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SAMPLE EXCERPTS FROM THE MONKEYNOTES FOR

"The Killer Angels" by Michael Shaara

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## ***The Killer Angels***

by  
**Michael Shaara**



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## KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

### SETTING

#### **Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; 1863; midst of the Civil War**

**Gettysburg** is a small town near the Pennsylvania-Maryland border. It served no strategic purpose during the war, it was merely coincidence that the Union forces, pursuing the invading Rebel army, caught up with Lee there and that Lee decided to drop his plans for Harrisburg and make towards the farming village.

In **1863** the US was going through severe growing pains. The thirty years preceding the Civil War were a time of territorial expansion and social development. The US grew physically with the expansion west—and flexed its military muscle with the Indian Removal Act and the Mexican War. The issue of slavery boiled up in the new territories of Kansas and Texas. Meanwhile, life in the.....

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

*italicized* names are characters who aren't active soldiers at Gettysburg

#### **Confederacy**

Armistead, Lewis (Lo, Lothario): close friends with Hancock before the war, they call him Lothario as a joke because he is an old widower and a "lothario" is a womanizer. Dies during Pickett's charge.

Early, Jubal: disliked, cocky lawyer who all but takes over Ewell's command. He seeks to gain rank whatever the cost. He despises Longstreet and the feeling is mutual. He is a realist.

Ewell, Richard (Old Baldy): One of Jackson's replacements, he is overly cautious and defers to Early too much. He lost his leg before the battle, and with it went his confidence.

*Fremantle, Arthur*: comical English observer. Idealist gentleman.

Garnett, Richard: seeks to salvage his honor from the accusations by the late Stonewall Jackson. Idealist gentleman. Dies during Pickett's charge.

Harrison (the Spy): Longstreet's "scout" of whom Lee doesn't approve. Realist.

Hill, A.P.: One of Jackson's replacements, he is often too ill to command during battles.

Lee, General Robert E. (Bobby Lee, the Old Gray Fox): pious commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, "the most beloved man in either army." The definitive idealist gentleman.

Longstreet, James (Old Peter, War Horse): Lee's right-hand .....

### MINOR CHARACTERS

*italicized* names are characters who aren't active soldiers at Gettysburg

#### **Confederacy**

Heth, Henry: leads an infantry brigade against Buford's defenses, mistaking the union cavalry for local militia.

Hood, John: urges Longstreet flank the Union's right, but Longstreet cannot go against Lee's orders.

*Jackson, Thomas (Stonewall)*: aggressive commander whose death shortly before Gettysburg forced a reorganization of Lee's army.

Kemper, James: politician from .....

#### **Union**

Chamberlain, Tom: Josh Chamberlain's younger brother and aide. Inexperienced idealist.

Gibbon, John: detached commander who has three brothers fighting for the Confederates.

Hazlett, Charles: artillery commander who supports Chamberlain at Little Round Top and is killed there.

*Hooker, Joseph(Fighting Joe):* head of the Army of the Potomac until Meade replaces him shortly before Gettysburg.

Howard, Oliver: his 11<sup>th</sup> Division (the Dutchmen) runs at Gettysburg and.....

## **CONFLICT**

### **Protagonist/Antagonist**

By telling the Gettysburg story from Federal and Rebel.....

### **Climax**

The Union wins the Battle at Gettysburg when Pickett's charge fails. Lee's plan for a massed assault to break the Union line's center is a disaster because Lee does not .....

### **Outcome**

Gettysburg marks the end of the South's second and final attempt to invade the North. Lee retreats to defend Virginia, where he will be slowly battered down over the next two years. Gettysburg marks the turning point in the Civil War, and .....

## **PLOT SYNOPSIS**

### **MONDAY, JUNE 29, 1863 (PART I)**

"Monday," the first and shortest of the book's four sections, introduces the reader to the circumstances directly before fighting begins. A Confederate spy tells Lee of the nearby Union brigades and Lee decides to make towards the town of Gettysburg; Chamberlain successfully adopts the mutineers thrown upon his Union division and continues to march north; Buford's Union cavalry runs into "blind" Confederate infantry (blind meaning they have no cavalry scouts) just north of town and establishes a defensive position; and Longstreet's Confederate infantry makes their way east to get involved in the fledgling Gettysburg conflict.

