

# The Portrayal of the Soldier in American Civil War Literature

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Preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i njemačkog jezika i  
književnosti

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## **The Portrayal of the Soldier in American Civil War Literature**

Završni rad

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## Abstract

America's entire history is intertwined with war; therefore, war has become a part of the American culture. Even today, it is legal for civilians in the U.S.A. to carry weapons due to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment of the American Constitution. In the American Civil War (1861-1865), many young men and boys enlisted into the Union or Confederate army due to propaganda which glorified war and promised them certain victory, reputation and financial status after the war. However, there is another truth concerning war which is mostly omitted: every side has casualties and every war is terrible. This paper analyzes the first American anti-war novel, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) by Stephen Crane, and *Cold Mountain* (1997) by Charles Frazier. In these novels, the protagonist soldiers are portrayed as men who experience the horrors of war: they are transformed by the pain they experience and the many meaningless deaths they witness. They reject romanticized notions of war heroism and they wage psychological battles with themselves and their fears. They are portrayed as normal human beings, full of weaknesses and strengths, to whom the readers can relate. Finally, they serve as a reminder to the reader that there is neither glory nor romance in war, that there is no honor in killing others and that there is no soldier without weaknesses and fears.

*Keywords:* American Civil War, soldier, Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*, Charles Frazier, *Cold Mountain*, American War Literature, heroism, Theory of Modes

## Introduction

The American Civil War, fought from 1861 to 1865, was the bloodiest war that took place on American soil. It was caused by the growing tensions between the Northern states, which were opposed to slavery, and the Southern, so-called slave states. James McPherson writes: “...the South seceded in the name of that freedom of self-determination and self-government for which their fathers had fought in 1776, while the North stood fast in defense of the Union founded by those fathers as the bulwark of American liberty” (McPherson 1). Following the presidential elections in 1860, in which Abraham Lincoln, a Republican and abolitionist, was elected president, seven Southern states seceded from the United States and established the Confederate States of America. The Confederate army opened fire first, attacking Fort Sumter in South Carolina. In the following four years, the war took more than 1.5 million casualties on both sides, with, according to David Skinner, over seven hundred thousand dead: “More Americans—some 750,000—were killed in the Civil War than in all of America's other wars combined” (Skinner 42). After the complete surrender of the Confederate army, the war officially ended on May 9, 1865.

Before the Civil War, American literature was still developing its own style. Transcendentalism as a movement was involved in the social reforms of the time and most literary works were dealing with slavery, women's suffrage and freedom. American War Literature as such did not exist; any war-related literary forms were romanticized, as Adam Wood implies: “These novels, though extremely popular and prolific, work in many ways to ideologically seal the Civil War in much the same fashion as many of the histories” (Wood 42). The war, with all its destruction and horror, influenced American literature in such a way that it crushed many romantic notions, as Mary Neff Shaw suggests: “...the romanticized notion of heroism, is explicitly and bitterly attacked as a meaningless and absurd attitude which creates the confusion of war in Crane's later fictions” (Shaw 426).

*The Red Badge of Courage*, written in 1895 by Stephen Crane, is considered as one of the first works of American War Literature, but also as the first American anti-war novel. The story follows Henry Fleming, a young soldier who joins the Union Army to gain honor and respect. However, when the battle starts, he deserts out of fear. He observes many soldiers dying in pain, and fights with his own fears and guilt. Finally, he returns to his regiment and continues fighting in the war. Before Crane wrote this novel, the American Civil War propaganda, on both the Union and Confederate side, attracted young Americans to enlist and fight for their cause, as Andrew Coppersmith argues:

They were the propaganda machines of the day. Though not universally true, many newspapers published biased accounts of events, “factual” testimonials of enemy atrocities, articles proselytizing for specific political and military goals, and emotionally charged letters from citizens affected by the conflict. (Coppersmith 18)

