



English Literature after World War I and World War II

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3. The literature of World War II
(1939-1945)
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1. Impact of World War I

- Cut the ties with the past;
- Brought discontent and disillusionment;
- Humankind was plunged into gloom;
- A shift from novels of the human comedy to novels of characters;
- Fiction followed the twisted, unnatural development of a single character or a group of related characters.

1. Records in literature

- Rupert Brooke - a thin performance in poetry; (a war casualty)
- Wilfred Owen – a realist about the heroism and idealism of the soldier; (a war casualty)
- Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden – violent accounts of the horrors and terror of war (survivors of the carnage)

1. Aldous Huxley

- He set the cynical and bewildered tone in prose (“Crome Yellow”);
- He best expressed the sense of disillusionment and hopelessness in “Point Counter Point” – the events of the plot form a dual pattern;
- He worked with the external world – false, brutal, and inhuman.

1. William Somerset Maugham

- He achieved the greatest popular success;
- ‘The Moon and Sixpence’ – was based on the life of the artist Paul Gauguin;
- ‘Cakes and Ale’ – shows how the real self is lost between the two masks – public and private.

1. James Joyce

- Language – was the means by which the inner, subconscious feelings gained expression;
- Stream of consciousness – reading the characters' thoughts exactly as they occur, without a moment by the author;
- 'Ulysses' – based on Greek mythology;
- 'Finnegan's Wake' – a whole vocabulary of puns and merged words from the elements of many languages.

Women novelists

- Virginia Woolf – reality is a stream; life is immersion in the flow of that stream;
- V. Woolf transformed the treatment of subjectivity, time, and history; traditional forms of fiction – were no longer adequate;
- Katherine Mansfield, Dorothy Richardson, Elizabeth Bowen – were concerned with the realities of the mind.

1. David Herbert Lawrence

- Famous for experimental novels – a return to the primitive, unconscious springs of vitality of the race;
- Symbolism of plots and forceful message broke the bonds of realism and replaced them with the direct projection of the author's own creative spirit;
- Rejection of fixed forms to achieve a freer, more natural expression of perceptions.

1. Evelyn Waugh

- Satirized the ignorance of society;
- Later novels showed a deepening moral tone – ‘Brideshead Revisited’;
- Together with Graham Greene and Aldous Huxley, E. Waugh investigated serious problem of evil in human life.

2. The literature of 1930s

- WW I created a profound sense of crisis in English culture;
- The worldwide economic collapse of the late 1920s, the rise of Fascism, the Spanish Civil War intensified the sense of crisis;
- Much of the writing was bleak and pessimistic;
- The turbulent 1930s – turned many writers towards traditional values.

2. Fiction

- Divisions of class and the burden of sexual repression – common and interrelated themes in fiction;
- Writers neglected the modernist revolution in technique, returned to the realist modes;
- Lewis Grassie Gibbon (James Leslie Mitchell) gives a panoramic account of Scottish rural life;
- G. Greene produced desolate studies of the loneliness and guilt of people;
- George Orwell wrote recollections of lower middle-class existence;
- Elizabeth Bowen made a sardonic analysis of upper-class values.

2. Poetry

- Poetry – as the authentic voice of the new generation (despair with defiance);
- Wystan Hugh Auden, Cecil Day-Lewis, Stephen Spender expressed extremely liberal political ideas in verse; criticized injustices in an unequal society by means of different genres, rapid shifts of tone and mood, strange juxtapositions of the colloquial and esoteric;
- Dylan Thomas – experimented with metaphorical poetry; expressed his passionate love of life in vivid images.

3. The literature of World War II (1939-1945)

- An end of an era of great intellectual and creative exuberance;
- The rationing of people affected the production of magazines and books;
- The poem and the short story – the favoured means of literary expression;
- The New Apocalypse movement (poetry is written in a surreal and rhetorical style) – Dylan Thomas, George Barker, David Gascoyne, Vernon Watkins;
- Alun Lewis, Sidney Keyes, Keith Douglas gave detached accounts of the battlefield;
- No important new novelists or playwrights appeared.

4. The literature after 1945

- Increased attachment to religion:

W. H. Auden turned to Christian commitment;

Christopher Fry's verse was suffused with Christian beliefs;

G. Greene and E. Waugh's Roman Catholicism was reflected in novels;

Eastern mysticism was found in A. Huxley's works.

4. Peculiar features of 1950s

Two groups of writers:

young writers, who are ready to keep up the standard of wholesome optimism,

mature writers, who have passed through a certain creative crisis

4. 'The Angry Young Men'

- Most of writers were of lower middle-class backgrounds;
- Kingsley Amis, John Wain, John Braine, John Osborne – best known;
- They had in common an outspoken irreverence for the British class system and the pretensions of the aristocracy;
- They strongly disapprove of the elitist universities, the Church of England, the darkness of the working class life;

'The Angry Young Men'

- They are conservatives: modernist writers are taken as museum pieces;
- The style is close to the straightforward narrative of 19th century fiction;
- They are not interested in the philosophical problems of men's existence;
- Characters are angry with everything and everybody, as no one is interested to learn what their ideas on life and society are.

4. Representatives

- John Osborne, John Wain, Alan Sillitoe – crystallized the trend of the period;
- Kingsley Amis – the best of the writers to emerge from the 50s; his 'The Old Devils' won the Booker Prize;
- Iris Murdoch gained recognition as one of the foremost novelists of the generation;
- Angus Wilson portrayed the emotional crisis of WW II;

Representatives

- Anthony Burgess's fictional exploration of modern dilemmas combines wit, moral earnestness, and touches of the bizarre;
- Doris Lessing was acclaimed for her mastery of the short story;
- Muriel Spark's novels were characterized by a humorous fantasy.

