

The Black Flower: A Novel of the Civil War Study Guide

The Black Flower: A Novel of the Civil War by Howard Bahr

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Plot Summary

The story begins with a dream being experienced by Bushrod Carter, a 26 year old soldier currently in Tennessee. Bushrod dreams that it is snowing and the ground is covered with hoe cakes drenched in molasses. Bushrod pulls away from the ranks to pick up the hoe cakes and eat them. Bushrod speaks to General Patrick Cleburne. Bushrod realizes that he had fallen asleep on his musket. At least it isn't snowing. Bushrod attempts to remember what day it is and realizes that it doesn't really matter.

Bushrod and his colleagues prepare to fight a major battle in Franklin, Tennessee. There is great detail about the logistics and emotions that accompany war. The reader is introduced to several characters, including Bushrod and some of his colleagues. Bushrod Carter, a soldier in the 21st Mississippi unit of the Confederate Army, is 26 years old. Although Bushrod is still a young man, his hair and mustache are already filled with gray. He has lines etched in his face and his knuckles are cracked. Bushrod is a veteran of every campaign of the Army of Tennessee since Shiloh and has maintained the rank of private. Bushrod had been a corporal once but lost his stripes after being accused of stealing a pitcher of buttermilk. Bushrod is a standup soldier who is well liked and respected. Bushrod's two good friends are Jack Bishop and Virgil C. Johnson.

The Soldiers arrive at the McGavock house, a two story brick house located in Franklin, Tennessee. The house is occupied by the McGavock family - John and Caroline McGavock and their children Caroline, Hattie and Winder. Also living in the house is Anna Margaret Hereford. Anna Hereford is a 24 year old unmarried woman. Anna had been sent to live with her cousins the McGavocks from her home in Lincoln County. Anna knew her father would not come as promised.

A scout approaches the McGavock house to ask John McGavock if the Confederate Army might use their house as a base while the Battle of Franklin wages on. McGavock knows this means that the house will be filled with dead, dying and injured soldiers - men whom he and his family will take care of for as long as necessary. McGavock agrees.

The main caretakers of the soldiers at the McGavock house are Caroline, her daughter Caroline and her niece Anna. The children help when and where they can. There are also officers and others to help, including two surgeons. Anna becomes emotionally involved with Bushrod and stays by his side during his stay and up to the point of his death. As Bushrod lays dying, Anna tells him that she could have loved him.

Many soldiers die in the yard and are taken to the oak grove next to the river. This is where Jack Bishop and Bushrod Carter die and are buried. Years later, Anna returns every year on the anniversary of the Battle of Franklin and walks the grounds including the oak grove and the cemetery.



Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary

Chapter 1:

The story begins with a dream being experienced by Bushrod Carter, a 26 year old soldier currently in Tennessee. Bushrod dreams that it is snowing and the ground is covered with hoe cakes covered in molasses. Bushrod pulls away from the ranks to pick up the hoe cakes and eat them. Bushrod speaks to General Patrick Cleburne. Bushrod's cousin Remy arrives with a large plate of ham. Just as Bushrod is prepared to eat the ham he wakes up. Bushrod realizes that he had fallen asleep on his musket. At least it isn't snowing. Bushrod realizes that he should not have listened to orders and left his bedroll behind. He would be forced to steal another one from one of the Strangers. Bushrod attempts to remember what day it is and realizes that it doesn't really matter.

"Last night was worse than any coon hunt. They had stumbled around in the dark, running in two trees and tripping over all old cotton rows, trying to keep their alignment, trying to catch the Strangers when it was all they could do to keep up with themselves. At last, around midnight, the regiment had gone in to a cold bivouac, sleeping on their arms, and way off in the night Bushrod had awakened to the sound of troops passing on the Nashville road" (Chap. 1, p. 4).

Bushrod thinks about his time in the Army. He is 26 years old but his hair and mustache are already filled with gray. He has lines etched in his face and his knuckles are cracked. Bushrod is a veteran of every campaign of the Army of Tennessee since Shiloh and has maintained the rank of private. He had been a corporal once but lost his stripes after being accused of stealing a pitcher of buttermilk.

"He had never been wounded, never been very sick, never been kicked by any of the multitude of horses that always surrounded them (though he'd been stepped on twice), never broken a limb nor fallen from a wagon nor gotten hold of any whiskey he would call bad. All this singular good fortune he credited to the Saint Michael medal that dangled from his watch chain, a parting gift from Mr. Denby Garrison, rector of the Church of the Holy Cross" (Chap. 1, p. 5).

On occasion Bushrod had taken items from the Strangers, although he considered them to be a loan rather than stealing. These items included a canteen covered in wool, a Federal cap box on a Federal belt, a haversack, ammunition and a wool blanket encased in a waterproof gum blanket.

The regiment comes into line during the afternoon and they are given the command to rest. They keep their arms which is a bad sign. Many men sit on the ground and some



talk, others play cards, and some write or read letters. Bushrod stares at the sky and watches the sun sink on the horizon.

"Ordinarily, Bushrod tried not to think too much in the time before a battle. Long ago he had learned to close his mind to speculation, fixing his eyes on the crossed straps or blanket roll of the man to his front or, if he was in the front rank (as he was now), the ground at his feet" (Chap. 1, p. 7).

That afternoon Bushrod has a difficult time not thinking about the upcoming fight. Bushrod begins to think that if the enemy would simply get to know him and to realize what a charming and extraordinary fellow he is they may not fight. Bushrod does not understand how these people could want to kill him. A voice in his head reminds Bushrod to let the black flower blossom.

Bushrod speaks to Jack Bishop, a fellow soldier and lifelong friend. The men lament that they are getting too old for this business.

Bushrod recalls the big battle at Stones River. There was freezing rain. For some reason Jack Bishop had stripped himself of everything but his hat and spectacles. Bishop prowls along the bank of the river scaring pickets and creating a piece of lore for the soldiers on both sides. Bishop returns to speak to his uncle Colonel Ike Stone who is shocked at his nephew's state.

Bushrod and Bishop talk about the upcoming fight and assume that the enemy is on the other side of the trees.

Bushrod takes out a notebook often referred to as a commonplace book where he writes down important quotes and things overheard.

