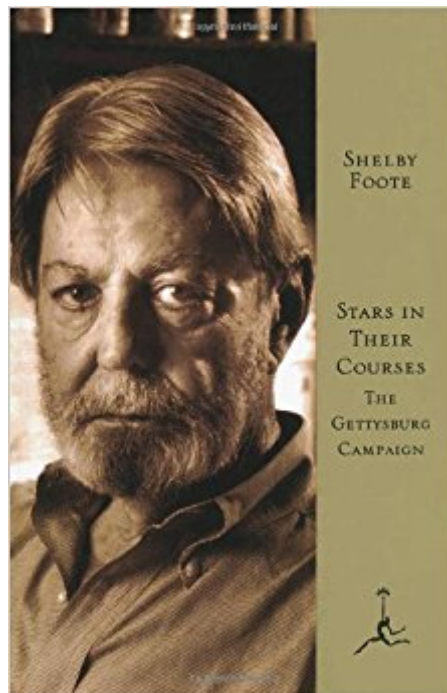




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# Stars In Their Courses: The Gettysburg Campaign, June-July 1863



## Synopsis

A matchless account of the Battle of Gettysburg, drawn from Shelby Foote's landmark history of the Civil War Shelby Foote's monumental three-part chronicle, *The Civil War: A Narrative*, was hailed by Walker Percy as "an unparalleled achievement, an American Iliad, a unique work uniting the scholarship of the historian and the high readability of the first-class novelist." Here is the central chapter of the central volume, and therefore the capstone of the arch, in a single volume. Complete with detailed maps, *Stars in Their Courses* brilliantly recreates the three-day conflict: It is a masterly treatment of a key great battle and the events that preceded it—not as legend has it but as it really was, before it became distorted by controversy and overblown by remembered glory.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Shelby Foote, who cut such a courtly figure in Ken Burns's PBS series *The Civil War*, is an uncommonly graceful writer as well, and this careful study of the 1863 Gettysburg campaign assumes the contours of a classical tragedy. Foote positions readers on the field of battle itself, among swirling smoke and clattering grapeshot, and invites us to feel for ourselves its hellishness: "men on both sides were hollering as they milled about and fired, some cursing, others praying ... not a commingling of shouts and yells but rather like a vast mournful roar." Foote's fine book is history as literature, and a welcome addition to any Civil War buff's library.

Historian/novelist Foote's masterly work has been culled from his critically acclaimed three-volume

narrative of the Civil War. 3 cassettes. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

There are two schools regarding Mr. Foote and his view of the Civil War. Those for and those not so much. I personally enjoy his take on things. In my study of the war I am most focused on the Gettysburg battle. This book starts with an over-view of how they got to Gettysburg and then an insightful look at the three days of the battle. I found the first part of the book a bit hard to get into but enjoyed it greatly when he got to Gettysburg. I am a fan.

Shelby Foote writing about the civil war? always great! he is able to write on a subject covered many many times over and still make it interesting.

Shelby Foote was a great American novelist. After reading his trilogy of the Civil War narrative that he wrote back in the 60's and 70's I'd have to call those the greatest Civil War books I ever read. On the PBS Ken Burns' Civil War series it was obvious that he knew what he was talking about. I've heard him referred to as a Southern apologist but I thought his Civil War narrative covered the War in it's entirety and could not have been made any better. This books tells a story beyond just military facts and figures.

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the book is just true to the ever lasting great writings of Shelby, what a true historian, the book is a eye opener to what we have read in the past on the Gettysburg three days of death, taking these 290 pages of words to explain what Gettysburg truly was on those three HOT days out of his three Vol. is putting it in everyday language and understanding. Sad to see that such a writer of this era was called home to continue his writings. I will be sure to look for another Foote writing to purchase in the near future from the big A. I will also look for the writings of Rick Atkinson on WWII. He pens a great review of his research of those terrible days following June 6, thank you....

**MUST READ ON GETTYSBURG-SOUTHERN PERSPECTIVE**

Shelby Foote. Stars in Their Courses. The Gettysburg Campaign. New York. The Modern Library. 1994 Some say that you cannot tell a book by its cover. In the case of Stars in Their Courses. The

