

# For the mind, not the heart

**Stephen Holden**  
N.Y. Times News Service

Ronald F. Maxwell's four-hour cinematic recreation of the battle that was the turning point of the Civil War has a stately tone and meticulous attention to historical detail that make it feel more like an epic documentary than a dramatic film.

Adapted by Maxwell from Michael Shaara's novel, "The Killer Angels," "Gettysburg" limits itself entirely to the first three days of July in 1863, when 150,000 soldiers threw themselves into a battle in which more than a quarter of them perished.

Probably no American movie has devoted more time to discussions of battlefield strategy than "Gettysburg," which is a film to warm the cockles of a military tactician's heart. Its battle scenes, which used more than 5,000 Civil War re-enactors surging over the actual site of the original conflict, are impressively choreographed.

In their sweep and grandeur, these scenes convey a strong visceral sense of what fighting a war used to be like. With the pageantry of marching bands and flag-waving, entwined with powerfully-held notions of honor and glory, a battle resembled a lethal football game in which the stadium was emptied onto the

playing field and the fans organized and handed rifles and bayonets.

The film offers a rich and detailed picture of how the Civil War was fought, what weapons were used, what uniforms were worn, and the attitudes of the soldiers.

By shifting its perspective back and forth from the thick of battle to behind the lines, where the military brass observe the carnage through field glasses, the film does a wonderful job of conveying the physical dimensions of the conflict.

It is also scrupulous about giving the Union and Confederate sides equal time, although the Confederates are painted as a bit loonier than the Federals. The film's most flamboyant patriot is the Confederate Brigadier General Lewis A. Armistead (Richard Jordan), who truly believes that he and his Virginia brigade are God's chosen victors.

But if "Gettysburg" is a spectacular exercise in logistics, does it succeed as human drama? It does, but only intermittently and in a chilly way. The same meticulousness that went into its battle scenes has produced a bloated screenplay (by Maxwell) in which the characters soliloquize and debate in a flowery language that aspires toward a Shakespearean elevation.

While these windy exercises in period rhetoric are probably true to the flavor of the American

## GETTYSBURG

TOM BERENGER JEFF DANIELS MARTIN SHEEN

**"A MASTERPIECE...  
COULD BE THE FILM  
OF THE DECADE."**

-Bobbie Wygant,  
KXAS-TV, DALLAS/FT. WORTH

PG NEW LINE CINEMA

Gettysburg



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language as spoken in the mid-19th century, they usually run on far too long. And for all the linguistic flourishes and high-minded sentiments being bandied about, the ideas rarely warrant such expansion.

"Gettysburg" is divided into two halves that don't fit together snugly. Much of the first part is devoted to the steep, woody battleground known as Little Roundtop, on which Col. Joshua Chamberlain (Jeff Daniels) commanded a Union brigade that against all odds successfully resisted wave after wave of Confederates. Had those troops broken through, they would have given the Confederate Army a clear part to Washington.

Daniel's luminous performance as the heroic colonel dominates this half of the film. And when the actor all but disappears in Part 2, he is sorely

missed.

The film's second half focuses on Pickett's Charge, the disastrous Confederate attempt to break a hole through the center of the Union Army line. In the charge, ordered by Gen. Robert E. Lee (Martin Sheen) against the strenuous objections of his right-hand man, Lt. Gen. James Longstreet (Tom Berenger), a line of 15,000 soldiers poured across an open field toward the Union Army and was systematically mowed down by an overwhelming barrage of Union fire.

There is a tragicomic majesty to the scenes in which hundreds of soldiers are raked with gunfire as they stumble over a wooden fence, tripping over their comrades' dead and wounded bodies in an almost suicidal lunge toward an invincible enemy.

That the second part of the film ultimately fails to touch the heart is the fault of both the screenplay and the casting of Sheen in the crucial role of General Lee. The film makes much of the fact that the Confederate general was worshipped almost as a God by his soldiers. And in actual photographs of General Lee, there is something in the eyes that suggests a rare mixture of empathy and nobility.

Sheen projects the requisite nobility, along with a sense of the general's profound quiet suffering and self-blame for the catastrophe. He even apologizes out loud for his mistake.

What's missing from the performance is a flash of holiness that would make the character a spiritual lightning rod.

Daniel's radiates the very qualities that Sheen reserves. The most moving scenes in "Gettysburg" come early in the film, when Colonel Chamberlain confronts an exhausted, battleworn brigade of Union soldiers who refuse to fight any more and who have been thrust under his supervision at the worst possible moment.

Addressing them with a simplicity and directness that convey a complete understanding of their plight, he wins a loyalty that transcends all the conflicting issues and philosophies that the film brings up.

### ECTV Guide November 18—November 24

	6PM	6:30	7PM	7:30	8PM	8:30	9PM	9:30	10PM	10:30	11PM	11:30
18 T	Elon This Week	Western Tradition	CNN Moneyline	Mapping Out Friendships	Bill Moyers World of Ideas	Elon This Week	Elon Current Events	Vision Thing	Anatomy Review	Elon Sports	Vietnam: A TV History	
19 F	CNN Programming								Movie Review	Pump Up The Volume		
20 S	CNN Programming ( <i>Campus Corps</i> at noon, <i>White Men Can't Jump</i> at 3:00pm)											
21 S	Destinos I		Popcorn Cinema: <i>Campus Corps</i>				CNN Programming		<i>Highlander</i>			
22 M	French In Action		CNN Moneyline	Destinos I		Western Tradition	Larry King Live		Anatomy Review	Earth Revealed	Frontline	
23 T	Western Tradition	Anatomy Review	CNN Moneyline	Mechanical Universe	Movie Review	Young Frankenstein						The Long Search
24 W	CNN Programming— <i>Thanksgiving Break</i>											

Coming Soon—Elon Current Events Holiday Show—Wednesday December 1 & Thursday December 2 at 9:00pm on Channel 11—ECTV Student Television