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## "To the latest generation": Cold War and Post Cold War U.S. Civil War novels in their social contexts

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“TO THE LATEST GENERATION”: COLD WAR AND POST COLD  
WAR U.S. CIVIL WAR NOVELS IN THEIR SOCIAL CONTEXTS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and A&M College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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M.A. University of Arkansas, 1996  
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“Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance or insignificance can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass will light us down in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation. We - even we here - hold the power and bear the responsibility.”

--Abraham Lincoln, *Annual Message to Congress*, December 1, 1862

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Meanwhile, the General, Leonard, and Cow Cat also kept me cheered and entertained, whether they knew it or not, but most of the time they knew it. And I cannot forget Brown Cat. *Requiescat in pace.*

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that readings of the Civil War novels published in America since 1955 should be informed by a consciousness of the social forces at work in each author's time. Part One consists of a study of the popular Civil War novel, 1955's *Andersonville* by MacKinlay Kantor; part two, 1974's *The Killer Angels* by Michael Shaara. Chapters One through Three explain that Kantor was especially fitted for the ideological work going on in *Andersonville*, then outlines the way that novel tried to contribute to the transition between World War II and the Cold War. The book attempted to aid in the process by which Americans were persuaded to shoulder the financial and military burden for the protection of West Germany and West Berlin.

Chapters Three and Four examine *The Killer Angels*, arguing that Shaara's decision to feature Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain and the Twentieth Maine's defense of Little Round Top is a working-through of the longing for a different, more creative style of leadership after the Vietnam War came to be perceived widely as a disaster. On the Confederate side, the conflict between Generals Robert E. Lee and James Longstreet parallels the conflict over the war in Vietnam.

Part Three examines about a dozen Civil War novels published in America in the past twenty-five years. In Chapter Five, I argue that these novels partake in the postmodern tendency toward the creation of characters who experience a confusion of perception and identity in the face of the unending cascade of information coming at them, and respond in ways typical of postmodern

characters. Chapter Six offers three models for the way contemporary novels explore the Civil War's meaning: the multiplicity novel, the 1990s anti-war model, and the counter-narrative model, which are all described using examples of each kind of book.



## INTRODUCTION

This study is divided into three sections. The first two are investigations of two leading Civil War novels from the middle of the twentieth century in their immediately contemporary contexts. The third section offers readings of several late twentieth century Civil War novels that, despite the conventional tendency to view many of them as stylistic throwbacks, abound in characters exhibiting a distinctly postmodern brand of confusion. These recent novels also manifest the difficulty settling on the Civil War's meaning that has pervaded their era's commentary on the subject. While the first two sections are done in the vein of cultural criticism, with the customary use of the novels to identify corresponding tendencies in the authors' worlds, the last section is more an exercise in literary interpretation, in which an argument about over a half dozen novels is supported by specific readings from the novels themselves.

The first section examines MacKinlay Kantor's *Andersonville* (1955), perhaps the most important Civil War novel to be published in the few decades after *Gone With the Wind* and *Absalom, Absalom!* The three chapters of this first section will make the case that Kantor's novel is as much about World War II and the coming of the Cold War as it is about the US Civil War. The first chapter argues that Kantor made a conscious effort, and ultimately a successful one, to market himself as the ultimate all-American, mainstream writer. He deliberately chose subject matter that built for him a reputation as a patriotic chronicler of the American experience. To the extent that his strategy was amply rewarded, in sales, in critical acclaim and in prizes won, his work should be read as a manifestation of the way those who decided American policy hoped the public at large would think about the Civil War and about more contemporary questions.

Chapter Two reads *Andersonville* as a novel informed by the experience of the Holocaust. In attempting to argue plausibly that America had suffered a similar tragedy in its own history, he had to read the record in a way that favored the sadism of the Andersonville prisoner of war camp's Confederate administrators and ignore contrary evidence of their attempts to save the lives of Federal soldiers. This chapter details these historical misreadings and considers their effects on the novel. The third chapter of this section suggests that *Andersonville* is a contribution to the effort to make Americans more likely to assent to the Cold War-era policy of alliance with the German people against the Soviet menace. By revealing that the Claffey family is unable to stop the tragedy unfolding in the prison stockade on their central Georgia land, the novel makes an argument for American common ground with those Germans who were, as the argument went, obviously unable to stop the genocides. This rough analogy was an attempt to contribute to the understanding among Americans that financing the reconstruction of West Germany and West Berlin should not be seen as coddling those who tolerated the Holocaust.

The second section examines the oft-taught and lavishly filmed novel by Michael Sharaa, *The Killer Angels* (1974), finding in it enactments of the conflicts and fears of the late Vietnam War era on the battlefield of Gettysburg. In Chapter Four, two of the novel's northern heroes resemble the most positive public image of the dead Kennedy brothers, John and Robert, and their deeds answer the longing of a confused nation for an idea of their leadership. In Chapter Five, I argue that the novel uses the relationship between the Confederate generals Robert E. Lee and James Longstreet to work through America's intergenerational conflict over the war in Vietnam. The older Lee's headlong pursuit of a recklessly aggressive attack on the Union position, and the younger Longstreet's

preference for the defensive and his more evident sensitivity regarding the deaths of his troops are informed by the tensions between the so-called hawks and doves as the war in Vietnam took its toll during the time *The Killer Angels* was being written. The novel's emphasis on Longstreet's relative youth and Lee's age, Longstreet's preference for more modern tactics and Lee's for massive Napoleonic frontal assaults is a transference of the 60s intergenerational argument over Vietnam and over America's foreign policy in general to a Civil War setting.

The third section of this study consists of a broader ranging look at several of the most popular or most important Civil War novels of the past 25 years. Chapter Six identifies the tendency of many of these novels to incorporate a recognizably postmodern approach to the identity of their main characters. According to this approach, characters are liable to be confused by the cascades of new information and influences and by the number of roles they feel obliged to play. These characters then retreat into any of several varieties of predictable, controllable refuges, perhaps an art or a social circle. Chapter Seven posits three models of the way Civil War novels of the past quarter century grapple with the war's meaning. Though a full accounting of the way the hundreds of such recent novels do so is impossible, the novels I have chosen, in addition to possessing literary importance, are representative of tendencies displayed by many other novels of lesser importance.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The first two-thirds of this dissertation attempts what many will recognize as Michel Foucault's archaeological approach, as explained in two of his works, *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. This method is built on the understanding that the best way of learning about the structures of thought of a given era on a certain subject is to scrutinize closely the contemporary archives,

being alert to those patterns of thought that recur in many discrete kinds of sources. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault is able to find common structures of thought existing simultaneously in the fields of linguistics, natural history and economics at three points in the past 400 years. While the scope of my use of archaeology does not compete with Foucault's, my study does identify several patterns of thought shared by several novels with what was being written in contemporary journalism and what was being said by contemporary policy-makers. Just as Foucault restricted his scrutiny of the archives to documents by those scientists, professors and administrators entrusted with authority in their fields, my study does the same in its narrowing of sources to those commenting on matters of war and peace, both to make the project manageable and to make my sources relevant to the concerns of these novels.

This study has also benefited from what later scholars made of Foucault's archaeology. Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* and his essays in *Culture and Imperialism* set my thinking in directions which led to the conclusions found in these pages, most specifically in my analysis of *Andersonville*. Without the example Said sets in locating in the literary texts of an imperialistic culture the ways that culture rationalizes its often barbaric foreign policy to itself, I might not have been alert enough to see the way *Andersonville* does its part for those who favored quick conciliation with the German people and their inclusion in a US-led military alliance against the Soviet Union. Stephen Greenblatt's essays on the signs he detects in the works of the Elizabethan era of an insecure culture defining its borders and compiling a vocabulary of means for perpetuating itself also had a role in my interpretations of the two novels that take up most of these pages. The way Greenblatt's reading of a particular passage from a Shakespeare play, for example, might then transition to a lengthy discussion of Elizabethan social

practices was a model that encouraged my leap from Little Round Top in *The Killer Angels* to the Kennedy White House of journalistic legend.

Another central influence on this study's in-depth examinations of *Andersonville* and *The Killer Angels* is that of Frederic Jameson, especially his *The Political Unconscious*. In this book, Jameson makes the case that a culture's prevailing ideology can be traced in its literature, but is necessarily obscured from easy view so that readers may absorb the ideology unawares, considering it simply common sense. The work of the critic, then, is to bring to light the ways a literary work is determined in shape and content by the particular stage of development the author's culture may be on the continuum of class struggle as delineated by Marx. While this study does not pretend to attempt to confidently affix any of the novels it scrutinizes to any historical graph, it does attempt to bring out the obscure "political unconscious" of these works while attending closely to the relation of the ideological structures found in these novels to the most important points of decision facing the culture these authors spoke for, these being the Holocaust, the early Cold War, the late Vietnam War-era and the post Cold War era of confused self-identity. As Jameson ties his readings to his timeline of Marxist economic history, I tie my own to the timeline of American reaction and response to world events.

The influence of one of Jameson's predecessors in Marxist critical theory, Georg Lukacs, appears in my contention that the anachronisms in historical novels are themselves worthy of attention. In his *The Historical Novel*, Lukacs presents a time line of literary history that identifies 1848 as the year after which truly accurate historical novels became impossible to write. It was during that year that the bourgeois hold on political and cultural power was completed in Europe, as various peasant revolts on the continent went down to defeat. After

that year, the strength of bourgeois ideology, and its ability to creep into nearly every arena of thought made it nearly impossible for writers who wished to remain relevant to alternative cultures.<sup>1</sup> So, inevitably, historical novels written after the bourgeois takeover were replete with anachronisms, modes of thought that came from the authors' own eras. My own attention to anachronism comes from a similar conviction to that of Lukacs, that the many cultures of America in the latter half of the twentieth century were sure to appear in some guise in historical fiction, owing to their power and to the inability of writers to envision alternatives. This study does not relate these anachronisms to an amorphous set of bourgeois values, however, but to specific anxieties and preoccupations shared by many of the authors' contemporaries, indeed by the dominant culture of the authors' eras.

The second section of this dissertation is devoted to an attempt to put the spectrum of Civil War novels of the past 25 years into an order that itself corresponds to what was taking place in the public and private spheres of American culture. Jameson again figures in the set of voices guiding this project, this time his 1987 work *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. In that book he argues that confusion is the most predominant reaction of human subjects to the task of making sense of their social circumstances in the late capitalist era and that this confusion has shown itself in architecture, painting, sculpture, film and, of course, fiction in the formal juxtapositions we call postmodern. Jameson's notion of postmodern confusion has steered my readings of several of the Civil War novels featured in the first chapter of my last section. The formal attributes of postmodernism are not as often noted in these works (although they do appear), but the reoccurrence of characters whose primary state is confusion, whose identities are undetermined

might have escaped my notice if not for Jameson's detailed essays on the postmodern condition.

The second chapter of my last section owes its existence to Mikhail Bakhtin's characterization of the novel as the dialogical literary form. In "Discourse and the Novel" Bakhtin contends that novels are often brimming with a panoply of disparate kinds of voices and language in conversation. This observation was integral to my method of classifying recent Civil War fiction. But in my scheme, I also retain the example of Jameson, who in *Postmodernism* compares the state of the present-day subject's consciousness of social forces to that of city dwellers in Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City* who are, quoting Jameson, "unable to map (in their minds) either their own positions or the urban totality in which they find themselves" (51). It was a hybrid of Bakhtin's ideas about dialogue in the novel and Jameson's remarks on the difficulty we postmoderns have in attaining an integrated understanding about our culture that led me to a tripartite model of the way Civil War novels use dialogism to explore options for settling on the cultural meaning of the war.

### **Review of Previous Literature**

The first published study of historical fiction set during the US Civil War was a short book by Robert Lively, *Fiction Fights the Civil War* from 1957. Lively places dozens of novels into categories according to their authors' regional affiliations, concluding, after doing a quantitative study, that a greater number and variety of novels arose from the losing side. He also identifies common tendencies looking upon the Union's conduct of the war and its goals in a critical way versus a greater likelihood that Southern writers would unreservedly embrace the Confederate cause as the most just one. His emphasis in his discussion of these novels on the reasons given for the war is carried into the last chapter of my

last section, though I do not attempt to account for as many novels as Lively does, preferring instead to allow myself more space for closer examinations of particular passages.

Edmund Wilson's *Patriotic Gore* (1966) focuses entirely on works produced by participants and contemporaries of the Civil War, not only novels but poetry, essays, diaries, speeches and memoirs. Wilson's method of inquiry is primarily the psychological portrait, which he shapes by gathering relevant texts that reveal authors' states of mind where they related to the questions at issue as the war flared up and burned out. Wilson also charges himself with the task of uncovering what he considers the real truth about what drove figures like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lincoln, Sherman or Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. He is suspicious of war aims that refer to "morality," "reason," "virtue," or "civilization" because they "rarely have any meaning--that is, they will soon lose any meaning they have had--once a war has been got under way" (xii). For Wilson, the human impulse to make war is akin to that of the giant sea slug ingesting all it can, even smaller sea slugs, but man dresses up his cannibalism in rhetoric. Wilson's book is an attempt to see through that rhetoric in each author's case to the instincts at work (xi). My study is much less reliant on the psychological biography or individuals, but is alert to the means by which the acquisitive urge is dressed in ways so as to win social approval. My findings regarding the Kantor novel's use of the Andersonville tragedy to advance Cold War-era policies is the most obvious example of this.

Daniel Aaron's *The Unwritten War* (1973) is a painstaking critical assessment of the job America's greatest writers (both those who lived during and those born after the fighting) have done in confronting the Civil War. Unfortunately, in keeping with his title, Aaron is forced to admit the job an



incomplete one. His book attempts to account for the reasons for the lack of an epic work on the Civil War that does for that conflict what Tolstoy did for the Napoleonic wars. Like Wilson, Aaron resorts to psychological portraits. These reveal that the greatest writers were so marginalized from the theater of war that their fiction could only have come from the most indirect of experiences. Such was the case with Henry James, who said an “obscure hurt” kept him from wearing the uniform. In those instances when a writer did experience combat, as did Ambrose Bierce and John William De Forest, that writer’s vantage points limited his ability to synthesize the political and the personal. For Aaron, those who came the closest to achieving that synthesis were the historians and the author of *Patriotic Gore*, because “it is hard to think of any recent writer who has indicated more explicitly the controversies and issues seldom transmuted into literature” (329). Aaron’s work is to be thoroughly recommended for the same reason. I have not attempted to duplicate his or Wilson’s attention to the way writers confront the issues of the 1860s or 70s, however, but to the way they confront the issues of their own times.

Jim Cullen’s 1995 book *The Civil War in Popular Culture* is more similar to my study in its use of cultural products to read the mind of the culture that produced them. His readings incorporate works from the mid-20th century like *Gone With the Wind* (both the book and the movie), Carl Sandburg’s Lincoln biography, rock and roll song lyrics, the movie *Glory* and include recent interviews with a battle re-enactor. Stating that he intends to add his book to the “memory movement” that has emerged in historical research, in which scholars attempt to trace the way institutions or a culture’s conception of an icon have evolved over long periods of time, Cullen cautions readers that he is not attached to any one thesis and that he realizes his method is not a scientific one. Instead,

he says “this book relies on textual analysis and imaginative speculation” (7).<sup>2</sup> My own study does the same, but with the hope that the correspondences I find between the literary and the non-literary will prove too exact for coincidence. My study differs most markedly from Cullen’s, however, in my restriction of my purview to novels. But my study is most similar to Cullen’s in the way its interpretations grow naturally from the world-historical moment a given cultural product arose from. One example is Cullen’s assertion concerning the 1989 movie *Glory*, which follows the exploits of the 54th Massachusetts regiment, which was made up of African-American volunteers but was led by white officers. For Cullen, *Glory* was the attempt of a nation still smarting from the trauma of what was generally accepted as a meaningless war in Vietnam to rehabilitate the idea of war as a means to achieve moral aims. By keeping blacks in a subservient role to the white Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, the movie also explores the idea of black social equality in a way palatable to conservative America. In one chapter, Cullen explains the contemporary context of the film with respect to recent Civil War scholarship which focused more on the experience of African-Americans, to Vietnam War movies, to Civil War movies. For good measure he adds a discussion of the history of the way the black regiment, the 54th Massachusetts, featured in the movie was thought of by commentators in the years after its famous exploits.

### **The Civil War’s Importance as a Literary Setting**

There are nearly as many reasons for the Civil War’s being a compelling subject for novelists as there are commentators. But, luckily these can be narrowed into tendencies, so that discussion can proceed with at least some sense of ground. There are those like Robert Penn Warren and C. Vann Woodward who both thought of the Civil War as the center of American history, as the fulcrum

along which all other historical and contemporary issues must balance. For Warren, working out of the Civil War's meaning took at least three novels, many poems and much essay writing. Surprisingly, the longest of and one the last of, his meditations on the subject even comes to conclude that Civil War interest in the United States had come too far toward side-taking, had acquired in the minds of many contemporaries a way of dividing the country between acolytes of The Great Alibi, those who say the lowly economic state of the South was caused by the Civil War, and The Great Virtue, those who thought of the war as the instrument that brought freedom to the slave. (Warren 54). Both divisions ignore key truths. It is for novelists of Warren's own stripe to explore what is ignored and for the historians like Woodward to go beyond mere white-black dichotomies on race, politics and the economy.

### **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Lukacs put the choice writers faced after the triumph of bourgeois ideology as follows: "It was the 1848 Revolution which for the first time placed before the surviving representatives of this epoch the choice of either recognizing the perspective held out by the new period in human development and of affirming it, even if with a tragic cleavage of spirit, like Heine, or of sinking into the position of apologists for declining capitalism, as Marx, immediately after the 1848 Revolution, critically demonstrated in the case of such important figures as Guizot and Carlyle." (30). By the "new period" Luckacs means the period after 1848.

<sup>2</sup>For a critical look at the way the word "memory" has been used by those who apply it to a method of historical research see Kerwin Lee Klein "On the Emergence of *Memory*" in *Representations* 69 (Winter 2000). 127-150.

## PART I

### CHAPTER ONE: “BUT I IMAGINED IT”: MACKINLAY KANTOR REPORTS FOR IDEOLOGICAL DUTY

Released in October of 1955, MacKinlay Kantor’s hefty and gritty, yet absorbing and sentimental novel *Andersonville* quickly garnered nearly unanimous rave reviews and began selling in the tens of thousands. “Out of fragmentary and incoherent records,” historian Henry Steele Commager said (and as the author of a book about the Civil War “as told by participants” he would be in a position to complain about those records), “Mr. Kantor has wrought the greatest of our Civil War novels” (1). His opinion of the book’s high quality, if not of its supremacy, would be nearly general that year among reviewers, and in March of the following year Kantor would be awarded his first and only Pulitzer Prize. But the book’s runaway popularity, and the sentimentalism that no doubt helped in the winning of that popularity, may have doomed the book’s chances of entering the American literary canon. It was not included in any of the retrospective lists of the century’s best fiction that were compiled at the turn of the 21st century. The MLA bibliography lists no articles on the book since the book’s fortieth anniversary year of 1985, when a reprinting of Kantor’s essay on what would be his most famous novel appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*, the same publication that had previously featured Commager’s original plaudits (“The Writing of *Andersonville*”).

The book follows the dismal fates of dozens of northern prisoners as they suffer, sometimes survive, but more often perish in the makeshift Confederate prison in central Georgia in the spring, summer and early fall of 1864. Built to hold only a few thousand, the prison eventually was used to confine over 30,000

union soldiers. Nearly 14,000 of them died, as starvation, exposure, disease and brutality meted out by privation, weather, fellow inmates and Confederate guards took their toll. While most of the book is set within the prison's pine-log stockade, much of it takes place on its perimeter. The high command in the novel is revealed to be uniformly either malicious or incompetent. The civilians living outside the prison, on the other hand, seem quite sympathetic toward the prisoners, but unable to be of any help. The two surviving members of the Claffey family, on whose land the prison is built, are depicted as nearly saintly despite their lack of success in ameliorating conditions inside the stockade or rescuing any significant number of potential victims.

Aside from its impressive handling of a large and various cast of characters, *Andersonville's* sheer density of description, its ambition to explain comprehensively the U.S. Civil War experience by sketching out the lives of its dozens of characters with scrupulous precision and detachment demands the attention of anyone interested in how the Civil War would be used in the decades following its end. Mere reason suggests that a work that reaches out in so many directions with such evident commitment must grab much more than it intends to. Not only would we be assured of finding much from 1864 and 65 in the book--because of Kantor's twenty-five years of research and his incorporation of the dozens of titles he cites in the novel's bibliography--but we must expect to find much from Kantor's own time, much that he could not cite.

The book was written in a time that was nearly as fraught with trauma and sudden change as the Civil War era itself. The book was researched before and during World War II, and was composed as the Cold War began to peak. As Kantor explains in the *New York Times Book Review* essay that shared a page with Commager's rave, "I was working each day from the 16th of December, 1953,

until the 25th of May 1955. I mean working each day” (“The Author,” 33). So, while Kantor maintains the research on *Andersonville* did indeed begin two and a half decades previously when the Soviet menace was temporarily eclipsed by the Axis Powers, the novel’s composition began in an era when America’s enemy had been defined as the Worldwide Communist Conspiracy, and U.S. funds, manpower and mass culture had been invested in its containment for nearly a decade. As Kantor was researching and planning his book, the U.S., in an international coalition that included the Soviet Union, faced down the Nazi menace, confronted its most dastardly work, the death-camps, then, in reaction to Soviet attempts at political consolidation of its military gains in Eastern Europe, gradually returned its attention to the Soviet threat it had perceived--except during the temporary alliance against Germany--all along. During these tumultuous years, these feints and turns would manifest themselves in Kantor’s fiction, not only in *Andersonville* but in the work leading up to it. *Andersonville*, as one of the most popular novels of its day, would be in a unique position to articulate the Cold War consensus to the American public in very specific terms. Kantor, meanwhile, had seemingly been outfitting himself for years before its publication to be the kind of writer needed to write such a book.

### **The Making of the “Most Typically American Author”**

When MacKinlay Kantor walked through the gates of Buchenwald concentration camp on April 24, 1945, American soldiers had been liberating Nazi death camps and enslavement factories for five months. Beginning with Natzwiller labor camp, located within the borders of present-day France, where hundreds of enslaved Jews, Gypsies and captured Resistance fighters from the surrounding countries were tortured and killed, American soldiers began seeing firsthand scenes of atrocities which till then had only been sporadic reports.<sup>1</sup> At

last, US soldiers confronted the sight of uncountable stacked corpses, filthy stockades and squalid barracks, and the smell of decay and human waste. Many Americans, whether in the service or in civilian life, were angered by the contrast between the misery in the camps and the sometimes bucolic lives led by Germans living nearby.<sup>2</sup> Understandably, the reactions to what they saw hardened them toward the German civilians who, at worst, could be accused of direct complicity in and, at best, tolerance of state-sanctioned cruelty. The question among Americans of the German civilian population's culpability in the outrages committed by its government and military was unsettled, as it remains today. But in the last year of the war, the freshness of grief over lost loved ones and the stunned indignation over the revelation of the death camps probably influenced many to blame all of Germany for these tragedies.

The tendency to lump all Germans together as a guilty race that had to be dealt with forcefully was in evidence at the very top of the American hierarchy. Both President Franklin Roosevelt and Dwight David Eisenhower, overall commander of Allied troops in Europe, privately expressed belief in collective guilt on the part of the Germans for starting the war and for steeping all of Europe in the blood of civilians. As the war in Europe was ending, Roosevelt told his Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, that an occupation policy had to be harsh by necessity:

We have got to be tough with the German people, not just the Nazis. You either have to castrate the German people or you have got to treat them in such a manner so they can't just go on reproducing people who want to continue the way they have in the past.

In a letter to his Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, Roosevelt confided that he was disturbed by an Anglo-American trend he perceived that favored a

restriction of moral and legal culpability to the Nazi political leaders: “Too many people here and in England hold to the view that the German people as a whole are not responsible for what has taken place--that only a few Nazi leaders are responsible. That unfortunately is not based on fact.” As for the possibility of an amicable occupation, Roosevelt declared, “Germany understands only one kind of language” (both qtd. in Hammond 355). Presumably, he meant force.

At the April 1945 Big Three conference at Yalta, the dying Roosevelt declared his preference, albeit in private discussions with his British and Soviet counterparts, for a policy toward German war criminals far harsher than that endorsed by Harry S. Truman a few months later. The question on the table was whether or not the most prominent Nazis should be given trials before what Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt had already decided would be sure executions. Roosevelt did say any execution “should be a judicial rather than a political act.” Stalin readily agreed, but Roosevelt clarified that “it should not be too judicial.” The media, he continued, should be barred from any proceedings and should only be provided with the names of those who had been executed. (qtd. in Gilbert 1201-1202).

While FDR in public statements (most notably his speech made during the Big Three conference at Casablanca in 1942) was careful to distinguish between Germans and the philosophy of Nazism, his private comments made no such distinction. It is possible that Henry Morgenthau’s plan to keep Germany a pastoral economy was drawn up in response to the President’s privately expressed views. When Truman got into office, he would dismiss the plan as too harsh and for that reason likely to repeat the mistakes made by the Allies after World War I which he believed had been a factor in the rise of Adolf Hitler (qtd in Hammond 355).<sup>3</sup>



Eisenhower phrased his observations about Germans in terms as absolute and condemnatory as those his president used. One of his biographers, Stephen Ambrose, discerned in the Eisenhower of late World War II, “hatred for the Germans” that was “deeply felt.” Like FDR, Eisenhower held the Germans responsible for the war’s very existence and for its savage character. But he also thought them guilty of “continuing the conflict long after any reasonable people would have quit.” After his tour of the newly-liberated Buchenwald, Eisenhower wrote his wife, “I never dreamed that such cruelty, bestiality and savagery could really exist in this world. It was horrible.” However, Ambrose contrasted Eisenhower’s indignant disdain for “the Nazis (and quite possibly the German people as a whole)” who were “beyond redemption” to his views of the Russians with whom a relationship “was both possible and necessary” (Ambrose 400-401). These privately held beliefs about Germans would not be reflected in his September 29, 1945, public expression of concern that the average German’s caloric intake had fallen below 33 percent of the subsistence level. In his capacity as Commander of Allied Occupation Troops, whatever he felt of a vengeful cast, his humanitarian response to the food distribution problem did not reveal (Webb 10).

Harsh treatment of German civilians was not a private matter at the newly liberated death camps, but a matter of everyday policy. The usual practice, after American soldiers liberated camps, was to immediately round up a contingent of Nazi guards (the ones who had not been fled or killed, at any rate), neighborhood civilians and local officials. Neither age nor gender would disqualify Germans from this duty. They would be forced to view the camps, often in the single-file lines of well-dressed and apparently well-fed Germans that would be shown in photographs and newsreels around the world. After this, the men would be

employed to bury the dead and clean the area. The liberated survivors would now be called “displaced persons” and would often remain in the camps until they could be returned to their homes or, (as was often the case) when they had no home to return to, until they could they could arrange transport elsewhere. Certainly, the use of German civilian men for the most onerous and filthy chores was a policy that spared many exhausted veteran American soldiers another grisly experience. The Germans, on the other hand, regarded it as punishment and viewed it as the usual use of the conquered population by the conquerors.<sup>4</sup>

In the latter half of April, 1945, the reports of the death camps began making front page news in the United States, although rarely of the above-the-fold variety. Reporters were now describing for American readers and listeners what they’d seen at Ohrdruf, Nordhausen, Buchenwald, Dachau and, in May, Mauthausen, usually beginning their dispatches with some variant of “you have to see it to believe it” or “this is not propaganda.” Nearly as often, editorialists lapsed into blanket condemnations of the German people as a whole and calls for harsh punishment, as when L. H. Todd, of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* said, “Even the most severe sentence cannot atone for these horribly fantastic deeds. Yes I am in favor of heavy-handed justice by heavy-handed victors and the Nazis and Japs deserve no less” (4a). In ending his dispatch on Belsen, reporter George Rodger merely quoted an inmate. “Perhaps it can all be summed up in the few croaking words that came from a pitiful bag of rags and bones at my feet: ‘Look, Englishman, this is German culture’” (38-39). In this way, the views expressed only privately by policymakers gained mainstream acceptance for a time.

After a contingent of VIP publishers and editors, which included such luminaries as Joseph Pulitzer of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, Julius Ochs Adler of the *New York Times*, Norman Chandler of the *Los Angeles Times*, and 15 others

from newspapers, magazines and wire services, toured the camps, the group released a statement--signed by every member--that conflated the guilt of the Nazi high command with that of the German people. The camps were “the inexorable consequence of the whole Nazi-German philosophy. By this philosophy and the cunning and persistence with which it was propagated, their German mind became contaminated and diseased.” The editors declared that “the German people cannot be allowed to escape their share of the responsibility” (“Editors” 8A). For readers wondering what could have accounted for the “German mind’s” susceptibility to the likes of Hitler, war correspondent Herbert L. Matthews was there in the *New York Times* of May 6, 1945, with an op/ed explaining that “Hitler had at his command the most diabolically perfect instrument for nazism that could have been devised--a brave, disciplined, military-minded, stupid people with enough brutality in them to provide the necessary measure of terrorism and to propagate the adequate amount of fear” (Matthews 4E).

Even after VJ Day some American writers could not shake a tendency to view all Germans as guilty of the aggressive war and the vicious genocide wrought in their names. In December of 1945, pioneering female war correspondent Anne O’Hare McCormick would write in *The New York Times* of seeing a crowd of Germans waiting for a tram in the ruined city of Nuremberg and being reminded of a time she’d seen at the very same spot, during the days of the Third Reich, a similar crowd “disordered and pushing each other . . . until a policeman appeared and waved them into line.” The crowd, McCormick said, formed into organized lines and stopped pushing. That scene, McCormick said, was “significant of that inner disorder which impels the German to seek order imposed from without.” But now, seven months after the surrender, there was no pushing and no policeman. “This is what makes you wonder where the Germans

are” (5). As late as 1952, former Roosevelt-administration official and foreign correspondent J.P. Warburg would harshly criticize the plan to rearm West Germany in preparation for its enlistment as a Cold War ally. “Once Germany is rearmed,” he said before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, “. . . we shall then have confided the future of Europe into the hands of the Politburo and the Nazi-infested Foreign Office of the Bonn Republic” (202). By the time he wrote his book, however, he did disclaim the view of Germans as homogeneously criminal which he heard espoused often in his days in government because “this seemed to me neither more nor less than Nazi racialism in reverse” (xvii).

The attribution of war guilt and death camp guilt to the entire civilian population cropped up repeatedly in the immediate post-war months in everything from ostensibly straight news to editorials and even letters to the editor. But some writers saw a danger in such thinking, as the editorial writer for the *Washington Post* did, saying “it is a melancholy paradox indeed that Americans themselves would interpret these crimes in racial terms.” The writer explains that German war criminals are “products of their cultural environment, not of any peculiar biologic inheritance. To recognize this is to take the first essential step toward solution of the problem they present.” Among those the *Post* editorial criticized were two US Congressmen. Representative Edouard V. M. Izac of California was quite clear about who he held responsible: “. . . the blame for these atrocities cannot be laid solely at the door of the Nazi system or of Hitler. Rather . . . they are the result of something innate in the German people.” Congressman Clare Booth Luce of Missouri, in an interview, “was moved to wonder if there can be ‘any good in any German’” (“Racist Reaction” 45). But the published letters which responded to the editorial weren’t in agreement. “I repeat my note of a month ago to you,” said a letter from Steven Rose which appeared four days later,

“Once a German, always a German, therefore the only good German is a dead German” (6). A column by Paul Winkler printed the same week predicted that Germans would only pretend to become democrats in order to placate their Allied conquerors (6).

Another writer who was notable for his minority status because he saw dangers in generalizing German war guilt was James Agee, who was a film critic for *The Nation* at the time. Agee refused to see the well-publicized newsreels of the German death camps taken by the American Signal Corps and distributed to movie houses worldwide in the spring of 1945. He saw the distribution as “an ordered and successful effort to condition the people of this country against interfering with, or even questioning, an extremely hard peace against the people of Germany” (161-62). But the *Washington Post* editorial writer and Agee did not represent the norm among immediate reactions to the revelations of the atrocities. Certainly as these pieces were written MacKinlay Kantor was writing about Germans in the way most American leaders and journalists were talking and writing about them.

The US Signal Corps films did elicit the very responses Agee warned of. After a showing of the death camp atrocities newsreel in St. Louis, Mrs. R.H. Vogan of Peach Orchard, Arkansas was heard to say, “I’m not vindictive . . . but the German people must be punished in some way.” A female student at St. Louis Central High said, “I wouldn’t treat the Germans that way, even if they aren’t human!” A black woman from St. Louis named Velma Jones expressed exasperation: “I don’t know what we’re going to do with those people.” In contrast to the reactions of reporters and editorialists, however, most of the reactions of filmgoers was relatively circumspect. A man in the Coast Guard, for

example, said, “Realizing what these atrocities mean is our only hope for a better life and the end of wars . . . I think the films will do some good” (qtd. in Abzug 136).<sup>5</sup>

Ultimately, US occupation policy in Germany did not follow the rather vengeful plan advanced by Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau which would have reduced Germany’s economy to an exclusively agrarian one. By the time of the German surrender, Roosevelt had already rejected the well-publicized Morgenthau plan and instead favored a less punitive but still quite harsh set of policy guidelines that were issued--after extensive consultations among the various government agencies--by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a policy directive that would be known afterward as JCS 1067.<sup>6</sup> From May of 1945 to July of 1947, the twelve-page, two-column document would make fraternization between US personnel and Germans illegal, require the removal of Nazis from public and private institutions, and, in its Morgenthau-influenced sections, promote farming and forbid the use of American help in rebuilding Germany’s heavy industries. The document was interpreted at times quite loosely, with Lucius Clay, the General in charge of the US military government in Germany, sometimes observing the terms of the less punitive Potsdam Agreement which was struck by Truman with Stalin and Churchill in the summer 1945. Two more JCS directives followed, the first one in July 1947, loosening up the restrictions on industrial aid.<sup>7</sup>

When the war in Europe ended, MacKinlay Kantor was doing his second tour in Europe as a foreign correspondent, this time for two Hearst Corporation magazines, *Esquire* and *Coronet* (“MacKinlay Kantor Assigned” 4). He had already been on bombing missions with the Eighth Air Force, even going to tail gunner school to earn his spot. While that might have been a slight breach of

journalistic detachment, the letter he'd write to his wife back in Sarasota after touring Buchenwald, like most letters from husbands to wives, casts objectivity to the winds. He tells Irene, the mother of their two children Layne and Timmy, that to those who say the concentration camp reports are official fiction, she should "just tell them politely to shut their big traps." After describing his whereabouts, "some damn German family's upstairs sitting room, with horrible oil portraits of Grossmutter and Grossvater staring stupidly from the wall: there is the smell of a good dinner being gekuchen, but I can hardly smell it--the smell of death is too persistent in my nostrils," Kantor explains to Irene what he did and saw that day:

We stood and stared at the piles of dead--scores of them, heaps, trucks laden with the newly-dead who could not survive the shock of liberty and salvation. We poked about among great stacks of half-consumed human bones, and saw bodies still half-burnt in the none-too-efficient cremation furnaces (the good Germans ran short of coke recently: ja, ja, they have shortages over here too). They looked like broken, shriveled black wienies that someone had forgotten and left on the grill too long.

But worst of all, to me, was the children's quarters--both in the *hospital* (smile when you say that, pard) and in the regular children's quarters. The dear Teutons--think how they have enriched our language: they gave us the word *kindergarten*. A true child's garden, was this. "This section for children from 5 to 15." Boys, all of them--just boys in this camp-- I kept imagining Timmy there. It was not too delightful, as you might say, but I imagined it.

Kantor's sardonic asides seem an effort to mask the real shock and rage he allows to surface in the letter's penultimate paragraph in which he says, "I saw a lot of pulverized cities today--smashed, ruined, pounded to extinction. I wish to God that all of Germany was laid in such ruins." Writing in his memoir *My Father's Voice* (1988), his son Tim would feel compelled to qualify his father's anguished vengefulness by referring to what his father would write later. "But he knew that inhumanity was not limited in such a fashion," Tim Kantor wrote. "America had produced its own horrors during the Civil War. Not such intended,

concentrated evil, on such a grand scale; far smaller, not nearly as horrendous, but still--emaciated bodies, and vomit on the ground.” Later in the memoir, Tim Kantor would reveal that his father would often compare Camp Sumter to Buchenwald when speaking to friends about the novel. (Tim Kantor 169-79, 194-95, 227).

There is much evidence in his son’s memoir (and in other places) that Kantor thought of himself as the voice of mainstream America, the one novelist who told the stories that ennobled his country and manifested its values, a literary Frank Capra who leaned to the right. In his son’s book we learn of Kantor’s pride in his 1942 novella *Happy Land*, which uses the formula from Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* to strengthen the morale of a country just drawn into World War II. A father, bitter over the recent loss of his sailor son in the war, is visited by the ghost of his own father and persuaded of the rightness of the cause for which his boy died. Not only did Twentieth Century Fox buy the movie rights to the story, but the U.S. Office of War Information brought out versions of the story in ten languages “from Italian to Indonesian--as propaganda for the American Way of Life.” MacKinlay Kantor thought his writing was helping to win the war, “helping to fight the enemies he loathed” (Tim Kantor 185).

He had in common with Ernest Hemingway a need to participate in the war through writing about it and through sharing the bodily risks with the soldiers. But Kantor had two strikes against him. When he was stationed in England by the news agencies for which he wrote, he found that the Army Air Corps prohibited the carrying of “dead weight”--a category that apparently included reporters--aboard their bomber planes, where space was always at a premium. Curtis LeMay, commander of the Eighth Air Force, finally helped Kantor get into air gunnery school, so he’d at least be a functioning crew member



able to earn his way. The other strike against Kantor's participation was a rule in the Geneva Convention which forbade war correspondents from taking part in active combat. LeMay, fortunately for Kantor, disregarded this particular part of the convention. "In those rough months of '43," says his son's memoir, Kantor took the course and flew on the missions, because "he wanted to risk, to share, to defend the countries that he loved. . . ." While on a run over Germany, gathering material for his dispatches, Kantor even racked up an official "kill" (Tim Kantor 7). The essays he wrote, published in magazines like *Esquire*, *Coronet*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*, were usually highly-stylized sketches, portraying life on an air base and the adventures of those who lived there. They made no comment on the factors that led to the war itself. Neither was there any mention of the civilians no doubt killed and wounded as bombs went astray. Strangely, Kantor published nothing on what he saw at Buchenwald, possibly because none of the three magazines were the sort that would host such harrowing material. His World War II writing exclusively concerned the travails of American servicemen and their families, an understandable fact given his market.

This tendency toward a narrow focus on the soldier and his immediate experience is also quite apparent in his long postwar poem *Glory For Me* (1946), which details the plight of several ex-soldiers readjusting to civilian life. As his son put it, MacKinlay Kantor hoped with his poem to "honor" those who came "from hovels and from mansions, and from modest, comfortable homes of the middle class." In describing the purpose behind *Glory For Me*, Tim Kantor seems to reach here for words his father might have used in describing his project, words that seem to draw all Americans into a homogenous mass, regardless of any differences in social status or ethnicity that was eager to be of service. The Americans his father wrote about were "[l]ike clover spreading in an empty

pasture, waiting to nurture those who, in time, would come to graze and thrive” (188). Among those who grazed, certainly, were the executives at Twentieth Century Fox, who bought the film rights to the poem and saw the William Wyler-directed film adaptation, titled *The Best Years of Our Lives*, sweep the Oscars, winning seven awards, including Best Picture in 1947. Kantor was said to be quite satisfied with the film itself, which Robert Sherwood wrote the screenplay for, although not with the opening credits, since they didn’t mention the title of his poem (197). The movie also engages in the same blurring of class distinctions found in the poem. Just as in the poem, the three soldiers come from differing social classes, but their class distinctions are insignificant to the narrative, as each soldier experiences similar readjustment problems and each seems to mix freely with the others. The fact that the prosperous banker has more room for error and more resources to draw upon in the course of his crisis occurs neither to Kantor as he wrote the poem, nor to the producers of the film. His struggle is equated with that of the other ex-soldiers, though one has lost his hand.

Kantor continued to take on the role as spokesman for a united, middle-class America even as he approached the writing of his most substantial and most popular novel. The book he published just before *Andersonville* is a paean to the Midwestern middle-of-the-road lifestyle. In *God and My Country* (1954), Kantor writes the biography of a fictional Boy Scout master named Lem Siddons, who, at the turn of the twentieth century, is given the responsibility--by the mayor, no less, of instilling in the town’s boys the values of their nation. These include the usual ones, diligence (through the earning of merit badges on the way to “making Eagle”) and respect for property (at one point Lem reforms a boy who has the unfortunate habit of tossing stones at store windows). But they emphatically

exclude the extremes of militarism, piety and godlessness. Instead, the scoutmaster counsels a comfortable middle ground among these tendencies.

When a local professor, an émigré from Germany, offers to teach the scouts how to march more precisely, the way the German boys do it, Lem (in a moment no doubt influenced by the decade-old vestigial distrust of Germans that lingered with Kantor) immediately turns him down, and in so doing, indulges in a dissertation on the American character. “This is a free-and-easy kind of world, here in America; and if the Scouts march kind of free-and-easy--I think it’s all to the good . . . [w]e’re not living in Germany, thank God.” But while the Scoutmaster has no use for the professor as a drill instructor, he does ask him to present lessons on how best to collect and preserve insect specimens. The Germanic martial character would not be needed, but its scientific rigor would be welcomed. It’s as if Kantor is here playing out a miniature version of the deal U.S. intelligence officials and weapons developers made with several ex-Nazi spies and scientists just after World War II.

This deal had reached American newsprint in early 1947. First, it was revealed in a *New York Times* piece with the rather damning headline “Nazis Sent to US as Technicians,” which charged the program dubbed Project Paperclip with opening the way to Nazi scientists fleeing Allied justice and charged General Lucius Clay’s occupational force with the laxity that allowed the escapes (Hunt 96). Then the *New York Herald Tribune* ran an op/ed, which observed that the German scientists which had been brought into the United States had been screened by the Nazis for loyalty to Hitler, even though the public had been assured that the government would apply painstaking scrutiny to keep Nazis out of the country (Bower 249). At nearly the same time as the appearance of these two pieces, other complaints cropped up in newspapers around the country,

including those of American scientists who asked why they should be forced to “work side by side with participants in the Nazi plan to rule the world” (qtd in Bower 250).

Meanwhile, the recently returned veterans, angered at the sight of several human scientists walking the streets of the town adjoining Wright Field, the air base near Dayton, Ohio, wrote in the local paper that their efforts had been lent to fighting the Germans, not housing them and paying them \$10,000 a year incomes (Bower 250). The Federation of American Scientists protested directly to President Truman, but Truman--assured by his Secretary of War, Dean Acheson, that former Nazis would be excluded from the program--had already given his signature (Hunt 40). The flow of German (and Japanese) scientists into the country continued even after the newspapers reported on the program and even accelerated as the Cold War intensified. Indeed, in the late summer of 1952, following the officially encouraged departure of Nazi doctor Walter Schreiber (protests had moved the Air Force to arrange for his transfer to Argentina), the American Jewish Congress would pass a resolution protesting Operation Paperclip and asking that Nazis working in the U.S. be returned to Germany. In late 1954, the year *God and My Country* was published--on November 11th, in fact--around 100 of the scientists who had worked on the German A-bomb at Peenemunde were sworn in as U.S. citizens in a public ceremony in Birmingham, Alabama. They all worked in that city on similar weapons for the U.S (Bower 296-297).

Kantor took upon himself, as he'd done during World War II, the job of justifying the ways of the U.S. military establishment through his scoutmaster protagonist. Employing Germans didn't mean the embrace of Nazism, for it was not their aggressive militarism that interested us, only their arcane, assuredly

apolitical, knowledge. The implications of allowing ex-Nazis to evade justice Kantor neatly deflects, simply by having his German professor be a pre-World War I immigrant and differentiating the outward aspect of his scouts, their out-of-step marching, from that of presumably goose stepping German boys. America's writer had here given America a homespun way to rationalize the employment of ex-Nazis in its Cold War military, using that most American and most salutary of institutions, the Boy Scouts.

Elsewhere in *God and My Country*, the scoutmaster's son gives a rather stilted speech that both explains to his apprehensive parents why he is joining the Army Air Corps during wartime and the reason for America's entrance into World War II ("... we've got the best little working machine on the market. . . . suppose someone else has plans for us? And do they just! Read the papers, children!" [91-93]). When Lem's son is killed, the novel has the occasion to clarify Lem's relationship to organized religion and to its opponents. "They'd never stressed the religious angle too much in the Scouts," we are told, and this choice offends the "cranks" who wish the scouts would pray more at meetings and also bothers the interestingly-named Mr. Ivan Apgar, "a fulminating atheist, who threatened to withdraw his son from the Troop because the Scouts had repeated the Lord's Prayer in a service at camp" (100-102). Lem Siddons even takes the middle way in his retreat to the Psalms for solace after the death of his son. He studies and repeats the Scripture to himself, never seeking to communicate its message, regardless of the solace it might provide, to his aggrieved wife and daughter-in-law. The town fathers approve of Siddon's choices, as evidenced by their successful efforts to keep him out of World War I ("You're more valuable to the Nation and to the community--right here doing exactly what you've been doing with our kids--than you'd be sitting in a little tent

down in Horned Toad, Texas!” he is told by his doctor, whose diagnosis of a heart murmur bars him from military service [68]) and later by their lavish celebration of his fortieth anniversary as scoutmaster. So by the time of the writing of *Andersonville*, Kantor’s record for upholding American values, and attempting to reconcile those that conflict, had been well established.

After the publication of *Andersonville*, Kantor seemed to gravitate toward the right of center in his approach to national questions and to have reaped professional benefits from this move. Although “once he himself had said mad things during the agony of the Depression years,” according to his son’s memoir, he would later become such an ardent anti-Communist that his son would impute to him the desire to lay waste to cities. “How he’d love to ride the first bomber over Moscow,” Tim Kantor’s memoir states, in a chapter that describes the MacKinlay Kantor of the mid-50s. By this time, Kantor had already taped extensive interviews with General Curtis LeMay, a man who never hid his disdain for communism (219). LeMay chose Kantor to ghostwrite his memoirs because he’d “read some of his books and liked them” (Coffey 3). The two had already worked together in Europe, LeMay’s liberal interpretation of the Geneva Convention allowing the war correspondent Kantor to become a member of a bomber crew. LeMay was obviously comfortable with Kantor, and evidently had no fear Kantor would suddenly object to including justifications for the bombing of civilian targets in a book with his name on the cover. While Kantor’s role as LeMay’s ghostwriter constitutes no endorsement of his patron’s opinions, LeMay would be unlikely to employ a writer who might put him on the defensive during interviews. The genre of the military memoir is not known for trenchant self-critique, General Ulysses Grant’s admission about his mistakes at Cold Harbor being the notable, perhaps because rare, exception. And LeMay was perhaps less

given to self-critique than others of his ilk. So when the bombing of Tokyo comes up for discussion in Book V of *Mission With LeMay* (1965), LeMay makes no effort to explain the targeting of civilians to an unsympathetic audience. Instead, he speaks as though to an audience acquiescent to his reasoning and to his clipped, even glib, enunciation of that reasoning, an audience like Kantor himself must have been. The Japanese civilians of Hiroshima and Nagasaki would be bombed, explains LeMay, because the “entire population got into the act and worked to make those airplanes or munitions of war . . . [his ellipses] men, women, children. We knew we were going to kill a lot of women and kids when we burned that town. Had to be done.” It was because the Japanese built their residential sections next to their factories, reasons LeMay, that there had been so many civilian casualties during the bombings. “In Japan, they were set up like this: they’d have a factory; and then the families, in their homes throughout the area, would manufacture small parts. You might call it a home-folks assembly line deal” (384). LeMay never anticipates the suggestion that his reasoning would have justified the bombing of hundreds of American cities by Axis planes. He could trust Kantor, who dreamed of bombing Moscow, not to raise these possibilities.

