

The Killer Angels

By

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Central Theme

The book informs the reader about the story of the Battle of Gettysburg, assaying to present both a factual retelling of events as well as the emotional experience of living it. The book presents the armies and individuals, the events leading up to the battle, and the action on a day-by-day, moment-by-moment basis. Using scenes that depict the interactions of some of the men involved, you see the problems faced and decisions made, as well as the personal and individual reactions to those decisions. Aside from these surface things, the book also communicates the reality of war, with its losses and tragedies, and the motivations and deep emotions of the men there.

Subject Coverage

The Battle of Gettysburg is reckoned a landmark in the Civil War. The primary characters of The Killer Angels are Generals Robert E. Lee and George Mead. Time is also dedicated to Generals Buford, Longstreet, Chamberlain and Pickett. The colonels get some focus, but not as much as the generals. During these three days, men of history demonstrate us much bravery and how they rose beyond the call of duty. The physical hardships for all in battle, such as daylong marches, want of food and sleep, and sickness, took its toll. But the emotional aspects demonstrated to be the most difficult. The reader is able to have an intense personal experience and truly imagine what it must have been like for both the North and the South in June of 1863.

Each chapter is named for one of the generals and accompanies him and his men, so some of the fighting is seen through the eyes of the South and some through the eyes of the North. This makes the battles easy to translate, since you know who is fighting whom. Many chapters explain the strategy and although some may consider these sections weak, they really aren't. They explain the battle and the human side of the war.

How the Subject is dealt?

The book opens with a present tense narration that sets the time, players, and place. The opposing armies are delineated, with information on their size, cultural makeup, beliefs, morale, and objectives. Also, the setting is portrayed: hot rainy weather; men feasting on ripening cherries as they march and then enduring the after-effects of this diet; and areas deserted by the local population who suspect the coming conflict. The approach is very much descriptive in nature.

Shaara uses these differences in beliefs to characterize the people in his story. Lee's men will follow him anywhere for their Cause. Longstreet has no use for one. Chamberlain is nearly a zealot for his. These personal reactions define the people involved.

The reactions also show the sense of confusion and misunderstanding about the whole war. There is sadness to it all. One has the feeling as the story progresses that if the two sides could have sat down calmly and really listened to each other, they might have heard a similar thing and worked out a peaceful solution. It only intensifies the sense of waste one feels by the end of the book over so much bloodshed and death.

Conclusion

The Killer Angels may be the finest war novel of all time. Anyone who wants to ascertain more about the Civil War will relish this fantastic and informative book. Also, I believe it is critical that we all learn about that time in our country's history.

Bibliography

Shaara, Michael. The Killer Angels. Ballantine Books, 1987.