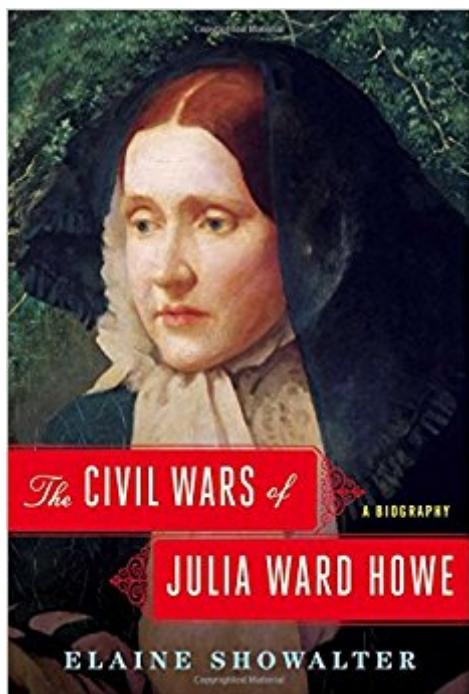


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# The Civil Wars Of Julia Ward Howe: A Biography



## Synopsis

“Unfailingly vivid and fair-minded” *The Atlantic*  
“Riveting” *The New York Times Book Review* “A biography with the verve and pace of a delicious novel...a polemic and a pleasure.” *The Boston Globe*  
The first biography to reveal Julia Ward Howe, the author of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* as a feminist pioneer who fought her own battle for creative freedom and independence. Julia Ward (1819–1910) was a heiress and aspiring poet when she married Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, an internationally-acclaimed pioneer in the education of the blind. Together the Howes knew many of the key figures of their era, from Charles Dickens to John Brown. But he also wasted her inheritance, isolated and discouraged her, and opposed her literary ambitions. Julia persisted, and continued to publish poems and plays while raising six children. Authorship of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic* made her celebrated and revered. But Julia was also continuing to fight a civil war at home; she became a pacifist, suffragist, and world traveler. She came into her own as a tireless campaigner for women’s rights and social reform. Esteemed author Elaine Showalter tells the story of Howe’s determined self-creation and brings to life the society she inhabited and the obstacles she overcame.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Fascinating are the personal tribulations that the feminist critic Elaine Showalter probes in her unfailingly vivid and fair-minded biography.” *(The Atlantic)* “In a

riveting and frankly distressing new biography, the distinguished critic Elaine Showalter insists that Howe, who was born in the same year as Walt Whitman, had "the subversive intellect of an Emily Dickinson, the political and philosophical interests of an Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and the passionate emotions of a Sylvia Plath." The problem was her world and, more particularly, her husband. (The New York Times Book Review) "A biography with the verve and pace of a delicious novel . . . a polemic and a pleasure. Showalter deploys her prodigious research and narrative skills, acerbic wit, and feminist commitments to reveal the entwining of Howe's public and private lives, as she righteously battled her husband and society, and finally saw the glory she always believed she deserved." (The Boston Globe) "This lively biography of the author of the Battle Hymn of the Republic focuses on what her marriage expresses about the position of women in the nineteenth century." (The New Yorker) "[An] invigorating feminist biography." (O: The Oprah Magazine) "Showalter has bravely taken on the task of examining the inner workings of a marriage that ended nearly a century and a half ago. That she succeeds as well as she does is a tribute not only to her scholarly diligence, but also to her proven historical curiosity and her fluent prose. . . . a model of fairness." (The New York Review of Books) "[An] excellent new biography." (Harper's Magazine) "Howe becomes far more than a woman who happened to author a landmark anthem. She emerges as a woman readers will know intimately, and admire for her resoluteness as an early feminist. . . . Showalter masterfully fits it all together" — the domestic drama of her "civil wars" with her husband; her complex relationships with her children; her role as an abolitionist, and advocate for women's rights; her travels in the US and Europe, and, of course, her achievements as a poet. Settle in for an absorbing story. . . . [a] powerful biography." (Christian Science Monitor) "An energetic new look at the author of the lyrics for "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" finds a modern feminist thread in the heroine's frustrated marriage. . . . A rich life well deserving of reconsideration. Showalter provides a solid launching point." (Kirkus Reviews) "Fresh, delightfully rendered and revealing . . . [an] engaging portrait of a marriage, a society and one woman's struggle for emancipation." (Austin American Statesman) "A robust and enlightening feminist portrait of a national icon." (Booklist, starred review) "[A] finely rendered biography." \* \* \* "The book gleams with calm humor, but it is a serious work: a study of Howe's evolution into a leader in the struggle for women's rights, viewed through the lens of her marriage to the abolitionist and educator Samuel Gridley Howe, an admirable man in many ways but a vain, jealous, destructive and