### **WEDNESDAY, JULY 1, 1863 (PART II)**

"Wednesday" sees the Confederate victory over the Union defenses just north of town, the Union establishment of new defenses south of town, and internal disputes in both camps. Lee debates whether to attack the Union position or swing around between the enemy and Washington; Buford holds out against the Rebel infantry until Reynolds arrives with support; by a stroke of luck Lee's reinforcements arrive in perfect position to flank Reynolds' line and the Union troops retreat from the heights north of town to the hills south of town; Chamberlain's men march through the night to reach Gettysburg; Longstreet discusses the new face of defensive warfare and the role honor plays with Fremantle; Lee receives Ewell and Early's explanation for allowing the Federals to retreat to the hills south of town; and Buford is confronted by the dispute between Hancock and Howard on his way to receive orders after a long day of battle during which his cavalry unit was decimated.

### **THURSDAY, JULY 2, 1863 (PART III)**

"Thursday" sees the Union victory at Little Round Top and Lee's plans for the next day: a valiant attack at the Union center. Fremantle theorizes that the Civil War came about because the South is like a transplanted Europe whereas the North despises the Old World; Chamberlain comes upon a black man and reflects on the ethics of slavery and the institution's role in starting the war; Longstreet reluctantly attacks the Union's left flank; Chamberlain defends the Union's extreme left flank against Longstreet's assault; Longstreet broods over his loss at Little Round Top and Stuart's return; and Lee reprimands Stuart and makes the decision for a final attack at the center of the Union line.

## **FRIDAY, JULY 3, 1863 (PART IV)**

“Friday” sees the failure of Lee’s grand plan to charge the Union center; the Rebels are forced to retreat and must give up their invasion of the North. Chamberlain moves his men from the vulnerable extreme left to the safety of the center of the Union line; Longstreet debates with Lee over the need to fight a defensive war but Lee wants to end the war here and now; Chamberlain is caught under the storm of Rebel artillery that precedes Pickett’s Charge; Armistead leads his men alongside Pickett and reaches the Union wall only to be beaten back by overwhelming numbers; Longstreet watched the disillusioned Rebels retreat; and the victorious Chamberlain looks over the battlefield and watches the rains come.

## **MAJOR THEMES (10)**

Lee vs. Longstreet: Lee’s a pious, idealist gentleman who belongs to the old school of warfare Longstreet’s a grim realist and pragmatist who advocates trench warfare and has lost touch with God.

Idealism vs. Realism: idealist Lee vs. realist Longstreet, idealist Chamberlain vs. realist Kilrain, idealist Pickett becomes realist Pickett

Gentlemen: Stuart vs. Harrison, Lee vs. Longstreet

Motives for Fighting: maintain/destroy slavery, maintain/destroy aristocracy, maintain states’ rights, preserve Union, defend home, self-advancement

Communication: inability to show .....

## **MINOR THEMES (11)**

Stuart’s Absence: Stuart joyrides and leaves Rebel infantry blind, court-martial vs. reprimand

Intuition: the sense that comes with experience

Strategy: Napoleonic tactics vs. WWI trench warfare

Soldiers’ Past Experiences: Mexican War, frontier fighting, family tragedies

Europe: similarities to the South, role in.....

## **MOOD**

Considering the solemn topic (war), the book is surprisingly light-hearted. Despite the internal .....

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Michael Shaara was born in 1928 in Jersey City, New Jersey. His father was an Italian immigrant who was active in local unions and politics. His mother was from the south and had family roots going back to Thomas Jefferson and “Light-Horse Harry” Lee.

After high school, Shaara served as a paratrooper, a merchant seaman, and a police officer. He graduated from Rutgers and it was during his college years that he realized he wanted to become a writer.

In his early thirties, Shaara published several award-winning science-fiction short stories in the most popular pulp magazines of the day. He then began to write straight fiction and published numerous short stories in *Playboy*, *Redbook*, and *Cosmopolitan*.

