

# ENCYCLOPEDIA OF AMERICAN WAR LITERATURE

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*Edited by*  
Phillip K. Jason and Mark A. Graves

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# INTRODUCTION

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People read war literature for many reasons. For some, it provides a high level of excitement. These readers enjoy the details of combat: the emotions of anger and fear, the physical challenges, the employment of soldierly skills. Others read war literature for the historical knowledge it may impart. Few forms of historical fiction have a greater following than fiction about war. Still others are intrigued by the moral issues raised by such texts and by the implicit discussion of leadership that is hinged to characterizations of unit commanders. All of these interests are satisfied by the central type of war literature that may be termed *combat literature*. But the literature of war has a wider arc that takes in representations of causes and consequences of the battlefield action. It has political, cultural, and psychological dimensions. And these dimensions, too, find an avid readership. For all its popularity, and even though many of the major literary texts in Euro-American culture deal with war, there is no critical consensus on just how or why it is important or how it should be approached. Indeed, there is little critical discussion of the literature of war. It has not been systematically classified or theoretically addressed in a comprehensive way.

And yet it is clearly an important body of representation. The essential story line places individuals in extreme situations, often at the margins of their capacities for survival and effective behavior. The laboratory of the writer's imagination, entered by the reader, tests understandings of the human condition, of the limits of human or humane nature. This aspect of much war writing brings it under the umbrella of literature that explores related extremes of traumatic victimhood. Essential to the discussion of such works is Kali Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (1996), a study that examines the interface between the personal and the political in the stories of survivors.

In the short history of that American nation known as the United States, war has marked the journey, and imaginative literature has reflected and shaped an understanding of that journey. Whatever is universal about war stories—assuming that there are universal attributes—takes on the local cultural color of creative transformers. To study the war literature of the United States, then, is to

study the representation not only of individuals at war but also of the American experience, variously understood. Sometimes this rendering is self-conscious, sometimes unconscious. Sometimes it is the veneer, and other times it is the core.

The existing critical forays seem to us to be limited in ways that leave much room for further examinations. Wayne Charles Miller's *An Armed America: Its Face in Fiction* (1970) is both too broad and too narrow. Its subtitle—"A History of the American Military Novel"—sets its limits at a single genre but expands its subject reference beyond war to portrayals of the military establishment and military life. Thus, his chapter on Melville has little to do with war representation, except for the brief mention of Melville's Civil War poems that cannot get more than fleeting attention in a book about novels. At the same time, Miller's concern with handling many noncombat "military novels" leads him to exclude or merely refer to scores of key works that treat men at war. Miller's is a useful book in many ways, but it just does not get to an ideational level. Other critical efforts, like Peter Aichinger's 1975 study *The American Soldier in Fiction, 1880–1963*, Peter G. Jones's *War and the Novelist: Appraising the American War Novel* (1976), and Jeffrey Walsh's *American War Literature, 1914 to Vietnam* (1982), make no attempt to be comprehensive. Indeed, the very titles of these useful volumes announce their limitations of genre or temporal scope.

Before there can be meaningful assessments of the American literature of war, there needs to be a gathering of basic information—an overview. The aim of the present project is to indicate the abundance and richness of the material, an abundance that can only be hinted at in the space at our disposal. Still, an encyclopedic reference can at least point out the high and some of the middle ground of this enormous body of work.

The remarks that follow are intended to suggest some of the possible directions for critical projects on American war literature.

War literature, particularly fiction, lends itself to classification by duration and focus of conflict. That is, plots are derived from such frames as the tour of duty (James Webb's *Fields of Fire*), campaigns (John Del Vecchio's *The 13th Valley*), particular battles or skirmishes (Humphrey Cobb's *Paths of Glory*), and sometimes the contours of a single day (Harry Brown's *A Walk in the Sun* and David Halberstam's *One Very Hot Day*). Another mark of differentiation is the command or unit level, a focusing decision of crucial importance that is often related to point of view. Most American war fiction is pitched at the company level, notably William March's *Company K* and James Jones's *The Thin Red Line*. However, the narrower platoon or squad narratives are abundant, and the broader battalion-level narrative (which is likely to become a "headquarters" tale) is available. Works focused on air or sea combat have similar ranges of reference and focus. Many successful works, like James Michener's *The Bridges at Toko-ri*, gain their organizing strength from the combination of parameters: the military objective and the military unit.

As a subject for literary treatment, then, war—as combat action—has convenient handles and shapes. It is, therefore, a storyteller's delight.

