmonious ecology and a peaceful living environment and reflects his thought of ecological humanism.

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