



Kent Gramm, Chris Heisey. *Gettysburg: The Living and the Dead*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2019. 240 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8093-3733-0.

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I knew that this work, *Gettysburg: The Living and the Dead*, would be a challenge from the beginning. An artistic work, the book looks at the largest battle ever fought in the Western Hemisphere through a myriad of lenses, peoples, times, and writings. This is not, nor does it purport to be, another military history of the Battle of Gettysburg. That being said, it is set up in a manner that would be familiar to anyone who has read military histories of the battle. *Gettysburg* has four distinct chapters, covering the first day of fighting with twenty separate entries, the second day with thirty-five entries and the third day with fourteen entries. It ends, as many histories of the battle do, with a chapter on the aftermath, which contains nineteen individual entries. Each entry, be it a poem or short story, is accompanied by an image. This structure struck me not only as a familiar choice, but also possibly a deliberate one to help the reader. As most are already familiar with the three traumatic days of the battle, this structure seems designed to place the reader into the right mind-set of each day and its aftermath.

That may be the reason why I found the first chapter so jarring. Set up as it is, even with a snippet of the famous 1889 Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain speech just before the table of contents to set the stage, the first chapter has little to do with the Battle of Gettysburg as the opening poems are

broad enough to describe almost any conflict. This is not a bad thing, and in fact can bring the past and present closer together as it reveals shared passions, fears, and sorrows. As the chapter continues, however, Gramm also reveals much of himself. There are numerous references to the Vietnam War in this chapter (entry 8: *Blood Trail*, entry 9: *'Stang*, entry 18: *Stayin' Alive*) and sprinkled throughout the book. The war is seen as a mistake and or something to be protested by the author. Some of his stories go so far as to use the memory of historical figures from the Battle of Gettysburg as inspiration for these protests. There are several very well-written short stories in this chapter taken from the soldier's perspective and even one apparently real letter from a migrant worker in 1927 who worked in the orchards around Gettysburg. In all, this is a very scattered chapter that feels lacking in focus.

Much like the second day of the Battle of Gettysburg itself, which saw the longest period of fighting, stretching well into the night on some parts of the field, the second chapter is the longest. It is also where I feel the book finds its focus. Of the thirty-five entries, again mostly poems and short stories, the majority focus on the Battle of Gettysburg or its participants. It is also where we start to see a large helping of one of the subthemes of *Gettysburg*, the supernatural. This had been hinted at

since the beginning of the book, but over a third of the entries of this chapter have to deal with ghosts or spirits tied to or trapped on the battlefield, for any number of reasons. Some are trying to communicate with the living to dissuade us from repeating the follies of history, some are still fighting the battle, and some are searching for fallen loved ones. This a theme that is hard to escape in Gettysburg, as the town itself is awash in ghost tours of dubious quality and historic accuracy.

The best aspect of *Gettysburg: The Living and the Dead* is the bravery of the author to tell his stories and poems through a broad range of voices. Both Union and Confederate soldiers are portrayed, sometimes with sympathy towards their enemies, often with the passions and hatreds of the war on full display. We hear the voices of women—those caring for the wounded, watching over the dead, pining for the lost, or educating the current generation. Veterans both old and new are written about, as are former rangers, battlefield guides, museum curators, and even a reenactor in one story. I will admit I was surprised to see the author use an African American dialect in two of his entries, a bold decision and a commendable effort to include the whole story of the region. The story that spoke to me the most, however, and which in today's climate of intolerance struck me deeply, comes nearly at the end of the work, entry 85: *North and South* (pp. 207-09). Two fathers, one from Wisconsin and one from North Carolina, tour the battlefield together, discussing fatherhood, loss, and the war. Both are products of their regional bias, neither having really dealt with anyone from the other side of the Mason-Dixon Line. This story ends with two men having a better understanding of the other and a promise to memorialize a loss from a much more recent conflict. I sincerely hope that this story, presented from the perspective of a writer, is the fulfillment of that promise.

It would be a mistake to review *Gettysburg: The Living And The Dead* without touching on the

beautiful photography of Chris Heisey. The images are as diverse as the stories and poems themselves, and sometimes suffer from the same out-of-place feeling that some of the writings have. Every poem or story has at least one image attached to it. Most of these are dramatic shots of the battlefield landscape or the monuments on it. Entry 31: *War Means Fighting* (pp. 79) is one such example of an oddity, as it has a praying mantis on page 78 to accompany the story. Surprisingly, almost a quarter of the images are wintry shots of the battlefield or monuments, and there are numerous autumnal landscape shots. Considering the sweltering July conditions in which the battle was fought, the snow-and-ice-covered images are beautiful, if unexpected.

While I had some concerns reading this work, I am glad I did. Our cultural landscapes, even our most studied, such as Gettysburg National Military Park, have meant and continue to mean different things to different people. While I may not understand all of the author and the photographer's perspectives and choices for *Gettysburg: The Living and the Dead*, it is obvious that they care deeply for this historic landscape, the history that happened here, and its visitors.

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