The enlistment into the army promised them a reputation, social, and financial status, but also the thrill and glory of defeating the enemy. The soldier was portrayed as an almost mythological hero: strong, fearless, and favored by the society. The soldier was the incarnation of true masculinity, and the press supported that ideal as Yost suggests in his essay: “The story of the war became one of men and men alone, of ‘brotherhood,’ a narrative “that stressed the shared heroism and bravery of white soldiers of ‘the blue and the gray.’” In this heroic brotherhood, many writers saw ‘the underpinnings of a robust new masculine identity’” (Yost 248). However, Stephen Crane, although he had never been to war, rejects all the glorification of war and portrays the war as it is – cruel and cold. Since then, many more wars were fought by the U.S.A., and many anti-war novels were written, one of them 100 years later - *Cold Mountain* by Charles Frazier. The protagonist of *Cold Mountain*, Inman, is a Confederate soldier who, after he witnesses the absurd cruelty of war, decides to desert and return home to Cold Mountain. On his way home, he is constantly chased by the Home Guard, but also by his nightmares; he dreams of all the people he had killed in war. Although he is tired of war, he is forced to fight without ceasing throughout the novel. Finally, when he reaches home and reunites with his love, Ada, he gets cornered by the Home Guard and shot by a young soldier.

This work will explicate the portrayal of the American soldier in Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage* and in Frazier’s *Cold Mountain*. Furthermore, the work will analyze and compare the protagonists of the two novels as heroes according to Northrop Frye’s Theory of Modes, which will be shortly introduced in the first chapter.

## 1. Theoretical Background: Northrop Frye's Hero Types

In his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Northrop Frye divides all fiction into five modes according to the abilities and the surroundings of the characters. The first mode is myth: "A narrative in which some characters are superhuman beings who do things that 'happen only in stories'; hence, a conventionalized or stylized narrative not fully adapted to plausibility or 'realism'" (Frye 366). The second mode is romantic: "A fictional mode in which the chief characters live in a world of marvels...(…) The general tendency to present myth and metaphor in an idealized human form, midway between undisplaced myth and 'realism'" (Frye 367). The next is high mimetic: "A mode of literature in which, as in most epics and tragedies, the central characters are above our own level of power and authority, though within the order of nature and subject to social criticism" (Frye 366). The fourth mode is low mimetic: "A mode of literature in which the characters exhibit a power of action which is roughly on our own level, as in most comedy and realistic fiction" (Frye 366). The last mode is ironic: "A mode of literature in which the characters exhibit a power of action inferior to the one assumed to be normal in the reader or audience, or in which the poet's attitude is one of detached objectivity" (Frye 366). Frye also adds another distinction:

Also there is a general distinction between fictions in which the hero becomes isolated from his society, and fictions in which he is incorporated into it. This distinction is expressed by the words "tragic" and "comic" when they refer to aspects of plot in general and not simply to forms of drama. (35)

There will be an analysis of the protagonists in the novel, first as soldiers and then as heroes according to the above mentioned criteria.

## 2. Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1985)

Henry Fleming, the protagonist of Crane's novel, represents the majority of all young soldiers who entered the Civil War with romanticized notions of war and traditional heroism. Without any experience of battle, he fantasizes of heroic deeds which would turn him into a man:

He had, of course, dreamed of battles all his life—of vague and bloody conflicts that had thrilled him with their sweep and fire. In visions he had seen himself in many struggles. He had imagined peoples secure in the shadow of his eagle-eyed prowess” (*Crane* 3).

One of the reasons for Henry's enlistment is the possibility of him being the only man in his family, as Robert Ficociello notices in his essay:

Although Crane does not provide the information about the father, we may hold that the father died in some earlier, war-related capacity in spite of (or as a result of) his high moral fortitude. Hence, Henry's rising status as civilian patriarch assumes greater significance than civic duty. This reinforces the rational opposition that Henry's mother pushes against his romanticism, but he enlists without her knowledge. (Ficociello 9)

It seems that, despite his mother's objection, Henry aspires to becoming a soldier to gain respect from the society. He seems to be bored with his everyday routine with his mother at home. He seeks approval from the world, and he finds it in what the world offers to him – the American Civil War. As any other youth, he knows only what he is told by the newspapers, as Ficociello suggests: “Henry constantly constructs his relationship to the war that had existed only through mediated discourses of oral traditions, magazine stories, and journalistic reports, the latter two accompanied by war photographs. His connection to the war governs his subjectivity”(5). Henry sees himself as a noble hero, just as Mary Neff Shaw concludes in her essay: “The romanticized conventional notion of heroism is primarily dramatized from the viewpoint of Henry Fleming, the chief sarcastic victim, who considers himself to possess attributes he actually lacks” (6). He wants to fight for a cause and he recognizes the nobility of it in the opinion of the society:

