

# Realistic Treatment of War in the Selected Works of Crane and Hemingway



**Alka Rani Agarwal**

Associate Professor & Head,  
Dept. of English,  
N.K.B.M.G. (P. G.) College,  
Chandausi, U.P., India

## Abstract

Since the beginning of this universe, mankind has been engaged in deadly battles, bloodshed, murder and killing. War has always been at the centre of art and literature. Beautiful and inspiring poems, hymns, drama and novels have been written to eulogize the heroic deeds and adventure of soldiers and to deal with different aspects of war. Till the arrival of twentieth century, war was portrayed in the romantic luster of war, keeping behind the most gruesome and ghastly aspects of war and its devastating repercussions. War was depicted as holy, glorious and adventurous place where soldiers get the opportunity to show their valour, strength and prowess. In the twentieth century, there came a certain writers on the literary stage who displayed the realistic aspects of war- the aspect which displayed the trench warfare, brutal killing, devastation, incalculable loss to life and property. Among these writers were Crane, Ernest Hemingway and George Bernard Shaw who depicted war realistically, shattering the age-old hollow, romantic and idealistic notions of war. Though these authors are dealing with the theme of war in different genre of literature but their chief concern is the same-that is, to debunk the harsh reality of the war.

**Keywords:** Realism, War, Devastation, Portrayal, Romanticism.

## Introduction

Literary realism is a way in literature that portrays things and folks as they are found in the real world. It presents things and people just opposite to romanticism or idealism. It is the style of portraying and treating things as they really are, not being swayed or influenced by emotions or false hopes. This concept believes in reflecting and giving real life semblance to life. Moreover, most often, literary realism refers to the trend, starting with literary works of nineteenth-century French literature and increasing to late nineteenth and early twentieth century authors in numerous countries, toward depictions of exact picture of life and society —as they were". These realist writers presented the society it was. They took realistic everyday activities that were prevalent in those days. Moreover, realism " is applied by literary critics in two various ways: (1) to recognize a movement within the writing of novels throughout the nineteenth century that included Honore de Balzac in France, Mary Ann Evans in England, and William Dean Howell in America, and (2) to designate a continual mode, in numerous eras and literary forms, of representing human life and experience in literature. "Moreover, —realistic fiction is often opposed to romantic fiction. The romance is said to present life as we would have it to be--- more picturesque, fantastic, adventurous, or heroic than actuality; realism, on the other hand, is said to represent life as it really is" (Abraham 302). So it's clear that the aim of realistic fiction is to present the result that represents life and society that suits and evokes the common reader.

## Aim of the Study

This study proposes to deal with the realistic portrayal of war in *The Red Badge of Courage* by Crane, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Hemingway.

## Main Text of the Study

The first writer to deal with the theme of war realistically was Stephen Crane, a prominent American realist, who in his novel *The Red Badge of Courage* tells the story of young passionate and enthusiastic soldier who having been greatly inspired by ancient books about war, enlists into war, quite ignoring the advice of his mother of not to join war.

During the course of the novel gets acquainted with harsh reality of war and finds nothing what he has imagined or thought about war. There was nothing on the battlefield which he has read in his books about war or which he read in the newspapers of the time, which covered war romantically in order to entice youth of time to enlist into war. He is placed in a situation where he has to reflect about war and his rash decision to join it. As a result, he gradually drifts more and more towards realistic aspects of war and eventually goes through some sort of transformation towards realism and disillusionment of war.

Maria Remarque, the great German writer dealt with the issue of war in the same manner presenting war in the realistic vein and dealt with WWI in his novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*. He was able to present the gruesome hidden reality of war as he himself had the first hand experience and was very well acquainted with each aspect of war. That is why Remarque had this to say about combat "War is not an adventure to those who stand face to face. (Remarque 11)" Hemingway, an American realist novelist, too dealt with the issue of war extensively and realistically as he got the opportunity of working as an ambulance driver in the first WWI and covered the Spanish Civil War as a war correspondent. For the purpose of this study, two major works of fiction have been selected –one- *The Red Badge of Courage* and -the other *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is a realistic novel about the Spanish Civil War. Though both these works deal with different war in different countries, they deal with issue of war in almost the same manner, debunking harsh reality which up until now has been kept under the luster of romanticism. Both these novelists showed the courage to go against the spirit of time to shatter age old notion and ideals of depicting war romantically. Both these works treat war with the element of realism, debunking war with its romantic notions. Both the works will be dealt one by one.

