

Joseph E. Seguin

Ms. Weis

U.S. History AP

5 December 1996

The Killer Angels Opinion and Commentary

In the novel *The Killer Angels*, Mr. Shaara's historical accuracy is unquestionable. He has written this fabulous (Pulitzer Prize winning) novel. Although the heroic suicidal charge of the 10th Minnesotans on the second day of the battle was left out, Shaara focuses on Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain and the 20th Maine which makes up for the lapse. It is safe to say that no other novel has so closely allowed the reader to understand the peculiar madness of this civil war.

After reading this powerful, exciting novel one assumes that whenever cultures clash, there will be a final conflict. By showing the reader what the principals of this great battle were (and may have been) current thinking on multiculturalism are highlighted in a new and perplexing way. This was a great feat for a book written in 1974 to be so magnificent.

*The Killer Angels* has been made into a five hour long motion picture and is called 'Gettysburg.' The novel is so compelling that the story seldomly deviates from the movie. The movie illustrates Mr. Shaara's ability to tell a complex story with clarity. The novel shows a great depiction of the tragedy of war, like in the part when Armistead races into battle, even though he is fighting his best friend (Hancock), and they both get shot. It really shows the views of each side, and what each character felt.

*The Killer Angels* will satisfy both the history buff and the Civil War buff. But, the sense of duty, honor, and the appalling loss of life as well as the unbelievable heroism displayed by both sides in the battle will move many readers.

*The Killer Angels Summary*

This outstanding historical novel depicts four days at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania which occur during summer of 1863. These crucial days are the turning point of the American Civil War and the strong days of the Confederacy. In just three days of slaughter in Eastern Pennsylvania, there was one-third as many casualties as during the three years of the Korean War. At the beginning, General Robert E. Lee leads a confident, flawless Confederate Army north into Pennsylvania. There, they hope to demolish the Union Army by provoking it into an attack. Colonel Chamberlain leads a desperate charge of the 20th Maine. For Colonel Chamberlain's actions, he later received the Congressional Medal of Honor. This is told with such force and clarity that the reader smells the gun smoke, hears the rebel yells, feels the heat and desperation and experiences the exhaustion and relief of the Union troops when the day is finally won.

At one point, Buford finishes a battle and goes to the cemetery on the hill. He had been hit on his left arm. There were barely any of his cavalry left. This scene described a sadness that Buford experienced. On the third and final day of actual conflict, Pickett's Charge is told with great patience and sensitivity. This was a highlight of the novel. During this run, 15,000 Confederate troops attacked a stable Union position that was spread across almost a mile of open ground. Many men died at this event. The conflicting strategies, which confronted General Lee, led him to order this ill-fated attack. These strategies are then further explained.

Mr. Shaara offers some insights into the nature of men (*Killer Angels*) and war. He states that the war was fought because of a clash in cultures and that the Union Army fought, not for plunder, loot, or power, but to make people free. He also makes it clear that the Confederate leaders and soldiers also fought for a different sense of freedom. The conflicts within men, who having vowed in happier times to never take arms against each other, yet nevertheless find themselves on opposite sides of a battlefield. The book closes with General Lee leading his weakened forces on a retreat south to the safety of Virginia after having lost

thousands of men in furious assaults on Union positions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Shaara, Michael. *The Killer Angels*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1974.