The regiment was fed and caressed at station after station until the youth had believed that he must be a hero. There was a lavish expenditure of bread and



cold meats, coffee, and pickles and cheese. As he basked in the smiles of the girls and was patted and complimented by the old men, he had felt growing within him the strength to do mighty deeds of arms. (Crane 7)

At this point, Henry enjoys the privileges of a Union soldier without thinking much of the war itself. In his essay “Skins Before Reputations”, David Yost rightfully notices: “that ‘he must be a hero,’ simply because of the attention paid to him on the way to the front. When he fantasizes about ‘the magnificent pathos’ of a death in battle, he imagines himself on a high place before the eyes of all” (254). In other words, “the Youth”, like many other young men, believes in the American myth of war; although he is no soldier yet, he already believes to be one. In fact, he is still a “youth” who is to be changed by the experience of battle.

Once on the field, Henry does not experience anything from his idealistic expectances; in fact, within all the monotony and boredom he starts to think about alternative possibilities and outcomes of battle:

Previously he had never felt obliged to wrestle too seriously with this question. In his life he had taken certain things for granted, never challenging his belief in ultimate success, and bothering little about means and roads. But here he was confronted with a thing of moment. It had suddenly appeared to him that perhaps in a battle he might run. (Crane 8)

At this point, although without any battle experience, Henry experiences fear; he wages an internal battle with himself and all that he believed in:

Whatever he had learned of himself was here of no avail. He was an unknown quantity. He saw that he would again be obliged to experiment as he had in early youth. He must accumulate information of himself, and meanwhile he resolved to remain close upon his guard lest those qualities of which he knew nothing should everlastingly disgrace him. (Crane 9)

Crane emphasizes the internal, psychological battle that many soldiers had to go through during the time between battles. The enemy is not physical, but mental; it is a battle with uncertainty. In his essay “A General Semantics Approach to *The Red Badge of Courage*”, Gary H. Mayer concludes:

He has yet to experience a battle; therefore, at this time he really does not know how he will behave. His fear of running becomes an obsession, a worry, and it might be surmised that whenever one worries, he is acting intentionally. He is concerned more about his preconceived ideas, notions, etc., than about reality.

(2)

Henry tries to fight his fears with rationalization; he realizes that he cannot ensure the outcome of the battles before him, nor can he ensure his own successfulness. He concludes that the only way to rid himself of this burden of insecurity is to enter the battle:

He finally concluded that the only way to prove himself was to go into the blaze, and then figuratively to watch his legs to discover their merits and faults. He reluctantly admitted that he could not sit still and with a mental slate and pencil derive an answer. To gain it, he must have blaze, blood, and danger, even as a chemist requires this, that, and the other. (Crane 12)

Just as he sought confirmation of his heroism in the society before arriving on the field, he now seeks confirmation of his fears in other soldiers; he wants to know if the other soldiers feel the same as he does: “The youth would have liked to have discovered another who suspected himself. A sympathetic comparison of mental notes would have been a joy to him” (Crane 12). In that internal battle he goes even as far as to suspect the other soldiers of hiding their cowardice when he observes them: “His emotions made him feel strange in the presence of men who talked excitedly of a prospective battle as of a drama they were about to witness, with nothing but eagerness and curiosity apparent in their faces. It was often that he suspected them to be liars” (Crane 13). Henry’s low mimetic characteristics can be recognized at this point; his heroic ideals gradually diminish even before the battle and he realizes he is not the hero he thought himself to be. In his essay, Ficociello notices:

Henry’s ideals are re-challenged, but not from that which surrounds him from the outside. Throughout the course of the novel, Henry’s enemy is internal—within his family, within himself, and within his unit. He fights to get to combat. The civil-ness of the war has receded, but the Civil War looms. (10)

Although many of Henry’s idealistic views crumbled, he still believes in some of them; because he cannot see any fear in other soldiers, he starts to believe that all of them except him actually are fearless soldiers: “He told himself that he was not formed for a soldier. And

he mused seriously upon the radical differences between himself and those men who were dodging implike around the fires” (Crane 17).