4. 1960s

- The criticism was revealed in the ‘working-class novel’;
- Characters come from the working class;
- Alan Sillitoe – the best known writer of the period

4. Contemporary literature

- New heroes, new experience in theatrical life and poetry, new forms and standards in prosaic works;
- The variety of genres and styles;
- The symbolic method takes place and develops further;
- Themes concern global problems: the Peace and the War, the environmental protection, the relations between the mankind and Universe;
- Themes concern the duties and obligations of the individual man, the psychology of the human nature, the life's situations, the ways of solving problems, the power and money.

4.1 Fiction

- Allegory and symbol set wide resonances – short books make large statements;
- William Golding and Muriel Spark – the two most innovatory novelists; short spiritual stories;
- Henry Green wrote stylized novels, the precursors of the compressed fiction;
- Iris Murdoch's fiction combine allegory and symbol with realistic rendition of character; she is famous for elaborately artificial works;
- Elizabeth Bowen, Barbara Pym continued the tradition of depicting emotional and psychological nuance – comedies of sense and sensibility;

4.1 Fiction

- A type of fiction, produced by writers deeply influenced by 'Angry Young Men' – Alan Sillitoe, Stan Barstow, David Storey – novels ruggedly autobiographical in origin and near documentary in approach;
- Anthony Powell inspected social mobility;
- Charles Percy Snow wrote novels about a man's journey from the lower class to London's 'corridors of power';
- Angus Wilson's 'No Laughing Matter'- the most inspired fictional work of social and cultural life in 20th-century Britain;
- A mood of growing self-consciousness in fiction – thoughtfulness about the form;

4.1 Fiction

- 1980s – widening social divides were registered in works that purposefully imitate the Victorian ‘Condition of England’ novel – David Lodge’s ‘Nice Work’;
- Margaret Drabble wrote about ‘Two Nations’ of an England cleft by regional gulfs and gross inequalities between rich and poor;
- Feminist novelists took to Gothic, fairy tales, and fantasy as countereffects to rationality and logic narrative – Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson, Doris Lessing;

4.1 Contemporary Irish novelists

- John Banville (the pseudonym – Benjamin Black) writes detective novels; ‘The Sea’ won the Booker Prize in 2005, he was awarded the Franz Kafka Prize in 2011;
- Colm Toibin – a novelist, essayist, playwright, journalist, and, most recently, poet

4.2 Poetry

- A shift from traditional forms to experimental verse and new techniques; the leader is Thomas Sterns Eliot;
- ***'yea-sayers' poets*** – had hope but little optimism, experiments with rhyme, rhythm, imagery, language, symbolism, and allusion- an uneven poetry that represented the unevenness of life (Stephen Spender, Cecil Day-Lewis, Louis MacNeice, Wystan Hugh Auden);

4.2 Poetry

- ***The stream-of-consciousness poets*** – sought to escape from the world of ideas and problems – vivid imagery – William Empson, Dylan Thomas represented the world through the confused, the irrelevant, and the inexact;
- Robert Graves advocated ‘pure’ impersonal poetry.

4.2 Poetry

- *The British Poetry Revival movement* – a wide-reaching collection of groupings that embraces performance, sound and concrete poetry (Jeremy Halvard Prynne, Eric Mottram, Denise Riley, Lee Harwood);
- *The Mersey Beat poets* – wrote poems in protest against the established social order, and the threat of nuclear war (Adrian Henri, Brian Patten, Roger McGough);
- Later 20th-century poets – Ronald Stuart Thomas, Charles Tomlinson and Carol Ann Duffy – the current poet laureate;

4.2 Poetry

- In the place of New Apocalypse poetry emerged ***The Movement*** – urbane verse in an antiromantic vein – irony, understatement (Dennis Joseph Enright, Donald Davie, Roy Fuller, Robert Conquest, Elizabeth Jennings);
- Philip Larkin and John Betjeman (poet laureate from 1972 to 1984) depicted intense consciousness of mortality and gracefully versified nostalgia;
- Ted Hughes's poetry is in contrast to sad traditionalism of Larkin and Betjeman – capture of vitality and splendour of the natural world.

4.3 Drama

- The early 20th-century – the Irish Renaissance movement – Sean O’Casey;
- James Matthew Barrie, John Galsworthy, Somerset Maugham, Sir Noel Coward – best known playwrights;
- 1940s-1950s – ‘well-made’ play movement – the focus was on the middle class audience; carefully crafted, conventional looking plays – Terence Rattigan;

4.3 Drama

- 1956 John Osborne's 'Look Back in Anger' initiated a move towards 'kitchen-sink' drama (naturalism);
- Shelagh Delaney and Arnold Wesker gave further impetus to the movement;
- John Arden wrote historical plays; provided a model for later left-wing dramatists to follow;
- *The Theatre of the Absurd* – a reaction against naturalism – Samuel Beckett – minimalist plays (30-second-long drama); Harold Pinter – a surreal atmosphere contrasts with dialogue of tape-recorder authenticity ;

4.3 Drama

- Joe Orton produced anarchic black comedies;
- Tom Stoppard sets intellectually challenging concepts in scenes; won the praise for the verbal brilliance, intricate plots, and philosophical themes;
- Alan Ayckbourn – the most prolific comic playwright from the 1960s for theatrical ingenuity;
- 1980s – *agitprop theatre*- antiestablishment, feminist, black, and gay –thrived – Caryl Churchill, David Edgar