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Echoes of Conflict: Exploring the Parallels Between *The Red Badge of Courage* and the Socioeconomic Dynamics of Post-Civil War America

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Abstract

Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) was published during post-Civil War period which was also one of America's greatest periods of migration and urbanization. Two significant factors characterize this period: firstly, the rise of industrial production with the support of scientific developments and subsequent economic expansion; secondly, the increasing migration due to the economic destruction in the South and higher standards of living promised by the industrial cities of the North. In this period, changes in production techniques created an advantage in favor of employers in wage competition. Therefore, factory owners began to prefer unskilled migrant workers instead of skilled workers and this also increased the intensity of urbanization. While rapid population growth turned the cities into industrial jungles where the strong oppressed the weak, life for the rural migrant workers, who were destitute of supportive social networks, was no different than a battlefield of problems. The novel was written in such a period. Considering this situation and drawing on F. Jameson's perspective that literary texts are not merely individual expressions of creativity, but rather products of specific socio-historical moments embedded with cultural, economic, and political meanings, this article argues that the 304th infantry regiment, composed of young and inexperienced soldiers in the story, is in many ways reminiscent of young American industrial workers in the post-Civil War era. In this context, *The Red Badge of Courage* reflects the socio-historical conditions of the period in which it was written as much as the historical event it narrates.

Keywords: Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*, Gilded Age.

ÇATIŞMANIN YANKILARI: *KANLI MADALYA* İLE İÇ SAVAŞ SONRASI AMERİKA'NIN SOSYOEKONOMIK DİNAMİKLERİ ARASINDAKİ BENZERLİKLERİ KEŞFETMEK

Öz

Stephen Crane'in *Kanlı Madalya* (1895) adlı romanı, Amerika'nın en büyük göç ve kentleşme dönemlerinden biri olan İç Savaş sonrası dönemde yayımlanmıştır. Bu dönemi karakterize eden iki

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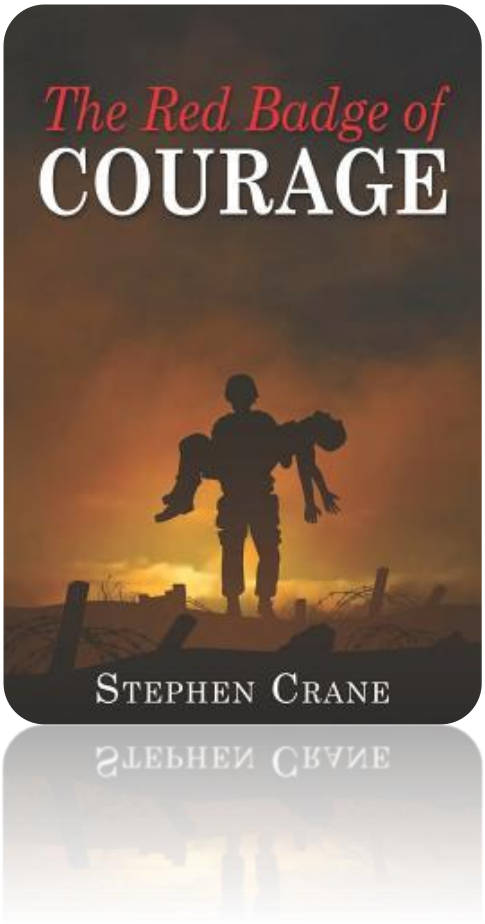
önemli faktör vardır: Birincisi, bilimsel gelişmelerin desteğiyle endüstriyel üretimin yükselişi ve bunu izleyen ekonomik genişleme; ikincisi ise Güney'deki ekonomik yıkım ve Kuzey'in sanayi kentlerinin vaat ettiği daha yüksek yaşam standartları nedeniyle artan göç. Bu dönemde üretim tekniklerinde yaşanan değişimler ücret rekabetinde işverenler lehine bir avantaj yaratmıştır. Dolayısıyla fabrika sahipleri vasıflı işçiler yerine vasıfsız göçmen işçileri tercih etmeye başlamış ve bu da kentleşmenin yoğunluğunu artırmıştır. Hızlı nüfus artışı şehirleri güçlünün zayıfı ezdiği endüstriyel cangıllara dönüştürürken, destekleyici sosyal ağlardan yoksun kırsal göçmen işçiler için hayat, sorunlarla dolu bir savaş alanından farksızdı. İşte roman böyle bir dönemde yazıldı. Bu durumu göz önünde bulunduran ve F. Jameson'ın edebi metinlerin yalnızca yaratıcılığın bireysel ifadeleri değil, kültürel, ekonomik ve politik anlamlarla örülü belirli sosyo-tarihsel anların ürünleri olduğu perspektifinden hareket eden bu makale, hikayedeki genç ve deneyimsiz askerlerden oluşan 304. piyade alayının birçok yönden İç Savaş sonrası dönemdeki genç Amerikan sanayi işçilerini anımsattığını savunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, *Kanlı Madalya* anlattığı tarihsel olay kadar yazıldığı dönemin sosyo-tarihsel koşullarını da yansıtmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Stephen Crane, *Kanlı Madalya*, Yaldızlı Çağ.

INTRODUCTION

The Red Badge of Courage was published during a pivotal era of growth in America characterized by rapid population expansion and economic development. Following the end of the Civil War in 1865, the nation witnessed unprecedented territorial expansion and industrial advancement, prompting a significant influx of migrants to the burgeoning industrial centers in the northern regions, both domestically and internationally. Within this transformative period, a minority prospered, accumulating substantial private fortunes, while the vast majority comprised industrial laborers, often overlooked and unnamed. While renowned figures such as John D. Rockefeller, Jay Gould, Jim Fisk, Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan, Philip Armour, and James J. Hill captured the public's attention with their remarkable success stories, the narratives of migrant workers, whose toil and exploitation contributed to the wealth of the elite, have largely faded into obscurity. This analysis contends that Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, through its depiction of the physical conditions of the Civil War, sheds light on the plight of rural migrants in the industrial hubs of America, where systematic oppression and exploitation prevail. Adopting the perspective of the new historicist critique, it underscores the intrinsic connection between literary works and the prevailing socio-political and



economic milieu of their time, irrespective of the author's original intentions. This reading also confirms F. Jameson's perspective that literary texts are not merely individual expressions of creativity, but rather products of specific socio-historical moments embedded with cultural, economic, and political meanings.

