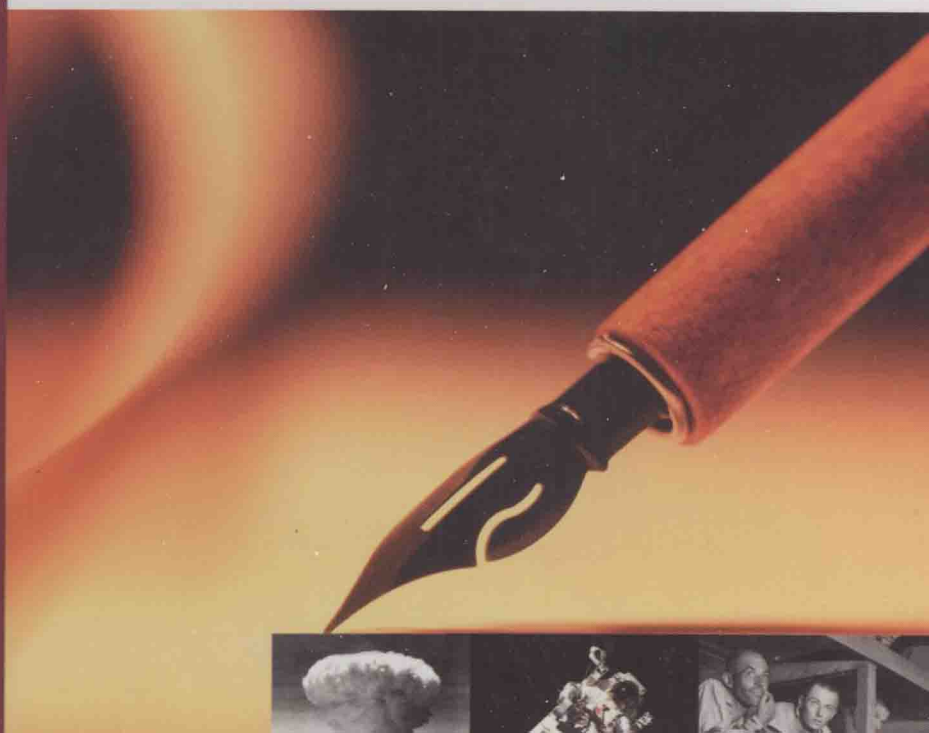


EDWARD QUINN

# HISTORY ~ IN LITERATURE

*A Reader's Guide to 20th-Century History  
and the Literature It Inspired*

FACTS ON FILE LIBRARY OF WORLD LITERATURE



# *History in Literature*

A READER'S GUIDE TO 20TH-CENTURY HISTORY  
AND THE LITERATURE IT INSPIRED



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EDWARD QUINN

藏书章



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**History in Literature: A Reader's Guide to 20th-Century History  
and the Literature It Inspired**

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# PREFACE

*History in Literature* is a unique reference book that combines alphabetically arranged summaries of events or biographies of people important to 20th-century history with discussions of works of literature inspired by those subjects. Thus each entry offers a brief account of relevant facts, followed by a description of how and to what purpose novelists, playwrights, or poets used or altered those facts. With this dual goal in mind, we chose our entries both on the basis of their historical importance and the importance of the literature they inspired. Each entry also includes a brief bibliographical note for readers interested in pursuing the topic further.

This history/literature format, we have found, makes for informative, entertaining—often surprising—reading with a wide range of uses. *History in Literature* can serve as a map for the reader with a specific destination: a descendant of immigrants from Greece or Turkey, say, seeking an interesting book on the Greco-Turkish War; an undergraduate or graduate student looking, perhaps, for a term-paper topic relating to existentialism; or a World War I buff on the lookout for a novel that deals with the battle of Gallipoli. On the other hand, it can be a guide for the reader who has no specific place in mind but just wants to ride around the countryside, maybe stopping at a few antique stores to see if there's anything interesting in the area. Or, it can be a kind of Michelin for time travelers, men or women who want to re-experience some aspect of the 20th century, matching their memory of "the way it was" against either the facts or someone's imaginative re-creation of the facts. Doubtless there are other uses (preparation for an appearance on *Jeopardy* comes to mind), but the emphasis on usefulness, perfectly appropriate as it is for a reference book, should not obscure the pleasure the reader will find in the books being referred to. They are not all great, but they are all good reads.