Henry’s transformation continues with his first battle. While he observes his comrades fighting, he sees his lieutenant getting shot. This raises laughter among other soldiers: “He began to swear so wondrously that a nervous laugh went along the regimental line. The officer's profanity sounded conventional. It relieved the tightened senses of the new men” (Crane 32). Laughing in dangerous situations is another characteristic of true soldiers. Finally, when Henry joins in the fighting, he becomes like the other soldiers: “He felt the subtle battle brotherhood more potent even than the cause for which they were fighting. It was a mysterious fraternity born of the smoke and danger of death” (Crane 37). This quote confirms that Henry did not enlist primarily because of the cause of the war, but, as mentioned before, to be one of them – a soldier and a hero: “He became not a man but a member. He felt that something of which he was a part—a regiment, an army, a cause, or a country—was in a crisis. He was welded into a common personality which was dominated by a single desire” (Crane 36). However, at this point Henry experiences the cruelty of war. He observes his comrades wounded and dying, and he recognizes no honor or heroism in it:

The men dropped here and there like bundles. The captain of the youth's company had been killed in an early part of the action. His body lay stretched out in the position of a tired man resting, but upon his face there was an astonished and sorrowful look, as if he thought some friend had done him an ill turn. The babbling man was grazed by a shot that made the blood stream widely down his face. Another grunted suddenly as if he had been struck by a club in the stomach. (Crane 39)

In this scene, Crane shows the meaningless cruelty of battle. He emphasizes the part of war which is omitted in the newspapers and journals. Adam H. Wood argues in one of his essays:

...Crane’s narrative works to reintroduce—to reanimate—the horror, the violence, and the injury of the Civil War that was largely omitted by stepping outside of any representation of the war that seeks to present it as a closed system, an historically isolated system, a system without the bodies and minds of the individuals—and the violence they enact and is enacted upon them—without which war itself would be an impossibility. (48)

As soon as the enemy attacks again, Henry, changed by the atrocities he experienced, does what he feared before the battle – he deserts. As a soldier, desertion is the worst thing he could have done. Again, he rationalizes his act so that he does not have to confront the feeling of guilt:

He had fled, he told himself, because annihilation approached. He had done a good part in saving himself, who was a little piece of the army. (...) It was all plain that he had proceeded according to very correct and commendable rules. His actions had been sagacious things. They had been full of strategy. They were the work of a master's legs. (Crane 49)

Furthermore, he goes as far as to blame other soldiers of foolishness for not deserting: "He, the enlightened man who looks afar in the dark, had fled because of his superior perceptions and knowledge. He felt a great anger against his comrades. He knew it could be proved that they had been fools" (Crane 49). On his way back to his regiment, after meeting some wounded soldiers, Henry again recognizes heroism in them; he sees their wounds as proof of their heroism and wishes to have one too: "At times he regarded the wounded soldiers in an envious way. He conceived persons with torn bodies to be peculiarly happy. He wished that he, too, had a wound, a red badge of courage" (Crane 60). After he earns a wound, but from one of his fellow Union soldiers and not the enemy, Henry does not care because his comrades do not know where it is from: "...when he realizes that his companions are unaware of his desertion, it largely ceases to matter to him: 'he had performed his mistakes in the dark, so he was still a man.' Again, Fleming defines his masculinity not by what he does, but what he is seen to do" (Yost 254). Once again, Henry does not care about ideals of heroism, but before everything else, his own reputation among his fellow soldiers.

Although Henry does not act completely honorably in his first battle, the experience does change him; in the second battle he fights heroically, but not out of ideals: "There was a maddening quality in this seeming resolution of the foe to give him no rest, to give him no time to sit down and think. (...) For to-day he felt that he had earned opportunities for contemplative repose" (Crane 105). Henry does change, at least according to his acts, but he is not conscious of the change:

He had been a tremendous figure, no doubt. By this struggle he had overcome obstacles which he had admitted to be mountains. They had fallen like paper

peaks, and he was now what he called a hero. And he had not been aware of the process. He had slept and, awakening, found himself a knight. (Crane 108)

However, Michael Schaefer argues in his essay “Heroes Had No Shame in Their Lives”, that Henry did not act courageously in the second battle, but out of an animalistic instinct; just as he deserted out of fear in the first battle, in the second battle he fought out of anger:

