

## THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

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**ABSTRACT:** Globally, there was a discernible cultural shift brought about by World War II, and these impacts are still being felt now. The fact that the United States, one of the main participants in the war, was isolated from the great bulk of the physical destruction by a full ocean is what has to be addressed.

**KEYWORDS:** The Second World War, American literature, poets, Evelyn Waugh's Put Out More Flags, Henry Green's Caught, tumultuous periods, poignant soldiers, American theatre.

### INTRODUCTION

The Second World War stands as one of the most defining and tumultuous periods in human history, leaving an indelible mark on societies worldwide. In the realm of American literature, this global conflict serves as a rich tapestry, woven into the fabric of narratives that capture the complexities of human experience during wartime. From the poignant reflections of soldiers on the front lines to the intimate struggles of families left behind, the literature of this era offers profound insights into the human condition amidst chaos and conflict. As the world was thrust into the crucible of war, American writers responded with a diverse array of voices and perspectives, shaping a literary landscape that continues to resonate with readers today. Through novels, poetry, memoirs, and essays, these writers grappled with the moral dilemmas, the sacrifices, and the enduring resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

### METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH MATERIALS

The only options available to the civilians who stayed at home to engage with the war were propaganda and their own imaginations, while soldiers were forced to deploy overseas. Because of this, the post-war experience in the United States differed greatly from that of various European nations, as did the post-war cultural psychology. Due to sociological and geographic circumstances, the psychological damage caused by World War II to the United States had a deeper impact on the national consciousness than it did in Europe, and this was reflected in some of the greatest literary masterpieces of the century. The writer has endeavored to select the books under consideration with a view toward incorporating a representative selection of the works of many of the older established writers as well as many novels of the younger crop of writers to emerge from the war. It will be seen further that there has been a casting aside of the fetters and restraints imposed upon writers by the staid Victorian traditions, and the new writers especially have delved into every conceivable artistic form in search of the best medium through which to convey accurately and realistically the experiences which the GI endured in the course of his struggles on the battlefields of Europe and Asia. But a close examination of these works reveals that, for the

most part, three different approaches to novel writing are evident. Consequently, the novels will be discussed in chronological sequence as they fit into these distinct categories for the sake of simplicity and clarity. Authors have historically used war experiences as a springboard to explore issues of racism, authority, democracy, and stress-related human behavior. U.S. war writing developed during and after World War II, in part because it tackled these and related topics with previously unheard-of candor and realism. Eventually hundreds of war novels emerged, some of them beautifully written. Impressive work was produced by many American poets, and postwar memoirs and wartime journalism frequently demonstrated a new level of nuance and clarity. Here, only the most well-known or innovative writers and works may be discussed.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The best wartime literature was actually written by well-known authors, such as Evelyn Waugh's *Put Out More Flags* (1942), Henry Green's *Caught* (1943), James Hanley's *No Directions* (1943), Patrick Hamilton's *The Slaves of Solitude* (1947), and Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1949). Only three new poets showed promise (all dying while serving in the military): Keith Douglas, who was the most gifted and unique and whose hauntingly detached tales of the battlefield revealed a poet of potential greatness. The other two were Alun Lewis and Sidney Keyes. Another extremely impressive piece of work by Lewis is his collection of eerie short stories concerning the life of officers and enlistees. William Golding and Muriel Spark, the two most inventive novelists to start their careers just after World War II, were also devout Christians. The concept of original sin—that is, that, in Golding's words, "man produces evil as a bee produces honey"—recurs frequently in stories with poetic compactness. Spark and Golding focus on little villages, transforming them into miniature versions of themselves. Symbols and allegories cause wide resonances to tremble, allowing small works to make powerful points. Schoolboys abandoned on a Pacific island amid a nuclear war in William Golding's 1954 first novel *Lord of the Flies* represent humanity's fall from grace as their relationships deteriorate from innocent companionship to totalitarian slaughter. It is possible to identify comparable presumptions and strategies in Spark's satirical comedy. For instance, in her best-known book, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), happenings in an Edinburgh classroom during the 1930s are tiny replicas of the spread of fascism throughout Europe. The fable *Animal Farm* (1945) and the novel *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949) by George Orwell, which explore the totalitarian nightmare, are similar to *Lord of the Flies* in form and spirit. The realist legacy of the era's fiction reflects the influence of the post-war society. As a result, during this time a new generation of writers emerged, including Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Lillian Hellman, and poet-essayist Robert Penn Warren. These writers "explored the fate of the individual within the family or community and focused on the balance between personal growth and responsibility to the group." (*American Prose, 1945–1990: Exploration and Realism*). One illustration of how the post-war world influenced American writing is found in the plays of the great genius Arthur Miller. "In the period immediately following the end of World War II, American theater was transformed by the work of playwright Arthur Miller. Miller, deeply impacted by the Great Depression and the war that followed, was able to access a feeling of discontent and restlessness in the broader American psyche. His inquisitive plays served as the nation's conscience and redemption at the same time, giving people a clear picture of the course the nation had followed. (Miller Arthur). The great literary genius's perspective on the world demonstrates how the experiences of the post-war era influenced the growth of American literature. War had an impact on his writings, as evidenced by the paranoia and prejudice that followed the war and how it affected the play *The Crucible* and the life of Willy Loman, the

main character in *The Death of a Salesman*. In light of this, an examination of American literature during the Second World War demonstrates that it was a pivotal period in the development of the genre. *The War in American Culture* investigates how the Second World War affected the social, political, and cultural landscape of the country. American society faced a crisis during World War II as a result of the necessity to come together across long-standing class, racial, and ethnic divides in order to defeat the enemy. These essays explore the censoring of war photos by the government, the rewriting of immigration rules, Hollywood filmmaking, swing music, and popular periodicals. They also show how a new national identity was created, one that was multicultural but also sanitized and controlled.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the literature of the Second World War in American literature is a testament to the enduring power of storytelling to capture the complexities of human experience during times of upheaval. Through a diverse array of voices and narratives, writers have illuminated the moral dilemmas, personal sacrifices, and collective resilience that define the wartime experience. As we reflect on these works, we are reminded of the profound impact of war on individuals and society as a whole. Yet, amidst the darkness of conflict, there is also hope, courage, and the indomitable spirit of humanity, which continues to shine brightly through the pages of these enduring literary treasures.

### INTERNET RESOURCE

1. <https://www.encyclopedia.com/defense/energy-government-and-defense-magazines/literature-world-war-ii>
2. New Fiction from the Fiction Collective · Volume 1
3. The <https://www.redhousebooks.com/american-literature-after-world-war-ii/Collective: A Novel>
4. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292012841\\_The\\_Second\\_World\\_War\\_American\\_writing](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292012841_The_Second_World_War_American_writing)