

# Bring the Jubilee: SF, the American Character and the Civil War

Review By Robert Bee

*“Any understanding of this nation has to be based . . . on an understanding of the Civil War. . . . the Civil War defined us as what we are and it opened us to being what we became, good and bad things” (Shelby Foote, Stars in Their Courses: The Gettysburg Campaign, viii)*

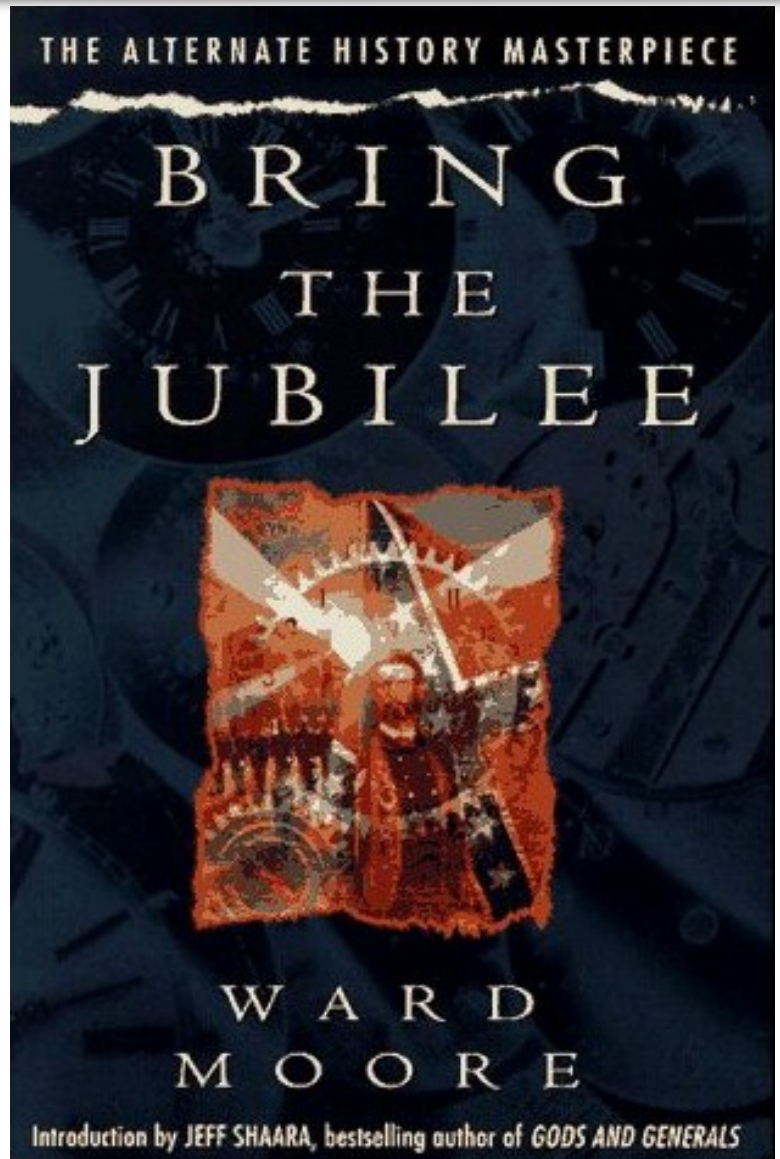
In Bring the Jubilee (1955) Ward Moore creates a powerful alternate world which uses science fiction and the Civil War to think about the American character and the nature of history. Since Moore’s classic novel was published, the basic premise -- the South wins the Civil War -- has become clichéd and spawned a number of mediocre works, (Harry Turtledove’s Guns of the South being one example). Moore’s novel is more powerful than many later books on the topic because of the detailed, believable alternative world he creates and the way he portrays history shaping the lives of his characters.

“The War of Southern Independence” splits the country in half: the North contains 26 states; the Confederacy possesses the remainder and expands into Mexico and Latin America. Although the Confederacy is a major power like Germany, the war reduces the North into a backwater.

The defeated North becomes a reversed mirror image of the South in our world. Northerners blame their troubles on the war and obsess on it as many Southerners did in our historical reality. “If it hadnt been for the war,” is a common complaint. Out of a sense of futility and misplaced pride, patriotic Northerners create a terrorist Grand Army, an underground organization that intimidates and sometimes kills Southerners and foreigners in an attempt to limit their influence, just as Southerners created underground organizations after the war to harass carpet baggers and emancipated slaves.

The Confederacy imposes the war’s cost on the North, forcing the U.S. to pay war reparations in gold which creates rapid inflation and economic devastation (similar to Germany’s experiences after the Versailles treaty of WWI).

In Moore’s 1930s world cars have not been developed, probably because Henry Ford did



not have an industrialized, populated Detroit to develop the auto industry. Most people drive carriages or ride horses. The wealthy have minibles: a small trackless locomotive or steam powered car. Electricity has not been harnessed, and most technology is steam powered. With no airplanes, air travel is limited to balloons. People watch tinographs, primitive movies projected by magic lanterns.

In the 1930s NYC is a city of one million and Brooklyn ½ mil, and the city's tallest buildings in NYC are no larger than 12 to 14 stories.

