

**Daniel Pastor García**, ed. *The Red Badge of Courage. An Episode of the American Civil War (El rojo emblema del valor)*. By Stephen Crane. Salamanca: Almar, 2003. 260 p. Paperback. ISBN: 84-7455-089-0.

Edmund Wilson's voluminous *Patriotic Gore* was one of the many books written in the United States in 1961 to commemorate the centennial of the beginning of the Civil War, often regarded as the most traumatic episode in U. S. history, followed by the Depression and the Vietnam War. After asking «[H]as there ever been another historical crisis of the magnitude of 1861-65 in which so many people were articulate?», in his 'Introduction' to the book Wilson admitted that, while literary works of real value about the conflict published in those four years had been quite scarce, on the contrary, pamphlets, speeches, diaries, letters, and similar texts of either a political or a private nature had poured at an extraordinary rate. Even though he is hardly mentioned in *Patriotic Gore*, Stephen Crane authored what is still unanimously considered as the major novel about the U. S. Civil War, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), which has been published for the first time in Spain in a critical edition.

Fortunately for those who still enjoy great literature, Ediciones Almar has put an end to a blatant absence in the overcrowded Spanish publishing market. As it was the case with the editions of *Death of a Salesman*, *The Awakening*, *The Scarlet Letter*, or *Huckleberry Finn* –all published by the small but courageous firm Almar in its 'Textos clásicos' series–, this volume is quite reader-friendly and offers the annotated original text in English plus a generous introduction in Spanish. It also includes a significant body of footnotes, several drawings and photographs, a helpful bibliography, and an Appendix with the original Chapter XII and other passages Crane eliminated.

Indeed, one of the several reasons to welcome this new edition is that, as Daniel Pastor points out in his remarkable introduction, Stephen Crane has never fared too well in our country and, as a result, the Spanish academy has largely ignored him, despite the solid 1992 edition of *Maggie* published by Pilar Marín in the prestigious Editorial Cátedra. In fact, most of the stylistic features that are deemed relevant in this new edition of *The Red Badge of Courage* –the use of irony, the elimination of curse words, the tendency to universalize human experiences, or the recurrence of color imagery, to name a few– had already been used to great effect in *Maggie*, Crane's previous novel from 1893, which therefore functions as a precursor text.

Pastor divides his 'Introduction' to *The Red Badge of Courage* (a title which he translates into Spanish as *El rojo emblema del valor*) in five sections according to the usual paradigm in these cases: Crane's life and career, the writing, significance and reception of the novel, the relevance of the Civil War as historical background, the question of Henry Fleming's heroism, and the Spanish reception of Crane's works. Even though all subjects are discussed with rigor and precision, there are some worth pointing out. One of them is that, if Crane was able to fictionalize in 1895 a war he himself had not experienced it was because of a lifelong connection to things military which reached back to his days as a student in Claverack College when he planned

to attend West Point, because of the influence of his brother William (an expert on Civil War battles), and because of the many veterans' narratives he consulted when writing his masterpiece. Another revealing topic is how and why Crane came to choose one of the most brutal and useless episodes of the Civil War, the battle of Chancellorsville (Virginia, 1863), as the unnamed historical setting for a book which originally was going to be titled *Private Fleming: His Various Battles*.

The 'Introduction' is also extremely helpful in detailing how the critical reception of the novel in 1895 was radically different on both sides of the Atlantic: while in the United States it was rather mild in general, the English reviewers showed great enthusiasm and compared *The Red Badge of Courage* to works by European masters like Tolstoi, Zola, or Kipling; later on, their colleagues across the Atlantic had to correct their initial position and recognize the mastery of Crane's novel, so that the complex intricacies of both literary history and canonicity are here implicitly foregrounded. In England, Crane was soon admired by the likes of H. G. Wells, Ford Madox Ford, or even Joseph Conrad himself, who penned a preface to *The Red Badge of Courage* which opened with the confession that first reading the novel had truly been «one of the most enduring memories» of his literary life (190). Conrad held no doubts that it was a masterpiece, «if only because of the marvellous accord of the vivid impressionistic description of action on the woodland battlefield, and the imaged style of the analysis of the emotions in the inward moral struggle going on in the breast of one individual» (192). When at the end of Section Two an informative overview is presented on how the status of Crane's novel improved throughout the twentieth century, especially during the reign of the New Critics immediately after the Second World War, one cannot help but wonder to what extent this canonical text has been affected by the advent in the last twenty years of invigorating and influential new theoretical paradigms like, for instance, Gender Studies or Cultural Studies.

In Section Two Daniel Pastor also mentions that the editor of the U. S. journal *The Dial* accused Crane of being anti-patriotic in an angry piece called «The Red Badge of Hysteria.» in which the novel was deplored as «a vicious satire upon American soldiers and American armies» (qtd. 47), given that soldiers, officials, and the Civil War in general were depicted in very negative terms. Interestingly enough, echoes of this attack have been heard in the United States again in the last few years once the war climate has intensified and high-sounding concepts like honor, duty, or patriotism have stirred enormous controversy in the public discourse, especially in the media. As a matter of fact, the text which Crane himself famously described as «a psychological portrayal of fear» (qtd. 38) remains quite relevant today at the dawn of the twenty-first century, and this is one additional reason to welcome the timing of this publication.

Arguably, the most fascinating part of the 'Introduction' is Section Four, entitled «Ilusión y realidad: el misterioso heroísmo de Henry Fleming» (71-90), where Pastor lucidly contends that Crane's war novel is a deeply ambivalent text that poses more questions than answers –and this is obviously one of the features that make *The Red Badge of Courage* such a modern text ahead of its time. In fact, even though it is

only hinted at in this introduction but never explicitly stated, it seems obvious that in its unheroic and complex depiction of war Crane's novel predated many of the texts written about the First World War only a few years later.

Once he has discussed the conventional view held by many critics that by the end of the novel Henry Fleming has largely become a mature individual as a result of his exposure to extreme experiences like death and war, Daniel Pastor fully enters this critical debate and offers a suggestive and detailed reading of the ending of the novel. According to his interpretation, Crane's protagonist essentially remains a self-centered individual, more concerned with public recognition than with dignity or integrity; in his opinion, Henry Fleming is not a real hero, but one of the several 'pseudo-heroic' figures that abound in Crane's fiction (90). Perhaps, the discussion of this crucial topic could have been illustrated with an intertextual reference to the conflictive and much-edited film adaptation directed in black and white by John Huston in 1951, especially since the role of Henry Fleming was performed by none other than the U.S.'s most decorated World War II soldier, a hero named Audie Murphy.

In conclusion, many are the reasons to hail Daniel Pastor's new work on Stephen Crane's canonical war novel not only as an outstanding contribution to literary studies, but also as the critical edition of *The Red Badge of Courage* in Spain for many years to come. At the same time, it also stands out as a healthy sign of the vitality the field of U. S. Studies enjoys in Spain nowadays. If only such valuable books like the ones published by Ediciones Almar in its 'Textos clásicos' series had a better commercial distribution all across our country, they would undoubtedly become the standard editions assigned in courses on U. S. Literature in Spanish universities. On the one hand, these editions are prepared by some of the most knowledgeable colleagues in the profession, while, on the other, they are specifically aimed at our students, taking into consideration not only their needs, but also their position as non-native readers of a foreign literature.

## WORKS CITED

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