In the mid-50s he moved he wife and his young son to Florida. In 1961 he began teaching creative writing and literature at Florida State University. He worked as an award-winning teacher until 1973.

In 1968 Shaara published his first novel, *The Broken Place*. It is the story of Tom McClain, a Korean War veteran who seeks to be free of his demons and finds that freedom through his boxing. Although *The Broken Place* was a commercial failure, Shaara’s drive to.....

## **LITERARY INFORMATION**

The Killer Angels is a fictional novel, not history

From Shaara's message to the reader: "I have condensed some of the action, for the sake of clarity; and eliminated some minor characters, for brevity; but .....

## **HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

### **Vietnam War**

The Killer Angels was written between 1966 and 1974, during which the Vietnam War was in full swing. A Vietnam timeline review: 1964, Gulf of Tonkin Resolution; 1965, first US ground troops; 1968, Tet Offensive; 1969, bombing of Cambodia; 1973, US troops withdraw; 1975, North Vietnam takes over South Vietnam.

The war seems to have had a minimal impact on Shaara and his writing. Nevertheless, the book contains a couple themes that might have been influenced by the Vietnam conflict: the poor handling of the Civil War by politicians and the irony of being drafted for a war for freedom are the most prominent.

## **CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES**

### **FOREWORD—the "before" picture**

The novel begins with an omniscient present-tense overview of the Union and Confederate forces, the army leaders, and the surroundings. This introduction to the book is like a "before picture," which—contrasted with the afterword—gives the reader a better idea of the transitions that took place during the battle.

The foreword first **juxtaposes** the gray (Confederate) and the blue armies as they stand in the third year of the war (June 1863), directly before the Battle of Gettysburg (July 1-3). The Confederates are moving deeper into the North (towards Harrisburg, PA) and want to draw the Union army out into the open for a conclusive battle. The Union army gives chase under shaky leadership.

Shaara introduces the nine key Confederate characters (Lee, Longstreet, Pickett, Ewell, Hill, Armistead, Garnett, Stuart, and Early) and the main five Union characters (Chamberlain, Buford, Reynolds, Meade, and Hancock).

The soldiers' advance north through Maryland and Pennsylvania is marked by heat and rain; the local civilians have fled and left vacant towns to greet the marching soldiers.

### **Point of View**

3<sup>rd</sup> person omniscient present tense

Shaara used a third-person omniscient point of view in the present tense for the forward. He wrote the rest of the book in past tense, but used present tense for this section because it gives a sense of imminent action.

"Omniscient" means that the narrator knows all, so even though a chapter might be told from Longstreet or Chamberlain's point of view, the reader is still told about events that Longstreet or Chamberlain do not know about.

The narrator clearly has knowledge of the future: "Lee had been down that Spring with the first assault of the heart disease which will eventually kill him." (p.xvi)

## **STYLE**

Specific language, foreshadowing, & juxtaposition

Shaara's style is simple and straightforward. He uses short sentences and low to neutral diction (he sometimes uses slang in the narration but generally avoids excessively flowery or complex phrases).

**Specific Language:** Lee is "five feet ten inches tall but very short in the legs, so that when he rides a horse he seems much taller." These details enable readers to become more engrossed in the setting and imagine what it would be like to be there. Through such seemingly inconsequential details (physical appearance, eccentric habits, gossip) Shaara creates believable characters.

**Dramatic irony:** Dramatic irony occurs when a character misjudges a situation while readers see everything correctly. Because this work of historical fiction is closely based on the Civil War battle at Gettysburg, the reader knows what's going to happen at the end of the book and beyond. Since readers know the Confederacy is going to lose both the battle and the war and that the conflict will drag on for two more years, they find it amusing when Pickett "worries constantly that he will miss the last great battle of the war." (p.xvii) Lee's knowledge that a letter offering peace is to be sent to Lincoln after the Confederate victory is ironic for the same reasons. (p. xvi)

**Foreshadowing:** The readers' knowledge of what's going to happen also makes foreshadowing a little awkward, but Shaara manages. Ewell "approaches Gettysburg unsure of himself." Ewell will later hesitate to take an enemy position as ordered. Longstreet "opposed the invasion of Pennsylvania." The invasion fails mainly because Lee did not heed Longstreet's advice to fight more defensively. Armistead "looks forward to the reunion with Hancock, which will take place at Gettysburg." This last example is less foreshadowing and more a blatant explanation of what's going to happen, but the line between the two is thin in the field of historical fiction.