The seed for this book was planted while I was teaching a group of bright, politically active college students in the late 1960s about *Macbeth* and its connections to the Gunpowder Plot. All of these students had read the play; none of them—no surprise here—had ever heard of the plot, a failed attempt by a group of Roman Catholics to blow up a joint session of the

English Parliament on November 5, 1605. Shakespeare had caught the plot when it was today's news, not yet "history," and spun it into gold. With characteristic daring and genius, he seized the term *equivocation* from the trial of the conspirators and made it the central point of Macbeth's relationship with the Weird Sisters.

The Gunpowder Plot played an important role in the subsequent social history of England, in the form of Guy Fawkes' Day (Fawkes was one of the conspirators), a popular celebration in which the straw-stuffed figure of Fawkes is burned in effigy. Guy Fawkes' Day weaves its way through English literature, appearing in the 20th century as the subepigraph ("A penny for the Old Guy") in T. S. Eliot's 1925 poem "The Hollow Men." (The main epigraph to "The Hollow Men"—"Mistah Kurtz—he dead"—is a line from Joseph Conrad's seminal exploration of colonialism, *Heart of Darkness*.)

Thus a single, brief segment of 17th-century history penetrated and enriched later literature, and, at the same time, developed a life of its own. That life took the form of a history of anti-Catholic feeling in Great Britain, which, in turn, generated the kind of terrorist activity (of which the Gunpowder Plot served as a prototype) represented by the Irish Republican Army. This example of an interlocking, recurrent pattern both in history and literature was precisely, it seemed to me, the sort of thing that our rigidly compartmentalized educational system had failed to provide those 1960s students. Not having been taught to look for history and literature in terms of interconnected recurring cycles, they had treated the past as past and, thus, as George Santayana put it, were condemned to repeat it. Since that time, interdisciplinary studies has emerged in American schools and colleges as a far from dominant but nonetheless vigorous movement. This book hopes to serve a modest role in its continued growth.

But the genesis of this book is not the same as its aim. It is designed, not to lecture the young, but to serve them, while it pursues the equally important task of trying to interest and please the no-longer-young, people like those same students, now in their forties and fifties, overcome with nostalgia, who find themselves inclining toward the History Channel, while the youngsters are watching "reality" television. But this book has in mind those—young or old—who have come of age in the most momentous—and, some would say, monstrous—century in history, but who have found solace, satisfaction, escape, wisdom, and, perhaps best of all, joy in its literature, specifically that particular species of literature rooted in historical events.

A word about limits: The literary selections are restricted to fiction, poetry, and drama. Excluded as a result are nonfictional accounts, such as memoirs. To include these would have swelled the book to unmanageable proportions. The same is true of films. An account of the films rooted in historical events of the century would have resulted in an encyclopedia, not a handbook. In those cases where we were unable to track down a suitable lit-

erary work, we have not included the entry. As a result, there are some notable absences from a strict historical standpoint, just as from a literary perspective; there are, for instance, no discussions of the works of Marcel Proust or James Joyce, since those two giants of 20th-century literature did not write historical fiction. Another restriction is that only books written in or translated into English are included.

# ENTRIES BY CONTRIBUTORS

**William Herman:** Arab-Israeli conflict; cold war; Kennedy, John Fitzgerald; October 3, 1951; Trujillo Molina, Rafael Leónidas.

**Leonard Kriegel:** War in the Pacific.

**Karl Malkoff:** Central Intelligence Agency; Einstein, Albert; Greco-Turkish War; Greece, occupation of; Greek civil war; Greek colonels; Knossos, discovery of the palace at; Lambrakis Grigorios, assassination of.

**Arthur Waldhorn:** colonialism; Great Depression.

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# HISTORY IN LITERATURE







## ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE (SPANISH CIVIL WAR) (1937–1938)

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Among the international brigades that fought on the Loyalist (pro-government) side in the SPANISH CIVIL WAR was a group of Americans, most recruited from the ranks of the American Communist Party, but with a substantial minority—about 25 percent—of unaffiliated individuals committed to the fight against fascism. Technically not a brigade, the group consisted of two battalions, forming a part of the XVth International Brigade, which also included British, French, and Spanish battalions.

