Robert Penn Warren has written that "The Civil War is, for the American imagination, the great single event of our history. Without too much wrenching, it may, in fact, be said to be American history." Whether or not this is an exaggeration, we are now embarked on another renaissance of Civil War writing. As in the past, both popular writers and the academic historians are at work. Much of the new scholarship is promising. If one may venture a cautious generalization, it may be said that the new writing, unlike that of prior generations, is marked by two principal characteristics. It is unromantic. Instead of glorifying or celebrating the war, the new scholarship treats it as the harsh tragedy that it surely was. In addition, today's writers are unapologetic to the South. The "Lost Cause" tradition, created in the South after the war and embraced by the North, has contained an implicit acceptance of the justification or logic of the Southern course of conduct. This is no longer the case among today's thoughtful writers. Stephen W. Sears's biography of General George B. McClellan and David M. Jordan's biography of General Winfield Scott Hancock, concerned with two of the war's leading military figures, are representative of the new genre.

In 1983, Sears authored an excellent book, Landscape Turned Red, a history of Robert E. Lee's 1862 Maryland Campaign and the Battle of Antietam. That book was marked by the writer's growing feeling of distaste for General McClellan, focused on McClellan's failure to support Pope's Army of Virginia at Second Bull Run on the eve of the Maryland Campaign, his slowness to realize the opportunity that Lee's movement into Maryland afforded, and his inept conduct of the Battle of Antietam. Indeed, the inadequacies of McClellan became the thesis of that book. A reader of Sears's McClellan biography senses that the study of the Maryland Campaign provoked in Sears a need to examine in detail the life and character of McClellan. The Young Napoleon is the result. It is a well researched and well written factual account of McClellan's life together with
reasoned interpretations of his conduct. The general represents a classic case of self-incrimination, betrayed by his own letters, especially the numerous letters to his wife. Although Sears has mined a wide range of manuscript sources, he draws his sharpest insights into McClellan's motives and character from these letters. He emerges as a seriously flawed human being.

Born in 1826 into a Philadelphia family of intellectual and social distinction, McClellan graduated from West Point in 1846 and entered the Corps of Engineers. Distinguished in the Mexican War, he was also identified as a military theoretician. He resigned from the Army in 1857 to become a railroad executive, but shortly after Sumter was appointed Major General of Ohio Volunteers by the Governor of that state and placed in command of Ohio's forces. This was quickly followed by Lincoln's commission as Major General in the United States Army. In Ohio he was responsible for organizing and drilling the early regiments raised in that state. In June he took the field and conducted the Federals' successful Rich Mountain Campaign in western Virginia, before being called to Washington in August of 1861 to take command of the Army of the Potomac. It was the combination of his success in the early fighting in western Virginia and the Union's defeat at Bull Run in July of 1861 that propelled McClellan into this command. On November 1, 1861, he became the General-in-Chief of the Armies of the United States. He was thirty-four years old.

During the relatively brief period between his Ohio commission and the call to Washington, McClellan manifested several attributes. In the first place, his administrative and organizational skills were of the highest order. In the chaotic early days in Ohio he was effective in mustering, organizing, equipping and training the early volunteers. He also had a gift for rhetoric in the Napoleonic style. He sounded like a great soldier. Related to this posing was the capacity to inspire the confidence and affection of his soldiers, developing what would today be called "personality cult" leadership. In the western Virginia campaign, he overestimated the enemy's numbers and exhibited a mindless caution, which he carried to the point of leaving a portion of his army in peril. He also showed that he perceived army command as something more than simply obeying orders and dealing in purely military matters. Antagonistic to the anti-slavery cause, he had a pronounced sense of the grand strategy of the war from the standpoint of the Union. It was to be a limited war in which Southern civilians and their property, including slaves, would be protected.

In Washington McClellan exhibited two additional tendencies. One was contempt for his superiors. As early as August 16, 1861, he was referring to the President as an "idiot," "baboon," and "gorilla." In addition, he involved himself directly with political questions and with politicians, and identified himself as a conservative Democrat. He was, he wrote, "fighting for my Country & the Union, not for abolition and the Republican Party." Bitterly racist, McClellan was hostile to abolition as a war aim; yet he was not sympathetic to slavery.
Sears ably recounts McClellan’s organizational and administrative activities as he trained and equipped the Army of the Potomac during the winter of 1861-62. During this period he was also heavily involved as General-in-Chief in the Administration’s consideration of the appropriate use of that army. The outcome of these deliberations was the well known Peninsula Campaign, undertaken on March 17, 1862, at which time McClellan was stripped of his status as General-in-Chief.

