

Kevin Grauke

**Vietnam, Survivalism, and the
Civil War: The Use of History
in Michael Shaara's *The Killer
Angels* and Charles Frazier's
*Cold Mountain***

In his book, *The Civil War in Popular Culture*, Jim Cullen examines a number of Civil-War-inspired twentieth-century works in light of how they, to varying degrees, rewrite history, thus revealing the influence of a “social or political stress” present at the time of their creations (199). To Cullen, the sentimental, panegyric qualities of Carl Sandburg’s biography of Abraham Lincoln should be understood within the context of the Great Depression, “a time of enormous social and psychological instability, [during which] Lincoln could simultaneously represent ideals of freedom and equality, order and democracy, ordeal and victory” (45). On the other hand, *Gone with the Wind*, particularly its protagonist, Scarlett O’Hara, should be read in terms of having been created at a “time when it finally seemed that modernity might allow women to escape, or at least restructure, the bonds of womanhood that had circumscribed their hopes for so long” (106). To Cullen, the Confederacy-infused music of Southern rock bands of the 1970s such as Lynyrd Skynyrd and the Allman Brothers Band should be heard as a reaction to the “Civil Rights movement and the fear and guilt that movement engendered in white men” (199). Along the same lines, I would argue that Michael Shaara’s *The Killer Angels* (1974) and Charles Frazier’s *Cold Mountain* (1997) should be read in terms of the social and political stress exerted upon the nation by, in Shaara’s case, the Vietnam War, and in Frazier’s case, the approach of the millennium.

Despite being awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1975, and despite selling nearly three million copies as of 1996, very little has been written about *The Killer Angels* except for the reviews that were published at the time of its initial printing and at the time of the release of its film adaptation, *Gettysburg* (1993). Praise for the novel was nearly unanimous in these reviews. The elements of

the novel that were repeatedly singled out for acclaim were its multiple points of view, which present perspectives from both the North and South, its authentic and detailed descriptions of battle scenes, and its strict reliance upon correspondence and other historical documents. Thomas LeClair, in the *New York Times Book Review*, praised Shaara's ability to capture the "terror and the bravery, the precarious balance of machine and man that made Gettysburg one of the last human battles," as well as his ability to provide the "minutia that give the immense motions of intellect and men their reality" (40).

Although I agree with the accolades that these facets of the novel have received, most of these reviews ignored the more interesting—and more important—question of the novel's ideological perspective. The few that have addressed it mistakenly have praised the novel for its nonjudgmental treatment of both sides. Shaara "doesn't attempt to glorify [. . .] the causes of either North or South," wrote one reviewer (Stoppel 2092). This may seem the case at first, simply because the majority of the novel is presented from the South's—particularly Lee and Longstreet's—point of view. However, if one carefully compares how each side is presented—particularly how the novel presents the reasons for which each side believes it is fighting—one inevitably will come to realize that *The Killer Angels* forwards the Union's cause at the expense of the Confederacy's.

In his disclaimer to the reader, Shaara states, "I have not consciously changed any fact. [. . .] I have not knowingly violated the action." However, at the end of this disclaimer, he adds, "The interpretation of character is my own" (vii). In light of the praise that has been heaped upon *The Killer Angels* by such respected historians as James M. McPherson, author of *Battle Cry of Freedom*, it seems fairly safe to assume that the novel does do an excellent job of accurately portraying the facts and action of Gettysburg; however, it is through Shaara's "interpretation of character" that the novel reveals the anxieties peculiar to the United States during the 1970s.

During the ten years that Shaara spent crafting *The Killer Angels* prior to its publication in 1974 ("Pure Primacy" 58), the American public's discontent with the United States' involvement in Vietnam steadily intensified, particularly after the 1968 Tet Offensive and Nixon's escalation of the war into Cambodia in 1970. An increasing number of people were coming to question not only the possibility of an American victory, but the very involvement of American forces in a conflict that some viewed as a Vietnamese civil war. By 1970, two out of every three Americans believed the war to be a "brutal,

dehumanizing, and pointless affair from which the United States should withdraw” (Taylor).