**Historical irony:** The Rebs—who are low on food, shoes, clothing, payment, and education—are much more high-spirited and successful than the well-stocked Union army. This is due in part to their unity, as mentioned in the Union vs. Confederacy theme.

## **MAJOR THEME**

Idealism vs. Realism

**Idealism vs. Realism:** Lee (idealist) vs. Longstreet (realist), Chamberlain(idealist) vs. Kilrain (realist), duty to family (idealist) vs. duty to state (realist)

### **Lee vs. Longstreet**

The Confederacy's first and second in command (respectively) are friends but are contrasting in their character, their strategies, and in what they stand for.

Lee is a true southern gentleman, a romantic who holds pride above life. The "formal and pious" general represents the strategies of pre-Industrial Revolution conflicts: he gambles with dashing offensives that lead to numerous Confederate victories in the second year of war.

Longstreet stands for all that is new: a "grim and gambling" pragmatist, his defensive trench warfare strategies are unheeded by Lee but later play .....

## LEE (CHAPTER 1 OF PART II)

### Introduction to Lee and offensive/defensive strategy debate between Lee and Longstreet

Lee wakes up feeling frail. After discussing Stuart's absence with Taylor, Lee's chief of staff, Lee orders the raiding parties to return some food to the local starving civilians and to give back a blind horse to his elderly owner. Venable then tells Lee of Pender and Pender's wife, who has condemned her husband for invading Pennsylvania and thereby becoming the aggressor.

Lee then meets with Longstreet and the two discuss the fact that no help can be expected from Europe, how to deal with Stuart, General Hill's plan to march into Gettysburg, and what to do in the face of Meade's approaching army. Lee wants to hit the new Union commander as he comes up, Longstreet wants to "swing round between him and Washington and get astride some nice thick rocks and make him come to us."

The chapter ends as Lee and Longstreet's discussion is interrupted by sounds of artillery from the direction of the town, evidence that Hill has run into the Buford defenses that were mistaken for militia.

## STYLE

**Extended Metaphor & Juxtaposition & Simile:** "Some of them saw the white head and came to the fence to stare at him... Troops were gathering along the rail fence, looking in at him. He heard a man cry a raucous greeting. Another man shushed him in anger...A bareheaded boy stood in reverent silence, black hat clutched to his breast...Lee took a deep breath, resting his chest: a windblown vacancy, a breathless pain. He had a sense of enormous unnatural fragility, like hollow glass." (p.73) Lee is repeatedly compared to some kind of god, his men seem to worship him and watch him in respectful awe. But later, despite the fact that he is perceived as godlike, we find that in reality he is mortal and susceptible to the effects of age. This godlike vs. human, perception vs. reality comparison is a study in contrasts, a juxtaposition.

**Character's Perception of Reality:** "The ground rocked." (p.73) The ground didn't really rock, but Lee thought it did because he was ill. Authors can manipulate point of view and the reader should be aware of the difference between what is being told vs. what's really true. Subjective accounts (such as chapters from a single character's perspective) are not objective reports of reality—the rocking ground statement forces the reader to remember that.

## Similes:

"...Steaming coffee in a metal cup. Lee took it in pained hands, drank, felt the heat soak down through him like hot liquid sunshine. The dizziness passed. There was fog flat and low in the treetops, like a soft roof." (p.73)

"He had a sudden rushing sensation of human frailty, death like a blowing wind: Jackson was gone, Stuart would go, like leaves from autumn trees." (p.74)

"Head thick as a stump." (p.80) Lee's perception of Longstreet.

