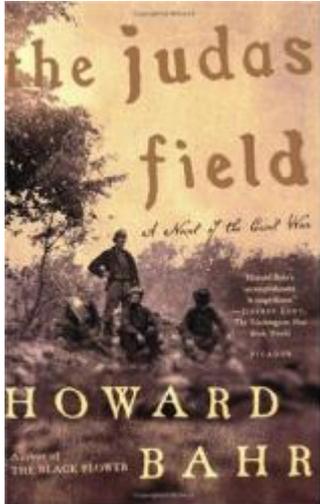


The Judas Field: A Novel of the Civil War

by Howard Bahr



About the Book

After returning from the Civil War, Cass Wakefield means to live out the rest of his days in his hometown in Mississippi. But when a childhood friend asks him to accompany her to Franklin, Tennessee, to recover the bodies of her father and brother from the battlefield where they died, Cass cannot refuse. As they make their way north in the company of two of Cass's brothers-in-arms, memories of the war emerge with overwhelming vividness. Before long the group has assembled on the haunted ground of Franklin, where past and present--the legacy of war and the narrow hope of redemption--will draw each of them to a painful reckoning.

Discussion Guide

1. How does Cass's faith evolve throughout this story, beginning at his mother's deathbed and ending with Queenolia and Alison's burial? What role does religion play for the other characters?
2. Is it possible to hold Cass and the others accountable for the violence they do during the war, for example burning down the house and beating up the owners (pp. 136-138), or for the violence at the end of the story? Is there any sense of right and wrong during the battle scenes in the novel?
3. "I got to feel something," Lucian says to Cass early in the novel, "or I will die." What does he mean? Is Cass right that "It is better not to feel anything"? Are the two men as numb as they think they are? Are there times when numbness is desirable, when it helps to save people?
4. How would you describe the novel's portrayal of organized religion? How well do the ministers and priests handle the effects of the war on the men and women they tend to in the story?
5. What does Cass try to teach Lucian as a young man? Do you think Cass is a good influence on the boy? 7. How do the battle scenes in this novel compare to those you've read in other novels or nonfiction accounts? How do these scenes affect the way you think about war?
6. Are the men better off for having returned to Franklin? How does it affect them differently to see the ditch again, to relive the battle? Are they better off? Is Alison?
7. Why does Cass force Alison to imagine the battle (pp. 209-210)?
8. Are the Death Angel and Rufus simply figures of Cass's imagination? If so, what drives him to create each one? What purpose do they serve in his mind?

9. How does the author use nature --- the sky, the sun, trees, birds, insects --- to supplement the description of his characters' experience? How do the soldiers in the novel perceive their surroundings differently than those, like Alison, who have not seen battle?

10. "She could never understand what honor meant beyond the word itself", the author writes of Alison (pg. 238). What role does honor play in the novel, in the behavior of Cass, Lucian, Roger, and the other soldiers? What do you think honor means in the context of a chaotic battle like the one at Franklin?

11. Look at Cass's musings about God and free will on the last page. Do you agree with his assessment? What in Cass's experiences has led him to this hopefulness?

Author Bio

Howard Bahr (born 1946) is an American novelist, born in Meridian, Mississippi. Bahr, who served in the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War and then worked for several years on the railroads, enrolled at the University of Mississippi in the early 1970s when he was in his late 20s. He received his B.A. and M.A. from Ole Miss and served as the curator of the William Faulkner house, Rowan Oak, in Oxford, Mississippi, for nearly twenty years. He also taught American literature during much of this time at the University of Mississippi. In 1993, he became an instructor of English at Motlow State College in Tullahoma, Tennessee, where he worked until 2006. Bahr is the author of three critically acclaimed novels centering around the American Civil War. He currently resides in Jackson, Mississippi, and teaches courses in creative writing at Belhaven University.

Critical Praise

"Heartbreakingly realistic picture of the madness born of violence and war, and the redemption to be found when the past is finally put to rest."

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