In direct opposition to the consensus of public opinion, Shaara—a former paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division of the U. S. Army (1946-49) and a former sergeant in the U. S. Army Reserve (1949-53) (“Shaara” 463)—puts forth in *The Killer Angels* what should not be read merely as an attempt to portray “what it was like to *be* [at the Battle of Gettysburg], what the weather was like, what men’s faces looked like,” as Shaara claims as his reason for writing the novel (vii), but as a defense of the United States’ involvement in Vietnam. To see this, one needs only to examine the distinctions that exist between the words and thoughts of Colonel Joshua L. Chamberlain, the heart and voice of the Union at Shaara’s Gettysburg, and the words and thoughts of Generals Robert E. Lee and James Longstreet, the foremost Confederate figures at the battle.

Early in the novel, before the Battle of Gettysburg commences, Chamberlain must speak to one hundred and twenty mutineers from the disbanded Second Maine in an effort to persuade them to fight with his regiment. While preparing himself for this speech, the narrator states Chamberlain’s reasons for being there, for fighting against the Confederacy:

He had grown up believing in America and the individual and it was a stronger faith than his faith in God. This was the land where no man had to bow. In this place at last a man could stand up free of the past, free of tradition and blood ties and the curse of royalty and become what he wished to become. This was the first place on earth where the man mattered more than the state. True freedom had begun here and it would spread eventually over all the earth. (29)

This passage, particularly the final two sentences, speaks as loudly against the perceived threat of communism toward democracy as it does against the Confederacy’s threat toward the Union. The mention of the word “state” brings to mind both the Confederate States of America as well as the communist state that, according to the foreign relations policy of the United States government during the Cold War, threatened, via the domino effect, the free world more and more with every country it consumed.

Chamberlain’s thoughts continue:

If men were equal in America, all these former Poles and English and Czechs and blacks, then they were equal everywhere, and there was really no such thing as a foreigner; there were only free men and slaves. And so it was not even patriotism but a new faith. The Frenchman may fight for France, but the American fights for mankind, for freedom; for the people, not the land. (30)

This jingoistic passage is intended to cause the chests of readers to swell with pride at the mention of such all-American sensibilities as freedom and equality, not only in contrast to the South's institution of slavery, but also in contrast to communism's "slavery" of individuals to the state.

In his note to the reader, Shaara claims to have "gone back primarily to the words of the men themselves, their letters and other documents" (vii). The actual Joshua Chamberlain may very well have held the beliefs that Shaara has placed in the head of the fictional Joshua Chamberlain, but if we look at what the actual Chamberlain said regarding the cause of the Civil War at the dedication of the Maine monuments at Gettysburg in 1889, it seems as if Shaara took considerable license with the true sentiments of the hero at Little Round Top. Says Chamberlain:

It was, on its face, a question of government. There was a boastful pretense that each State held in its hands the death-warrant of the Nation; that any State had a right, without show of justification outside of its own caprice, to violate the covenants of the constitution [sic], to break away from the Union, and set up its own little sovereignty as sufficient for all human purposes and ends; thus leaving it to the mere will or whim of any member of our political system to destroy the body and dissolve the soul of the Great People. This was the political question submitted to the arbitrament arms. But the victory was of great politics over small. It was the right reason, the moral consciousness and solemn resolve of the people rectifying its wavering exterior lines according to the life-lines of its organic being. (192)

According to this passage, the reason Chamberlain felt the Civil War was fought was not to further the cause of democracy via the crushing of the

South's peculiar institution and the aristocratic impulses that forged it, but simply to bring back into the Union the rebellious southern states that unlawfully considered themselves able to disengage from it. But this reasoning does not allow itself to be applied to the contemporary situation in Vietnam. The Vietnam War was not an attempt to bring back into the fold a mutinous constituent; it was an attempt, at least theoretically, to free an innocent people from the bondage of communism. Hence the transformation of Chamberlain.