In "On interpretation: Literature as a socially symbolic act," a chapter from his book *The Political Unconscious* (1982), Fredric Jameson states that "certain texts have social and historical-sometimes even political-resonance" (1982, p. 17). Further he presents a compelling argument for the prioritization of political interpretation in literary texts. He asserts that the political perspective should be the fundamental point of view for all reading and analysis. In opposition to the contemporary trend of interpreting past texts through modern or post-modern concepts of language, Jameson calls for a genuine philosophy of history that acknowledges the specific social and cultural contexts of the past while also revealing their connections to the present. Besides, by contending "Only Marxism can give us an adequate account of the essential mystery of the cultural past" (1982, p. 19), he underlines the importance of understanding the political elements of everyday life. Overall, this chapter shines a light on the critical role of political interpretation in literature and emphasizes the urgent need for a new and more effective hermeneutic framework, rooted in Marxist ideology and the concept of structural causality.

In examining Jameson's analytical framework, it becomes evident that despite his focus on Marxism, his approach bears striking similarities to the methodologies of New Historicism and Cultural Criticism, which gained prominence in many Western academic circles during the 1980s. As Tyson (2015) elaborates, unlike traditional literary historians who viewed literary texts as reflections of either the author's intent or the prevailing spirit of their era, New Historicists reject such notions. Similarly, they diverge from the New Critics' perspective, which treated literary works as autonomous entities detached from their historical and social contexts. Instead, proponents of New Historicism and Cultural Criticism regard literary texts as cultural artifacts embedded within the socio-political and cultural discourses of their time and place. These texts serve as windows into the complex interplay of discourses and social meanings operative within the historical milieu of their creation. They offer valuable insights into the dynamics of power and meaning within the societies that produce them (pp. 276-277).

Widely acclaimed as Crane's *magnum opus* by both critics and the general readers, *The Red Badge* delves into the psychological and ethical growth of a rural teenage boy named Henry Fleming, who willingly enlists in the Union Army during the tumultuous period of the 1861-1865 American Civil War. Notably, the novel was penned approximately three decades after the war's culmination, by a young author who lacked personal exposure to the actual battlegrounds. Moreover, the literary work emerged from an American urban center that had undergone transformative changes instigated by the forces of industrialization, migration, and rapid population expansion. This era witnessed a remarkable surge in economic expansion and affluence, albeit accompanied by cyclical waves of economic flows and downturns. The period stretching approximately from 1870 to 1900 is widely referred to as the Gilded Age, a term often used with negative connotations due to the increasing crime rates and widespread corruption that affected both public and governmental

bodies. Additionally, because of the complex social challenges stemming from political misconduct and economic inequalities, this era is often depicted as one of the darkest and most contentious periods in the evolution of industrial capitalism in American history. The changing economic landscape following the Civil War undoubtedly set the stage for the moral and political decline witnessed during this time. It becomes clear that the atmosphere of this era shares notable similarities with the unpredictability and chaos found on actual battlefields. Amidst the prevailing influence of Darwinism in scientific and cultural circles, the instinctual reactions of frightened soldiers serve as a poignant representation of the innate human drive for self-preservation, which can also be applied to the precarious living conditions faced by migrants, particularly young, unskilled laborers, in industrialized urban areas.

The predominant literary convention of the era, together with the fundamental concerns that propelled this convention, can be employed to delineate its distinctive literary style. Besides Crane's use of language, which is "concise and clear, lively rhythm and plain and easy to understand" (Shi, 2019, p. 92), *The Red Badge of Courage* has garnered acclaim for its portrayal of the psychological ramifications of warfare in a verisimilar manner, encompassing frequent and abrupt fluctuations in emotional temperament, manifestations of anxiety disorders, and an acute apprehension stemming from the imminent presence of peril and the ever-looming specter of harm. The accuracy of the depictions was so remarkable that critics like Bloom went so far as to claim that "to write about battle in English, since Crane, is to be shadowed by Crane" (Bloom, 2004:1). However, it can be argued that *The Red Badge of Courage* has some differences from the Civil War novels written before it. For example, despite depicting the same physical setting as the war narratives in which the traditional concept of heroism was mostly used, this novel, according to Tanrıtanır, "is the story of the desire of a young soldier to prove his courage in the face of his fear and deficiency" (2019, p. 60). By virtue of these distinctive attributes, *The Red Badge of Courage* is regarded as the author's seminal contribution to the canon of American literature.

The entire corpus of Crane has been incorporated into the realist and naturalist literature of the late 19th century, a dominant style among American literary circles with prominent representatives such as Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser. For instance, Bloom's comment on this novel, "uncanny accuracy at the representation of the battle" (2004, p. 1), points out the importance of factual accuracy which was a common feature among the naturalist novels of the period. Crane clarified this issue with these words: "a story should be logical in its action and faithful to character. Truth to life itself was the only test, the greatest artists were the simplest, and simple because they were true" (Nagel, 1980, p. 18). In addition to its closeness to literary realism, critical readings of this novel often refer to impressionistic influences and symbolist overtones, both of which were then newly flourishing movements. Impressionist novels, as it was understood at the end of the 19th century, can be seen as the literary response to altering perceptions of reality on the eve of the first modernist experiments. According to Pater, "the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realize it distinctly" (2006, p. 341). Focusing on the impressions of the factual elements that flew through the inner world of Crane's deromanticized hero, this novel, on the one hand, reflects the godless and ruthless world

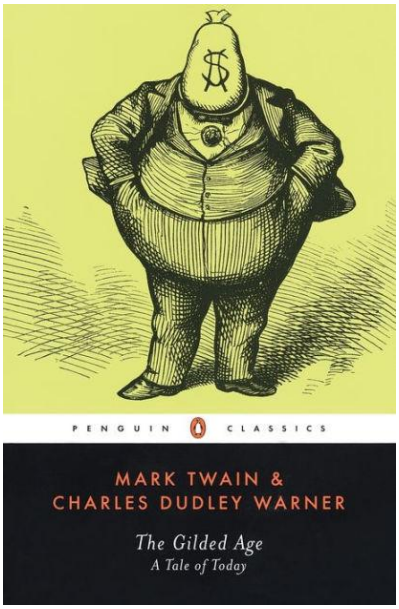
driven by biological and social forces which man has no control over, on the other hand, it can also appeal to the literary understanding of the modernist world, where reality has begun to be perceived more individually.