The group's first engagement, at the battle of Jarama in February 1937, was marked by mishaps and confusion, typical of unprepared troops and compounded by the failure of the Loyalist command to deliver the artillery and air support the brigade had expected. The result was a disastrous defeat in which the "Lincolns" suffered heavy casualties. Subsequent engagements at Belchite, where they experienced their first victory, and at the Ebro River, where after initial success their offensive was halted, added to the casualty list. Of the 2,800 volunteers in the brigade, 900 were killed and virtually all of the others wounded. In December 1938, with a final victory for Franco's forces imminent, the battalion was repatriated to the United States. In their own country, the Lincolns continued to be involved in leftist causes. Although time reduced their numbers to a small band, they remained actively engaged until the end of the century. As one survivor put it, "Struggle is the elixir of life. . . . [I]f you are not struggling, you are dead."

## THE LITERATURE

During the war, a significant number of troops in the International Brigades experienced serious morale problems; most were due to the incompetence of its leadership, almost all of whom were Russian officers. The treatment of the brigades offers additional proof that the Soviet Union was less concerned with supporting the fight against Franco than in strengthening its own interests and policies. The Communists tried to subvert the efforts of the socialists, anarchists, and Trotskyites who were their allies in the so-called Popular Front, going so far as to assassinate many of the leaders of these groups. The machinations of the Communist Party are the subject of the novel *Hermanos!* (1969) by William Herrick (1915– ). Herrick was a member of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, wounded at the battle of Jarama. His novel, though written 30 years after the war, seethes with the fresh anger of one who feels betrayed. His protagonist is Jake Starr, a natural leader and a rising star in the Communist Party, whose flaw is a touch of romantic idealism. Jake experiences no internal conflict when fighting alongside his fellow Lincolns, where the air is pure and the group is motivated solely by their antifascist feelings. Once exposed to the battle, they exhibit the usual range of courage and fear, but their commitment to the “good fight,” as they called the war, remains untarnished.

But Jake’s singular abilities require his attention to duties that take him from the front lines to the fetid air of the “commissars,” communist officials overseeing the actions of the military, whose sole function is to carry out direct orders from the Kremlin. Jake’s position is further complicated by his passionate love affair with the wife of a Nobel Prize-winning physicist whom the party is wooing for his public relations value. At first, Jake is able to adhere to party discipline and reject his lover, but eventually he rebels, triggered by an incident in which he has to murder a Spanish ally whom the party views as a threat. In the meantime, his Lincoln comrades undergo harrowing battles that decimate their ranks. Eventually, he and they come to see the “good fight” as having been betrayed by its leadership.

*Hermanos!* is a flawed novel, overstating its case, demonizing its Communist villains, deficient in bringing its protagonist to life. However, the publication in 2001 of secret Soviet state documents relating to the civil war (*Spain Betrayed*, eds. Ronald Radosh, Mary Habeck, and J. Sevostianov) suggests that the novel may have been historically more correct than had previously been imagined. In this respect, *Hermanos!* stands as the fictional equivalent of George Orwell’s (1905–50) classic account of the Communist betrayal of the Loyalist cause, *Homage to Catalonia* (1938).

## FURTHER READING

Peter Carroll’s *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (1994) provides an interesting study of the Lincolns, particularly in its account of their post-civil war history.

## AFRICAN-AMERICAN EXPERIENCE (1865–1950)

From the end of the Civil War through the first half of the 20th century, African Americans received the clear message from the larger society that they were, at best, second-class citizens. After moving from slavery, the very existence of which constituted a denial of their humanity, into segregation, the condition of being separate and notoriously unequal, many American blacks found themselves on the bottom rung of the social and economic ladder, often below recent European and Asian immigrants. A matter of law in the South and an unofficial *de facto* reality in the North, segregation gave birth to discrimination in jobs, housing, and education. The great migration of the early decades, which brought thousands of southern blacks to industrial centers in the North, appeared, at first, to be the critical breakthrough they were seeking. The spirited, creative flowering of the Harlem Renaissance seemed to suggest a new dawn, but the GREAT DEPRESSION soon eclipsed that light, as economic realities overcame cultural aspirations. With WORLD WAR II, northern migration again intensified as war production factories offered opportunities for work; with war's end, the principle of "last hired, first fired" saw blacks once again at the bottom of the ladder, still suffering from the same social indignities and humiliations.