As for the Confederacy, the novel paints both Lee and Longstreet as tragically heroic figures, but it does not allow them to fight for reasons they believe in; they merely fight because they are soldiers. In the first section dedicated to Longstreet's perspective, the narrator says that Longstreet "did not think much of the Cause. He was a professional: the Cause was Victory" (68). Then, after Pickett's Charge fails and the battle is known to be lost, Lee echoes these words in a conversation with Longstreet: "You and I we have no Cause. We have only the army" (361). By disallowing these men a legitimate reason for fighting, the South's heartfelt cause is condemned in the same manner that the cause of Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh movement and the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam was condemned to the American public by its government.

This denigration of the South's cause exists in other parts of the novel, as well, particularly in a section in which Tom Chamberlain conveys to his brother Joshua a conversation he has had with a group of Confederate prisoners. Says Tom:

They kept on insistin' they wasn't fightin' for no slaves, they were fightin' for their 'rats.' It finally dawned on me that what the feller meant was their 'rights,' only, the way they talk, it came out 'rats.' Hee. Then after that I asked this fella what rights he had that we were offendin', and he said, well, he didn't know, but he must have some rights he didn't know nothin' about. (180)

Granted, many of the men fighting for the South—as well as the North—probably did not have a firm grasp of what exactly they were fighting for, but no Northern equivalent of this lack of sophistication exists in the novel (nor is any Northerner ridiculed as is this soldier). Instead, we are shown soldiers such as Buster Kilrain, Chamberlain's brave and loyal man Friday, who says,

“What matters is justice. ’Tis why I’m here. I’ll be treated as I deserve, not as my father deserved. I’m Kilrain, and I God damn all gentlemen. I don’t know who me father was and I don’t give a damn” (188). The Northern soldiers, like the U. S. government of the 1960s and 1970s, are to be seen as fighting for a righteous cause, whereas the Southern soldiers, like the Viet Cong, are, at best, sadly misled by their leaders, or, at worst, thoroughly un-American in their beliefs.

According to the historian Robert Brent Toplin, regrets about American involvement in World War I affected the manner in which historians of the period perceived the Civil War, causing them to see it as a conflict that was avoidable. But this opinion changed after World War II. “America’s fight for freedom against fascist oppression evidently had its impact on the interpretations of history. The ‘Good War’ had involved a struggle against the evils of racism and territorial aggrandizement, and in this context consideration of ethical questions seemed to take on heightened importance” (24). Shaara’s *The Killer Angels* fits well within this sort of reasoning. During a time of draft dodgers, anti-war demonstrations, and a growing fear that the U. S. had entered an unwinnable war, Shaara turns to the Civil War, a war that, at least in historical retrospect, had a clearly delineated moral conflict, particularly in comparison to the dubious nature of the Vietnam War. By doing this, he attempts to transmit the artistically enhanced gloriousness and patriotism of the Union Army of 1863 to the U. S. armed forces of the 1960s and 1970s that were fighting the red scare in Southeast Asia. Had the Confederacy won, the novel implies, the America of the late twentieth century would not have come to pass. Slavery would have continued and spread, as would have the aristocratic mindset that stresses the blood of the father over the achievement of the son.

And if we extend this implication to the situation contemporary to the writing of this novel, we see that we are to understand that the America of the 1970s had reached a similarly crucial crossroads. The America that the Union affirmed with the victory over the South was in peril. If communism were allowed to sweep through Vietnam—if it were not fought militarily—it subsequently would sweep through neighboring countries, spreading until it reached the United States, where it would annihilate all the freedoms and rights we had struggled to maintain. Thus, in “one of the few effective defenses of military culture in [the Vietnam era]” (Cullen 154), *The Killer Angels* stands up against the tide of contemporary popular opinion, and via the seemingly unrelated topic of the Battle of Gettysburg fought in 1863,

subtly forwards the United States' unpopular campaign against the spread of communism.