Stephen Crane

Stephen Crane was descended from a well-educated and sophisticated family. Both of his parents were well-known people, especially with their posts in Methodist Episcopal church, as writers and activists. Although he did not have a consistent schooling phase, it can be said that his education life was enriched with colorful and various experiences: he had religious and military education intermittently, while he devoted enough time to sports to be considered a successful baseball player. This multi-source environment of cultural interaction apparently had an impact on his relatively short literary career. He was only 24 when he published *The Red Badge of Courage*, yet it appears that he was not a romantic country boy like his main character. He had not seen or experienced a real battlefield before writing this war novel, however, it is known that he made some detailed studies on secondary sources to compensate for his inexperience. The point we want to underline here is that despite his limited knowledge of warcraft, he was a real master of another setting, which he pictured in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, published only two years before *The Red Badge*. During the 1890s in New York City, The Bowery, situated in South Manhattan, constituted a petite locality, and served as the initial abode for destitute migrants. In contrast to the anxiety and bravery experienced by novice soldiers in *The Red Badge*, the narrator bore direct witness to the arduous struggle for survival prevalent in impoverished urban districts throughout the Gilded Age. These neighborhoods were full of undereducated and 'untried' young people who had to work in harsh conditions to make a living. Pittenger, likewise, discusses the author's approach to class issues and the disadvantaged segments of big cities through Crane's short story 'An Experiment in Misery' (1894). In this story, Crane narrated the miserable plight of the people who could not afford a room to spend the night despite the booming economy, through the eyes of an unnamed young protagonist. Pittenger's scholarly work also raises inquiries concerning Crane's association with Walter Augustus Wyckoff, a Princeton sociologist renowned for his seminal contributions to labor issues as a writer. Wyckoff's influential analyses shed light on the novelist's artistic style and potential underpinnings of his subsequent major achievements, as he contends, "Crane wrote not with the intent to catalyze reform or to present unadulterated truths, but rather to aesthetically portray the urban landscape from the vantage point of its most marginalized denizens" (Pittenger, 1997, p. 33). To dismiss *The Red Badge* as a mere overly idealized rendition of the Civil War would be an underestimation of its intrinsic literary worth. Within this contextual framework, this paper posits that the spiritual and intellectual

conflicts experienced by the central protagonist in *The Red Badge of Courage* can be comprehended in relation to the burgeoning instinct for self-preservation amidst socially, economically, and environmentally inhospitable industrial cities during the Gilded Age. The objective of this paper is to illustrate how certain intricacies within the novel overtly or covertly allude to the grandiose economic and political struggles waged between the laboring classes and the ruling elite, several decades after the historical event it chronicles.

1. The Gilded Age



American Civil War (1861-65) was an important turning point, however, the period "from the assassination of Abraham Lincoln to the accession of Theodore Roosevelt to the presidency in 1901" (Cashman, 1994, p. xiii) is a relatively less known episode in the United States history, which took an active position in world politics, economy, and cultural life after World War II. As a specific phase of Unites States history, this age is named after Mark Twain's utopian novel *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today* (1873) that bitterly satirizes the political atmosphere of post-Civil War America, corrupted governing class, and pretentious lifestyle of nouveau riche. One of Twain's lesser-known novels, *The Gilded Age*, according to Bassett, is "the most Dickensian" of them in the context of the literary tradition it represents that, besides Dickens, "included Rabelais, Cervantes, [and] Swift" (Bassett, 1985, p. 395) who were the giants of satirical prose in European literature. *The Gilded Age* was co-authored with Twain's fellow novelist Charles Dudley Warner who was a jurist and closely involved with social issues. Rather than its literary value, this work is mostly remembered today for its title evokes the bad reputation of the historic period it dealt with.

Although there is no exact consensus on the beginning and end dates, this age partially coincided with the Victorian age of the United Kingdom, and consequently, they share same characteristics at a certain level. During this age, the British philosopher Spencer's Social Darwinism project based on 'survival of the fittest' motto found many supporters among American social theoreticians. Darwin's ground-breaking idea of natural selection was believed to provide sufficient basis for the legitimation of materialism and *laissez-faire* economy. In this period, belief in supernatural powers and philanthropy activities were declared completely unnecessary which made life more difficult for the urban poor. Obviously, this understanding had serious consequences on cultural production as well as on the social and economic structure of the country. The literature of this period, especially prose fiction, was under intense influence of French naturalism which "purported to take a more scientifically analytic approach to the presentation of reality than had their predecessors" (Britannica, n.d.). Due to the "lower class subject matter, violent action, and blatant sexuality" in their works, Crane and the leading novelists of this period, such as Norris,

Dreiser, and London, were "frequently assailed for their seemingly over-critical and thus negative view of the ills of American society" (Pizer, 2006, p. 189).

During the Gilded Age, railway network expansion paved the way for the transformation of many local businesses into industrial scale production facilities. Besides, "the development of commercial electricity allowed industries to take advantage of the labor supply in large cities" (Hirschman & Mogford, 2009, p. 2). As a result of this, in addition to rapid industrialization and economic growth, numerous social problems were seen due to rapid population growth in industrial areas. In fact, this population growth was expected and even encouraged by officials and industry barons. While the main conflict underlying the Civil War was the abolition of slavery, Northern states' need for workers who work like slaves was not a secret. Until the end of the war, just like Crane's young hero and most of his fellow soldiers, a large part of the population was still rural. Even, "in 1880, when the agricultural frontier had largely disappeared, almost one-half of the American workers were still farmers and only one in seven workers (less than 15%) worked in manufacturing of any sort" (Hirschman & Mogford, 2009, p. 2). After 1880s, population began to concentrate in big cities. For this reason, Hirschman and Mogford argue that "The decades surrounding 1900 were not only the age of industrialization in the United States but were also the age of urbanization and immigration" (Hirschman & Mogford, 2009, p. 2). For this reason, people who left their homelands for better incomes and more comfortable living conditions and migrated to the industrial centers of a young and promising country, occupy a significant place in the social panorama of post-Civil War America. For instance, Nevins described this era as a period of "currency inflation, with rising prices, wages and speculation" (1971, p. 291). Such rapid population movements usually come with certain social problems by disabling the social networks and institutions that help people in bad times.