In the American war narratives of the twentieth century, the command level of the company or subunit allows for the panorama of types—the “American boys” from varied backgrounds—that constitute a special version of the melting pot myth. In his essay “The War on the Home Front” (collected in *Americans at War*, 1997), Stephen E. Ambrose comments on the development of the melting pot motif:

Unlike the Civil War, when army units were recruited from a single state, in World War II men in most cases were thrown together willy-nilly—so much so that a war-spawned cliché of film and fiction is the squad made up of the hillbilly from Arkansas, the Jew from Brooklyn, the coal miner from Pennsylvania, the farmer from Ohio, the lumberman from Oregon, the Italian from Chicago, the Pole from Milwaukee, the Cajun from Louisiana. At first they hate each other; training draws them together; combat welds them into a band of brothers; they emerge by the final scene as just plain Americans with a strong sense of nationalism. And the truth is that this happened in life before it happened in art. (177–178)

The melting pot cliché informs popular and influential works like Leon Uris's *Battle Cry* and Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*. It is implicit in such World War I works as *Company K* and Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers*. However, it undergoes uneasy modification and expansion in the later Asian wars by the introduction of African Americans into the mix, as well as Hispanics and Native Americans. Webb's *Fields of Fire* is a case in point. The bonding step of training together vanishes in Vietnam fact and fiction, as men came to Vietnam individually as replacements rather than as part of replacement units that had trained together. And while combat often brings fighting men together as a band of brothers, in the case of Vietnam representation, and to some extent that of the Korean War, the strong sense of nationalism that characterizes the trailing action of World War II writing is rarely present. Often enough, veterans return as isolated, alienated individuals out of phase with anything like a national identity. Their loyalty, if to anything, is to one another.

On the other hand, much of the experience of war remains an individual business, a personal testing and act of becoming. Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* acknowledges the power of the group and fashions metaphors that underscore the merging of individual identities into larger marching and fighting organisms, but his novel is nonetheless primarily about one man's initiation (to borrow a Dos Passos title). Similarly, for all the color and delight in the supporting cast, Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato* is first and foremost Paul Berlin's story.

In fact, the great bulk of war narratives that focus on young men (as they so often and so unfortunately must) are essentially initiation or coming of age stories, and the complex of ways in which a tour of duty turns into a trial of selfhood needs detailed examination, as does the corollary motif of bonding and brotherhood.



Both of these motifs find particularly vivid expression in a major subset of war literature—the prisoner of war story. This kind of tale, which overlaps with nonmilitary narratives of incarceration, provides both a horrific range of particulars and a fascinating microcosm—a laboratory experiment, almost—for the creative imagination. Works like MacKinlay Kantor's *Andersonville*, e. e. cummings's *The Enormous Room*, and Francis Pollini's *Night* demand comparative exploration, in part for what they tell us about the human condition and in part for what we can discover about literary construction and the power latent in the confinement premise.

One version of the prisoner of war story is the narrative, largely interior, of solitary confinement. The circumstance, for all its literal reality, clearly has a dimension of metaphor and reminds readers of how psychological circumstances can (and do) create something like a solitary confinement of the mind. The mood or atmosphere of exile, alienation, or aloneness runs through much war literature. The state of mind is projected into and contained within plots that deal with the lost soldier—the individual who is cut off from or isolated from his unit by the chances of war and by his sole survivorship. Through much of his ordeal, Stephen Crane's Henry Fleming is alone, literally and figuratively lost. Because of its lack of extended action and character interchange, this kind of experience or sensation is more often rendered in short stories and poems than in novels.

The consequences of war—on the individual, on the war-torn country, and even on the culture of the participating nation whose borders remain secure—have generated a body of work that rivals the literary response to combat itself. Aftermath and homecoming stories have their own dimensions and motifs. Stephen Becker's *When the War Is Over*, Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* and "Soldier's Home," and Philip Caputo's *Indian Country* are only a few representative titles in this provocative category, a category of works that need to be sifted against one another for their lessons and their merits of craft and vision. How do Americans put war behind them? Literary artists can help us find out.

Any critique rooted in significant grouping or classification may overlook questions about changing responses through time. Certainly questions about how cultural change affects various genre need further exploration, though several critical studies have made inroads here. We can offer some statements about the poets' responses to war that invite elaboration and correction.

American war poetry has gone through several shifts, reflecting to some extent broad cultural shifts in sensibility. The poetry of the Revolutionary War tends to be anthemic and sentimental. Sometimes narrative, often focused on heroes and events, it is part of the process of national identification. Civil War poetry is more varied in tone. While a good portion of it is mawkish lament or ideologically driven, there are as well image-centered lyrics, like those of Whitman, capable of celebrating the innocent soldier while questioning the necessity of war. Some pieces aspire to popular mythmaking, as does the poetry (and other writings) of the Indian Wars. The little verse that we have from the Spanish-American War is journalistic and jingoistic.