#### **The Red Badge of Courage**

Stephen Crane, the great American novelist penned down this war novel in 1895. It is about American civil. The chief protagonist of this novel is Henry Fleming who drawn to the glory and adventure of war joins war. He is all the time lost in the glory and adventure of war. He has romantic visions of about war that when he returns from the battlefield he will be surrounded by women asking about his adventurous life on the battlefield. As a result, he will be the objects of men's jealousy. Having been greatly influenced by the ancient books about war, and newspaper of war time, he has leant certain phrases of ancient heroes of war, which he too will use at time departure and on the battlefield. In the very first fight on the battlefield, he flees from the battlefield, without any thought of his previous ideals of war like adventure, glory etc. in this novel, Stephen Crane has beautifully depicted Henry's journey from the early romanticism to later realism. In his war novels, it has been observed that it is the strategy of Stephen Crane to display the early life of his characters as naïve, inexperienced or romantic but as the novel moves forward, they get more and more and more acquainted with reality, futility,

devastation and repercussion of war. Sense of the futility of war dawns upon them and the whole enthusiasm and euphoria about heroism and courage fades in the air at the very moment these naïve soldiers come face to face on the battlefield. By putting both early romantic life and later realistic life of characters within the framework of a novel side by side, Stephen Crane makes reality and truth about war more distinct and more easily noticeable.

In the early part of his life, Henry was very romantic, enthusiastic and passionate about war and had great expectation about it that war would end all problems, bringing peace and prosperity. Such devastating and horrific scenes on the front bring change in his attitude towards war. It is the strategy of Crane to put his characters in the situation where they are compelled to change their earlier formed conception. The same method of characters' transformation was displayed by Hemingway and Remarque in the portrayal of his characters in their war novels. Robert Jordan in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Hemingway and Paul in *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Remarque go through the same kind of transformation. Similar traits of enthusiasm and excitement are quite obvious in the behavior of the characters of Hemingway's and Remarque' war-novels.

It has been established in detail that Henry Fleming was romantic, zealous and quite unaware with the reality of war and attempts will be made to establish the fact that hard reality of war transforms Henry's viewpoint about war and eventually turns into a realist. On the battlefield, he finds everything just opposite to his expectation. While Henry is on the front, it is announced by Jim Conklin that war is imminent he becomes astonished at the mere announcement of it. There can be no bigger irony than this that he has long been waiting to be among the enemy and to show his valour and courage but now when it is announced that the regiment will fight the next day he becomes astonished and completely dumbfounded. "The youth was in a little trance of astonishment. So they were at last going to fight. On the morrow, perhaps, there would be a battle, and he would be in it" (Crane 03). Furthermore, his whole body becomes wet with perspiration. It is worthy to be noticed that it is the same Henry Fleming who took leave in a great classical manner to participate in the war, thinking he was going on great mission like the great heroes of ancient Greece and Rome, and disregarding the entreaties of his mother against joining the war. Now his whole body is perspiring "Perspiration streamed down the youth's face, which was soiled like that of a weeping urchin. He frequently, with a nervous movement, wiped his eyes with his coat sleeve. His mouth was still a little ways open" (Crane 36).

The fear of war grips him wholly and he is completely panic-stricken, not able to think clearly what he is doing. It is not the imagination of his home where he thought of doing might deeds. It is the harsh reality of war that even the bravest of the brave start to tremble and their minds stop functioning properly. When the fierce fighting and firing is going on the front, Henry cannot even recollect the simple thing whether he has loaded his gun or not- the gun which

is in his hands and with which he has to confront the enemy. Those romantic visions of heroism and adventure seem to have got lost now on the front where in his imagination he craved to orchestrate his valour. "As he caught sight of them the youth was momentarily startled by a thought that perhaps his gun was not loaded. He stood trying to rally his faltering intellect so that he might recollect the moment when he had loaded, but he could not" (Crane 35).