domineering husband. (The Wall Street Journal) Showalter proves there is much more to be known about Howe's achievements, political activism, and feminist commitment. . . . Showalter presents a new, multifaceted interpretation of Howe, the first woman to be inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In this highly readable and absorbing narrative, the author argues that Howe's "turbulent and unstable" marriage may be viewed as a clash of 19th-century male and female ambitions. . . . Showalter's appealing analysis of Howe's writings, and her arguments about the tasks of literary historians create a biography that is highly recommended to literary scholars; history students; and general readers interested in women's biography, literature, and history. (Library Journal) Showalter skillfully reveals the depths of Howe's pain and talent. | Howe's resilience and success in light of her family's efforts to thwart her ambition make her worthy of Showalter's admiring biography. (Publishers Weekly) Elaine Showalter is that rarity: a scholar, feminist historian, sharp-eyed cultural critic, with a knack for choosing subjects that are both entertaining and brilliantly illuminating. The Civil Wars of Julia Ward Howe is written with Showalter's usual witty, sparkling, and erudite style. This zestfully narrated life of an early, pioneering feminist, a tireless crusader for social reform and women's rights, would make an ideal PBS series. • indeed, all the parts are in place for a felicitous adaptation of Showalter's gem of a biography of a truly remarkable American woman. (Joyce Carol Oates) Famous as the author of *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, Julia Ward Howe had a memorable career beyond this single momentous achievement, as a poet, abolitionist, mother, lecturer, and feminist. Interweaving her public life with Julia's troubled marriage to the domineering Samuel Gridley Howe, this splendid biography shows how Julia emerged from her private tribulations as a stronger and more complete person. (James McPherson, author of *The War that Forged a Nation: Why the Civil War Still Matters*) In this gracefully presented biography of the woman we remember as the author of the nation's signature hymn, we find ourselves fighting along with Julia Ward Howe as she wages her long struggle for independence as a 19th Century daughter, wife and mother. Only occasionally did she call retreat as she used the reach of the *Battle Hymn* and the responsibilities assigned to women during the Civil War to wage her own fight for freedom for herself and the women of America. (Cokie Roberts, author of *Capital Dames, The Civil War and the Women of Washington*) Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! At last a full, fine, modern biography of the independent woman whose words reanimated the American Civil War and crowned Lincoln, its greatest hero, with a worthy anthem. (Harold Holzer, author of *Lincoln and the Power of the Press*, winner of the Lincoln Prize) An accomplished literary critic, Elaine

Showalter draws on journals and letters to give us a true story worthy of fiction. This finely rendered portrait of the oppressive marriage and inner turmoil that fueled Julia Ward Howe's writing and her later activism on behalf of women's suffrage compels a feminist reinterpretation of the iconic Battle Hymn of the Republic. "Mine eyes have seen the glory . . ." takes on entirely new meaning. (Ellen Chesler, author of "Woman of Valor: Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in America") "Showalter brings Julia Ward Howe alive as a fascinating and powerful woman rather than a legend on a postage stamp" • a feminist pioneer who was as witty, engaging, and intrepid as she was scholarly, literary, and enlightened. (Wendy Martin, Professor of American Literature and American Studies, Claremont Graduate University) "Elaine Showalter has brilliantly narrated the life of Julia Ward Howe, with her unhappy marriage to the famed Samuel Gridley Howe, her dislike of motherhood, and the unpublished novel she wrote about a transgender man. This historical biography is timely, as it shows us the underside of a famed Victorian marriage and how patriarchal attitudes could trap even a powerful woman. The story of how she released herself from the emotional captivity of that marriage through becoming a leader in the woman's movement is inspiring in our own day of considerable backlash against women's rights. The book is beautifully written and a delight to read." (Lois W. Banner, Professor Emeritus, History and Gender Studies) "Elaine Showalter has produced a compelling portrait of an American literary luminary whose extraordinary career deserves just the kind of exacting reappraisal this biography offers. From a marriage marked by private domestic turmoil, Julia Ward Howe moved onto the public stage with the assertion that "A comet dire and strange am I," but by the time she died, at ninety, the poet of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" had become an impassioned feminist, a national celebrity, and • in the words of a 1940s admirer • one of the "Wonder Women of History." Showalter's introduction to the civil wars and triumphs of her life is utterly absorbing." (Sandra M. Gilbert, Distinguished Professor Emerita, University of California, Davis) "Fascinating, readable and beautifully done, Elaine Showalter offers us a deeply studied portrait of a nineteenth-century woman poet, Julia Ward Howe, who found herself imprisoned, her gifts stifled, in her marriage to an autocrat resistant to a wife's right to publish her work. This biography, at once profoundly feminist and balanced, and rounded out with the full range of Howe's achievements as a mother, visionary suffragist and reformer, fulfills Virginia Woolf's ideal: to select for the facts that suggest and engender." (Lyndall Gordon, author of *Lives Like Loaded Guns: Emily Dickinson and Her Family's Feuds*)