Although the psychological damage inflicted on black people in these years before the CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT took its toll in terms of their own self-image and sense of identity, they nevertheless created a distinctive culture. In black hands, the dour Christianity they had absorbed from their slave masters became a deeply emotional, passionate expression of suffering and joy, captured in soulful spirituals and plaintive gospel music. In the secular world, jazz improvisation gave full rein to the full experience of freedom otherwise denied to them, while the blues rendered the painful conditions of existence into a form of creative play. In the 1920s, jazz entered the American mainstream and transformed the culture, shattering its ties with the Puritan past (see JAZZ AGE). From there, jazz assumed worldwide cultural influence, reflected, for example, in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* (see EXISTENTIALISM) and Haruki Murakami's *After the Quake* (see KOBE EARTHQUAKE).

The onset of the CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT of the 1950s produced significant changes, notably in the elimination of legal segregation in the South and in fostering racial pride, expressed in the slogan "Black Is Beautiful." But a major reason for the movement's success was no doubt the deep, rich culture out of which it grew.

### THE LITERATURE

In his novel *Invisible Man* (1952), Ralph Ellison (1914–94) incorporates the metaphorical invisibility of the black man in the white world with that which many regard as the fundamental theme of 20th-century literature.

Employing elements of jazz, blues, and African-American folklore and fusing them with modernist literary techniques that include realism, surrealism, and overt symbolism, Ellison merges the two traditions to depict the novel's black protagonist as a quintessential existential hero, asking significant questions about identity, choice, and meaning. In a work that combines echoes of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's (1821–81) *Notes from the Underground*, T. S. Eliot's (1888–1965) *The Waste Land*, and Louis Armstrong's recording of "Black and Blue," Ellison, in the words of the critic Albert Murray, "had taken an everyday blues tune . . . and scored it for full orchestra." As a result, the novel won international acclaim, but, at the same time, it drew a certain amount of negative reaction from militant blacks, who saw in the "universalization" of its protagonist a diminution of his particularly black character. Ellison's response to his critics is reflected in his comment that there is no reason why a novel about a black man "could not be effective as literature and, in its effectiveness, transcend its immediate background and speak eloquently for other people." The debate over the novel's racial politics has continued in the years since its publication, although few deny its status as a work of art.

*Invisible Man* is a picaresque novel, a type of tale in which the protagonist undergoes a series of seemingly unrelated incidents; the plot moves incrementally rather than developmentally. The novel opens with a prologue in which the narrator, an anonymous black man, has taken refuge from a race riot that has broken out in Harlem. He is living in a cellar wired with hundreds of lights. The lighting helps to offset his realization that he is invisible, at least to white people: When they look at him, they see not an individual, but a black man, an object to be used for their own purposes. In the novel's first chapter, the narrator flashes back to his graduation from high school and the puzzling advice he receives from his dying grandfather. The old man instructs the idealistic young man to "yes" the white man to death, to "overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins." What follows is a description of a "battle royal" among young black teens, staged for the entertainment of the prominent men in the Southern town, cheering on the boys as they savage each other. At the conclusion of the fight, the bloodied, young narrator, who has been chosen as the speaker of his graduating class, delivers his earnest, pious declaration and is awarded a leather briefcase, containing a scholarship to a southern Negro college (modeled on Tuskegee Institute, which Ellison once attended). But that night he dreams that his grandfather tells him to open the briefcase, where he finds a letter that reads, "Keep This Nigger-Boy Running."

Undaunted, still clinging to his belief in a kind of Horatio Alger-like future, the narrator leaves college without graduating, after a wild, farcical incident with a white benefactor. He comes to New York, where he secures a job in a paint factory, noted for the "purity" of the whiteness of its paint. Here