Tom Jenkins, a Second Lieutenant, walks over to the man accompanied by Mr. Sam Hook, the Chaplain. Bushrod thinks Jenkins does not behave according to protocol or the accepted decorum. Bishop tells Jenkins that he and Bushrod have been discussing tactics. Their take is that they are going to be badly beaten.

The author gives basic background on Jenkins and Hook. A conversation about tactics continues. The author also gives general background about Virgil C. Johnson, a fiddler from upper Missouri.

Johnson tells Bishop and Bushrod to look over by a church where he spots a man on horseback. The men don't believe Johnson. Johnson begins to walk toward the church. The men follow Johnson.

The men go into battle in the driving rain. Bushrod declares that he has had enough of the fighting and wants to go to the Gulf of Mexico to see the ocean.

Bishop, Bushrod and Johnson talk about facing their mortality.



"Bushrod could not remember when his army had last been arrayed like this, where he could see nearly all of it at once. It seemed an enormous living thing, breathing and moving, possessed of instinct and intelligence and malevolence all its own" (Chap. 1, p. 27).

Bushrod thinks about the Strangers. From a distance they look like a strange group of mush-rats. Up close they seem much like himself and his fellow soldiers. Bushrod hates face-to-face contact for that reason.

The company loads their weapons and prepares to fight. Bushrod has some difficulty. He watches the rest of the company stop their foolishness and become grim. Nebo, a conscripted soldier to Johnson's rear, shoots off his gun. Johnson collapses to the ground screaming that he has been killed. In truth, Johnson is only scared and not injured.

The author talks about the differences between conscripted soldiers and those who have volunteered.

The Confederates meet up with the Strangers. However, the Strangers are friendly and know Bushrod and the others.

The Confederates bury their Departed. Bushrod says he never wants to see another shovel in his lifetime.

The men return to battle.

"Bushrod's bayonet was already fixed when the command came, so he shut his eyes and listened as thousands of others rattled home on thousands of muzzles. He always shuddered at the sound, so terrible in its finality" (Chap. 1, p. 42).

The lieutenant yells for the men to be quiet. The troop becomes solemn and prepares to march.

Chapter 2:

Captain Patrick Tanner is chosen to ride ahead. He meets a young boy along the way in search of a mule. Tanner asks for directions to the McGavock farm. Tanner rides on until he reaches the land. Just for a minute he thinks about home and realizes that he is homesick. He dreams about a place just like this and a young girl named Nancy just waiting for him. Tanner asks John McGavock if the Confederate army might use his land. McGavock says they are ready and willing. Tanner notices McGavock's daughter, Anna, and is taken with the girl.

McGavock shoos Tanner along. Soon, drums can be heard in the distance. A battle is about to begin.

Chapter 3:



Good humor resumes as the group begins to march along. Three drummers accompany the troop. Bushrod thinks about the fifes that had once been a part of the band and is grateful that they are gone.

The battle begins. Bushrod is shocked by a shell that blasts nearby and for a moment he is deaf. People scream and shout while the lieutenant gives orders. It is over quickly, with Departed left on the plain.

The precursor to the real battle is over but the men know there is a big battle to come. They struggle to gather and to calm themselves. Some of the men bicker. Nebo confesses to Bushrod that he does not know if his gun is loaded. Bushrod thinks that they all belong in an insane asylum.

Preparing to fight, Nebo continues to fiddle with his gun. It goes off and shoots Johnson in the back of the head.

Chapters 1-3 Analysis

The story begins with a dream being experienced by Bushrod Carter, a 26 year old soldier in the 21st Mississippi unit of the Confederate Army. At this point in the story Bushrod has been in the Army for several years and is bone weary. The soldiers rarely sleep and receive little food. Bushrod dreams of food and of his loved ones, including his cousin Remy.

Bushrod often commiserates with his fellow soldiers, particularly Jack Bishop and Virgil C. Johnson. The men have a good relationship and often grouse about the conditions or about their commanding officers or other soldiers who are incompetent. There is a marked difference between the conscripted (drafted) soldiers and those who have enlisted. Many do not know how to hold or use a gun. It is a conscripted soldier, Nebo Gloster, who accidentally fires his gun into the back of Virgil C.'s head.

In general, Bushrod manages to keep up good spirits. He is a man of faith, although not a zealot. He maintains a Commonplace Book, a journal, in which he writes important quotes from things that he has read or thoughts he has while on the field. There is often time when the men have to wait for something to happen, which is when Bushrod writes.

The men try to keep up their spirits through good humor and other things that will pass the time. When it comes time to fall into rank, however, the men become solemn and serious. Oftentimes officers become annoyed with the men's humor but the conditions warrant a little bit of leniency.

Various soldiers' lives are outlined, including their history and how they came to join the army.



Although the men are exhausted, the officers demand 100% commitment. The band is there to raise morale although some, like Bushrod, think that the music is too much and often grating on the nerves.

A scout is sent to find a place to house the soldiers and to tend to the dying and injured. The army knows about the McGavock farm which is just across the river. The scout requests permission to use the house. John McGavock does not hesitate. The family prepares for battle. Even the children, the youngest of whom is only seven years old, is prepared to house and care for soldiers. It is their duty.



Chapters 4-7

Chapters 4-7 Summary

Part II: Night Watches

"Some times I do not think I shall live to be very old - but should it be God's will for me and any come to me and ask how it was on the Old War times, I will say - that there was really no victory, and no defeat. There were only brave men" (Bushrod Carter's Commonplace Book, Florence Alabama, November 16, 1864; Chap. 4, p. 74).

Chapter 4:

In the McGavock house, soldiers wait to be tended to by surgeons. Some are sewn up while others have limbs sawed off. Many die while others suffer. Meanwhile the McGavocks try to tend to them all. This includes Anna, a 24 year old unmarried woman.

Anna had been sent to live with her cousins the McGavocks from her home in Lincoln County. Anna knew her father would not come as promised. Anna does not mind since she likes her cousins and dearly loves her cousin Caroline. Anna works hard to emulate Caroline, particularly in these trying times. Anna feels that she is not up to Caroline's ability but tries anyway. There are times when Anna snaps at the soldiers or simply leans against a wall and cries.

Soldiers continue to arrive at the brick house.

The author tells a tale of Calvin Jones, a Professor of Music at the Cumberland Female Music Academy.