The majority of the new residents of the cities had minimum wage jobs for non-specialized workers, yet their average income far exceeded those living in non-industrialized areas. Regarding this, Wright argues that "Key industries like iron and steel and motor vehicles paid high wages to unskilled workers presumably because it was rough, disagreeable, demanding work, and because it was vital to have an ample excess labor supply available" (2002, p. 471). The physical conditions of industrial facilities were so dangerous that they were almost no different than the battlefields where soldiers fight for their lives. Workplace safety was not a priority issue for the owners:

> When factories sprung up in the cities and industrial towns, their owners prized production and profit over all else. Worker safety and wages were less important. Factory workers earned greater wages compared with agricultural workers, but this often came at the expense of time and less than ideal working conditions. Factory workers often labored 14–16 hours per day six days per week. (Rafferty, n.d.)

Here we mention the "unskilled workers" and "unsafe working environment" details on purpose, since this review would draw attention to the events that took place when the 304th regiment, mostly composed of fresh soldiers like the novel's hero Henry, was sent to the front line.

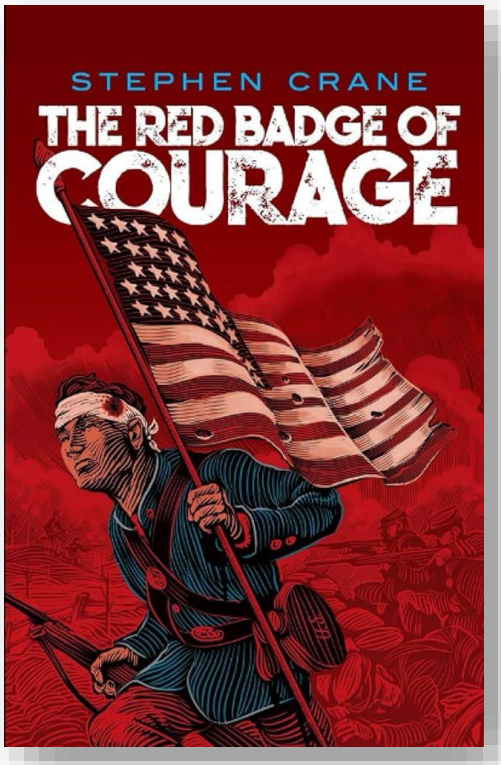
2. The War Within: *The Red Badge* as An Expression of Class Conflicts During The Gilded Age

Modern art has often been seen as "the social antithesis of society" (Adorno, 2013, p. 10) by the philosophers of the 20th century; however, when it comes to late 19th century fiction writers, it is obvious that social issues shaped their works in terms of content and form. As a general statement, it can be said that fiction writers, like all other producers of art, grow up and live as members of their communities and they cannot be considered completely free from the ideological influences of the societies in which they live. To put it more clearly, whatever their expressed or unexpressed intentions, the majority of fiction writers can be valued within the conditions of their age. Accordingly, it seems reasonable to argue that the basic conflicts in *The Red Badge of Courage* are mostly about the effects of the period in which it was produced rather than the period it described. Besides, both in terms of literary studies and other social science disciplines, it seems reasonable enough to compare urban life in a war-wounded country, which was not only ideologically and emotionally fragmented but also divided into a "battlefield" of class conflicts by economic and cultural differences.

This paper adopts an approach that involves identifying the specific genre within which *The Red Badge of Courage* can be situated. Drawing upon the aforementioned perspective, Crane's novel can be contextualized alongside Disraeli's *Sybil, or The Two Nations* (1845). Disraeli, a novelist and politician, utilized his work to elucidate how profound socioeconomic disparities can fracture a nation, effectively dividing its people into two conflicting factions. This scenario bears resemblance to a nation involved in a civil war. In *Sybil*, Disraeli meticulously examines the economic and social injustices endured by the lower classes, juxtaposing their struggles against the opulent lifestyles of the privileged elite. Although Crane's narrative lacks explicit portrayal of the affluent ruling class, the underlying suggestion of a shadowy group manipulating the conflict (war) implies a similar power dynamic. This analysis contends that both novels share thematic explorations of poverty, inequality, and the effects of industrialization on societal structures. Both works vividly depict the grim realities faced by the working class, including oppressive working conditions, exploitation, and political marginalization.

Mufti, echoing a similar perspective, allocates considerable attention to Disraeli's novel within his comprehensive work *Civilizing War* (2018), which examines the historical evolution of civil conflicts. Within this context, Mufti posits that Disraeli adheres to the conventions of nationalist historiography, albeit replacing a narrative of fraternity with an extensive portrayal of fratricidal conflict in *Sybil*. Through the novel, Mufti contends, Disraeli underscores that the shared history of the English people is not founded upon racial or ethnic affinities, but rather on centuries of internal conquests, international discord, and civil strife. The escalation of industrialization and urbanization in the United States following the Civil War, mirroring the situation in Britain, has undoubtedly intensified class tensions, underscoring the clear connection to the underlying conflicts. In essence, both Crane and Disraeli's works exhibit numerous parallels in terms of thematic content, settings, and recurring motifs.

Furthermore, this reading provides rationale for representing the socioeconomic class conflicts prevalent in American cities during the 1890s through metaphorical battle scenes. Following the Civil War, American cities experienced a surge of migration, with the majority of the working class enduring abysmal living conditions beyond their expectations. Some, unable to endure the harsh social environment, sought refuge elsewhere (mostly by going back to where they came from), while others, by showing resilience against all adversities, survived and became indispensable to their employers. These individuals, grasping at the elusive American Dream, ascended to heroic status within their communities. Conversely, a significant portion of the less fortunate succumbed to poverty, often meeting tragic ends as destitute and forgotten denizens of the very metropolises they had sought for their pursuit of happiness. This situation has apparent similarities to the stories of young, enlisted soldiers who returned from war either as deserters or in body bags, despite their dreams to become heroes. Due to the unstable nature of the economic structure, it was also a period of instant transitions between social classes. Like the farm boy Henry who transformed from a deserter and a traitor to an exemplary war hero in record time, the era when the novel was written was filled with both dazzling rags-to-riches (self-made man) stories and individual economic failures. The unstable political and economic structure of The Gilded Age constantly re-defined the socioeconomic positions.