On the Peninsula McClellan’s advance toward Richmond was slow and cautious. Insisting that he was outnumbered by the much smaller forces of Confederate defenders, he sent forth repeated, impassioned demands to Washington for reinforcements, including the request for the assignment of divisions that Lincoln believed to be required for the safety of the capitol. On May 31, 1862, at Seven Pines, the Confederates attacked. Although unsuccessful, this show of offensive spirit further daunted McClellan. Ultimately, the Confederates initiated a series of battles known as the Seven Days, which caused McClellan to change his base of operations to Harrison’s Landing on the James River, which point his army reached on July 2nd. From Harrison’s Landing McClellan continued to proclaim that he was outnumbered and reiterated his demands for reinforcement. He also indulged his penchant for criticism of his superiors. This criticism was especially directed at Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton. His correspondence from Harrison’s Landing accused the Secretary of incompetence, treachery and the intentional sacrifice of Federal soldiers. When visited by Lincoln on July 8, the general presented the President with a letter setting forth his views concerning the conduct of the war. This letter rejected the idea of confiscation of rebel property and also rejected the “forcible abolition of slavery.”

After much debate and controversy, on August 3, 1862, the newly appointed General-in-Chief, Henry W. Halleck, ordered the Federal army withdrawn from the Peninsula. On August 13 Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia moved north in Virginia toward the newly-organized Federal Army of Virginia commanded by General John Pope. General Halleck’s order to McClellan promptly to reinforce Pope introduced another sad chapter in the McClellan story.

Preoccupied with the question of his own command status, McClellan procrastinated in moving his divisions to the scene of action in northern Virginia. His correspondence suggests that he sought to extract from the Administration commitments as to his command status as the price of cooperating with Pope. On its face, the inference of this correspondence is also that McClellan wanted Pope to be defeated. Other writers have believed this, but Sears finds this “too much to say” and concludes instead that “captive of his delusions, he put his own interests and his messianic vision ahead of doing everything possible to push reinforcements to the battlefield” (p. 254). Pope was, of course, defeated at
Second Bull Run. His divisions and those of McClellan were drawn into the defenses of Washington as Lee crossed the Potomac into Maryland.

In Washington, the armies of Pope and McClellan were merged with the Army of the Potomac as the survivor and with McClellan in command, to the great pleasure of the soldiers. With the vigor and skill that he customarily displayed away from the battlefield, McClellan reorganized the badly disorganized Federal army. On September 6, he undertook the pursuit of Lee into Maryland. At Frederick, he came into possession of Lee's Special Order No. 191 which disclosed that the Confederate leader had split his outnumbered army into four separated parts. McClellan waited sixteen hours from this discovery before acting on this unique opportunity to attack Lee in detail. He then advanced, forced a crossing of South Mountain on September 14 and proceeded toward Sharpsburg.

By early morning of September 16, 1862, McClellan had seventy-five thousand troops assembled along Antietam Creek. Opposing them were eighteen thousand Confederates, Lee's detached commands having not yet rejoined his army. McClellan did not attack and Lee's force rapidly increased as the day progressed. There was sharp fighting late in the afternoon of September 16 as McClellan positioned a portion of his army to attack Lee's left flank. The following day, September 17, witnessed the bloodiest single day of the war as the Federals assaulted Lee's line.

Badly outnumbered, his back to the Potomac and with inadequate fords for retreating, Lee gambled the life of his army at Antietam. Sears is correct that McClellan "squandered the unique opportunity of winning a battle of annihilation" (p. 322). He "lost his inner composure and with it the courage to command under the press of combat" (p. 323). Withholding a third of his army, he forfeited his numerical advantage by bloody piecemeal assaults on September 17. He then did not attack the crippled and decimated enemy on the following day, in spite of the fresh troops available to him. He let Lee retreat into Virginia.

After another period of delay, McClellan followed Lee, but at last, on November 7, Lincoln had had enough. McClellan was removed. Although he did not actually resign from the army until election day 1864, McClellan never again had an active military command. Residing variously in New Jersey and New York after his removal, McClellan occupied his time with a defensive report of his service, efforts to obtain an active command and conservative Democratic politics. In 1864, he was nominated on the Democratic ticket to run against Lincoln, but suffered a decisive defeat.