Now skip ahead to 1993, the year *Gettysburg* the film adaptation of *The Killer Angels*, is released. Upon seeing the name of the distribution company, Turner Home Entertainment, one might be suspicious of *Gettysburg's* interpretation of *The Killer Angels*. After all, Turner Home Entertainment is owned by the Atlanta business mogul/Southern gentleman, Ted Turner, and its logo is an antebellum plantation house. Would the bias shift somehow from the North to the South? Would Chamberlain be portrayed as less heroic? Would Lee be portrayed as less stubbornly and foolishly arrogant? Oddly enough, if anything, the biases of the novel are intensified in the film. Overbearing, triumphalist music accompanies every move made by the Union army, while Martin Sheen's Robert E. Lee seems on the verge of senility.

Why did this film come out when it did, so long after the initial publication of *The Killer Angels*? Undoubtedly, one reason was the popularity of Ken Burns' 1990 eleven-hour documentary, *The Civil War*, as well as the popularity of Edward Zwick's 1989 film, *Glory*. But another probable reason was the "popularity" of the Persian Gulf War a few years before. Times—and sentiments—had changed. The American public's cynical distrust of the government and military that had been bred by the U. S. military's involvement and subsequent defeat in Vietnam had withered away significantly during the Reagan dynasty of the 1980s.¹ Once again, public opinion supported the U. S. military's involvement in world affairs as the global policeman, the peacemaker. Operation Desert Storm, the United States' response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, inspired a sense of nationalistic pride not experienced since World War II, a sense that maintained itself in the years following Saddam Hussein's defeat. It is within this context that *Gettysburg* should be viewed. Even the reprint of the novel is aimed toward such a reading; the only blurb present on the cover is from General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, the chief military officer of the Persian Gulf War: *The Killer Angels* is "the best and most realistic historical novel about war I have ever read."

In less than twenty years, *The Killer Angels*, which had once threatened the commonly held beliefs of the status quo, had come to embody them. The South, the enemy, the region that fought to continue slavery, could now reflect upon—and be reflected upon—Saddam Hussein, the despot who used his country's own people as human shields to protect his palace.

Four years after the release of *Gettysburg* Charles Frazier published *Cold*

Mountain. The patriotic atmosphere of the Gulf War had faded in the face of intensifying cultural anxieties emerging with the steady approach of the millennium, anxieties that reveal themselves from within *Cold Mountain* in much the same way that the cultural anxieties inspired by the situation in Vietnam reveal themselves in *The Killer Angels*. Like *The Killer Angels*, *Cold Mountain*, too, was a critical and commercial success. This story of Inman, a wounded Confederate veteran, and his struggle to return to Ada, the woman whom he wants to make his wife, and his home on Cold Mountain in North Carolina, sold 1.6 million copies within nine months of being published and won the National Book Award. Rick Bass's hyperbolic dust jacket blurb typifies much of the reaction this novel received: It "seems even possible to never want to read another book, so wonderful is this one."

What was it about this novel that caused such a furor? Some mentioned its realistic detail, its authentic rendering of nineteenth-century life. Others pointed to Inman and Ada's romance, the love that impels each of them to overcome numerous obstacles. "The genuine romantic saga of Ada and Inman is a page turner that attains the status of literature," wrote one reviewer (Jones, Jr. 73). Wrote another, "The author's focus is always on Ada and Inman. It is their movement toward each other that always remains central, and that finally makes *Cold Mountain* such a memorable book" (Polk). Still others referred to its setting during Civil War times, which continued to remain popular with the culture at large. One reviewer called it this generation's version of the Civil War, as were Michael Shaara's *The Killer Angels* and Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* for each of their respective generations (Breslin 33). But unlike Shaara's and Crane's novels, Frazier's novel provides very little battle; what combat it does provide comes to us distilled by Inman's memory. In addition to this, we get virtually no mention of the usual elements we have come to expect of Civil War novels—slavery, the Union, or states' rights.