The Red Badge of Courage has been mostly analyzed by following the steps of Henry's mental and emotional transformation which roughly take place in three stages. The chapters describing his first days at the encampment to the moment he decides to escape make a coherent whole together, therefore they are often handled collectively. This initial stage of Henry's military life, while his regiment rests along a riverbank, is full of growing anxiety and confusion. The second group of chapters tells Henry's experiences during his desertion from the battlefield. The last part begins with a long and deep sleep he had after returning to his regiment: "it seemed to him that he had been asleep for a thousand years, and he felt sure that he opened his eyes upon an unexpected world" (Crane, 2000, p. 89). In accordance with the naturalistic atmosphere of the novel, the consequences of Henry's regaining his courage with the effect of environmental conditions and his awareness of masculinity, heroism, and sense of mission are discussed in this part. His overall journey from immaturity to maturity happens in a relatively short time thanks to extraordinary conditions.

As he often dreams about in the early chapters, his initial motivation for enlistment is the heroic images of war rather than his patriotic feelings. Apparently in the narrow social circles they

were living in, the veterans who successfully returned from battles were guaranteed their social reputation. Henry, probably like most of his peers, envies the experiences of the glorious war heroes in the stories he heard or read. He is captivated by the idea of being a member of a warring army and having a favorable name in his small-town community. When he goes to "bid adieu" to his classmates in his blue uniform, the narrator says, "He had felt the gulf now between them and had swelled with calm pride" (Crane, 2000, p. 6). At this point, it is necessary to remember that in the USA, a country of 35 million citizens at the time, approximately 620,000 people died during the Civil War (A specific figure of 618,222 is often cited, with 360,222 Union deaths and 258,000 Confederate deaths) (Zeller, 2022). To give a more precise figure, the Civil War caused the death of one out of every four Southern soldiers and one out of every five Northern soldiers. When we add the tens of thousands of people who were amputated and remained disabled for the rest of their life, it is understood that the Civil War caused a great number of human casualties. The survivors had paid a high price to achieve the social reputation if they could get any that was initially promised.

A similar environmental influence that led Henry first to enlist and then to become the brave soldier who acts as the standard-bearer was operative in disseminating the American dream ideology among the rural youth, who were initially living in a dream world like Henry. In post-Civil War North American cities, what White called the "industrial jungle"[1] (White, 2009, p. 302), only the fittest members of society could survive and success in business was the sole criterion for high esteem. This situation was quite similar to the ideals of rural farm boys like Henry. In this context returning home from the battlefield as a war hero could be the metaphorical equivalence of success in brutal free-market capitalism. The American cities at the time of Crane's boyhood evidently offered a tempting economic success and reduction of poverty thanks to the abundance of job opportunities and upward social mobility. Nevertheless, despite the myriad challenges, they likely perceived the endeavor as worthwhile. As Cashman (1994) puts it "During the Gilded Age natives and immigrants alike were more interested in the stars in their eyes than the stripes on their backs. The promise of American life lay in its industrial future" (p. 6). Easily accessible commodities and services might well be quite attractive for rural migrants who were dreaming of leading more comfortable lives compared to their hometowns. These are the developments that made the American dream an attractive ideology and made it widespread in society.

Oxford English Dictionary defines the American dream as "the ideal that every citizen of the United States should have an equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity through hard work, determination, and initiative". While Churchwell (2018) asserts that the original concept primarily pertains to "America's democratic structures, its ideals of political and personal liberty, and of defending equality" (p. 64), rather than "success or prosperity, or hard work, or initiative", as evoked by OED's definition, it wouldn't be inaccurate to argue that, for the American

[1] In his work, "The American Intellectual versus the American City", where he discusses the effects of rapid urbanization and population growth, White argues that even before the Civil War, this situation was seen as a threat by American intellectuals: "Optimistic empiricist like Jefferson, optimistic transcendentalists like Emerson, pessimistic believers in original sin like Hawthorne and Melville, all forgot their philosophical differences when they looked upon the American city, even before it developed into industrial jungle it was to become between the Civil War and the end of nineteenth century" (2009: p. 302).

metropolises of the 1870s, both paths converged at a common destination. As the United States assumed the role of the representative and eventually the leader of the free world through active participation in international military and political conflicts throughout the 20th century, the American Dream underwent a broadening of meaning. Even in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the economic crisis of 2008-2009, it has retained much of its essence in referring to the potential for upward social mobility for impoverished immigrants from diverse parts of the globe—narratives of success that embody economic self-sufficiency and security. The ongoing discourse on new immigration laws (The Dignity Act of 2023) and endless debates over the barriers built on the Mexican border (Mexico–United States border wall a.k.a. Trump wall) serve as evidence that a considerable number of individuals remain drawn to this enduring dream.

OED's definition of the American dream, portraying it as a socioeconomic promise of material prosperity, illuminates only one facet of the concept, yet it likely held paramount significance for impoverished migrant laborers in burgeoning northern cities. The allure of the dream lies in its ability to highlight the coveted prize it dangles before aspirants. At this juncture, Henry's decision reflects a quest for rewards, encompassing stages of endurance, self-validation (by proving one's worth through sufficient experience), and ultimately attaining the prize. Thus, whether as a proletarian or a recruit, enlistment offers a shortcut to the 'promised land' of the American dream, albeit at the expense of relinquishing the predictable yet stable existence on his family's farm.

Henry and his comrades' living conditions in the campsite have strong similarities with the living conditions of the "army of workers" (Engels, 2010, p. 77) in the industrial cities who can be categorized as the poor migrants in Crane's New Jersey working-class communities. This relationship also serves to highlight the parallelism between the positions occupied by lower-ranking soldiers during the Civil War and migrant laborers within the social stratification framework. One of the primary contentions posited by Marxist theory, namely the notion that labor engenders value, has been a persuasive rhetorical tool employed by political figures in their advocacy for the working class. Drawing upon this foundational principle, if we establish an analogy between the concept of warfare, which is frequently entwined with economic considerations, and the realm of industrial capitalism, it becomes evident that it is the lower-ranking soldiers who generate value by risking their lives on the battlefield. The ensuing passage can be interpreted as an exemplification of this very predicament: "Individuals must have supposed that they were cutting the letters of their names deep into everlasting tablets of brass, or enshrining their reputations forever in the hearts of their countrymen, while, as to fact, the affair would appear in printed reports under a meek and immaterial title" (Crane, 2000, pp. 55-56).