The paradox of war's horror and grandeur begins with Stephen Crane and is a focal point of much World War I poetry. Irony is the grand device of much twentieth-century American War poetry, along with a grim—sometimes gruesome—realism. In part, these traits derive from the fact that we have more participant poetry. Many critics see modernist free verse as largely a response to war—its experiential chaos and the chaos of values that “world war” connotes. The poetry of the Korean and Vietnam Wars is largely an outcry of perceived betrayals, shame, loss, and cynicism. Its techniques are often in the service of undermining complacency and heroic clichés.

In all periods, the poetry that is not primarily narrative tends to fix frozen moments, presenting image snapshots of vivid sensory and emotional material, with or without editorial comment. Sometimes, as in Whitman's “Cavalry Crossing a Ford,” the camera is stopped and a few consecutive frames explored. Often, as in Bruce Weigl's “Song of Napalm,” it is the hideous image lodged in memory that is the fulcrum of the war poem.

Dramatists have had far less to do with the material of war, certainly of combat interludes, than have fiction writers and poets. This fact may have to do with the difficulty of such stage representation. (These very difficulties, of course, have been solved by the conventions and techniques of filmmaking.) Nonetheless, there is a significant body of dramatic literature that attempts to come to terms with the experience of war, thought it often relies on departures, homecomings, and lulls in the action. The problems of dramatizing war—revealed long ago in the selective scene building of the Greek masters and of Shakespeare, the stage convention of single combat, the reports of offstage bloodshed—on occasion bring forth an inspired impressionistic invention. David Rabe's *The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel* is a case in point.

Having said this much, we will say little more by way of preamble to the main business of this volume. We must emphasize, for those who might be looking for a more inclusive selection of historical, biographical, and autobiographical texts, that our dominant concern is with imaginative responses (fiction, poetry, and drama) by American authors to wars in which Americans have participated. By “American authors” we mean here men and women writing in the regions of North America that became known as the United States. We have opened the door to significant literary nonfiction of various kinds, but we have made no attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of historical or theoretical writings. A few are included as they bear in some way on the imaginative literature itself.

The plan of this volume is simple and predictable: We have arranged the entries in a single alphabet by author, interspersing in the same alphabet several topic entries giving overviews on the literature of individual wars, special types of works, and categories of authorship. These topic entries are as follows: African American War Literature, Civil War, Civil War—Women's Diaries, *Corridos*, First World War, Ghost Dance Songs, Indian Captivity Narratives, King

Philip's War, Korean War, Revolutionary War, Revolutionary War—Women's Diaries, Second World War, Spanish-American War, Spanish Civil War, Vietnam War, and Vigilantes. Author entries provide short biographies focused on the subject's involvement in the issues or experience of war, a short critical discussion of the subject's important contributions to war literature, and a brief reference section. If an author or topic entry refers to a writer for whom there is a separate entry, that name appears in boldface to indicate that it is a cross-reference. Following the entries, we have provided a selected bibliography and an index of titles and topics.

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# A

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**ADAMS, JOHN TURVILL (1805–1882).** Born in British Guiana in 1805, Adams migrated to Norwich, Connecticut, where he set up a law practice and began his literary career. Although he later became a state senator, Adams considered his two novels, his brief career as an editor, and his collection of poems to be his primary accomplishments. In particular, his novels are noteworthy for their insightful depiction of colonial New England. The second of these, *The Knight of the Golden Melice*, republished as *The White Chief among the Red Men* (1859), is one of many historical romances dealing with intrigues of the real-life figure Sir Christopher Gardiner in the early settlement of Boston, Massachusetts.

In Adams's depiction, Gardiner, or "Soog-u-Gest," is the spiritual brother of Sassacus, the Pequot Grand Sachem, and a spy for Father Le Vieux, a French Jesuit missionary. Although Gardiner, a British nationalist, believes himself to be working toward the supplanting of fanatical Puritanism by the milder religion of the church of Rome, Le Vieux is actually using him to further the territorial interests of France. Unknown to Gardiner, Le Vieux plans to aggravate relations between the Pequots and their surrounding tribes, thus thwarting the tribal unification that would make trade easier between British colonists and their Indian neighbors. Le Vieux's eventual goal is to eliminate the colonists and open British territory for the use of migrating French Catholics. At the novel's conclusion, Gardiner is exiled from the colony, but the expulsion occurs too late. Chaos has erupted in Governor John Winthrop's Boston, chaos among local tribes, between the British and the French, and among the colonists themselves.

As the novel *The Knight of the Golden Melice* details the adventures of the wily and charismatic Gardiner in a colony ruled by fanatical Puritans and malign magistrates, it also presents the growing conflict between English and French interests in the colonies and the tensions that resulted in the Pequot War.