So what kind of Civil War novel is this? Like *The Killer Angels*, *Cold Mountain* takes the Civil War and manipulates it in order to approach a contemporary issue. Where *The Killer Angels* concerns Vietnam, *Cold Mountain* alludes to the phenomenon of survivalism, as well as the ideology that encompasses survivalism, millennialism. As a cultural phenomenon, millennialism originated in the ancient Hebrew and Christian apocalyptic prophecies that foretold God's destruction of evil and his raising of the righteous to his kingdom, where they would live for a thousand years. It tends to gain popularity "during periods of intense social change, coinciding with the end of an age or era"

(Lamy viii). But millennialism does not necessarily have to be of a religious order; it can be secular, as well. As we approached the year 2000, we saw the evidence of both religious and secular millennialist thought in such diverse individuals and groups as the Branch Davidians, the Unabomber, Timothy McVeigh, Aum Shinrikyo (the perpetrators of the Tokyo subway bombings), Randy Weaver (Ruby Ridge), the Montana Freeman, the Heaven's Gate cult, and the countless numbers of people who stockpiled living necessities in fear of fallout from the universal computer glitch famously known as Y2K. A world populated by such individuals and groups was the context from which *Cold Mountain* emerged, a world not too unlike the world which Inman passes through in his quest for home and in which Ada struggles to gain the knowledge necessary to allow her to survive in Inman's and her father's absence.

According to Philip Lamy in his book, *Millennium Rage: Survivalists, White Supremacists, and the Doomsday Prophecy*, the survivalist philosophy, which can generally be thought of as the pragmatic aspect of millennialist thought, grew specifically from the cold-war paranoia of the fifties and gained popularity throughout the years of the Korean and Vietnam Wars (70). It "speaks of mass destruction and death. It is not interested in reforming the system; the collapse of civilization is imminent. However, it does offer a plan of action, a kind of 'redemption' or 'salvation,' in the manner of surviving the great destruction of the current order and living on to build a new one" (Lamy vii).

In *Cold Mountain*, the end of the world seems to have already occurred. The landscape—nearly post-apocalyptic in its bleakness—is blighted, blasted. On the second page of the novel, as Inman looks out the window from his hospital bed where he is recovering from a wound to his neck, before he has even begun his treacherous trek back home, the narrator tells us that "he had seen the metal face of the age and had 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" (2). Traveling primarily by night, Inman passes through a cruel and inhospitable landscape inhabited by vicious hounds, vipers, moths that look like ghosts, tree stumps that look like people, mosquitoes, ticks, gnats, horseflies, butterflies that drink from the stream of a man's urine, poison ivy, Venus fly traps, foul rivers, scythe-wielding attackers, "root doctors" (read: witches), the not-yet-dead picked apart by buzzards, lecherous preachers, and roving bands of murderous looters. In order to provide himself with at least the illusion of luck as he makes his way through this Godless world that "spoke of nothing but strife,

danger, [and] grief" (19), he "daubed on the breast of his jacket two concentric circles with a dot at the center and walked on, marked as the butt of the celestial realm, a night traveler, a fugitive, an outlier" (55).

This image of the loner determined to prevail in an environment that is, at best, indifferent, and at worst, hostile, is the quintessential image of the survivalist hero: he wants only to survive in order that he may be left alone to make a modest life for himself. Cold Mountain, the destination of his trek, becomes for him the embodiment of his ideal, his isolationist Heaven (or, if you prefer to read Inman's journey from a non-secular perspective, his true Heaven). "He thought of getting home and building him a cabin on Cold Mountain so high that not a soul but the nighthawks passing across the clouds in autumn could hear his sad cry. Of living a life so quiet he would not need ears" (65).