"Lee felt a sudden strength. It came out of Longstreet like sunlight." (p.81)

"They rode through soft green rounded hills....moving toward adventure as rode the plumed knights of old." (p.84)

"Up ahead, in the mist, A.P. Hill probes toward Gettysburg like a blind hand." (p.77) This quotation also touches on the *Stuart's Absence* theme.

"Lee felt a deeper spasm, like a black stain." (P.79) This quotation touches on the *War Truth* theme and shows that emotion pain is greater than physical pain.

"The roads all converged, weblike, to Gettysburg. And where's the spider?" (p.79) This excerpt also contains a **metaphor**.

**Metaphors:**

“Lee came slowly awake, back to the misty world.” The mist represents the fact that the world is not clear, not black and white. There is much moral gray area, for example, there are no clear good and evil forces in the civil war. (p.74)

“I swore to defend. Now I invade...Misty matters.” (p.79) Matters are misty because they are not morally clear.

“There was no hunger in the glassy chest.” (p.77)

“They rode out into a space in the great gray bristling stream.” (p.84) The stream is the crowd of marching Confederate (gray uniformed) soldiers.

“There was still fog in the trees, caught in the branches like fragments of white summer.” (p.85)

**Synecdoche:** “The clear black eyes were concerned.” Shaara is referring to the entire body and person of Taylor by mentioning only his eyes. Using a part to represent a whole is called a synecdoche. (p.74)

**Repetition & Stuart’s Absence & Irony:** “Lee remembered Longstreet’s spy. If it is Union cavalry, there will be infantry close behind it.” (p.76) In case you missed the first three references, Harrison and others in low command say there’s cavalry in Gettysburg, but General Hill discounts such reports. There’s yet another reference on page 83.

**Allusion:** “ ‘Napoleon knew a thing or two.’ ” (p.77) Napoleon was the first general to use canned food to feed his armies—thus his troops were generally better fed.

**Synecdoche & Lee vs. Longstreet:** “Now there was only Longstreet, and a thumping heart.” (p.77) Lee is referring to his entire person by mentioning only his ailing heart.

**Extended Metaphors:**

“He was riding along in a cloud of visitors...and the motley bright cloud remained respectfully distant.” (p.80)

“The rode several miles before they heard the first thunder... the sound of the guns [artillery].” (p.85)

**Cliffhanger Ending & Dramatic Irony:** “ ‘That was artillery...’ Lee said...He left Longstreet and rode toward the sound of the guns.” Lee is surprised and doesn’t know what’s going on but the reader knows that the artillery is Buford’s. What will Lee do when he finds out? Who is winning the Hill/Buford skirmish? Is this the beginning of the entire battle? The chapter’s ending raises many a question and thereby encourages the reader to continue on to the next chapter post-haste.....

**OVERALL ANALYSES**

**CHARACTERS**

**JAMES LONGSTREET**

Longstreet is the book’s main character on multiple levels. He is a realist pragmatist.

The non-gentleman Confederate: one of the few Generals not from Virginia, he is at odds with the gentlemanly Lee and Stuart.

A quiet man who is tormented by his dead children and cannot find God.

The representative of warfare’s new defensive tactics.

Right-hand man for Lee, for whom he has mixed feelings. On one hand Longstreet greatly admires the old man and all but worships him when God cannot be found, on the other hand he cannot forgive Lee for making the mistake of charging the Union position at Gettysburg.

The pillar of Lee’s army: with Jackson gone, Longstreet is Lee’s .....

**The Effects of War theme**

**Makes one numb:** The spy's nonchalant comment that "there'll be some of them die of the heat today." (p.3) Normal people would be shocked to know that some of the individuals they are watching would be dead within a few hours, but the spy has grown numb to it.

**Enemy Friends:** The Civil War was unlike other wars (such as the Gulf War, Vietnam, or WWII) in that the two sides were very similar culturally. Lee "is the most beloved .....

**The Europe theme**

Fremantle is the primary source of the book's occasional focus .....

**STUDY QUESTIONS**

1. What does Shaara believe caused the Civil War?
2. Does Shaara sympathize more with the realist Longstreet or the idealist Lee?.....

**End of Sample MonkeyNotes for "The Killer Angels" by Michael Shaara**