Whenever the image of soldier comes into mind, the naïve and romantic people tend to bring to their mind the image of soldier fighting among the enemy and the blood dripping from his deep wounds in profuse. But it is not the reality of war. Henry too had such vision of doing great deeds. "He could not accept with assurance an omen that he was about to mingle in one of those great affairs of the earth. 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 (Crane 03)." But real confrontation on the front has brought about changes in his thinking and attitude about war. Now the things that is of paramount importance for him is the self preservation. He found no shame in self-preservation or fleeing from the battlefield. Self-preservation is quite contrary to his earlier formed conception of courage and heroism. It is one of the hardest realities of war that before any responsibility for a soldier self preservation is the greatest responsibility. When the fierce fighting ensues, Henry too flees from the battlefield without any shame in doing this. "He, too, threw down his gun and fled. There was no shame in his face. He ran like a rabbit. Others began to scamper away through the smoke. The youth turned his head, shaken from his trance by this movement as if the regiment was leaving him behind. He saw the few fleeting forms. He yelled then with fright and swung about. For a moment, in the great clamor, he was like a proverbial chicken. He lost the direction of safety. Destruction threatened him from all points" (Crane 44). These words show Henry's cowardice and timidity. This is the condition of the same Henry who is talking highly about war, adventure and courage. Now when he is on the front, he seems to forgotten everything even what thoughts he had before coming on the battlefield.

Through the character of Henry, Crane brought this fact into light that it is not only the condition of Henry rather it is the story of every soldier. Not only Henry loves his life rather every one of them wants to live as long as he can. The same thing was explained by Shaw in his drama *Arms and the Man* through his mouthpiece, Bluntschili who tells Raina the harsh reality of war, "All of them [soldiers] are afraid to die [and] it is our duty to live as long as we can, [and] nine soldiers out of ten are born fools" (Shaw 23). Bloom described the cowardice and the fearful condition of Henry in his words. "The youth ran like a madman to reach the woods before a bullet could discover him" (Bloom 4). Such reaction of Henry was because of the expectation and the concept he had formed about war. The situation he faced on the

battlefield was quite opposite to what he had dreamed. Whatever he witnessed was quite shocking and bloodcurdling for him. "Henry Fleming has been lulled by a sense of his invulnerability and apparent victory and bodily fatigue, so that he is taken by surprise and flees from the battle. He has surrendered to panic" (Bloom 21) The instinct of self preservation is displayed in the characters of Hemingway also who was greatly influenced by Crane's war novel. Pablo and several other characters in the novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Hemingway hide themselves in the hill for self preservation.

Before being on the front, Henry had no idea about the workings of the army. In his imagination, he thought that the army must be engaged all the time in face to face confrontation and fierce gun battle. He had no other concept about war except fighting and doing adventure. "A series of death struggles with small time in between for sleep and meals" (Crane 07). But real experience on the front was quite opposite to his expectation. What he witnessed was quite opposite to his romantic concept of fighting and doing adventurous tasks he had no idea that army sometimes might have to wait long before being entangled in any fighting, "but since his regiment had come to the field the army had done little but sit still and try to keep warm. He was brought" (Crane 07). On the battlefield for quite some he has come to believe that there is great lack of heroism on the battlefield. His experience is just opposite to his romantic visions. He realizes, "There was a singular absence of heroic poses. The men bending and surging in their haste and rage were in every impossible attitude. The steel ramrods clanked and clanged with incessant din as the men pounded them furiously into the hot rifle barrels. The flaps of the cartridge boxes were all unfastened and bobbed idiotically with each movement. The rifles, once loaded, were jerked to the shoulder and fired without apparent aim into the smoke or at one of the blurred and shifting forms which upon the field before the regiment had been growing larger and larger like puppets under a magician's hand" (Crane 38). Cody, a great critic on Crane has this to say about Henry's experience, "Early in the morning of his first battle day, Fleming dashes, wild with curiosity, upon the scene of what he expects will be immediate combat. He is disappointed when he sees that nothing is happening; and as the regiment presses on into a silently ominous landscape, his courage oozes away" (Cody 127-128).

Till the end of novel, there comes a great change in his personality and in his attitude towards war. He has himself has witnessed the hard reality of war. This personal experience on the front brings change in his attitude toward war. He no more thinks about war in the same romantic fashion as he used to. Now like any other soldier in any parts of world, he has come to realise the universal truth about war. "And I don't see any sense in fighting and fighting and fighting" (101). The visions of heroism and hero worship too seem to have vanished in the air. The experience on the battlefield has turned into a realist who has a message for the all soldiers who enter war with the dream of heroism. The following words of

Henry Fleming reveal the universal truth about the fate of a soldier on the front. This is the bitter truth he has come to accept through personal experience on the battlefield. "we're always being chased around like rats! It makes me sick. Nobody seems to know where we go or why we go. We just get fired around from pillar to post and get licked here and get licked there, and nobody knows what it's done for" (102).