Moreover, the material circumstances surrounding the military tents utilized by Henry's regiment draw a striking parallel to the squalid living conditions endemic to slums inhabited by low-wage laborer households. The ensuing excerpt provides a depiction of the interior layout of the military tents. It is crucial to highlight that, barring the presence of rifles strewn about the premises, the two types of inexpensive dwellings exhibit negligible distinctions:

> [Henry] lay down on a wide bunk that stretched across the end of the room. In the other end, cracker boxes were made to serve as furniture. They were grouped about the fireplace. A picture from an illustrated weekly was upon the log walls, and three rifles were

> paralleled on pegs. Equipments hung on handy projections, and some tin dishes lay upon a small pile of firewood. A folded tent was serving as a room. The sunlight, without, beating upon it, made it glow a light-yellow shade. A small window shot an oblique square of whiter light upon the cluttered floor. The smoke from the fire at times neglected the clay chimney and wreathed into the room, and this flimsy chimney of clay and sticks made endless threats to set ablaze the whole establishment. (Crane, 2000, p. 3)

Scholarly discussions on Stephen Crane often propose that he utilized not only literary and historical materials but also visual elements such as photographs and paintings to depict war scenes he had not directly witnessed. This argument, although based on inference rather than conclusive evidence, offers an explanation for his vivid visualization of the battlefield's reality. According to the findings of Crane scholar Sorrentino (2014), the surge in interest in concrete and factual accounts of the Civil War, starting in the 1890s, was notably influenced by the widely popular series of articles titled "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War", featured in *Century* magazine (p. 119). This publication included numerous illustrations derived from wartime depictions and photographs, emphasizing factual events over personal impacts on individuals (p. 119-120). Crane gained access to these magazines through his cousin Corwin Knapp Linson, an illustrator and painter. Gislason (1996) draws attention to Crane's indebtedness to the style and subject matter of visual representations of the Civil War by American artists, including photographs by Mathew Brady, Alexander Gardner, and Timothy H. O'Sullivan, as well as paintings by Winslow Homer and others. Gislason contends that Crane's work, particularly *Red Badge*, subtly reinforces and reinterprets the enduring significance of these visual representations in shaping the popular imagination surrounding the war (p. 22).

On the other hand, there was another battlefield that Crane could directly witness, for which we possess more detailed visual materials owing to the advanced level of technology that permitted meticulous photo documentation. Notably, Crane's contemporary, Jacob Riis, stood as one of the pioneering figures among reformist photojournalists, dedicating his efforts to spotlighting social issues and political corruption. Riis's globally renowned photojournalism publication, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (1890)[2], meticulously chronicled the living conditions of impoverished immigrant workers. Crane seized the opportunity for firsthand observation, an experience today's readers can only vicariously encounter through Riis's and similar photo collections[3]. Consequently, Crane bypassed the need for secondary resources in crafting descriptions such as: "Perspiration streamed down the youth's face, which was soiled like that of a weeping urchin" (Crane, 2000, p. 36), aligning perfectly with the prevailing image of child workers in an industrial facility. Having personally witnessed the dwellings of laborers inhabiting barracks and slums, Crane found little necessity to conjure visualizations of the interior adornments within Civil War soldiers' tents, as his exposure to them remained confined to depictions in pictorial or artistic representations. The primary distinction between the soldier's tent delineated in the

[2] A part of this collection can be seen in this virtual photo gallery: https://www.sanalsergi.com/jacob-riis-how-the-other-half-lives/

[3] For a comparison of the miserable living conditions of migrant workers in late 19th century American metropolises, as mentioned above, and those in military barracks and tents during the Civil War, see the image gallery: https://smarthistory.org/seeing-america-2/civil-war-in-art/experiences-of-the-war-slideshow/

aforementioned passage and a slum dwelling amid the Gilded Age era likely lay in the conspicuous absence of weaponry within the latter.

As Henry seeks refuge from the tumultuous battlefield, the narrative embarks upon a new phase, thereby unveiling an additional dimension of the allegorical correlation between the battleground and industrial production facilities. Within the highly patriarchal framework of American society during that era, the prevailing belief held that men, as breadwinners, were duty-bound to engage in gainful employment outside the home and provide their families with a sufficient income. Within this context, it becomes imperative to acknowledge the intrinsic connection between the conduct of a man who deviates from the prescribed "duty" by evading work and the behavior of a deserter, as both are perceived as feeble and lacking in masculine virtue. In his initial encounter with the Confederate Army, Henry discharges his rifle in a state of blind panic, and an overwhelming sense of fear envelopes him when the enemy launches a second charge. Alongside fellow deserters, he expeditiously resolves to flee for his life. For a period, he traverses the solitary expanses of the forest, observing the rhythms of natural existence, the fauna, and the flora. His ruminations are captivated by the sight of a fallen soldier, engendering profound contemplation. Concealed within the sanctuary of the woods, he covertly observes the warring factions engaged in combat. Subsequently, he joins a contingent of wounded soldiers, some teetering precariously between life and death. During this juncture, a palpable sense of guilt pervades his being, stemming from his perceived “dishonorable” behavior. Overwhelmed by the incessant queries of a wounded soldier, he departs from that scene. He then encounters a cohort of soldiers rapidly retreating from the battlefield, whereupon he incurs a blow to his head by the rifle of one of these comrades, an act precipitated by Henry’s distressing manner. It is during this incident that he acquires the symbolic red badge, from which the novel derives its name.