That Henry’s prime motivation under fire is unconscious anger comes across most sharply in the account of the first combat of this day. The narrator says that “When, in a dream, it occurred to the youth that his rifle was an impotent stick, he lost sense of everything but his hate, his desire to smash into pulp the glittering smile of victory which he could feel upon the faces of his enemies... (105)

Schaefer also argues that Henry’s last fight was not completely reasonable:

Even in a later moment when Henry might seem to perform a conscious act of unselfish heroism, recklessly exposing himself to enemy fire in an effort to rally his regiment when it has stalled during a charge, vanity and rage are the true engines, for his goal in this endeavor is to prove wrong the officer who earlier predicted just this outcome in saying that the regiment fights “like a lot ‘a mule-drivers’”. (106)

However, his acceptance of all his faults and deeds clearly show his change from a “youth” into a man:

Yet gradually he mustered force to put the sin at a distance. And at last his eyes seemed to open to some new ways. He found that he could look back upon the brass and bombast of his earlier gospels and see them truly. He was gleeful when he discovered that he now despised them. He had been to touch the great death, and found that, after all, it was but the great death. He was a man. (Crane 148)

This quote confirms that Henry does undergo a transformation in this novel; the reality of war makes him discard many of his romanticized ideals of heroism. Crane portrays Henry as a soldier who, like every human being, has fears, faults and virtues, but learns to accept them.

### 3. Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* (1997)

While in *The Red Badge of Courage*, the protagonist begins with a mythical view on war and heroism and transforms through the story, in Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*, Inman, the protagonist, begins his journey and transformation with already demystified views on war and heroism. He wakes up in a hospital ward after receiving a neck-wound in a battle; in a conversation with a blind man, he expresses his regrets about entering the war: "I fear it might turn me hateful. It's done it to me, Inman said. There's plenty I wish I'd never seen" (Frazier 5). He is scarred by the experience of war, not only physically but also mentally:

But what Inman did not tell the blind man was that no matter how he tried, the field that night would not leave him but had instead provided him with a recurring dream, one that had visited him over and over during his time in the hospital. (..) One figure, whose wounds were so dreadful that he more resembled meat than man, tried to rise but could not. (...) From the ground he craned his neck and looked at Inman with dead eyes and spoke Inman's name in a low voice. Every morning after that dream, Inman awoke in a mood as dark as the blackest crow that ever flew. (Frazier 7)

Frazier portrays Inman from the very beginning of the novel without any romanticized notions of heroism. Most of his beliefs are already destroyed by the war: "He no longer thought of that world as heaven, nor did he still think that we get to go there when we die. Those teachings had been burned away. But he could not abide by a universe composed only of what he could see, especially when it was so frequently foul" (Frazier 11). After one of his comrades, who spent all his days translating ancient Greek texts, dies in the hospital, Inman suddenly realizes the pointlessness of fighting for a cause he does not even believe in:

A sentiment that struck Inman's eye as he leafed through the pages was this: We mark some days as fair, some as foul, because we do not see that the character of every day is identical. Inman believed he would rather die than subscribe to that, and it made him sad to think that Balis had spent his last days studying on the words of a fool. (Frazier 12).

According to Caedric Gael Bryant, Inman represents all the other soldiers who recognized the meaninglessness of that war:

In a reflective moment early in the novel *Inman*, the Confederate "Everyman" trying to make his way home, concludes that 'he had seen the metal face of the age and had been so stunned by it that when he thought into the future, all he could vision was a world from which everything he counted important had been banished or had willingly fled.' (1)

With all his beliefs and ideals crushed, the only refuge where he could continue any sort of worthwhile life is home – Cold Mountain: "Cold Mountain nevertheless soared in his mind as a place where all his scattered forces might gather. (...)So he held to the idea of another world, a better place, and he figured he might as well consider Cold Mountain to be the location of it as anywhere" (Frazier 11). As a result of this cognition, Inman finally decides to desert and leaves the hospital.