This is also the bitter truth about war that none recognizes or appreciates the sacrifice made by the soldiers for the cause or the country. This bitter truth too he comes to realize about war just opposite to his earlier expectation in the early part of the novel that when he returns from the battlefield, he will be surrounded by women asking about his adventure on front and he will be the object of men's jealousy. Let alone the general public, even the senior officers and lieutenant cannot appreciate the sacrifices and efforts of the soldiers. There is none to mention the sacrifices made by the great heroes on the front. Henry comes to realize the futility of fighting on the front and he finds nothing on the front for which he joined the war. He joined with the hope of hero-worship, adventure and courage. "It was useless to expect appreciation of his profound and fine senses from such men as the lieu-tenant. He must look to the grave for comprehension" (27).

#### **For Whom the Bell Tolls**

As far as the novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is concerned, its author Ernest Hemingway is one of the most famous writers to deal with the themes of war. The plot of the novel revolves round the Spanish Civil War which was fought between the fascists and the republicans. During the Spanish Civil War, Hemingway went to Spain to cover the Spanish Civil War. His personal experience of covering the Spanish Civil War as a war correspondent finds expression in this novel. While he was writing, to deal with the theme of war realistically was considered very much essential and need of the time as most of the authors before the time of Hemingway presented war in the romantic style. People had already witnessed the devastation, killing, massacre, loss of life and property in the First World War. It was because of this demand for realistic portrayal of war that contemporary writers adopted different style of writing to give the semblance of war. Hemingway wrote in a very straightforward and direct manner to give the exact picture and real experience of war.

This novel is one of the best examples of war novels. There are only a few novels in which war has been dealt with so minutely, precisely and extensively. The plot of the novel revolves round the experiences of Robert Jordan, and display how the stories of characters' excruciating pain compel him to bring change in his attitude towards him. The novel tries to bring before the people the horror, pain, suffering, bloodshed, murder in a realistic way.

The protagonist of the novel, Robert Jordan joins the republican side in the civil of war of Spain in the beginning of the novel. He joins the republican side out of sheer idealism and romanticism of war. Having been on the battlefield for some time when he does not find those ideals on the battlefield, he gets

disillusioned. In the beginning, he was so much enthusiastic towards the cause that he does not think about anything except his duty, "He would not think about that. That was not his business. That was Golz's business. He had only one thing to do and that was what he should think about and he must think it out clearly and take everything as it came along, and not to worry. To worry was as bad as to be afraid. It simply made things more difficult. (Hemingway 105).

Hemingway in his war novels tend to show the early life of his characters romantic and as the novel progresses he displays them drifting towards to realism as Crane, his predecessor does with his characters of war novels. . The same was the experience of Robert Jordan and his fellow soldiers had the first experience war and cruelties committed on the battlefield. In the beginning enlistment for the republican cause was like a crusade for him or as he was going to participate in a religious war. "At either of those places you felt that you were taking part in a crusade" (Hemingway 243). When the general asks him whether he will do the task of blowing up the fascist controlled bridge, which is the most difficult task, he says "I will do it, I will do it all right" (Hemingway 8). This was the task that nobody liked to do. But for him life was not so much important as fighting for the cause of war. He is not a bit hesitated and gets ready to blow up the fascist- controlled bridge. This decision of taking the responsibility of blowing up the fascist controlled bridge shows his passion and zeal for the republican cause for which he left his country and has come in Spain to defend the cause at the stake of his life.

After having been at the front, there comes a great change in his attitude towards war. He does not find any of those ideals at the front. He realizes that all those ideals of war for which he joined have no relevance on the battlefield rather atrocities have been committed from both sides in the same manner, justifying their acts of cruelties on the basis of ideals espoused by them. Painful story of the pain and suffering of Maria, the heroin of the novel shakes him deeply and is responsible to great extent for bringing change in his attitude towards war. Maria the innocent girl was raped and her parents were killed at an age when she knew new about war. Jordan comes to realize that innocent persons like Maria have to pay the price of war. These are the people who have nothing to do with war. Morality of war seemed to be subjective to him, which everyone interprets in his own way. Towards the end of the war, there is such a great change in his attitude that he does not want others to participate in the war. He has grown such hate towards war that he thinks about every being way from the battlefield. He has been fatally wounded and is about to die he wishes for the safety and safe return of his fellow from the battlefield where he lies fatally wounded, waiting for death. He says, "Think about them being away. Think about them going through the timber. Think about them crossing a creek. Think about them riding through the heather. Think about them going up the slope. Think about them" (Hemingway 489).