LeMay’s support for Project Paperclip also lacks the merest hint of a qualm. Because “we were still far behind the Germans when the war was over,” LeMay declares, it had been right in his opinion to recruit German scientists, and to dangle favors in front of them in doing so. American scientists who objected to working alongside ex-Nazis “were frightened by their own deficiencies. They didn’t welcome any German competition.” LeMay describes part of his own role in post-war Germany as that of liberator of these erroneously captured scientists: “Well, that was a crying need in my new job: rescue these able and intelligent

Jerries from behind the barbed wire, and get them going in our various military projects.” That these scientists were prisoners of war at all was “somebody’s bright idea,” grouses LeMay. “Wonder where we’d be today if we let those people languish in the pen” (397)

Like his country’s political class, Kantor had come a long way by this time from the hatred of Germans as a race that had prevailed in the World War II era. From writing of his contempt for a German civilian family’s comfortable dwelling after a tour of Buchenwald in April, 1945, he’d progressed to the point of using his own prose to sell Project Paperclip. True, his name would be placed under and not above the name of LeMay, but there is no record of Kantor distancing himself from LeMay’s opinions, and he had every chance to do so honorably. LeMay’s most recent biographer denies LeMay wrote the infamous and oft-quoted bluster at the end of the book that advised the North Vietnamese to “draw in their horns and stop their aggression, or we’re going to bomb them back into the stone age” (Coffey 3, 442; LeMay with Kantor 465). Admittedly, Thomas Coffey’s biography of LeMay is a bit too enthralled with its subject to be taken seriously as the definitive consideration of LeMay’s life and legacy, but if he is correct, it is possible Kantor himself coined the phrase for which LeMay is most remembered.

### **Conclusion**

Kantor’s career up to and just after the writing of *Andersonville* invites the reading of his most famous and most substantial work as an attempt to articulate an American consensus on the country’s role in the world. His writing during World War II was unapologetic morale-building propaganda in which he expressed pride. When he toured a concentration camp near the war’s end, he echoed the political and journalistic consensus on how the German people should



be viewed. As the Cold War gradually blew in, he adopted the Soviet Union as the new brute enemy and relished the thought of flying on nuclear bombing missions over Moscow. He also carried on a long collaboration with General Curtis E. LeMay, who distinguished himself as one of the most hawkish generals when it came to the use of American arms, recommending pre-emptive air attacks on the Soviet Union in the 50s, on Cuba during the crisis of October 1962, and (possibly) North Vietnam in 1965. Kantor's pattern is that of an author who sought a role as spokesman for what policy-makers hoped, and what he himself probably believed, was the American mainstream. The fact that his 1967 collection of stories and sketches, *Story Teller* was able to mention in its cover flap that Kantor had been judged in a poll "the most typically American author of our time . . . by a substantial majority" attests to Kantor's success in his endeavor.

Although *Andersonville* would be set over fifty years before the Russian Revolution and over seventy years before the Nazi death camps, the ideological current proved so strong that even in a historical novel Kantor was unable to resist fulfilling the need he perceived in the arena of discourse. Just as he had done in *Happy Land* and *Glory For Me* during World War II, and in *God and My Country* just after the war in Korea, he would absorb the prevailing drift of American discourse on several pressing questions, then use his literary skill to promote a structure of thinking, often a way of reconciling responses to the immediate needs of the present with what had been firmly entrenched principles. In *Happy Land*, Kantor justifies the sacrifice of sons in a country that had been staunchly isolationist just a few years before. In *Glory For Me*, Kantor argues for the fundamental unity of America's social classes as their members shared the burdens of war in a country that had been deeply divided along class lines during the Great Depression. In *God and My Country*, Kantor takes on several tasks.

First, by presenting the analogy of the Boy Scouts as regimented corps that had played a central but benign role in the community, the book argues in favor of militarization in a country that had been opposed to the maintenance of standing armies. Then, in one brief sequence, the book makes the distinction between German science and the German military culture so that the nation's use of German science is presented as only common sense. In *Mission With LeMay*, Kantor continues his advocacy of a constant state of military preparedness and gives voice to one of the most visible proponents of an aggressive foreign policy in a time when an America that had elected Lyndon Johnson as the candidate who would keep it out of war in Vietnam was now having to accede to Johnson's use of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution to call up more and more troops.

In light of Kantor's repeated pattern of working through the cognitive dissonances in US policy and in the national culture, a look at *Andersonville* that anticipates a use of the Civil War-era to sift mid-20th-century discourses into a more digestible substance would be most instructive. On a canvas of such scope, with so many themes in play, there's much potential for superimposing contemporary values onto the historic scheme in such a way that the result is predetermined and looks like the consensus the author's culture needs. Examining the means by which present-day values are superimposed on a historical novel and the final configuration that emerges once past and present values clash can lead to some conclusions about the often awkward and precarious way consensus is arrived at in Western-style representative democracies.

## **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Robert Abzug's *Inside the Vicious Heart* dates the first reports of Nazi death camps to "early 1933, when Dachau first slammed its gate shut on a group of

Communists and other political enemies of the Nazis.” It also cites the CBS broadcast of a 1940 speech by Hans Frank, who was made governor of the conquered parts of Poland by the Nazis, announcing the impending removal of Jews from Krakow. *Time*, *Newsweek* and the *Saturday Evening Post* were, in 1942, regularly reporting on atrocities in Poland and in death camps and estimating two million had already perished (4).

<sup>2</sup>Edward R. Murrow noticed at the environs of Buchenwald “the country round that was pleasing to the eye and the Germans were well-fed and well-dressed” (qtd. in Snyder 45).

<sup>3</sup>Truman himself seems to have reserved his belief in collective guilt for the Russians rather than the Germans. In an interview given September 9, 1959, the former president would make himself quite clear: “I think they’re the worst barbarians the world has ever produced. They have a cross of the Tartar in them, and they haven’t changed a bit--just the same as Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, only they’re not as smart as Tamerlane and Genghis were” (qtd. in Weber 69).

<sup>4</sup>The April 15, 1945, *New York Times*, described one detail of civilians on page nine of its A section forced to bury “2,700 Allied and political prisoners” as “probably the first time that the Allied Military Government had forced the German people to pay personally for their misdeeds.” The UP story from Nordhausen said, “They did not like it. Some became violently ill. One husky man collapsed with a heart attack.”

<sup>5</sup>Abzug himself is quoting from *A Report to the American People*, which was issued by Joseph Pulitzer, II, the editor of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, after his trip to Germany.

<sup>6</sup>Harry Truman said in his 1955 memoirs, “I had never been for that [Morgenthau] plan even when I was in the Senate, and since reaching the White House I had come to feel even more strongly about it.” He was also “deeply concerned that the peace to be written should not carry within it the kind of self-defeating provisions that would enable another Hitler to rise to power” (qtd. in Truman 235, 308).

<sup>7</sup>See Jean Edward Smith’s *Lucius D. Clay: An American Life*, 232-236, for an account of Clay’s loose observance of JCS 1067 and see 431 for his relief at the less onerous and, as he thought, more practical JCS 1779.

## CHAPTER TWO: *ANDERSONVILLE* AS “PREVIEW OF BUCHENWALD”: THE IDEOLOGICAL USE OF AN HISTORIC ANALOGY

Even at the time of this writing, it is difficult to read Kantor’s tale of an inhumane Civil War-era prison camp without thinking of concentration camps of the Nazi-era. No doubt any prison camp novel written after the Holocaust would give rise to such associations, which are themselves a part of the cultural legacy of Hitler’s genocide. But Kantor’s book, in its description of the circumstances in which captive Union troops were forced to live and its characterization of their captors, seems to evoke the German horrors quite purposefully and specifically. Through *Andersonville*’s not-so-implicit comparison, the case was being made that Americans had themselves experienced a kind of Holocaust. When the analogy breaks down, as it does with respect to the few glimpses of Wirz’s humanity the novel allows or the presence in the novel of benevolent prison doctors who were allowed to try their various ameliorative treatments despite the horrendous sanitary conditions and the paucity of supplies, these should be read as cultural manifestations of the American ideological world of the mid 1950s, a world that needed to admit to the possibility of innocent civilian bystanders, redeemable Nazis and an incorruptible science that worked to the good despite the regime it served.

While Kantor’s treatment of the civilians living near the Confederate death camp and the doctors practicing within it is nearly uniformly sympathetic, the same cannot be said of his depiction of the guards and the official staff. Captain Henry Wirz, who was Swiss and whose native language was German, would be fictionalized by Kantor as a short-tempered martinet whose concern for the prison’s upkeep only applies to making it run efficiently. His superior, General

Richard Winder, is given a lusty sadism that isn't warranted by the documentary record. In these two characterizations can be seen the influences of Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler on Kantor's interpretation of Civil War history. The influence of Joseph Mengele, however, is notably absent. Both camp physicians in the novel are shown to be appalled by the condition of the Union POWs, who suffered from a myriad of diseases in the festering, swampy stockade while receiving nearly no food and no medicine. The odor of guilt for prison atrocities, which Kantor had linked directly to the Germans after the liberation of the death camps, hovers to pungency around the 19th century prison overseers whose stories he would narrate, but would not alight on the doctors or on the people living nearby. The guilt for the death camp in *Andersonville* would be limited, pinned on those giving the orders. In Kantor's *Andersonville*, what *San Francisco Chronicle* reviewer William Hagen would call "a 19th century preview of Buchenwald" was indeed like the Nazi camps but in some very strategic ways. Kantor, meanwhile, was obliged to skew his research findings in order to make the analogy work out (18).

### ***Andersonville as Death Camp, Confederates as Nazis***

The most obvious way the novel suggests its connection with the Nazi death camps is in its description of the 1864-65 camp's conditions. It has already been mentioned that Kantor's son wrote of his father conjuring up the memory of his visits to Buchenwald while writing of the Confederate camp, and certainly many passages from the novel read like the letter Kantor wrote to his wife. The smell is there, as one would expect, and the apparently rather comfortable family living close by whose well-appointed home he wrote from also seems to be there in the guise of the Claffeys. So Kantor includes the civilians living outside the camp's gates in his book, and does so in a way that evinces the same questions

that were asked about German civilians shortly after the Holocaust. He has also included material on the Confederate officials charged with the building and the administration of the camps. In these sequences, there are characters like General John Winder, who controlled all Confederate POW camps and who seems to mirror the behavior of the most sadistic of the Nazi commandants. There is also Captain Henry Wirz, the head administrator of Camp Sumter itself, who seems--in his hyperattention to efficiency to the detriment of his inmates' welfare--to be a Civil War-era answer to the cold, accountant-like mass murderer Heinrich Himmler. The presence of Jewish characters can't quite be considered a means by which Kantor artificially emphasized the analogy to the Nazi camps, simply because so many Jews did indeed fight on the Union side. But Kantor's decision to render his depiction of his one prominent Jewish character (an inmate of the prison) in elegiac tones is a choice that might not have been made had the Holocaust not occurred. Close scrutiny must be given to those instances in the book in which it is clear that a choice by Kantor has been made so as to bring the conditions into closer association with what was publicly understood about the Holocaust in the mid-1950s, beginning with the images by which Americans would come to recognize the Holocaust.

One of the first such images in *Andersonville* is set on a February evening in 1864, when small plantation owner Ira Claffey has his reading of Shelley to his daughter and a lodger interrupted. Out the window, the lodger has seen orange glows, ominous flickering that plantation owner Ira must investigate. As Claffey and his lodger walk north and approach the newly constructed Confederate prisoner of war camp built on Claffey land (the lodger, Surgeon Harrell Elkins' place of employment), the glows reveal themselves to be mere bonfires set to

signal trains to stop. They illuminate a scene that would no doubt call forth, for readers of *Andersonville*, images of other depots at other camps:

The snapping blazes revealed a train halted beside the Anderson depot; the train had been loaded with goblins, and several hundred goblins had trooped already from their box cars

...

\* \* \*

Next car, called a distant voice of authority. Count them as they come out, align them in ranks of fifty, two ranks deep, form them by Hundreds. Hold on! March those eight men over there to complete this Hundred.<sup>1</sup>

The use of trains for transport, the sheer numbers of prisoners, the strict and heartless accounting that necessitated a kind of marching formation all served to remind readers of a more recent use of trains to transport captives. The only things missing are women and children, yellow stars and machine guns.

As the trains keep coming over the next few months, too many trains bearing too many prisoners for the makeshift stockade of Camp Sumter, other resemblances to the conditions familiar to those who had read of or seen photos or films of the Nazi death camps would accumulate. Kantor's own practice of drawing upon his memory of his tour of Buchenwald, the odors, the piles of decaying corpses, the near proximity of houses full of middle-class comforts, is well documented in the letter excerpted in his son's 1988 reminiscence, *My Father's Voice*. Tim Kantor also quotes his father drunkenly exclaiming to neighbors in the night's small hours that *Andersonville* was proving difficult to write, although "I've researched Andersonville prison for years, and I smelled the stink of Buchenwald . . . I know the things that men do to men" (227). Kantor's reliance on Buchenwald as a model surely accounts for the way we are reminded in passages like the following of the unspeakable smells that reportedly arose

from the Nazi concentration camps. Here, the Claffey family, bearing up admirably otherwise during a hot summer day, suddenly notices an intolerable stench:

[The wind] changed, it shifted to the east then bore farther from the north. Smell walked the trees in a cloud and swept across the open veranda among short squared primitive posts which supported the open gallery. Now the fans switched steadily.

Poppy, shouldn't I have the wenches make a smudge?

It all depends. Whether you wish to be smoke-dried or whether you wish to breathe--this.

Reckon I'd rather have smoke in my eyes, said Lucy with a nervous giggle. She lifted a copper camel-bell which Uncle Felton had brought from Egypt before she could remember, and rang it. She waited, rang again, rang, rang, rang (A 314).

Though the similarities are many, readers should also note the differences from the situation just outside the German camps; here, it is smoke the Claffeys prefer, and Lucy seems desperate to have the Claffey slave women begin the preparations needed to produce it. But it is odor nonetheless that causes the disturbance and the expressed preference for the smoke comes off, for those who remember the accounts of the Nazis' use of crematoria, as a startling irony.

Another likeness to the later, internationally publicized, camps appears in *Andersonville's* depiction of death, its cited causes and its images. Starvation was one of the leading causes of death in both the American and the German camps, and descriptions abound in Kantor's book of emaciated victims milling around the stockade grounds, suffering the ravages of starvation and the diseases it makes its victims prey to. On first seeing prisoners being transferred into Camp Sumter, Ira Claffey calls them "goblins" and wonders "Are these alive? Walking, it is true--parading now before our gaze--but are they The Quick? Might not this be a procession of the dead?" (A 109). Willie Mann, just arriving at Camp Sumter in the spring, is greeted by "eviscerated cannibals or whatever they were," and he



promptly takes for “jeering and taunting” their “rowdy grim welcome filled with curiosity and a certain envy because he had not been compelled to suffer as they had suffered. But now he would suffer” (A 422). When a false rumor takes hold that a prisoner exchange has been brokered with the Federals, inmates begin to bestir themselves, revealing their conditions:

Men who were in the early stages of crippling illness arose and walked as if a gentle stranger had strolled among their couches of rags and earth and said, Walk; you can take up your bed if you want to, you can leave it behind. But--Arise and Walk.

\* \* \*

It could have been that the dead already deposited in the dead row began to roll away from it . . . there seemed motion and flexing among stiff meager bodies on the hill yonder even as shovels tamped them down (A 540).

In the fall of 1864, when those prisoners who are still ambulatory are being transferred to the slightly more hospitable Camp Lawton, Ira Claffey again gets a view of the inmates, the “identical goblins who had marched in their Belle Isle rags half a year earlier.” He observes that “their skeletal limbs were sticks,” and, instrestingly, feels moved “to cry a hosanna.” As he walks back home, he trips over stumps. “He could not see because of his tears” (A 554, 555). When the one-legged teenaged Confederate veteran Coral Tebbs first encounters the one-handed escapee, Naz Stricker, in the woods, he thinks Naz is “such a spook as might have sent any field Negro of the region scuttling” with a “crusted blackened skull for a face.” A little later, as Coral half-heartedly tries to capture Naz, he finds his orders--given by gunpoint, won’t be obeyed: “This shrunken scarecrow spook could be made to say nothing, he could not be made to look up” (A 647).

The combination of starvation, rampant disease and insensibility was a heavy presence in the published accounts of the World War II concentration camp

discoveries. Often journalists likened the victims to goblins or walking skeletons, and often the victims were called living dead. Though some inmates at the camp were able to give tours of the facilities and some were even able to take revenge (winked at by the allied liberators) on their former tormentors, most were quite exhausted and unresponsive. *New York Times* correspondent Harold Denny described Buchenwald inmates in terms MacKinlay Kantor himself probably remembered later as he wrote of what Ira Claffey, Willie Mann, Coral Tebbs and his many other characters had seen:

Prisoners lying or crouching on their shelves seemed hardly human and some had lost their minds. Some stared at me with piercing eyes from shrunken faces. Some looked idiotically ahead, their eyes seeing nothing, their mouths gaping. Some noticed me and moved what little clothing they wore to show their grotesque malformations and a few smiled sardonically (42).

Of course, two writers, both journalists, trying to describe cases of starvation and its familiar array of symptoms are liable to employ the same terminology. Such easy reaches as “scarcely human” and “walking skeletons” might naturally occur in any writer’s description of starved prisoners regardless of era. But there have been few cases of mass starvation among captives in prison camps that have entered the cultural vocabulary. To evoke one is to evoke the few others.

Whether or not Kantor intended to employ what he knew to be Holocaust imagery in his Civil War novel, his descriptions do resemble the way the discoveries were portrayed by contemporary journalists. A conscientious reading of *Andersonville* should respond to unintended connotation, because connotation is itself a result of a cultural context, a manifestation self-evidently worthy of attention.

Another correspondence to the World War II death camps is in the sadism exhibited almost as a point of policy by those charged with administering the Andersonville camp. While the resemblance in the descriptions of victims may be attributed to the universality of starvation and exposure symptoms, in the portrayal of the Camp Sumter high command, the sadistic management style of the Winder clan and the habitual, rule-bound inhumanity of Henry Wirz are matters of authorial choice. Kantor had at his disposal a wide spectrum of sources on which to base his portrayals, from the full transcript of Wirz' trial to the complete *Official Record of the War of the Rebellion* compiled by the US government. While depicting all the Winders as intentionally cruel and lazy, Kantor embraces no particular extreme in his portrayal of Wirz, who in the novel is an often passive but on occasion willful contributor to the horrors that unfolded under his watch. Wirz does not emerge from *Andersonville* as the sole villain, but he certainly emerges as *a* villain, however pathetic he often appears. He also sports a cruel streak.

**The Sadism of the Winders** The first appearance of a Winder in the novel comes as Surgeon Elkins tells his host Ira Claffey what Captain William Sidney Winder said when Elkins asked him why he had all the trees around the stockade cut down, explaining that sun exposure “may cause a high degree of mortality”:  
“. . . I hope it does, Surgeon, I hope it does. What the hell's the use of coddling a pen full of Yankees? I've got a pen here that ought to kill more God damn Yankees than you ever saw killed at the front” (A 105). But according to the documented record, the trees had actually been cut down, not by Winder's crew,

but by other parties, first by a railroad construction crew who needed the wood for crossties, according to a recent historian, and later by prisoners searching for firewood, according to a witness at Wirz's 1865 trial (Roberts 21).<sup>2</sup> Ira Claffey later tours the prison, even climbing onto one of the guard platforms to look down into the stockade itself. After Colonel Alexander Persons remarks upon the lack of shelter, Claffey alludes to what Elkins has told him about the disposition of Captain William Sidney Winder: "Ah, yes, I remember when Captain Winder was approached on that topic, and I recall his reply." Claffey and Persons then share a moment of quiet commiseration about "the name of Winder as applies to individuals associated with this place." We are then told that Dick Winder, who is probably General John H. Winder's nephew and Captain William Sidney's cousin, had ignored Persons' observation that waste from the camp's bakery would be flowing straight into the stockade creek, polluting the prisoners' drinking water. "I report directly to Richmond. I receive my instructions from Richmond," Persons hears Dick Winder say to "a subordinate within Persons' hearing" (A 144-45). But in the novel, Captain "Sid" Winder answers Elkins' assumption not with an evasion of responsibility but with an expressed hope that the lack of trees would indeed prove as fatal as Elkins feared it would. Kantor leaves out General John H. Winder's amply documented (especially in the *Official Records*) but sadly futile attempts to secure timber from local sources for the purpose of building barracks. As historian Ovid Futch, writing in 1968 observed, "they would not sell to Winder because he had orders to pay no more than fifty dollars per thousand board feet." When General Winder tried to order

tents, the Confederate quartermaster general responded that he had no tents to send. The state of Georgia, meanwhile, reserved its tents for its own troops' use (Futch 11). By the time of Futch's writing it had become permissible for mainstream historians to attempt a rehabilitation of the conduct of Winder and Wirz.

The Winder patriarch and the commander in charge of all prisoner-of-war camps for the Confederacy, John H. Winder, fares even worse in the novel than his son and nephew. In the novel, as he is first meeting Henry Wirz, his interior monologue employs what could be called genocidal rhetoric, referring to the "Yankees" as an inferior race, wishing that young Southerners be taught "to crush all supporters of that Faith as one would snap the shell of a cockroach with his boot sole and feeling the shell pop, feel gush and squirting, find happiness in the smear made so." His use of the term "Faith" for men who had joined the army, many of them because they had to, seems out of place, possibly another of Kantor's attempts to associate the administrators of Camp Sumter with those Nazis who certainly targeted members of a Faith. Once Wirz sits down across from his desk for what amounts to a demented job interview, Winder promptly sets about inciting him to harshness by reminding him of the forearm injury he sustained in battle:

. . . Captain Wirz, do you bear any love for the Yankees?

*Ach!* Love?

I put a question to you . . .

Is it I must now love the enemy? Nein. I hate them much!

Why, Captain?

Because--Why, because it is coercion! They invade the Sister States, they come with sword and fire, our rights they would trample--

And--your arm, Captain?

Ja, I tell you what they do to me! *Mein* General, I also was one surgeon before the war, and I tell you that my radius and ulna--

You wouldn't feel like--coddling Yankees?

What means this coddling, General?

Oh, treating them soft as silk. (His voice was softer than silk.) Babying them. Being--kind to them, Captain.

Kind? We must be stern. We must show them who is boss!

The thin mouth in the huge face began to curl lazily at its lined corners. John Henry Winder was cooing.

(A 138).

Another episode in the novel that supports the case for General Winder's sadism occurs in late August of 1864, when the Claffeys, together with their minister Cato Dillard, organize a group of citizens living near the prison to bring a wagonload of vegetables and clothing to the prisoners. Winder is there to refuse the donation and to rebuke the citizens (a smattering of farmers, ministers and their wives) for making the effort. "I'll see you in hell first," he tells Cato Dillard. "You're a damn Yankee sympathizer, and so are all the rest of you!" All attempts, by a local minister and by Dr. Pace, who tells Winder he left his arm in "the valley of Virginia," and by Ira Claffey himself ("I do not believe, sir, that it is any evidence of Union sympathies to exhibit humanity.") fail amid Winder's steady stream of cursing and accusation of traitorous conduct. As he gets into his chaise to leave, he finally declares, "I'd as lief the damn Yankees would die here as anywhere else! By God, upon the whole, I don't know that it's not better for them. Now you folks vamoose!" (A 476). As Kantor writes it, General Winder's speech is as nearly genocidal as it could be without an explicit promise to make sure the killings take place and the mention of favored methods from bringing them about. At best, it's a confession to negligent homicide.

According to the record, as it has been assembled over the past forty years by historians who have concerned themselves with the question of Winder and Wirz's culpability for the nearly 14,000 prisoner deaths, the chief witness to Winder's tirade was Dr. Bedford Head, whose wife actually led the effort to donate vegetables and clothes to Camp Sumter's prisoners in early September 1864. But in this case, Dr and Mrs. Head had more reason than the characters in Kantor's novel for believing the donations would be accepted. Mrs. Head had already successfully sent a couple of packages into the stockade, using her slaves as couriers, and on the day the Heads, accompanied by some servants and ministers, got off the train at Anderson Depot, a wagon provided by the hospital staff awaited them. When Dr. Head stopped at General Winder's office for a pass, however, he found the General had already been briefed by an irate subordinate named Reed, and was now in a bad mood himself. At Henry Wirz's trial, Head testified that Winder reacted to Head's request for a pass by accusing him and those in Head's retinue of being Northern sympathizers, as in Kantor's novel, but there's no record of any statement along the murderous lines of those Kantor has him making, even in the unreliable testimony of the sole corroborating witness, an office-seeker named Ambrose Spencer who'd been successful with both the Confederacy and, just before the Wirz trial, the Federals (Marvel 193-194).

Spencer, who gave three radically differing versions of the Winder-Head dispute before Wirz's military tribunal, attributed to Winder the remark that "he'd be damned if he would not put a stop" to "the whole country becoming Yankee" (Roberts 119). Spencer had been given a job by the Federal prosecution despite his having been a Confederate claims agent in Georgia (a job which probably took him far away from Winder's office in September, writing IOUs for supplies

requisitioned by General Hood's army) just over a year beforehand. He was by no means the only pro-prosecution witness to be rewarded for his testimony.<sup>3</sup>

Ovid Futch ascribes General Winder's conduct to the results of the anxiety he'd been prey to since he had begun to live at the prison in early June; he'd dealt with escapees, the ever present threat of a mass breakout, riots and he'd even seen repeated instances of interference from accomplices living nearby (58). A later historian, William Marvel, adds that Winder's rage may have been borne of a misunderstanding. An ad had just run in the local newspaper soliciting donations for the Confederate soldiers in the prison's hospital for guards who were on the edge of starvation themselves. Reed and Winder's explosions become a bit more understandable in that light (194).

Measured against the plentiful documentary evidence of General Winder's concern about prison conditions, the impeachable statements of Head and Spencer cannot be construed as conclusive of Winder's blood thirst, or even negligence. Winder had built up a record of solicitous concern for union prisoners dating back to the Battle of Bull Run. Some of this record is to be seen in the diaries of northern captives in the various prisons he commanded prior to coming to Camp Sumter, but much of it comes from his own hand in the form of letters beseeching his superiors to send food, clothing, supplies, authorization to impress labor, and other necessities that would have improved prison conditions. In some cases, as with the quality of rations, the condition of the latrines, and the construction of barracks, Winder was able to make modest improvements despite the difficulties presented by the Union's naval blockade and its armies' policy of destroying Southern railroads and factories.

John Henry Winder, the son of the Baltimore general blamed for allowing the British to enter Washington D.C. and burn both the capitol and the White



House in 1814, was given 1,000 Union prisoners the day after the first real battle of the Civil War, the First Battle of Bull Run. The thousand were promptly ensconced in buildings that had been used as tobacco warehouses. A Union colonel records that Winder felt compelled to apologize to his new charges for the poor condition of the facilities and assured the northerners that he was about to commandeer buildings nearby so as to give them more room (qtd. in Hesseltine 57). By July 24, Winder had made good on his assurance, and some men were dispersed to a neighboring building. Congressman Alfred Ely of New York who was captured at Bull Run when he got separated from his wagon also wrote of Winder's conduct, saying he had shown mercy to the prisoners and that he had no tendency "to exercise his power beyond proper limits." Ely said it would be a "dutiful pleasure to speak of him on some future public occasion, in a manner which his merits deserve" (qtd. in Hesseltine 58).

In June 1864, when Winder was sent to Camp Sumter and told to live on its premises, he immediately set about trying to improve what he judged to be a deplorable state of affairs. He put in his first day of duty at the prison amid the sounds of baying bloodhounds that had to be sent after more than a dozen escapees. Not only did Winder request extra guards, he also proceeded to address problems within the stockade, moving the cookhouse farther away so that its detritus no longer flowed into the creek the prisoners used for drinking water. He also set about rebuilding the latrines and increasing the amount of corn meal and meat doled out to the prisoners. Then he purchased vegetables from neighboring farmers for distribution inside the prison's pine walls, all the while beginning a program whereby prisoners were allowed to plant gardens outside (Roberts 66). While the incremental scale of these improvements could not prevent the deaths of 13,000 prisoners during Winder's term of command, they did register in the

*Official Record of the War of the Rebellion* in the form of correspondence and reports. Union prisoners, meanwhile, recorded the results of Winder's efforts, sometimes in the form of complaints about the frequency with which beans were served at the camp after Winder had taken steps to curtail the ravages of scurvy in early August (Marvel 170; Roberts 216-218).

Winder also left a record of intolerance for cruelty. When his prisoners at the Richmond tobacco warehouses protested the shooting of one of their number by guards, both Colonel Corcoran and Congressman Ely write of Winder saying the shooting had been unauthorized and would be the last such incident (qtd. in Hesseltine 57). When the prisoners later complained about Southern visitors stopping by to see, and presumably taunt, the caged Yankees, Winder put a stop to this, too (qtd. in Hesseltine 60). Three years later, when Winder was at Camp Sumter, a member of the Confederate guard there wrote to President Jefferson Davis himself about the overzealousness of other guards in enforcing the deadline. He said too many Union prisoners had been shot due the guards' "adolescent longing to kill a Yankee." Davis, as soon as he received the letter, sent it to the guard's commander, General Winder. There was no retaliation. A few months later, Winder even approved a furlough for the man who had made the complaint, this man having been transferred to a post as passport agent (Marvel 88-89). If Winder had approved of his guards' shootings, surely his notoriously short temper would have been piqued by the presumed disclosure of his clandestine policy of murder. If contemporary documents can suggest behavior patterns, Winder probably took the letter seriously and made the needed changes. Edward F. Roberts sums up his survey of General Winder's career this way: "He denounced cruelty and wrote numerous letters to Confederate officials complaining about conditions in the prisons. He investigated charges of brutality

against guards and punished those he found guilty.” Roberts closes his analysis by noting that Winder was investigating reports of prison cruelties at the new Camp Lawton when he had his fatal heart attack there in February of 1865 (68).

Kantor’s depictions, through Harrell Elkins’ talk, of Winder’s younger relatives William Sidney and Richard, are also based on a tendency to believe only one side of the spectrum, excluding the side of it that may be exculpatory. Both the younger Winders are alike described as disdainfully negligent. Obviously, when Kantor wrote of his years of living with the voices of Andersonville, he never included the plaintive plea of Captain Richard B. Winder for the wood he needed to build coffins. Captain Winder seemed to have the dignity of northern dead uppermost in his thoughts as he wrote at least one letter. “The very great emergency,” he said in correspondence addressed to the Macon, Georgia quartermaster on April 11, 1864, “as far as the need of it here requires safely excuses me in requiring you to act in this matter. I am burying the dead without coffins. I shall rely entirely upon you. If it is not here in a reasonable period, I shall be compelled to report the matter to the authorities at Richmond” (Roberts 217). Here, in his nervous, syntactically tortured way, Richard Winder was directly threatening an officer who held rank over him, so that animals would not be able to get at the deceased enemy prisoners.

John H.’s son, Captain William Sidney Winder, is never credited in Kantor’s novel for coming up with the idea of attempting the alleviation of the filthy condition of Sweetwater Creek by constructing a dam (Roberts 61-62). In fact, the dam itself is not mentioned. Nor is it observed anywhere in Kantor’s novel that William Sidney, when he was told by his father to select a new site for a prison in September 1864, selected a 42-acre site with a much larger creek, no swamp and made sure a ditch drained away the waste. At the new site in Millen,

which would become Camp Lawton, there was also enough wood left in the stockade for use in building shelters (Hesseltine 156-157). If William Sidney had been the diabolical character Kantor made of him, surely he'd have chosen a site more like that of Camp Sumter, or one that might have been worse.

Although several *Official Records* documents are quoted extensively in *Andersonville*, none are included that was written by any member of the Winder family. Doing so might have risked breaking the analogy to the Nazi camps, and it was important as of 1955 for Kantor's novel to raise the specter of deliberate, institutionally-condoned sadism if it was to perform the ideological function of aiding in the American Cold War effort.

**The Cruel Henry Wirz** Kantor's sketch of Camp Sumter's wounded warden, Captain Henry Wirz, is particularly shadowed by the recent memory of the Nazis who'd presided over the deaths of millions. Unlike the Winders, he is not depicted as favoring genocide. But only one of his more humane decisions is given prominence--if it can be called humane at all--, his allowing the prisoners to flush out, capture, try and execute the gang of thieving murderers preying on them. The rest of the time, he stewes about the subhuman Yankees, comparing them to beasts he saw at the Bern zoo as a child, worrying constantly about them staging mass breakouts, riots or otherwise disturbing the order he holds so precious. He may well be partially modeled on Hitler (in his physical bearing and speaking style) and Heinrich Himmler (in his rage for efficiency, his lack of compunction about imposing torturous punishments and his status as doting family man). This caricature leaves little room for the evidence that has led more recent historians to conclude that Wirz's trial and execution was a shamefully politicized sham.

When we first encounter the future Camp Sumter commandant, he is sitting in a Paris restaurant with a French physician friend, conversing in the local tongue. The narrative explains that Wirz's "French was spoken shrilly, almost explosively, with a pronounced German accent. Many people took him to be a Jew but he was not a Jew" (A 30). Another figure, notorious, too, for presiding over mass deaths in camps, immediately suggests himself here. In newsreel images it is Hitler's German that was explosive and shrill during his well-publicized Nuremberg rallies. Rumors did indeed circulate that Hitler was the descendant of an Austrian member of the Jewish Rothschild banking family. His paternal grandmother reportedly became pregnant with Alois Shickelgruber while housekeeping for the apparently profligate (if his reputation was to be believed) Baron von Rothschild. US intelligence officials were by no means the only contemporaries who ascribed Hitler's animus toward Jews to the possible consciousness of his own illegitimate Jewish ancestry (Langer 112).

Wirz's shrill, explosive voice is noted by nearly every character he encounters in the book. From the narrative itself, however, we learn Kantor has given him drive; Wirz dreams of future grandeur, harboring ambition similar to that of both the Nazi models Kantor worked from as he wrote. Wirz, we're told, "dreamed of rank and emoluments, he wished that his name were known, he prayed that one day his name would be known throughout the Confederate States" (A 137). Wirz's aspiration to national fame strikes readers conscious of his later fate as inventively ironic to be sure, but also works to keep the novel's Holocaust analogy going. The German-speaking man in charge of Camp Sumter must necessarily view his duty as more than mere occupation of a post, but as an integral part in something transcendent, a sustained act of heroism later to be written up as founding legend. As implausible as it may be for the Swiss-born

Wirz to believe he can win adulation in the South by presiding over prisons, it makes sense that in a novel seeking to establish a close historical analogy with the Holocaust, Wirz would think fame could be gotten by presiding over concentration camps. Wirz's repeated requests to be promoted to colonel, then, can be interpreted by the novelist not as a realistic request for greater power to requisition supplies and labor, but as crass, sycophantic scheming. The greatest compliment Wirz is ever given in the book comes from the Confederate general Howell Cobb, who has traveled over from Macon to write a report on the disposition of Camp Sumter. As he thinks of Wirz, the narrative permits us to eavesdrop: "Wirz was a blundering, snapping, sputtering little wretch; but at least he stood devoted with a whole soul to the task of superintending prisoners. . . ." (A 208).

Cobb's compliment might equally have been applied to the Nazi deemed second only to Hitler in responsibility for the creation and administration of the death camps, Heinrich Himmler. If one is "devoted" to "superintending prisoners," one could be either cruel in his devotion or humane. In the novel Wirz is seldom humane except in the most ambiguous of ways when staving off potential riots or, as he does with Cobb, requesting promotion. His highest goal is administrative efficiency, and it is often pursued through the threat or the application of force. This rage for efficiency becomes, as it was in contemporary descriptions of the justly notorious Himmler, part and parcel of what makes him cruel. Those most attached to efficiency, so the story goes, often have little regard for human suffering. In February, 1945, a *Time* reporter attempting to sum up Himmler acknowledges the man was, by all appearances, unremarkable, except in one respect: Himmler "simply uses terror with absolute cold-bloodedness and efficiency as his main professional tool" ("The Man" 23). This

stock description of Himmler as a bland but conniving schemer, Hitler's ultimate lackey, hyperconcerned with the smooth administration of the SS and the death camps, would remain in the cultural lexicon. In any movie or television program that included generic, fictionalized Nazis, one would be sure to encounter the type of the efficiently cruel commandant, often vain of his uniform as Himmler was, and often outfitted with Himmler-esque pince-nez. This type is one of Himmler's least appalling legacies, but they are legion and Wirz is easy to spot as yet another Himmler-esque character, right down to his abstemiousness about food and drink.

In October of 1943, *Time* magazine, again trying to describe Himmler, wrote, "Like Hitler, Himmler is an undeviating vegetarian. He adores U.S. breakfast cereals, drinks herb tea instead of coffee, occasionally sips a glass of white wine . . ." ("Man in the Way" 26). Early in *Andersonville*, Wirz admits to the physician with whom he is dining in Paris, "I am a dyspeptic," and when he is first offered a drink replies "I have no head for cognac. You should remember" (A 30, 31). There being no record of Wirz's dining and drinking habits, Kantor must have reached for the stock description of Himmler, because it was ready to hand and because it was necessary that an American POW camp be run by a Hitler-Himmler composite to the extent allowed by the outline he had settled upon of the prison's historical record.

Kantor's choice, however, does the historical Wirz the injustice of leaving out or minimizing those items exculpatory to his memory. Indeed, the remembrances of Wirz that do his record the most credit are nearly uniformly absent from *Andersonville*. The decisions that may have been made by Wirz out of humanitarian concerns, like his decision to allow the Regulators to capture, try and execute the Raiders, are ascribed in the novel to his dread of riots, to his preference for order, or to his need to impress a humanely disposed superior (like

General Cobb). It is true, however, that Kantor refrains from the impulse to make Wirz like the monsters that he makes of General Winder, his son and his nephew. Instead, Wirz comes off as pathetic, as an automaton that hides his fear of the northerners with bellicose posturing. Though his arrest at the end of the novel evokes some pity, it is mostly for his wife and young child, since he has already been seen directly presiding over the deaths of several prisoners, none of whom deserved their fates.

Kantor might have encountered documents that revealed Wirz to be more competent and well meaning than the popular conception of him as a cruel overseer might have allowed. He might also have sensed that yet another uncomplicatedly evil Confederate prison administrator might have led reviewers to castigate him for writing a historical hatchet job or portraying the tragedy in only one dimension. But later in the novel's composition, he might have begun to sense his culture's need for a redeemable Nazi, a figure who (as was said of the scientists recruited and settled in America under Project Paperclip) might not have performed honorably in the service of the Nazis, but still deserved to be let off the hook for merely doing the duty his circumstances demanded. Regardless of Kantor's motive, his Wirz is not quite the ghoul seen in some of the northern prisoners' diaries and in the condemnatory opening statement made by Judge Advocate N.P. Chipman at Wirz's trial. Readers might have come away questioning the rationale of a harsh de-Nazification if it meant sending more Wirzes to the scaffold.

For Wirz to need redemption, he has to be portrayed in most situations as cruel. In this interest, Kantor leaves unmentioned many real kindnesses shown by Wirz, the evidence of which is contained in the *Official Records*, in the diaries of contemporaries and in the testimony of his thirty-two defense witnesses (Roberts



131). The *Official Records* show Wirz begging repeatedly in letters for more supplies and being praised by General Winder for working in the August 1864 heat while ill (qtd. in Roberts 72). Over the objections of his fellow Confederates, Wirz even tried to get a Federal major named Archibald Boyle, who had commanded black troops in Florida, transferred to the more hospitable officers' prison in Macon. The major would later testify before the Federal tribunal on Wirz's behalf. Other witnesses testified that Wirz had paroled Union drummer boys, even allowing one to board with Wirz's own wife and child. Still others said he had been kind to members of the clergy, always allowing them access to the stockade. He provided, said a few more witnesses, places to live for the wives and widows of prisoners. He had allowed the prisoners to go outside and pick the wild blackberries once they came into season (Marvel 173-174). In fairness, Kantor does not say he read all of the Congressional report of Wirz's trial. Not many of us could. He only says he quoted documents from it. But if he inspected the transcripts of testimony that gave reports of Wirz's more humanitarian side, he must have disregarded them. None of this material manifests itself in *Andersonville*. It falls casualty to the need for the American Holocaust novel. Wirz's only sympathetic moments come in his dealings with his family, his attempts to improve the camp's infrastructure despite being in severe pain from an infected arm wound and, most dramatically, his arrest, imprisonment and death by hanging.

**Relevance to German-American Relations** Kantor's unwillingness to include the more humane aspects of the Winders and Wirz in his novel was less a result of a northerner's ancestral animus toward the old Confederates than of a need to employ the administrators of Camp Sumter in a 1955 scheme. To build the structure that Kantor believed was required of a quintessentially American writer

in the Cold War era, he needed to demonstrate that some Americans had once been Nazis, and that Georgia had once been host to a Buchenwald. If his readers accepted his analogy, they'd also be inclined to favor the analogy of the American bystanders--like the Claffeys--to the German bystanders who for a myriad of reasons either tolerated or did not actively resist their own infinitely worse Winders and Wirzes. In this way, Americans would be persuaded of the justice of the expensive reconstruction of West Germany, Berlin and Japan, the rearmament of West Germany and the maintenance of expensive and risky military bases in West Germany and many other far-flung nations. As the chain of reasoning went for Kantor and many others at that time, if America allowed its Claffeys to keep their plantation and live relatively happily ever after, then surely it was wrong to hold the Germans accountable for their thousand fold larger and more murderous Camp Sumters and it was wrong to penalize them by withholding humanitarian aid and allowing them to fend for themselves versus the Soviets. It was right, though, to bring former Nazis with specialized knowledge into the fold and to reward them for their expertise with salaries and prestige.

The mid-1950s magnanimity toward the Germans was a far cry from the way things stood just after VE Day. Not even women were immune from blame in Virginia Irwin's report on the plight of women who were held in concentration camps. "It is unbelievable," she said, "that German women could have had so much while their enslaved sisters had so little. It could never have happened in any other nation." Commenting on a story she has heard of women who beat Allied pilots at crash sites, she said, "These women are ordinary German women weaned on aggression, intolerance and hate" (Irwin 1h). American GIs seemed to translate her condemnation into policy. *Time* correspondent Bill Walton encountered an evidently once well-heeled woman claiming to be a relative of

British royalty, trying to flee with her husband from the Soviets by crossing a bridge into American lines. When told by American guards the couple could not be allowed through, she protested that the Russians would likely kill her. A GI guard replied that the Russians were American allies and “[b]esides, you Germans started this war.” The conversation continued:

“But I am a woman. Women don’t make war.”

“Yeah? Plenty of women are members of the SS and Voldssturm. And look at what you Germans did to people in every country where your Army went.”

“Oh, but we didn’t have anything to do with that. Those were the politicians and the generals. Not us.”

“Seems like I’ve heard that one before,” said the soldier. “Now that you’re beaten, nobody was a Nazi. It was some other guys.”

A final appeal from the woman’s husband (“But we had no part in it, no part in it.”) proves ineffectual, and when the woman asks the guard, “Is there to be no compassion?” the answer is the same: “You cannot cross the river” (Walton 35-36).

The May 14, 1945 *Life* magazine contained several instances of the generalization of guilt in two separate pieces. An editorial acknowledged the difficulty of sustaining the practice of punishing an entire people: “We try to still our doubts by saying what is true--the Germans set out to behave like beasts, and now they are living like beasts. But the sudden destruction of a great industrial economy has never happened before, and the consequences of it are beyond the power of almost any human being to predict” (“Moods” 40). A few pages later, the magazine features a sequence of drawings meant to dramatize the book *Phantom Victory*, by Erwin Lessner, who was tortured by the Gestapo and escaped in 1941. Although the book had already been out for two years, the introductory material to the drawings explained that the book was still relevant

because “some of Major Lessner’s fantastic predictions had jumped out of his satirical book into today’s and yesterday’s headlines.” The book itself describes the years after the surrender of Germany, presenting a scenario whereby the Nazis regain power in ten years following the reign of a nominal anti-fascist who placates the Allies. The book, says the introduction in *Life*, is “built on the thesis that the German people are psychologically compelled to create their monstrous mythical leaders, from Frederick Barbarossa, who gobbled up Europe in the 12th Century, to Hitler, who tried for the world” (“Phantom Victory” 49).

The difference between the tone of much of the journalism in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust discoveries and what was said in defense of Project Paperclip in LeMay and Kantor’s *Mission With LeMay* about the need right after the war’s end to “rescue these able and intelligent Jerries from behind the barbed wire, and get them going in our various military projects” could not be more profound. (LeMay with Kantor 384). When Cold War exigencies gave rise to this contradiction in US policy, there was need for reconciliation, and that reconciliation could not simply ignore the facts of the Holocaust. Kantor’s *Andersonville* certainly acknowledges the Holocaust, but as we will see, it also carefully cordons it off from his civilian characters and cordons its “perpetrators” from the book’s scientists, so as to absolve both parties from blame for the catastrophic loss of life.

## **Conclusion**

*Andersonville*’s portrayals of the Confederate high command of Camp Sumter are quite consistently negative. General John H. Winder is depicted as a sadistic, embittered ghoul bent on massacring in his prison the soldiers he is too old to take on in the field of battle. His son and nephew have both inherited his viciousness, albeit in forms diluted by indolence and tendencies to avoid

responsibility. Captain Wirz, who functions as a warden of the camp, is also featured in an unflattering light, epitomizing the term *martinet* while seeming to avenge his war wound as he deals with his inmates. He is only given a touch of humanity at the end of the novel when he is arrested and sundered from his wife and child. Up to this point his only humane impulse was in affording some prisoners the opportunity to capture, try and punish a gang of robbers and murderers. But the narrative makes plain Wirz' attraction to the idea stems from the hope that "they might conceivably bring about an orderly regime within the stockade which had not abided before." In the novel Wirz seems not to care a whit that the plan might save lives. Instead, "Wirz agreed on grounds of practicality." (A 308). The commanders in charge in *Andersonville* closely resemble Nazis not only in their sadism, but in their concern for efficiency over humanity. In ways too specific to be mere coincidence, Wirz himself temperamentally resembles the popular conception of Hitler and in his pallor, his abstemiousness and his need for routine he embodies what was known at the time of the novel's writing about Heinrich Himmler. But the historical consensus does not support any tendency to make Wirz a prototypical Nazi. While Wirz's use of chain gangs, stocks and the withholding of rations certainly led to prisoner deaths by increasing their susceptibility to disease, he presided over no deliberate mass killings of the sort Americans read about in their newspapers in April, 1945. There were mass burials, but most of those corpses died of starvation and disease that Kantor repeatedly demonstrates, by featuring the learned opinions of surgeons, quartermasters and others, Wirz could not have alleviated any more than he did given the shortages and distribution problems any prison in the South and many in the North faced.

