



THE UNIVERSITY OF WEST ALABAMA

L I V I N G S T O N

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PICKETT'S CHARGE, A Novel **By Charles McNair**

Imagine Kurt Vonnegut and Ken Kesey joining forces with Shelby Foote and Margaret Mitchell to tell the last story of the American Civil War. Welcome to *Pickett's Charge*.

At 114 years old, Threadgill Pickett believes he is the only living Civil War veteran. He bides his time at a retirement home in Mobile, Alabama, where he nurses a great vengeance over something terrible that befell him as a boy on a journey to join the Confederate army.

On a day in turbulent 1964, Threadgill's long-dead brother, Ben, visits him with the news that one Union soldier remains alive, in faraway Bangor, Maine. Threadgill Pickett doffs an old hat with a yellowhammer feather in its band and heads north to fight the last battle of the Civil War. Through one improbable adventure after another, he finds himself forced to reexamine notions of valor and vengeance he has held so fiercely, so long.

Charles McNair inventively blends the historical fiction of Threadgill's past with 1960s-influenced tall tale-telling of an epic journey north. It's the most ambitious Civil War fiction since Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* and as sweeping ... on its own terms ... as *Gone with the Wind*.

Pickett's Charge is a long-awaited second novel. McNair's first novel, *Land O' Goshen* (St. Martin's Press; December 1994; ISBN-13: 978-0312112967), was a nominee for the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1994. Part romance, part adventure yarn, part horror story, this novel about a boy and his friend growing up in a mythical Southern town draws on the most fantastic elements in the tradition of Southern fiction.

About the Author:

Charles McNair, a native of the Yellowhammer State of Alabama, released his first novel, *Land O' Goshen*, to critical acclaim. *Land O' Goshen* was a nominee for the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1994. Charles currently lives in Atlanta where he writes full-time, combining freelance literary duties with assignments for corporations and businesses, including "Power of Storytelling" workshops. Since 2005, he has served as Books Editor for *Paste* magazine and shared his reviews on Atlanta radio station WMLB 1690 AM. He is currently at work on his third novel, *The Epicureans*. Visit Charles online at charlesmcnairauthor.com.

PICKETT'S CHARGE, A Novel
By Charles McNair
Livingston Press
On Sale: September 20, 2013
Price: \$30.00 hardcover; \$18.95 trade paper
ISBN 13: 978-1-60489-120-1 hardcover
ISBN 13: 978-1-60489-121-8 trade paper



Praise for *Pickett's Charge*

"*Pickett's Charge* is a genuine delight—a wild, comic, sometimes hallucinatory ride through a century of Southern history."

— Charles Frazier, author of *Cold Mountain*

"*Pickett's Charge* is a rousing depiction of William Faulkner's belief that the past is not dead, it's not even past. Charles McNair is a gifted writer."

— Ron Rash, author of *Serena*

"Charles McNair has crammed the whole history of the South into one man's epic lifetime adventure. *Pickett's Charge* is big and noisy, comic and tragic, absurd and profound: a hundred times larger than life. "

— Mark Childress, author of *Crazy in Alabama*

"This hootenanny of a novel would have Flannery O'Connor snorting sweet tea out her nose on one page and crying her eyes out the next. Threadgill Pickett is a bona fide original, and so is Charles McNair."

— Hillary Jordan, author of *Mudbound*

"The only trouble with Charles McNair is that HE DOESN'T WRITE BOOKS FAST ENOUGH! It's been far too long since *Land O'Goshen* but boy have I been happy reading *Pickett's Charge*. It charges from the get-go and never lets up, filled with so many kick-your-ass sentences and images that I'm lost between admiration and envy. My consolation is that the book is so good it'll make for a lot of rereading, and my hope is that it'll be sooner before his next book comes out."

— Tom Franklin, author of *Crooked Letter, Crooked Letter*

"Threadgill Pickett is as vivid a character as any I have encountered in recent memory. I was despondent to leave him on the last page of this book. McNair is wildly imaginative and poetic, and creates cinematic scenes with an ease and elegance that is breathtaking. Inner and outer lives bleed into each other with such beauty and humor and force that I was carried along like on the rapids of a river with Threadgill and his memories and his mind-boggling journey. This book is like time travel, like a psychedelic drug, but grounded in the most disciplined literary instincts. *Pickett's Charge* is a tour de force."

— Rosanne Cash, author of *Composed*

"Charles McNair writes like William Kennedy in full flow, like J. P. Donleavy on a bender, like Donald Hays at a sing-song. I will stack up my favourite writers and bring McNair to the party. "

— Colum McCann, author of *TransAtlantic*

"Charles McNair is the mad moonshiner of American fiction. In *Pickett's Charge*, he has distilled a century of Southern history into a heady concoction that might not make you blind, but will certainly change the way you see our country."