Sears is more interested in McClellan the soldier than McClellan the civilian. His account of the presidential campaign is succinct and conventional. In detailing McClellan's well-known disavowal of the so-called peace plank of the Democrats' platform, Sears suggests that his doing so was motivated as much by political as by patriotic considerations. The general's later years were marked
by long sojourns in Europe, occasional writing, occasional employment in
corporate management or engineering and, from 1878 to 1881, a term as
Governor of New Jersey. He died in 1885 at the age of 59.

David M. Jordan carefully recounts the story of Winfield Scott Hancock.
Born in Pennsylvania in 1824, the son of a small town teacher who was to
become a lawyer, Hancock was graduated from West Point in 1844. His pre-war
service included the Mexican War, Western Indian fighting and the Utah
expedition against the Mormons. He was a birthright Democrat and wholly
unsympathetic to the free soil movement, as evidenced by his having voted for
Kentucky Democrat John Breckinridge for President in 1860. Fortunately for the
Union, Hancock was a staunch nationalist. Although disapproving of the
North's course there was never any doubt of his allegiance.

A captain when Sumter was fired on, Hancock was stationed in Los
Angeles as chief quartermaster for the Southern District of California. He arrived
in Washington after McClellan's appointment to command the Army of the
Potomac and was at once appointed a brigadier general of volunteers in that
army. He and his brigade rendered excellent service in the Peninsula Campaign.
During the Battle of Antietam he succeeded the mortally wounded General
Israel B. Richardson as commander of the First Division of the Second Corps,
which led to his major generalship. Further distinguished at Fredericksburg and
Chancellorsville, he took command of the Second Corps after the latter battle.

On July 1, 1863, the first day of Gettysburg, Hancock was with General
George Gordon Meade, commander of the Army of the Potomac, at the latter's
headquarters in Taneytown, Maryland. Serious fighting had begun at Gettys-
burg. Two Federal corps and General John Buford's cavalry were there. Another
corps was nearby. It had been reported that First Corps commander John F.
Reynolds was either seriously wounded or dead. On this assumption regarding
Reynolds, who had in fact been killed, Hancock was ordered by Meade to
assume command and decide whether or not to give further battle at Gettysburg.
This assignment evidences the high esteem in which Hancock was held by
Meade.

Hancock arrived at Gettysburg to find the Federals defeated. With a sure
hand, he took charge, established the Federals effectively on the high ground,
and made the critical decision to defend that ground. General Meade and the
balance of the Federal army arrived at Gettysburg that night and on the
following morning. Hancock continued to serve with distinction until seriously
wounded on July 3. Jordan accurately observes that "Gettysburg was Hancock's
field" (p. 100).

Recovering from his wound, Hancock stayed on leave until late in 1863.
Although the wound was to cause a lifetime of suffering and occasional
disability, he resumed command of his corps in December. In Grant's Overland
Campaign of 1864, Hancock and his corps continued to perform well. His service
included the storied battles of the Wilderness, Spotsylvania and Cold Harbor. Because of the Gettysburg wound, Hancock was sent from the field in November of 1864 to various commands behind the lines.

A lifetime soldier, Hancock after the war was assigned as commander of the Middle Military District which included Washington, D.C. In this role he was responsible for carrying out the warrant for the execution of the Lincoln assassination conspirators. Because of the questionable processes of the military commission that tried the conspirators and the hanging of Mary Surratt, the general was criticized, it would seem unjustly, for his involvement in these events. In 1866, a major general in the regular army on the recommendation of U.S. Grant, he was assigned as the commander of the Military Department of the Missouri, the focal point of warfare with the Indians of the plains.

At General William T. Sherman's direction, in 1867 Hancock led an army expedition into Kansas, a show of force intended to intimidate and pacify the Indians. His conduct of this campaign was obtuse, insensitive and provocative, a prime example of the government's Indian policy. This service was followed by assignment to command the Fifth Military District with headquarters in New Orleans. Apparently believing that, regardless of the war, the historic leadership of the region was to resume its authority, in this post Hancock uniformly favored the white, Democratic faction. Although Jordan's bibliography includes recent revisionist analyses of Reconstruction, he writes of Hancock during Reconstruction from the traditional premises and does not question his acts which were anti-black and anti-reform. Hancock's activities during the Louisiana command identified him with President Andrew Johnson as anti-black and an enemy of the developing Republican position. This brought him into conflict with U.S. Grant. Relieved in New Orleans at his own request, Hancock left that post thoroughly identified as a conservative Democratic general.