This desire for isolation and self-sufficiency is a common characteristic of the survivalist (and also of the retro-Confederate), who generally fosters an intense dislike and distrust of others. Inman "wished not to be smirched with the mess of other people," says the narrator (95). This dislike and distrust particularly applies to governments, which are considered a tyrannical threat to personal freedom. Many survivalists "refuse to pay federal taxes, purchase an automobile license, or vote in nationalist elections" (Lamy 124). A very distinct strain of anti-governmental thought runs throughout *Cold Mountain*. For Inman, the Civil War began as a fight "to drive off invaders" (217), but it becomes for him just as much of a fight against the defenders of the South as embodied by the Home Guard, whose purpose is to round up defectors and return them to the front lines but who more often than not merely murder those whom they find. At one point, Inman is forced to kill several Federals after they have stolen everything from a widowed mother of an infant and left her to starve; at another point, he is caught and driven for days by the Home Guard, then shot and left for dead. Both sides are equally horrible, leaving Inman with no allegiances but to himself.

But Inman's story is only half of the novel. The other half concerns Ada, a former Charleston socialite who finds herself alone, helpless, and poor on a farm that she doesn't know how to maintain after the death of her wealthy and impractical father whom she had completely depended upon her entire life. Upon introduction to her, we are told that she

was perpetually hungry, having eaten little through the summer but milk, fried eggs, salads, and plates of miniature toma-

toes from the untended plants that had grown wild and bushy with suckers. Even butter had proved beyond her means, for the milk she had tried to churn never firmed up beyond the consistency of runny clabber. She wanted a bowl of chicken and dumplings and a peach pie but had not a clue how one might arrive at them. (21)

Eventually, in exchange for room and board, a world-weary but thoroughly capable woman named Ruby teaches her the art of subsistence. Grudgingly, Ada puts away her novels as well as her art materials and begins to learn everything that she needs to know to survive, from when to plant what in the garden to how to butcher and process a hog. Gradually, she grows to appreciate her newfound knowledge and respect these aspects of life that she once had disparaged. In a letter that she writes to her sister near the end of the novel, she describes the transformation, both physical and spiritual, that she has experienced: "I am brown as a penny from being outdoors all day, and I am growing somewhat ropy through the wrists and forearms. [. . .] Working in the fields, there are brief times when I go totally without thought. Not one idea crosses my mind, though my senses are to all around me. [. . .] You would not know [my new mien] on me for I suspect it is somehow akin to contentment" (258).

By the end of the novel, when she and Inman reunite, Ada has come to be as self-sufficient as Inman has always been. Inman is pleasantly surprised by her metamorphosis. In their newfound harmony, the social barriers that had existed between them before Inman left to fight in the war have disappeared; the couple is able to come together naturally, without artifice. But, just as it seems they soon will begin an idyllic life together upon Cold Mountain, Inman is killed by the Home Guard, ending their hopes for the future promised by their first sexual encounter.

Despite this calamity, however, as we see in the epilogue that moves us ahead in the story nine years, Ada, without Inman, prospers in her life on Cold Mountain. Along with Ruby, Ruby's father, and Ada's daughter by Inman, Ada has come to realize that society at large is not necessary to be content; in fact, it is a hindrance. All that is needed is the community of the family and the knowledge needed to live off the land. In the final scene, we are shown a sentimental tableau: the group sitting outside around a campfire, listening to Ada read a story. "The night was growing cool, and Ada put the book away. A crescent moon stood close upon Venus in the sky. The children

were sleepy, and morning would dawn early and demanding as always. Time to go inside and cover up the coals and pull in the latch string" (356). No mention is made in the epilogue of the world beyond Cold Mountain; having completely isolated themselves within their self-sufficient sphere, they are oblivious to the struggles associated with Reconstruction that the rest of the South is experiencing.

For the South, the Civil War was the millennium, the end of the world. As we approached our own millennium (at least in the calendar sense of the word), we did not have to look through too many newspapers to find the values held by Inman and Ada reflected by a growing number of individuals and constituents in this country. Like Randy Weaver's wife and son at Ruby Ridge and David Koresh at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Inman dies a martyr's death in defense of his beliefs, leaving behind him a small but fervent group that is adamant in its desire to continue what he had started. All that he wanted was to be left alone, "to exist unmolested somewhere on the west fork of the Pigeon River drainage basin" (65). But the government (first the government of the United States, then the government of the Confederate States of America) that once served his interests had stopped doing so; in fact, it had come to oppose him actively as he attempted to make it through the wasteland to his home.