"From his youth, Calvin Jones had moved in a world smelling of cork grease, of ink and resin, of the vague, indefinable odor that clings to the inside of instrument cases. Unmarried and unmarriageable, he walked through life in rumpled frock coats and soiled collars, collecting dust, listening for pitch and key even in the songs of birds and telegraph wires" (Chap. 4, p. 78).

Jones had dedicated his entire life to music, which he considered to be divine. Music was Jones' only truth.

"But the world offers too much for any single truth to suffice. For every archangel there is a dragon, and the true artist is one who can embrace them both. Calvin Jones was never prepared for dragons." Chap. 4, p. 79

People from Jones' class are distracted and go outside. Jones is annoyed but follows. The girls stare over the fence at the approaching soldiers. They coo and reach for the horses. Professor Fitter tells Jones there has been a battle and the Confederates have



won. Jones watches the soldiers and thinks that they look like farmers. The soldiers nod to the girls. Jones recognizes the Archbishop.

Jones decides that he needs to join the army, despite his sister's protests. Jones enlists in 1862. After a few stints in the hospital Jones is finally sent to the Army of Tennessee. Jones already knows Bushrod and Bishop.

Jones learns that the band typically does not go into battle. However, this time, they are surrounded by the battle and are asked to keep playing to lift the soldiers' spirits. Jones is killed.

Chapter 5:

Simon Rope manages to slip out of rank and hides during the Battle of Franklin. Rope thinks about how Bishop might die, hoping that the man suffers. Rope stays in his hiding place but manages to get shot, losing an ear. Rope forages for food and finds it in a cabin. Rope loots the cabin. Along the way Rope meets a wounded man. The man begs for help. Rope says he will only help if the man can pay him. The man has nothing. Rope slits the man's throat.

The band sees the dead - many of which are still twitching. The archbishop tries to save one he knows and arranges for the soldiers to carry a litter to the nearest hospital. Not all men are willing to comply.

The story switches to the McGavock's brick house. It is hot and the red wasps have come out of hibernation. One wasp struggles although it is dying. It lands in a pool of blood. It manages to get out and crawls on a soldier.

"While the wasp climbed, the man began to grow restless. He jerked and trembled, began to whimper. He was drenched in blood, though most of it was not his own - it belonged to the men under whom he'd been buried for hours during the battle. It had come from their mouths, their ears, their multiple gunshot wounds; it was freighted with fecal matter, urine, microscopic bits of cloth and leather and flesh, stomach bile - not to mention personalities, histories, dreams, memories." Chap. 5, p. 107

The wasp finally manages to take flight but then flies into a lantern and dies.

Chapter 6:

Anna falls asleep on a pallet. Mrs. McGavock tells her son to let Anna sleep. Winder wonders why Anna looks angry. Hattie and Winder climb into bed.

Bushrod thinks all the boys are dead. Bushrod walks and talks to Hicks and Johnson. Bushrod meets a Stranger and sees a burst of light.

There is only one room intact at the McGavock house - Mr. and Mrs. McGavock's bedroom on the second floor. The noise and suffering continue to fill the house while the children sleep. Winder screams and wakes everyone up at 4:40. Anna had slept for two



hours. She feels as if the night will never end. She dreams of Tanner and cries. Anna finally goes to find Caroline at 5 AM.

Chapter 7:

Dawn comes. Anna thinks about time and how it will continue to pass until years have gone by. Names would fade from Caroline's book and the survivors would grow old. Women would remain bitter from their losses.

Anna decided that day that she would never join the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Ever year after the Battle of Franklin, Anna returned to walk the oak groves and visit the cemetery.

Anna meets General Forrest. Anna is very rude to the General at first and is stunned when she learns his identity. The General understands. He gives a plume to Anna as a remembrance.

Chapters 4-7 Analysis

Bushrod thinks he will not last long in the war. He is tired and thinks that perhaps he will be shot and killed. Regardless, Bushrod is resigned to whatever is going to happen because it is God's will.

The setting turns to the McGavock house. The Soldiers arrive at the McGavock house, a two story brick house located in Franklin, Tennessee. The house is occupied by the McGavock family - John and Caroline McGavock and their children Caroline, Hattie and Winder. Also living in the house is Anna Margaret Hereford. Anna Margaret Hereford is a 24 year old unmarried woman. Anna had been sent to live with her cousins the McGavocks from her home in Lincoln County. Anna knew her father would not come as promised. Anna does not mind since she likes her cousins and dearly loves her cousin Caroline. Anna works hard to emulate Caroline, particularly in these trying times. Anna feels that she is not up to Caroline's ability but tries anyway.

The main caretakers of the soldiers at the McGavock house are Caroline, Caroline and Anna. The children help when and where they can. There are also officers and others to help, including two surgeons. The soldiers are everywhere, lying on the floor, covering every possible square inch, save the McGavock's bedroom on the second floor. The soldiers are gathered to see the surgeons. The surgeons attempt to tend to the worst off first but the number is overwhelming. The surgeons work until they are nearly blind - stitching and amputating limbs where needed. The dead are carried out into the yard or into the oak grove beyond. The winter weather is warmer than usual so the bodies stink.

The author tells the tale of yet another man who joined the army late in life. Calvin Jones was convinced that music - his muse - could be a benefit in these trying times. Musicians were generally not in the heat of battle and therefore were rarely injured. Jones is killed.



The reader is also introduced to Simon Rope. Rope is a murderer and a rapist - a true sociopath. It is believed at one point that Rope is dead. However, Rope is the kind that seems to survive the most difficult and deadly circumstances. The author paints a portrait of a detestable man bound to make a profit from the war and deaths of others.

Anna and Caroline work until they are ready to drop. Anna tries hard to emulate Caroline's kind manner and patience but often falls short. Still the soldiers appreciate her and one calls her an angel.



Chapters 8-11

Chapters 8-11 Summary

Chapter 8:

It is December 1, 1864. Men cover every inch of floor in the McGavock house. Anna will never forget the smell of blood and the stink of the soldiers. Anna loses patience and gets angry with the men. She berates them but still they are grateful to her.

Anna meets Nebo. Anna does not believe that Nebo is a soldier because he wears ordinary clothes. Nebo shows the ramrods to Anna to prove his identity. Anna also meets Bushrod.

Bushrod has decided that he can no longer soldier. This will be his last battle. Bushrod tries to ignore the voice in his head that calls him a deserter.