With his decision to desert, Inman's fighting does not end, with the change of his goals, his enemies change also. While Inman is about to be chased by the Confederate Home Guard, as he sees it, the world becomes his enemy: "...so he walked and said the spell, aiming it out against the world at large, all his enemies" (Frazier 37). After he is captured by the Home Guard, Inman gets shot and buried in a shallow grave, which he survives. He is still unable to feel anything as he sees Veasey's corpse:

He had grown so used to seeing death, walking among the dead, sleeping among them, numbering himself calmly as among the near-dead, that it seemed no longer dark and mysterious. He feared his heart had been touched by the fire so often he might never make a civilian again. (Frazier 119)

It seems that Frazier emphasizes Inman's numbness as something common to all soldiers who experienced war. This numbness separates Inman from the rest of the world, which makes him doubt ever becoming a civilian. However, as Bryant suggests, this burial and rising represents not only his physical resurrection:

Metaphorically and literally, Inman is repeatedly buried alive by the unspeakably violent "theatres" of war—Petersburg, Sharpsburg, Fredericksburg—as well as the random acts of inhumanity he encounters on his journey home, all of which deaden some part of him that must then be resurrected by the kindness of strangers like the yellow slave, the old goat woman, the young widow named Sarah, and, of course, Ada Monroe... (596)

Although Inman encounters death and cruelty on his way home, the encounter with kind people unconsciously heals his emotions to some extent, and this continues through the following chapters of the novel.

Even though Inman is tired of watching death and pain, he does not completely lose his soldier's instincts. For example, when a woman called Sara is robbed by three Federal soldiers, he decides to kill them in order to save the lives of Sara and her baby; although he is not proud of that act, he justifies his actions by reminding himself of all the other horrors he experienced: "At either place he had probably killed any number of men more satisfactory in all their attributes than this Eben. Nevertheless, he figured this might be a story he would never tell" (Frazier 165). Besides the physical fights, Inman constantly fights internal battles; he hopes that as soon as he reaches Ada, she would bring him peace:

He thought Ada might save him from his troubles and redeem him from the past four years and that there would be time ahead for her to do it in. He suspected you could work yourself some good in calming your mind by thinking forward to what great pleasure it would be to hold your grandchild on your knee. (Frazier 205)

However, this hope is followed by other grim thoughts; he fears that it is too late for him to change and ever lead a peaceful life: "A dark voice came in Inman's mind and said no matter how much you might yearn for it and pray for it, you would never get it. You could be too far ruined. (...) At such time, faith and hope were not to the point. You were ready for your hole in the ground" (Frazier 205). It seems as if through his whole journey, Inman is followed by a constant internal and external war, which could be interpreted as an ominous foreshadowing.

Finally, as Inman reunites with Ada, for a certain time he believes to have found redemption. He hopes that the war would end soon and that time will erase some of his bad memories:

He wished to live a life where little interest could be found in one gang of despots launching attacks upon another. Nor did he want to enumerate further the acts he himself had committed, for he wanted someday, in a time when people weren't dying so much, to judge himself by another measure. (Frazier 224)



As Inman decides to abandon the life of a soldier, as well as a deserter, he agrees to surrender himself to the Federal army and wait for the war to end. However, the set of circumstances forces him again to fight; as the Home Guard chases him and Stobrod, he has no chance but to use the gun again. After he kills most of the Home Guard, he still decides to spare the life of a boy named Birch, who shoots Inman. As C.G. Bryant notices:

Ironically, the “hope” that has become both Inman's *raison d'être* to return home and an obstacle to his journey is nowhere more problematic than in the chapter “spirits of crows, dancing,” which chronicles his death. It is the hope in a Platonic “reality of things unseen,” or rarely seen on his journey—such as love, tolerance, and brotherhood—and Inman's struggle to believe in an enlightened rationalism in which such ideals are the irreducible sign of humanity that cause him to err tragically at the end. (600)

It seems ironic that, after all the battles he has been through, Inman is shot by a boy. However, his last fight differs from others in two ways. First, he fights for a cause he believes in; he fights to protect the people he cares about, not for someone else's goals. And second, in this fight he is not numb anymore; he shows mercy to the enemy even at the cost of his own life. He ends his life as a soldier without intention, yet he does not regret dying to save people he cares about.