Cold Mountain can be read as a paean to survivalism and anti-governmentalism; it is a novel that accurately reflects a small but distinct population of the United States that either believes that it must protect itself from its government by arming itself and becoming self-reliant, or believes that it must isolate itself in preparation for the end of the world (or believes a combination of both). Like some conflation of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, the Home Guard strikes down Inman (Henry David Thoreau as portrayed by a *Josey Wales*-era Clint Eastwood), leaving him to burn in our memories as a symbol of what we have to fear from these times of ours. The comparatively clear-cut morality of the Civil War as observed by Shaara in the Vietnam era has transformed. No government—neither North nor South—can now be trusted. All that we can depend upon is ourselves.

How we tell the story of the Civil War structures the cultural narrative of the United States; it is the American sacred text, the American *ur*-text—or, at the very least, the New Testament to the Declaration of Independence's Old Testament. All that came before it in this nation can best be understood by

thinking in terms of how each significant decision made or action taken influenced subsequent decisions and actions that would finally culminate in the 1860s. And all that has come after it has been influenced by how it resolved. Because of the fundamental role that the Civil War has served and continues to serve in the creation and maintenance of our nation's notion of itself, the significant attention that it continues to be paid should come as no surprise. But, like anything so monolithic, it should also come as no surprise that its meaning remains utterly protean. It is frequently interpreted in manners that drastically conflict with each other, as well as frequently referenced to buttress any number of diverse ideologies. Even the very naming of the conflict itself (The Civil War, the War Between the States, the War of Northern Aggression) tellingly exposes the divisiveness that has marked all aspects of discourse about it. The very fact that it refuses to be completely understood and explained goads us to attempt to infuse it with our own concepts of what is significant and important to our contemporary lives. In the 1970s, *The Killer Angels* recast the Civil War as a parable of Vietnam; in the 1990s, *Cold Mountain* recast it as a backdrop to the political and spiritual concerns that faced a growing number of individuals as the millennium approached. In the future, the concerns and fears of the populace of the United States will again make themselves known through the manner in which the decisions and actions made by the likes of Lincoln and Lee are recast.

Notes

1. Because it lies beyond the scope of this essay to make conjectures regarding how this complex transformation came about, please allow me simply to speak of this transformation as having occurred.

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Kevin Grauke will receive his PhD in English from the University at Buffalo in September, 2003. He is a Lecturer in American Literature and Creative Writing at the University of North Texas.

Charles Frazier based *Cold Mountain* extensively on his own families history and their dissatisfaction with the confederacy that can be tracked to the reckless actions of the North Carolina militia who were sent to the Appalachians to glean taxes and supplies, often leaving starvation in their wake. *Gone with the Wind* was noted for its complete inaccuracy as part of the lost cause narrative. What was the growing split between the North and the South that led secession and the Civil War in 1850? What are some details to explain this? Why couldn't Great Britain and other countries who supported the Confederacy during the American Civil War, send soldiers to crush the Union? Craig Simons, lives in The United States of America. *The Killer Angels* (1974) is a historical novel by Michael Shaara that was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1975. The book depicts the three days of the Battle of Gettysburg during the American Civil War, and the days leading up to it: June 29, 1863, as the troops of both the Union and the Confederacy move into battle around the town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and July 1, July 2, and July 3, when the battle was fought. The story is character-driven and told from the perspective of various... *The Killer Angels*. by Michael Shaara. Start Free Trial. Michael Shaara's riveting novel about the Battle of Gettysburg presents in novelistic form some of the political and social factors that divided the North from the South during the Civil War years, and in the dialogue he carefully selects spokesmen on both sides who argue that their cause is the just and right one. Along the same lines, I would argue that Michael Shaara's *The Killer Angels* (1974) and Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* (1997) should be read in terms of the social and political stress exerted upon the nation by, in Shaara's case, the Vietnam War, and in Frazier's case, the approach of the millennium.