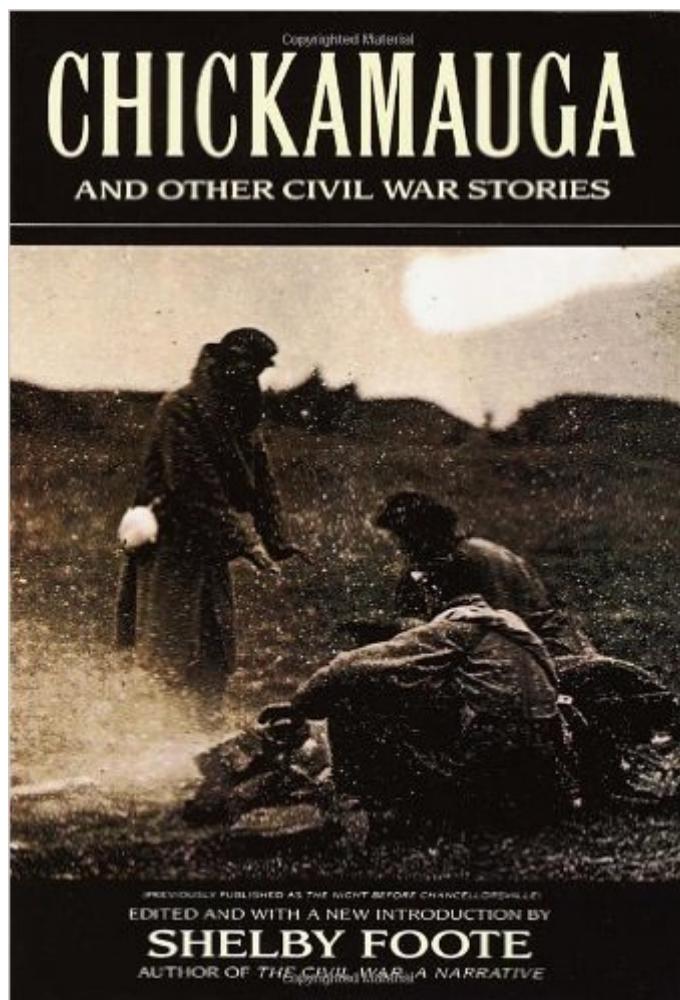


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Chickamauga And Other Civil War Stories



Synopsis

Shelby Foote's monumental historical trilogy, "The Civil War: A Narrative," is our window into the day-by-day unfolding of our nation's defining event. Now Foote reveals the deeper human truth behind the battles and speeches through the fiction he has chosen for this vivid, moving collection. These ten stories of the Civil War give us the experience of joining a coachload of whores left on a siding during a battle in Virginia . . . marching into an old man's house to tell him it's about to be burned down . . . or seeing a childhood friend shot down at Chickamauga. The result is history that lives again in our imagination, as the creative vision of these great writers touches our emotions and makes us witness to the human tragedy of this war, fought so bravely by those in blue and gray.

Book Information

Paperback: 252 pages

Publisher: Delta; 1st edition (October 1, 1993)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0385311001

ISBN-13: 978-0385311007

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.6 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (11 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #809,068 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #44 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Historical > Short Stories & Anthologies > Anthologies #6259 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Short Stories & Anthologies > Anthologies #79368 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > United States

Customer Reviews

I finished CHICKAMAUGA several days ago. Since then, I've been unable to whip-up enough mental energy to give it either an emphatic thumbs-up or thumbs-down. I guess you could say it's so-so. And writing the review approaches being a chore. Except for the first and last chapters, which I'll get to in a moment, these stories of the Civil War come from the point of view of the common man and woman, whether he or she be either a soldier in battle or a civilian caught up in the collateral damage. The first chapter is the inaugural address of Jefferson Davis at Montgomery, AL on February 18, 1861. The last chapter is Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address of March 4, 1865. The two serve as bookends to what comes in between, but it's hard to care (despite whatever

eloquence the two have to offer.) As with most collections of short stories, these run the gamut from better to worse than average, and the two extremes cancel each other to result in my overall lassitude concerning the whole. Perhaps the best chapter is by, no surprise, Mark Twain: "The Private History of A Campaign That Failed" - an account of his time as a civilian irregular in Missouri at the outbreak of the war playing at soldier with a bunch of his buds, and who did more retreating in the face of real and imagined enemies than advancing to the sounds of battle. It incorporates Twain's characteristically wry, self-effacing humor, which, to me, made it the most readable of the lot. Perhaps the least deserving chapter is one by Stephen Vincent Benet: "Fish-Hook Gettysburg", a 25-page free verse summary of the event. There are so many excellent prose accounts of this decisive encounter that my reaction was "why bother?". The battle deserves better treatment.

In 1992, novelist and historian Shelby Foote was asked by Recorded Books to record an audio CD of his 1952 Civil War novel Shiloh. At the end of the audio book, Foote was interviewed and gave some of his thoughts about writing, the Civil War, and especially writing books about war. In the interview he said: "There is a general belief that war books promote a love of war. That is true of bad war books, but every serious book about a battle or about a war, if it's serious; it's bound to be anti-war. All good literature about war is anti-war. If you're celebrating the glory of war you're writing trash--if that's what you're doing. Because the truth is it's more bloody than it is glorious. The pain and the suffering are a far bigger part of it than the patriotism and the glory. That will come across with an honest writer. Cheap literature hurts everybody. Decent, honest literature will always carry this anti-war message; it's bound to be there." While best known for this three volume non-fiction narrative of the Civil War, Foote also wrote a novel about the Civil War battle of Shiloh in 1952 and he edited a collection of Civil War short stories which was first published in 1957 and re-released in 1993. It is my thesis, based on the quote above, that Shelby Foote's Civil War novel and collection of short stories have clear anti-war themes; sharing the pain, suffering and human tragedy of war rather than the themes of the glory and patriotism which might be seen as promoting a love of war. That is very evident in the stories within written by five southern writers and five northern writers. While not made for enjoyable reading, the stories were clearly selected by Foote to display the human cost of war.

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