Evident within this segment is the profound sense of entrapment, both physical and spiritual, experienced by Henry, as he finds himself trapped in a purgatorial state. Nevertheless, as time unfolds, he gradually realizes that the separation between perishing on the battlefield and living in dishonor as a deserter is far more tenuous than he had initially perceived. In accordance with religious doctrines, purgatory denotes a realm of purification or temporary retribution wherein individuals must atone for their transgressions prior to attaining salvation in heaven. (Britannica, n.d.) As an inexperienced rural youth, Henry confronts the brutal realities of warfare and, throughout his desertion, encounters the battlefield from a distance, engaging with wounded soldiers. In moments of epiphany, he becomes aware that his self-consciousness serves as a burdensome weight upon him, necessitating the completion of a transformative process of suffering to initiate his journey toward self-validation. Within the framework of more conventional interpretations of the novel, it is significant that Henry enhances his survival aptitude by adapting to the exigencies of his external milieu. It is worth recalling that, aligned with the naturalistic undercurrents prevailing during the period, the author seemingly conducts a controlled experiment, wherein a familiar character is thrust into an unfamiliar environment. Notably, Henry seizes the opportunity to make observations, assuming the role of an onlooker trapped within the purgatorial realm, wherein he can behold both heaven and hell from a distance. On one side, he witnesses the

unchanging cyclical patterns of the non-human natural world since the inception of the universe, while on the other, he bears witness to the infernal realms constructed by human hands. These observations form the foundation for the subsequent contrast between modern civilization, grounded in advanced technology and industrialization, and the pristine natural realm:

> The trees began softly to sing a hymn of twilight. The sun sank until slanted bronze rays struck the forest. There was a lull in the noises of insects as if they had bowed their beaks and were making a devotional pause. There was silence save for the chanted chorus of the trees.
>
> Then, upon this stillness, there suddenly broke a tremendous clangor of sounds. A crimson roar came from the distance. (Crane, 2000, p. 55)

There is a similar contrast in the following lines: "A cloud of dark smoke, as from smoldering ruins, went up toward the sun now bright and gay in the blue, enameled sky" (Crane, 2000, p. 17). However, despite this clear view unfolding before his eyes, Henry, as a human being, eventually decides to follow the majority and return to his regiment.

The battle scenes Henry observes from afar are almost always covered by a dense veil of smoke and fog (Crane, 2000, p. 36). According to Davis (2010), "A soldier could see very little during battle. The gunpowder used in Civil War weapons generated plumes of heavy smoke that left a battlefield buried under a literal fog of war" (p.147). Military historians and the Civil War experts explain this situation by the quality of the gunpowder used at that time which is called 'black powder'. The Civil War was more than fifty years earlier than WWI. Military technology made great progress during the two world wars of the 20th century. Therefore, considering the technical conditions of the period, low-tech weapons and ammunition can be considered as a reasonable explanation for the "fog-filled air" (Crane, 2000, p. 99) that dominates the novel. On the other hand, such details also evoke industrial areas which were intensely smoggy, extremely noisy, and dirty, especially during the low-tech late 19th century conditions. This relationship can be seen quite clearly here: "He became aware that the furnace roar of the battle was growing louder. Great brown clouds had floated to the still heights of air before him. The noise, too, was approaching. The woods filtered men and the fields became dotted" (Crane, 2000, p. 77). At this moment it is also important to look at how the sounds of the battlefield replayed in Crane's ears. In the novel, guns that make deafening noises like thunder even make the ground tremble. "A profound clamor" turns into "an interminable roar" (Crane, 2000, p. 136) in a moment, just like an industrial machine starts to work. Given the conditions Henry and his comrades were in, it was not an unexpected situation: "To those in the midst of it became a din fitted to the universe" (Crane, 2000, p. 136). It's noteworthy that the author portrays the sounds and motions within factory settings here, likely drawing from personal observations during his time in New York, a burgeoning industrial center at that time: "It was the whirring and thumping of gigantic machinery, complications among the smaller stars. The youth's ears were filled cups. They were incapable of hearing more" (p. 136).

The advent of electricity in everyday life commenced with the implementation of public and domestic lighting during the early 1880s. Thus, during Crane's era, industrial establishments primarily relied upon steam engines fueled by coal for their operations. The tumultuous sounds emanating from the battlefield, the billowing brown smoke, and the throngs of soldiers evoked vivid parallels with the furnaces of factories, the hazy atmosphere engendered by emissions containing

elevated concentrations of sulfur and carbon monoxide discharged through chimneys, and the laborers commuting to their workplaces. Given the absence of noiseless electric-powered machinery, chimney filtration systems, and the utilization of low-sulfur coals for combustion, the interior and exterior of production facilities were characterized by incessant noise and perpetually shrouded in a dense smog.

In industrial areas, manual workers had to work in unison with the machines to survive. Although this situation, which positively affected productivity and profitability, was defined as a breakthrough by the factory owners, after a while, it brought about mechanization of human relations, accompanied by various social and psychological problems in the working class. A more modern presentation of this criticism can be found in Charlie Chaplin's *The Modern Times* that featured "the struggle to eschew alienation and preserve humanity in a modern, mechanized world" (Vance, 2003, p. 229). From the allegorical perspective developed here, *The Red Badge of Courage* contains numerous references to the dangers of mechanization and industrialization.

In the following quote, it is seen that Henry establishes a one-to-one relationship between the enemy soldiers and the machines: "Himself reeling from exhaustion, he was astonished beyond measure at such persistency. They must be machines of steel. It was very gloomy struggling against such affairs, wound up perhaps to fight until sundown" (Crane,2000, p. 44). A similar critical reference can be seen here: "The youth pitied them as he ran. Methodical idiots! Machine-like fools!" (Crane,2000, p. 46). There are many examples in the novel that reflect the impact of industrialization on human life. Here, for example, Henry relates war to a machine that turns living things into corpses: "The battle was like the grinding of an immense and terrible machine to him. Its complexities and powers, its grim processes, fascinated him. He must go close and see it produce corpses" (Crane,2000, p. 56). He again uses the machinery analogy when describing the miserable situation of the soldiers returning from the front and the hot conflict: "The torn bodies expressed the awful machinery in which the men had been entangled". As they face the enemy once again, the turmoil of the battlefield makes things fraught with uncertainty. At such a moment, this time he likens his own military unit to a weakened machine: "But the regiment was a machine run down. The two men babbled at a forceless thing" (Crane,2000, p. 123).