Although Kantor was not the only American to say the Winders and Wirz were monsters, his decision to rely upon the most damning accounts of their actions must be construed as a selective reading of the sources he cites in the novel's bibliography. He relies a great deal on graphically illustrated reports of angry former prisoners that were widely published beginning in August of 1864 and roiled the northern public into indignant outrage. The conception of Camp Sumter's Confederate authorities as deliberately cruel only solidified as more Andersonville diaries were published in the immediately ensuing decades. Only with the publication of series II, volumes VI and VII of the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* in 1899 did another version of the conduct of the Winders and Wirz emerge from official sources. But, except with certain obscure partisan Southern historians and a few former inmates who wrote to defend Wirz at the turn of the century, their demonization in widely published print continued at least until the publication of William Best Hesseltine's *Civil War Prisons* in 1930. Ovid Futch, writing in his 1968 *History of Andersonville Prison* would assess Kantor's *Andersonville* as going along with the early consensus about Andersonville. The book "adopts the old groundless charge that General Winder desired to kill as many prisoners as possible and portrays him working toward that end," Futch says (142).

For Kantor the idea that Americans had presided over a deliberately cruel death camp no doubt held much appeal as an analogy to contemporary events. Considering what he believed his culture needed, he was extremely unlikely to overturn a decades-old condemnation of long-dead Confederates. Depicting Camp Sumter's Confederate guard as well-meaning, often exasperated, often impotent men making due--at times heroically--in a no-win situation was not a possibility for Kantor in the late 1940s and early 1950s. His novel had to argue

that a real concentration camp and a semblance of a Holocaust had happened in America. Otherwise, there would be little for the reader to forgive the surrogate German civilians, the Claffeys and their neighbors, for doing or not doing. Before there can be an expiation, there must be an offense. In his willfully unforgiving reading of Wirz's and the Winders' character and actions, Kantor manufactured the offense.

In 1945, Kantor revealed in a letter to his wife that he himself was as caught up in the tendency to blame all Germans for what took place in the death camps and for the war itself. By the early 1950s, when US policymakers believed it necessary to extend its perpetual protections to the citizens of West Berlin and to all of West Germany, Kantor had written *God and My Country*, in which a German professor is kept away from the local Boy Scout troop as they're learning to march but is invited back to future meetings to share his knowledge of science. By 1955, Kantor had published a novel restricting blame for an American variety of death camp to a narrow few. He had also, by this point, begun his interviews with Air Force General Curtis LeMay, who played a major part in Operation Paperclip, the plan carried out by various agencies of the US government to transport ex-Nazis from Germany--where many were being held in custody--to jobs in nuclear weapons programs. When placed alongside the continuum of Kantor's rightward tending ideology and viewed in the context of Cold War history, *Andersonville* fits quite easily.

If we examine the structure of power and of responsibility set up in *Andersonville*, we're also looking at the same structure that would be applied to Germany by Kantor and by the establishment to which he pretended membership in the wake of the Holocaust. For the sake of the continuation of policies that began with the Berlin Airlift of 1948 and proceeded into the 50s as the US called

for the re-armament of Germany responsibility for the Holocaust would need to be limited to the Nazi central command and to the camp commandants themselves. According to this scheme, the Nazi regime itself had all the power. The citizens had none. In *Andersonville*, only General Winder and Captain Wirz had any sort of power to act, and they abused it. The characters who lived nearby or who worked within the camp had no power and their attempts to get it fall short. In this way, the novel makes a case for Americans and Germans being bound by a common experience. And with such a case made, military assistance, aid, and permission to rearm would be much easier to sell to American arbiters of opinion, voters and soldiers.

#### **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Kantor, *Andersonville*, 107. Hereafter cited as *A*.

<sup>2</sup>Information on the prisoners cutting the trees is from the otherwise pro-prosecution testimony of Confederate Surgeon Joseph Jones at the trial of Henry Wirz in John. L. Ransom. This material is included as an appendix in *John Ransom's Andersonville Diary*.

<sup>3</sup>The trial itself is deemed a farce by most commentators. Marvel's summary is quite typical of assessments made by recent historians of the way Wirz's trial was conducted by the Federal military tribunal: "The government had taken months to prepare its case, stinting neither funds nor efforts to procure witnesses, many of whom realized rewards such as those that came to Ambrose Spencer, Ben Dykes, and Felix 'Delabaume,' who was never court-martialed for his desertion. Wirz enjoyed no such resources or time, and the judge advocate [General Lew Wallace, the eventual author of *Ben Hur*] actively impeded the defense as well as he could, threatening and subverting Wirz's witnesses" (246). Futch, meanwhile, calls Wirz's trial "farcical" (121).



### CHAPTER THREE: *ANDERSONVILLE'S* CONTRIBUTION TO THE COLD WAR CONSENSUS: "GOOD" CONFEDERATES, GERMAN CIVILIANS AND "AMERICAN" SCIENCE

Though its setting is mid-19th century America, we see in *Andersonville* the tension between two ways of thinking about the German civilians after the discovery of the death camps. One way holds civilians personally responsible for the doings of their government. The other allows the civilian some leeway to one degree or another; the civilian may be given a variable proportion of the responsibility, or perhaps responsibility itself may be quantified with such terms as "direct" or "indirect." Members of the Claffey family struggle to define the terms of their own responsibility for what is happening to the thousands of Northern soldiers held captive in the prisoner of war camp built on their central Georgia farmland. What are they to do to mitigate the conditions of exposure, of starvation, of deliberate cruelty that they know exist within the pine-plank enclosure? Can they do anything at all? Is the responsibility theirs for the many agonized deaths they know are occurring because of their past and present support for the Confederate war effort, because of their mere proximity, because of their inaction, or because of all these factors? Given the uncertainty that reigned in America throughout the 1940s and 50s over how to view those German civilians who lived near a camp like Buchenwald yet did nothing effective to stop what went on in their neighborhoods in their names, the Claffey family's dilemma doubtless took on an extra resonance for the novel's first readers.

The culpability of a second group of people is conspicuously made a non-issue in *Andersonville*. This one is sealed off from responsibility for what goes on inside the stockade and even given heroic credit for doing what they could to lessen the crushing weight of suffering taking place before their eyes. They are

homogenously good, and often risk the ire of their superiors in the performance of their duties. These are the camp doctors. The second hero of the novel, the fictional Harrell Elkins, is such a doctor, and his nonfictional friend Ernest Jones, by writing an excoriating report on Camp Sumter's conditions, receives flattering prominence despite the indifferent role historians show he actually played. No lazy or villainous doctors appear, although Harrell does make disparaging remarks toward some of those working in the hospitals. In addition, because of the way other characters defer to it in the novel, the very language employed by the doctors defines the camp's conditions in the most authoritative way. Science, in *Andersonville*, is the nonideological conduit of exact truth.

### **The Good Confederates and the Difficulties Of Humanitarian Intervention**

Camp Sumter is not long in operation before Ira Claffey begins to experience discernible signs of a pained conscience. These manifest themselves in the forms of insomnia and general restlessness, both symptoms evident to his daughter Lucy ("fairly does he walk the floor," Lucy says in a letter, describing his insomnia (A 364). Gradually, he becomes obsessed with the prison camp just across from his front porch. After a tour of the outside of the stockade, he would ascend to a guard post to look down at the increasing numbers of disheveled, scrawny inmates, and he'd often return:

Again and again through weeks to come, he would reappear on that sentinel's box, passed first by Persons and later in negligent fashion by subordinate officers of the guards before they knew Ira's face and learned that he lived next door, and sometimes drifted over to the plantation to receive a gift of fresh things from the garden (A 155).

These trips do little to put the idea of the camp to rest in Claffey's mind, but they do much to keep Claffey from his own rest. As he goes about the house late at night, "pacing on desperate solitary rounds in his nightshirt," he begins to

feel helpless in the contemplation of the prison's ugliness and the inmates' increasingly obvious suffering:

More and more the power of Andersonville poured over Ira Claffey like a glistening dark tide: it was there, reaching around him, it was sticky (he thought of molasses leaking from a barrel but the tide was not sweet. . . . Once more to the stockade the next day, wondering, staring, absorbing increased terror of the thing (A 155-56).

Far from getting on with the work of maintaining his farm and of ensuring the survival of himself of his daughter in Civil War-era Georgia (itself no mean feat), he is preoccupied by the image of the camp. It is as though he has voluntarily undergone the punishment imposed by allied troops after the liberation of the Nazi death camps. It's significant that only with repeated exposure to the image, the sounds and smells of the stockade and to its suffering inmates (at first he is confused, stupefied and unbelieving) is Claffey able to experience the healthy kind of psychic trauma the Allied command, including Eisenhower, evidently believed essential in the wake of the Holocaust.

After some weeks of Claffey's repeated voluntary exposures to what is taking place, he and Lucy find they need not travel far outside their door to be reminded of the horrors taking place near their property. Their attempts to cover up the odor, an attempt I have already examined in chapter two, end in failure, a failure which prompts another attempt to stare the problem in the face. The Claffey's recognize early that denial of what is happening is an untenable strategy, simply due to the near proximity of the camp. But their early dismissal of denial lends further credit to them as characters. Not for them the excuse that the suffering going on in their neighborhood happened without them knowing. So realistic are the Claffey's that statistics and administrative procedures even enter their talk:

Poppy, is it-- Is it the Dead?

Partially, I suppose. Although they're so far in the other direction. But mostly the marsh and its filth, and the Yankees themselves.

How many have died by now?

Thousands, tis said.

I overheard you speaking with Uncle Dato, Poppy.

Ah, I regret that.

About--the hogs-- In the cemetery--

Such things are bound to happen. I mean--when burials are so shallowly and carelessly made. In any event, more earth is used now. They're--deeper. Lucy, shall we speak of other matters? (A 315).

Ira's cutting off of the conversational drift here seems more a matter of the preservation of Victorian propriety--women were not to be allowed to overhear such matters discussed much less talk of them--than an exercise of the kind of denial that countenances misery. The Claffey family always knows very well what is taking place in the Andersonville camp, because Ira talks about his visits and because housemate Harrell Elkins is not shy about describing his struggles as camp doctor. Before Claffey's reflexive reinstatement of decorum, he offers a conjecture about the source of the odor that is informed and precise. He isn't cutting the conversation off because he's keeping a secret from Lucy, but because the subject is too unpleasant for him to allow her to dwell on. Not for them the excuse "we didn't know."

As Claffey learns more about the way the camp is being administered and the living conditions, he takes various actions. The failure of his donation efforts and of his journey to Richmond to obtain an audience with Jefferson Davis disillusion him with the Confederate leadership and leads him to wonder what the effect will be on the Confederate legacy once the story of Camp Sumter is known. He is conscious of the possibility of a mercilessly objective historical accounting. Indeed, in this way he anticipates the mid-twentieth-century concern

on the part of Western policy-makers and arbiters of opinion for human rights. In considering the future of the Confederacy in the cultural memory, he speculates that the moral shame he knows as Andersonville may prove decisive in the way the Confederacy is evaluated as a project. When Claffey is beginning his soon-to-be aborted trip to Richmond, he pictures himself confronting a clerk in Secretary of War James Seddon's office, taking on the troublesome question of whether the Confederacy as a whole should be blamed for the disaster occurring on the Claffey property. As he does so, he again displays his precise knowledge of the way Camp Sumter is being mismanaged:

Sir, as I have described to you, the place is a menace and disgrace.  
But upwards of twenty thousand prisoners have already  
been removed, Mr. Claffey!

Some of them have been returned, because there seemed no  
safe place to hold them, either at Savannah or at Blackshears.  
True, the crowded conditions have lessened, but smell continues.  
And disease. A higher percentage of hospital patients go to death  
each day . . . (A 585).

When Claffey's soliloquy does not win him passage into Seddon's office, he daydreams of asking to be admitted to the office of God. As he renews his request, he discloses his concern about the possibility of a dire judgment being handed down on his country:

I plead on behalf of our dear new Nation, on behalf of whatever  
tradition shall be suffered to exist when once we have gained  
the--the--victory, the unchallenged independence we seek. What  
matters a chivalrous Lee if we have a Winder? What matters the  
sacrifice of a Hood, if we have a Captain Wirz? (A 586).

When Seddon's clerk threatens to have Claffey arrested for his pleas and comparisons, Claffey gives voice to the premonition that has haunted him all along. "I prophesy," he says, "with all the terrible ardor I can muster: this will be a stench in the nostrils of history. But the clerk stops Claffey up short when he

replies with the question that would most frequently asked by Nuremberg defendants, “How can I be held responsible?” Claffey responds, “If an individual, it is impossible for me to name him.” (A 586).

Although Claffey is only threatened once bodily in the course of the novel (this was by General Winder; the clerk’s threat cannot count since it is a mere figment of Claffey’s bored traveling reverie), the events of 1864 move him to take admittedly ineffectual action. Unlike accounts of the willful ignorance of most German civilians in post-World War II American journalism, Claffey’s sections of the book reveal that he saw what was taking place around him with clarity, and that his response--rather than embodying a wish for the problem to vanish--actually includes risky attempts to do his culture credit. Having made Camp Sumter as much of a Nazi death camp as plausibility allowed, the novel makes its main characters, Southern Confederates, as much into heroes as the setting could accommodate. Americans reading the novel in 1955 would no doubt wonder how Claffey could have behaved any more honorably than he does in the fix he is in, and might have applied the novel’s suggested analogy to contemporary events. If so, they’d have been more likely to look sympathetically on Germans they believed had lived in similar situations. Opposing the Cold War-era policy of rehabilitating West Germany quickly and protecting it from the Soviets might seem vindictive in the context of a reading of *Andersonville* and would seem to stem from ignorance about the obstacles facing potential resisters. After all, Ira Claffey had made a heroic effort to help the Union prisoners but had been stymied at every turn. He’d, in fact, never come close to ending the suffering, unlike the doctors, who had at least been able to make a few minor changes for some inmates.

Harrell Elkins, Claffey's houseguest and soon-to-be son-in-law, has moral advantages over Claffey insofar as his response to the wrong of Camp Sumter is concerned. His status as a decorated, battle-tested captain in the Confederate Army and his medical training both allow him frequent visits to the stockade hospital and acceptable ways of acting on his compassion. Nevertheless, his duties impose a physical toll which Ira Claffey is fortunate at his age to be spared. As soon as Elkins arrives to stay, he begins putting in punishing hours in the camp hospital. A few months later, when he is called to the bedside of a young girl from a poor local family suffering from a botched abortion attempt, he is unable to hide his exhaustion. Seeing Elkins' unsteadiness and hearing him "chanting absurdities," Ira has "grave doubts" that Elkins will be of any help (A 560). Yet Elkins is somehow able to assume the necessary veneer of professionalism when he arrives at the patient's house.

By the winter of 1864-5, Elkins is comparing his duties at the stockade hospital with his experiences trying to live through an artillery barrage. In both cases, Elkins felt an equally wearying powerlessness: "Will it ever cease? Nay, never. It cannot, cannot, will not, never will cease" (A 604). As was the case with Ira Claffey, Elkins is unable to prevent the images of the stockade from stealing into his thoughts. His reaction to these intrusions is to feel guilt such that an ascetic life seems an appropriate response. To enjoy the embrace of a woman, for example, in the near presence of such ongoing misery proves at first impossible. When Lucy Claffey makes her advances toward him, his reaction is to demur in a clumsy monologue derisively pointed to by critics who balked at the novel's sometimes implausibly melodramatic excesses:

Elkins pushed her from him rudely. No, no, he mumbled . . . He said, I can't bear it. We can't-- Not in this! There's so much filth

and screaming. You should hear the gangrenous! No, no, you should not, I couldn't bear for you to hear them-- (A 462-463).

While the dialogue is indeed overwrought, it is quite in keeping with the pattern in the novel of highlighting Southern characters who are tangibly affected for the worse by their consciousness of what is taking place in their names and in their midst. The implication is that though German civilians and soldiers had not been able to stop the deaths of six million, some of them were likely to have suffered as Claffeys and as Harrell Elkins suffered. At the same time as it associates the cruel Confederates with the cruel policies of the Nazis and with German traits, the novel allows for the possibility that conscience did emerge in the minds of some Germans. The novel presents to us the possibility of the good Confederate alongside that of the wicked ones, Winder and Wirz. And in the persons of Harrell Elkins, Alexander Persons and Colonel D.T. Chandler (the latter two officers file documents excoriating Winder for Fort Sumter's harshness), the novel presents the possibility that membership in armies that were on the losing side of history did not preclude those members from doing what they could to palliate its worst policies of their government. In this light, the curtailment of de-Nazification might not seem as egregious to mid-1950s Americans as it would have had the commentary that is echoed in *Andersonville* not been widely disseminated.

Father Peter Whelan, meanwhile, who might have prevailed for room and board upon any of the families living near Camp Sumter, seems bent on sharing the hardships of his flock, the northern inmates. As he did in real life, in the novel he boards in a roughly appointed shack near the stockade. Kantor's harshly precise prose lingers on his bedding arrangement:

Father Whelan's army blanket was spread over a compressed mound of pine straw and oak leaves. Rats came to visit him at



night but they did not offer to bite; he'd hoped that the persuasion of Saint Francis of Assisi might rule these small creatures away from their natural savagery, and it did rule. (A 328)

As a silently musing Henry Wirz likens Whelan to "a prelate" who "was squeezed into an iron basket" and "swung above the coals," Whelan is reposing in his shack. Kantor's prose keeps the metaphor of the martyr going, but this time Whelan is a tortured Lazarus who would hide himself in a closet, atoning for the world's sin with his asceticism:

Father Whelan lay like that same effigy [the prelate of Wirz's analogy] again in hot darkness, rude-shirted and bitten by bugs; he lay in temporary death; there was no one to see him unless saints peered through split shakes of the shed's roof. Sometimes he ran as a youth in beech woods again-- There was a path which went to old Brigid Shachlin's house, and she would roll a hot potato from the ashes to thank him for the fish he fetched her (A 329).

Apparently, at night Whelan's shack shuts out all sensory information (save the tactile) and the childhood reveries creep in.

The historical Father Peter Whelan did indeed share the hardships of the prisoners in this way and did indeed live in a hovel, but the penitential overtones of Kantor's descriptions draws on the discursive climate of the mid-twentieth-century West. It is as if Father Whelan's self-imposed austerity, Harrell Elkins' instinctive withdrawal from Lucy and Ira Claffey's psychological torment are meant as opposites to the family whose home Kantor stayed in during the week of Buchenwald's liberation.

As potential rescuers, the Claffeys would seem to have a good chance of succeeding in their efforts. They, after all, conform to Thomas Jefferson's prototype of the ideal agrarian family. "Those who labor in the earth," Jefferson declares in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, "are the chosen people of God if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for

substantial and genuine virtue .” Jefferson goes on to compare favorably the morals of the farmer with that of the merchant who must rely on “the casualties and caprice of customers.” Jefferson then asserts that the ratio of other vocations to farmers in a country’s population represents “the proportion of its unsound to its healthy parts, and is a good enough barometer whereby to measure its degree of corruption” (280). Ira Claffey, in particular, fits the prototype of the gentleman farmer perhaps too snugly for plausibility. He speaks with a vocabulary elevated by study of British Romantic poetry. He employs the latest sound agricultural techniques in the raising of his crops. He has even exercised his right to run for and hold high office, having served as a state legislator. In the context of Jeffersonian ideals, such a man would be expected to prevail in any contest of principles. But while these principles certainly impel Claffey to make creditable efforts to reduce the suffering at the camp, in the end Claffey disappoints himself. The Jeffersonian principles of self-sufficiency, self-cultivation and willingness to participate in the institutions shaping one’s destiny collide with the innovations of government-enforced mobilization of mass populations and resources and the resulting diffusion of individual responsibility. For 1955 readers in the US, the notion that one isolated gentleman farmer’s participation can shape official policy was one still treasured as a part of the American myth. The attempts of Claffey and his friends to make change might have shown that not even the most egalitarian of ideologies could reckon with wrongs committed by governments on the modern scale. By extension, how could a people like the Germans of the 1930s and 40s--conditioned to embrace dictatorial power structures and the subordination of the individual to the state--be expected to resist effectively a system of concentration camps far larger, more mechanized and more psychopathic in management? While the Claffeys and their neighbors never face

the threat of being arrested and placed in the camps, while Elkins and Persons never have to brave the possibility of arrest and execution for treason while attempting to achieve humanitarian reform from within, these characters do face what prove to be insurmountable obstacles in their attempts to ease their respective consciences in the exercise of compassion on the large scale. The obstructions to helping prisoners (in addition to the wartime scarcity of resources) faced by the Claffeys, their neighbors and the Confederate reformers fall under two fundamental categories: 1) the verbal threat of bodily harm and, 2) the inability to find a responsible party who can approve the reforms proposed. In the end, the only positive and measurable effects these characters can achieve under the circumstances are on the individual level. These obstacles each correspond in a miniature way to the experience of Nazi-era bystanders as it was known when the novel was published.

The first of these obstacles proves effective even before the camp is fully built. Early on, as the stockade is in its construction phase, Elkins asks Captain Sidney Winder about the lack of barracks. Winder replies with the boast, "I've got a pen here that ought to kill more God damn Yankees than you ever saw killed at the front" (A 105). Elkins responds with a question Winder interprets as casting doubt on his war record. The query (how many Yankees had Winder seen killed at the front?) wins Elkins a challenge to a duel, which Elkins accepts with the promise his choice of weapon, the cavalry saber at two paces, would prevail. This ends the confrontation, but the confrontation itself makes clear the dire consequences of raising objections to the treatment of northern prisoners. Although the threat of Elkins actually being imprisoned in the camp is never an issue, there is certainly a reflexive tendency to compel obedience through the threat of violence.

Ira Claffey and his pastor and neighbor, the Reverend Cato Dillard, find that the threat of arrest and social ostracism (being labeled a traitor to the Confederate cause) is one that General John Winder is quick to invoke. When a delegation of those residing near the camp attempts to donate a wagon-load of food and clothing, its members are turned away with the repeated charge that they are union sympathizers and potential spies. These charges could get a person hanged in that era and, no doubt, the charges leveled by a general like Winder, who had the esteem and the ear of Jefferson Davis, carried a lot of weight. To take him at his word, as the delegation eventually does after making its outrage clear, seems only the prudent course. His command of a sizeable retinue of guards discourages any attempt at illegal circumvention. So the guards get the food. But, thanks to the intercession of Effie Dillard, Cato's strong-willed wife, *not* the clothing.

In the fall of 1864, by which time Camp Sumter has been in operation for six months, Ira Claffey hears from the lieutenant colonel who had been honest with him back in May about the camp's living conditions as he assessed them in his capacity as prison inspector. In the letter Claffey receives in the fall, Colonel Persons explains that his effort to file an injunction in a district court to have the camp shut down raised the ire of General Howell Cobb. Cobb, whose own inspection called for drastic improvements, acts here to obstruct Persons in his own attempts to follow his conscience. Cobb informs Persons that filing an injunction against "his own Government" amounts to treason. As Persons explains it, "The tenor of his communication was unmistakable: it was obvious that I would be treated by court martial or something of that sort. I said to General Cobb that if he deemed what I had done in the matter unofficerlike, I would leave the case. He said that he did deem it that way and would be glad if I

would retire without being driven” (A 568). Thus, Persons defers to threat, this time not only to his career but to his life. Claffey, upon reading the letter contemplates action also punishable by death:

It even occurred to Ira that he might calmly assassinate General Winder--turn his back on religion and morality, take the law into his own hands: cry that he was invoking a higher law. He sat up in bed shocked yet still playing with the possibility. (A 568, 569).

In Persons’ case, the threat issued by Cobb did not lead him to blame the camp’s intolerable conditions on Cobb himself or, for that matter, on Winder: “I think some of the higher officials are responsible; but who they are I cannot say” (A 569). Claffey, meanwhile, startled awake by the revelation of his own capability, draws a similar conclusion. If Claffey were to act on his impulse, “who might then follow Winder? A worse Winder no doubt, if such there could be” (A 569). Against a systemic problem of the kind culminating in Camp Sumter, the initiative of one or two could easily be absorbed by an institution as large and outspread as the Confederate bureaucracy. And at the same time, the complicity of two individuals (Cobb and Winder) would be by definition unexceptional. Again, if exemplars of the Jeffersonian ideal of American citizenship are not able to make change in such a case, how then could undemocratic Germans, traditionally credulous toward institutions and authority figures, make a bigger difference? For 1955 readers, the question could prove haunting and for 1955 policy-makers that haunting could make constituencies more amenable to the funding and rearmament of former Axis countries.

Far from being the bystanders who were so widely condemned in Western publications of the immediate postwar period, the Claffeys, Harrell Elkins and Colonel Persons do reveal not only an awareness of what was happening around them but an eagerness to learn more. Their attempts to change the way the camp

was run and, in so doing, to improve conditions for the union prisoners are carefully thought out and might have been successful if not for the situational and official obstacles presented. The active investigations carried out by these characters differ markedly from the reports published soon after the liberation of the death camps. Typical of these is the May 7, 1945 *Time* magazine dispatch from Germany by Percy Knauth in which one janitor of an apartment house emphatically denies knowing what was taking place in his country: “You must tell your people how we’ve been lied to and betrayed! Every day we have more and more proof of how those men have ruined us!” The contemplation on Claffey and the other characters’ parts about the responsibility they and their nation share for the Andersonville debacle reads as a near-exact opposite to comments like the janitor’s. In the same article Knauth would draw the conclusion that Germans in general were not coming to grips with their responsibilities or with the responsibility of their nation: “In all the various emotions which the Germans are feeling now--fear, anger, hopelessness, bitterness, shame, servility and helplessness--there is one which you will rarely find and that is a sense of guilt, the sense of being responsible personally and as a nation for what is happening. . . . the main reason the war seems wrong to them is because they lost it” (Knauth 31-32). A *Newsweek* dispatch from April 30 said, “German civilians living near the camps professed to have had no knowledge of the atrocities. No one believed them, but few thought they had any real idea of the extent of what had taken place.” Because of this lack of knowledge of the “extent,” the piece continues, General George S. Patton required that 1,500 citizens of Weimar tour Buchenwald (“Nazi Policy” 56). Two weeks later, in calling for a more ideological (as opposed to what had been exclusively factual) allied radio news service in Germany, Alfred Kantorowicz would declare it a

necessity that the Germans “be taught that it will be to their advantage to correct the basic lie that they can expect consideration only if they plead guilty. . . . They must be faced continuously with the basic fact of their collective guilt.” A former Paris correspondent for *Vossische Zeitung* and an acting director of the CBS short-wave listening station, Kantorowicz would be assumed to have firsthand knowledge that the Germans weren’t owning up to their guilt in a satisfactory way. (673-674). With their gatherings of information and their numerous risky attempts to be of service, the Claffeys and Colonel Persons seem to be sketched as polar opposites to the Germans of Knauth’s and Kantorowicz’ acquaintance. They can’t seem to go to the camp often enough and are driven to distraction by their own moral ruminations on it.

Only once in the novel is an intervention carried out successfully, and this requires some luck. Late in the novel, Coral Tebbs, a Gettysburg veteran and amputee sent home to the hovel he shares with his widowed mother and three younger siblings, happens upon Naz Stricker, a recent escapee from the nearby camp, as he hunts in the woods. Tebbs catches the desperately ravenous Stricker in the act of stealing a chicken hawk he has just shot and when he compels Stricker to come out from his hiding place, he is greeted with a living ethical quandary. The description of Naz unmistakably echoes phrases used to caption photographs of newly liberated death camp survivors:

A figure arose to confront him. It was such a spook as might have sent any field Negro of the region scuttling. It was a spook somewhat smaller than Coral Tebbs, nearly beardless, with a crusted blackened skull for a face, and dressed in scarecrow shreds of flannel and jeans. Coral could not recognize immediately this starveling for what the thing really was (A 647).

At first Coral is eager to take Naz as his own captive back to the stockade. But Naz either will not (preferring that Coral go ahead and shoot him) or cannot

(because of his state of physical breakdown): “Yank. Come on. Going to take you in! The boy tried to arise; he seemed to try to arise; again he slid back among cypress knobs” (A 649-650).

Coral finds that the two soldiers not only share in common service to their respective causes, but they were wounded on the same battlefield on the same day, Coral having to have a foot removed and Naz, as he reveals, having to lose a hand. Rather than capture Naz, Coral goes home alone. There he gathers fried salt pork, a batch of purple-hull peas, potatoes, corn-pone, fills a canteen with milk and returns to where he last saw Naz, calling out, “Hey. God damned Yank! You want some rations?” (A 660). Before long, the two have built a friendship and, thanks to the sympathetic Ira Claffey, found shelter for Naz in an abandoned outhouse on the Claffey property. “Brace up, lad. You’re not going back . . . . Twould be tantamount to murder,” Claffey tells Naz. In the privy, Naz, a woodworker by vocation, works on hollowing out the top of a wooden stake. With leather straps provided by Claffey, the work on Coral Tebb’s new prosthetic limb is completed, and Naz leaves for the union lines carrying fifty Confederate dollars Claffey has given him. The story of the Naz-Coral encounter is significant not only because it provides an example of the only sort of help humanitarians were able to give in these circumstances; but because it also renders plausible a mutually beneficial union between two recently violent adversaries, each bearing scars inflicted by the other. Indeed, the relationship between the two can be read as a template for future relations between Americans and Germans. The relationship is to be predicated not only on the common humanity of the two parties and the crying need for survival of the one. If Naz Stricker, who is revealed to be from Pennsylvania Dutch country, is to be rescued and aided, it is only expected that he volunteer his skill and his replenished energy to prop up the



lamed Coral Tebbs. But the relationship is also to be based on what they do for each other emotionally. Food is not the only thing Coral gives Naz. He also gives him the will to live. And physical propping up is not the only service Naz Stricker provides. When Naz is leaving, presumably to meet up with northern forces who have by this stage of the war occupied the northern half of Georgia, we learn Coral has acquired, because of the relationship, a new consciousness:

Release from storming emotion came to Coral. Crutches slipped, fell from his open clutch, he lay in burs and pea-vines in his mother's dooryard, kneading crushed little sheaves of wire grass in his large hands, sobbing, momentarily without hope. God damn it, Naz, don't go way. But Naz was gone with not even a star to lessen the night into which he walked (A 685).

Caring for this lone, helpless figure who had been part of a force arrayed to do him harm (and that force indeed had) leads to an abandonment of his previous embittered impetuosity. Coral now has a sense of his emotional interdependence. Similarly, the United States, hard by its recent rescue of hundreds of thousands from Nazi death camps, embarked on an enthusiastic campaign to give the international interdependence it now felt the status of law, hosting in San Francisco the conference where the United Nations charter would be written and repudiating an earlier reluctance (at least on the level of public rhetoric) to take part in geopolitics.

The last lines of *Andersonville* spring from the mind of Ira Claffey as he walks near what used to be the dread Camp Sumter. He is thinking of his country's future, but not his own, though his own future, if the symbolism of the last seven words holds, is promising:

Ira felt that he himself held no desire or ambition, but this bruised collection of states must hold ambition, else the Nation was not fit for the sun to shine upon it; and the sun was shining. *Or, while she is seeking a middle course, will they lay her glory in*

the dust? He went past abandoned earthworks, abandoned camps, going directly to his plantation and into the future, and toward challenges waiting there. When he had nearly reached the lane, birds rose before him like an omen. ([Kantor's emphasis] A 726).

These are not the thoughts of the typical Southern planter facing the Reconstruction era, a time in which many in his position felt besieged by the onus of higher property taxes, demands to take loyalty oaths, general economic collapse and the psychological burden of living under an occupation force. Claffey feels himself a part of the general drift of American advancement. There's no barrier to his joining in this drift. He expects no investigation of his involvement or lack thereof in what occurred just a short walk from his front door. The war is finished for him. The camp is closed. He is going to work.

Such was the destination of so many ex-Nazis as the conquering allies gradually lost their resolve to de-Nazify, to investigate, prosecute and punish those who participated in war crimes. While the campaign to bring such figures to justice began with a nearly vengeful zeal, the rivalry between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union for technological expertise, for economic and commercial know-how and for popularity with a voting West German public clamoring for prisoners to be freed, allowed the sword of justice to rust. In the beginning of the European occupation, there were a few cases in which high-profile Nazis were freed in exchange for their services, though they had presided over the fiscal and technological buildup of the war machine on the backs of slave labor. But the numbers of these cases increased as tensions rose between the West and the Soviets. Around the time of the Korean War, these numbers spiked significantly. By January 31, 1951, John J. McCloy, the head of the US occupation government in Germany could commute the sentences of 74 out of 104 convicted war criminals whose clemency was requested by an American

advisory board and feel no job insecurity as a result. McCloy, by way of explanation, said he believed the defense of obeying superior orders was a sound one. This policy directly contrasted with that of the Nuremberg Tribunal (Bower 347-348). Once released, many of these convicted Nazis--like Alfred Krupp, an industrialist who used slave labor but denied it in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary--went right back to work, often in high positions of governmental or corporate responsibility.

The policies of giving aid to countries perceived by US leaders to be involved, like West Germany, in the struggle against communism, was quite popular from the start, according to polls from the time. In fact, the only uncertainties about Congressional passage of the Marshall Plan of 1947, which was to allocate \$5 billion a year to Europe, was with the specific amount of aid and the speed at which it could be doled out. Even after the stalemate and ensuing public rancor of the Korean War, Americans supported the use of their funds to support Western European countries who were, it was thought, in the midst of the fight against the spread of Soviet communism throughout the 1950s (Wittkopf 309).<sup>1</sup> The reaction to CIA-sponsored coups in Iran and Guatemala did not register in the poll results.

But a consensus must be reinforced if it is to broaden or last. The conventional means of political speeches, editorials and the like are important, but less conspicuously propagandistic tools are also important. As Beverly Crawford and James Martel have noted, films that sought to humanize Germans began to be released in the early 50s. *The Desert Fox* (1951), which portrayed General Erwin Rommel sympathetically and even heroically is perhaps the earliest of these, with the trend culminating in such films as *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961), in which the American head of the tribunal (played by Spencer Tracy) carries on a flirtation

with a woman who he learns did nothing to protest or resist the Nazi regime she must have known to have been genocidal and *The Bedford Incident* (1965), which features an ex-Nazi who, after the war, helps Americans fight the Soviets (Crawford and Martel 296-297). These movies brought into being the character type of the “good German.” The differentiation of the German people from the Nazi menace was fairly well accomplished with the majority of Americans by 1954, when a poll revealed a 52 percent approval rating for Germany. By 1966, this rating would be 73 percent; by 1976, 77 percent, which indicated Germany was in that year enjoying the same level of respect among Americans as Sweden.<sup>2</sup>

In *Andersonville*, we find a historical novel which attempted to contribute to the trend which would lead to Americans’ acceptance of the burden of alliances. When the Claffeys emerge unscathed (in fact, unquestioned) from the Union army’s visit to the neighborhood, the same visit in which Captain Henry Wirz is scooped up for transport to Washington D.C. and to his trial, it parallels the distinction Americans were counseled to make as West Germany was brought into the Western, anti-Soviet fold. But the Claffeys are also given a good helping of credit for pluck, even though they don’t make overt attempts to throw off the Confederate authorities. Their organization of a relief effort to donate surplus vegetables to the inmates of the camps features prominently in the novel. When the effort is turned away, the only protest is verbal, but General Winder’s threats to try the party as traitors are not mere bluster. He is not portrayed in the novel as a man whose threats are idle. The Claffeys also seem genuinely troubled with what is taking place right next to their house. Ira, in particular, is so moved by feelings of civic responsibility that he attempts a trip to Richmond to speak personally to Jefferson Davis, whom he knew from his years in the army. He never gets there, except in the realm of fantasy. In a reverie, he gets to the

Confederate White House and meets with a functionary who resists showing him to the President. Claffey makes his supplication and ends with his ringing question: “What matters a chivalrous Lee if we have a Winder” (586)? Claffey is worried, in particular, about the possibility of Southerners all bearing the burden of guilt for the horrors of Andersonville. The functionary retorts as so many Germans would in the mid-1940s when asked about the Holocaust: “How can I be held responsible, you upstart? Who can be held responsible?” Claffey continues to worry about collective responsibility, “If an individual,” he answers, “it is difficult for me to name him.” (A 586). Claffey’s readiness to do everything possible to help Union prisoners and then to assume his share of collective responsibility dissociates him from the “bad Confederate” he is talking to in the same way good Germans like Konrad Adenauer, the first chancellor of West Germany would be dissociated from the Nazis. Adenauer, who resisted the Nazis and was imprisoned in a concentration camp himself, was never personally saddled with guilt by the Americans, and by Eisenhower’s administration he had so much credibility with the President that, as Marc Trachtenberg found, “Eisenhower was surprisingly eager to endow [West Germany] with an independent nuclear capacity” (146-147). Adenauer’s dissociation from the bad Germans came despite the lack of any record of his condemning the persecution of the Jews. However, it was clear he had suffered under the Nazis, and his post-war condemnation of the war on the Jews was, although he did have to be prompted, emphatic.<sup>3</sup> He was the good German not because he’d opposed the regime with any success, but because he had not supported it, just as Claffey is the good Confederate despite his feeble attempts at charity and intervention.

It was enough that Claffey had helped bring the vegetables to the prison’s perimeter, and that he had confronted the Confederate White House mentally

while trying to do so physically. He is still given the privilege of ending the novel with his vaguely prescient meditation on his country's future. The standard of heroism, because of Claffey's being outnumbered, because of his family's vulnerability, because of the sheer numbers of victims involved, has been lowered. In the same way, for the same reasons, German civilians who made little attempt to dislodge the murderous Hitler and his henchmen were still given the privilege of leading their nation toward the rising birds, and toward the possession of medium range ballistic missiles. In *Ira Claffey*, the novel gives us a stand-in for the postwar German civilian, and by humanizing him, by advocating for him, contributes to the resolution of the contradiction between the mid-1940s blanket condemnation of the German as a race and the need to persuade Americans to arm the Germans in the mid-1950s.

### **Science as the Privileged Realm of Discourse**

The only discourse other than the religious that is accepted uncritically in the novel is that of conventional medical science. The relevant documents are quoted verbatim, and in all cases they're considered the final word on what they describe by every character who writes, reads, or hears them and the solution to the dilemma of Andersonville if only they could be put into practice. The most heroic character in the novel who is not a Union prisoner is the physician Harrell Elkins. Though realism forbids him the ability to save thousands of sick prisoners, his efforts to press the language of his discipline into reality wins the respect of almost every other character with whom he interacts. The second character who serves in the novel as a scientific exemplar is Dr. Joseph Jones, expert medical chemist, who comes down from Augusta in September to inspect the camp. His arrival is anticipated as though his utterance is all that would be needed to end the suffering and resolve the moral dilemma posed by it.

Unfortunately, the accuracy of the two doctors' diagnoses is never matched by an ability to administer an effective treatment regimen. But their status in the novel remains heroic because of their expressed concern and often self-sacrificing application of effort.

Elkins begins his acquaintance with Camp Sumter with a short stay during which, as the camp is built, he assesses the camp's ability to accommodate large numbers of prisoners. Elkins can see the disaster looming, but Captain Sidney Winder seems unconcerned with the lack of shelter, shade and potable water when Elkins brings these problems to his attention. In doing so, Elkins incurs a challenge to duel. But Elkins rebuffs it and returns to his regular post knowing the Confederacy he fights for will soon be presiding over a disaster. By letter, he explains to Lucy Claffey that he feels that if he were to return to Camp Sumter, "I might feel that I fought somewhere along a line of battle, even though my task entailed saving a few lives among the very human beings whom once I strove to destroy. Humanity seems crying aloud and who is there to listen" (A 363)? In this 1864 setting a mode of discourse that would become suspect in 1945 is given the status of the ultimate answer; a means of understanding and a vocabulary associated with the barbarities of the 1940s finds itself deemed the hoped-for panacea in a novel set in 1864 published in 1955. Any sign that those who use it may be aware of the potential of their discourse to dehumanize as well as heal is dismissed as soon as it is mentioned.<sup>4</sup>

Elkins' dedication in the face of medicine shortages and deplorable sanitary conditions in the camp hospital has already been noted. But his virtuousness of character apparently makes itself so obvious to Ira Claffey that he thinks nothing of allowing Elkins time alone with his daughter, a privilege not casually given in the Victorian era. Later, Claffey is delighted to learn of Elkins'

honorable intentions toward Lucy, seemingly unaware that the two had slept together while he was trying to get to Richmond. So Elkins is allowed the groom's place in the marriage that seems an obligatory ingredient for the ending of any Civil War novel.<sup>5</sup> As if to provide Elkins with a chance to ply his trade in a more favorable environment for its proper display, the novel features a sequence in which Elkins saves the life of Laurel Tebbs after her mother's attempt to administer an abortion. Despite his exhaustion, Elkins' talents impress even the midwife who--against the centuries' old archetype which usually pits midwife against physician in a turf war--eventually acts as his nurse. Up to the Laurel Tebbs sequence, the discourse had done little other than generate documents. The success of Elkins' treatment serves to build the credibility of his discourse, much in the way the miracles lent credibility to Christ's theology for some readers of the Gospels. To be trusted, a discourse must first show it can do things.

In September, the lost potential of Elkins' discourse is cause for tragedy when he burns in a candle flame an "entirely unsolicited" report he has carefully crafted. With its sequential listing of "causes of disease and mortality" and "preventative measures," the letter employs the discourse we've seen act with so much success in the case of Laurel Tebbs and, indeed, throughout the ensuing 150 years (A 483-4). That his letter and the other diagnostic documents quoted employs the same sort of systematically empirical discourse used to implement Hitler's Final Solution constitutes an attempt to rehabilitate scientific language in a time when legitimate questions had been raised about its reputation as a boon to mankind. Toward this end, the novel uses multiple strategies: the sheer frequency and length with which medical discourse is featured, the clear overtones of tragedy with which the impotence of this discourse is accompanied and the general trustworthiness of the characters who employ it all constitute



novelistic attempts to counter the reports emerging from newly liberated central Europe of the predations carried out by Joseph Mengele and abetted by the scientists at I.G. Farben.

With Elkins' medical reports, credibility comes from an abundance of information, whether it be about the fictional writer, his self-sacrificing dedication, his trustworthiness with women or his reliability as a narrator. In the case of the nonfictional Dr. Joseph Jones, credibility depends on what the novel leaves out. Jones, who we're accurately told is a medical chemist, comes down from Augusta, visits the camp, and, assisted by Elkins, produces a devastatingly specific diagnosis of what is killing the camp's Federal inmates. Once the report is finished, Jones is recalled to his post, which in the novel is that of surgeon for the Army of Tennessee. The only subsequent mention of Jones appears as Ira Claffey explains to Lucy why he has decided to go to Richmond: "Indeed we've heard nothing from Jones, there's been no alteration of circumstances. Conditions grow worse steadily at the approach of winter" (A 576). The novel does not reveal that Jones essentially sat on the report till months after the end of hostilities, possibly because he feared what would happen if it were to fall into Federal hands and be made public. Later, his report was used against Henry Wirz at his trial (Denney 376, 382).<sup>6</sup>

In *Andersonville*'s portrayal of its physicians, we encounter a hamfisted attempt to separate science from ideology. Heading off potential public distrust in 1955 medical science was not the main purpose, however. Accusations that Nazi scientists had helped to forward the progress of its rocketry program could have sapped the American public's faith in what was being promoted as a fitting source of nationalistic pride--America's high technology industries. A public unused to financing a perpetual war machine that associated Nazism with these

programs might take umbrage when asked to subsidize them. Therefore, there was need to associate science with an effort to avert a mini-Holocaust event, even if it meant bending the truth.

### **Conclusion**

The interpretation most likely to be drawn from this novel about Americans in a similar moral dilemma to that faced by German civilians who lived near the death camps is that both populations were in hopeless positions. The Americans living near Camp Sumter (as the camp just south of the village of Andersonville was officially called in Confederate dispatches) after all, had been unable to exert any significant humanitarian influence. Meanwhile, the novel's Civil War setting had the effect of justifying present-day U.S. policy toward German civilians, which had softened and even warmed by the early 1950s. Since the Civil War had been America's most defining event, determining so much of the country's national identity, the conduct of American characters in the literature of the conflict weighed heavily in considerations of how that identity was to be understood. A member of Kantor's generation and a fellow writer of colorful Civil War narratives, Bruce Catton would call the Civil War, "one of the great datum points in American history: a place from which we can properly measure the dimensions of almost everything that has happened to us since" (Catton 12). Certainly, *Andersonville* places the Claffeys in that starting point. The conduct of the Claffeys and their neighbors, in their indecision, their ineffectuality, would be the precedent-setting response to such circumstances as they faced, and to other circumstances faced later. The mythic quality, too, that Civil War characters and stories acquired, would have a hand in elevating the doings of the Claffeys and those who assisted them in their efforts, to the status of

moral exemplars. If our mythic characters had been unable to save the lives of death camp victims, how could we expect decidedly non-mythic Germans to do it?

*Andersonville*, then, in its sympathy for civilians living near the camps and its condemnation of those running the camp, registers the tension of an era in which the death camp discoveries were still recent, but the need for a crucial Cold War buffer-state in central Europe counterbalanced the remembrance of those atrocities. In this context, a novel that gave Americans a way to think of civilians who made no moves against a death camp as sympathetic characters would certainly be welcomed. The book's brisk sales may not in itself a product of American readers' need for some way of thinking better of the Germans, but Kantor's novel could not have hurt the cause of German-American friendship and indeed may have helped it. As of 1955, thanks to the Marshall Plan's billions, that friendship was in such robust shape that in West Berlin, Amerika Haus had already been serving Germans as a kind of library and lecture hall for five years, and the American Memorial Library, with its "70,000 books, 1,000 newspapers and thousands of record albums" had been open for a year (Richie 706-707). Obviously, the tensions had already been deftly managed on official levels without the help of Kantor's novel. But in case the public was not yet in agreement with its foreign policy-makers, *Andersonville* not only registered the tension between Germans as venal or as enablers of the venal and Germans as hardy, supportive allies against the Soviets, but it presented Americans with a way to manage that tension, a way to keep an officially necessary Cold War friendship stable without trivializing the Holocaust.

In those sequences, for example, that depict the conversations among the Claffey family over the proper response to the proximity of large-scale (even if

officially-supervised) human suffering, we hear expressions of helplessness, of anxieties about collective responsibility and of uncertainty regarding the definition of the just response. The tenor of this talk bears deep resemblance to what was said and written by Americans as they reconsidered their government's policies in the wake of the discovery of the German death camps. While retrospective thoughts on the conduct of World War II turn up in the novel, present-day musings on the American role in the mid-20th century, and its strategies for the playing of that role also arise in the book. They do so specifically in the way the attitudes of the Claffey family toward Camp Sumter's escapees seem to play out the strategy of US containment of what was viewed as the imminent Soviet threat by providing aid to countries it viewed as vulnerable to a Soviet-backed and/or indigenous Left. The Claffeys, because of their feelings, simply do not deserve punishment.

Since no two distinct historical moments are the same in all particulars, there must be breakdowns in the analogy Kantor's novel makes. Like the forced correspondences, these can themselves be concessions to 1955, since in a work of historical fiction, especially one about an event most of Kantor's audience had heard very little of, the author is free to take liberties with the facts. Kantor has no trouble rewriting General John Winder, certainly, adding to his amply documented lassitude and incompetence a puzzlingly anachronous, and dehumanizing hatred for his northern captives. But in the cases of Henry Wirz and Colonel Alexander Persons, Kantor resists the urge to make all his Confederates appallingly cruel. In the case of Colonel Harrell Elkins, Kantor even creates a hero figure whose futile struggle to save the lives of northerners wins the respect of Ira Claffey, in whose home he boards, and the swooning awestruck admiration of Lucy, Ira's unmarried daughter. In *Andersonville*, most

of the deliberate cruelty is carried out not by Wirz, his guards or his doctors, but by a group of inmates, the Raiders, a gang of strong-arm thieves and murderers led by an Irish New Yorker.