Estranged from Grant, Hancock was assigned to command obscure military departments beneath the level of his seniority and experience. In 1868 he was a serious candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination against Grant but was defeated in the convention by Governor Horatio Seymour of New York. In 1870 Hancock was assigned to the Department of Dakota where his mission was to carry out the government's effort to prevent white encroachment on the Black Hills, which had been ceded to the Sioux by the 1868 Treaty of Laramie. He was again interested in the Democratic Presidential nomination in 1872 but withdrew from consideration by the convention.

As the senior major general in the army, Hancock was appointed in 1872 to command of the Division of the Atlantic with headquarters in New York City. He was to occupy this post for the rest of his life. His name was placed in nomination in the Democratic Convention that nominated Tilden in 1876. During the railroad strikes of the late 1870s, which were accompanied by violence and riots, he commanded the army's efforts at suppression, although he
objected on philosophical grounds to the use of the army as a police force. Although not an intellectual man or military theoretician, he conducted himself with respect for military justice and the appropriate role of the army.

At the age of 56, Hancock was nominated for President by the Democrats in 1880. He ran on the proposition that the states should be free from interference by the Federal government and accepted the Democratic platform position that tariff was to be for revenue only. The Democratic Campaign of 1880 was unusually inept. Hancock made his own contribution by remarking that the issue of tariff was "a local question." Ohio Republican James A. Garfield defeated him by slightly more than 7,000 popular votes, but by a broader margin in the electoral college. Jordan suggests that Hancock had limited understanding of the political processes, but concludes that the general would have been "an adequate if undistinguished president" (p. 308). Hancock died in New York City in 1886 of diabetes.

Jordan's book is at its best in its descriptions of the general's Civil War career. The post-war years are less carefully treated. In summarizing Hancock's life, his comment regarding his attitude toward the Indians seems both to beg the question and not to follow from his earlier description of the general's activities: "He developed feelings of benevolence toward the Indian, so long as interference with the westward spread of the white settler did not result" (p. 318). The context in which Jordan views Hancock's Reconstruction role also appears in his summary. He states that "the course of the Radicals in Reconstruction kept the wounds of conflict fresh and raw" (p. 318). He does not acknowledge that the Southerners' political and racial goals contributed to this conflict.

These then are the two generals who became politicians. As is obvious from these books, they had many things in common: background, political point of view, education, the military profession and political activity. They were also faithful husbands and family men of exemplary personal habits. But their biographies make plain that despite these similarities they were vastly different men. Hancock was a "good soldier," fully grasping the constitutional role of the military. A lack of this understanding was the source of some of McClellan's problems. But their differences were at a more profound level. Although neither book purports to be a psychohistory, it is plain that the men are to be distinguished in terms of basic character and personality.

McClellan had what would today be called charisma. In an era in which people were more vulnerable to sentimentality and romance, his Napoleonic ideas of espirit de corps were useful to his military leadership. It is also apparent that he was highly competent at military administration, for which Sears gives him full credit. One may even attribute to McClellan good faith. But he failed because of the cast of his mind and heart, his psychological makeup. The evidence of Sears's book makes it difficult to exaggerate McClellan's weaknesses. He was erratic and unstable. His moods and attitudes, like those of a manic

Pennsylvania History
depressive, swung in wide arcs between extreme confidence and self-congratulation on the one hand, and hysterical despair and self-pity on the other. Paranoid and conspiratorial by disposition, he had difficulty with reality and with truth and frequently dissembled when the facts were not to his liking. He sought positions of great responsibility but shrank from taking that responsibility in a practical sense. Someone else was always to blame. McClellan lacked moral courage and, Sears suggests, his occasional absences from the scene of action may have been caused by a lack of physical courage. He had intemperate contempt for those whom he believed, often wrongly, did not support him without question. Although Sears does not refer to it, his account of McClellan's military career fits the characterization made by the military historian Kenneth P. Williams: "McClellan was not a real general. McClellan was not even a disciplined, truthful soldier. McClellan was merely an attractive but vain and unstable man, with considerable military knowledge, who sat a horse well and wanted to be President."

In essential character and personality, Hancock was none of the things that McClellan was. Genuinely confident, he took and also accepted responsibility. At each level of military command, he was appropriately aggressive. Possessing physical and moral courage, he and his soldiers were frequently at the center of the action. He was candid and realistic. Finally, although possessing his share of vanity and ambition, he was not self indulgent on the battlefield.

Since both McClellan and Hancock were presidential nominees, their biographies provide convenient vehicles for exploring the political history of that era. The books complement each other. Because of their common experiences each protagonist moves in and out of the other's life. Read separately or together, those books illuminate the Civil War and post-war periods. Their authors have made a substantial contribution to scholarship.