Pablo is also one of the most important characters. In the beginning of the war, he too was an enthusiastic and a ferocious soldier and killed a large number of fascist soldiers. He blew their trains up. While telling about the courage and ferocity of Pablo, Anselmo, an experienced old soldier says, "It was Pablo who blew up the train at Arevalo that was Pablo" (Hemingway 16). No doubt, he devoted to the republican cause and was ready to sacrifice each and everything for republican cause but when the war continues for long period of time and causes loss of life and property from both the sides, it dawns upon him that it is better to keep himself away from the war and protect himself. It is because of this he hides himself in the hills. He is hiding himself in the mountain in order to save himself and not to get entangled in direct confrontation as further fighting will disrupt the peace of mountain which he does not want lose any cost. Through his long experience of fighting he has come to realize the repercussions of war and the importance of peace for the human being. Cruelty and devastation of war has led him towards transformation and change in his attitude towards war. He does not find any solution in war anymore and does not seek the same romantic luster in war as he did in beginning of war.

Hemingway through the novel also displayed that no one on the front likes to kill soldier after all the enemy is the same human being of flesh and blood. There is a sense of repentance in Pablo for his past deeds or killing and bloodshed he committed. He thinks if he had the ability of making someone alive, he would bring back to life all those fascist soldiers he killed in the beginning of war. He says, "If I could restore them to life, I would, I would bring them all back to life" (Hemingway 217). He has grown such hate and repugnance towards war that when Robert Jordan comes with the explosives to blow the fascist controlled bridge, he runs away with the explosives so he may not blow up the fascist controlled bridge and there may not start a fresh fight.

Hemingway, through the life of these characters on the front, brings out the truth that people start war in enthusiasm, thinking that war will bring end all their problems and do good to humanity but the devastation and loss of property and life brings a transformation in their attitude towards war, which compel them to bring change in their early formed conception about war and they drift more and more towards realism. Anselmo, an experienced soldier who has been on the front for a long period of time, speaks about the bitter truth of war that war brings nothing to anybody except death and pain. He says "That is the way all men end. That is the way men have always ended" (Hemingway 17) Anselmo's words carry the universal appeal and tell all of us that we get nothing out of war except devastation, torture suffering and pain .

It is not only the experience of Pablo and Anselmo who thinks that war is futile and brings no change except pain and death rather it is experience of all of soldiers who participated in the war. War shatters the hope and romantic visions of all soldiers on the front and gives excruciating pain and death to all. Maria, the heroin of the novel, was raped and her parents were brutally murdered. It happened with Maria when she was an innocent child and knew nothing about war. Hemingway attempts to bring the fact into light that war makes its victims even those innocent people who are not part of war, like animal and children. The Following words of Pablo bring out the universal truth about war in the same manner as Anselmo's words, when he hears about the death of Kashkin, "That is what happens to everybody. That is the way we will all finish" (Hemingway 17).

#### **Conclusion**

The above discussion clearly establishes that though Crane and Hemingway were dealing with different war in different countries and in different times, they have dealt with the theme of war realistically in the similar way exposing the devastation of war, bloodshed, murder and killing. By dealing war realistically and exposing its dark side before the people, they gave a new dimension to the treatment of war, which up until now has been dealt with in romantic luster, praising the glory of war and adventure of soldiers. Thus Crane and Hemingway and have succeeded in their attempt of presenting realism and eventually making this world a safer place to live by making people understand the futility of war through their war novels.

#### **Bibliography**

- Abrams, M.H, Galt Harpham, Geoffrey. *A Glossary of Literary Terms. International Student Edition. 2009.*
- Bloom, Harold. *Modern Critical Interpretations: Stephen Crane's The Red Badge of Courage. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987.*
- Cody, Edwin H. *Stephen Crane. . Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980.*
- Crane, Stephen. *The Red Badge of Courage. Minnesota: EMC/ Paradigm Publishing, 2000.*
- Crane, Stephen. *The Red Badge of Courage. EMC/ Paradigm Publishing, 2000.*
- Gibson, Donald B. *The Red Badge of Courage: Redefining the Hero. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988.*
- Hemingway, Ernest. *For Whom the Bell Tolls. Arrow Books, 2004*
- Remarque, Maria. *All Quiet on the Western Front. Trans. Brian Murdoch. Vintage Books, 1996..*
- Shaw, George Bernard. *Arms and the Man. York Press. 2002*