It's nearly impossible, based on the novel, to attribute any direct responsibility to the farmers and their families living near the camp for its existence or for the slow death that made sure progress within.<sup>7</sup> While possibly their payment of taxes and contributions of manpower to the Confederate cause can be construed as indirect guilt, there is no case in the book in which the local farmers willingly partake in acts of cruelty. Indeed, Ira Claffey and Coral Tebbs even risk imprisonment by hiding and aiding the escaped Naz Stricker.

The fact that whatever the Claffeys tried failed (Ira, the patriarch, in particular, takes bodily risks to intervene for the Northern captives) served to resolve some of the discomfiting questions that had been the stumbling blocks to an alliance with the Germans against the Soviets. Since the very American Claffey family tried its best to stop what was going on in an American death camp of sorts and could not make a difference, how could we fault German civilians in their failure to bring an end to the war against the Jews? How could German civilian war guilt be used to rationalize the abandonment of Berlin to the Soviets if Americans like the Claffeys had been unable to stop the atrocities in their own back yards?

### **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup>The book includes in its appendix a table which shows that on average Americans polled from March 1949 to November of 1956 consistently responded favorably to the policy of furnishing military supplies to Western Europe. The lowest ebb in such support came in 1949, when favorable ratings hovered around 50 percent. But around 1950 began an upward trend which peaked at 76 percent in 1951. Wittkopf got his numbers from the National Opinion Research Center (NORC).

<sup>2</sup>For more such numbers, see Nincic Miroslav and Bruce Russet. "The Effect of Similarity and Interest on Attitudes Toward Foreign Countries." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 43 No. 1 Spring 1979: 68-78.

<sup>3</sup>Adenauer is vulnerable to the charge of pushing leniency toward Nazi war criminals, however, as is made clear in Norbert Frei's book *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past* (3-4).

<sup>4</sup>Dr. Jones at first believes he will be gratified upon finding at the camp such an "excellent field for the investigations of the relations of typhus, typhoid and malarial fevers," but seeing how those in that field must live, whatever clinical appreciation he feels vanishes: "I received my orders, proceeded here, and walked into--this" (A 572).

<sup>5</sup>*Andersonville* is one such, along with Faulkner's (doomed marriage though it was) *Absalom, Absalom!*, *The Unvanquished*, and such earlier novels as *Gone With the Wind*, *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* and such later ones as *The Guns of the South*, *Cold Mountain* and *The Black Flower*. Many of these couples form of partners from each side of the conflict, but the others that form of like-believing couples have their own reconciliations to achieve.

<sup>6</sup>Jones' report was not finished till around April 16, 1865, by which time Richmond had fallen and the Confederate leadership had taken to the roads. General Robert E. Lee had surrendered his Army of Northern Virginia to General Ulysses S. Grant on April 12.

<sup>7</sup>In only one case does one of the residents of the *Andersonville* area kill a prisoner, as the newly-recruited teenage guard Flory Tebbs seeks to prove his beleaguered manhood to his peers by shooting a prisoner at random. The fact that this prisoner turns out to be the Jew Nathan Dreyfoos, the only Jew who is given much prominence in the novel, may point to the possibility that Kantor felt he'd be vulnerable to the charge of whitewashing the role of neighboring civilians in the crime of *Andersonville*. In having a local boy kill a Jew, the novel effectively refutes this charge in advance. Making the victim a Jew also brings the Holocaust into the book, but the characterization of his killer still isolates the responsibility. Flory Tebbs is the son of a prostitute and is depicted throughout the book as exceedingly immature. Through class and through his condition, he is deliberately set up as being unrepresentative of his community.

## PART II

### CHAPTER FOUR: “SO NATURAL THERE SEEMED NO ALTERNATIVE”: THE VIETNAM WAR ERA IN *THE KILLER ANGELS*

When Michael Shaara, the author of *The Killer Angels* (1974), tells his readers he has “avoided historical opinions,” he must mean he never pauses his narrative as Tolstoy does in *War and Peace* (1865-69) to offer an interpretation of the events his novel describes (xii).<sup>1</sup> His narrative of the Battle of Gettysburg actually incorporates a fair amount of historical opinion, not only from the Civil War period itself, but also from the late Vietnam War era when the book was written. *The Killer Angels* seems to absorb the trauma and disillusionment many Americans felt in the late 60s and early 70s and attempts to work through these reactions by answering a longing for creative leadership, specifically the kind it was thought the two slain Kennedy brothers tried to provide before they were assassinated. By providing a counter-narrative in which American leaders behave honorably in another bloody era of national division, *The Killer Angels* attempts to distance America’s view of itself from the catastrophe of Vietnam and steer it in the direction of a more mythical tableau and one that, if the author’s hints are to be taken, was resolved relatively neatly. The book may restrict itself to recounting the events of a few days in mid-1863, but it gathers in the anxieties and yearnings experienced by its first readers.

In his note “To the Reader,” Shaara is quite adamant about his claim that the book is based on accounts from the Civil War era alone. He does acknowledge, though, that the novel’s rendition of the events it treats may differ “from the one you learned in school,” and that “there have been many versions of that battle and that war.” Shaara does not explicitly claim he is attempting the

definitive synthesis of source material on the battle of Gettysburg, but he does explain he has tried with his research to clear away what he judges extraneous:

I have therefore avoided historical opinions and gone back primarily to the words of the men themselves, their letters and other documents. I have not consciously changed any fact . . . though I have often had to choose between conflicting viewpoints, I have not knowingly violated the action. (xii)

Considering Shaara's stated methodology, it is all the more remarkable that his present day slips in as it does. To be fair, with only a couple of exceptions, *The Killer Angels* shows praiseworthy fidelity to the historical consensus as it stood in Shaara's day on what happened at Gettysburg. But the Vietnam era comes through anyway, not just in the author's choice of which events to include in his book, but in the choices about which characters are included, how they are drawn, and in what the book chooses to emphasize about their relations with one another. Sometimes these modes of description and choices regarding interactions and behavior match very closely to specific near-contemporary figures as they were understood in Shaara's day. This is especially the case with the decision to give Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain a prominence equal to that of the Confederate field commander Robert E. Lee and many times greater than that given to his own field commander George Meade, the man credited with leading the Union forces to victory.<sup>2</sup> In the case of the book's portrayals of Lee and his second-in-command James Longstreet, the Vietnam era influences the way the two characters contrast with one another. In Michael Shaara's retelling of the battle of Gettysburg, which relies on the "great man" idea of what drives historical movement, the social forces of the 1960s and early 70s which emanated from organized masses make themselves most evident in the way the relationship between Lee and Longstreet unravels, although they also appear



in the Chamberlain sequences in the way Chamberlain and his subordinates react to the presence in their midst of an ex-slave. A reading of this historical novel that recognizes it as a phenomenon of the mid-70s will grasp these details and the way the novel uses them to cope with a national crisis of conscience.

### **The Kennedy Brothers Defend Little Round Top**

In the years just after the Tet Offensive, there arose a wave of nostalgia for the leadership of the Kennedys, perhaps most vividly seen in the quick success of Senator Robert F. Kennedy's hastily assembled presidential campaign which seemed on the cusp of capturing the nomination when it was brought to its violent end, but also in the market enjoyed by the many officials, friends, journalists and hangers-on (or some combinations of all these) of the Kennedys who published books in the late 60s and early 70s, each contending for the right to define the Kennedy legacy. These books made and promoted a set of assumptions about the Kennedy administration and the subsequent political career of Robert that turn up in *The Killer Angels*, transposed through choices of emphases and shadings of description onto a Civil War setting: namely, that the two Kennedys would have steered the nation either away from or through the tumultuous era of Vietnam and the latter part of the Civil Rights Movement in a way that was tactically superior to the ways Presidents Johnson and Nixon did. As "a lifelong Democrat, and rabid fan of JFK," Michael Shaara may have been predisposed to express a longing that was experienced by many as the sixties bent their way to the early seventies.<sup>3</sup>

Noam Chomsky has convincingly argued that the belief in the superiority of a hypothetical Kennedy Vietnam policy of withdrawal is nowhere to be found in the books by Kennedy supporters written prior to the Tet Offensive. Harvard

professor Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, who enjoyed daily access to the White House during John F. Kennedy's term, published a densely voluminous narrative, *A Thousand Days*, in 1965, but, says Chomsky, there "is not a word in Schlesinger's chronicle of the Kennedy years that hints of any intention, however vague, to withdraw [US troops from Vietnam] without victory" (105). The only instance in which Chomsky finds withdrawal alluded to as an idea comes when Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara returns from a trip to Saigon in October, 1963, apparently optimistic about the way the war was going. He "announced . . . that a thousand American troops could be withdrawn by the end of the year and that the major part of the American military task would be completed by the end of 1965" (Schlesinger qtd. in Chomsky 105). But McNamara's conjecture is never acted upon during either administration he served, and never mentioned again in Schlesinger's book.

In the same year, JFK's special counsel and former speechwriter (who also stayed on for a few unhappy months in the Johnson administration) Ted Sorensen published his own version of the Kennedy days, entitled simply *Kennedy*. By the time of Kennedy's assassination, Sorensen says, the administration "was simply going to weather it out, a nasty untidy mess to which there was no other acceptable solution." For Chomsky, Sorensen's account also reveals "no hint of any intent to withdraw short of victory" (106; 107). The next year, 1966, saw a gradual increase in US involvement in Vietnam and an accompanying increase in public concern, but Kennedy supporters continued to say Johnson's policy merely continued that of his predecessor. A transitional book, the 1966 *Bitter Harvest*, by Arthur Schlesinger criticizes Johnson's decisions in Vietnam on mere tactical grounds without implying Kennedy would have withdrawn troops entirely. Nor

does Schlesinger himself recommend withdrawal, preferring that new US-backed elections be held in South Vietnam. The idea of withdrawal Schlesinger dismisses as “humiliating” and, relying on the domino theory that dictated the whole region would rapidly fall to communist regimes if the United States were to allow South Vietnam to do so, Schlesinger says a decision to withdraw troops “would have ominous reverberations throughout Asia.” (qtd. in Chomsky 110-111).

But once the Tet Offensive of January 1968 showed that a viable, aggressive North Vietnamese army had survived despite years of what President Johnson and his advisors had said was a successful American military campaign to which half a million troops had been committed, memoirists from the Kennedy Administration suddenly discovered something new about their former chief. He had been an incipient dove; his plans for withdrawal of American troops had been thwarted by the assassin(s) and by several militarist though respectably idealistic advisors who had remained to serve under Johnson. The fallen president had simply been too talented a leader to set foot in the Vietnam quagmire, much less to become stuck or to lose his balance altogether as Johnson had done.

One of the first post-Tet works Chomsky has identified as revisionist is the 1972 memoir by Kenneth O'Donnell, *Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye*. O'Donnell, one of Kennedy's closest aides, claims in the book to have witnessed a meeting the president had with Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield in the Spring of 1963. O'Donnell has Kennedy agreeing with Mansfield on the need to pull troops out of Vietnam, but saying he could only do so after the 1964 election. After the meeting, O'Donnell says JFK confided to him that he knew the political price of such a pullout but was willing to accept it: “In 1965, I'll become one of the most

unpopular Presidents in history. I'll be damned everywhere as a Communist appeaser. But I don't care" (Chomsky 116; qtd. in O'Donnell and Powers 16). O'Donnell has Kennedy approaching the Vietnam conflict with a politically audacious plan, one that accepted a risk but first sought the politically protective cover of a second and final presidential term. Here the President who had shown himself to be so sharp-eyed and courageous yet realistic in his brother's narrative of top secret White House deliberations during the Cuban Missile Crisis, *Thirteen Days* (1969), brings these same qualities to bear on the Vietnam problem.

Though he does not deny conversations with Mansfield and O'Donnell may have taken place about a possible withdrawal of a few troops from Vietnam, Chomsky discounts the prevailing interpretation of Kennedy's remarks on the grounds that they most likely constitute an example of a politician telling his needed allies what they wanted to hear. The withdrawal Kennedy mentioned was most likely the same withdrawal of 1,000 troops (from the total of 15,500 then in Vietnam) proposed in October 1963 by McNamara. But even more to the point, Chomsky finds it preposterous that JFK would contemplate a total withdrawal even as he was assuring the nation that the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong they presumably controlled posed an imminent threat to US interests (in the context of the domino theory). To have brought all troops home after indulging in such rhetoric and without attempting to moderate his public statements or reach out to "highly respected military figures," would have been, for Chomsky, "sheer stupidity" (116-117). O'Donnell's thesis suffers, too, from a lack of corroborating evidence in the documentary record and from the fact that Kennedy's decisions seemed to belie any withdrawal plans. Vietnam War

historian Stanley Karnow believes the O'Donnell thesis but notes that "whatever he said privately, Kennedy's actions and statements at the time were tough" (268-269).

If a novel were to include a JFK surrogate character, then it would not be unexpected to find this character approaching an apparently insurmountable difficulty in a way that might cause admirers to cite it as an example of tactical brilliance, a seizing of an unanticipated possibility of the sort Sorensen, O'Donnell and Schlesinger presume Kennedy would find with respect to Vietnam. Chamberlain's crowning moment of tactical brilliance comes on the second day of the battle of Gettysburg at a most unlikely moment. His men are fanned out in a defensive perimeter around the top of Little Round Top. There they occupy the leftmost flank of the entire Union army. If the attacking forces of the Fifteenth and Forty-seventh Alabama regiments can somehow breach their position, the Southerners would be able to attack the entrenched Unionists where they were most vulnerable, from the side or from behind. After two hours of intense infantry combat (during which he counted Company B, which he had detached to his right, as captured), Chamberlain is told his regiment is running out of ammunition. Now his riflemen must sift through the pockets of the Twentieth's dead for more shells, with the Southerners showing no signs yet of retreating. "Sir, I guess we ought to pull out," says one soldier to Chamberlain. Chamberlain makes no answer but pictures the horror, the ignominy of a broken line, of "troops running; he could see the blue flood, the bloody tide." Suddenly, in this time of maximum crisis, "the idea formed," the Twentieth Maine, curled around the top of the hill, would straighten, the leftmost companies coming

forward as the rest remained so that “we swing like a door, sweeping them down the hill.” After Chamberlain issues his instructions, one last order must be given:

He stepped out into the open, balanced on the gray rock. Tozier had lifted the colors into the clear. The Rebs were thirty yards off. Chamberlain raised his saber, let loose the shout that was the greatest sound he could make, boiling the yell up from his chest: *Fix bayonets! Charge! Fix bayonets! Charge!*

With this, the regiment goes flying over its protective wall of boulders, running down the hill, “roaring animal screams.” From behind a nearby wall, Company B, thought to be lost, is heard from, covering the charge with a volley of timely fire. The Confederate advance, just as Chamberlain has suspected, wilts the exhausting uphill fight, hunger and thirst having taken their toll at last. At the end, Chamberlain has to give the order to “stop the boys,” but he is told it may be difficult. “But they’re on their way to Richmond” (KA 226-228). The day is saved for the Union and about a hundred Confederates are headed for prison camps. For the quick decision and for leading the charge Chamberlain would be rewarded with the Congressional Medal of Honor.<sup>4</sup>

A war novel--historical or not--written as America’s Vietnam adventure was proving a debacle would be likely to partake of the nostalgia for a lost leader whose finesse in national defense policy had been one of his most extolled traits. It would not be surprising if an author living in the time just before JFK’s legacy was subjected to question settled upon the story of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain’s improbable defense of Little Round Top. An author’s choices are not mere capitulations to form. They are also manifestations of that author’s specific cultural context. For Michael Shaara, the image of JFK exerted enough power to make Chamberlain’s story (of all the stories of Gettysburg battlefield

heroism he might have chosen) appear to him the inevitable vehicle for a depiction of the Union effort during those three pivotal days. As a measure of Chamberlain's status relative to that of other Gettysburg heroes, consider that he is only mentioned once in a casual list of those who distinguished themselves on the Union side in a recent anthology on Civil War command leadership edited by Gary Gallagher (Greene 169). In James McPherson's bestselling *Battle Cry of Freedom*, Chamberlain only appears twice, and receives only brief mention in both instances (659, 850).

In too many respects for coincidence, the Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain of *The Killer Angels* conforms to the image of John F. Kennedy as it was promulgated by Kennedy's supporters in the time just after the Vietnam War went bad. Some of the resemblances pertain to life circumstances, the two men's physical likenesses and their common backgrounds. These have no ideological significance except insofar as they underscore the deliberateness with which the author chose Chamberlain and the susceptibility of the author's culture to the attractions of Kennedy-esque characters wherever they may be found in history. The other resemblances, however, point up what manner of leadership the culture longed for in a confusing era. Both JFK and the JLC of the novel base their personalities and decision-making on strict adherence to what their respective cultures considered sound, moderate reason rather than on emotion. Related to this point, both rely frequently on what can be gained through careful maintenance of "style," a term that when applied to Kennedy referred to his cool detachment, his adroit use of the spoken word, a wry sense of humor, and a sophisticated veneer. Lastly, both the president and the Civil War hero exhibit signs of growth as they each confront a series of confusing and constantly

changing circumstances, so that they seem capable of negotiating these circumstances in inventive ways that others around them may be incapable of imagining let alone guiding to fruition.

**Resemblances: Physical, Intellectual and Familial** In the matter of visual likeness, Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain resembles the youthful JFK of the years during and immediately following World War II more than the somewhat bloated, stiffly shambling president. We are told in the foreword to *The Killer Angels*, which is an annotated dramatis personae, that Chamberlain is “tall and rather handsome, attractive to women, somewhat boyish, a clean and charming person” (xix). In the novel, Chamberlain never has contact with a female character (other than in reveries in which he relives a conversation with his wife). Descriptions of his attractiveness, and especially his physique, certainly heighten his resemblance to the iconized Kennedy. As the novel begins, however, Chamberlain is looking less than his best. He is the worse for a heatstroke suffered while marching with his command, the 20th Regiment of Maine, on a July afternoon in northern Maryland. Nevertheless, he retains much of the description given him in the foreword. As he shakes off sleep, preparing to speak to 120 fellow soldiers from Maine who have been added to his regiment but have mutinied beforehand, he has “a grave boyish dignity, that clean-eyed scrubbed-brain naive look of the happy professor” (KA 19). The Pennsylvania captain presenting the 120 “prisoners” to Colonel Chamberlain is even disbelieving at first that Chamberlain is the regimental commander, such is his appearance of youth. But the colonel’s younger brother, Tom, ever zealous in his protection of his brother’s interests and image, proudly declares the authenticity of JLC’s declared rank.



Compare Shaara's descriptions of Chamberlain, and his depiction of the way other characters relate to his appearance, to John F. Kennedy's longtime secretary's memory of her first encounter in 1952 with the Senate candidate: "My first thought was 'He looks so young and thin.' His gray suit seemed much too big for his frame and he kept pushing his hair off his forehead." Later, as he stands on the Senate floor about to take the oath of office, Evelyn Lincoln remarks on the way her employer stood out from his colleagues: "He seemed a little self-conscious standing with all those gray-haired politicians who were so much older and more experienced, and I noticed him trying to button his coat to hide his necktie, which was hanging down far below his belt" (12, 17). In their first meeting in 1946, Kennedy's future close adviser, Kenneth P. O'Donnell, was also stunned by the youth of the candidate John Kennedy when set beside the prestige of the seat in Congress he sought that year: "I did not think that he would even be elected to the House of Representatives. . . . He seemed too boyish and shy to be running against experienced politicians like Mike Neville and John Cotter in that tough Congressional district" (82).

The physical resemblance, then, to descriptions of the twentieth century president-to-be is worthy of note, but becomes perhaps more significant when added to their life-circumstances. Both men sustained during their respective wartime terms of service nearly debilitating injuries. (JFK strained his already suspect back; JLC was shot in the foot and then, in a battle that postdates the setting of *The Killer Angels*, was shot again through both hips). They carried their injuries with them into long and successful political careers. (We learn in the novel's Afterword that JLC was elected and three times re-elected governor of Maine.) A background of decorated military service in wartime for both men

followed New England upbringings and distinguished academic careers. Chamberlain, who is described repeatedly in the novel as looking professorial, left his post as rhetoric and modern languages professor at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, to accept a commission in the army. After the war, he returned to Brunswick, eventually becoming college president.

Kennedy had the rare distinction of having his Harvard bachelor's thesis published under the title of *Why England Slept* (1940), and the rarer distinction still (thanks to his father's bulk-buying) of having it become a best-seller. After he was elected to the Senate, he continued his output in political history with *Profiles in Courage* (1956), which won the Pulitzer Prize and only enlarged Kennedy's reputation as a scholar, though allegations would emerge later that Ted Sorensen wrote all or most of it. Just after the assassination, Arthur Schlesinger would help to perpetuate the view of Kennedy as intellectual, as demonstrated not only by his list of publications, but by his habits of drawing his staff from faculty and of citing works of history in meetings as precedents or cautionary exemplars for presidential decision-making. Kennedy "was a man of action who could pass easily over to the realm of ideas and confront intellectuals with perfect confidence in his capacity to hold his own," wrote Schlesinger in 1965 (*A Thousand Days*, 104).

In Chamberlain, on the other hand, many readers could watch a man of ideas pass easily over to the realm of action. Any arrangement of these terms could plausibly be applied to the way either man is popularly understood. Even Chamberlain's approach to action, we learn in the novel, is scholarly. As the regiment awaits its orders in Maryland, Chamberlain removes a book from his coat and urges his brother to read it, saying, "Here. This is Casey's *Manual of*

*Infantry Tactics*. You study it, maybe someday [sic] you'll make a good soldier” (KA 23).

The two decorated future politicians also come from extremely similar family structures. JFK's reliance on a close younger brother who acted as his keeper, his head administrator and his enforcer is iconic, as is the way his father Joseph P. Kennedy instilled in his sons the importance of meeting the challenge thought previously impossible. JFK also married a woman who was considered his equal in glamour, but who was known not to share his ambitions or to enjoy the international fame it bought, considering it dangerous. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain also uses the services of an aggressively loyal younger brother, Sergeant Tom Chamberlain, who not only looks after the Colonel's safety and performs many administrative tasks (it is he who does the final count on those mutineers who will elect to join the Twentieth Maine and sees that they're sorted among various companies), but also acts in the novel so as to consolidate his brother's hold on his army by acting as a kind of mouthpiece, a nineteenth century version of a media flack, telling the story of his brother's leadership in a way best calculated to win the esteem of the mutineer now listening to him. As the regiment marches to Pennsylvania, Tom explains the Twentieth's unique bugle calls to one formerly recalcitrant member of the now defunct Second Maine. He declares that the last commander of the Twentieth was “the worst, I mean to tell you, the triple-toed half-wound, spotted mule *worst*.” When Tom's listener asks where the Twentieth had been during the battle of Chancellorsville, Joshua, listening nearby, seems to brace himself to hear the unflattering truth: “A painful subject. Joshua Chamberlain opened his eyes” (KA 120).

But he need not have worried. His younger sibling explains the reason for the Twentieth's absence at once of the Union army's worst defeats in a way that deflects blame from his brother, but does so in a darkly wry gibe against the higher-ups, always a popular source of humor among soldiers. After being vaccinated for smallpox, which in the 1860s was as likely to sicken as it was to immunize, members of the regiment began to take ill. The regiment was then put under quarantine and forbidden to join the fighting, being found "unfit for combat" by a Surgeon Major, "that's a stumble-fingered man named Wormy Monroe." Joshua Lawrence had tried to get the Twentieth into the fight but could get no one to allow him a hearing for fear of contracting smallpox from him. "Lawrence said hang it, we ought to be the first ones in, we'd probably give the Rebs a disease and be more useful than any other outfit in the whole army. Matter of fact, way things turned, we probably would've been more use than most of them people. Anyway we wasn't in it" (KA 120.)

Along with his role as his brother's right-hand, Tom even seems to take on the pugnacious personality of Robert F. Kennedy in the novel. We are told that as a boy Tom had gotten lost in the woods "in the dark of winter" and all searches had been unsuccessful, but that he had "survived out there and come back himself, a grinning kid with a bright red nose, never once afraid . . ." (116). This vignette, which Joshua Lawrence summons to mind, is similar to the childhood legend about Robert F. Kennedy repeated in biographies that "he had once broke a toe when it was crushed beneath an old radiator that he had been forbidden to play with and he hopped about in silent agony for an hour before he dared tell his parents of the incident" (Thimmesch and Johnson 35). But perhaps the most

poignant parallel of Bobby to Tom comes on the second day of the battle as the Confederate shells are ripping through tree limbs around the two brothers:

Chamberlain turned, saw Tom's white grinning face, saw him flick rock dust from his uniform, blinking it out of his eyes, grinning bleakly. Chamberlain grimaced, gestured. Tom said, "Whee." Chamberlain said, "Listen another one a bit closer and it will be a hard day for Mother. You get back to the rear and watch for stragglers, Keep your distance from me" (KA 208).

The novel here seems to suggest the specific fate that overtook the Kennedy brothers. Shaara might have included a third Chamberlain brother, John, who was visiting the regiment as a member of the Christian commission riding abreast with Joshua and Tom and formed the other half of Joshua's intended audience. (Pullen 110). But it seems as though the presence of a third Chamberlain would have somehow marred the parallelism. As of 1974, Edward had not been shot. Additionally, his image had been forever tarnished by his conduct on the night of July 18, 1969 when he drove off a bridge and a passenger in his car drowned. So the third brother John Chamberlain makes neither the scene nor the novel itself.

In a later passage in the novel, when all the fighting has concluded, the two brothers Chamberlain seem to take on the roles JFK and Bobby were thought to play in their time in the White House. The President was noted, according to the conventional understanding, for always being aware of the ambiguities in a given circumstance. But it was thought that his brother, the Attorney General, saw things more starkly. Members of the Kennedy circle helped to promulgate this view. As Arthur Schlesinger phrases it in his 1978 biography of Robert, the president used his brother "as a lightning rod, as a scout on far frontiers, as a more militant and somewhat discountable alter ego, expressing the President's own

idealistic side while leaving the President room to maneuver and to mediate” (*Robert Kennedy and His Times*, 599). In a tribute he wrote to Robert just after his assassination, Pierre Salinger acknowledges that “when I first met Bob he saw the world in rather simple black and white terms” (“Tribute,” 16). In his 1988 autobiography *Remembering America*, President Kennedy’s speechwriter Richard N. Goodwin would dramatize the difference between the two men by telling of a White House meeting in which RFK had upbraided the Undersecretary of State savagely for a pessimistic report on US policy toward Cuba. After the Attorney General fulminated, the President said nothing and merely drummed a pencil against his teeth. In this episode, Goodwin saw the way the two men contrasted but yet complemented one another: “I became suddenly aware--am now certain--that Bobby’s harsh polemic reflected the president’s own concealed emotions, privately communicated in some earlier, intimate conversation. I knew, even then, there was an inner hardness, often volatile anger beneath the outwardly amiable, thoughtful, carefully controlled demeanor of John Kennedy.” (187). As Joshua Lawrence and his brother Tom sit and discuss the cause of the Civil War, Tom is certain that the cause is slavery, but Joshua is preoccupied with what he sees in front of him, the bodies strewn across the field that had been contested just hours before:

“Thing I cannot understand. Thing I never will understand. How can they fight so hard, them Johnnies and all for slavery?”  
[Joshua Lawrence] Chamberlain raised his head. He had forgotten the Cause. When the guns began firing he had forgotten it completely. It seemed very strange now to think of morality . . . He looked out across the dark field, could see nothing but the yellow lights and outlines of black bodies stark in the lightning.

Tom said, “When you ask them prisoners, they never talk about slavery. But Lawrence, how do you explain that? What else is the war about?”

Chamberlain shook his head.

“If it weren’t for the slaves, there’d never have been no war, now would there?”

“No,” Chamberlain said.

“Well, then, I don’t care how much political fast-talking you hear, that’s what it’s all about and that’s what them fellers died for, and I tell you, Lawrence, I don’t understand it at all.”

Joshua Lawrence responds to his brother’s confusion by referring to the dead lying in front of them in the hardening rain, “Well, they’re all equal now” (KA 344). Where Tom is judging the conflict in two-dimensional, starkly ideological terms, his older brother favors a more holistic view. In an earlier passage of the novel, we have already seen that Joshua has expressed the same belief as Tom in the war being fought “to set other men free,” but while he sits silently, his brother verbalizes it in more uncompromising terms (30). An Oval Office conference has been moved to Gettysburg.

Another way Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain reminds one of the iconic John F. Kennedy is in the way the two men cultivated an appearance of supreme rationality. “The image of Kennedy as a man of reason was perhaps the most favored one in the immediate aftermath of the assassination,” comments Thomas Brown in his 1988 examination of the history of the JFK icon. This conception of the fallen president, Brown states, performed a necessary function for his supporters after his death, in that it cast Kennedy’s predecessors in office and the opponents of his policies as irrational. Brown finds numerous examples from the immediately post-assassination commentary on JFK of writers--like Schlesinger--praising JFK for a particular kind of intellectualism that was not overly abstract but instead took into account the world as it was. *Commonweal*’s John Cogley, writing in the May 1964 issue, is typical when he compliments the late president because he “used” ideas but had never been “enthralled” by them, because he was

conscious “that in itself intellectuality is not enough for political leadership.”

Brown notes the downside of the promotion of this idea of Kennedy too, namely that it “lent sanction to the notion that the people should defer to the leadership of elites who were the putative representatives of the force of ‘reason’”(8-12).

The concept of the ideal leader as that supposedly rare entity among men, a learned decision-maker, certainly informs Shaara’s choice to feature Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain so prominently. This professor of the humanities defies stereotype with his ability to move boldly and win respect from professional men of action. His decisions themselves are models of moderation, which are neither too arbitrary, and therefore liable to be executed by his men resentfully, nor too timid, which on a battlefield would be likely to get one’s regiment captured or, worse, written up unfavorably in the generals’ dispatches. Perhaps Chamberlain’s most recognizably Kennedyesque (as the term might have been understood by the commentators Brown cites) moment of decision away from the field of battle comes when he is presented with the 120 mutinous men of the Second Maine. He knows they had somehow believed their terms of service to be at an end only to be told their enlistment had not yet run out. Now, instead of being on their way home, the men find themselves under guard, escorted to the Twentieth Maine’s camp somewhere in northern Maryland. Chamberlain also knows, after receiving a letter from the commander of the Army of the Potomac General George Meade himself that he is “authorized to shoot any man who refuses to do his duty.” Chamberlain’s response when he reads this? “Somebody’s crazy.” (KA 18). Early on, Chamberlain dismisses the potential use of execution (“How can I shoot Maine men? I’ll never be able to go home.”) as destructive of his own future prospects, but we also learn later that he shares with the men of the Second Maine



a perception that the leadership of the Union army had thus far been poor in quality (19). Identifying with those with whom one is at odds is surely a mark of rationality.

When the men are finally marched into camp, prodded forward by the cynical Pennsylvania captain, Chamberlain treats them as a politician would treat an interest group, plying them with rations, promising he'll give a fair hearing to their grievances about the Union army's execrable leadership. His decision in the face of this administrative crisis is to be honest with the veterans about the regiment's situation but to "use" the ideas of Liberation and of History. He makes something of an inaugural address here, attempting to placate a previously hostile audience and enlist them in the cause of defending a general vision without promising specific policy concessions in their favor. In this case, JLC has exercised not only moderation but the specifically pragmatic variety of it attributed to JFK.

**Resemblances in "Style," Speech and Concern for Image** Another inextricable part of the Kennedy iconography has been his apparent reliance on what was called by his contemporaries, "style." Thomas Brown lists a few of the adjectives most commonly used to describe it: "coolness, charm, detachment, wit, irony, elegance, lightness, litheness, taste, zest, and a zeal for excellence in all things," (13). Nearly all of these characteristics are expressed exclusively through speech. Brown adds that the frequent comparisons of the Kennedys to royalty were also very much a part of the complex of associations included in that intangible but powerful cultural phenomenon the Kennedy style. Theodore Sorensen, in his first book about his fallen employer, praises Kennedy's adherence to rationality but

also makes clear in a character sketch that so much of Kennedy's style depended on his use of the spoken word:

I came to marvel at his ability to look at his own strengths and weaknesses with utter detachment, his candid and objective responses to public questions and his insistence on cutting through prevailing bias and myths to the heart of the problem. He had a disciplined and analytical mind. Even his instincts, which were sound, came from his reason rather than from his hunches. (*Kennedy*, 13).

The longing as of the early 1970s for a leader with the qualities Sorensen is attributing to JFK seems to crop up even in the novel's offhand explanation of what Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain's instincts consisted of: "Well, he was an instinctive man; the mind would tell him sooner or later" (KA 31). Chamberlain is here trying to figure out what to say to the 120 mutineers of the Second Maine. The speech he finally makes to those bedraggled, cynical veterans functions in the novel as exposition, further establishing Chamberlain's character and presenting much of his regiment's history, but it also betrays the influence of future speeches by two US presidents. The influence of the Gettysburg Address (not to be made till four months after the consecration Chamberlain is about to take part in) comes through in the way he begins by invoking a founding ("This regiment was formed last fall, back in Maine . . ."), the uniqueness of the Union cause against the prior record of armed struggle ("This is a different kind of army. If you look at history you'll see men fight for pay, or women, or some other kind of loot. . . . But we're here for something new."). Chamberlain deftly alludes, as Lincoln will do, to the trope of "the great experiment" which dated from the adoption of the Constitution. For Lincoln, the "something new" was "a new nation." For the more politically guarded Lincoln, "going out to set other men

free” would be relocated in time so that those who had died had fallen for “a nation conceived in liberty” that was experiencing “a new birth of freedom.” But the resemblance of a Union commander’s fictional rallying speech to the Gettysburg Address would not surprise. The rhetoric in Lincoln’s speech was chosen in part for its correspondence to conclusions parts of his culture had already come to which the president wanted to acknowledge and then amplify in the way most beneficial to his policies. The Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain of 1863, as distinguished from the one in *The Killer Angels*, could plausibly have made a speech in which he alluded to the Twentieth Maine’s being part of “a new kind of army.” Whether he would have emphasized liberation (“We’re an army going out to set other men free.”) may be more debatable since it is known the notion of the Union forces being an arm of the abolitionist cause was never a strong recruiting tool in the northern states, where those men who didn’t enlist for nationalist reasons or for fear of ostracism did so because receiving a bounty was preferable to being drafted or to going on the lam (KA 29-31; McPherson 605-607).<sup>5</sup>

The other famous address echoed/anticipated by Chamberlain’s *Killer Angels* speech is Kennedy’s inaugural. In both cases the speakers are aware their audience has been through severe times that had required great sacrifice of lives and resources and will not have much patience for flowery rhetorical flourishes. Chamberlain, as he is preparing to speak to his new subordinates, acknowledges the nature of the challenge, observing to himself that a “man who has been shot at is a new realist, and what do you say to a realist when the war is a war of ideals?” (KA 28) Because of this context, both Kennedy and Chamberlain keep the language of their respective speeches direct and lay out the few choices they

believed available, making clear the preferred responses without attempts to blur their distinctions of understate their urgency. Both speakers ask for their listeners' help, not for personal reasons (at least on the face of it) but in the service of a nationalist or in Kennedy's case internationalist cause. A comparison of certain passages reveals that while Kennedy's address is of necessity more polished, the two speakers respond to their circumstances with similar strategies

Theodore Sorensen's comments on John F. Kennedy's essential style of leadership are equally descriptive of both Kennedy's inaugural speech and the speech Chamberlain gives to the disgruntled troops. We see in both speakers a readiness to admit realistically the perils each audience faced, the "candid and objective responses to public questions," Sorensen describes. As they are depicted in books and in nostalgic journalism, then, leadership for both men comes of honesty, of an ability to render their possibly confusing contexts as dual choices and of a readiness to call for full participation. The addition of a certain smoothness was also crucial, that ability to draw in an otherwise unsympathetic audience, the nearly royal quality Chamberlain believes he possesses that makes it so that "when he spoke most men stopped to listen," the quality that Sorensen, in trying to account for Kennedy's election victory and citing his performance in the televised debates as one factor, called "sincerity and vitality" which "appealed to millions of voters who would otherwise have dismissed him as too young or known nothing about him but his religion" (KA 29; Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 213). It was this same quality that led Pierre Salinger, JFK's press officer, to counsel his employer to speak more often to reporters. "He was," appraised Salinger in his 1966 book *With Kennedy*, "without question, the most articulate and persuasive Chief Executive since FDR" (129). Certainly, the impression that one was

hearing from royalty fit into the context of this praise, the variety applied to Chamberlain by his valued Irish immigrant subordinate Private Buster Kilrain, who tells the Colonel, “There’s only one aristocracy. . . [that of the mind]. . . and you, Colonel laddie, are a member of it and don’t even know it” (KA 178).

A concern for the outward image also links the president to the Civil War soldier. The image of the upright professional and the brave leader was viewed by the Chamberlain of the novel as worth any amount of physical hardship. The heatstroke he is recovering from as the novel opens comes from his insistence on making a show of imposing on himself the same footsoreness and fatigue his men were taking on as they marched. His brother and his friend, Kilrain, both try, to no avail, to persuade him to ride his horse for a while. But Chamberlain believes a “good officer rode as little as possible” (KA 116). It takes a public upbraiding from Color Sergeant Tozier (“I’ll tell you, sir, be a damn site easier handlin’ these here new recruits if the officers would act like they’ve got sense, sir.”) to get the reeling colonel back on his horse (KA 121). Meanwhile, we have already seen Chamberlain’s anxiety over the possibility that appointing his brother as his adjutant may lead his men to “think there’s favoritism,” so he makes sure that Tom knows when to call him sir and when to call him Lawrence (KA 23, 26). He also seems to worry about Tom’s image, reminding him at one point to smile more and later telling him to attend to his uniform (KA 23, 171). Late in the novel, as his regiment is making its stand on Little Round Top, Chamberlain gets shot in the foot and loses his balance. His first thought as he is kept from going down by one of his captains is about how it may look: “Damned undignified,” he concludes (KA 219).

John F. Kennedy's concern with image was also based on a need to project an air of command. For a president such an air will not only imply command of political and military resources but also a command of one's role as national symbol. In addition, a president who was younger than the historical average for the office had to prove himself up to the responsibility. In his 1997 book, *The Kennedy Obsession*, John Hellman has identified several junctures at which John F. Kennedy fashioned a public image for himself designed to advance his ambitions. His seeking the role of public intellectual by writing and publishing *Why England Slept*, his decision to cooperate with the writer John Hersey in the writing of an essay about his experiences as commander of the destroyed patrol boat PT-109, his association of himself with the image of Ernest Hemingway by employing the author's "grace under pressure" phrase as the organizing standard of the book *Profiles in Courage*, among other crucial maneuvers helped to craft an image that he believed answered a cultural need and, in turn, benefited his political career. Beyond these interpretations, however, there are many anecdotal cases of JFK exhibiting a tendency to sculpt his image on a more superficial level. The foreword of Arthur Schlesinger's *A Thousand Days*, meanwhile, demonstrates Kennedy's worry about the way faithful transcriptions of remarks made in the course of White House talks might make him look later. He warned Schlesinger early about the danger of recording his every comment verbatim:

At the start of his administration President Kennedy said that he did not want his staff recording the daily discussions of the White House. Remarks tossed off gaily or irritably in conversation, he knew, looked very different in print. He mentioned Henry Morgenthau's solemn chronicling in his diaries of Franklin Roosevelt's jocosities during the gold-buying episode of 1933; and he wished no restraint on his own freedom of expression (x).

Kennedy later changed his mind. But his self-consciousness with regard to how he would be perceived, and how his discourse might be inhibited had been registered. His near-obsession with the way he was portrayed in newspapers and his willingness to trade on the friendships he struck with reporters to do so is the running theme of Ben Bradlee's 1974 *Conversations With Kennedy*. Bradlee, the future executive editor of the *Washington Post* who oversaw his paper's Watergate coverage, courted the candidate and president John F. Kennedy as a friend, all the while collecting his share of valuable leaks from the most official of official sources (18-25). One of Kennedy's more caustic demonstrations of a need to be perceived as sophisticated came at the expense of a friend named "Red" Fay who wondered in Kennedy's presence who was responsible for two paintings on the White House wall. "My God," said Kennedy, according to the friend's account, "if you have to ask a question like that, do it in a whisper or wait till we get outside. We're trying to give this administration a semblance of class. Renoir and Cezanne just happen to be about the two best-known French Impressionist painters" (102). Such stories abound in Fay's book, which may be why the Kennedy family was not happy with it (Brown 17).

**Chamberlain, the Kennedys and Race** The way Chamberlain interacts (or doesn't) with the escaped slave who somehow finds his way to the place where the Twentieth Maine is stopped exhibits yet another example of the way a late sixties and early seventies cultural manifestation makes its way into a Civil War novel. When Chamberlain is told by Kilrain, "I have found me a John Henry, sir," he follows him to where the ex-slave lies wounded, having been shot by a woman he startled in Gettysburg. KA 167 It is not Chamberlain's first time seeing a black man, but we're told he "rarely" sees them. Chamberlain, looking

down at him, thinks his face is “empty, inscrutable” and that “the red eyes looked up out of a vast darkness” (KA 168). As it happens, the man’s speech is also inscrutable to Chamberlain, although, as we deduce later, not to all the troops who overhear. Through guesswork, Chamberlain ascertains the man is saying thanks for the coffee he has been given. As he watches the ex-slave eat a ration of hard-tack and bacon, Chamberlain thinks back on his own experiences with blacks and on the sensations he now feels in near proximity to one:

You saw black men in the cities but they kept to themselves. Chamberlain’s curiosity was natural and friendly, but there was a reserve in it, an unexpected caution. The man was really very black. Chamberlain felt an oddness, a crawly hesitation, not wanting to touch him. He shook his head, amazed at himself . . . Chamberlain stood up. He had not expected this feeling. He had not even known this feeling was there (KA 168).

He also recalls, now almost sympathetically, the words of a Southern Baptist minister who’d told Chamberlain long ago while visiting his home in Maine, “*my dear man, you have to live among them, you simply don’t understand.*” The revulsion Chamberlain feels at the black man’s appearance startles him, causing him to wonder about his own adherence to principles he’d repeatedly invoked, having done so to motivate his men in fact. “And what if it is you who are wrong, after all?” he remembers the minister’s companion, a professor from Virginia, asking him (KA 170). As the surgeon leans down to treat the ex-slave’s slight chest wound, causing temporary panic in the patient, Chamberlain leaps to the assumption that the black man could have no idea what the stakes are in the contest he’d happened upon: “What did he know of the war? And yet he was truly what it was all about. It simplified to that. Seen in the flesh, the cause of the war was brutally clear” (KA 171). The regiment soon learns it



must move out, and the decision is made to leave the ex-slave where he is. Meanwhile, Kilrain has somehow managed to learn something about the black patient, apparently by simply talking to him. Kilrain learns how the man was shot and that he has only been in the country a month. He also learns the ex-slave wants to leave already, “since now he’s free” (KA 172).

As the men of the regiment fall into their ranks, Chamberlain begins to ride toward their front, tipping his cap to the black escapee, “feeling foolish and angry” (KA 172). In a discussion with Kilrain a little later, he declares that between the races white and black, “to me there was never any difference . . . you looked in the eye and there was a *man*” (KA 176). He explains to Kilrain what happened when the two Southerners, the minister and the professor, visited his home. The minister had lectured Chamberlain that northerners like him were not capable of seeing the Southern point of view, because “you have to live with the Negro to understand.” When the minister had told Chamberlain “that a Negro was not a man,” Chamberlain had left the room (KA 177). Chamberlain explains that the encounter with the two men had angered him but that “something at the time said: You cannot be utterly right” (KA 178).

The moral imperative toward freedom for the slave for Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain is restrained, then, by the awareness that many Southerners believed just as fervently in their “property” rights. It is also limited by an awareness that his ability to bring that imperative into being must reckon with the checks on it brought forth by such men as the Baptist minister. Able to lay claim to a more immediate stake in the way emancipation unfolds, the minister is not easily dismissed. Chamberlain knows there are so many more who agree with both the minister and the professor. Chamberlain is unlike his brother, then, who can

dismiss the Confederate cause as “political fast-talking.” He is unlike him in the way the icon JFK is unlike the late 60s icon RFK. The deliberate, hyper-solicitous policy-maker is unlike the abrasive, single-minded policy advocate.

The icon JFK was equally circumspect in the way he thought of race. Nearly all the memoirists from his administration credit him with a genuine sympathy for the cause of equal rights for the African-American but, unfortunately, they say he could not act on his ideals immediately due to a dependence on a fragile coalition of Democrats that partially owed its possession of the presidency and of majorities in the other two branches of government to a pro-segregationist Southern bloc. As a result, Kennedy had to keep the pace of reform slow, thus trying the patience of those who took part in the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>6</sup> But in under three years in office, conclude the memoirists, often at his own political expense Kennedy had done much to forward the integration of schools and universities, had done away with by executive order, race discrimination in public housing and in the federal workforce and had proposed a far-reaching civil rights bill to Congress, which Lyndon Johnson would sign later. Arthur Schlesinger would sum up Kennedy’s achievements in the issue of race:

The Negro leaders had never doubted that Kennedy was on their side. But they had feared he regarded the civil rights problem as only one among many problems. By the summer of 1963 he had clearly made it the major problem next to the pursuit of peace itself (*A Thousand Days*, 976).

Theodore Sorensen ends the chapter in his book *Kennedy* entitled “The Fight For Equal Rights” with a depiction of the Kennedy of the Fall of 1963 as a willing political martyr to the cause:

Privately he confided to a Negro leader that “this issue could cost me the election, but we’re not turning back.” Publicly he remained

cautiously optimistic. The people in time will face up to the truth, he said, and the Republicans will live up to their legacy as the party of Lincoln. He realized that he could never pick up enough Negro and liberal votes (in addition to those he already had) to offset the votes this issue would cost him in the North as well as the South (506).

In an adroitly concise synopsis of what the result of the truncated JFK term had been for his supporters, the President's secretary, Evelyn Lincoln, would acknowledge, if only implicitly, that Kennedy had only been able to start to address certain urgent problems, including that of racial inequality, but that his "mind and heart" had been the source of the impetus:

He said, "Let us begin." He was a man for beginnings. From his mind and heart, I think we will find, has come the beginning of peace and the turning aside from what was sure to lead to war. We are beginning to find the beginnings of making some of America's too-long-delayed promises come true: a land where children are educated as they deserve to be, where the older generation is not forgotten and neglected, where skin color may be no more important than eye color, and where idle hands are seen as the worst kind of waste (371).

For Kennedy's defenders, then, Kennedy's intentions were only of the best but he was aware, too, of the powerful social forces that could make his intentions moot through legislative means and through the marshalling of public opinion. Still, part of Kennedy's intent eventually won out with his executive orders and with the posthumous passage of his Civil Rights bill. Despite the moderation that often exasperated black leaders, they had to admit JFK had used his office to empower black Americans by increasing their access to the public resources that had been denied them in the South. Meanwhile, Kennedy had averted the occurrence of the large-scale riots that plagued the terms of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. In those tense years, then, it would be natural to expect an author to emphasize a hero's tendency toward conciliation with regard to race. It would

be nothing strange to endow a fictionalized Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain with an empathetic consciousness of at least part of the Southern slaveowner's view.