Chapter 9:

Nebo sits and talks with Hattie and Winder. Nebo shows them a green glass and tells the children that it is magic.

Anna talks to Caroline about Bushrod.

Bushrod thinks about Bishop and feels guilty for not thinking of his friend sooner. Bushrod takes a gun from a dead man. Bushrod also thinks about Johnson's dead body. Anna approaches Bushrod and offers coffee. Anna asks about the gun and clearly disapproves of Bushrod's methods.

Nebo sits in the room with the children. He begins to cry about Johnson.

Anna watches as Bushrod kicks men on the floor. Bushrod sees Nebo and raises the gun. Nebo begs to be spared.

Chapter 10:

Anna tries to stop Bushrod from murdering Nebo. Anna slaps Bushrod and tells him to put the gun down. Bushrod obliges. Bushrod asks Nebo if he remembers shooting Johnson. Nebo says he didn't mean to do it. Bushrod finds Nebo's ramrod.

Major Cross arrives and has a conversation with Bushrod. Bushrod talks about deserting. Cross jokes that Bushrod should not make such a confession to a major. Cross says he would join Bushrod if he wasn't so afraid of Forrest. Cross makes comments about Anna. Bushrod becomes protective of the girl.

Bushrod learns that General Cleburne is dead.



Bushrod wants to find Bishop. Cross, trying to lighten the mood, says Bishop had better be alive because he owes him \$3.

"Bushrod turned back into the yard. He was dizzy and sick at heart, and the whole littered field of Franklin lay before him. But no matter, for Jack was out there somewhere, and it was still early in the day. In fact, Bushrod needn't have worried; though he didn't know it, he had but a little way to go" (Chap. 10, p. 175).

Cross manages to bring order to the house, removing the dead bodies and organizing those that still need medical care from the surgeon.

Anna thinks about Bushrod and chides herself when her heart flutters.

Chapter 11:

"When it came to religion, Bushrod Carter tries to keep everything simple" (Chap. 11, p. 179).

Bushrod thinks about the past three years and how his faith had not been shaken. Bushrod thinks about praying and the fact that petitioners should be reasonable.

Nebo's history is recounted. Nebo had never seen a woman other than his nurse until he was eight years old. Nebo's mother had died at birth. Nebo made it a point to avoid all women; they scared him. Once his brothers thrust him upon a whore and traumatized Nebo.

Nebo's older brothers died.

Nebo continued to avoid women. When Anna touches Nebo's arm, he is startled. Anna seems so small.

Simon Rope sees Anna and is interested.

Soldiers are moved into the grove; however, not all are dead.

"Bushrod knew very well that the Departed were sometimes restless - they moaned, belched farted, sat upright, did all manner of awful things" (Chap. 11, p. 184).

Bushrod walks through the grove and finds Bishop. Bushrod knows Bishop is dying. Bishop tells Bushrod to just leave him to die. Bushrod refuses and apologizes for not finding him sooner. Bushrod insists on getting water for Bishop. Bishop begins to see the dead and Bushrod knows it is too late. Bishop sees Simon Rope with Anna. Rope has a hold of Anna's collar. Rope threatens to kill Anna. Nebo sneaks up from behind and kills Rope. Anna grabs a knife and wants to kill Rope. Bushrod grabs and holds onto Anna, hoping to calm her down.



Chapters 8-11 Analysis

Anna begins to snap at some of the soldiers that reach out to her. She desperately wants to rest but cannot.

Bushrod decides that he has had enough. He refuses to think of himself as a deserter but knows that he has to leave or die. Bushrod is tired and fed up. Bushrod confesses to Major Cross, who teases Bushrod for telling his plans to an officer. Cross will not report his old friend and in fact wishes he could desert as well. This is why Cross is surprised when Bushrod returns to help bury the dead.

Nebo turns out to be a decent man. He speaks with the children and poses no threat. He feels remorse for what happened to Johnson as it was truly an accident. Nebo continues to show that he is not a soldier but tries his best. Like many of the soldiers, Nebo is beginning to fall apart.

Anna meets Bushrod. She is not impressed at first. However, as time goes on, the pair begins to communicate more and eventually fall in love. This is partly due to the stressful situation and the war.

The story of Virgil C. is muddled and confused. The author states that Virgil C. was killed by Nebo; yet he appears later in the story, supposedly alive. This is not presented as one of Bushrod's dreams. However, Virgil C. is in fact dead and is in the yard at the McGavock house, another fact that does not mesh with the earlier story.

Cross puts the house into order and tries his best to help. Unlike the general, Cross knows it is the soldiers that will rally on their own with some guidance. The general has a messiah complex.

Anna and Bushrod become closer, sharing stories.

Bushrod is completely unraveled when he finds Bishop as he lays dying. It is clear that this will be the end of Bushrod.



Chapters 12-16; Epilog

Chapters 12-16; Epilog Summary

Part III: Banquo's Return

Chapter 12: Bishop is dying. This is his last hour. Nebo, Bushrod and Anna stay by his side. Bishop talks little. Anna thanks Nebo for saving her and thanks Bushrod for holding her back from Rope. Bushrod finds a quilt for Anna to sit on while Nebo goes to look for firewood. Anna falls asleep, exhausted.

"Simon Rope's body in death was an uncanny mirror of Anna's in sleep. He was curled on his side, knees drawn up, hands tucked under his chin. But he was having no bad dreams. Not in this world, anyway" (Chap. 12, p. 197).

Bushrod thinks about the river. He wants to bathe in it, drink from it, and use it as a place to hide, to escape. Bushrod sleeps.

Jack Bishop dies. Bushrod is upset that he was sleeping when Jack died. He thinks about their childhood and time together in the Army.

"So there it was, and a long way they'd come to this little clearing in Tennessee. Bushrod watched for a moment, thinking of nothing, feeling nothing, aware of nothing but the memory of quiet waters carrying them home. Then he rose stiffly to his knees and made the sign of the cross" (Chap. 12, p. 198).

Bushrod checks Bishop's pockets. He takes a pair of spectacles and some other items. He closes Bishop's eyes, buttons and smooths his coat front. Bushrod folds Bishop's arms across his chest. Anna walks over and sits by Bushrod.

Cross orders bodies moved from the yard. Cross calls out to Billy Blevins, a scout. Cross tells Blevins to find General Forrest and ask for orders. Cross says Blevins must return with orders.

