

## PHENOMENON OF STEPHEN CRANE'S NOVEL «THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE»

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The article analyses why a short novel «The Red Badge of Courage» written by Stephen Crane within ten days and nights in June 1893, is still considered to be one of the best American novels and occupies a unique place among the best works of war literature. The way of this novel to the general reader appeared not to be as easy as all that. It was published as a book only on October 3, 1895, but even in a serialization version the novel managed to get such a high appraisal of a wide readership that immediately became the hit of the sale and was reprinted by hundreds of newspapers and periodicals. After that, many literary critics had to admit that the merits of Stephen Crane's novel exceeded all their expectations. His war battle was depicted with such an unprecedented skillfulness that surpassed even the best battle scenes created by L. Tolstoy, E. Zola, Prosper Merimee and other great writers. Crane's literary work was highly assessed by E. Hemingway, who included it into the anthology «Men at War: The Best War Stories of All Time». All the critics agree that «The Red Badge of Courage» differs greatly from all those romanticized stories about the Civil War written before that. And even in those cases when their authors managed to reflect the real war being, they failed to get closer to reproducing the moral and psychological aspect of war. None of them touched upon the problem of a tragic existence of an ordinary person in extreme circumstances of a war time, and antihuman nature of war in general. And it is these problems that determined uniqueness of «The Red Badge of Courage». There has always been a fierce debate about the literary sources of «The Red Badge of Courage». Crane as an artist was greatly impressed by Tolstoy whose works influenced the artistic manner of the writer, his adherence to realistic principles of reflecting reality, moral, ethical and philosophical generalizations. But these comparisons were possible only because Crane managed to abstract himself from the specific historical material. And though, by means of historical analogies, investigators determined the scene of action of the novel as the battle at Chancellorsville, Crane aimed at quite a different task than reproducing this specific situation, having attached timeless importance to his work. Contributing to such a perception of the novel is the device of using vaguely-personal names for his characters, such as 'the tall soldier', 'the loud soldier'. Even the name of the protagonist, Henry Fleming, is mentioned first only in the middle of the narration, before that he is just called 'the youth'. Continuing the tradition of great European masters, Crane tries to preserve the feeling of a deeply personal, individual perception of war and through psychological sufferings of the main character to show the tragic nature of war. That's why the novel lacking epoch panorama becomes the panorama of a human soul. Crane managed to depict instantaneous changes of mood and inner state of the main character, that's why separate episodes acquire the character of impressionistic sketches. Especially obvious does it become in those episodes when the emotional state of the character is correlated with the state of the surrounding nature. All his inner emotions, which reflect constant changes in his attitude to war, aim to reveal a soulless nature of war suppressing an individual. Having been faced not with illusory, but real and dismaying war, Henry runs away from the battle field. To justify himself, he tries to perceive the revelations of terror in his companions. But having failed to find anything in common with his emotions, he feels unhappy and perceives it as a personal drama. He appears to be a spiritual outcast. The whole novel is built on contrasts and oppositions. Henry's dreams about heroic deeds get in contrast with the absurd accident as the result of which he finally gets his 'badge of courage' to save him from dishonor. A thoroughly planned strategy of battle leaders turns to be an absolute chaos bringing to endless victims and losses. A romanticized war appears to be a bloody slaughter, cruel and senseless. And on the background of all these, there occurs a majestic image of serene nature, which emphasizes unnatural character of war, its hostility to everything that is still alive. «The Red Badge of Courage» is the first antiwar novel created on the Civil War material. This fact explains its peculiar place in American war prose. And Crane's artistic innovations and the depth of his generalizations rank this novel among the best works of world literature.

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