The presence in the novel of Chamberlain's anecdote about the Southern visitors, which is told twice, once in elliptical form in Chamberlain's stream of consciousness and again when Chamberlain tells it to Kilrain, may not have been warranted by the documentary record. The one full-length biography of Chamberlain to which Shaara undoubtedly had access, Willard M. Wallace's 1960 *Soul of a Lion*, includes no mention of any visit from Southern professors or clergy to Chamberlain's home prior to the war. Recent biographers have also found no evidence such a visit ever took place. In the voluminous correspondence Chamberlain left (which even includes the most personal of letters to his wife Fanny detailing the state of their marriage at one point in a successful bid to dissuade her from resorting to divorce as well as his thoughts on the coming of war and other political matters) one would expect to find such a meeting mentioned. Shaara, feeling it necessary in his era and from his point-of-view to establish Chamberlain's credentials as a relative moderate within the spectrum of abolitionist thought, gave him a bit of supposed life history that would reveal Chamberlain's moderation in the retelling.<sup>7</sup>

Added to the likenesses of physical form and of personality, the apparent moderation of Kennedy on race forms one more of the ways the historical Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain could have drawn the interest of a novelist working in the post-Vietnam War, post-Civil Rights Movement era. The yearning for the tactically brilliant, intellectual, rhetorically effective, moderate Kennedy-figure who could save the Union in under three hours was an understandable feeling in that period and one so powerful that even an attempted escape into the past like

*The Killer Angels* could not be free of its manifestations.

### **Conclusion**

When Michael Shaara declares to his readers that what they are getting in *The Killer Angels* is “the story of the Battle of Gettysburg, told from the viewpoints of Robert E. Lee and James Longstreet and some of the other men who fought there,” he is admitting other tales of Gettysburg have been told, but assures the reader his story is different, first for the novel’s reliance on “the words of the men themselves” and second because Shaara “has avoided historical opinions” (*KA* xiii). To add to the impression he is striving for, that of the journalistic, detached observer, something the hilariously pro-Confederate English correspondent Arthur Fremantle is *not*, the chapter headings have what amount to datelines. The first section is simply entitled Monday June 29, 1863, and each section is as precisely dated.

But historical opinion creeps in, however sincere Shaara undoubtedly is about his novel’s mission. In the choices of Lee, Longstreet and Chamberlain for the book’s main characters, in the cultivated, earnest, cool, wry, improvising personality Chamberlain is given, and in the cultural touchstone with the Kennedys Shaara was confident he could trade on, historical opinion of a kind can be discerned. The choice to give Chamberlain rather than Meade or Hancock so many chapters implies that the latter, who were up to then more storied soldiers, lacked some necessary literary quality, most likely the self-aware and conscientious heroism associated with the recently martyred president which Chamberlain’s character apparently offered.

Shaara need not be playing a sly trick, either, at least consciously. A novelist so interested in what kept officers of both armies fighting can only

accommodate so many characters in one book. Jeff Shaara's prequel and sequel projects prove such examination in Civil War fiction (and lately the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and Mexican War fiction) can go on inexhaustibly. The choices of whose story and which events to narrate being limited for practical reasons to begin with, other reasons are bound to slip in, from the political, as I propose, to the exceedingly personal.<sup>8</sup> When the cultural critic Frederic Jameson defines ideology at one point in *The Political Unconscious* (1981), as he is explaining why the immediate historical circumstances around an artistic work's creation ought to be examined, he makes clear that the political, which includes in his sense of the word social, cannot help being included in the artist's work. It is already there in the work's very conception:

We may suggest that from this perspective, ideology is not something which informs or invests symbolic production; rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal "solutions" to unresolvable social contradictions (79).

Under Jameson's scheme, readers should not be surprised to find *The Killer Angels* attempting a "solution" to America's loss of self-esteem as a military power following the Tet Offensive, the rise of the war protest movement and the Nixonian quests for a politically acceptable withdrawal from Vietnam. Shaara's recruitment of a surrogate Kennedy (who gets only one protectively helpful brother in the novel, though two were present with the nonfictional Chamberlain during the battle) works to reconcile the country to its reverses by placing on display the kind of enlightened warrior Kennedy was and implying that like Chamberlain, he and his brother would have fought their way out of the treacherous thicket of Vietnam using clever means unavailable to the more

orthodox fighters represented by Lee and by Presidents Johnson and Nixon. The Little Round Top fantasy (that is not quite fantasy) presented many Americans with a scenario they could substitute for the deception, disgrace and mediocrity that their media increasingly revealed to have been the rule during the Vietnam War. Meanwhile, on the other side, along Seminary Ridge, a reenactment of the American crisis over the Vietnam War's strategy, tactics and generational schism was taking place, suggesting "solutions" of its own.

### End Notes

<sup>1</sup>Shaara xiii. Hereafter cited as *KA*.

<sup>2</sup>In *The Civil War 100*, a 1998 ranking of the 100 "most influential" personalities of the Civil War era, Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain doesn't make the cut. Such figures as Henry Wirz, Lincoln's first vice president Hannibal Hamlin, and mediocre Confederate General Earl Van Dorn make the list, but Chamberlain is relegated to the Honorable Mention section with the likes of Varina Davis, another mediocre Confederate general A.P. Hill and the exemplary but unknown Union General John Logan (Wooster 250-251).

<sup>3</sup>Email correspondence. June 22, 2003.

<sup>4</sup>Some question arose among historians over whether or not the charge began with Chamberlain's order or with the advance of Lieutenant Holman Melcher who called for the regiment to follow. This is mainly due to the accounts of the episode in Theodore Gerrish's 1882 autobiography *Army Life: A Private's Reminiscences of the War* and an 1892 letter written by Ellis Spear, one of Chamberlain's captains. In both, the men of the Twentieth hesitate when ordered to charge, only going when Melcher does. But for the most part, Chamberlain is still credited with ordering and taking part in the charge even if he was not the first down the hill. (Trulock 146-7, n443; Golay 162-163).

<sup>5</sup>The real Chamberlain expressed the reasons for the war as he saw them quite differently. In an 1866 lecture entitled "Loyalty," which he gave in Philadelphia to the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, an association of ex-Union officers, he declared that while the founding fathers had meant slavery to "be limited, not extended" and eventually had hoped a fair means would be found to "wipe that blot off from our escutcheon," the war had actually arisen due to the threat by seceding states. The war had come about, said Chamberlain,

because “the integrity and the existence of the People of the United States had been assailed in open and bitter war” (qtd. in Trulock 60) There is no mention in “Loyalty” of the war as an opportunity to advance the abolitionist cause. His memoir *The Passing of the Armies* also ascribes the cause of the war to an attack on the nation’s integrity and not to an altruistic concern for slaves in the South. (Chamberlain 10).

<sup>6</sup>For a detailed study of the slow pace Kennedy adopted where Civil Rights were concerned see Stern’s *Calculating Visions* 40-112.

<sup>7</sup>No mention of any meeting with Southern Baptist ministers turns up in biographies of Chamberlain by such authors as Wallace, Trulock, Golay or Perry.

<sup>8</sup>See the excellent 2001 Greystone documentary, *Michael Shaara*, part of A&E’s Unknown Civil War series (available at [www.greystone.com](http://www.greystone.com)), which includes interviews from all of Shaara’s family members. Shaara’s ex-wife, daughter and son are each persuasive that the characters of Lee, Chamberlain, Longstreet and Armistead all come from facets Michael’s own complex personality. Lee’s heart disease, described in quiet but ever present malignance, was informed by Shaara’s own experience of a nearly fatal heart attack in 1966. Longstreet’s depression and Armistead’s longing for closeness were both well known to the troubled Shaara. In Chamberlain, says Jeff Shaara in the documentary, his writing teacher father saw “the character who goes from the classroom to the battlefield. . . . I think there was something about that that appealed to my father’s sense of himself.” Michael Shaara, a popular Florida State teacher, had also been in the Army although, unlike Chamberlain, his service occurred during peacetime.



**CHAPTER FIVE: “YOU MAY HEAR OF IT, GENERAL:”  
LONGSTREET AND LEE AS DOVE AND HAWK IN *THE KILLER  
ANGELS***

As Michael Shaara’s novel, *The Killer Angels*, tells it, General James Longstreet, commander of the crucial First Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia, is yet another unsung hero of the battle of Gettysburg--despite his side’s loss of the field. He earns this distinction, not because of the quick thinking credited to Chamberlain, but through his moral courage. Certainly, he does show physical courage, displaying blatant disregard for rifle and cannon fire, except where it would needlessly injure his men. But the source of the tension in the novel’s Confederate sequences is the confrontation between Longstreet and his superior, the already legendary (the men barely allow themselves to laugh in his presence) General Robert E. Lee, to whom Longstreet has shown and continues to show a filial devotion. When the army, on its invasion track into southern Pennsylvania, runs into the forward detachments of George Meade’s Army of the Potomac on July 1, Lee decides to attack the Federals, breaking a promise he had made to Longstreet back in Virginia a few weeks before that Lee would stick to defensive tactics during his invasion of the north. “But the situation has changed,” Lee explains to Longstreet after watching the first engagement near Gettysburg end with the men in blue moving back (KA 111). It’s only one of several discussions the two generals hold on battle tactics, and as the novel unfolds, Longstreet’s successive attempts to convince Lee to wait for, rather than actively seek, battle, will be the counterpart to Chamberlain’s ordeal on Little Round Top.

In the dual between Lee and Longstreet over how best to fight the battle, it is possible to see the playing out of the binary scheme by which policymakers and arbiters of opinion in the late 1960s and early 1970s were often divided, sometimes embracing the relevant label, sometimes having it applied by others. Lee, with his aggressive philosophy of war strategy, his willingness to sacrifice large numbers of troops and, above all, his paternal mien of command, embodies the Vietnam War “hawk,” while Longstreet, with his recommendation of a withdrawal (if only to a point a little to the southeast), his anguish over the loss of his men and his being of the next generation with respect to both age and his preferred mode of military operation, may be read as the Vietnam era “dove,” transposed onto a mid-nineteenth century battlefield. Michael Shaara’s choice to base his portrayal of Longstreet on the most favorable accounts of his conduct at Gettysburg (using dialogue from Longstreet’s memoirs and post-war writings) loads the dice, so to speak, so that the result in the novel vindicates the point of view of Longstreet and, by extension, the doves of the Vietnam War era. In neither case, however, is the dove’s vindication final or happy. For doves of Vietnam and for Shaara’s dove of Gettysburg, the tens of thousands who would die, sustain injuries or sustain psychic trauma and (especially for Longstreet) a public all too ready to brand dissent traitorous would pall any feeling of satisfaction at being right. As Longstreet was charged by defenders of Lee’s legacy with sabotaging Lee’s war plan two days in a row, the doves of the time in which Shaara wrote would be criticized for cowardice and for indirectly aiding the North Vietnam effort.<sup>1</sup>

As the author’s son admitted in email correspondence with this writer, “If there is one historical flaw in *The Killer Angels*, (as has been suggested by a

number of historians), it is my father's acceptance of Longstreet's version of events, particularly on the 2nd day." Michael Shaara had his choice among several things to do with the Longstreet of his novel. He could have complemented his mostly sympathetic portrait of Lee with a spiteful, stubborn, slow Longstreet that might have pleased more historians, especially those more partial to Lee. This way the book would have been of a piece with the Lost Cause mythology that arose just after the death of Lee in 1870. Lee would become the movement's patron saint. Inaugurated by a Longstreet archenemy, General Jubal Early, who gave ceremonial speeches that lay out the mythology's central tenets, the Lost Cause extolled the virtues of Lee, principally his modesty, good manners and indomitability on the field of battle. The Civil War, according to those veterans--especially those from Virginia--who agreed with Early, president of the Southern Historical Society and a kind of editor-at-large of its influential monthly journal, *The Southern Historical Society Papers*, had ended with the wrong side winning. The forces of sheer numbers and soulless industrial capacity had won out, its way now clear to remake the South in its image, if Southerners allowed it. This view, which began as a regional one, soon spread throughout the South and even made its way into the north, contributing both to an increase in general respect for figures like Lee, Jackson and Davis, but also helping defeat the Reconstruction movement in the public mind of the north. Longstreet fell astray in the opinion of Lost Cause proponents when he gave a post-war interview criticizing Lee's strategy at Gettysburg and when he compounded the offense by joining the Republican Party and representing a Republican administration as a surveyor at the port of New Orleans. In adopting the Lost Cause view of Longstreet as an ineffectual stick in the mud, Shaara would have been carrying on

in a long cultural tradition with the most reactionary of roots (Wilson 119-138; Piston 104-128). In *The Killer Angels*, Lee would retain his noble bearing, but the cause itself will be as irrelevant to him as it is to Longstreet.

Shaara might have given Longstreet a lesser role in the Confederate chapters of his book, much as he does with General Meade, whose decisions were certainly crucial to any understanding of the events of those three days but who receives only glancing consideration in the novel. He might have ranged to any degree between making Longstreet a mere cameo performer and the option he has chosen to make Longstreet so central. The decision to feature Longstreet's arguments with Lee rather than, say, the deliberations of Lee with A.P. Hill was not made arbitrarily. A display of the historical Longstreet's best qualities will be the narrative's lynchpin. His worst will either be left out entirely or turned into virtues.

### **Longstreet Confronts Lee**

In his consultations with Lee, Longstreet shows the persistence that would lead Lee to call him after Antietam, "my old war horse." Rather than being satisfied with Lee's rejection of his advice to swing southeast of Gettysburg and dig in behind breastworks had ended the matter, Longstreet continues to press his case at nearly every opportunity, despite Lee's growing irritation. In lobbying Lee so hard, Longstreet puts at risk his future credibility as an advisor (what if Lee's plan should succeed as so many of his other risky plans have done?) and the friendship he and Lee have built over their time as soldiers. Longstreet's position in the esteem of his new nation, if not that of his commander, however, is more precarious than it would appear, since he has only recently replaced the late and much-lamented "Stonewall Jackson" as Lee's second-in-command.

Before Longstreet begins his effort to change Lee's mind, we already have some idea of the difficulty of the task. In a conversation with an aide who has reported qualms of conscience expressed among the troops over the decision to invade the north, Lee quotes from the figure who perhaps exerted the most influence on him as a military strategist: "Napoleon once said, 'The logical end to defensive warfare is surrender.' You might tell him that" (KA 79). The first time Longstreet and Lee discuss tactics in the novel is a mere skirmish, but already the respective philosophies of both men are clear. For Longstreet the tactical defensive is the best option for most circumstances, and is especially appropriate for those the army now finds itself in. The newly-installed General Meade "will have Washington on his back, urging him to throw us out of Pennsylvania." Lee also reads Meade's situation, but predicts he'll be cautious. What Longstreet thinks of as concessions to recent changes in technology, namely the innovations in rifle design that increased a soldier's accuracy at hitting long distance targets, Lee thinks of as "bright theories" that "so rarely worked." Lee points out that Meade would surely expect the Confederates to swing to the southeast to try to cut off Meade's line of communications with Washington. Longstreet answers that it is "because he fears it." (84). At this, Lee ends the talk of tactics, not yet irritated at this point, only thankful for a subordinate who is not afraid to differ with his commander. But the battle of Lee's Brain has only begun.

The next stage of this battle occurs the afternoon of July 1. Confederate corps arriving at Gettysburg have encountered Union cavalry and an advanced detachment of infantry. At first Lee is discomfited by division commander Henry Heth's apparent haste in engaging the bluecoats. The week-long absence of Lee's own cavalry, Jeb Stuart having taken it on an impromptu raid of southern

Pennsylvania for wagons and guns, has left him vulnerable to surprises of this sort. In short order, messengers apprise Lee of the near proximity of two Confederate divisions led by Rodes and by Early. Aware that happenstance has given him an opportunity to do real damage to a good part of the Union army, Lee orders Heth to attack, knowing he'll be well-supported now by the other divisions soon to arrive. The consequence is a Union retreat, which Lee wants followed up with more attacks. Longstreet, having just ridden up, is of another opinion. He makes no effort to express it diplomatically:

He turned, saw Longstreet watching him. He had the look of a man suppressing his thoughts. Lee said, "Say it, General."

"We shouldn't have attacked here, General. Heth had his orders."

Lee waved a hand, "I know that. But we have pushed them back."

"In the morning we will be outnumbered."

Lee shrugged. Numbers were meaningless. "Had I paid attention to numbers, General . . ." Lee left the next unsaid.

Longstreet said, "If we moved south, toward Washington, we could fight on ground of our choosing."

"The enemy is *here*, General. We did not want the fight, but the fight is here. What if I ask this army to retreat?"

"They will do as you order" (KA 112).

In this second debate, Lee has brought in a new counterargument, the idea that the tactical maneuver counseled by Longstreet will look to the troops like a retreat and therefore be damaging to morale. For the remainder of the book Lee will rely on this possibility as his only reason for rejecting the defensive move Longstreet advocates. As his impatience with his second-in-command grows, he also makes a practice of excluding all alternatives to attack at Gettysburg, simply because the "enemy is *here*." Though Longstreet has not been gentle about making his points ("If Meade is there . . . it is because he wants you to attack

him.”), he doesn’t yet raise Lee’s ire, only a little irritation. At this point, Lee is only “growing weary of this” (KA 112).

Lee’s concern for what might come of the mere appearance of making Longstreet’s proposed move is shared by General Richard Ewell, who reacts with incredulity when Lee tells him what Longstreet has proposed. Even though Ewell himself has disappointed Lee by not seizing Culp’s Hill after the Federal retreat, Ewell feels no shyness about denigrating Longstreet’s plan in Lee’s presence. Ewell’s very influential division commander (and the future interpreter of Lee’s legacy) Jubal Early is in attendance too, already determining the worth of Longstreet’s plan: “To move this entire Corps, in the face of a fortified enemy?” He smiled slightly with a touch of the disdain for which he was rapidly becoming notorious” (KA 139). Satisfied again that what he calls retreat is not a viable option, Lee tells the generals to be ready to attack (though, significantly he does not say when the attack will be mounted).

The third parley between Lee and Longstreet occurs early the next morning, this time with Lee trying to change Longstreet’s mind, arguing that when in the enemy’s territory battle should be given quickly to avoid being cut off from one’s supply line. “We must hit him now,” Lee urges. “We pushed him yesterday; he will remember it. The men are ready. I see no alternative” (KA 184). Longstreet can only answer, “Yes, sir,” then receive his orders to attack the Union’s right flank. Now that tactics for the day have been decided, Longstreet merely asks to wait for as many of his outlying units to arrive as possible. Lee tells him he can wait for another hour for Law’s brigade, but Pickett’s division is simply too far away must be counted out of the action. In a moment that will be significant later, General John Bell Hood, one of Longstreet’s division

commanders, suggests Lee allow him to send one brigade a little farther around the Union's left flank. "I think I can get into their wagon trains back there," he says. Lee is not persuaded. "Let's concentrate, General, concentrate. I can't risk losing a brigade," Lee replies (KA 187). In none of the memoirs from Longstreet or Hood is Hood's request and Lee's rejection at the morning meeting of July 2 mentioned. Hood's 1879 book, *Advance and Retreat* quotes verbatim from an 1875 letter Hood wrote to Longstreet, in which Hood indicates he did not conceive the idea of a brigade-level swing to the Union left until the mid-afternoon, after he had received reports from his scouts about the Federal position. It was not until Hood's troops had reached Emmitsburg Road, the place from which Lee wanted the attacks to begin, that Hood realized that an attack from there would be a difficult proposition because of an unforeseen advance of Federal troops and unlikely to result in the capture of the high ground Lee prized:

I found that in making the attack according to orders, viz. : up the Emmetsburg road [sic], I should have first to encounter and drive off their advanced line of battle; secondly, at the base and along the slope of the mountain, to confront immense boulders of stone, so massed together as to form narrow openings, which would break our ranks and cause the men to scatter whilst climbing up the rocky precipice. I found, moreover, that my division would be exposed to a heavy fire from the main line of the enemy in position on the crest of the high range, of which Round Top was the extreme left, and, by reason of the concavity of the enemy's main line, that we would be subject to a destructive fire in flank and rear, as well as in front; and deemed it almost an impossibility to clamber along the boulders up this steep and rugged mountain, and under this number of cross fires, put the enemy to flight (Hood 58).

Hood simply did not know all this at the time of the meeting with Lee. This information came from his scouts and from on-the-spot observation. As it



turned out, Union corps commander Daniel Sickles, without having been ordered by Meade to do so, had brought his men quite a distance forward from the line of defense the rest of the Union army was occupying along Cemetery Ridge. Seeing the situation for what it had become, one which put his division in what he judged to be wasteful danger, Hood began sending his messages to Longstreet.

Longstreet's memoirs, *From Manassas to Appomattox* (1895), echo Hood's version, possibly because Hood's letter is the source for Longstreet's own placement in time of Hood's realization about the Union position and suggestion as to how to respond to it (Hood's proposed move to the southeast): "As soon as he passed the Emmetsburg [sic] road, he sent to report of the great advantage of moving on by his right and to the enemy's rear." And how had Hood come to this conclusion? "His scouting parties had reported that there was nothing between them and the enemy's trains" (367). Thus, there is no basis in the primary source record for Hood's knowledge as of the early July 2 meeting of the enemy's exposed flank and therefore none for Lee expressly forbidding the brigade movement Hood proposes in the novel.<sup>2</sup> The effect of what can only be called novelistic license here is to make Longstreet's later refusal (repeated three times after the initial rejection) to allow Hood to make a southeastward move in the afternoon seem like admirable loyalty to Lee rather than a ridiculous exhibition of pique or a misunderstanding. Absent Lee's refusal of Hood's suggestion, readers may believe Longstreet is applying Lee's strategic orders to brigade-level tactics, where Longstreet himself has wide discretion. Whatever the cause, most historians agree Longstreet's stubbornness in this instance is a blunder. He should have used his discretion and allowed Hood to make the flanking move.<sup>3</sup>

Another case of Shaara supplying orders Lee may never have given is revealed in a conversation Longstreet has with Captain Samuel Johnston. Having scouted the Union left flank early that morning (but somehow without detecting the presence of infantry camped out near the Round Tops), Johnston is given the responsibility of leading three divisions of Longstreet's First Corps to a position that runs perpendicular to Emmitsburg Road. In the novel, Johnston tells Longstreet, "General Lee has ordered me to conduct you to the field" (*KA* 189). But Johnston's own account of the episode contradicts this and it seems preposterous that Lee would entrust the movements of a corps to a scout no matter how thoroughly he said he had inspected the terrain and the Union position (Johnston qtd. in Wert 262 ). In addition, Lee's customary reliance on the discretion of his subordinates makes it unlikely he would have insisted the corps follow Johnston regardless of what the division commanders observed while the march proceeded. Johnston's role here in the novel underscores Longstreet's version of a Lee who had decided to attack his way regardless of contrary advice or the positions of the two armies. In Longstreet's own account of day two at Gettysburg, Johnston's temporary authority is there only by Longstreet's assumption. In the novel, Johnston takes on this authority by formally declaring it himself. Rather than having to rely on Longstreet's word, as readers of his memoirs and articles must do, readers of the novel hear from Johnston himself that Lee has indeed assigned him the "responsibility for an entire corps" (*KA* 189).

As Longstreet's corps, most of it at any rate, is beginning its march to Lee's designated staging area for a series of brigade attacks on the Union's left flank, Lee rides alongside Longstreet a short distance. The two generals here

indulge in a desultory discussion on politics, Longstreet admitting to Lee to feeling troubled over breaking the oath he'd sworn upon entering the US military to defend the Constitution. "Let's not think on this today," Lee says, but cannot help adding his own answers, defense of home and trust in God. "There was a higher duty to Virginia. . . . The issue is in God's hands. We will live with His decision; whichever way it goes" (KA 191). Not for Lee the soul-searching, the ceaseless self-examination so endemic to Longstreet's character here and to the doves of Shaara's era. Rather than looking back at the past, in the novel Lee (except in his aged battlefield tactics) looks resolutely forward. His second-in-command (though his tactics may prefigure those of the next century) dwells at times on the recent deaths of his children, broods on his broken oath to defend the US Constitution, and worries about the high probability that his comrades-in-arms, many of them (like Pickett, Hood and Armistead) old friends, may perish under his orders:

Hood took [Longstreet's] hand, held it for a moment. Sometimes you touched a man like this and it was the last time, and the next time you saw him he was cold and white and bloodless, and the warmth was gone forever (KA 188).

Lee is different though, and on this bit of march tells Longstreet so with a cautionary undertone to his words. Longstreet, to truly excel as a general, must become more inured to the sacrifice of the lives of the men he has trained and grown to love. Lee describes the "trap" he does not quite accuse Longstreet of falling into, but Longstreet does realize Lee's drift: "But . . . that is the trap. You can hold nothing back when you attack. You must commit yourself totally. And yet, if they all die, a man must ask himself, will it have been worth it"<sup>4</sup> (KA 192). The conversation appears in none of the primary sources that would have

recorded it, although one of Longstreet's articles does imply Lee was present with him at that time ("Lee's Right Wing," 340-41). But what is said is consistent with Lee's record of taking the offensive and Longstreet's oft-stated preference for the defensive. Considering the other topics available to the two generals, especially those relating to the immediate circumstances (terrain, logistics, the fighting readiness of the respective divisions), it must be counted significant that the topic at this moment is appropriate command psychology. Lee's comments are reminiscent of the accusations leveled on the doves by the hawks in the years just before *The Killer Angels* was published as the death toll of American soldiers rose into the tens of thousands with no hint of surrender from Hanoi.

Though Lyndon Johnson's private grouching about the "nervous nellies" he thought ran the anti-war movement presaged this kind of rhetoric, he was unwilling to be as direct as the Nixon administration would be later for fear of being charged with the "liberal McCarthyism" one of his advisors warned him against. (Small 21, 67). Just before *The Killer Angels* was published, accusations of cowardice from official sources would become more commonplace. Spiro Agnew's Ft. Lauderdale speech, which he gave the week after four students were killed at Kent State University as they demonstrated against the war, and in which he called universities "circus tents or psychiatric centers for overprivileged, under-disciplined, irresponsible children of the well-to-do blasé permissivists" was par for the course (qtd. in Levy 159-160).

The rhetoric Lee uses about the proper way to conduct the war, with its contention that an attacker "can hold nothing back" and "must commit . . . totally" puts him in the company of those who criticized Lyndon Johnson's conduct of the Vietnam War because of what they considered timidity (*KA* 192). Purveyors of

this view were represented early by the Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater, whose acceptance speech at his party's 1964 convention accused Johnson of lacking commitment: "We are at war in Vietnam," he said, "And yet the President . . . refuses to say--refuses to say, mind you, whether or not the objective over there is victory" (qtd. in Levy 78). Goldwater was joined in his calls for Johnson to hit the North Vietnamese harder, with bombings of Hanoi, with the mining of its Haiphong harbor and with more intense bombings of its industrial facilities, by Democratic senators like John Stennis of Mississippi, Henry "Scoop" Jackson of Washington, Stuart Symington of Missouri, Howard Cannon of Nevada and Richard Russell of Georgia. Until late 1967 and early 1968, when it became clear that intense aerial bombardment was hindering the North Vietnamese war effort only a little if at all, these men consistently urged Johnson to prosecute the war more forcefully, as many generals were urging. (Shapley 428). Despite the prominence of these hawkish Democrats, Richard Nixon, speaking in support of 1966 GOP candidates, accused the Democratic party of not committing itself totally, citing the twenty-five senators and ninety Congressmen from the party "whose cries for peace at any price has given heart to Hanoi" (qtd in Levy 79). The Republican convention of 1968 approved a far more measured plank on the war than it had done in its previous meeting but still deemed unacceptable the "peace at any price" option and refused any "camouflaged surrender of legitimate United States or allied interests" (qtd in Levy 79).

The appearance of the rhetoric of "go all the way or stay home" in Lee's admonition to Longstreet (Longstreet does take it as such) is another manifestation of the hawk-dove debate. But while Longstreet argues his points

here very moderately, never contemplating measures so extreme as mutiny (or “fragging”), outright disobedience of Lee’s order, surrender to the Union or resignation (yet), Lee’s speech is representative of the most radical camp who had a part in the Vietnam-era debate. To employ an anachronistic analogy, if Longstreet represents that legion of Americans who favored a less aggressive approach to the war (like the so-called “enclave” strategy, which would have concentrated US troops in strictly defensive positions near the cities, coasts and other key locations) , Lee represents those like Barry Goldwater who favored the use of overwhelming force so as to get the war over with quickly.<sup>5</sup> The version of the hawk-dove dispute in *The Killer Angels* lists decidedly to the Right.

Another dubious bit of military history interposes itself as Longstreet and Lee are interrupted by the approach of a messenger from Hood, who tells Lee that Hood has spotted a northern force marching onto Little Round Top. “Tell General Hood that General Meade might have saved himself the trouble,” Lee replies. “We’ll have that hill before night” (*KA* 193). Though the moment allows Lee to exhibit bravado and the novel to anticipate Chamberlain’s spirited defense, no contemporary sources have Hood sending a message to Lee about the disposition of Federals on Little Round Top. Lee may indeed have conferred with Longstreet either during the march or just after and ordered a slight change in Hood’s starting position and the order in which he would attack. While one of Longstreet’s articles implies Lee’s presence at the early part of the march to positions, Hood’s letter to Longstreet includes no mention of any courier traffic between himself and Lee (“Lee’s Right Wing,” 340-41; Hood 57-58). Again, the novel has offered up evidence Lee will not allow any alternative to the plan he ordered his corps and divisions to follow that morning. Apprised of a new factor

that might call for an adjustment, Lee merely utters a boast and rides off.

Longstreet the dove looks all the more reasonable.

In the novel, the exchange between Longstreet and Hood that occurs just after Hood stops and arranges his men in a line perpendicular to Emmitsburg Road in accordance with Longstreet's orders happens just as Hood and Longstreet describe it in their respective accounts. Three times Hood requests by courier message to be allowed to flank the Union forces. Three times Longstreet repeats the rejection, the first time explaining that he had "been telling General Lee that same damn thing for two days, move to the right, and there aint no point in bringing it up again" (KA 198). Evidently, Longstreet intends to observe Lee's order on the tactical level as well as on the strategic and, contrary to contemporary accounts, he has heard Lee prohibit Hood from making any tactical move to his right. Not even in the popular twentieth-century narratives of the battle that are relatively sympathetic toward Longstreet's criticisms of Lee's plans (Foote's and Catton's come to mind here) is Lee depicted as specifically ruling out any Hood-proposed flanking move.<sup>6</sup>

A few hours after Longstreet's attack fails, running up against troops Lee had not figured to be there (including Chamberlain's Twentieth Maine) and against reinforcements that kept coming, the narrative finds Longstreet at the hospital, briefly consoling the wounded Hood. Longstreet then sends scouts off to look over the Union left so as to avoid the confusion that probably delayed, disclosed and doomed today's attack. T.J. Goree, the Texas captain he counts on to make sure the reconnaissance is done, becomes the conduit for the first sampling of the withering wind of criticism Longstreet is to experience throughout the remainder of his life for his conduct at Gettysburg. But in this

case, rather than being castigated for not moving with the necessary speed or for his lack of faith in the effort, Longstreet finds himself questioned for what he did do:

Goree said, "You may hear of it, General. I had to hit this fella. They all said the attack was your fault and if General Lee knowed he wouldn't have ordered it and I just couldn't just stand there and I couldn't say right out what I felt, so I had to hit this one fella. Pretty hard. Had to do it. Ain' goin' to apologize neither. No time. But. Thought you ought to know" (KA 240).

That Goree's response so alarms Longstreet is jarring considering that Longstreet does not show himself to be particularly squeamish with regard to fisticuffs.

Later, in Armistead's last narrative, we learn of "a savagery in Longstreet they all knew well" that "was always there" and which "was an impressive thing" (KA 319). But as Goree makes his confession it is evident that Longstreet views its import with a gravity that seems out of proportion for a mere physical squabble among subordinates. Longstreet even asks if the officer Goree hit is dead. Goree, too, is worried, but only about the way Longstreet may be perceived. And in this instance his words do apply to both the Civil War and the Vietnam-era contexts:

"Thing is, if anything bad happens now, they all blame it on you. I seen it comin'. They can't blame General Lee. Not no more. So they take it out on you. You got to watch yourself, General" (KA 240). There are shades here of the manner by which Lost Cause adherents like Jubal Early will extol Lee at Longstreet's expense. Though the harbinger Goree conveys is anachronistic (Longstreet has not yet given the interview to northern historian William Swinton that would arouse such ire because he deigned criticize Lee's July 3rd decisions), the concern both he and Longstreet show to avoid violent incidents for fear of the



inevitable public disapproval they would thereby incur seems to come from an era even further into the future.

In Longstreet's next conversation, this one with his adjutant Moxley Sorrel, the General makes a special point of getting an accurate count of the numbers of his corps' dead and wounded. As with his request for a night reconnaissance, he does this on his own authority. He does not encounter Lee until after he has told Sorrel not to "play it down." It is a tough assignment. "The men tend to suppress the truth," Sorrel explains, possibly because the men fear getting their superiors in trouble with General Lee (*KA* 241). With these hard numbers, Longstreet hopes to convince Lee the two tired divisions of Longstreet's corps that fought that day are in no shape to make another attack tomorrow.

With Longstreet's request for an accurate body count, the novel departs from the documentary record, although it would have been customary for such accountings to be made after engagements. The decision to include this accounting in the novel, however, may represent an inverted version of the "body count mania" that US servicemen perceived and felt during their time in Vietnam. The tallying of enemy dead in Southeast Asia, which was often done by guess work and often prone to being inflated, was part of a more general emphasis on statistical indicators begun early in the war by Robert McNamara (Shapley 250-252). But later, the body counts became a notorious phenomenon and came to be associated with the strategic failure and the moral bankruptcy of the Pentagon's Vietnam policy. Because it was difficult to produce news of battles won or of territory conquered, pressure came from above to report that impressive numbers of enemy fighters had been killed. The result was a tacit incentive placed on

indiscriminate killing. As the war was winding down, many servicemen testified in informal hearings held by such organizations as Vietnam Veterans Against the War to the frequent practice of measuring the war's success by tallying up the number of enemy troops killed and the unfortunate effects of the practice.<sup>7</sup> In *The Killer Angels*, however, Longstreet requests an accurate body count on his own troops. Rather than use this information to argue for his unit's success or to jockey for his own promotion, he intends to argue that his tattered divisions should be kept out of tomorrow's action, possibly endangering his status in General Lee's eyes. The novel has brought in a version of the "body count" phenomenon that is exactly overturned to the extent that Longstreet conspicuously demands Sorrel take the trouble to get accurate numbers. He does not want estimates to be massaged in favor of optimism as commanders did during the war in Southeast Asia. Longstreet might have been made to tell Sorrel he wanted him to err, if at all, toward larger numbers. Larger numbers would have buttressed his case with Lee. But the novel is so intent on inverting the Vietnam body count scheme and on a sympathetic portrayal of the dovish Longstreet that he is instead made to ask for accuracy. While the Vietnam body counts had the effect of dehumanizing the opponent, Longstreet's are meant to humanize his divisions for Lee.

Armed with the results of Sorrel's survey and with reports from scouts that show his flanking move might still work, Longstreet confronts Lee one last time. Longstreet hopes to talk Lee out of launching a frontal attack against Union positions General Meade had had three days to shore up. Lee does agree to spare the divisions Longstreet had led into yesterday's action, not only because of their state of depletion but because they'd be needed to hold off the Union cavalry or a

possible countercharge. But the one fresh division of Longstreet's corps, commanded by General George Pickett, will be called upon to make up a frontal attacking force along with a large supplement from AP Hill's corps. Aside from his use of Sorrel's body count, Longstreet's conversation with Lee at this point in the novel as it pertains to what he views as the likely futility of Lee's assault is consistent with the historical consensus of what Lee and Longstreet said to one another that morning. But when Longstreet all but begs Lee to replace him with Hill, citing his own profound and possibly incapacitating lack of faith in Lee's plan, the novel again deviates from what the documents support and from what most scholars have agreed upon. Judging by its frequent appearance in Longstreet's various writings and in scholars' accounts of the battle, it's reasonable to conclude Longstreet did tell Lee something that resembles what he says in the novel (which appears paraphrased in his memoirs): "Sir, I have been a soldier all my life. I have served from the ranks on up. You know my service. I have to tell you now, sir, that I believe this attack will fail. I believe that no fifteen thousand men ever set for battle could take that hill, sir." (Longstreet, "Lee in Pennsylvania," 429; *From Manassas to Appomattox* 387-388; Shaara 292).<sup>8</sup> That the novel prefaces this with an explicit offer to recuse himself that is nowhere to be found is significant. Again, the dove Longstreet behaves as conscientiously as Lee behaves callously, doing more credit to his position than if Longstreet had not made the offer. Here, the novel pre-emptively protects Longstreet from the charge leveled by his contemporaries and by later critics that he should have offered to step aside rather than participate in tactics he didn't believe in.

Each confrontation with Lee is emotionally painful for Longstreet but none more so than this last. As the war has gone on, Longstreet has become increasingly conscious of Lee as aged, as a father-figure. This is manifested in the frequency with which Longstreet notices Lee is growing old or that Lee is making paternal gestures. And Lee seems, in what he says and what he does, to invite these perceptions from the very start of the novel, when Longstreet has Lee roused from sleep to receive a visit from the spy Harrison. "He looked haggard," thinks Longstreet; "he looks older every time you see him" (KA 12). After the July 2nd fighting, Lee looks on the verge of exhaustion. When Longstreet takes his hand in greeting, there "was no strength in it," but still Lee's gaze has a power, an "extraordinary flame in the dark eyes, concern of a loving father, that flicked all Longstreet's defenses aside and penetrated to the lonely man within" (KA 244). Longstreet, visiting him at his headquarters that night, grabs hold of a member of Lee's staff "in a metal clasp" to keep him from disturbing the General's rest (KA 247).

### **Conclusion**

In *The Killer Angels*' depiction of the Lee-Longstreet dispute, the troubles America found itself confronting in the late 1960s again encroach on a Civil War-era setting. Lee is cast as exemplar of an older generation's adherence to outdated tactics and to the notion that any sacrifice of lives in war can never be a waste. Longstreet, whose youth relative to Lee is overstated in the novel, represents a belief that, as powerful as his Army may be, there are limits to what Lee should expect of it. Longstreet also departs from Lee in his concern that the lives under a general's command not be expended with frontal attacks on well-armed, dug-in positions.

The differences between the two Confederate commanders are a simplified version of the conflict that occupied the minds of so many Americans over how best to fight (or whether not to fight) the Vietnam War. Lee can be read as the ultimate hawk, expecting troops to obey orders regardless of the senselessness of those orders and expecting that the families and friends of those killed would only feel gratified to have sacrificed loved ones to the cause. Longstreet's dovish sensibility holds commanders responsible for the way their troops are to be employed, insisting that fighting is to be done on the defensive if possible. Taking the offensive is a dubious prospect, at best, for Longstreet, and Lee's preference for it is a distressing sign of the older man's inhumanity.

The manner in which Longstreet makes his objections known consists of a sequence of confrontations with Lee which take place over the three-day period of the battle. Deferring diplomatically to Lee's rank, age and status as old friend, Longstreet carefully points out the Union force's numbers, its formidable and well dug in occupation of the high ground on Cemetery Ridge and the available option of moving the Confederate force southeast to cut the Union off from Washington and compel Meade to order an attack. But Lee's preference for the offensive, his confidence that the Army of Northern Virginia can do anything and, finally, his growing weariness with Longstreet's convictions that borders in their later conversations on disdain will all prevail, despite Longstreet's persuasive efforts.

The growing friction between the two men, which strains and probably breaks their friendship, is a pale reflection of the often violent clashes that erupted during the anti-war movement, but it is possible *The Killer Angels* places more weight on the Longstreet-Lee dispute than is warranted by a more balanced reading of the historical record. The book's reliance on Longstreet's various

memoirs, especially on his version of the orders Lee gave him prior to Day Two's engagements, results in a version of Lee inconsistent with his past behavior. Longstreet's (and Shaara's) Lee is more adamant that Longstreet not use his own discretion as new information is known. But Lee is famous for giving his corps commanders leeway, often to a fault, as many military historians say was the case in his orders to General Ewell on Day One to attack the Union troops on Cemetery Hill "if practicable."<sup>9</sup> The choice to favor Longstreet's version of the battle (as compelling and detailed as it is, almost too detailed to be a product of one man's memory) ignores the possibility that Longstreet could have been overly self-serving in his account, especially in his memoirs' portrayal of Lee as ignoring all of Longstreet's advice and offering no reason for doing so other than impatience for battle to begin. For a novelist working in America in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Longstreet's virtues as a prototypical dove and the readiness with which readers who had identified with the anti-war movement could embrace Longstreet as one of their own had to be appealing. In the case of *The Killer Angels*, I suggest Longstreet's potential as a forerunner to the doves of Shaara's present was too great a temptation for a novelist of Shaara's sympathies to pass up. Longstreet is not written as a Gettysburg Abbie Hoffman, but because of Shaara's deft shadings of portraiture on Longstreet, Lee is made more like Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon than he might otherwise have been.

### **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup>The author's son, the author himself of the well-received prequel (*Gods and Generals*) and sequel (*Last Full Measure*) to *The Killer Angels*, said his father "was definitely a 'dove with regard to Vietnam. So much so that he offered to expedite my own trip to Canada if I chose not to serve (I ended up not serving anyway because of a high school football injury--I have a steel plate in my arm." Perhaps it's no coincidence that in Longstreet, who is tormented by the past and

perhaps future deaths of children and friends, Jeff Shaara says, “My father saw a lot of himself in the man” (Email correspondence, June 21, 2003).

<sup>2</sup>It was also, by most accounts, including the novel itself (“But it was Lee’s practice to back off, once the fight had begun and let the commanders handle it”) uncharacteristic of Lee to concern himself with specifics below the division level (KA 193-194). As the British observer Colonel Arthur S. Fremantle found, “It is evidently his system to arrange the plan thoroughly with the three corps commanders, and then leave to them the duty of modifying and carrying it out to the best of their abilities” (208). Fremantle, whose persona in *The Killer Angels* resembles one of Shakespeare’s fools, spent two months with the Army of Northern Virginia and published a diary recording his impressions.

<sup>3</sup>For perhaps the most blistering attack on Longstreet’s decision-making since Jubal Early’s, see Robert K. Krick 147-168. Explaining Longstreet’s error in turning down Hood’s flanking move because Lee had forbade such a movement, Krick says Lee “had refused to relocate his army southeastward into a different county; that had nothing at all to do with relocating its tactical arrangements in the same direction--or in any other--by the width of a pasture of two or a few hundred yards of woods” (161).

<sup>4</sup>The resemblance of Lee’s speech to the most oft-repeated line from John Kerry’s testimony before Congress of April 1971, given as a representative of Vietnam Veterans Against the War is striking: “We are asking Americans to think about that because how do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?” (qtd. in Kranish *et al.* 123).

<sup>5</sup>The “enclave” strategy was first developed by the former Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman and ambassador to South Vietnam, Maxwell Taylor. Beginning in the spring of 1965, Democratic House Speaker Mike Mansfield urged Lyndon Johnson to adopt this strategy, but to no avail. Senator George McGovern would advocate this strategy before the Senate in the summer, and it was endorsed by his colleagues Frank Church and Ernest Gruening. See Mann 419, 442, 462-63.

<sup>6</sup>Foote even gives Longstreet the benefit of the doubt on one of the points about Longstreet’s story of the Gettysburg campaign’s planning that many historians have castigated the general for, his contention that Lee had promised Longstreet he would use defensive tactics while in the enemy’s territory. During those Virginia meetings in late May of 1863, Foote says Longstreet “had indeed received that impression at the time; whereby trouble was stored up for all involved” (436). Later, Foote makes his strongest criticism of Longstreet in admitting that while “he had of course obeyed all orders given him, he had not

anticipated them in the best tradition of the Army of Northern Virginia, with the result that he was partly to blame for the delays encountered in the course of the unreconnoitred flank march” (498). Catton credits Longstreet’s prescience about what would take place during Pickett’s charge, but says little about any delays or sulking (188).

<sup>7</sup>A typical example from *The Winter Soldier Investigation*, the book of excerpts from testimony at the Vietnam Veterans Against the War hearings: “There was a big pressure for body count. We had a very low body count in our company and we had a lot of pressure come down from the battalion commander to the company commander, down on to us. We were given new incentives to get a higher body count such as a six-pack of beer or a case of soda. And sometimes, a three-day pass, you know for the amount of body count we had” (83). For more see pages 11, 13, 19, 51-54, 78, 92 of the book.

<sup>8</sup>For reconstructions of this conversation that have Longstreet saying to Lee what he says here, see Trudeau 442, Randall and Donald 404-405, Catton 188, Foote 529-530, Wert 283-284.

<sup>9</sup>For an account of Lee’s orders to Ewell and Ewell’s use of his discretion see McPherson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom*, 654-655.



### PART III

#### CHAPTER SIX: “WE MUST DISENTHRALL OURSELVES:” POSTMODERNIST AND CONFUSED CHARACTERS IN THE CIVIL WAR NOVELS OF THE LAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

Over the past twenty years dozens of Civil War novels have been published in America which reveal a culture adrift, foundering, unsure of its identity—our own. The debacles of the Vietnam War exposed the insufficiency of the master narrative that determined the US to be the bulwark of freedom and human rights against the monolithically threatening powers of the USSR and China. The revelations of the Nixon administration’s abuses later exposed the corruption endemic to latter-twentieth-century domestic politics. Civil War fiction, like other fiction produced in America, began to acknowledge the resulting widespread confusion in ways too various to account for completely but generally involving multiplicities of genre, points-of-view and ideological stance. Very often the plot structures of these major novels have verged toward the picaresque. Main characters find themselves in contexts in continual flux, and their attempts to master that context depend on an ability to face the withering inundation of verbiage, images, undercurrents, seductions and salesmanship and cull the useless from the useful, a task often proving impossible, often forcing a retreat into a nearly separate, relatively predictable and more comfortable context. In his 1982 book *The Metafictional Muse*, Larry McCaffery describes the effects of a chaotic era on the protagonists of its novels. These characters tend to be

lonely, alienated, disaffected, skeptical; these characters also find themselves victimized by a repressive cold social order to such an extent that their lives seem meaningless, drab, fragmented; in response to this powerful sense of personal isolation and violation,

these characters decide to create or invent a system of meaning which will help to supply their lives with hope, order, possibly even some measure of beauty (4).

Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon, E.L. Doctorow, Don DeLillo and John Barth are perhaps the most famous examples of novelists who seem unable to produce a main character who doesn't fall into this pattern. Such characters also turn up in the fiction of writers not generally associated with the boldest extravagances of postmodernism, as in the cases of Toni Morrison, John Updike (especially in his Rabbit novels) and Ernest Gaines. Even novelists whose work is viewed as less given to stylistic disjunctions of the postmodern persuasion place their characters in circumstances that continually disintegrate, reintegrate and expose characters to cascades of rhetoric in an unsympathetic world. The only certainty seems that whatever courses these characters choose will be wrong.

The Civil War era, as proven in many novels published relatively recently, has shown a capacity to be presented as just as bewildering as any of Thomas Pynchon's more contemporary settings. The characters in these novels have to be just as resolute in the face of the unknowable as Oedipa Maas or Tyrone Slothrop. Although such characters are free from the influence of TV and radio, their exposure to telegraph messages, newspapers, the mails and mere conversation often proves adequate to the task of communicating the overwhelming demands of the characters' context-at-large. One character's experience of the Civil War is no longer reduced to a solid, linear sequence as it was in *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) or *Gone With the Wind* (1936). Instead, these characters most often find themselves challenged at every turn by information coming at them in no particular order but with dizzying speed that forces a nearly instant response. Henry Fleming would get no time to experience the internal turmoil that animates

Crane's great novel if Crane had been writing a century later. Moreover, it is seldom that we encounter a novel in recent years that attempts to account for the entire war in the fashion of Evelyn Scott's *The Wave* (1922). Often a character will have to operate within and negotiate among one or two of its far-flung fragments, possibly serving as a lowly laborer on the breastworks, possibly sitting at the president's desk. No one character feels anything but a tenuous connection to the forces that ultimately decide the war's outcome. To lend their situations the characteristic postmodern self-reverential irony, these characters often reveal a vivid consciousness of their inability to seize or control any of these forces. As Gore Vidal's Abraham Lincoln observes to a couple of admiring senators and a cabinet member just before pushing for conscription, "Well, if I am monarchal, it is the times that shoved the crown on my head. Anyway, when the war is won, I'll lose my crown fast enough and probably my head, too" (459). In a moment when his visitors are ready to ascribe genius to him and even pay tribute to his seeming mastery of the office, Lincoln is himself conscious of the perennial truth of the recent Civil War novel: "the times" shove down and swipe off crowns with the same alacrity. To crow over gains of power sure to be rendered temporary is to court embarrassment.