**BEST BOOK OF 2016 - THE ECONOMIST**

Elaine Showalter, Emeritus Professor of English at Princeton University, combines scholarly expertise in English and American literature with a passion for a wide range of cultural subjects. She has written ten books, most recently *The Civil Wars of Julia Ward Howe: A Biography* and *A Jury of Her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx*, which was awarded the Truman Capote Prize for Literary Criticism. Her writing has appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement*, *People*, and *Vogue*.

This was an interesting, well-written book. The scholarship showed. I expect that some will raise issues about Showalter's emphasis on Julia's relationships with both her father and husband. To be charitable, she was "a product of her times." Her father did an outstanding job of bringing in outstanding teachers for his daughters, while his sons were sent to boarding schools. In fact, Showalter makes the point that the daughters probably had better educations by staying at home. However, one is led to question whether this was to help them in the marital sweepstakes. The missing star is for the missing part of the book. When JWH's husband dies, Showalter pretty much finishes writing and researching. Given the fact that JWH was widowed for one year longer than she was married, roughly 1/3 of her life is pretty much neglected. As a minister, I used this book as the basis for my Mother's Day sermon. JWH wrote a splendid "Mother's Day Proclamation for Peace." Showalter devoted half a page to this. So, the missing star is for the unwritten part of the book that I had to search for elsewhere.

"The Civil Wars of Julia Ward Howe" is both a biography of the poet and an overview of what life was like for upper-middle class American women during the 19th century. Born in 1819 to the scion of an old colonial family, Julia's world shrank as her widowed father's increasingly Calvinistic outlook cut Howe and her sisters off from society. Marriage to a pioneering Boston doctor, whose views on motherhood clashed with her own desire to work and write, led to a life of not-so-quiet desperation; she published books without telling him, while he drained her inheritance. They found some common ground in their passion for the abolitionist movement -- which led to her writing the Battle Hymn of the Republic -- but drifted apart until he died after the Civil War. Finally free to pursue her interests, she blossomed, living on for 35 years and working as a reformer, writer, lecturer, and traveler. Showalter uses family papers and letters between the Howes, their six children, Julia's siblings, and their famous friends (Longfellow, Henry James, Charles Sumner, etc.) to delve into their private lives and motivations. It makes for fascinating reading, as she reveals Julia's frustration with being tied to the conventional domestic life of a workaholic Boston physician.

Correspondence during their periodic separations, such as times she spent in Europe, show a woman coming into her own and finally building her own legacy. Although the book reflects excellent scholarly research, it is an engaging read. For a relatively short book, it covers nearly a century of American social history and the long life of Julia Ward Howe

This is an outstanding biography of Julia Ward Howe. I had just finished reading a book on Abraham Lincoln. It was just after he realized that there could be slavery in this country. He asked Julia Ward Howe to write a poem for the North that could be song to the tune of John Brown's Body. This hymn became the turning point in her life. Even though this hymn was written for the North it has become a favorite throughout the Nation. It was from this I wanted to learn more about her. She came from wealth. She was very talented. As is expected of a girl she needed to learn domestic talents such as needlepoint and sewing. Which she did not like. She loved writing. She wrote poems , stories and poems. She married beneath herself. Her husband lost the majority of her wealth. Back then women could not own property or handle their own affairs. Their husbands or some other male family member handle the money or property. Writing the Battle Hymn of the Republic was the turning point of her life. She became well known from then on. After her husband died she got involved in politics and in the Women's Rights movement. She went on several speaking tours throughout the country. This is a must read book. It is because of women like Julia Ward Howe that we as women today can pursue our dreams and desires.

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