Bushrod returns to the yard to help bury the dead. Cross is surprised that Bushrod has not yet deserted.

Nebo digs a grave big enough for Bishop and Virgil C. Johnson. Virgil C. is moved from the yard to the grove.

Anna brings food and wakes Bushrod. They dream aloud about a feast at the cookhouse.

Bushrod paints a marker for the grave. Along with names and dates he writes *Virtute Junxit Mors Non Separabit*. He translates: What valor has joined, death will not separate.



Bushrod insists on having Virgil C. turned over because he can't be buried face down. Nebo does the job. Nebo begins to put Virgil C. in the grave. Bushrod puts his hand on Nebo's chest, thinking that Nebo should go into the grave for shooting Virgil C. Anna stops him.

Bushrod remembers a fall day when he and his cousin Remy skipped school. It had been Remy's idea. They had lain in the grass, dozing, and watching the clouds. Remy had spent every summer with Bushrod's family to avoid the yellow fever that plagued New Orleans. She had always been a tomboy. One summer Remy had appeared, changed. Remy no longer had interest in the same things as Bushrod. Remy had shunned Bushrod to read poetry and be with other girls. On the day in the field the old Remy had returned. Bushrod had watched her breathing, looking at her for the first time as a girl. They had pledged themselves to each other.

Anna wakes Bushrod. Bushrod had called her by Remy's name again. Meanwhile, Nebo continues to bury the dead. The sound of Virgil C.'s arm breaking is a sickening sound. Anna cries. Anna and Bushrod hold hands. They try in vain to have a polite conversation. Both have read *Leaves of Grass* although neither had understood much of it. Bushrod teases Anna to lighten the mood.

Bushrod exhibits signs of pain from his arm. Anna tries to get Bushrod to show his wounds. Bushrod talks about deserting and thinks he is a fool. Anna disagrees.

Anna takes Nebo for a walk so Bushrod can grieve in private. Bushrod kneels by the grave. Bushrod puts his St. Michael medal on Bishop's body. Bushrod leaves his gold watch for Virgil C and weeps.

Chapter 13:

"By the afternoon of the First of December, the scattered bones of the Army of Tennessee began to draw themselves together. It was a supernatural rite the Army had performed time and again, like some mythical beast that refused to die, that writhed up out of its own corpse until it found its shape again" (Chap. 13, p. 219)

General John Bell Hood arrives in Franklin. Hood believes he is responsible for the company's resurrection. The Army has been victorious and now the road to Nashville is open. Hood will draw out the Yankees and fight them on open ground. The Army will claim victory once more.

"In the end, it was not the Commanding General - nor any other general, good or bad - who raised the Army from its scattered fragments and made it whole again. Rather it was the corporals, the sergeants suddenly in command of companies, the junior lieutenants and the captains, the field-grade officers who had once been sheriffs and county clerks and cotton planters, the color bearers who planted their battle flags in the rocky fields and sang out the numbers of the numerous regiments: Here is the Fifteenth, here the Forty-third Mississippi..." (Chap. 13, p. 219).



Bushrod sees Bishop and Johnson. Anna tells him they are dead. Anna insists on looking at Bushrod's arm. Red streaks run up the arm. Anna insists on consulting a surgeon. Bushrod claims that the surgeons are butchers. Anna wonders if Bushrod is dying. Bushrod argues. Bushrod sees Jack walking into the woods. Anna says he is going back to the house and that they should follow.

Lieutenant Tom Jenkins believes he is the last officer of the 21st Mississippi. Jenkins searches for soldiers and finds 44 men at the McGavock place. He thinks that more may come straggling in and gathers his men. Jenkins gathers the men and thinks that he should give some kind of speech but does not know what to say. Jenkins waits for a long time. Finally, he tells Sergeant-Major Bomar to have the men fall in. Bomar addresses each man by name, reminding each man of his history and of the battles they have fought together.

Men prepare to go. Cross thinks about farewells. Cross thinks he will never be good at saying farewell.

Chapter 14:

Winder sits outside. He thinks about stranger creatures in the woods including many of the legends told by various peoples. He thinks about the silver dog that supposedly appears in the moonlight the night before someone dies.

"The boy shivered and thought about what it meant to be dead. It was a raving and cursing and knocking against the door" (Chap. 14, p. 233).

Winder sits and holds Bushrod's haversack, which had been entrusted to him. Winder looks inside the haversack at Bushrod's items. It is an impoverished lot. Winder continues to think about death.

The Chaplain arrives with a dog. The Chaplain is drunk. He tells Winder that he has been looking for the regiment all day. The Chaplain tells Winder a story about a pony named Banquo. It had run off one day and was killed by a wildcat. All these years later, the Chaplain still waits for Banquo to return. The Chaplain and Winder lay on the ground and fall asleep.

Caroline finds Winder. A soldier carries Winder to the house. Caroline had been scared that Winder had been lost. Anna recognizes the haversack. Caroline tells her to take it and to keep it, until... Anna says it will be just another memento of the great Confederate War. As Anna picks up the sack, the tintype photo falls out onto the ground.

Chapter 15: Bushrod sleeps in comfort for the first time in many years. Anna gets the surgeon. The old surgeon says that Bushrod's arm must be amputated or he will die. The surgeon won't let Anna go with him to the operating table. The surgeon on duty has been working for twelve hours. He is exhausted and drunk from chloroform fumes. The old surgeon takes over. The men talk about the 87 amputations that have been performed so far. Each one is represented by a notch on the door being used as a table.



The old surgeon knows Bushrod is going to die and contemplates euthanasia. Bushrod loses his left arm.

Caroline needs to rest. Anna tells her to go and sleep while she sits with Bushrod. The surgeon says Bushrod will probably die. Anna says Bushrod is right, that the surgeons are butchers.

"The old surgeon cut her off. 'Now, you listen to me. I have had enough of this - I am tired and old, and I do not mean to be insulted, not by you, not by anybody. I have done the best for him I can - what happens now is up to him and God'" (Chap. 15, p. 253).

Anna apologizes to the surgeon for being rude.

Anna asks Nebo to pray. Nebo says he does not know how.

Nebo watches Bushrod. Nebo tries to talk to Bushrod but gets no response. Nebo thinks Bushrod will not wake.