In the last part of the novel, Henry brings the process of reconciling the turmoil around him with the laws of nature to an end. When he remembered the letters that his talkative friend gave him at a moment of fear, he began to get rid of self-depression, and "his self-pride was now entirely restored" (Crane,2000, p. 95). Feelings of self-pride and self-confidence facilitated Henry's raising awareness and sensitivity towards his social environment and mission. He began to embrace the natural consequences of the circumstances: if the fates had led him to a battlefield, he had to stop thinking and take action immediately. This transformation can be related to his rising awareness as an individual. However, it is also possible to read it as Henry's reaching of class consciousness in the sense that Marx attributed to the proletariat. As soon as he entered the battlefield, he realized that he became "not a man but a member", he was part of "a regiment, an army, a cause, or a country" (Crane,2000, p. 36). "He was welded into a common personality which was dominated by a single desire" (Crane,2000, p. 36). After the 'purgatory' experience he had, these feelings became

more permanent, and he began to put the success of his regiment before his personal interests. He even began to treat others with great kindness, starting with those he was closest to him, more clearly to his talkative friend Wilson. Wilson served as "a foil to Henry's fears" for much of the novel, and underwent "a similar, and even more rapid, growth to manhood through the ordeal" (Solomon, 1959, p. 226). As they began to take control of their destiny, they gradually shed their individuality and turned into two young citizens devoted to a common purpose. Besides, despite his uncertain distrust of the commanders, he began to have sympathy for his comrades. For example, Lieutenant Hasbrouck, whom he initially hated and described as "the savage minded" (Solomon, 1959, p. 226), turns into a sympathetic figure for Henry in the final part. His cold and distant attitude towards the General, who dragged the 304th regiment to a deadly mission, can be given as an example of this awareness process. These behavioral changes were evidently an important part of his maturing process.

CONCLUSION

The utilization of symbolic language in the portrayals of the battle scenes, as exemplified throughout the course of this investigation, provides substantial support for the interpretation of Stephen Crane's novel as a reflection of the socioeconomic landscape during the post-Civil War era marked by economic expansion and industrialization. It is crucial to bear in mind that the war depicted in *The Red Badge of Courage*, fought in the name of the Northern states, including the protagonist's homeland, was not a struggle for liberation against a foreign adversary or a defensive battle to safeguard the homeland. Instead, it emerged as a civil war instigated by the concurrent forces of abolitionism and industrialism, both of which relied heavily on the availability of inexpensive labor to bolster their dominance. Moreover, despite his youth, Crane's comprehensive education and diverse professional experiences equipped him with the acumen necessary to recognize the incessant transformations wrought by rapacious capitalism upon the social fabric of societies, likening it to a colossal machine that pulverizes and reshapes everything that enters its realm. This examination effectively demonstrates that the struggles for survival endured by the impoverished masses during Crane's lifetime served as both an informing backdrop and a wellspring of inspiration for the thematic essence encapsulated within *The Red Badge of Courage*. In both the battleground and the industrial zones, the specter of political maneuvering and intricate conflicts of interest cast a haunting pall over society, disproportionately burdening the most destitute strata, both within urban centers and on the frontlines of warfare. Positioned as mere cannon fodder, they are thrust into the forefront of combat, their deaths having little substantive impact on the military machinery, for there are invariably countless fresh recruits readily available to take their place. Analogously, the massive factories engaged in mechanized production exhibit a similar disposition, wherein expendability and replaceability are tacitly acknowledged.

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FEMİNİST EDEBİYAT KURAMI BAĞLAMINDA

GÜLTEN AKIN ŞİİRİ

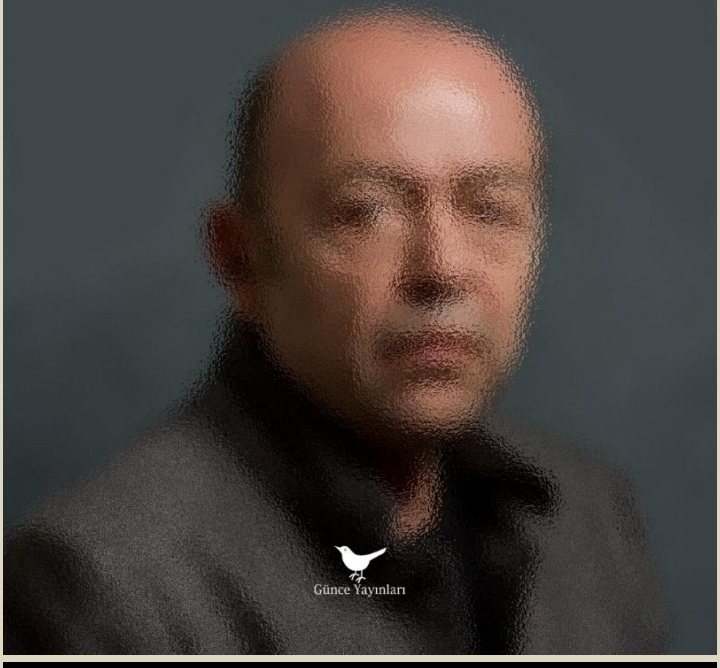
GÖKAY DURMUŞ

Günce Yayınları

Berna Akyüz Sizgen

POSTMODERNİZM KAVŞAĞINDA

Selim İleri Romancılığı



Günce Yayınları

Edebiyat Sosyolojisi ve Sosyoeleştiri

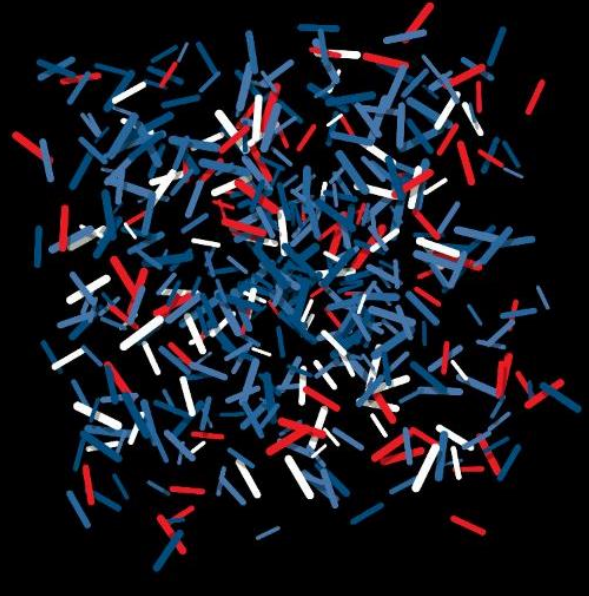
Dr. İrfan Atalay

Günce Yayınları

FRANSIZCA VE TÜRKÇENİN SÖZDİZİMİ

KARŞITSAL VE DAĞILIMSAL BİR ÇÖZÜMLEME

Dr. Yusuf Topaloğlu



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