American literature develops differently in Moore's reality. Henry Adams becomes an expatriate historian disgusted with his country who writes a monumental history *Causes of American Decline and Decay*. Adams is critical of the "stay-at-home" essayists William and Henry James, who are patriotic exponents of the lost cause – the Northern war effort – and write in a colloquial dialect to espouse their Yankeeism. These are interesting variations because in our world Adams wrote extensively about American democracy and his personal experiences, whereas Henry James became an expatriate novelist, his brother William a philosopher-psychologist and university professor, neither renowned for excessive patriotism and certainly not colloquialisms. Moore does a superb job showing how history twists and alters human lives.

Race is an important issue in this novel. In the North "a black man was, more than anything else, a reminder of the disastrous war and Mr. Lincoln's proclamation" (66). Northern blacks are encouraged to repatriate to Africa. Mass lynchings occur in the North. Blacks are treated more humanely in the Confederacy, and one Southern character lectures the narrator on Northern racism again creating a reversed mirror image of our world and history in the reaction to defeat.

Many U.S. citizens blame abolitionists for their defeat, which is a realistic portrayal. In our historical reality, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was widespread contempt for abolitionists, especially in NYC where there were several anti-abolitionist riots. The most famous – the draft riot of 1864 – was a reaction against the draft, the war and black Americans (who were unfairly blamed by some rioters for the war), resulted in over 2,000 deaths, and was only broken up when troops returning from the battle of Gettysburg fired muskets and cannons on the crowd. See Herbert Asbury's *The Gangs of New York* for a good depiction of these riots.

It was commonly believed – especially by the working class -- that freed slaves would journey north and take jobs. *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* discusses the problem of racism during the 1850s and 60s.

Just as manifest destiny caused the expanding U.S. power to colonize the West, the South invades Mexico and Latin America, becoming an imperialistic empire with 50 million whites and 250 million subjects of other races similar to the British Empire with its subject races in Hong Kong and India.

The novel fits within the genre of the young man -- Hodgins Backmaker -- making his way in the world, a type of novel dating back to *Tom Jones* in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Hodges is a bookish young man in a United States so poorly industrialized and educated that it offered few if any opportunities for a man such as himself. The only great universities in his society are in the South. The opportunities available for him are limited to indenture, an impoverished freedom of hard farm labor, enlistment in the army or immigration.

Hodges escapes this limited future by becoming a fellow at Haggerhaven, a community

of scholars living a communal lifestyle on a self-supporting farm. Hagershaven resembles the utopian communities that sprang up in 19<sup>th</sup> century American – one of which Thoreau joined – but unlike them it is not socialist. Instead it provides scholars with a safe and free environment for the study of ideas.

A variety of interesting characters emerge in the novel. Roger Tyss is a bookstore owner and secret member of the Grand Army who employs Hodge and lets him have free range at reading the stock. A lot of Hodge's education comes from his reading and his love/hate relationship with Tyss. Tirzah is a pretty materialistic girl who Hodge has a love affair with and who ends their relationship because he refuses to conform to social norms. Rene Enfadin is a black ambassador from Haiti and ardent reader who is subjected to racist taunts from many people in NYC, but nonetheless befriends Hodge and teaches him a great deal.

Another Hagershaven fellow, Oliver Midbin, is an expert on Emotional Pathology, and develops a talking cure similar to Freud. He treats one patient through a dramatic reenactment of the emotional trauma that made her sick, in a dumb show reminiscent of Hamlet.

Another fascinating character is Barbara Hagershaven, one of Hodges' lovers and an Einstein analog, who develops theories of space and time – a variation of relativity -- which enable her to create a time machine.

Barbara's time machine sets off the narrative's final events. During his time at Hagershaven, Hodges becomes a historian of the War of Southern Independence authoring Chancellorsville to the End. He uses Barbara's machine and travels to Gettysburg to observe the battle and test his theories about the war. Throughout the novel Hodges has been described as an observer, a thinker rather than a doer, but his attempt to observe sets off a chain of events which causes the South to lose the battle of Gettysburg and ultimately the war. Distraught that he altered the course of history, Hodges discovers he cannot return to his own reality because his actions prevented Barbara's birth and the time machine's creation.

The book is dark in tone but not utterly a tragedy. Although Hodges' act destroys his life and his world, he creates our reality, where slavery is abolished in 1865 and the opportunity for a more democratic nation is created. Hodges comments: "That this world is a better place than the one into which I was born, and promises to grow still better, seems true" (219). However, Hodges is disappointed at the novel's end because political deals destroy the democratic potential of Reconstruction. In both worlds, the high ideals that motivated many during the Civil War are betrayed by politics and corruption. The novel does an excellent job at portraying how the Civil War or the War of Southern Independence encapsulates some of America's highest ideals and lowest realities.

The novel asks important questions about history. Can it be changed? Do we control history or does it control us? Moore's characters offer different interpretations. There is Tyss's Nietzschean decree that history is mechanist, predetermined and circular; we are doomed to repeat the same actions like automatons eternally. There is Enfadin's Christian belief in redemption; we can only see partial truths due to our human limitations; God is the complete reality. Many narrative events converge in a fatalistic way, but Hodges the observer is not helpless; he alters the phenomena of history and manages to escape the limited opportunities of his social milieu. Ultimately, the novel's philosophy of history is ambiguous, dark but offering redemption.