Nebo has a bad memory but he remembers talking to Jack down by the river.

Nebo tries to wake Bushrod once more. Nebo falls asleep.

"In the tricky, shifting light of the fire, the sleepers - Ann, Bushrod, and Nebo - seemed figures in a very old painting, caught in a vanished moment of repose. It was easy to believe that they might sleep forever, free from pain and grief and confusion, pardoned from all things and especially from tomorrow" (Chap. 15, p. 258).

Anna wakes because she is cold. Anna sends Nebo for water, rags and coffee. Nebo refuses because he is afraid. Anna gives her silver cross to Nebo and tells him that it is magic. Nebo leaves.

Bushrod wakes up and gives Anna a button from his uniform. Bushrod falls back to sleep. Anna beseeches God to save Bushrod. Anna asks God if it isn't enough already. Bushrod wakes and Anna tells him that it is okay to go to Jack and Virgil C. She says she could have loved him. Bushrod dies.

Chapter 16:

The cold weather finally arrives. Snow and ice cover the ground.

"The Army was gone. In its wake lay a vast ruin of broken things: muskets, gun carriages, ammunition boxes, canteens, clay jugs, spectacles, pocket watches - and men. Especially men. The dead ones filled the ground in backyards and alleys and garden plots, among the woods and low places, among the rocks of the fields. Other who might still be saved overflowed the buildings and houses of the village. All of these suffered, many of them died" (Chap. 16, p. 263).



Nebo digs a grave next to the one he dug for Jack and Virgil C. Bushrod is carried to the grave. Caroline tells Anna that she should be the one to speak. Anna prays.

Epilog:

Winder finds a pony near the place where the remaining soldiers had been gathered by Bomar. Winder coaxes the pony to follow him home.

Chapters 12-16; Epilog Analysis

Banquo serves as a metaphor. At the end of the story, a pony arrives, a harbinger that things will be all right once more although the scars of battle and war will remain forever.

Anna works past the point of exhaustion to help Bushrod. Bushrod's protests fall on deaf ears.

Nebo redeems himself by killing the detestable Simon Rope as he threatens to rape and kill Anna. Anna has become numb to this brutal world and the underlying violence and primal need to survive.

Nebo also redeems himself by digging the graves single-handedly. Bushrod gives his most prized possessions to his friends. It would not be long before Anna would do the same for Bushrod.

The author speaks of those who died, most under horrendous circumstances. The ones who would survive and live in the town of Franklin or perhaps return home, would do so in a fragile and devastated state.

Anna would never forget Bushrod and the others. She shuns the United Daughters of the Confederacy, all ceremonies and other events because she cannot bear to be reminded of the horrors she witnessed at that time.

Characters

Bushrod Carter

Bushrod Carter, a soldier in the 21st Mississippi unit of the Confederate Army, is 26 years old. Although Bushrod is still a young man, his hair and mustache are already filled with gray. He has lines etched in his face and his knuckles are cracked. Bushrod is a veteran of every campaign of the Army of Tennessee since Shiloh and has maintained the rank of private. Bushrod had been a corporal once but lost his stripes after being accused of stealing a pitcher of buttermilk. Bushrod is a standup soldier who is well liked and respected.

"He had never been wounded, never been very sick, never been kicked by any of the multitude of horses that always surrounded them (though he'd been stepped on twice), never broken a limb nor fallen from a wagon nor gotten hold of any whiskey he would call bad. All this singular good fortune he credited to the Saint Michael medal that dangled from his watch chain, a parting gift from Mr. Denby Garrison, rector of the Church of the Holy Cross" (Chap. 1, p. 5).

Bushrod is more educated than most but does not flaunt it. He is philosophical and takes time to make observations when time allows. These observations are often recorded in a small leather bound book known as a Commonplace Book.

Bushrod is tired of soldiering. He thinks about deserting.

"Some times I do not think I shall live to be very old - but should it be God's will for me and any come to me and ask how it was on the Old War times, I will say - that there was really no victory, and no defeat. There were only brave men" (Bushrod Carter's Commonplace Book, He Alabama, November 16, 1864; Chap. 4, p. 74).

Things begin to change for Bushrod when he meets Anna, a young woman who lives in the house invaded by the soldiers.

Anna Margaret Hereford

Anna Margaret Hereford is a 24 year old unmarried woman. Anna had been sent to live with her cousins, the McGavocks, from her home in Lincoln County. Anna knew her father would not come as promised. Anna does not mind since she likes her cousins and dearly loves her cousin Caroline. Anna works hard to emulate Caroline, particularly in these trying times. Anna feels that she is not up to Caroline's ability but tries anyway.

Anna works tirelessly to help Caroline and the others tend to the soldiers. Along the way Anna meets Bushrod. The two begin to fall in love despite the tragic circumstances.



Jack Bishop

Jack Bishop is a soldier in the 21st Mississippi. He and Bushrod have been friends since childhood. Bishop dies at McGavock house.

Nebo Gloster

Nebo Gloster is a soldier in the 21st Mississippi. Nebo accidentally kills Virgil C. Nebo buries Jack, Virgil, and Bushrod.

Calvin Jones

Calvin Jones is a professor of music who joins the army.

Caroline McGavock

Caroline McGavock is Anna's cousin. She helps to care for the soldiers.

Winder McGavock

Winder McGavock is Caroline's 7 year old brother.

Hattie McGavock

Hattie McGavock is Caroline's 9 year old sister.

Major R.K. Cross

Major R.K. Cross is a provost guard in charge at the McGavock house. He is also a friend to Bushrod.

General Forrest

General Forrest is the commanding general.



Objects/Places

The McGavock House

The McGavock house is one of the main settings in the story. It is a two story brick house located in Franklin, Tennessee. It is in a relatively rural area near a river. The McGavock family resides in the house. This consists of John and Caroline McGavock and their children Caroline, Hattie and Winder. Also living in the house is Anna Margaret Hereford. Anna Hereford is a 24 year old unmarried woman. Anna had been sent to live with her cousins, the McGavocks, from her home in Lincoln County. Anna knew her father would not come as promised.

A scout approaches the McGavock house to ask John McGavock if the Confederate Army might use their house as a base while the Battle of Franklin wages on. McGavock knows this means that the house will be filled with dead, dying and injured soldiers - men that he and his family will take care of for as long as necessary. McGavock agrees.