the narrator becomes the hapless victim of another comic catastrophe, losing his job as a result. Now living in Harlem, he becomes acquainted with the Brotherhood (the Communist Party), who enlists him as a black recruiter in the Harlem community. His success there causes some jealousy among the Brotherhood leaders, and he is transferred downtown to speak on women's issues. When trouble appears to be developing in Harlem, partly the result of the activities of a black separatist, Ras the Exhorter, he is called back there, but by now he has become increasingly aware that the party is cynically exploiting him and the entire black population for its own ends. In the meantime a full-blown race riot breaks out in Harlem, which, the narrator realizes, the Brotherhood has provoked. Caught in the middle of the violence, he falls into a manhole and finds refuge in the cellar described in the prologue. In the epilogue that concludes the novel, the narrator prepares to abandon his underground home and to engage the world, chastened and disciplined by his naïve mistakes, but not entirely disillusioned. In spite of everything he has been through, he has not abandoned the possibility, remote as it may be, that the day would come in America, when, as Martin Luther King, Jr., later expressed it, a man would be judged not by the color of his skin but by the content of his character.

#### FURTHER READING

Albert Murray's *The Omni Americans* (1970) is an affirmative account of African-American culture. *Modern Critical Interpretations: Invisible Man*, edited by Harold Bloom (1999), is a collection of critical studies of the novel.

### AIDS (ACQUIRED IMMUNE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME)

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In 1980, doctors in Africa and large urban areas of the United States began to confront a new and mysterious disease. In sub-Saharan Africa, the disease appeared to be relatively indiscriminate, while in cities such as San Francisco and New York it attacked a disproportionate number of gay men. In the following year, the disease was identified as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), a lethal infection in the immune system. In 1983, researchers isolated human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which attacks the immune system, constituting the first phase of AIDS. The virus spreads from the initial site through the lymph nodes. Eventually, usually about 10 years later, it moves into its final phase, AIDS. At that point, diseases such as pneumonia, lymphoma, or sarcoma develop. HIV can be contracted in a variety of ways: through semen or female genital secretions, shared use of a hypodermic needle, blood transfusions, or breast milk. Pregnant women can transmit it to their unborn babies. By the year 2001, the international death toll from AIDS

had reached 21.8 million, with another 40 million infected with HIV. Although AIDS is now a worldwide pandemic, the most seriously affected area remains sub-Saharan Africa.

One controversial feature of the response to AIDS in America has been the perceived inadequacy of research efforts to fight the disease. As the AIDS historian Randy Shilts aptly summarized the issue, “the federal government viewed AIDS as a budget problem, local public health officials saw it as a political problem, gay leaders considered it a public relations problem, and the news media regarded it as a homosexual problem that wouldn’t interest anybody else.” Since those early years, research and treatment have benefited the United States and other Western countries, but the condition in Africa and Asia has become increasingly alarming.

## THE LITERATURE

In the relatively brief period since its outbreak in the early 1980s, AIDS has resulted in the production of a large body of literature. Most of this work has formed the central theme of contemporary gay literature. As the disease achieves the dimension of a worldwide epidemic, however, a small but increasing proportion of AIDS literature is being written by heterosexuals.

Much of the early AIDS literature was angry, direct, and combative, striving to overcome the hostility, superstition, and fear that greeted the disease. While more recent literature has retained this angry tone, it has been tempered by infusions of comedy and the themes of love, compassion, and remembrance.

Among the early accounts of the disease was the widely acclaimed “The Way We Live Now,” a powerful short story by Susan Sontag (1933– ), published in the *New Yorker* in 1986, which depicts the progression of the disease in a young man, as reflected in the conversations of his friends, who continually refer to “it,” unable to bring themselves to use the word *AIDS*, and Larry Kramer’s (1935– ) *The Normal Heart* (1985), the first play to bring AIDS to the attention of the general public. The outstanding chronicler of the disease in literature is Paul Monette (1945–95), who died of AIDS in 1995. Monette’s novels *Afterlife* (1990) and *Halfway Home* (1991) affirm the strengths of homosexual love in the face of death. Monette is also the author of a moving collection of poems celebrating the life of his deceased lover, *Love Alone: Eighteen Elegies for Rog* (1988).

In drama, the AIDS crisis forms the center of the most acclaimed American play in many years, Tony Kushner’s (1957– ) *Angels in America* (1991), a two-part drama that touches on a broad range of themes, with AIDS playing a central role.

Among the nongay literature of AIDS, a notable example is Alice Hoffman’s (1952– ) *At Risk* (1988), the account of an 11-year-old girl’s contracting of AIDS from a blood transfusion. Reynolds Price’s (1933– ) *The*