Gettysburg Campaign (SITC) everything you need to know is revealed on the book jacket. A photo of Shelby Foote dominates the cover and is immediately recognizable as the individual who introduced many of us to the Civil War. His visage evokes the Southern aristocrat and vaguely resembles Robert E. Lee. Who can forget his avuncular presence and mesmerizing stories in the Ken Burns documentary, *The Civil War*. He reeks of authenticity. If he was not present at the Civil War battles, he recalled the details as if he were. We trust him implicitly. Immediately to the right of the photograph is the book's title. *The Stars in Their Course* is a biblical reference. According to Judges 5:20, Jael kills Sisera by driving a tent peg through his head, and thereby saving the Jewish people. The Bible informs us that it was fate that doomed Sisera. And it is fate that consumes Foote as he contemplates the meaning of the Civil War. The literary genre, which Foote employs, is known as narrative history. In his interview with Brian Lamb in 2004 on the C-Span Book Notes, Foote quotes Aristotle to explain what constitutes a good narrative. Aristotle counsels that the account must be well written; the characters must be developed so that they leave a shadow and the story must have a plot. Foote succeeds by each criterion in SITC. The author developed his writing skills as a novelist rather than as a historian. He reports that he wrote with a dip pen so that he could have a tactile connection with the words. He never used a computer. What he put down on paper was not revised and he did not allow his editors to change even one word of the prose. In his eyes it was perfect as conceived. Foote begins his book with an introduction to the characters along with their leit motifs. He introduces us to Lee, the noble Southern aristocrat, who is careful, yet willing to take risks. . We then learn about Longstreet, the risk averse colleague. He warned the General that although strategy ought to be offensive, tactics should be defensive. Ignoring Longstreet is done at one's own peril, as Lee was to find out. We learn about Ewell, the successor to Jackson who unlike Jackson required explicit direction. It was the lack of explicit directions that led the General's failure to take the high ground and thus doomed the Confederacy to failure. Jackson died a little over a month prior to Gettysburg. Nevertheless he haunts the pages of the drama. Foote informs us that the loss of Jackson was so devastating to Lee, that the latter was unable to even mention his name. He used the maps drawn by the deceased Jackson and is seemingly led to Gettysburg by Jackson's invisible hand: Lee laid his hand on the dead Jackson's map, touching the region just east of the mountains that caught on their western flanks the rays of the setting sun. "Hereabouts we shall probably meet the enemy and fight a great battle," he said, "and if God gives us the victory, the war will be over"...One of the place names under his hand, as he spoke was the college town of Gettysburg. The structure of the book and the manner in which the plot unfolds is unusual and often difficult to follow. Unlike most accounts of Gettysburg there is no subdivision based on days. There

are 6 numbered chapters, but the chapter divisions seem to have no rationale. We are therefore often left without guideposts as to when events are taking place. Plot digressions add to the confusion. Just when we begin to lose patience with Foote, it becomes clear that the author seems to be remembering events, and it is the vagaries of memory that we are dealing with. As Foote relates in an interview with Brian Lamb, it is in the nature of memory that events tend to fade, until something reminds us and then we remember things in their entirety. It is something in the text that rekindles Foote's memory and he relates these events to us, albeit sometimes out of order. In describing the campaign, the events of the initial two days are confusing with little apparent direction. All changes as the 3rd day dawns and both sides consider battle. Here Foote remembers the events in their entirety. There are no digressions and the action proceeds quickly and effortlessly as the characters and the country rush to their fate. Numerous Northern and Southern officers and generals are killed. The Confederates are soundly defeated and vacate the field. Lee is devastated and takes all the blame. Even though Foote loves the man, he does not absolve Lee of his failing. He remains true to the facts.. Foote is the master of narrative history and for the most part is a joy to read. But narrative histories are a bit troublesome. History is told as a story. However it is a story wherein we know the ending, raising the question as to why bother with the story at all. The story is necessary if we are to understand the ending. In other words, identification of contingencies is necessary to understand what made the ending inevitable. However, Foote seems to be dissatisfied with such an explanation and seeks a more elusive determinant, viz. fate. Foote never defines fate and does not seem to equate it with God's will. It seems to be something in the stars, a concept as old as man himself. If Foote attributes outcome to fate, we must wonder if Lee or Meade had any influence on the outcome. It would be fun to ask this question of the author. Alas, fate has intervened. Shelby Foote died in 2005.

The man was a writer. The South, and particularly the Civil War, was about what he wrote as a historian, and story-teller. I think he could write about bees mating, and I would find buzz in it. In the 1990s, the publisher Modern Library reproduced and edited two chapter-size parts of the three-volume Foote masterpiece "The Civil War" written two decades earlier. One part was "The Beleaguered City" about Grant's Vicksburg campaign; the other was "Stars in their Courses" about another event which climaxed on the same day of 1863 - the Gettysburg battle. I own all three volumes of "The Civil War" in addition to owning both chapter-size parts. I bought the latter because I thought they were Foote's writings about the turning points of the American Civil War. When I want to read about the Civil War, I can read what the best writer on that topic wrote about the climatic day

of it. In my view, this is five-star stuff!

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