The main caretakers of the soldiers at the McGavock house are Caroline, her daughter Caroline and her niece Anna. The children help when and where they can. There are also officers and others to help, including two surgeons.

Many soldiers die in the yard and are taken to the oak grove next to the river. This is where Jack Bishop and Bushrod Carter die and are buried. Years later, Anna returns every year on the anniversary of the Battle of Franklin and walks the grounds including the oak grove and the cemetery.

The Civil War

The Civil War is the great battle that was fought between the North and the South. The majority of the story takes place in December 1864 during the Battle of Franklin. The characters in the story are from the Confederate Army.

21st Mississippi

Bushrod Carter belonged to the 21st Mississippi regiment.

Franklin, Tennessee

The Battle of Franklin was fought in the town of Franklin, Tennessee.



Lincoln County

Lincoln County is the original home of Anna Hereford.

Florence, Alabama

Florence, Alabama is the original home of Bushrod Carter.

Haversack

Bushrod and others carry their valuables in haversacks.

Oak Grove

Bushrod is buried in an oak grove.

Ocean

Bushrod longs to see the ocean.

Confederate Army

The Confederate Army is the branch of the military joined by Bushrod and others.



Themes

War

War - the Civil War - is one of the main themes of the story. While the book focuses on the Civil War, it is clear that the spoils and devastation that comes along with war is not specific to any conflict or battle but a universal feeling, event and dilemma. This war and its effects are examined in detail by the author, mostly through the experiences of Bushrod Carter and Anna Hereford - soldier and the woman that cared for him and grew to love him during that emotional and horrific time.

The soldiers have many ways of coping with war, including the stress, hunger and exhaustion. Bushrod writes in his book and tries to distract himself with his friends. Bushrod tries not to think that the enemy, who are referred to as Strangers, are people much like him as he faces them on the battlefield.

"Ordinarily, Bushrod tried not to think too much in the time before a battle. Long ago he had learned to close his mind to speculation, fixing his eyes on the crossed straps or blanket roll of the man to his front or, if he was in the front rank (as he was now), the ground at his feet" (Chap. 1, p. 7).

That particular afternoon Bushrod has a difficult time not thinking about the upcoming fight. Bushrod begins to think that if the enemy would simply get to know him and to realize what a charming and extraordinary fellow he is they may not fight. Bushrod does not understand how these people could want to kill him.

The war takes on a different face when seen through the eyes of the caretakers who are forced to distance themselves and do what must be done. This is not possible, however, when Anna begins to fall for Bushrod, just one of the soldiers who will not survive.

Death

Death is one of the main themes of the book. Death surrounds the characters everywhere - on the battlefield and in the McGavock house and on their land. Each soldier and character handles death differently. The change for Bushrod comes when Jack Bishop dies. During Bishop's last hour, he talks very little. Nebo, Bushrod and Anna stay by his side. When Bishop dies, Bushrod is left disconsolate. Bushrod is upset that he had been sleeping when Jack died. He thinks about their childhood and time together in the Army.

"So there it was, and a long way they'd come to this little clearing in Tennessee. Bushrod watched for a moment, thinking of nothing, feeling nothing, aware of nothing but the memory of quiet waters carrying them home. Then he rose stiffly to his knees and made the sign of the cross" (Chap. 12, p. 198).



Simon Rope also dies but his death is a result of his own actions when he grabs Anna and threatens to kill her. Bushrod cannot help but compare Rope's body to those of someone sleeping.

"Simon Rope's body in death was an uncanny mirror of Anna's in sleep. He was curled on his side, knees drawn up, hands tucked under his chin. But he was having no bad dreams. Not in this world, anyway" (Chap. 12, p. 197).

Bushrod's death affects Anna in a way that she never thought possible. She knows she could have loved him and they could have had a life together if it wasn't for the bloody war.

Breaking Point

Each person has a different breaking point. Many of the characters in the story are seen as they reach the breaking point. Bushrod's first breaking point is when he reaches the height of exhaustion. At this point Bushrod talks about deserting. Bushrod even shares his desperation with his friend Major R.K. Cross when Cross arrives and has a conversation with Bushrod. Cross jokes that Bushrod should not make such a confession to a major. Cross says he would join Bushrod if he wasn't so afraid of Forrest.

Bushrod's final breaking point comes when Jack Bishop dies. Bushrod has seen so many things and people destroyed that it seems he cannot recover.

Anna begins to reach her breaking point when she is beyond exhaustion. She snaps at the soldiers that grasp her hem and beg for help. Anna works hard to hold herself together and manages to care for Bushrod although she is barely able to stand on her own two feet.

The surgeons experience their breaking point after operating for countless hours on end. The surgeons are so exhausted that they are nearly blind and their efforts seem to have little or no effect on the dying.

Style

Point of View

The point of view used in *The Black Flower: A Novel of the Civil War* by Howard Bahr is third person omniscient. This point of view works well throughout the book since there are several components and underlying factors that would not be revealed otherwise. The story itself is rather complex and only third person omniscient would allow the reader to follow and understand the activities of all of the characters as well as the dangerous and deadly events of the Civil War, and the complicated relationships between the soldiers, officers, and civilians. It also allows for the reader to follow and understand actions and thoughts of other characters in the book as well as those events of which one single character has no knowledge.

The main characters, Bushrod Carter, Jack Bishop, Nebo Gloster, Anna Hereford, and Virgil C. Johnson, each have their own unique perspectives on the war. Each is affected in a specific and lasting way according to their histories and personalities.

While the first person point of view might have been interesting when coming from the characters in their time of confusion, third person conveys the entire story and not just the subjective opinions of the characters. It also permits the reader to take part in the journey and development of each character in the story.

Setting

The McGavock house is one of the main settings in the story. It is a two story brick house located in Franklin, Tennessee in a relatively rural area near a river. The McGavock family consists of John and Caroline McGavock and their children Caroline, Hattie and Winder. Also living in the house is Anna Margaret Hereford, who is a 24 year old unmarried woman. Anna had been sent to live with her cousins, the McGavocks, from her home in Lincoln County. Anna knew her father would not come as promised.

A scout approaches the McGavock house to ask John McGavock if the Confederate Army might use their house as a base while the Battle of Franklin wages on. McGavock knows this means that the house will be filled with dead, dying and injured soldiers - men that he and his family will take care of for as long as necessary. McGavock agrees.