In the inclusion of such a statement, then, which is based on much Lincoln said in his own speeches and letters (possibly to express the then-obligatory public modesty and to caution against inordinate expectations), Vidal's novel partakes of the postmodernism conventionally thought to be most perceptible in the work of the Pynchons and the DeLillos. Though its structure, like those of most of the other novels to be considered in this chapter and the ensuing one, doesn't go far outside the bounds of the realistic novel received from the

eighteenth century and apotheosized in the nineteenth, the conception of self and of that self's ability to perceive what is happening around him or her, owes itself to the postmodern sensibility. Postmodernism is not simply a set of techniques an author is free to employ or not as the muse requires. It is an inescapable condition of living and thinking in the late 20th century. As Frederic Jameson explains to those commentators mistaking postmodernism for an isolated cultural tendency subject to moral judgments, these commentators themselves are "now so deeply immersed in postmodernist space, so deeply suffused and infected by its new cultural categories, that the luxury of the old-fashioned ideological critique, the indignant moral denunciation of the other becomes unavailable" (*Postmodernism*, 46). Novelists whose plots begin at the beginning, rise to a climax at the expected place, and then descend to a denouement are not immune to the postmodern inundation and cannot emerge from their endeavors unsaturated, regardless of whether their novels are set prior to the invention of television.

Beginning with Vidal's fictionalized Lincoln biography of 1984 and proceeding to later novels up to 2001, I will show that characters often express recognizably postmodern complaints about their circumstances. As the years proceed, the most crucial problem for these characters seems a debilitating lack of an identity outside the context of the war. It is as if the identity search embarked upon at the same time by the United States, as it found itself without its Soviet antithesis, creeps into the Civil War setting in the guise of characters who cannot determine who they are, what they should be doing in the times when they're not called upon to attack or defend against an armed contingent. As characters struggle forth on their quests for stable gender roles or occupations or ways of thinking about what they just took part in, they encounter a dizzying array of

already available identities, none of which prove sufficient for any appreciable time. These optional identities sometimes correspond quite conveniently to the options available to that other, even less definable character in an identity crisis, the post-Cold-War United States as it marked time until its presentation with its next possibly defining enemy on September 11, 2001. But the options presented in these novels are also shaped to the circumstances faced by citizens rather than states in a time when the verities like those the Union and the Confederacy fought to preserve were deemed suspect, not necessarily because of their content but because they were held to be verities at all.

The response of these characters to their inability to know the next step varies. There is a marked tendency however, for characters to seek refuge in an illusion of order, often self-created. The act of story-telling itself is a frequent resort, as is the pursuit of an obscure specialty. Each character's choice should be examined in the book's context and in the context of the anxieties to which the novel is responding. This chapter merely opens what would be a long discussion about coping mechanisms for what Jean-Francois Lyotard has called the postmodern condition, even if the characters predate the modern one.

In 1989, Richard Saul Wurman, who at various times was professor of architecture, urban design and graphic design at Cambridge University, Princeton and the University of Southern California published *Information Anxiety*. Replete with illustrations and marginal notes ("to reduce your book-induced anxieties") the book is a primer for helping readers through their confusing times in a culture that liberally peppers them with data and requires a response all too quickly (5). Wurman says information anxiety "is produced by the ever-widening gap between what we understood and what we think we should understand. It is the black hole

between data and knowledge, and it happens when information doesn't tell us what we want or need to know" (1). The book provides fifteen chapters worth of coping mechanisms for people "who know what they don't know," which "makes them anxious" (334). In summary, the techniques involve "narrowing your field of information to that which is relevant to your life" (317). Rather than enlarging the self, expanding the number of choices at one's disposal, Wurman counsels the use of techniques to narrow the number of choices.

The main characters in post-modern novels, including novels set in the pre-modernist era, seem to take Wurman's advice. They respond to the information they're engulfed by with a willingness to narrow the range of choices available. When they opt not to choose, or when they defer that choice to others, they pay a penalty and often find themselves cornered. Gore Vidal's Lincoln, in making a given decision, is always at pains to explain what he is *not* doing. William Safire's John C. Breckinridge pays the penalty for allowing narrow states-rights traditions to make his choice for him by becoming politically irrelevant as the Civil War goes on, and as the years go by he finds his part in the contest to be demoted to a supporting and then a bit role. Characters may complain often about their information anxiety, but when they attempt to simplify their lives by narrowing their range of choices, they may not take control of the novel's events, but they do take control of their immediate circumstances. Those who defer choice lose their prominence in the narrative to characters who carve out a corner they *can* control, and in so doing adapt to circumstances even if it means transforming their selves.<sup>1</sup>

### **Abraham Lincoln as Postmodern Subject in *Freedom!* and *Lincoln***

In the mid-1980s two figures accustomed to writing about US politics published Civil War novels, sizeable ones. William Safire had been a mainstay columnist for the *New York Times* for years as a conservative who had written speeches for Nixon in the years before the Watergate scandals. Gore Vidal since the early 1960s had made his own unaffiliated Leftism known in essays mainly published in the *New York Review of Books* and *The Nation*. Of the two books, Vidal's *Lincoln* (1984) is the one still in print. But both were given middling to good reviews at their publication. Vidal received early praise from no less a personage than Harold Bloom for being the only novelist so far with "the precision of imagination to show us a plausible and human Lincoln, of us and yet beyond us" (5). C. Vann Woodward, meanwhile, praised Safire's *Freedom!* (1987) to the detriment of Vidal's novel for providing us with a Lincoln who "at least suggests the one scholars debate and often differ about" (24).

Considering the notoriety of their authors, it is tempting to read the novels, *Lincoln* and *Freedom!*, as the liberal's and the conservative's Civil War respectively, but neither book conforms readily to present-day ideologies (and, if anything, Safire's book is quite suspicious of Lincoln's Nixonian traits). The present day surfaces in these books mainly in their interest in the characters' psychological make-up. Vidal and Safire both want to examine what is at the inner core of a character's being and to what extent that inner core affects decision-making. There's much speculation about the ultimate source of Lincoln's famous "melancholia" (but in both novels Mrs. Lincoln's struggles aren't played for much more than comic relief). The two books are mainly set in Washington DC and much of their action takes place in the Executive Mansion

itself. Both books, to a degree that would make the claustrophobic nervous, restrict themselves to the war room, the cabinet room and the drawing room. Seldom do we see battle, but we witness many tense cabinet meetings, many urgent consultations, many whispered confidences.

Both novels are narrated in fairly conventional fashion, in third person but usually restrict their attention to single characters, each character dealt with recurrently in discrete chapter units. *Lincoln* deviates from this pattern in one way: its insistence that Lincoln's own thoughts remain a mystery, but *Freedom!* does not set that ground rule. *Freedom!* also makes an exception of itself in its inclusion of a 171-page "Underbook" of endnotes and source citations. The effect, after reading these novels, is of a presidency viewed from a myriad of viewpoints, most of them sympathetic to the cause of Union and to Lincoln but some troubled by the precedents being set and some viewpoints--of course--shattered by the losses and devastation of war. Numerous characters profess confusion about their worlds, not out of a lack of knowledge but because of a profusion of data that cannot be said yet to amount to knowledge. The basis for decision-making is generally, under the circumstances, at least treacherous and at best unstable. In the Civil War novel of the mid-1980s, characters would find themselves subjected to the same information (and emotion) overload complained of frequently by those reading of their adventure; the most glaring example in these two books being Lincoln himself.

Of course, Lincoln is the most central character in both novels, and, as expected, their plots concern Lincoln's foray into the deep politics of the American presidency in wartime. In neither book is there a sense of Lincoln attaining mastery, except perhaps of rhetoric and image management. It is plain



in the two books that he has already come to the presidency with a mastery of the language. But, though he is plainly gifted, Lincoln is consistently unsure of his footing from the first to the last chapters of both novels. Both versions of Lincoln can certainly be said to be, in the sense of McCaffrey's metafictional characters, "lonely, alienated, disaffected, skeptical." Vidal's Lincoln can find no consolation in his family, with Mary Todd nearly insensible due either to grief over the loss of Willie, obsession with decorating the Mansion or petty jealousies. Tad is so mischievous that if left alone he is liable to set off all the bells in the building. As a minority president, Lincoln has had to stock his cabinet with political rivals in whom he cannot completely confide. His most loyal friends are the young secretaries John Hay and John Nicolay, neither out of their twenties, neither able to do much more than listen and record. Safire's Lincoln is even more alone, all but ignoring his family, and his isolation from his supporting cast is made even more pronounced because of Safire's supplementing the record with various sexual scandals Safire himself admits are fictional. Safire's teetotaling, celibate, Machiavellian Lincoln is certainly more conspicuously alienated in Safire's novel than in Vidal's, from the menagerie of eccentrics *Freedom!* makes of his colleagues.

Gore Vidal's *Lincoln*, as Joyce Carol Oates and Harold Bloom both observed in their reviews, offers up a Lincoln that is recognizably the icon taught to elementary school children, but to this Vidal adds a faculty for cold calculation that may have surprised many readers. Both these facets of Lincoln, the familiar purveyor of homespun stories and the ruthless political chess player, are presented as self-conscious responses to the formidable problems facing the president. Near the middle of the book, Lincoln uses both these tendencies in relatively quick

succession. Just before an inspection trip to Harper's Ferry, where the Army of the Potomac is encamped, he learns he has nearly been assassinated while riding a horse near the Executive Mansion. The shot he had heard, thinking it came from a hunter, had nearly found its mark. His bodyguard Ward Lamon has found the hat he lost at the time, with its two holes. Lamon warns Lincoln that the detective in charge of the Secret Service, Allan Pinkerton, believes there may be as many as three conspiracies against the president. Lincoln's response is a combination of grim humor and the coldest political calculation:

“If Pinkerton says there are three that means one and a half. He doubles the enemy's numbers from habit.” Lincoln put his forefinger through the bullet hole. “From the size of the hole, I'd say that's from one of our new rifles. The problem, Ward, is not my being killed. If that happens that happens and there's no way to stop it. I am a fatalist in the matter. But there is one recurring plot I don't much care for, and that is being captured by rebels and held for ransom” (Vidal 370).

In dire circumstances, whether it be in his private life or the life of his war-ravaged nation, Vidal's Lincoln often begins to work out the possibilities aloud, doing the very opposite of wishful thinking, always removing himself from the situation first, then accounting for the most likely of tendencies. Then comes a decision. For Lincoln, the decision is to go about business as usual and not to be hamstrung by security measures, because, in the age of the rifle, he cannot control, let alone anticipate the movements of, the millions of Southerners or Northerners who might visit harm on him. His next move is to go inspect the troops at Harpers Ferry.

Some weeks later, on election night 1862, after Lincoln has learned that his Republican party has not fared as badly as he had thought though it has not fared well, he is joined on his walk from his office to his living quarters by a

reporter from the Washington *Chronicle*. How did he feel upon hearing his party had lost New York?

“Somewhat like that boy in Kentucky who stubbed his toe while running to his sweetheart. The boy said he was too big to cry, and far too badly hurt to laugh.” Those in the street all laughed at this; and Lincoln bade them good night.

A few minutes later, John Hay asks Lincoln if he’d had the story prepared. Lincoln reveals here his reason for the use of stories:

“Sometimes I say those things and don’t even know I’ve said them. When there is so much you cannot say, it’s always a good idea to have a story ready. I do it now from habit.” Lincoln sighed. “In my predicament, it’s a good thing to know all sorts of stories because the truth of the whole matter is now almost unsayable; and so cruel” (Vidal 386-387).

The story for Vidal’s Lincoln places serifs on the icon, but also offers its user consolation; laughter is, as it is so often, a defense, reflexive in Lincoln’s case. Storytelling, though, is also a craft, one of several that Lincoln allows to absorb him in the course of the novel. Of course, statecraft is the one Lincoln is constitutionally obliged to practice, and it is the one to which he gives the most attention, often rehearsing to his aides and cabinet members his next administrative steps, never allowing himself to make one unless it accomplishes several goals at once and leaves room for later maneuver. But Lincoln frequently quotes Shakespeare’s histories (stagecraft) and spends a lot of time on his speeches, too, admitting he is not good at extemporizing:

Lincoln’s best speeches were those that he himself had written and rewritten; sometimes he took weeks over a single paragraph. “My mind does not work quickly, he used to say to Washburne. Certainly, he had taken his time on the speeches he had made in the course of the debates with Douglas. Those speeches were often learned by heart; certainly each argument had been worked out in precise detail. At such times Lincoln did seem to Washburne like

a rail-splitter. The ax was his logic, going methodically and rhythmically to work on the subject's wood (Vidal 375).

Safire's *Freedom!* features another Lincoln who finds refuge in the written word. C. Vann Woodward remarked upon the appropriateness of a Nixon speechwriter and the author of numerous books about word usage including an extended sequence in which Lincoln is drafting lines from an upcoming speech. But it is also very appropriate to Safire's era for him to write a character reacting to the general confusion of his circumstances by concentrating on bringing to bear a single word's connotation as he does before delivering his December 1, 1862 message to Congress:

The beliefs of the past were inadequate to the present, he would exhort them; rewriting in his head, as he walked back through the dark hall to his office, he added "quiet" to the past and "stormy" to the present, for the emphasis of contrast. And "beliefs" did not have the negative connotation he sought; "dogmas" was the word (Safire 1058).

It is in this same speech, incidentally, that Lincoln asks his audience to set aside the turbulent emotions endemic to war time and make the decisions necessary to end the war and secure the nation's existence. Safire includes one passage in his "Underbook," praising its language, but he could just as well be offering Lincoln's summary of what the problems are in Safire's time: "The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country" (Lincoln, qtd. from Safire 1394). After his own immersion in craft, Safire's Lincoln can urge his Congress to face the real. If not for his tactical retreat into humor and into craft, the Commander-in-chief might not be able to lead. Like Larry McCaffrey's metafictional characters, in both these novels, the 1980s Lincoln needs his systems.

### **Retreat into Stories and Friendship in *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All***

A version of the best-selling novel *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All* (1989), one of the few comic Civil War novels was staged on Broadway as a one-woman show starring Ellen Burstyn in November 2003, but closed in one night (Gardner 13D). Though the play was universally panned, the commentary on it resembles the more mixed reviews of the novel that spawned it in at least one respect: critics of both point out the peril an author can run into when deciding to have one character tell all the stories. The 1992 CBS miniseries was more successful, including in its cast many past and eventual Oscar-winners and showing, rather than telling, the many stories abounding in the book. The perils inherent in restricting the narration of a giant book to one character can be surmounted brilliantly, as in the case of *David Copperfield* (1849-50) or *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953). But in an era when attention-spans have been foreshortened by processes not always of our doing, such a narrative choice can be risky indeed. In his novel, Allan Gurganus can ask for a greater suspension of disbelief than the director of his play can do. His doing so, by having the title character Lucy Marsden mimic other voices when it is required, probably saves the reading experience for many though not all, as Jonathan Yardley wrote in the *Post*. Yardley faults Lucy because she “belabors the obvious at every turn, drawing from the experience of a full century morals more suited to the sandbox than to a book representing itself as literature” (X3).

Yardley also lives up to his caustic reputation by saying that the book is for “readers who find comfort and pleasure in the bromides of such contemporary philosophers as John Irving, Alice Walker, Robert Fulghum and Leo Buscaglia,”

and it is true that the novel seems to use the values of the age of psychotherapy to interpret what took place in the Civil War, Reconstruction and New South eras. The novel might have been better served by somehow incorporating a more acute skepticism of those values, certainly. But, on that day in the early-1980s, as she is delivering her monologue for the young woman reporter and her Sony tape recorder that never seems to exhaust its batteries or need more tape, Leo Buscaglia's values help comprise the system Lucy has retreated into and which impel her to "tell all." Perhaps struggling with our own knee-jerk skepticism is the price of admission to her confidences.

Yardley does not contest the fact that Lucy Marsden's world is well worth retreating from. At fifteen, she marries the fifty-one-year-old William Marsden, whose slight physical scars incurred in the Civil War belie his extensive mental ones, most borne of the guilt he feels for the death of a childhood friend. Indeed, the Civil War was William Marsden's childhood. Gurganus has flouted history by having the Army of Northern Virginia (which didn't make a practice of drafting children) conscript Marsden and his doomed friend Ned at age thirteen. When Ned dies, wounded by Yankee snipers while swinging off a rope into a swimming hole, William takes the psychic blame, having promised Ned's mother he'd look after Ned. Though it commences at nearly the turn of the century, Lucy spends most of their marriage nursing this child traumatized in an old war, even as she raises the nine he children he sires with her. The book is her monologue, delivered in the course of a taped interview many decades later.

Both marriage partners deal with their respective traumas through the apparently cathartic telling of stories. When William Marsden returned home from the war, for instance, Ned's mother required him to tell her all his war

stories, as a kind of expiation for having failed to protect Ned. Recalling this in the 1980s, Lucy Marsden credits Winona for having helped William readjust to peacetime. “I sometimes wonder,” muses Lucy, “what might’ve come of him if Winona hadn’t made him [talk about the war]. If allowed to keep stone silent about his war.” One answer suggests itself. “He might’ve become one of those returned Rebels--like the ones from this more recent war they lost in Asia (it mostly happens to survivors of the *losing* side)--ones who come unsnapped so suddenly, with a violent caving-in.” To be more specific, Lucy means the Vietnam veteran who “walked into his poppa’s insurance office and opened fire with two hunting guns.” The stories might have been the “steam-pressure release valve that let the sense and poison free” (Gurganus 57, 58).

Lucy, over a century later, explains why she felt it necessary to talk about the trauma of the repeated rape that took place on her wedding night. She does not reveal these graphic truths in pursuit of catharsis, the balm that had accompanied tale-telling for Will, but to claim her part in history’s onward rush, to carve out her corner: “Keep your tales around long enough, they won’t go bad on you like leftover food. Oh no, they’ll improve, honey, they’ll upgrade nearbout to legend. . . .” The young reporter is advised, therefore, “get *your* stories in order, child. Because a person’s life, it’s just about a week” (Gurganus 106). History for Lucy encompasses the most personal and the most public of experiences. Not distinguishing between her own life and the life of a nation constitutes for her a coping mechanism and an obligation, lest her sort of history be lost. History is the meaning-providing system she retreats into. Conveniently for her and perhaps unfortunately for readers like Jonathan Yardley, her conception of history is an inclusive one, to the tune of nearly 900 pages.

Lucy is a character seemingly determined to flout stereotypes. Unlike most nonagenarian characters in fiction or film, she has a great interest in what is happening in the present day, whether it be her orderly's trips to a local disco, developments in genetics research, or the fashions favored at that moment by rebellious teenaged girls, in one case a fifteen-year-old volunteer who "went out and got herself a Mohawk hairdo" and then "just *had* to stick a [safety] pin clear through her right nostril." While the other residents of Lane's End nursing home shun the girl, Lucy questions her and listens closely, ascribing near preservative powers to doing so. "See, I'm trying and learn. I don't plan to be like one of these fuddy-duds in here. Some whine they just don't *get* the latest craze. Then they cross their arms, roll their eyes, and pray that death'll take them beyond fads" (Gurganus 28, 29). Lucy's eager collection of the most up-to-date and arcane knowledge also enables her to construct some metaphors all the more striking for their being said by someone born in the nineteenth century, as when she says a disgraced former supervisor of Lane's End comes from a family accustomed to scandal and then comments, "Gossip comes what they now call genetically encoded. Oh, I read. I keep up" (80). But because she is more attuned to developments in isolation from one another rather than their attachment to a broader context, what she notices is simply added to a mental collection, not requiring much rethinking of old values. Lucy's sensitivity to the signs of change, however, whether those signs be from the sciences or from the punk counterculture, gives her a manageable way to think about the world Lucy is usually separated from because of her status as wheelchair-bound nursing home



resident (she *does* take occasional outings, to shop or to attend the ceremonies that seem to be obligatory for someone in her position as last living widow of a Confederate soldier).

The character Lucy Marsden may be the most well-adjusted character in Civil War fiction (perhaps being rivaled only by Gore Vidal's acerbic but ever-cheerful William Seward), finding serenity in her old age despite a harrowing early adulthood in which she was called upon to be her husband's psychiatric nurse as well as his reluctant lover and devoted mother to his nine children. But she certainly had her coping mechanisms, the story, her philosophy of history and her absorption in the present, all of which turn out to be ways to make order from chaos, ways to confront a harsh world with grace, and even confidence. Though these mechanisms cannot always be called withdrawals from the world, they do require the building of a system and those systems each offer a simplifying consolation. William Marsden never quite reaches Lucy's state of calm, but it is clear that the craft of storytelling and the catharsis it allowed him probably afforded him years of functional life compared to what he would have had otherwise.

The novel also continually examines the notion of character itself, of whatever constitutes personality and stamps it as an unchanging original. The first-person narrator and protagonist Lucy is always channeling other characters, many of them radically distinct in voice from Lucy's. We are to assume (as does her audience, the young woman reporter) Lucy can credibly represent the voices and the experiences of her husband William, the Civil War veteran 40 years her senior, Castalia, an African tribal princess abducted into slavery then emancipated when Sherman's troops burned the Marsden plantation house in which she'd

served, Captain Marsden's mother and many other Falls, North Carolinians quite different from Lucy in time, social class and accent. She never strains for the details of dress or manners necessary to convince readers her tales are authentic. Her very ease in moving from her own point-of-view to that of many other characters begs the question of whether Lucy Marsden is herself a mere role to be played like any of the others she so effortlessly assumes. Or is she a mere conduit for these dead characters to live through again? If Lucy's best friend, the slave Castalia, and Lucy's mother, the pampered heiress of a prosperous Indigo merchant, can be brought to such immediate presence as a result of Lucy having lived with them and listened to their stories, surely the understanding of personality itself as a quantity held solely by the owner and never to be duplicated or transferred must be insufficient. Novels of the postmodern era have often attempted to contest the realist idea of a singular, unified (if complicated and divisible into discrete Freudian categories) self. With *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*, the Civil War novel again joins this movement.

While self is shown in the novel as a drifting, easily counterfeited phenomenon, it is also shown as one that undergoes radical transformations in response to circumstance. Lucy Honeycutt, the indulged single child, becomes a selfless, conscientious caretaker after her marriage to Marsden and her bearing of nine children (and loss of one). Castalia, the revered West African princess, becomes the defiant slave and then the loyal bosom friend of Lucy, the daughter-in-law of her former owner. Willie Marsden is at first the ardent boy-soldier, then the traumatized and embittered boy-veteran, then the proud, presumptuous, self-indulgent and unreconstructed Captain Marsden before a stroke renders him mostly inert, if still prone to his usual bouts of unmanageability. Lady Marsden,

who had prided herself on her alabaster skin has her complexion later darkened and disfigured by the fire Sherman's soldiers set to her home. What critic and novelist Raymond Federman observed and foretold in his 1975 book *Surfiction* about the new fiction here comes to pass: "the people of fiction, the fictitious beings, will also no longer be well-made characters who carry with them a fixed identity, a stable set of social and psychological attributes;" . . . the "creatures of the new fiction will be as changeable, as illusory, as nameless, as unnameable, as fraudulent, as unpredictable as the discourse that makes them." For Federman, these "creatures" will be more like those in the world readers know "because they will be what they are: word-beings" who *know* that is what they are (12-13). The characters in Lucy's long monologue, according to Lucy herself, have all told her their stories as if their lives depended on them, and indeed they eventually will, since Lucy outlives them all. They are fortunate Lucy is so able to adapt and to mimic, not only so that she can survive to tell their tale but also so that she can tell it in such a way as to convince readers she is representing them vividly and fairly, for Lucy Marsden has become a late 1980s Lucy to charm her reporter and to charm Allan Gurganus' millions of readers if not his reviewers.

### **Shifting Identities and Survival in *Guns of the South***

Harry Turtledove's *Guns of the South* (1992) may vie with Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1976) as the most recognizably postmodern Civil War novel. But while Reed's book trades in the juggling of chronology and genres typical of so-called postmodern fiction and, in its stylistic playfulness, never allows the reader to forget the book's status as a novel, *Guns* is told in a fairly straightforward manner. Its postmodernism comes from its nearly preposterous plot rather than from the style in which it is written. Members of a South African

white supremacist group from the year 2014 have found a way to smuggle AK-47s into northern Virginia in 1864. The distribution of these machine guns among the Confederate troops results in a rout of Lincoln's forces, as Lee's armies march into Washington to cordially receive Abraham Lincoln's surrender. Private Nate Caudell, who had been a schoolteacher before the war, helps to warn Lee of the South Africans' motives, their need to create a powerful, and reliably racist, American ally for the 21st century. The book then follows Lee's post-war career as a Confederate statesman, overseeing his country's gradual abolition of slavery and reconciliation with its former foe in the North.

Quite understandably, what with South Africans from the year 2014 trying to orchestrate post-war Confederate politics from behind the scenes, characters in *Guns of the South* frequently express amazement at the seemingly uncontrollable, inscrutable turns events take. In 1866, the war having ended two years before, and with Lee and Nathan Bedford Forrest now campaigning against each other for the Confederate presidency, the transplanted Northern engineer Henry Pleasants (known mainly to Civil War students for overseeing the planting of explosives under the Confederate garrison at Petersburg that led to the debacle of The Crater) warns his school teacher friend Nate Caudell of what is coming and how it cannot be forestalled. Caudell, having said the Confederacy was founded as an attempt to keep the status quo, including slavery, reminds Pleasants of one Confederate motto, All We Want Is To Be Left Alone. "But the world keeps changing whether you want it to or not," Pleasants replies. "You can't keep walls up forever--look at Admiral Perry's trip to Japan" (Turtledove 359-360). Lee himself, having already realized the "disorderly--quality of civilian life and especially of civilian administration" eventually finds he misses "the clean well-

defined world of the soldier, where compromise had to be made only with weather and terrain and what the enemy would allow, not with one's own principles" (368, 387).

As the novel progresses, the characters each must undergo radical transformations just to stay in the story and to carry out what they see as their duty to an evolving Confederacy. The most radical of these changes are undergone by Mollie Bean, who abandons her crinolines for butternut to fight in the 47th North Carolina as the smooth-faced teenaged private Melvin Bean. Once the Confederates win the war, aided by the South Africans' donation of thousands of AK-47s, Bean goes to the Afrikaners' compound--mainly out of curiosity, to work as a kept woman. She again dons a uniform to hand off to President Lee a stolen 1996 edition of *The Picture History of the Civil War* with text by Bruce Catton. She keeps the uniform on to take part in the operations against the Afrikaners' compound. As the book ends, she has reassumed the role of a 19th century woman to marry Nate Caudell. Lee's aforementioned foray into electoral politics (along with his less successful but nonetheless formidable political opponent [but later faithful military ally] Nathan Bedford Forrest) merely signals the more drastic change he must effect in his thinking as he assumes the Confederate presidency, pushes slavery reform legislation (gradual, very gradual abolition) rather than guiding opposing armies and confronts the South Africans' increasingly violent attempts to keep the white supremacist cornerstone of the Confederacy in place. As he finds the evidence--much of it in books with copyright dates well into the next century--that the Afrikaners may have lied about their own role in the future, that in fact their insistence on white supremacy would be a withering relic in its own era--Lee must add to his earlier revision of

what he had known of the laws of physics and make momentous decisions based on a new understanding of what the South African saviors of the nearly Lost Cause had attested to. It's quite appropriate that the most prominent fictional character, Nate Caudell, is a teacher, and is often shown exercising his vocation, that of assisting other characters' transformations of themselves to suit the changing needs of the era. His most trusted teaching tool, in fact, is that of persuading his students of the necessity of changing.

The characters who are most willing to set aside prejudices and wishful thinking, and to engage in the most scrupulous study of the information and the options at hand, however unlikely their sources, find themselves rewarded. The rewards come in the form of the ability to choose one's preferred path at a later date, as in the case of Lee, who does indeed pass the gradual abolition measure through the Confederate Congress, and in the cases of Nate and Mollie, who do marry and live happily ever after in Nashville, North Carolina. Those characters unwilling to adapt--the Afrikaners, Abraham Lincoln, Nathan Bedford Forrest (temporarily)--find themselves crossed out of the game, and they can only hope to return to it with desperate gambits. The language of poker is repeatedly invoked in these cases. Lee, as he stands in the Executive Mansion giving Lincoln his surrender terms, suspects the recalcitrant president of bluffing but "Lee knew he was holding aces," and "turned one face up," a telegram conveying the news that Forrest had routed a Union force near Corinth, Mississippi (Turtledove 186-7). Lincoln is unable in this scene to perceive the situation he is in, surrounded as he is by the Army of Northern Virginia in his own capital. So he loses to Lee and recedes into the narrative's background. A similar fate temporarily befalls Forrest, who loses the Confederate presidency to Lee, but who redeems himself

by coming to Lee's aid when the plans of the Afrikaners to subvert the Confederates by force is revealed. Lee's relative mastery of the novel's events (a mastery he always assumes is temporary) comes of his setting aside his own self-interest (most notably his refusal of the Afrikaners' offer to cure his wife's invalidism) and his own prejudices (against Forrest's rough manners, against the human tendency to disbelieve in time travelers or books from 150 years in the future). In other words, it is Lee's readiness to disregard any claim on a consistent core identity that preserves his status in the narrative as its hero and indeed forms the occasion for the novel's continuation. Improvisation, for the characters of this unusual book, becomes a refuge, in fact the only one available.

### ***Sharpshooter and the Agony of Never Finding the Mark***

As the narrative that forms David Madden's *The Sharpshooter* (1996) begins, the title character, Willis Carr, is thirteen years old and it is late 1861. The novel opens in Eastern Tennessee, which had been a hotbed of anti-Confederate sentiment. The first chapter is an account of Carr's following a party of Unionist saboteurs as they set out on a mission. This party, which includes his grandfather, father and older brother, rides toward a railroad trestle in eastern Tennessee, intending to blow it up. Incited by the newspaper demagogue Parson Brownlow and coordinated with half a dozen other such parties staging similar simultaneous attacks throughout the mid-South, the group disarms the few Union guards standing sentry at the trestle and succeed in dynamiting it. Soon after, Willis Carr watches helplessly as the party is caught by patrolling Union cavalry. When he himself is captured later for making the naive error of asking a random Knoxville civilian where the Union headquarters are, he is offered a choice, join the Confederate army or be shipped down to a Montgomery, Alabama prison.

Thinking he can simply desert at his first chance, Carr agrees. So begins one young Tennessean's Civil War tour of duty with General Longstreet's corps that takes him through all the major battles of the eastern theater (except Chancellorsville, which Longstreet missed while Lee had assigned him to other work away from the Army of Northern Virginia).

The first quarter of the novel places Carr repeatedly in Forrest Gump-like proximity to major historic events. But unlike Gump, he cannot explain what he sees with homespun bromides. After his capture and impressment early in the war, Carr's one attempt at desertion from the Confederate Army puts him in a position to see even more of the worst of the Civil War, landing him in a POW camp called Andersonville. An unlikely sequence of events, however, rescues Carr from the notorious stockade, then from the firing squad and posts him on one of the guard platforms outside the pine plank fence with a rifle. Serving at Andersonville until the surrenders, he embarks for home on the ill-fated steamship *Sultana*. After its boiler explodes, Carr keeps from becoming one of the 1,500 who perished in the cold Mississippi by floating to shore with a piece of driftwood. All of this occurs in the book's first fifty pages.

Carr spends the rest of the book and his long life drifting on land, trying to find out what exactly he did and saw. He is handicapped in his quest by a memory he says has been addled by two years spent drunk in the West. But his bout of drinking seems the least of the impediments in the way of his understanding what he saw and did during the war. As he retraces his way through the battlefields on which he served, selling sketches to veterans as he goes, for every memory that gets jogged, dozens of questions also arise. His post-war journeys end up revealing more about the problems of recollection and of



one's own identity in an era that has made memory itself a commodity than it reveals about what he himself experienced in those four years that proved so pivotal to his nation's history.

Confusion is the consistent attitude Willis Carr holds toward those who seem to any degree definite about the war he saw so much of. On his way home from the West, during a stop near cannon-fire-scarred Vicksburg, Carr meets up with a northern veteran taking the measure of a crater that had been made during the summer 1863 siege. The one-legged vet asks Carr to sketch him standing in a Union uniform at the crater's edge, but with both legs intact. The veteran's eagerness to take the finished drawing prompts a question in Carr's mind, one which drives the rest of the novel: "Why doesn't it mean that much to me?" (Madden 60) During a later talk, the two veterans from the opposed sides come upon the place, marked with a stone where Generals Grant and Pemberton held their surrender talks. The Union soldier is obviously moved ("Here's the very spot. . .") but Carr is suppressing a very different reaction: "I wanted to tell him that I didn't understand any of that" (62).

Carr keeps thinking of the encounter as he starts toward his boyhood home. As he nears Nashville, it surprises him that he runs into so many others seeming to hold onto their memories of the war this way with such effortless command of detail, these "men of both sides who had fought there, as if two years ago was yesterday." Carr begins to feel, as he encounters more and more veterans insisting on telling their stories, "haunted" by "the one-legged Yankee" and "as if I was missing some part of myself" (Madden 64). To make matters even more puzzling, he keeps hearing other southern sharpshooters claim they fired a shot Carr himself remembers firing while suffering from the flu, the shot that killed

Union General Sanders as he made a spectacular horseback charge at Confederate infantry near Knoxville. "I believed him," concludes Carr after hearing one such claimant, "because I didn't remember a damned thing. Who would remember a fever dream?" (66). More and more, Carr feels he is traveling through "one vast battlefield that was vanishing under weeds and saplings right before my eyes" (69). The metaphor is taken from what Carr must literally be seeing as he passes battlefields being reclaimed by nature, but when applied to the processes of the mind, it suggests an inability to distinguish the significant from the noise.

Though the cabin where he had grown up in central Tennessee is precisely where it was when he had left it, he concludes after visits to Elizabethton where his mother now lives with a widower she has married that "everything had changed, I came back to no continuity" (Madden 70). A minister he runs into while in town named Reverend Carter agrees as a favor to Carr's dead forbears to teach him to read. One day, while reading the works of Parson Brownlow, Carr takes the notion to follow the example of that bloviating Unionist editorialist who wrote his memoirs at age 28. But once Carr finishes writing what he calls "My Story," he doesn't allow its publication: "Even as I employed my elementary ability to write, I heard voices always, never felt I was writing for cold type. Then I imagined listeners, readers, and silenced myself and swore my editor friend to secrecy" (75). The sheer number of other versions of what he'd experienced proves inhibiting. Especially vexing to Carr from the time he starts to write is the question Brownlow asks at the start of his own autobiography, "who is this man who offers this book to the world?" It is a question Carr keeps asking himself, "reluctant to submit the results to the world" (74).

The next stage of Carr's journey takes place in Reverend Carter's study, when Carter tells the story of his own participation in the war as designer of the plan to destroy railroad bridges along a 270-mile route from Bridgeport, Mississippi up to Holston, Tennessee. The plan does not completely succeed, however bold its conception, and Carter's article about the plan now languishes, for reasons similar to those that Willis Carr believes mar his autobiography:

I was certain I had failed, to shut out whatever was not pure fact. I knew that editors would instruct me to expunge all fanciful elements. I set it aside, but could never, somehow, work up enough interest to reduce what I had written to the status of an unimpeachable historical account (Madden 84).

While Carr is on a bear hunt near his mountain cabin, similar questions about historical veracity continue to dog him. If he knows he *did* shoot the General, why does Carr believe "that I missed the War?" (87) Outside voices determine for Carr what is and is not a valid memory. And that very questioning of validity renders his whole experience of the war suspect.

From 1876 to 1877, to find out what he'd missed, and "to get the War, as I'd experienced it, on target," Carr is gone from his cabin retreat, taking a trip through the Civil War battlefields, sketching what he sees, beginning with the site of the bridge his family members had burned, then moving into Virginia (92). A man who lends Carr a room in his Fredericksburg home for a night also lends him his copy of Alexander Gardner's *A Photographic Sketchbook of The Civil War*. In that book Carr comes upon a caption for a missing photo of a dead Confederate sharpshooter in his sniper's nest at Gettysburg. Gardner's story of seeing the skeleton still there, its rifle rusting nearby on November 19, 1863, the day of Lincoln's great address, doesn't wash with Carr, since "Union soldiers would have taken that rifle . . . and then burial details would have disposed of the body"

(94). When Carr finally gets to Gettysburg, he investigates Gardner's claim, learning from locals that a man other than Gardner actually took the photo and that photographers were seen a few days after the battle moving bodies to pose them for their cameras. From other townspeople, Carr seeks out other battle stories unrelated to the photo, "hoping one of them, or all of them together, will, one of these days, fix me in my own place in the war." But he can't see how he fits in. When he finally turns South, like Lee after his defeat, he is "dodging a fusillade of words and images" (96). Much in the way postmodern characters tend to do if they are to preserve any sense of identity or any hope of coming to a logical conclusion about what is going on in the world they live in, Carr takes temporary cover in the system of historical detection. The fusillade faced by Carr is in English critic Thomas Docherty's terms an "attack on the singularity of the human's 'place' . . . carried out through the elaboration of a multiplicity of conflicting narratives (180).

While making his way through the Wilderness, Carr reflects on the death of Jackson and the wounding of Longstreet, whose shooting Carr says "I think now that I *did* see . . . without knowing who was getting shot" (Madden 100). It's frequently unclear to Carr whether a given memory of the war came from direct experience or from being told what happened after the fact. In a particularly striking passage, Carr admits he feels little different from those who were never at the scenes of the battles in which he knows he did fight: Many others talk of other battles at other places, for they, too, missed the battles in this neighborhood, as I did, even though I was actually here, somewhere. I am the mysterious figure in the background where men are gathered, who haunts the reunions, the consecrations, the conclaves of storytellers, I am "that feller over

there” who has no story to tell, only the ones others have told me, I have only a hatfull of fragments to sort out. I am the very impulse without the tale (100).

At Resaca, Carr again states that he cannot himself tell stories as other veterans do, because “wherever I go, I cannot compete with all the voices” (Madden 103). When pressed, Carr doesn’t try to fake it either: “I think this happened, but I’m not sure. . . . Maybe that’s just what somebody else told me about his own experiences” (104). His role as he tours the now decade-old battle sites is that of mere listener. Up to this point, the narrative itself is his only attempt to explain what he saw, but he often features the storytelling of others, often self-appointed guides he encounters while walking along a historic site. At Shiloh, Carr quizzes one of these:

“Why do you haunt this battlefield?” I asked him. “Why does it haunt me? The next time you see me, I will have an answer.”  
“But it may be wrong.” he said.  
“Yes, I know,” I said, and we wallowed in laughter on the Indian mound until I rolled off (106).

Strangely, Carr’s reluctance to speak seems to him to draw other men his way. Not contributing to the hail of voices proves no defense, apparently, against their finding him. The voices, as Carr discovers, are not the only carriers of contrary versions of the war. That picture of the dead sharpshooter at Gettysburg keeps turning up, meanwhile, often published in drawn form, and besides the back story about the movement of bodies by the photographers and the fact that the weapon is not that of a sharpshooter, there’s something more that’s wrong. But another approach at solving the mystery must wait till after Carr’s return to Bleak House Tower in Knoxville where Carr believes he fired the shot that killed General Sanders. Stumbling out of the grasp of yet another volunteer guide, who insists on taking Carr up into the tower, he runs into yet another man insisting on

telling his tale of what occurred the day General Sanders fell. This is Mr. Anderson, who proceeds to lay out the scene without preamble. Once Anderson gets to the point in the story that Carr remembers, Carr interrupts to explain what he was thinking as he squeezed off a shot at an apparent Union officer riding a white horse. Carr's unprecedented breaking of his silence about this day does not register with Anderson as anything significant. In fact, Anderson just continues with his story. Although the moment is a breakthrough for Carr, perhaps the moment the novel has been leading up to, Anderson, with his contrary version, can take little notice of it. Hearing Anderson's version, Carr concludes it is possible he shot but not mortally, a Confederate artillery captain. If the Confederate captain, not General Sanders, made the charge this means it is possible Carr shot an officer from his own side, or at least the side he found himself fighting on. Mr. Anderson even declares that his rendition of the event in which Sanders is killed standing under a tree praising the captain's bravery is the true one ("I know because I have read the Official Report now.") despite the local popularity of the version that has Sanders dying while leaning forward in the saddle (119). Although Carr admits he likes Anderson's version since it absolves him of responsibility for anyone's death, he remains in the dark about his own role in what happened that day, mistrusting Anderson's romanticism and his own newly-unearthed memory.

After Carr returns home from his wanderings, he finds Reverend Carter has acquired a copy of Gardner's *Sketchbook* with the photo of the dead sharpshooter intact. Nearly speaking in tandem, the two determine that the corpse must have been posed, and during the conversation Carr makes what he calls a slip: "So they stretched the corpse out there, turned him into a Sharpshooter, into

a photograph, there where I had made a wall the night before” (Madden 133). He makes matters worse for himself later, though, in his enthusiasm forgetting Carter’s virulent anti-Confederate views and revealing that the photographers “faked my death in one of the most famous photographs of the war.” Hearing the “my,” Carter takes up a contemptuous silence. Carr kindly removes himself from Carter’s home soon after. So malleable have memory and identity become by now for Carr that he may be incorporating photographs into his own memory and attributing the creative act instead to others.

The novel ends with Carr working on a manuscript he’ll call “Going Home,” which presumably is what we’ve been reading already, but he admits he is no closer to an exact account of what happened to him in the war than he was immediately after its end. He refers to what he’ll be leaving to his descendants to read after his death as nothing more than fragments. He is still trying to figure out what happened, though. “I hate my ignorance as if it were a disease,” he says. “I want to get cured. Facts are like medicine. I want to *know*” (136). One last memory, in which he is forced by his role as guard at Andersonville to shoot the prisoner who had taught him to read Cherokee writing, does resurface at the end of the novel. Some may read the event as the trauma that caused Carr to block out all memory of the war, but this is surely too neat a solution for the phenomenon of forgetting and of loss of identity that Carr complains of, and too many other characters have corroborated their own experience of the same dysfunction. The cause of Carr’s confusion is in his present, not his past.

### **The Consequences of Giving a Damn in *The Wind Done Gone***

*The Wind Done Gone* (2001) made headlines in the months before its publication, having raised enough of the ire of the Margaret Mitchell estate to

earn a lawsuit. Perhaps aided by its notoriety, the book made the bestseller list. Readers expecting a zany send-up were no doubt surprised by Randall's brooding, extended character study of Cynara, half-sister to Scarlett O'Hara (referred to in the novel as Other) and daughter of Mammy as she returns to Tara (called Tata and Cotton Farm in the novel) to help bury her mother. Cynara also describes how she goes from being the mistress of Rhett Butler (R and Debt Chauffeur in the novel) to his wife then jilts him to become--briefly--a mistress again to a black Congressman. While in Washington DC, she becomes pregnant by this Congressman and gives up the child for the Congressman and his infertile wife to adopt. She then lives out her years in a house in Maryland, finally dying of lupus. All along, Cynara ruminates on the nature of identity, its relation to parentage and to race. *The Wind Done Gone* is her diary.

In the course of Cynara's fragmentary descriptions, we learn much about the *Gone With the Wind* characters Mitchell did not disclose, starting with Cynara's existence, itself a result of a till now unrevealed affair between Scarlett's father, Gerald O'Hara, and the domestic slave Mammy. When Mammy dies, Cynara inherits evidence of yet another interracial component of Scarlett's family history, an old letter revealing that her mother's great grandmother had been "a Negresse" (Randall 124). In *The Wind Done Gone* Scarlett is legally black, and Melanie (called Mealy Mouth) Wilkes is a murderer, having had a male slave whipped to death who revealed he'd had a gay relationship with her husband Ashley. Prissie's sudden, and fatal, ignorance about how to deliver Melanie's baby was a convenient means of revenge, as it turns out, for the death of her brother. Tara itself was designed by Pork (called Garlic in the novel), the slave Gerald O'Hara won in a poker game.



The 2001 novel's sly use of its 1936 precursor is its most obviously postmodern trait, but not the only one. The fluidity of Cynara's character, not only in the way she drifts from one allegiance to another, but in her lack of a settled, unitary identity and in her consciousness of that lack and its causes, mark her as a postmodern character. Her reactions to the information she has been allowed about her origins and on what she later discovers constitutes the book's plot, if it can be said to have one. The sheer variety of external sources of influences (archival letters, present-day politics, gossip) is considerable. Cynara's responses to what she learns fall very much into the pattern of the postmodern characters described already. She retreats into a self-designed, simplifying system and gains strength of will there.

As the novel begins, (literally when *Gone With the Wind* ends) Cynara is walking with R through an Atlanta park, remembering her time spent as a teenager working as a maid in an Atlanta brothel. She was fond in those days of using "a fancy sentence I had practiced to show I was somebody" to those customers who asked how she came to do such work: "A strange series of deaths in rapid succession following an influenza epidemic left a trail of inheritances that led me to the flesh market with a stop of work with a family who couldn't afford to keep a second ladies' maid." Her knowing assumption of another voice proves expedient "for a laugh and a nickel tip" (21). She also recalls the day she and R moved into the house he had built for her, when he instructed her to "forget everything before now" and his insisting, "Don't bring your past into this house," but now--with Mammy dying (as she has learned via letter) and Cynara wondering whether she should go back to Tara to see her, "Every day it gets harder to see why he can bring his history into my house, I can't bring my past"

(27). Again, she refers to parts of her identity as though they can be separated from her. But events and new information can either bring them to the surface or end their existence.

She remembers seeing the letter her father wrote nearly 25 years ago to a trusted fellow planter, proposing to sell the young Cynara because Scarlett is “beginning to find her Mammy’s daughter tiresome.” He urges that Cynara be made a “lady’s companion” because Gerald O’Hara “to put it clearly . . . would not like to see someone who looked so much like my sainted mother ill-used in field or bed” (Randall 36). Concludes Cynara “twice I’ve been kilt by a man” and one of those times was when she’d read this letter (the other instance occurred when she saw R in his Confederate uniform). As well as referring to the emotional trauma of finding out her father could countenance such a thing as selling his own child, “kilt” can also be read as referring to the fate befalling a prior, more naive self (57). Frequently, Cynara speaks of having parts of her self destroyed when she discovers new information, as when Garlic reveals to her his true role, apparently long-standing, as the de facto head of the plantation. Upon hearing this, she feels herself “dissolving and falling to the ground” (57).

What Cynara seeks, above all, however, is a static place in a forcibly divided nation where, in 1871, “the pendulum seems to swing again, swinging away from the promise of real change” (87). The political energies pushing for Reconstruction reforms, for the Federal enforcement of voting rights and civil protections for blacks are now ebbing, so it is out of a need for security more than anything else that Cynara accepts R’s marriage proposal. But her marriage to R is much more short-lived than her tenure as his mistress, which began in her teens (she is 29 now). R has asked that they go to London, in which case he specifies

she must live as a white woman. But Cynara refuses the trip, though not the ring. She perceives in his condition a lack of respect for her that rankles and contributes to her decision to leave him for the black Congressman. Her short affair with the Congressman, her decision to give the child they produce to him and his wife constitute her response to the impending change of world her narrative refers to with dread as “our Gotterdammerung” (202).