#### 4. Henry and Inman as Low-mimetic Heroes

The description of Henry in the second chapter clearly defines him as a regular human being, the one that might wish to aspire to greatness, but is still very much flawed and troubled by doubts and fears in the midst of battle. As mentioned in the first chapter, Northrop Frye describes the low mimetic mode as: “a mode of literature in which the characters exhibit a power of action which is roughly on our own level, as in most comedy and realistic fiction” (366). This confirms Henry as such a hero; at the beginning he is a young man fascinated by the myth of war and the romanticized notion of heroism like everyone else. However, it is obvious that he has no special powers or attributes; he is a common soldier who wants to be like the others, as Yost notices: “Fleming not only seeks validation of his masculinity in the opinions of his comrades, but comes to see it as the only validation of his masculinity” (254). He experiences fear of the unknown future and observes the harsh reality of meaningless pain and dying. He also experiences the reality of his own weaknesses – his desertion from battle – and confronts guilt and shame. While reading the novel, the reader is allowed to enter Henry’s mind, observe his internal changes and battles and identify with him. Henry is neither weaker, nor stronger than the average soldier and this makes him the perfect low mimetic hero, as Frye states:

If superior neither to other men nor to his environment, the hero is one of us: we respond to a sense of his common humanity, and demand from the poet the same canons of probability that we find in our own experience. This gives us the hero of the low mimetic mode, of most comedy and of realistic fiction. (34)

Furthermore, as Henry manages to return to his regiment and experience his own value and unselfish acts, he becomes a respected member of his community. His acceptance into the society of soldiers places him more precisely into the category of low mimetic heroes with the tragic aspect, as Frye suggests: “The theme of the comic is the integration of society, which usually takes the form of incorporating a central character into it. The mythical comedy corresponding to the death of the Dionysiac god is Apollonian, the story of how a hero is accepted by a society of gods” (43).

In the same manner as Henry, Inman battles internal battles between moral ideals and the harsh reality of war. Similar to Henry, he has his own fears, and, at times, he acts heroically. He is scarred by all the deaths and pain he has seen, and he strives to live with

these scars. Furthermore, the readers can relate to Inman, without feeling superior or inferior, which confirms Inman as a low-mimetic hero.

However, unlike Henry, who desires to be accepted by the society, Inman is isolated from the society. In fact, at times he does not even want to be a part of society:

Inman tried to picture himself living similarly hermetic in just such a stark and lonesome refuge on Cold Mountain. Build a cabin on a misty frag of rock and go for months without seeing another of his kind. A life just as pure and apart as the goat woman's seemed to be. (Frazier 144)

Furthermore, Henry succeeds in being accepted in the society of his regiment; he is praised and commended for his heroic deeds by his superiors. *Cold Mountain*, on the other hand, ends with Inman being tragically shot by the Confederate Home Guard, his former allies, which represents Inman's complete rejection by the society. According to Northrop Frye's Theory of Modes, the isolation of the hero is considered as a tragic fictional mode:

The best word for low mimetic or domestic tragedy is, perhaps, pathos, and pathos has a close relation to the sensational reflex of tears. Pathos presents its hero as isolated by a weakness which appeals to our sympathy because it is on our own level of experience. (38)

Therefore, Inman, like Henry, can be categorized as a low-mimetic hero. However, he differs from Henry in the fact that he is not a hero of a comic, but of a tragic aspect, which the analysis clearly shows.

## Conclusion

Although written more than one hundred years apart, both *The Red Badge of Courage* and *Cold Mountain* share the most important feature – the realistic portrayal of a soldier in the American Civil War. They both discard war myths and romanticized notions of war heroism, and they clearly and thoroughly portray the soldier under physical and emotional influences. Through the reflection of psychological changes of soldiers in war, these two novels expose the soldier's mind to the reader, thus inviting the reader to experience the novels on a deeper emotional and personal level. Most importantly, they attempt to familiarize the reader with the harsh reality of war by describing the war as it is, as Adam H. Wood states:

*The Red Badge of Courage*, I have attempted to display, works to reanimate the object, to return to war its essential aspects of violence—its injury, its death—in order to remind us, as readers, as secondary subjects of war: that the voices of those who cannot speak or are silenced may still be heard and, thus, may alter our awareness of a violent historical past and, more importantly, our ambivalence about our own violent present and potential future. (55)

In other words, *The Red Badge of Courage* and *Cold Mountain* are anti-war novels that, through the portrayal of the two protagonists, remind us of the seriousness of war, which is often being either omitted or diluted. Equally important, both Crane and Frazier reveal the soldier primarily as a human being with all the human strengths and weaknesses - capable of fear, joy, and compassion.

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