— Thomas Mullen, author of *The Last Town on Earth*

“Charles McNair is a wizard-like word-slinger, making myths and casting spells that ricochet from hilarity, to horror, to heartbreak.”

— John Holman, author of *Luminous Mysteries*

"Just your typical soul-searching, century-spanning Civil War story with all the usual ghosts, scaly monsters, time machines, and crazed monkeys. Spellbinding and raucous, epic and intimate."

— Jack Pendarvis, author of *Awesome*

“Pickett’s Charge is not just visionary; it’s a novel of indelible visions. It’s not just an example of American magical realism; it’s a reinvention of the backwoods tall tale, with all its wild humor. And it’s not about the Old South so much as it’s about the Primeval one, brought to the page by a writer whose only rivals in the description of Southern flora and fauna are William Faulkner and Cormac McCarthy. Go with Charles McNair on the dirt-road joyride that is *Pickett’s Charge*; he’s taking you to a place you’ll never forget, and from which you can never return.”

— Tom Junod, *Esquire* magazine

“Charles McNair won't let us forget that old, weird South in *Pickett's Charge*, his century-spanning new novel, populated by an old, weird protagonist who at times makes Ignatius Reilly seem downright genteel. McNair is following in the footsteps of writers like Toole, Percy and O'Connor, with the wit, insight and originality to make that trio proud. He's an extraordinary storyteller, effortlessly weaving the mundane and the surreal into a singular vision of literature.”

— Josh Jackson, *Paste* magazine

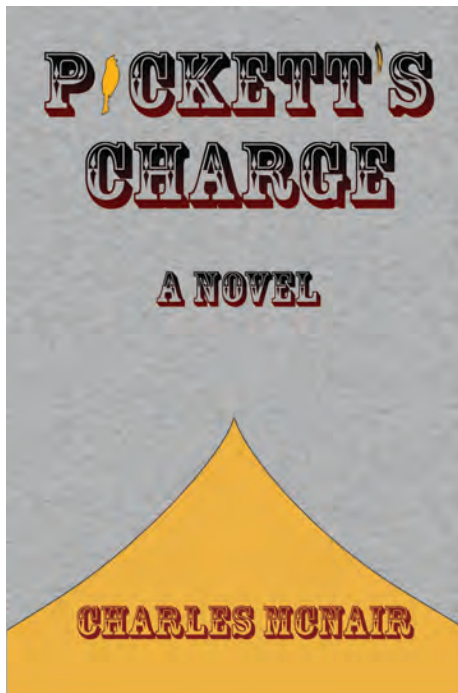
Praise for *Land O' Goshen*

“In *Land O'Goshen*, Charles McNair has created an enchanting tour de force through the Southern backwoods that is guaranteed to keep you turning the pages.”

— Winston Groom, author of *Forrest Gump*

“Charles McNair has written a psycho-political thriller full of strange and wonderful twists and turns, bumps and surprises. A truly unique and original new voice.”

—Fannie Flagg, author of *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café*



Denise McNair and me

by Charles McNair

Cars lined the highway. People stalked eerily through headlights, streaming down in the dark toward a field. Three wooden crosses stood among corn rows, crosses empty of Jesus or thieves but soaked in reeking fuel by men in white robes with jerry cans.

As the crosses went up in flames, a cheer rose from the crowd. I can't recall if my father joined in, but he surely believed then ... and likely until the day he died ... that the Klansmen who shouted incendiary words that night in south Alabama in 1962 spoke for people like him.

People in love with defeat, a lost cause. People who held a grudge precious ... because they had so little else to hold onto.

I was eight. Boys down here are taught to believe what a father believes, taught to honor a father. It's right there in the Bible. You can look it up.

My conversion started when four little girls died in the Birmingham church bombing in 1963. I felt troubled especially that one of the children carried my own family name. Denise McNair was about my age. Were we ... kin? Cousins? Family matters more than anything, I'd been taught.

The coming years weren't hard because I came to believe in racial equality – that was only a wedge to split the tough wood. No, those years ached because I chose to leave behind a father and grandfathers and a legacy. It was especially hard to watch my daddy's beliefs, once all I had in the world to trust and depend on, diminish and fade away and grow grotesque.

I have friends and family members who never changed. They just couldn't go against blood and brothers and belief. They threw in with the prejudices of fathers. They held fiercely onto ugly ideas passed down to them, an inheritance just as unfortunate as diabetes or heart disease. They clung to bigotry and found it a comfort to believe God made them white because it's somehow better than other colors. I pray for them, these friends, my family. I love them and hope that they find a new confidence and faith.

Pickett's Charge explores legacy, belief, good and bad. I hope it is a memorable work.

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