With her son’s birth, and her leaving him in the custody of what would otherwise be a childless couple, all is reconciled. “All my life,” says Cynara at the book’s end, “I saw the tangles that stood between me and love--until you” (Randall 205). Her response to an unexplainable world in which she had been sold on a Charleston auction block (to R) then learned that the children of the family who sold her were themselves legally black is to have a son with a black Congressman and allow him and his wife to take custody of him. She had been sold from her white family, so the next logical step is to give her own child to an upper middle-class black family. In her way, she is evening out the original injustice, in addition to making allowances for the likelihood, due to her being diagnosed with what we know today as lupus, that she has made the pragmatic choice to give up her child to parents more able to take care of him.

Cynara’s identity is not the only one in flux in the novel. Aware of her own wavering identity she is quick to notice and remember the outward signs of the same condition in others, as she does at her mother’s graveside:

Watching Other stand by the grave, I knew for sure that Mammy had stopped wearing the mask and the mask had worn her. By the time we were born, choosing between Other and me was like choosing between paper dolls, and Other had the prettier clothes (Randall 54).

Other's identity, meanwhile, isn't quite a unitary one either for Cynara, who ascribes to her "the vitality, the vigor, and the pragmatism of a slave in a white woman's body" (47). For Cynara, Other is a mixture of persons, at odds with her outer appearance. R's identity, too, seems less than settled in Cynara's sight, but in this she probably finds a kind of consolation. As they lie next to one another one night in bed, Cynara wonders about him but comes to no conclusion: "'Who is this man I lay with?' and I have no response. This man is unknown to me. Perhaps even unknowable by me. And maybe that is exactly what I love about my man."

### **Conclusion**

The presence of postmodern characters, most of them protagonists, in the Civil War novels of the past quarter century shows that something of an injustice is done when readers cordon these novels off from the rest of contemporary literature. That this separation assuredly takes place can be verified with a quick perusal of a barometric book like Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon*, in which historical novels in general are dismissed as unworthy of candidacy for Bloom's listing (although Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* quite deservedly makes it anyway).<sup>2</sup> An inspection of the syllabi of college American Literature and creative writing courses also reveals a conspicuous lack of Civil War novels from the past twenty years. Indeed, while contemporary literature itself is underrepresented on such syllabi, contemporary novels that address the Civil War are more likely to be included on history syllabi than those of English faculty. If these novels are skipped, readers lose the chance to see what a postmodern sensibility (the author's or the characters) makes of an era that readers may

already feel overfamiliar with because of their exposure to more conventional Civil War novels like *Gone With the Wind*, *Andersonville* and *The Killer Angels*.

The reputation of historical novels may have suffered from the erroneous but popular notion that they are necessarily antiquarian in viewpoint and style as well as in their settings. But as the novels treated in this section demonstrate, a character's Civil War-era setting does not prevent the author's own setting from impinging on the conception and treatment of that character. Such lapses may leave the author open to charges of taking anachronistic license, but in a time like our own when the inability of persons to completely banish their contexts from their points-of-view is more generally acknowledged, these lapses are not as likely to fatally mar a novel for a given reader. In a book like *Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All*, in fact, encroachments of the author's present-day attitudes upon Lucy Marsden's past are embraced for comic effect and even make available parts of a Confederate soldier's wife's story that would have gone untold in previous novels, the most obvious example being Captain Marsden's suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Without Lucy's familiarity, from reading the magazine articles and watching the talk shows of her present-day, with a way of thinking of her husband's symptoms and a way of explaining them, they might not have found their way into her narrative. Such instances of the present leaking into the past abound in these novels and force in readers a reevaluation of the historic process that integrates the past into the present in a more complex way, a way more likely to conform to readers' own life experiences.

If novels like Vidal's *Lincoln* or Madden's *Sharpshooter* are viewed not only as examples of the historical novel genre but as contemporary American

novels with Civil War-era settings, new questions arise as to how to interpret the works. My own inquiry, which sought and found in the novels manifestations of our present confusion about what to make of our situations in the face of proliferating conversations, theories and options, is only one possibility among many. When we conceive of these novels as responses to a present-day cultural need rather than simply journeys into an antiquated, remote past, then the present becomes the object of scrutiny, too. A reading of Safire's *Freedom!* which speaks of Safire's Lincoln rather than just Lincoln gives rise to the question of what the twentieth century Safire does with Lincoln and why he may do it. This is surely a more conscientious reading than one that simply views the book as yet another attempt to render 1860s Washington DC politics in an accurate and enlivening way. A reading of Randall's *The Wind Done Gone* that merely stipulates to the book's fidelity to its Reconstruction-era setting is surely as one-dimensional as any reading of a contemporary novel that never acknowledges the effect of our own times on the author's choices.

The practice of viewing history in novels as "uses" rather than as disinterested storytelling is one that should become a habit. If readers can suspend the idea that because a living author lays her tale in a past era, it should be read as a story discrete from our own stories, they will not be as likely to accept uncritically the ways high officials interpret the past so as to advance today's policies or explain recent mistakes. When in August of 2004 National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice a Veterans of Foreign Wars gathering in San Antonio that America's difficulties with the insurgent counterattack in Iraq was similar to the problems faced by the Allied occupation in Germany just after the Nazi surrender, she was offering an interpretation of America's past just as

subject to critique as a present-day phenomenon as any other version of our history.<sup>3</sup> Just as it is convenient and fulfilling for our authors to place our present-day befuddlement in the mid-19th century, it is also a choice, probably unconscious, that neglects other possibilities. Rice's conflation of World War II with the invasion of Iraq leaves out much in the interest of tailoring a narrative to the time. Readers who ask why Safire's Lincoln is featured taking refuge in the careful crafting of his rhetoric will be just as likely to ask why Rice includes only our wars against aggressive, expansionist powers in her litany that ends with America's war on terror. Readers who ask what Allan Gurganus leaves out of his version (the role of religion in the post-Civil War south being one notable omission) will be more likely to ask why Rice leaves out conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Panama and Iraq. To exclude historical novels from the syllabus deprives students of another sorely needed opportunity to acquire the interpretive skills needed in our electorate and our board rooms.

On the other hand, there is the possibility these novels may themselves be the systems we retreat to (even if they don't present themselves as such), away from the world we live in that puts us in such numbing quandaries. If so, these systems offer false refuge. They don't reward us with a simpler set of problems or a setting where it is any easier to make up our minds than it is in our own settings. While it may be relatively easy to come to a conclusion regarding whether or not Lee should have attacked cemetery ridge on the third day or whether the Claffey family should have tried to help the prisoners in Camp Sumter, it is far more difficult to determine, say, whether Lucy Marsden should have stayed with her husband to the end, or whether Willis Carr's is a life wasted or well-spent, or whether Cynara should have stayed away from RB or not, or

whether, in *Guns of the South*, Lee's slow abolition policy is a just one. Any novels that avoid promoting a view of the Civil War era as one in which the moral choices and the best life-choices were refreshingly obvious perform a valuable service. They deprive us of the chance to feel chauvinism about our own latter-era sensibility being superior, and they make it possible for us to identify a modicum more closely with our fictional (and actual) forbears, since we no doubt share their feelings of confusion as to the appropriate response to what is happening around us and to us.

### **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup>The Canadian critic Linda Hutcheon, in her book *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989) said that the hallmark of postmodernism is doubt about the information available, and additional doubt about one's own ability to come to adequate understanding of it all. She identifies in postmodern fiction a "contradictory turning to the archives" in which historical texts are invoked and subsequently doubted as authorities. The concern with information and self-doubt in its wake are patterns that certainly appear in the postmodern Civil War fiction in my analysis here, and often there is indeed a concern with historical documents, especially marked in *Lincoln, Freedom!* and *Sharpshooter*.

<sup>2</sup>See Bloom's *Western Canon*, 21.

<sup>3</sup>On the same day, August 25, 2003, Secretary of Defense also compared the Iraqi insurgency to the German resistance group known as the *Werwolves*, a comparison which, as Daniel Benjamin points out neglects the numbers of Americans each group killed (zero on the part of the *Werwolves*, thousands and counting on the part of the Iraqis) and the fact that the US shared the burden of occupation and reconstruction with many allies in the earlier case. ("Condi's Phony History" *Slate* August 29, 2003. <http://slate.msn.com/id/2087768/> )



**CHAPTER SEVEN: “OF COURSE IT WOULD MEAN  
SOMETHING LIKE THAT:” THREE MODELS OF MEANING IN CIVIL  
WAR NOVELS OF THE PAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS**

Like the situations in which characters in most late-twentieth-century works of Civil War fiction find themselves, the reader of these works could be forgiven for feeling confused about what the war means. No one interpretation of the war has predominated in the past two decades, in contrast to other eras when rough agreement on the Civil War’s meaning prevailed, especially among authors from the same region.<sup>1</sup> I humbly suggest that the ways our recent novels deal with the Civil War’s meaning fall into three categories: 1) the novels that defer the argument by depicting numerous interpretations as equally important if not valid; 2) those that lump the war’s meaning with all other modern wars as wrongs in themselves without regard to political causes; and 3) those that proffer a new politically-informed counter meaning. By far, the most confusing of these with regard to explorations of the war’s meaning is the first, with the emancipation of the slaves--to choose one issue--frequently depicted in the same novel as a moral imperative, as a matter of political expediency, as a tactical military move, or as a cynical bit of nose-thumbing at the foe.

Emancipation, in novels of my first category can be the entire point of the Union war effort for some characters and entirely irrelevant for others, according to which chapter in the same novel one might be reading. For the narrator’s part, no aid is offered to the reader who (perhaps naively) wants to determine with finality what the relation of the emancipation to the war effort might have been. There are many possible stances to choose from in such books, given that the plots themselves often hinge on their characters’ process of selection from among

these seemingly equally viable stances (or an attempted avoidance of the selection). If a novel can be said to consistently offer a theory of the Civil War's meaning, it is often a meaning that denies the Civil War's uniqueness (my second category). Then there are other novels in which the Civil War is merely another manifestation of the true overarching driver of events, which is the novel's central preoccupation (my third category).

The novels I'll treat here, probably the most publicized and most read Civil War novels of the past 25 years, fall into three sometimes overlapping categories in the way they approach the question of the Civil War's meaning. In my first group, the novels that follow what I call the multiplicity model, the Civil War becomes too complex an event, too important and too life-changing for too many kinds of people to define in any one way. In a book like *Jacob's Ladder*, the long saga of a Virginia slave-owning family which sets itself up as a late-twentieth-century answer to *Gone With the Wind*, one can read of as many versions of the Civil War's meaning as there are characters and vantage points. But in a narrower book like *Where I'm Bound*, which is primarily about an African-American cavalryman, it is clear that when we are given his view of the Civil War, we are being given one among many viable others which must be respected, even though the protagonist's view has seldom been rendered in a novel. In the novels of my second model, what follow what I call the 1990s antiwar model, the war is nearly identical with any other in its meaning since any analysis of the role of slavery, of Lincoln's speeches, of any cause whatsoever, is never taken seriously, as the war is depicted as a phantasmagoric nightmare the main characters merely hope to survive. But this conception of the war is accompanied by a disdain for the role of government in harboring its citizens

from the war's brutal effects that echoes the thought of many 1990s neo-liberal commentators about the ineffectiveness of government as an institution that can be of benefit to its citizens. In the third group, which follows my counter-narrative model, all the consensus meanings that have become familiar to school children or viewers of historical documentaries are indicted as myth or as propaganda, and a counter-meaning is offered that renders the war simply another tragic episode in a larger narrative driven by forces the author specifically identifies.

### **The Three Models**

The Multiplicity Model of the Civil War's meaning admits, as its name implies, to many possible interpretations of the war's causes, purposes and legacies. While the novels that subscribe to this model may slightly privilege one particular community's view of the war, they do so advisedly, allowing those characters who hold contrary or slightly differing views their dignity rather than condemning them together with their views to caricature. If a character gives voice to a view of the war shared by another community, that view is given the space to unfold itself fully, even if the character may turn out later to lack moral standing as the novel defines it. The implication of such novels is that those views of the war, because they have been shared by interpreters who themselves went on to affect history by acting on those views, should at least be understood, even if they are no longer widely shared by the author's contemporaries. The multiplicity pattern conforms to the tendency in our era's literary depictions of history to include as many frameworks for understanding as possible, to right the perceived wrongs of prior eras in which one master narrative was presumed to serve for all readers. Even as these novels seek to redress the under

representation of some communities' versions of the war, they do not compound the original wrong by leaving out the interpretations of other, more predominant, groups. While Donald McCaig's *Jacob's Ladder* (1998) seems bent on including as many kinds of interested parties as history allows (men, women, the young, the old, slaves, freed slaves, Northerners, Southerners, the rich, the poor), the other novels I examine in this category restrict their foci to distinct splinter groups. But all three make a point of allowing voices from the farthest reaches of the interpretive spectrum to have their say, as though the author is a judge, ensuring that jurors hear testimony from every witness before rendering a verdict.

### **The Multiplicity Model**

The novels in this study that are most exemplary of a view of the Civil War that is itself composed of multiple views, some contradictory, depending on the circumstances of the character speaking (or thinking) include Donald McCaig's *Jacob's Ladder* (1998), Allen B. Ballard's *Where I'm Bound* (2000) and, a book discussed in the previous chapter, Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone* (2001). The first novel is the most panoramic and the lengthiest of the three. Quite appropriately, its cover is a panoramic painting of the Battle of Atlanta. The other two works restrict most of their space to the doings of a small circle of characters. In *Where I'm Bound*, the narrative is concerned with the adventures of two escaped Mississippi slaves who work as spies, couriers and cavalrymen for the Union army, and take part in fight after fight, but allows the narrative to take on the point of view of many of the other characters around them. *The Wind Done Gone* occupies itself faithfully and probably more narrowly with the up-to-now untold story of Cynara, Scarlett O'Hara's previously

unknown half-sister but, like *Where I'm Bound*, takes on the task of depicting the states of mind of many other characters.

Because of the sum of these complicated relations of character to character, view to view, an illusory impression can arise in novels of multiplicity that all relevant points of view have been featured, or that the views featured in the novel are of equal weight. Such books are often praised for their balance, for their attention to the nuances attending a set of conflicting points of contact in a culture at a given time. But an all-encompassing fictional treatment of these points cannot be done. Selection is always necessary, so some meritorious or momentarily popular view of the war is bound to be omitted. But the attempt at conveying a “balanced” representation of the Civil War (or of one of its fronts) is itself a choice, and should be recognized as such. Such novels imply the Civil War’s meaning is still unsettled, but fail to make an attempt to settle the question, instead deferring that attempt to the reader’s discretion.

***Jacob’s Ladder*** In the case of Donald McCaig’s 525-page Civil War novel a wide variety of interpretations of the war are offered by its many characters. The novel follows the wartime and Reconstruction-era doings of the family who owns Stratford Plantation in central Virginia, their slaves and their neighbors. For opens, there is Marguerite “Midge” Gatewood, born a half-white slave on the plantation, later sold to a slave trader named Silas Omohundru who frees her and marries her, then dies in the war. Marguerite uses Silas’s inheritance to start a bank in Richmond, passing as a white woman for the rest of her days and regarding northern troops as little more than thieves while honoring her dead husband’s decision to join Lee’s army. Her husband has volunteered near the end of the war and written from his post on the Petersburg fortifications that he knows

the war is going badly, but justifies his enlistment as a way of making up for his loss of honor when his importing business sank with his ships: “My hopes were frustrated, my accomplishments ashes in my mouth. I write today as a gentleman—a soldier of the Army of Northern Virginia” (McCaig 462). The war’s causes aren’t talked of among the troops, Silas writes, and he hides from his comrades the fact that he has volunteered, since they’d be likely to “jeer at patriotic talk” so that “nobody dares mention ‘nobility’ or ‘chivalry’ in their presence” (464).

Another major character, an escapee from the Gatewood plantation named Jesse Burns, joins a “colored regiment” of the Union army after remarking to a friend, “I don’t know as how I want this war to pass me by,” but, amazingly, he holds no grudge against his former master for selling Marguerite, to whom he’d just been married or for having Jesse whipped and confined in a basement after she is sold (McCaig 192). “He didn’t have no more choice than I do. For a master he wasn’t so bad” (193). Duncan Gatewood, meanwhile, the son of the plantation owner, begins the novel as a cadet at Virginia Military Academy, working as a guard at the hanging of John Brown as part of his service there, and joins the Confederacy at the start of hostilities, never shedding his belief in the rightness of secession but not mourning the loss of slavery when it comes. His father Samuel, however, defers to what he believes is well-established Southern tradition, explaining himself to his neighbor, a newly-transplanted Northerner who made the error of providing temporary shelter to the escaped Jesse Burns:

“Sir, you are not native here and cannot understand our ways. Please indulge me when I assure you that customs which may to the naive eye appear harsh are necessary for the management of our domestic institutions. Men as wise as Jefferson, Calhoun, and Clay have wrestled with it. There are, if

you'll permit me the term, 'Yankees,' who simplify our concerns. Theirs is a world of vivid blacks and whites, ours is swirling gray" (83).

For the elder Gatewood, the war is a collision of cultures whose values were diverging, much in the way the historian Arthur Charles Cole portrayed it in his 1934 *The Irrepressible Conflict*.<sup>2</sup> Samuel Gatewood's views are given a lot of space. At several points in the text, he is allowed to argue for his interpretation of the war in his own words. The novel even features one of his articles on the proper treatment of slaves, which he believes should involve the use of the whip--albeit sparingly.

The pro-slavery view is here propounded by Samuel Gatewood, who is rather cold and rationalizes slave owning as a merciful institution in treatises printed in *Southern Planter*. The more anti-slavery view of the war is represented by both the noble Sallie Botkin, who is the daughter of a schoolmaster living near the Gatewood plantation, and by her new husband, the cowardly Northern ex-professor Alexander Kirkpatrick, to whom she is briefly married. Kirkpatrick ends up a rather pathetic outlaw, hanged from a tree. But it is also represented by the deranged South Carolina fire breather Edmund Ruffin, who makes his cameo outside the prison where John Brown is about to be hanged. In *Jacob's Ladder*, favoring the continuation of slavery could be sanctioned by both the ostensibly thoughtful Southerner as well as the extremist.

The most nihilistic voice, of all those in the novel, comes from the lawyer Catesby Byrd, a good friend of Samuel Gatewood, who makes his views (which seem influenced by Edmund Wilson's preface to his study of the Civil War literature *Patriotic Gore*) known to his fellow Confederate, the idealistic Silas Omohundru, just before the Battle of Gettysburg:

“War is transporting but dreadful beyond imagining--and we are its willing pawns. Our lives will be used up for purposes we do not fathom by a God we imagine only at the peril of sanity. How God is served by a boy burned to death in the Wilderness I cannot imagine, but that He is served I cannot doubt. Are we tools for some grander purpose? There are those who believe so. But Mr. Darwin claims this world is more ancient than previously thought, that creatures once flourished upon our planet that no longer exist. When those creatures lost their lives in some terrible struggle, did their deaths serve some greater, nobler purpose?” (284).

So abundant is this novel in disparate points of view on the meaning of the war that it is impossible to cite examples of all of them here. *Jacob's Ladder* seems, in fact, to be the fictional answer to the tendency of historians in the past decade and a half to attempt to give voice to those segments of the population left out of previous histories of the war. The soldier's experience, that of his mother, father, sister, slaves, that of the nurse and that of the slave trader, the abolitionist, the small-stakes merchant and the recent immigrant get their share of space in the book. There seems plenty of room, even though the book hardly ventures over the northern border of Virginia.

***Where I'm Bound*** Although the nihilistic view of the war is not featured in Allen B. Ballard's 2000 novel, perhaps because its major characters have such personal stakes in the war's outcome, Ballard freights his book with a similar panoply of opinions about the war's aims and consequences. The book follows the nearly nonstop combat service of Joe Duckett, an escaped slave from the Kenworthy Plantation of Mississippi, who, along with his friend Zack Bascom, has escaped doing forced spadework for a Confederate unit and joined the Union's Third Cavalry. The stories of several other characters intertwine with his. His former owner is the Confederate Major, and later, Colonel, Richard Kenworthy, who plays the part of Joe's violent nemesis but is never allowed to lapse into a stock



villain. His malignity is never motiveless. He does have a semblance of a conscience, too, or at least the knowledge that others expect him to have one. Though the novel makes clear that Kenworthy has no qualms about executing escaped slaves or captured black Union troops at Fort Pillow, when presiding over a mass shooting, he seems relieved to have it averted by news of a Yankee cavalry unit's approach, and he does feel called upon to conjure up some emotion about the deaths of African-American fighters. He writes to his wife, Sue, about what he says he saw during his participation in the battle at Fort Pillow:

“It was a horrid sight, and I hope never to see such again. They begged mercy, still we fired and kept on firing. I attempted to stop the slaughter, but to no avail. General Forrest came over and ordered the men to keep on shooting, even though the victory was won and the Negroes and their white allies defeated.”

He closes the letter by revealing that he'd been unable to stop the immolation of many blacks who hold up in some buildings. “I am told their cries for help were piteous as the flames consumed the buildings. Pray for me, and ask God's forgiveness on my soul” (Ballard 95).

Even late in the novel, the attempt is made to depict the source of Richard Kenworthy's anger at the Union invaders in a way that cannot be dismissed. White supremacist, he certainly is. War criminal, there is no doubt he is, but Ballard has accepted the challenge to attempt to understand his specific motives for pursuing Joe Duckett and his family with an intensity that proves self-destructive:

He'd marched off to war so proud and happy to protect the Southern way of life, and the very act of protecting that great and wonderful culture--the highest social form Western civilization had

yet devised--had resulted in its destruction. And darky soldiers in his living room, giving his sweet Sue orders, putting their hands on her to restrain her! Somebody would have to pay for all this (294).

The terrors felt by Southern women on the home front also receives respectful attention, despite the temptation in such cases to minimize these difficulties or to overwhelm them by comparison to those of Zenobia, Joe Duckett's wife, as she escapes her own plantation and makes her way across Mississippi with several other fugitive slaves, eluding capture, braving the elements, all while fighting a crippling case of gout. Though Zenobia's plight is rendered so starkly as to make her sequences among the novel's most memorable, the dread felt by Major Kenworthy's wife and sister as they contemplate what the Federal occupation will mean for them is portrayed in the novel as reasonable, given the context. Although the novel's crowning irony has Joe Duckett's Union Cavalry detachment actually saving Sue Kenworthy from being raped by a contingent of Confederate irregulars, she really is left in a vulnerable position by her husband's absence. Admittedly, there are notes of laughable self-pity and naiveté to Sue Kenworthy's complaints to her husband, but her feeling of defenselessness is undeniable and it is possible to sympathize with her:

“. . . We're practically *destitute*, only ten slaves, and one of them that worthless Uncle Dan over at Clifton.”

“We'll get them all back when we drive the Yankees out. The Nigras will have nowhere to go.”

Sue sat up and looked at him. “You surely don't believe that, do you? Why the Yankees are thicker than flies around here, raiding up and down the Mississippi and Yazoo like they owned them. . . . I'm sorry, but between having no money, and Clifton gone, and *begging* from your relatives, and now having to go to Mobile to live--it's just too much for a body.”

“I know, honey,” he said. “It’s not easy to see everything we’ve worked for destroyed, or take charity from kin, or--” (Ballard 181).

As a counterpoint to the way *Where I’m Bound* takes seriously the motives and the anxieties of those fighting to preserve a slave-holding society, it also resists the temptation to portray all those fighting for the Union as uniformly noble. Starting with Joe Duckett’s slicing of the throat of a Confederate sentry during his escape, the novel never quite allows us to see Joe as a moral exemplar in his every facet. Indeed, not only does he seem to favor overkill in this case and to occasionally even enjoy the violence he must unleash, he also has a weakness for whisky (which proves a factor in his brief demotion for shooting a fellow soldier he believes may be a poker cheat) and a weakness for feminine beauty. The readiness with which he takes up with a black nurse he meets in Vicksburg seems a bit inappropriate considering that he has left a wife and two children in captivity. But it seems the hero of a novel in our era must have his share of interesting flaws, and Allen Ballard has not been remiss about providing Joe Duckett with a goodly number, along with a mischievous streak, to boot. He cannot resist, in one scene, humiliating a group of Confederates whose party he breaks up in the process of freeing his sidekick Zack from their clutches. Though his intent is sensible--after Joe is through, the pantsless Confederates will be none too eager to mount a pursuit--the zest with which he carries out that intent can only have stoked his opponents’ anger:

“Right now, I’m going to burn these trousers and boots of yours in this here fireplace. When they put you out working on those roads in them swamps with them pioneers, you going to be in bad shape.” He tossed the clothes into the fire, then picked up the banjo. “You knows how us darkies just love to strum and strut. And you’d look like hell strumming in them nasty old britches of

yours, so I don't reckon you'll be needing this no more tonight." His eye fell on the bottle of bourbon. "This neither."

He took a good deep satisfying swig, corked the bottle, and doffed his hat to all (Ballard 67).

While it is clear that readers are meant to root for Joe Duckett, much as they'd root for Indiana Jones or the Terminator or any other action hero, he is like his movie counterparts in that he does not always behave as charitably in triumph or as nobly in repose as he might (to the point of being vulnerable to the charge of behaving stereotypically). Despite his being, in sum, a living advancement of his people's rights and a much-needed addition to an American literature that contains few black male characters like him, he is also a reminder that the rightness of a cause does not automatically ennoble those who serve that cause. So Joe Duckett's theory of the war ("We trying to punish these slave masters, break them out of their nasty ways.") is not represented by a saint just as the slave master view is not represented by a monster (Ballard 109). The characters counterbalance one another, and their views in the novel align with the characters. The effect, in these books' case, is to counsel a suspension of judgment of their characters for choosing the sides they choose (or, in the absence of the ability to choose the side, continuing to *support* a given side).

***The Wind Done Gone*** While readers of Alice Randall's novel come away with a sense of its characters' flawed humanity similar to the sense one gets reading *Where I'm Bound*, the lack of heroic figures in this novel leads to an impression that nearly every character is consumed by self-interest, and that their particular theories of the war are also compromised by the characters' limited perceptions and narrow goals. The book's two major characters, Cynara O'Hara (then Butler) and R. (Rhett Butler) each have their separate views of what the war and its

aftermath means, and survival in both eras depends on each character perceiving accurately what the larger forces at work in their world mean. The theories they come to must be put into instant practice since they all call for immediate life choices to accommodate them. That Gerald O'Hara, who sells his daughter Cynara into slavery, gets the privilege of explaining himself reinforces the novel's properties as a nearly journalistic attempt to depict the full spectrum of thought during a period of history we still scrutinize.

For Cynara, the war and Reconstruction eras are times when racial and gender-based hierarchies are subject to rearrangement, allowing her to assume a variety of roles forbidden to her before. As we have seen in the previous chapter, she experiences a loss of core identity that is only partially resolved at the novel's end. By that time, the period of cultural upheavals that has allowed her to marry R. after he has divorced Other (Scarlett), that have allowed her to live for a brief period as a white woman, as a valued employee at Beauty's brothel (as a housekeeper), and, the black wife of a Confederate soldier, comes to an end. Various passages reveal that Cynara realizes that the unsettled states of identity may eventually be resolved for her whether she likes it or not--a prospect she seems to dread because when her identity was settled before, she was subject to the treatment accorded to the slave:

Bits and pieces. It comes back to me that way. I had a dream last night I was a girl again. In my dreams I am a girl again. I am sent to the market with a heavy load of rice. A little of the rice seeps out. I notice a fine little trail behind me. I panic. I put down my burden, tie a knot in the hole. I am scared. I know I am not still carrying everything. . . I always wake up before I arrive, 'cause I know I'd be punished for losing stuff (Randall 31).

That punishment would likely be corporal. But for all intents and purposes in that earlier era, Cynara would never be any more than her ability to do work, and she would always be at risk (should she be so unfortunate as to drop rice) of incurring punishment for not fulfilling the one role imposed on her. She feels herself in danger again of being pulled into a role not of her choosing when, toward the end of the Reconstruction era, as lupus symptoms are beginning to show themselves, Cynara realizes the period of experimentation with black suffrage and equality is over, to be followed by the return of the Southern aristocracy to power. “And now someone’s pulled the rug away,” she concludes when thinking about the dawn of the 1870s (Randall 130).

Her improvising spirit contrasts with those of the other characters in the novel, but comes off as only one way among many of coping with the series of changes that began long before the fall of Fort Sumter and came to a rude halt with the revival of the Democratic Party in the South. Her interpretation of the historical forces at work is an inclusive one, and one that defers to her inability to master them. The last days of Reconstruction she describes as a series of dances R. takes her to while in Washington D.C. doing business, where the conversation hints at imminent change. “This is our Gotterdammerung,” Cynara says. “This is the twilight and we are the gods” (Randall 202). The end of Cynara’s infatuation with R. comes shortly before the black Congressman she is having an affair with loses his seat in the election that swept Democrats into office in several Southern states. Federal troops would be leaving soon after, allowing for a new order of terror-enforced racial segregation. The lupus-afflicted Cynara turns down R.’s offer to take her to Europe and moves permanently to Washington D.C. to become a valued member of a black middle-class community. She never ventures

across racial lines again. She has recognized that other perspectives can, at times, outweigh her own and necessitate that she be careful not to assume the rightness of her position ensures its success.

Cynara's sensibility about her times is not the only one the novel examines closely and with respect. The character R., who bought Cynara, freed her, claimed her as mistress and then married her (this after telling Scarlett he no longer gave a damn), only to lose her, is not portrayed as the hedonistic, insensitive Rhett Butler one might expect to reappear in the novel that parodies *Gone With the Wind*. Here, he is a man whose defiance of Victorian norms is not merely for the sake of defiance but because of genuine emotional needs. But, as in *Gone With the Wind*, conventional mores eventually impose themselves regardless of R.'s contempt for them. As much as he may want a typical marriage to Cynara, to replace what he lost when he rejected Scarlett, she cannot obey his request to "Forget everything before now" (Randall 27). But the past is "breaking in like a robber in the night" (27). She cannot erase from her mind memories of R.'s having worn a Confederate officer's uniform. The war for R., then, holds out the hope he can attain his wishes, even if they flout tradition, but Cynara, in her realism, believes the return of a strict system of racial separation to be inevitable. For R., she proves its enforcer, unwilling to allow their interracial marriage to continue into the Jim Crow-era, even in Europe because she knows she would have brought her memories of the past there too. As a result of the war, Cynara says, "all my old dreams have come true, and I am too tired to dream anew" (175). The novel's treatment of R. is cruelly ironic in that his conception of the war as potentially an egalitarian revolution is exposed as naive by none other than his black wife. But he is always portrayed sympathetically by the

narrator Cynara who sincerely pities him for his loss of a child and for his general rootlessness. R's later resigned passivity is yet another approach to surviving in a tumultuous era, an approach not easily dismissed, since it does allow R. a temporary feeling of belonging that he might not otherwise have enjoyed had he joined the White Supremacist movement or simply fled the country at the outbreak of war.

A third voice that intrudes upon the narrative is that of Cynara's exploitive, insensitive father, Gerald O'Hara, whom she calls Planter. In the days when he still owned her, before she could even read it, Cynara copied out a letter on his desk. Later, as R. is teaching her to read, she comes to understand the letter is to a fellow plantation owner, begging him as a special favor to purchase Cynara and take her away:

This is a delicate situation, a delicate situation I know you will understand. The girl is no longer a child and she's getting in the way of our Mammy's work. A matter of divided loyalties. My eldest daughter adores her Mammy; she's beginning to find her Mammy's daughter tiresome. But I have a certain tender concern for this child. To put it clearly, I would not like to see someone who looked so much like my sainted mother ill-used in field or bed (Randall 36).

Again, Cynara is not forgiving of her father's decision, naming her reading of his letter as one of two instances when "I've been kilt by a man." Cynara concludes that for her father "all that counted were the acres" (37). Measured against the admittedly exasperating traits of Cynara and R., their self-centeredness and self-pity being only the most prevalent, Planter's sale of his daughter can be viewed as more of the same, the beginning of a series of self-interested acts that only end when Cynara agrees to act as a surrogate mother for the Congressman and his wife, who would otherwise have gone childless. Planter's letter revives the voice



of the morally bankrupt system of chattel slavery that the war does away with. And as the book unfolds, it stands as a reminder that Cynara might possibly be dispensed with by R and subjugated politically just as easily once the Reconstruction-era ends. But Cynara, as we have seen, pre-empts R.'s move, seemingly before he can contemplate making it.

The clashing of contrary voices is a phenomenon from which Cynara feels bound to protect her son until he is at least old enough to recover from the confusion he will inevitably experience. As an addendum to the novel, Cynara writes to the Congressman that the child Cyrus should not be told of his birth mother's adventures or shown the book she is writing about them, till he is an adult: "Don't let it form him, and he will grow strong enough to master it" (205). The indefinite "it" she uses twice here likely stands for the narrative, which Cynara believes is so ambiguous in its value, what with its record of the crimes of his forbears, especially his grandfather the Planter, and its admissions of weakness from his mother. Cynara's own anguish, stemming from the knowledge of her mixed race O'Hara parentage, and specifically about her father and mother's conduct, she'd lived with since her childhood, stands as a precautionary example of what damage too much knowledge of contrary perspectives too soon can do.

Finally, there's the matter of *The Wind Done Gone*'s relation to its own forbear *Gone With the Wind*. Much like the use the newer book makes of the words in the older book's title, the new novel is a clever rearrangement that adds an acerbic, jaded edge to the predominantly elegiac tone of the older book. As with the use of the title, nothing of significance from the older book is canceled out, but a new inflection of hard realism, Cynara's character itself, is brought in.

As this new book is Cynara's, the earlier book is Scarlett's, and while Cynara has no love lost for her half-sister, she in no way contradicts the earlier book's view of the war as the North's depredation on a South that had no idea what it was provoking. Instead, Cynara's book works as a balancer to Scarlett's, and even implies that if one is to have a true understanding of the war's effects on the characters concerned, both books should be read and read closely. No one view, then, of the events described is deemed the comprehensive one, and the implication is that all views should be understood. Like *Where I'm Bound* and *Jacob's Ladder*, *The Wind Done Gone* leaves the reader to decide which view to prefer.

### **The 1990s Anti-war Model**

Two novels examined in this chapter depict the Civil War as a nearly historically undifferentiated, destructive chaos, uprooting the central characters from their accustomed lives and forcing them to accommodate its effects or else give up their chances of survival. These novels resemble such modernist antiwar classics as *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *A Farewell to Arms* (both 1929) in that the war depicted in these books could almost be any other war. The particular political and social upheavals of the Civil War don't register here as much as the general upheavals visited on their major characters, none of whom are generals, presidents or industrialists. The characters in these novels had been going about rather anonymous lives as farmers or spinsters or small-town teenagers when a national-scale conflict confronted them, demanding a participation the characters submit to only reluctantly. The central conflicts in these novels have little to do with the pressures peculiar to the Civil War, implying that the many crushingly important "issues" that the war attempted to

settle--according to our conventional histories--were not what crushed the ranks of ordinary citizens. Instead, the decision to make war, to unleash violence on a mass scale, mattered the more than the potential settlement of political questions, and rendered all later decisions irrelevant.

***Cold Mountain and The Black Flower*** Charles Frazier's and Howard Bahr's novels came out nearly simultaneously (in 1997) and bear a great resemblance to one another in plot and setting, a fact which worked perhaps to the second novel's detriment in sales. Bahr's *The Black Flower* did, however, garner much critical acclaim, mainly for its poetic prose style. Frazier's *Cold Mountain* was praised for the same reason, but sold more books, owing probably to an aggressive advertising campaign and to two more assertive, more contemporary-seeming female characters, Ada Monroe and Ruby Thewes, whose presence in the book could only have broadened its appeal. *The Black Flower*'s Anna Hereford is less winsome (a Confederate soldier telling Anna and her family that battle is coming, concludes Anna is "not that pretty anyhow"), though she does have great moral strength (Bahr 50).

The two novels are nearly interchangeable in their depictions of the Civil War as so blindingly violent that all rhetorical allusions to causes seem to most of the characters irrelevant, even silly. When lawlessness has been unleashed to the degree seen here (in *The Black Flower*'s case, the Battle of Franklin; in *Cold Mountain*'s, the Battle of the Crater), the war's participants and bystanders only have time to think on matters of survival and give little consideration to the constitutionality of secession or to the legality of the Emancipation Proclamation. Such matters are mere abstractions when considered against the possibility that

marauding Home Guardsmen may rob you blind and leave you to starve, or the pressing need of the wounded Confederates who lie on tables and floors in your home.

The lack of political discussion in these novels has very much to do with the class of the characters the authors have chosen. While it is true that the average Civil War soldier was very likely to express in his letters agreement with the various kinds of dogma adopted by his chosen side, “not unrelated to the complex mixture of patriotism, ideology, concepts of duty, honor, manhood and community or peer pressure,” the characters in these two novels have lost faith in this mixture (McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*, 13). Both *Cold Mountain* and *The Black Flower* begin in the war’s latter stages and the characters live in the losing region. The books follow the strivings of two veteran poor white Confederate soldiers whose commitment to the cause has long since been eroded by the sheer trauma of infantry duty in battle after battle. WP Inman in *Cold Mountain* witnesses the absurd incident at the siege of Petersburg in which the Federals set off an enormous underground explosion in an attempt to break the heavily fortified Southern defenses. But the idea proves a bloody boondoggle, as thousands of charging Unionists end up scrambling, trapped, in the bottom of a fifty-foot-deep crater, powerless against the Confederates raining gun and mortar fire from the rim. Bushrod Carter, in *The Black Flower*, has most recently survived a charge at the Battle of Franklin that any commander would have been a fool to order in the face of obviously formidable Union entrenchments. The fuss and feathers speeches of officers afterward receive from the remaining troops the derision they deserve, once the officers turn their backs.

These are the sorts of war novels that began to proliferate in America during and after the Vietnam calamity, when doubt of military authority became the starting place rather than the end-consequence for the soldiers in its fiction. At the same time, there arose a growing conviction among those interested in history that the lives of the poor, the female and persecuted were worth scholastic scrutiny in their own right, not as mere parties to royal, presidential or martial decisions. *Cold Mountain* and *The Black Flower* are the products of the cultural tendency that culminated in Howard Zinn's oppositional history book, *A People's History of the United States* (1980), reaching its status as a half-million-copy seller worldwide. At this point, an increase in the number of Civil War novels centrally concerned with the struggles of nearly destitute farmers with no presidents, generals or even captains in the cast became inevitable, and just as inevitable was the way matters of survival predominated over the political for the characters who did the majority of the hard work of history.

The disdain for the war's causes or for any talk about the war's meaning beyond its viciousness alone seems more in character with attitudes from the late 20th-century than the soldiers from both sides of the conflict whose letters James McPherson so often quotes in his *For Cause and Comrades*. The disdain seen in these 1998 novels also resembles the general belief that arose in England (and in the rest of the world) after the first great bloodlettings of World War I, amply documented by Paul Fussell in his *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), that the often idealistic early rhetoric that greeted the coming of modern war is later quelled by the scale and brutality of the war itself (21). If the overriding wrong is the presence of war, all other questions, even those the war is supposedly fought to settle, are subsumed. *Cold Mountain* and *The Black Flower* follow in

this tradition, but with a decidedly 1990s suspicion of those representing governmental institutions, such that their potential to help is never considered: every problem is to be dealt with by the individual, with only a little help from long-trusted friends.

With the ascent of the neo-liberal administration of Ronald Reagan to the presidency starting in 1980 and the lasting reign of fiscally conservative policy into the 1990s under Bill Clinton, the art of the era was bound to engage the predominating attitude (at least in the Oval Office and among the majority of social commentators) that the problems afflicting us are best addressed by individuals talking personal responsibility for their own fates rather than being helped by a munificent public sector. Perhaps one manifestation of this culture-wide preference for the idea of self-help (except, perhaps, where it pertains to one's own self) is the production of historical novels in which characters survive the worst of times by use of personal (certainly not public) resources.<sup>3</sup> So in *Cold Mountain* we have two women who build a prospering farm during the Civil War's worst period without applying for welfare. In *The Black Flower*, Bushrod Carter protects Anna Hereford from the homicidal deserter Simon Rope without calling the MPs and insisting on an arrest and court martial. The point of these novels isn't just their characters' rejection of the notion that causes had any relevance after war had come into their lives, but their acceptance of a world without government worthy of the name, however harsh conditions might be and whatever dire fate may await them. The nobility of these characters indeed depends on their attempts to achieve self-sufficiency.

*Cold Mountain* begins with Inman's escape from a Raleigh, North Carolina hospital. The immense waste of life he had witnessed at Petersburg

during the debacle of the crater has clinched his decision to desert. Inman's fidelity to the Confederate cause had never been strong anyway. He had joined the army in the spring of 1861 by default rather than conviction. It was simply what men of his age were doing then. But now, as Inman wends his way from eastern to far western North Carolina, he passes by "the lights in the big houses at night" and he knows he has been "fighting battles for such men as lived in them and it made him sick" (Frazier 203). Never dreaming of a homeland free of invading hordes, with victorious soldiers returned home to enjoy the rights they were told were accorded to states, Inman instead envisions himself simply flying away, or retiring into hermitude in the mountains, "the contentious world but a fading memory" (236, 223).<sup>4</sup> By spring and early fall of 1864, Inman's sentiments are common ones in his former home, with other deserters living in caves on whatever they can beg or steal and eluding a half-dozen or so murderous Home Guardsmen.

Ada Monroe, the Penelope-figure to whom Inman is returning, never did side with the fire breathers. Like her father, she had only viewed the prospect of secession with dread. Two years after Fort Sumter, just a few months after her father has died, Ada discovers that the investments he'd made for her inheritance have been burned away in the inflationary Southern war economy like so much gun powder. As she and her friend and newly-hired farm-steward Ruby Thewes are returning from town, they visit a friend of Ada's late father named Mrs. McKennet who expresses "opinions exactly in accord with every newspaper editorial Ada had read for four years, which is to say Mrs. McKennet found the fighting glorious and tragic and heroic" (Frazier 140). It is here that we learn Ada's views on the sacred cause:

She said, That is the most preposterous thing I have ever heard. She went further, adding that, contrary to the general view, she found the war to exhibit anything but the fine characteristics of tragedy and nobility. She found it, even at a great distance, brutal and benighted on both sides about equally. Degrading to all. (141).

Mrs. McKennet replies that Ada is “the most naive girl I have yet had the pleasure to encounter.” Ruby, the waifish and illiterate but immensely resourceful girl who has pressed her services as farmhand on Ada and taken immediate control of its administration, reveals, when Mrs. McKennet asks her what her views are on the war, that it “held little interest for her.” But Ruby has heard reports of what life is like in the North where money is God and “under the rule of such a grabby creed people grew mean and bitter and deranged until, for lack of higher forms of spirit comfort, entire families became morphine-crazed” (Frazier 141). Measured in terms of how many pages she gets, Ruby is the third of the three major characters in the novel and the third to say she views the war’s aims as irrelevant to immediate concerns. Her mouthing of the pat denunciation of the North is without conviction.

Mrs. McKennet’s view is in the distinct minority in the book and the vehemence of Ada’s response only places it seemingly farther from the acceptable. Mrs. McKennet’s rejoinder seems anachronistic, since supporters of the Confederacy were more likely to view opponents as abolitionists or cynical or mercenary rather than naive. The accusation of naiveté in this context seems more likely in Charles Frazier’s era of Rush Limbaugh’s campaign against liberals who want to preserve welfare spending than in Jefferson Davis’ era of defense against the proponents of wage-slavery. Mrs. McKennet never appears before this scene and she never appears again. In no other case does the novel provide a character with the chance to advocate for the Confederate or Union



causes directly. Every dyed-in-the-wool Confederate's rationale comes to us through the memories of more skeptical characters. Ruby defuses the political argument by repeating a fantasy she, as a devout realist, must know is absurd, something she's heard second hand--most likely originating from local newspaper broadsides--about the Northern way of life. Ruby, in her way, slyly demonstrates that although she is no flag-waving secessionist, she isn't Mrs. McKennet's brand of naive. She is well aware of what nastiness is thought around Cold Mountain about Northerners. But it doesn't mean she supports the war.

*The Black Flower's* lead character only considers desertion. He never officially departs his regiment, though by the end of the battle of Franklin there's not much of his regiment left to abandon. The plot of the novel consists of Mississippi private Bushrod Carter's post-battle wanderings around the McGavock house, which has been commandeered for the Confederate hospital. He buries two friends from his hometown, meets a damsel in distress, Anna Hereford, who has ironically fled to the McGavock household from western Tennessee to get away from what her father thought the most likely sites of battle, and then he witnesses her attempted knifepoint kidnapping and rape. Though he doesn't actually save her life, her life is definitely saved when a feeble-minded fellow survivor from Bushrod's regiment intervenes, dispatching her attacker by stabbing him through the body with a ramrod. With the burials of friends and the killing of the would-be rapist villain accomplished, Bushrod surprisingly dies when the stump of a lost finger goes gangrenous and he doesn't survive the amputation of the affected arm. Neither Bushrod nor Anna believe much in the Confederacy at this point. Bushrod had joined the army for reasons similar to those of Inman, while Anna is as disgusted with the war as Ada.

In the scene most revealing of Anna's attitude, she must make way for the storied general Nathaniel Bedford Forrest as he climbs the stairs of the McGavock house to get a better view of the field. She doesn't yet recognize him, but his plumed hat, indicative of proud cavalry officer status, only irritates her with its connotations of rakishness: she is similarly unimpressed with the Latin phrase Bushrod carves on the makeshift grave marker of his two friends. When told its translation, "What valor has joined death will not separate," Anna says, "Yes . . . of course it would mean something like that" (Bahr 205). When Bushrod sheepishly confides to her he is thinking of desertion, she sees nothing wrong in it. "And you think there is shame in that?" she asks him, to which he replies, "Yes. I am a fool. I wish I wasn't" (217). Bushrod by now has already begun thinking of northerners as human beings and exhibited a rather severe cynicism about his superiors' judgment about the conduct of the war. The idea of a Confederacy "existed for Bushrod only as a vague and distant, and rarely generous, entity" (6).

The two novels frequently ascribe their characters' lack of fidelity to the cause, even to the point of contemplating and carrying out desertion, as logical responses to the overwhelming violence and uprooting social upheavals these characters have seen. In *Cold Mountain*, Inman, lying wounded in his hospital bed has, like Henry Adams after seeing the dynamo, "seen the metal face of the age and . . . been so stunned by it that when he thought into the future, all he could vision was a world from which everything he counted important had been banished or had willingly fled" (Frazier 2). Remembering the carnage he'd seen at Fredericksburg, Inman concludes that if the battle "was to be used as a marker of current position, then many years hence, at the rate we're going, we'll be eating

one another raw” (16). *The Black Flower* abounds with minor characters who have also come to a much less credulous view of the war’s abstract causes than Bedford Forrest would have preferred. By way of explanation, the narrative offers a version of the same critique Anna will make later--in her tone of voice--of Bushrod’s high-flown Latin epitaph:

For they had come a long way, as memory measures such things, from the sunlit fields of their youth, and they no longer had any illusions about themselves. Valor or cowardice, glory or shame: they heard the generals offer these as paths a man might actually choose--when in fact, at this late hour, they were all of a piece, and nobody but generals and newspaper correspondents gave any weight to them at all (Bahr 12).