The main caretakers of the soldiers at the McGavock house are Caroline, her daughter Caroline and her niece Anna. The children help when and where they can. There are also officers and others to help, including two surgeons.

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Language and Meaning

The language and meaning used throughout *The Black Flower: A Novel of the Civil War* by Howard Bahr reflects on the times in a number of ways. It is clear that the people in the stories live in the 1860s, as they speak of particular events including the Civil War and battles of that time. While the story mostly takes place in 1864, Bahr does not use a great deal of slang outside the expected regionalisms or any language that would date the work in a negative way. There are many examples of the soldiers and southerners peppering their speech with slang from their every day vernacular.

Bahr is a master of language and is not afraid to exercise his vocabulary. There is a marked absence of sex, violence, and vulgarity throughout the stories and it is rare to see any use of profanity. There are some exceptions - some of the soldiers use profanity when under duress. However, this is usually withheld or restrained by the presence of women. Anna comments that she has not heard some of the words before. The soldiers typically apologize.

It is easy to see the progression of the work, both in structure and language. The language is more formal in the beginning of the collection and becomes looser toward the end.

The meaning of the story may be deciphered in one of two ways. The reader may take the stories at face value and enjoy the tales that involve many adventures, complicated relationships and the themes involving politics and conspiracy.

If one chooses to delve deeper into the meaning of the book, it is possible to do so. For those who prefer to deconstruct the story, there are several underlying reasons for the characters' actions. One can easily see the correlation between the prose and historical events, which makes reading even more entertaining.

Structure

The work is chronological in nature. It is comprised of 267 pages, broken into 16 chapters plus an epilog. The shortest chapter is one page in length; the longest chapter is 44 pages in length; the average number of pages per chapter is 16 pages.

The story begins with a dream being experienced by Bushrod Carter, a 26 year old soldier currently in Tennessee. He dreams that it is snowing and the ground is covered with hoe cakes covered in molasses. Bushrod pulls away from the ranks to pick up the hoe cakes and eat them. As Bushrod speaks to General Patrick Cleburne, Bushrod's cousin Remy arrives with a large plate of ham. Just as Bushrod is prepared to eat the ham he wakes up and realizes that he had fallen asleep on his musket. At least it isn't snowing. Bushrod realizes that he should not have listened to orders and left his bedroll behind. He would be forced to steal another one from one of the Strangers. He attempts to remember what day it is and realizes that it doesn't really matter.

Bushrod and his colleagues prepare to fight a major battle in Franklin, Tennessee. There is great detail about the logistics and emotions that accompany war. The reader is introduced to several characters, including Bushrod and some of his colleagues as well as the family which tends to the soldiers after the battle.



Quotes

"He had gone to sleep standing up, leaning on his musket." Chap. 1, p. 4

"Ordinarily, Bushrod tried not to think too much in the time before a battle. Long ago he had learned to close his mind to speculation, fixing his eyes on the crossed straps or blanket roll of the man to his front or, if he was in the front rank (as he was now), the ground at his feet." Chap. 1, p. 7

"He had never been wounded, never been very sick, never been kicked by any of the multitude of horses that always surrounded them (though he'd been stepped on twice), never broken a limb nor fallen from a wagon nor gotten hold of any whiskey he would call bad. All this singular good fortune he credited to the Saint Michael medal that dangled from his watch chain, a parting gift from Mr. Denby Garrison, rector of the Church of the Holy Cross." Chap. 1, p. 5

"Bushrod could not remember when his army had last been arrayed like this, where he could see nearly all of it at once. It seemed an enormous living thing, breathing and moving, possessed of instinct and intelligence and malevolence all its own." Chap. 1, p. 27

"Bushrod's bayonet was already fixed when the command came, so he shut his eyes and listened as thousands of others rattled home on thousands of muzzles. He always shuddered at the sound, so terrible in its finality." Chap. 1, p. 42

"Some times I do not think I shall live to be very old - but should it be God's will for me and any come to me and ask how it was on the Old War times, I will say - that there was really no victory, and no defeat. There were only brave men." Bushrod Carter's Commonplace Book, Florence Alabama, November 16, 1864; Chap. 4, p. 74

"From his youth, Calvin Jones had moved in a world smelling of cork grease, of ink and resin, of the vague, indefinable odor that clings to the inside of instrument cases. Unmarried and unmarriageable, he walked through life in rumpled frock coats and soiled collars, collecting dust, listening for pitch and key even in the songs of birds and telegraph wires." Chap. 4, p. 78

"But the world offers too much for any single truth to suffice. For every archangel there is a dragon, and the true artist is one who can embrace them both. Calvin Jones was never prepared for dragons." Chap. 4, p. 79

"While the wasp climbed, the man began to grow restless. He jerked and trembled, began to whimper. He was drenched in blood, though most of it was not his own - it belonged to the men under whom he'd been buried for hours during the battle. It had come from their mouths, their ears, their multiple gunshot wounds; it was freighted with fecal matter, urine, microscopic bits of cloth and leather and flesh, stomach bile - not to mention personalities, histories, dreams, memories." Chap. 5, p. 107



"Bushrod turned back into the yard. He was dizzy and sick at heart, and the whole littered field of Franklin lay before him. But no matter, for Jack was out there somewhere, and it was still early in the day. In fact, Bushrod needn't have worried; though he didn't know it, he had but a little way to go." Chap. 10, p. 175

"When it came to religion, Bushrod Carter tries to keep everything simple." Chap. 11, p. 179

"Simon Rope's body in death was an uncanny mirror of Anna's in sleep. He was curled on his side, knees drawn up, hands tucked under his chin. But he was having no bad dreams. Not in this world, anyway." Chap. 12, p. 197



Topics for Discussion

Compare and contrast Bushrod and Jack Bishop.

Discuss Anna's living situation. Why did her father leave her with the McGavocks? What was Anna's reaction?

How might you react in John McGavock's place when asked if the army could use the house?

Discuss the relationship between Anna and Bushrod. What might have happened if Bushrod had lived?

Discuss the scene between Nebo and Bushrod at the graveside. Why did Bushrod contemplate killing Nebo?

What was the symbolism behind the story of Banquo?

How did the war affect Anna overall? Do you think she ever forgot Bushrod or the others?