The passage comes perilously close to being a straight lift of Frederick Henry’s statement in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) that “abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates” (Hemingway 191). The specific mention of generals and correspondents in Bahr’s passage also echoes the arguments leveled by commentators on the Left about television coverage of the American wars of the early twenty-first centuries, in which the usually narrowly logistical analyses of former generals and current war correspondents were given more air time than the broader critiques by opponents of the wars.<sup>5</sup>

Bahr’s choice to feature near the book’s end the encounter of the young McGavock boy with the tubercular, traumatized chaplain of Bushrod’s regiment, an encounter which is only part of Bushrod’s story because the boy has found the haversack Bushrod dropped in the yard, reinforces the overall Ambrose Biercean attitude toward war as a general wrong in itself. What other conclusion could be

drawn about a phenomenon that brings a pre-pubescent boy into proximity (in the middle of the night, no less) with such sights as he's seen of the wounded and such gory tales as the chaplain tells, of his childhood loss of a prized pony to wildcat attack? The story disappoints the boy with its lack of a conclusion other than that miserable things do happen, and they can't be gotten over. The boy will certainly never think of soldiers the way he used to after what he has seen of them in the nights after the battle and what one chaplain has told him.

The big name generals who have walked proudly across the pages of conventional Civil War histories are each quite hobbled in these two works. In *Cold Mountain*, not even the venerated Lee escapes the critical glare cast his way. Inman recounts in his usual mordant manner, one of the most familiar episodes in any account of Lee's command, a time during the height of the fighting at Fredericksburg in December of 1862 when Lee and Longstreet had "spent the afternoon up on the hill coining fine phrases like a pair of wags." As the story goes, Longstreet has told Lee that from the present Confederate position on the high ground, his men can kill every soldier in the Army of the Potomac. Lee's famous reply ("it is a good thing war is so terrible," goes Inman's recollection of it, "or else we'd get to liking it too much.") wins no argument from Inman and, in Inman's opinion, only reveals truths Lee himself cannot grasp, tragically for his troops (Frazier 8).

Inman's remembrance has a similar purpose in the novel to the incident in *All Quiet on the Western Front* in which the infantry soldier on leave, Paul Baumer, overhears several older gentlemen avidly at a cafe, dismissing Paul's comments since he sees "only your little sector and so cannot have any general survey" (Remarque 167). While Lee and Longstreet certainly did see combat up

close earlier in their careers (although always as officers), their exchange of bon mots is depicted as being just as crass as the talk of the old men enjoying their cigars and mugs of beer while the young men fight for the temporary possession of enemy trenches.

The novel that *The Black Flower* resembles the most in its attitude toward generals and other officers is *Catch-22*. Not only are Bushrod's superiors insensitive to what the enlisted men must go through as a result of their orders, they seem more likely to choose the unquestionably absurd course of action than not, as when General John Bell Hood orders the Confederate attack on the formidable Federal works outside Franklin. For the infantrymen, officers are the proper subject of comedy, since they're so blind to the realities the infantry finds most obvious. The pre-battle dialogue of the mostly doomed men of Bushrod's regiment is especially poignant for including the sound judgments, stated very casually, of those who know full well how cavalier General Hood has been with their lives:

"You know," [Jack Bishop] said, "I am not the least bit comfortable with the way this affair is shapin up. What you reckon that old peg-leg son of a bitch has in his head to commence this thing so late in the day?"

The reference was to their commander, General John Bell Hood, who'd lost his leg at Chickamauga. Hood was an old Indian fighter and apparently thought he could fight the Strangers in the same way. Bishop, who studied generals as he might some species of exotic bird, despised the man, and always referred to him as a peg-leg son of a bitch.

"No tellin," said Bushrod. "No doubt he knows what's best."

"Shit," said Jack Bishop, and spat (10).

\* \* \*

"So, what do you think, Sammy?" asked Bishop.

"I say fuck it," said Sam Hook. "Let's go. I'd as lief try it now as have to try it tomorrow."

“That ain’t what I asked,” said Jack Bishop.  
“Hmmm,” said Sam Hook. “No--no, I guess it  
ain’t. . . . Aint it curious,” he said. “How we do, I mean.  
Always wantin to know how a thing will turn out, when it  
will turn out just the same anyway” (18).

The disdain for the authority of generals in the two novels is of a piece with the lack of faith in any governing institution whatsoever. The response of the characters to the lack of any appropriately governing agency is to temporarily form their own. In Ada and Ruby’s case, this means they cultivate a garden, raise livestock and do their best not to attract the notice of the Home Guard. In Inman’s case, the response requires he be skilled with a gun, which he is, but finally not skilled enough. For the characters of *The Black Flower*, the answer is to huddle together in small, close-knit, self-protective groups. That the authors of these two novels choose situations in which no government can be trusted is only to be expected in an era when government itself was the object of so much sustained critique. That all the major characters of works that fall into my general anti-war model react to the war by retreating into localized systems is also no coincidence. Bushrod, Inman and Ada are each postmodern in their confusion and in their choices to seek out systems where some sort of rudimentary order can be imposed.

### **The Counter-narrative Model**

Ishmael Reed’s *Flight to Canada* (1977), Gore Vidal’s *Lincoln* (1984) and Ev Ehrlich’s *Grant Speaks* (2000) are three novels that each advocate a single theory of the war as preferable to all others by aligning that theory with a central character. That character’s search for the truth of the war’s meaning becomes the preoccupying concern of each book. Each does take a particular side in the conflict, but in doing so cannot escape the need to take other arguments into

account. Indeed, if these characters had gone forward in a way heedless of the beliefs of those around them, the results would have been even more disastrous than they do become. In each case, the characters arrive at their particular theories of the war even as they're exposed to the more familiar ones, many of which their new theory takes into account. But these are unmistakably subsumed as the character accumulates experience, dismissing and incorporating information and theories as history turns.

Although the three counter-narrative novels this chapter examines are each a species of biography, there's wide variation in their approach to the form. Gore Vidal's *Lincoln*, which I have already discussed in Chapter Six, has a solemnity and an attempted breadth that distinguishes it from the other novels in this category. But the theories of the war each book propounds are not presented flippantly. Ev Ehrlich's clever and slapstick send-up *Grant Speaks* no doubt owes a lot to *Flight to Canada*, a novel that represents a stunning departure from all prior Civil War fiction in that it is a farce beginning to end. Perhaps the 1975 book proved to Ehrlich that the Civil War could at last be used for comedy.

Certainly, Civil War fiction has featured its share of comic sequences--they abound in Faulkner--but apart from a Three Stooges short and Mark Twain's "Private History of a Campaign That Failed" there has been a conspicuous lack of comic treatments of the Civil War. The audacity of Ishmael Reed's book only begins with its lack of solemnity, since the book fairly revels in anachronisms. While the historical milieu in which the characters do their business is recognizably that of the Civil War and early-Reconstruction period, they make use of telephones, allude to air travel, watch television, work as models for pornographic photographs, and take vitamins. They take advantage of all of the

technological innovations available to Ishmael Reed as he wrote the novel in 1976. They also diagnose each other using the latest psychotherapeutic lingo, and think of themselves in terms remarkably similar to those employed in the mid-1970s.

Though the style of the novel is allusive and jumpy, the storyline is fairly coherent. Raven Quickskill, having escaped with two other slaves, from Arthur Swille, III a Virginia plantation-owner, is on his way to Canada. In his attempts to reunite with his accomplices in Emancipation City, he is unsuccessful, since his fellow fugitives have both found ways to make a living and to buy their freedom without having to leave the country. Quickskill, however, continues his journey, with a well-connected white girlfriend in tow, but, once he gets to Canada, he finds the country overrun with American corporations and American racism and learns that his former master has been killed. He returns to Virginia, then, to help write the biography of a house slave at the Swille plantation who managed to forge Mr. Swille's will and leave the plantation to himself.

Along the way, readers may find that the Civil War does not happen as their school books have described it. In one of the novel's earliest scenes, we find that none other than Abraham Lincoln has come to visit Swille, who evidently is no ordinary planter. With his armies stymied in the field, Lincoln has come to play the part of the lowly bumpkin, to bow to Swille's obvious cultural and material superiority and beg him to invest enough money in US bonds to bankroll the buying of all Southern slaves. Although Swille and his slaves humiliate Lincoln to the point of provoking him to fisticuffs, Lincoln leaves the plantation carrying large bags of gold, apparently on his way to end the war by carrying out a policy of compensation. Already, Reed has presented a view of the war's



meaning and purpose that challenges the conventional. According to this narrative, the true source of political power was never in Lincoln's White House, but in fact rested with the very class he sent armies to oppose. Lincoln only adopts the strategy of uncompensated Emancipation, continues this version, when he found he could do so without depleting the US treasury, and presumably keep Swille's money. The book abounds in these kinds of scenes, in which new explanations are offered for events that have become cherished American myth.

The common factor in all of the novel's counter-explanations is wealth. Although Arthur Swille does meet a fiery end and his estate does fall into the hands of his house slave, Uncle Robin, the capitalist system itself does prevail, even to the extent of rendering Raven's long dreamed of arrival in Canada an anticlimax. It's been overrun by American corporate expansion, with "aesthetically unsatisfying" strip malls and restaurant chains along every street. One of America's exports, violent white supremacy, has also found a market in Canada, Raven discovers, with marauding contingents of the "Western Guard" making "the Klan look like statesmen" (160). Raven is glad to return to Uncle Robin's big house and take up gainful, steady employment as his ghostwriter. The Civil War, then, has little to do with the strivings of a people toward freedom. Politics only functions as window-dressing. In *Flight to Canada*, the Civil War is only one more episode in a far-longer story with a far larger cast than Lincoln, the plantation owners, the slaves and the soldiers. The story is that of wealth pushing amorally for expansion. The question for the novel's characters is how they respond to this expansion, since it is certainly inevitable.

***Lincoln*** The theory of the war advanced in Gore Vidal's novelistic treatment of Lincoln's presidency is that the most significant effect of the war was a

consolidation and increase in power on the part of the Federal government. Lincoln, with his willingness to assume near-dictatorial power if it means the Union may be saved, becomes the political instrument of this consolidation, while his Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase, even as he schemes against Lincoln, raises the necessary capital and extends the government's strings to its puppet masters, the bankers and industrialists. Though the book is narrated from the point of view of several characters in Lincoln's immediate circle, including his eventual assassins, the central concern is with Lincoln's wily efforts to bend a republic with all its unwieldy diffusions of control, to his own will. Vidal's choice to omit Lincoln's own point of view entirely does render Lincoln's intent a mystery; it simply cannot be known from this novel whether Lincoln was carrying out a conscious design to centralize Federal power and to remand that control into the hands of a few of the very rich.<sup>6</sup> But he seems unable to consider an alternative plan that would preserve the Union without greatly empowering its government, and he's always willing to live with the consequences of the course he does choose.

In the novel, Lincoln's first major move in the direction of consolidating federal power comes just after the surrender of Fort Sumter when Lincoln on April 15, 1861, stretches the Constitutional powers delegated to the commander-in-chief by calling for 75,000 troops from the state militias on a 90-day term of service. Congress is not in session to approve this call-up, so Lincoln specifies a 90-day term, knowing that when Congress does convene in a couple of months it can decide whether to extend the term of service. Before issuing his call, Lincoln uses a fortuitous visit from a prominent Democrat to heed off partisan complaint. Seeking the public approval for his decision of one of his opponents in the 1860

election, the now dying Illinois senator Stephen Douglas, Lincoln reads to him his formal request to the states, but before offering his support, Douglas reminds Lincoln of a speech the president made as a young candidate for Congress. In that speech Lincoln had warned his audience in 1828 about the possibility of an overly ambitious man attaining power. Douglas can quote verbatim from the speech, since he'd learned it in case the opportunity to use it had arisen in the debates of 1858:

“Your lion and your eagle cannot endure the notion of following in the footsteps of any predecessor, or of anyone at all. *Your* great man ‘thirsts and burns for distinction; and if possible, he will have it. whether at the expense of emancipating slaves or enslaving free men . . . Well you are the eagle, you are the lion. You have it in your power, thanks to that marvelous oath the Constitution unwittingly gave you, to free the slaves or to enslave us all. Which will it be?” (Vidal 112).

Lincoln answers by saying he'd already released the call-up statement to the press, and when pressed by Douglas, says he had ended that long-ago speech with the hope the voters in his audience would not forget the principles of Washington. “But you also said those principles had quite faded away,” Douglas responds. “And that there must be something else. . . . Well, whatever else there is, you have it now” (112). The conversation between Douglas and Lincoln is nearly all fictional interpolation. We know they met in the president's office for two hours and that afterward Douglas did make known to the press that though he “was unalterably opposed to the administration on all its political issues,” he supported Lincoln “in the exercise of all his constitutional functions to preserve the Union” (qtd. in Donald 296). Lincoln biographer Stephen B. Oates has the two former political opponents speaking, in the words of a *Washington Daily Chronicle* correspondent, “of the present and the future, without reference to the

past” and plotting out strategy on a map on Lincoln’s wall (qtd. 245). Vidal’s scene has them talking at length about an 1828 speech and never referring to any map or, for that matter, to the future, except in Lincoln’s jokingly telling Douglas that if he continued to say he hoped Lincoln would be another Buchanan he’d “really hear the Lion’s roar!” (113).

Lincoln’s next move toward consolidation of power, this one taken in June 1861, is to suspend the writ of habeas corpus, allowing Federal commanders to arrest 40 citizens of Maryland who were active in that state’s secessionist movement and to detain them indefinitely without what would surely for Lincoln have been a counterproductively publicized trial. Though Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Taney has declared Lincoln’s order unconstitutional, Lincoln is determined to stand his ground, though the Constitution restricts the power to suspend the writ to Congress. “But the Constitution is silent,” says Vidal’s Lincoln “as to which of us is to exercise . . . to execute this power [the author’s ellipses]” (183). Lincoln explains to his Attorney General Edmund Bates that since in his view the rebellion has threatened the capital (if Maryland secedes, Washington will be pinned in by Confederate states), he has no choice but to use Congress’s power and then ask Congress to approve his action once it returns to session in July. But lest we suspect Lincoln of purposely taking on tyrannical powers he confides to Bates, “I am improvising from minute to minute” (184).

Salmon Chase seems more troubled than Lincoln about what the lingering results of his actions (approved by the president) will be. As he is putting the last touches on an agreement with New York banking magnates to sell them 20-year government bonds that can be cashed in after five years without penalty, we learn that Vidal’s Chase is “by no means as certain as he once was that the financing of

the Federal government by these . . . wolves . . . was in the interest of the people,” but that Chase is resolved “to reinvent the banking system of the United States” or be devoured in the process (179-180). Including so many passages that detail Chase’s rather involved financial maneuvers is a risky decision for any novelist and at times Chase’s bland sanctimony makes us long for the sharp-eyed, but cloyingly overcharming personality of Secretary of State William Seward. But who was to control this new centralized active government if not the voter? In *Lincoln*, the answer is the bankers and the industrialists with whom Chase is forming treaties. That answer is the source of Chase’s anxiety.

Perhaps Lincoln’s most coercive action in the novel apart from his decision to force the seceded states to return is his support for the Conscription Act and his insistence that it be executed before the Supreme Court could rule on its constitutionality. In the late summer of 1863, just after Gettysburg and the New York draft riots, Lincoln tells Samuel Tilden, a prominent New York Democrat opposed to the draft, that he realizes what Tilden’s objections are. “Now I know that you and Governor Seymour and a number of other Democrats think that we have torn up the Constitution down here,” Lincoln tells him. “But we are simply trying to salvage it, and the nation” (Vidal 459). When another member of the delegation from New York, Republican Senator Edwin Morgan, protests Lincoln’s unwillingness to wait for a ruling from the Supreme Court, Lincoln is peremptory with him: “Sir, I will not wait upon anyone. The time for argument is past. If this is not agreeable to you, then we shall just have to see who is stronger” (459-460). Seeing this show of Lincoln’s presidential resolve, Seward experiences “an involuntary shudder in his limbs,” because he is seeing the emergence of the Cromwell-figure so many people, including Seward himself,

had called for. Lincoln, gushes Seward, “had been able to make himself absolute dictator without ever letting anyone suspect that he was anything more than a joking, timid backwoods lawyer” (460). But just as he had done in his admission to Attorney General Bates, Lincoln undercuts this surge of grandiosity by entertaining his listeners, reading aloud “a page or two from Artemus Ward,” a folksy humorist of the time (460). Though the novel permits Lincoln to assume the mantle of the Lion and Eagle, it does not allow him to sustain the performance. One of the methods Lincoln uses to convince others he is no power hungry dictator is to disarm with humor.

The book does not end at the presidential bedside on that violent night of April 14, 1865, though it does depict that scene quite movingly. Instead, the last narrative segment finds Lincoln’s loyal assistant John Hay attending a New Year’s 1867 diplomatic reception at the Palace of the Tuileries and the court of Napoleon III. Hay is now finishing up a term as first secretary to the outgoing American ambassador who will soon be replaced by the choice of President-elect Ulysses S. Grant. While at the palace, Hay meets Vidal’s fictional American historian Charles Schuyler, who, with his daughter, insists on hearing Hay talk about Lincoln, to explain “what sort of man had he been” (654). Hay’s answer (and his unspoken musings) underlines the theory of the novel: “ ‘He was always very sure of himself.’ As Hay spoke, he thought of the highly unsure little emperor in the next room. ‘From the beginning, he knew that he was the first man in the country, and that he was bound to get his way if he lived’” (654). The novel’s lack of any narrative sequences that take Lincoln’s point of view makes Hay’s conception more plausible than it might be had Lincoln revealed himself to be “unsure.” The proper comparison for Hay, at any rate, is to a European

emperor, and in that comparison Lincoln easily bests Napoleon III. The conversation the fictionalized John Hay has with Schuyler (who has already appeared in Vidal's *Burr* and *1876*) centers on Lincoln's place in the history of nations. The comparison is not with George Washington, says Hay, surprising Schuyler, but with Otto von Bismarck, the man who united the German empire. Following up on this idea, Hay gets the novel's last spoken line and his thoughts could be taken as the novel's epilogue:

“It will be interesting to see how Herr Bismarck ends *his* career,” said Hay, who was now more than ever convinced that Lincoln, in some mysterious fashion, had willed his own murder as a form of atonement for the great and terrible thing that he had done by giving so bloody and absolute a rebirth to his nation (657).

The placement of Hay's words on the novel's last page, along with the choice to make his narrative voice the predominant one in the novel itself lends great weight to his interpretation of the Civil War against that of, say, Seward or Chase, who each have their own ideas of what the war is doing and what it should mean. That neither of these characters gets the number of pages or the last word that Hay does constitutes a significant choice, a strategic move that increases the chances readers will finish the book believing Lincoln is indeed the Bismarck-figure of American history and that national consolidation and the centralization of power had been the main consequence, if not Lincoln's main intent.<sup>7</sup>

***Grant Speaks*** The counter-narrative of the war the newer book offers is the least funny thing in an otherwise consistently funny book. Ehrlich's premise is that before Ulysses Grant wrote his *Personal Memoirs* for Mark Twain's publishing house, he wrote the contents of *Grant Speaks*, which, when Twain read them, were promptly returned to Grant as being too truthful for the reading public to tolerate. In 2000, over 120 years after Grant's rewrite resulted in the memoirs we

know today, the *Grant Speaks* manuscript is supposed to have been found by workmen renovating the Twain home in Hartford, Connecticut. A story by that town's newspaper, included before the table of contents, quotes the local historical society president calling *Grant Speaks* "a shocking text" and adds that "sources familiar with the draft say that Grant makes a variety of disturbing revelations regarding, among other topics, his use of psychotropic drugs in the Mexican War" (Ehrlich 1).

But the strangest conceit of the novel is its idea that the Grant who became general and later president had actually assumed the identity of another boy of the town, a son of privilege named Ulysses Grant who had been nominated to go to West Point. Hiram Grant had been a rather slow-witted son of a leather-goods store owner. Hiram Grant and his father inadvertently cause a carriage accident as the original Ulysses (called "Useful" by the Galena, Illinois town folk in contrast to the famously "Useless" Hiram) is leaving town with his parents to take his place at West Point. Only Ulysses survives, but Hiram and his father take advantage of the amnesia he suffers as a result of his injuries. They tell him they have witnessed him attempting to rob the carriage and say he'll surely be tried as a thief and murderer for the deaths of those inside. So Ulysses Grant flees the scene, leaving Hiram Grant to assume his identity and seek a grander destiny as an army cadet. From here, the novel assumes the character of a postmodern picaresque, as Grant travels from Galena to the US Military Academy in upper New York state, displaying for his professors and classmates no particular gifts other than for horsemanship and for proposing strategic shortcuts in military history courses. Events follow episodically, tracking closely with what we know of Grant's life. The differences come from the "impostor" conceit and from the



conclusions this fictional Grant draws from what he sees--in addition, of course, to the influence of psychotropic drugs on this new narrative.

The peyote episode comes as Grant is taking a break from his service in the Mexican War and is offered a few slices of the potent hallucinogenic cactus by some friendly locals. After a while he notices all his companions around the campfire are taking on a purple aura. Then in the night sky he sees a giant horseman ride down from the stars and issue a prophecy. "Ulysses Grant," he says, "will lead great masses of men in the glorious cause of their human redemption" and "will become the champion of those who seek deliverance" (Ehrlich 95). Already, though, Grant is wondering whether the horsemen, who he recognizes as the mythical Mescalito the locals kept mentioning to him in solemn tones, might not have the wrong Grant. Subsequent chapters give this question more weight as Grant gets booted out of the army due to chronic drunkenness, strikes out as an importer of glacial ice into California, as a farmer and as a rent collections agent and then returns to his fathers' leather goods business in hopes of appealing to the elder Grant's nepotism. As the Civil War begins, he is far from being the champion of his old hallucination.

The question of which Grant the prophecy is meant for acquires even more salience when Grant, standing behind the counter of his father's store in Galena, sees a familiar-looking visitor walk in with his wife and four children, well-dressed and explaining he had made a good living in the West and now was here to transfer his business to where his wife's family lived. He seeks a leather wallet to present his father-in-law as a gift, but there is no such thing in stock. So "Useful" Grant and family leave "Useless" to contemplate what he has learned. The encounter convinces Grant Mescalito got the wrong man: "It was Useful

who was destined for greatness. If I had ever been so destined, I had bartered that destiny away, exchanging it as had the befuddled Esau for the thin porridge of military life.” But, as Grant reminds us just a few lines later:

Of course, in a year I would be a general.  
In three years I would take Vicksburg.  
In five years I would defeat Lee.  
In nine years I would be President of the United States.  
And in twenty-three years, I would finally understand what it all really meant (149).

The narrative comes to its explanation for the war and for its aftermath after Grant completes a rocky couple of terms as president and attempts an even more jagged post-presidential career as a businessman. One horrible night in the 1880s, he finds himself in the front parlor of William Vanderbilt, the son of Grant’s long-time patron Commodore Vanderbilt, explaining that he’d lost a fortune and even stood to go to prison, because again he’d trusted a schemer, this one a friend of his son named Ferdinand Ward. William Vanderbilt at first insists the check he eagerly writes to Grant for \$140,000 be a gift, but accepts Grant’s collateral of battle flags and swords. Before the ex-general, ex-president and future memoirist leaves his posh New York townhouse (to lose this loan to the embezzler Ward, as it turns out), the heir to a railroad and banking fortune explains why Grant had already been well worth the investment:

He reached for his brandy and took a short sip. “I admire--my father appreciated--what you have done for your country, Grant. Without you, the South’s cotton and its African manpower would have been absorbed into the British sphere, British coffers fattened overseas, the British Empire extended to this continent, and the positions of my family, and a few others like my own, compromised. We appreciate the sense of duty you have brought to your service to the nation, Grant. The world, you see, requires a balance--a balance between men of honor such as yourself and

men who have no need of it such as me. Each of us has his place, sir, which is how you and I happen to be here today. I have need of men like you” (Ehrlich 381).

At last, the truth comes to Grant that Mescalito *had* been mistaken in his prophecy, and instead of leading, he’d been led; instead of delivering a people, he’d been the instrument of their further enslavement. But “Useful” Grant, meanwhile, had already made his reputation, having led an insurrection of farmers to the very door of Grant’s White House. By then calling himself Mr. Phipps, the man Grant recognized from his childhood and from that encounter in his father’s Galena leather-goods store, represents during a time of agricultural depression the rebelling farmers who had driven their wagons into Washington to press for government aid. “I am a farmer, sir, and a veteran, wounded at Shiloh,” Phipps told Grant. “I returned home to farm after the war and found I was really working for the bankers and the railroads, for they kept more of my product than I did” (Ehrlich 343). Though Grant didn’t agree to sign the Inflation Bill as the farmers wanted, he couldn’t help respecting “Useful”/Phipps and seeing the truth in his arguments even then. As he looks back from the vantage point of a bankrupt ex-president whose administration had been a study in the ways the public trust could be looted by the rich, Grant finds Vanderbilt’s words explain very well what Grant had seen of the nation and the way its history had run.

The novel finishes its speculations on what is really driving American history with a bizarre last chapter. In 1885, the dying Grant summons up energy to tell the last Union soldier, a Corporal Struggles who Grant learns from a letter has been camped in a cave in the North Carolina wilderness since getting cut off from his regiment just before the battle of Chattanooga twenty years ago. The corporal is still sure he is at war with the Confederates, and has fired off his rifle

at veterans hunting in their old grey tunics. Though near death from throat cancer and cultivating an addiction to morphine, Grant cannot be restrained from traveling to see his old subordinate. After an arduous journey by rail and by ambulance coach, Grant explains to Struggles what he'd missed of the war after going missing just before the fight at Chattanooga, from the pushing of Longstreet and Bragg off Point Lookout, to the Confederate surrenders, to Lincoln's murder. About events after the war, Grant is now quite blunt in stating what he believes was behind them. In answer to the corporal's question as to whether the Union had been preserved, Grant is quite specific, having learned from "Useful"/Phipps, from an ex-slave he once had named William Jones, from Vanderbilt and from hard experience the meaning of the war, the Reconstruction and the Gilded Age:

"Preserved? Well, it's intact, yes," I conceded. "We became one nation again. But preserved? As what? Not as a nation of small towns where men of goodwill could congregate. Not as a place to raise a family and to farm. Our nation is an infernal place now. Railroads! Factories! Oligarchs who control the wealth!" (Ehrlich 392).

The Corporal then asks what so many of his friends had died for. Grant's response is an indignant rant, but the culmination of what his life experience has taught him was the true meaning of the Civil War:

I leaned forward. "I'll tell you what we died for, Corporal," I croaked. "We died so there would be cheap cotton to feed the mills and cheap labor to run the machines. If you want a monument to our brave men's sacrifice, then go to the cities and look at the factories. Slavery's over and the Union's one again, but that's who won the war, Corporal. Vanderbilt and his ilk. The bullets flew by and the blood flowed, and the Vanderbilts loaned the nation the money for the pleasure of letting them do so. And when it was all over, they duly thanked the participants and went back to what they were doing before the disruption" (Ehrlich 393).

After delivering himself of these points, Grant orders the corporal to return to the cave, to hold out as long as he can, to never allow an end to the war, “because once it ends, everything I told you will happen” (394).

The novel that might have been merely biographical (but also hilarious) ends as a provocative novel of ideas about America, offering a theory as to when America went wrong and precisely who is to blame. Much like *Flight to Canada* and *Lincoln*, *Grant Speaks* concludes that the Civil War had been a means for the industrialists to solidify the hold they already had on the nation’s political apparatus. Grant had begun his political career believing very differently, but his naiveté is always apparent, as one scoundrel after another helps him or herself to the public riches that became accessible through their friendships with the ever-gullible, approval-starved Grant who as a boy had been called “Useless” by his hometown. So the only opposition to the belief Grant arrives upon by the novel’s end is the early version of himself, the one who believes Mescalito’s prophecy applies to him, not exactly the most effective advocate for the liberation of a people. The result is that the theory of the war and of America’s history set forth by Useful Grant, William Vanderbilt, and by many minor characters along the way before being adopted by Grant prevails, far overbalancing its only competitor, the idea of the war as the instrument of Emancipation and of Grant as freedom’s champion.

The third way recent Civil War novels approach the war’s meaning is corrective. These novels demythologize those ways to explain the war that we’ve grown used to hearing and then offer alternative ones. These explanations may not be new, but they will surprise those readers who expect a mere fictional elaboration of what they read in their school textbooks. This is not to say that

slavery as a cause or emancipation as a consequence recede to irrelevance. However, they seldom retain their accustomed status as the war's proximate causes, and instead find themselves cast as indirect manifestations of the true causes or consequences proposed in these novels. With Gore Vidal's *Lincoln*, then, the central and driving force of the book is toward the concentration of power into the hands of a class of industrial capitalists. The freeing of the slaves becomes a mere means to achieve the goal. Ev Ehrlich's *Grant Speaks* makes a similar claim, as the dying Ulysses Grant finds that during his entire military and political career, he had been an unknowing but nonetheless valuable servant to the interests of bankers and railroad magnates, rather than the champion of the people he'd believed himself to be.

### **Conclusion**

The possibility of overlap from category to category among the books I have placed in my three models scheme has to be acknowledged. Certainly there are segments of the books in my multiplicity model that include general anti-war sentiments, as the quote from *Jacob's Ladder's* Catesby Byrd demonstrates. Meanwhile in the anti-war novels, we can find isolated, scattered expressions of support for war as a means of problem-solving (as with *Cold Mountain's* Mrs. McKennet). But these are but small contextualizing pieces of works that on the macroscopic level fit very neatly into their places. Likewise, books from the multiplicity and anti-war models may be taken as candidates for my counter-narrative model if segments from those books that appear to offer alternative theories of the Civil War's meaning are considered without regard to whether there are multiple competing narratives at play in the book in question, or whether that counter-narrative forms part of a design that can more appropriately place the

book in my anti-war category. In my assignments, then, I attempt to take into account the larger structures of each book rather than those momentary instances in which the book features one kind of interpretation of the war.

Having defended my models to the extent of their nonapplicability to short passages (although a large number of short passages may add up to a conclusion about which model a given book may end up in), its limitations must be owned up to. My models turn on the books' approaches to the war's meaning, but not to other important considerations, such as the relative significance of particular races or classes to the way a war unfolds or the ways each novel assesses America's national identity (if it does and if there can be said to *be* an identity). So while my models may be useful in discussions of the war's causes, purposes and consequences (all of which I include in my catch-all term "meaning"), plenty remains to be discussed. The work of interpretation must go on.

A question arises as to whether or not Civil War fiction that predates the postmodern era may be divided into the categories I have evolved from the more contemporary works of that genre. The answer depends on where one wants to draw the line of demarcation between the modern and postmodern eras of fiction production. The two novels I have treated in part one of this dissertation might well fall into the postmodern era if that era begins in American fiction with, say, Norman Mailer's 1948 novel *The Naked and the Dead* or Saul Bellow's 1953 *The Adventures of Augie March*. The multiple perspectives in the 1955 *Andersonville*, however, seem more modernist than postmodern to this reader, more Joycean than Pynchonian, because these perspectives all eventually subordinate to the larger, more conventionally authoritative views of the situation given by characters like Ira Claffey and his doctor friends. Such a resolution into one reading would be

anathema to the postmodern sensibility, especially if the unitary reading is not a rebellious counter-narrative like that found in *Lincoln, Flight to Canada* and *Grant Speaks*. But admittedly, *Andersonville* in many ways does fit into my multiplicity model. *The Killer Angels* would do so as well, with its numerous characters each given their opportunities to declaim on the war's meaning in their separate turns. That this 1974 novel exhibits qualities of both the modern and postmodern is no surprise given that it was written during such a disorienting transitional time for literary fiction.

But regardless of whether a book is or is not part of that amorphous phenomenon called the postmodern, my models may be useful, since they are not concerned solely with literary form but with the relation of a novel (and its forms) to political assessments. While, as I have shown, it may be problematic to attempt to fit older books into my multiplicity model, since older books are more likely to come to a conclusion that synthesizes the multiple meanings of the war it contains into one conventionally accepted meaning, many older novels are recognizably anti-war. Many, like Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and *The Unvanquished* (1938) offer interpretations of the Civil War's meaning that counter the interpretations that prevailed in their own eras (before, as with Faulkner's example, *determining* the prevailing interpretations that would ensue).

My models, in summary, should not be read as attempts to end discussion or to cordon off an era of Civil War fiction as having its own monolithic integrity. This set of models is a mere offering, humbly suggested for the value it may have in making order of an often confusing but definitely rewarding set of texts whose



use in the classroom should be encouraged and often aren't, perhaps owing to our not seeing what each book is doing and how each relates to an ever-burgeoning and unwieldy whole.

### End Notes

<sup>1</sup>See Robert A. Lively, who as of 1957 was able to see general tendencies evolve among writers from the same region and could generalize lavishly. Typical of his analysis are statements like "Also, modern Southern writers do not appear to be nearly so self-conscious as were their nineteenth-century forbears on the issue of slavery" (100).

<sup>2</sup>Gatewood's contrast of North and South indeed seems the Southern version of Cole's book, which certainly portrays the Northern mode of living as preferable. In their introduction to Cole's study, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr. and Dixon Ryan Fox describe Cole's thesis this way: "From his text emerges a picture of two different civilizations contesting, one for supremacy and the other for independence; the one resting on a caste system and slave labor, the other a fluid society based on free wage labor; the one pivoted on the production of a few staple crops, the other grounded on a diversified production of farm and factory; the one aristocratic, indifferent to intellectual achievement and hostile to freedom of opinion, the other democratic, proud of its poets, novelists, scientists and educators; the one living increasingly to itself and clinging to the past, the other responsive to the spirit of the age and frankly experimental in the pattern of its political and social life. It was this deep-reaching "irrepressible conflict" that defeated every effort to patch up mere political difference in 1860-61 and made the South willing to secede though it still wielded a controlling hand in Congress" (Cole xiii-xiv).

<sup>3</sup>For an account of this transition that emphasizes governmental economic policy see Yergin and Stanislaw 325-363.

<sup>4</sup>One can see here how readily Inman would fit into the conception of the postmodern character I explore in the previous chapter.

<sup>5</sup>In the lead-up to the United States invasion of Iraq, sixty-four percent of the commentators on the television networks' major evening news shows were found in a study by *Extra!* magazine to have been pro-war. Ten percent were anti-war. (qtd in Amy Goodman with David Goodman. *The Exception to the Rulers*, 168.

<sup>6</sup>Vidal said his choice to write *Lincoln* without allowing readers into Lincoln's private thoughts was both an attempt at portraying his subject accurately and a

way to clear room for Vidal's own interpretation. Explaining his choice to omit Lincoln's own point of view, Vidal wrote in his April 28, 1988 *New York Times Book Review* essay, "I only show him as those around him saw him at specific times. This rules out hindsight, which is all that a historian, by definition, has, and which people in real life, or in its imitation the novel, can never have." On August 18 in the same journal, Vidal wrote that he decided to distribute the novel's narration among so many characters because, "What I aimed to achieve was balance. . . ." He further argues that he is "also reflecting upon the nature of fact as observed in fiction, and; indeed, fiction in fact. . . . For the novelist it is the imagining of connections that brings life to what it was" ("*Lincoln and the Priests of Academe*" 678, 695-6).

<sup>7</sup>Vidal's own view of Lincoln is rather consonant with Hay's. In *The American Historical Review*'s February 1991 issue, Vidal even employs a phrase indelibly associated with Otto von Bismarck to describe Lincoln's role in American history. "I should have thought it plain that for all the pleasure I take in the Lincoln personality, I regard that statesman's blood-and-iron response to the withdrawal of the Southern states as a very great evil; hence his tragedy; ours, too" ("*Lincoln and the Priests of Academe*" 699).

## CONCLUSIONS AND POSSIBILITIES FOR FURTHER INQUIRY

A historically informed reading of Civil War fiction need not restrict itself to questions about the Civil War. Indeed, unless the book was written during that crisis, it invites questions about what has come into it from the author's present, too. A Civil War novel is necessarily a highly selective version of the war, informed by influences that long postdate the end of hostilities between North and South. Once readers admit any conception of a historic event is a present-day production, the most obvious way to begin to detail these influences is by finding out what the most urgent questions facing the country in the author's era were and whether or not these questions turn up in the subject matter of the novel.

In the case of *Andersonville*, the answer to part of the latter question suggested itself, since the book's nightmare vision of an American death camp of the nineteenth century so obviously corresponds to what was known in MacKinlay Kantor's time about the German genocide (and to what Kantor himself saw). But the effects of the ensuing Cold War were less obvious, and I confess to having been prompted to look for these effects by a comment from one member of my dissertation committee during the General Examination before I found that the novel also concerns the hastily put together alliance with West Germany that had been made necessary by the American fear of Soviet expansionism.

Because *The Killer Angels* was published in 1974, it made sense to look for correspondences between the events leading up to that year of national disillusionment, the personalities involved and the richly peopled version of the battle of Gettysburg Michael Shaara lays out. The match of Joshua Lawrence

Chamberlain to Kennedy seemed quite obvious. The question remaining for research was, what facets of the JFK legend are present here, and why might they appear as they do? My survey of the primary and secondary record found that in Chamberlain it is possible to see a clever and realistic but compassionate way of approaching crises and a set of traits that would be desired in such a person so that he could approach crises this way. The writings of Kennedy's friends in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as well as more recent scholarly works examining the phenomenon of the JFK "icon," proved fruitful in my inquiry, confirming my suspicion that President Kennedy had indeed been placed on Little Round Top in *The Killer Angels* and suggesting that the post-Tet Offensive disillusionment with American civilian leadership had given impetus to a longing for the Kennedy style of leadership, in the way it was defined as Shaara wrote. By the time his son Jeff disclosed to me his father's esteem for the Kennedys as politicians this communication was only surprising in its precise congruence with what I had already concluded.

Meanwhile, on the other side, an enactment of the conflict over how best to conduct a war (or whether to conduct it at all) was playing itself out. For its version of the Confederate deliberations, the novel relies heavily on the accounts of General James Longstreet, especially as compared to the consensus of historians, which seems to be that Longstreet's memoirs should be read skeptically. Longstreet's accounts of the repeated warnings he made to Lee are especially singled out as instances of self-serving embellishment of history. The choice to privilege Longstreet, who favored the tactical defensive and could be plausibly written as the antithesis of the aggressive Lee, is influenced by the body of the case made against the series of decisions that led to half a million

United States troops finding themselves in Southeast Asia, serving in what by the time of *The Killer Angels*' writing was roundly considered a tragic folly. It was necessary, to lend weight to Longstreet's moral standing and to his viewpoint, to make Lee more insistent on the letter of his orders than the documentary record warrants, even to the point of contradicting what an otherwise reliable source reports about Lee's marked tendency to delegate authority once his troops are in place.

The second part of the dissertation is still historically informed, but rather than closely examining the contents of one novel at a time for correspondence to the author's time, this section attempts to bring order to the variegated landscape of more recent Civil War fiction. The first chapter of this section proposes that many of the most popular and critically acclaimed of these books features a character who shows signs of a syndrome critics have recognized as postmodern, a confused response to a besieging attack of information that often leads to a kind of retreat. The second section presents three models for classifying recent Civil War fiction based on how each novel negotiates attempts to determine the Civil War's meaning. There is some close reading in this section as passages are quoted which demonstrate my reasoning, but a large sampling of novels needed to be discussed. Consequently, each book is dealt with within the space of a few pages, enough to present useful synopses of each book along with my arguments and evidence. Together, it is my hope that these two chapters contribute to and renew a discussion of Civil War fiction that has gone on only sporadically over the past century and two-fifths, a period when the production of such fiction has never ceased.

The study I have begun here can be expanded in several directions. Other novels lend themselves to the approach taken in the first half of the dissertation, novels that offer views of American culture that have not been accounted for in my examination of *Andersonville* and *The Killer Angels*. The series of Civil War works by William Faulkner, both short stories and novels, are intriguing subjects for their enactment of the progression of thought on racial conflict in Faulkner's time. Beginning with his first Yoknapatawpha novel *Flags in the Dust* (1928) and continuing to his late novel *A Fable* (1954), explaining the Civil War is a central preoccupation for Faulkner and one which absorbs his other preoccupations (and those of his culture) with problems of race and class. I have made a beginning of a chapter of this project, focusing on Faulkner's early work, particularly his short stories. Perhaps with some polishing and some key additions, this chapter could be included in this study.

The Civil War material by another Southern author, Robert Penn Warren, calls for a similar treatment, perhaps integrated into the same section that treats the works of Faulkner. From his early writing in *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), to *All the King's Men* (1949), to his Civil War novel *Band of Angels* (1955) and proceeding through his later essays, it is possible to discern a gradual progress toward an admission that the destiny of African-Americans was the crucial issue in the fighting of the war and, increasingly as Warren's career went on, that their participation had played the decisive role in the way the American nation has evolved. Tracing the trajectory of this realization on Warren's part would be a worthwhile pursuit, especially if the endeavor is accompanied by attention to the ways Warren's Southern culture also dealt with the immeasurably heavy contribution of blacks to the Union Civil War effort and to the slow rebuilding of

the Southern economy. Both Faulkner's and Warren's work also went on simultaneously with the advent of the Civil Rights Movement, a fact which should not be neglected in any future study of their Civil War works.

The 1966 novel *Jubilee*, by Margaret Walker, is a novel that would also reward the mode of inquiry undertaken in this dissertation's first half. In addition to its obvious literary quality the book draws interest for two reasons. First, the book occupies a place in the history of African-American literature between the pioneering and militant work of Richard Wright and the less confrontational but still vital work of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison that deserves exploration. Second, having been published as the Civil Rights Movement achieved its big legislative successes, grew more diffuse and found itself both more integrated with the mainstream of American culture and, paradoxically, more effectively marginalized politically, the book offers the researcher another opportunity to work with the turbulent 1960s.

Following up on the broader scope of the dissertation's second half, I would turn toward recent films and other works of electronic media that take on the Civil War. Long form public television documentaries and Hollywood features, television movies and long-running A&E series are not immune to particular kinds of impingements from the producers' present, whether from acute news events or from more chronic anxieties and prejudices. Continuing the hard-hitting work of Jim Cullen in identifying the sources and the structures of the versions of the Civil War our electronic media present, I would not neglect the new realm of Civil War computer products, which have come in the form of educational software and video games that task one's command of mid-nineteenth-century military strategy.

Questions concerning the issues of race and gender can prompt an expansion of research based on the content of both of the books I make a minute study of, and of all the books I name as examples of larger tendencies. Just to begin, *Andersonville*'s treatment of race I find very concomitant with what I know of the discussion of what was commonly then called "the race problem" in the decade in which it was written. I have already remarked upon the extent to which American perceptions of Nazi rhetoric against the Jews are reproduced in the way Wirz and Winder refer to their prisoners. But I may in the future examine more closely (and may in future work) the depiction of Ira Claffey's speech to his slaves upon their release and of his shock at the fact that a few of them don't count as fair recompense his offer to pay wages from that day forward to those who stay with him and continue working. The reactions of white establishment figures to the early stirrings of the Civil Rights movement might well reflect upon Claffey's astonishment in ways too complicated to anticipate. With such source material arranged around Kantor's literary treatment, the climate for learning would be temperate indeed.

Kantor's book also features four strongly-etched female characters, Veronica Claffey, invalid wife of Ira; Lucy, their sensually open and confident daughter; the Widow Tebbs, a middle-aged prostitute working out of her home; and her daughter Laurel Tebbs, who is raped and has her life saved later by a doctor. What should we make of the lack of female figures who we know participated in the war, the nurses, the middle-class farm wives who labored so hard, the few who donned male attire and joined regiments? What of the presence of so many female victims, and the lack of those like Clara Barton who contributed so much to strengthening the profession of nursing and later made it



her mission to record the names of Andersonville's victims with their graves. (Roberts 177-186). Her story alone was surely novelistic enough for Kantor.

It can be remarked that in my attention to the documentary history around two novels and in my struggle to frame an argument about emerging trends in recent novels, I forget that literature is art rather than cultural artifact. I have also at times allowed in the second part of the dissertation statements that do betray my own value judgements on the works being discussed. It is my position that in the mere act of description necessary in the study of novels that few of my readers have recently read, choices of words that imply value judgements are inevitable, and even helpful. In addition, in my short essays on such books as Madden's *Sharpshooter*, I perhaps unconsciously act the part not only of the advocate for my interpretations but also as an advocate for the novels themselves. So if my tone at times resembles that of a book reviewer rather than a disinterested cataloger of historical tendencies, this is an innocent rather than a calculated move.

Having confessed that evaluations on my part have slipped into this text, ethics demand that I not be coy about them, nor about how I arrived at these evaluations. My preference as a reader, however, is separate from what my preference would be as I developed a literature course. A susceptibility toward novels of breadth, like *Andersonville*, over novels of lesser scope, like Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* does not mean I would choose the former over the latter when designing a syllabus. *Andersonville*'s length would require it be read in carefully chosen excerpts, lest other kinds of Civil War novels be given short shrift. *Flight to Canada*, meanwhile, brings voices and attitudes toward history

into the classroom in combinations that other books of its time and genre have not. To present the spectrum of thought on the Civil War by all concerned with the justice that the classroom demands, a teacher will always need to think of more than her own taste in fiction.

In any case, the examination of Civil War fiction in its direct relation to its present should certainly continue and in light of the name and date obsessed predominant mode of history teaching on the secondary levels, the point that we transform our history in the telling of it is one that is not being dramatized enough.<sup>1</sup> Only one way to do it among many, although I think a powerful way, is through the reading and examination of Civil War fiction for artifacts from the author's (or perhaps the students') world. *The Killer Angels* could in this way become more than a powerful conduit into Civil War history but into the history of the late 1960s, too, in a time when such conduits are rare in American classrooms. This is but one example and one book chosen from a genre that offers nearly limitless possibilities for the kinds of discussion that must go on as long as we know, to employ Lincoln's phraseology, that we cannot escape history.

### **End Notes**

<sup>1</sup>In his article "The Idea of History Teaching: Using Collinwood's *Idea of History* to Promote Critical Thinking in the High School History Classroom" (*History Teacher* 37: 2; Feb. 2004; 239-250), Anthony E. Pattiz proposes that teachers strive to put their students in the shoes of historical decision-makers so as to prepare their critical thinking skills for the task of weighing issue-oriented arguments. In my view this can be adapted to the secondary and college undergraduate English classroom as well, using such novels as those I've examined here. In addition to urging students to picture themselves as the characters, I would also ask students to imagine themselves as the novels' authors and begin discussions with a consideration of why the authors may have

made the narrative choices that they did. It should be noted that Pattiz does see in a recent Educational Testing Service decision to test the writing and reasoning skills of prospective college students the sign of what would be a positive trend.

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## VITA

Jeffrey Neal Smithpeters, born June 5, 1972 in Gurdon, Arkansas, then raised in Hope, Arkansas, began graduate school in the English Department at Louisiana State University-Baton Rouge in August of 1997. He earned his Doctor of Philosophy in 2005. He first began college at Ouachita Baptist University in August of 1990, graduating with an English B.A. degree in 1994, and in the same year beginning work toward his Master of Arts in English at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville. He graduated from UA in 1996.

He spent a year as General Assignments reporter for the *Arkadelphia, Arkansas Siftings-Herald* from mid-1996 to the spring 1997, in the process covering the arrival and aftermath of an F4 tornado into his adopted community. His yet-to-be-published novel, *What the Tornado Did*, spawned from his experiences as a reporter and as a witness to his town's response to it. He has taught for a living at the University of Arkansas, LSU, Baton Rouge Community College and River Parishes Community College.

His interest in the Civil War stems from childhood. Among his first classroom memory is the sight of a bulletin board with a cut-out color profile of a dark-bearded man in a top hat. When asked what had happened to this man, his first-grade teacher, Nancy Mitchell, replied that he was a kind man but had been shot for being so kind. His interest in the Civil War shows no sign of waning.