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Priscilla Glanville

**ADAMS, SAMUEL HOPKINS (1871–1958).** Born in Dunkirk, New York, Adams began writing in the early 1900s. By the time he died at age eighty-seven, this prolific muckraker, biographer, and historian had written more than 500 articles, short stories, and novels. Adams is perhaps best known for a series of muckraker articles he published in *Collier's Magazine* to expose patent medicine quackery. This series is credited with furthering the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act. Adams's novels also reflect muckraking concerns. One of Adams's early novels, *Common Cause: A Novel of the War in America* (1919), depicts the struggle of Jeremy Robson, a patriotic muckraker, at the onset of the First World War.

Robson is a reporter in Fenchester, Centralia, an American town whose elite constituents are German expatriates. Overrun with German sympathizers, corrupt politicians, and pandering newspapermen, Fenchester is thrown into chaos at the onset of the First World War. Robson and his newspaper, *The Guardian*, outrage the community with nationalistic editorials and muckraking exposés on German sympathizers who hide behind pacifist propaganda.

The more successful Robson becomes at exposing the fraudulent politics of the self-proclaimed pacifists, the more the community conspires against him. At one point, a member of Fenchester's pro-German "Deutscher Club" accuses Robson of avoiding military duty. When Robson, whose poor heart kept him from active duty, refuses to stop publishing nationalistic editorials and scathing exposés, he earns for himself the title "mud-slinger," which we know as "muck-raker."

Robson's patriotic zeal and unapologetic muckraking eventually earn the respect of the citizens of Fenchester. As Adams notes, "Men of all types of political belief, of all classes, of all economic and social creeds, abandoned their private feuds and bitterness in a fervor against the common enemy." Through the novel *Common Cause*, Adams demands that politicians and newspapermen who profit from the mechanisms of war not be allowed to create derision among nationalistic American citizens.

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*Priscilla Glanville*

**ADLER, MORTIMER JEROME (1902– ).** Adler was born in New York City. He received his Ph.D. in psychology from Columbia University in 1929. He taught philosophy of law at the University of Chicago from 1930 until 1952, with stints outside academe including serving as an Indoctrination Lecturer for the U.S. Air Transport Command. Known primarily as a popularizer of philosophy and a promulgator of the Great Books Reading Program, Adler is also a

prolific writer, having authored or edited over sixty books and hundreds of articles, the most prominent being *How to Read a Book* (1940). Adler also served as chief editor and organizer of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th edition.

Adler's direct involvement with war literature stems from three pieces of writing. In October 1940, he published in *Harper's Magazine* "This Pre-War Generation," which takes to task the moral relativism and subjectivism Adler sees all around him, as well as beginning to make a case against the isolationist stance espoused by (among others) the influential president of the University of Chicago, Robert Hutchins (also Adler's friend). In 1944, a short article, "Thinking Straight on War and Peace," appeared in *Vogue* (January 15). This is a redaction of a book Adler published later in the year, entitled *How to Think about War and Peace*. In this book, Adler favors U.S. involvement in the war, while he deplores the destruction that all wars bring. The work is a detailed philosophical disquisition on what might lead to a permanent and universal peace once this war is concluded (Adler never doubts that the powers of right and good will prevail). Adler contends that through rigorous thinking on what we mean by the words *war* and *peace*, we will be able to achieve perpetual peace, but only through the establishment of a world government. Truly reasonable and logical human beings should recognize that "membership in the human race should be enough to bring [our] virtues into play and to overcome [our] indifference in the long run" to the establishment of a federated conglomeration of nations, the only means whereby increasingly destructive wars can be avoided.

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*Brian Adler*

**AFRICAN AMERICAN WAR LITERATURE.** In 1770, fugitive slave Crispus Attucks took two bullets in the chest during the Boston Massacre, the first of a series of volatile, often bloody conflicts leading to the American Revolution. While Attucks's active resistance against the British prompted white colonists to roundly hail him as both patriot and hero, blacks found something more in Attucks's display of loyalty to the fledgling American republic—an argument for black citizenship rights. That argument, as compelling as it was, failed; legal enfranchisement would continue to be deferred for nearly a century. Indeed, Paul Revere's famous engraving of the massacre symbolized the long fight that lay ahead for African Americans: Revere depicted the five men slain as white, effectively erasing any sign of Attucks's involvement. Black historian William Nell (1816–1874) would later conclude in *Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (1855), the first book-length treatment of black participation in

American warfare: "A combination of circumstances have veiled from the public eye a narration of those military services which are generally conceded as passports to the honorable and lasting notice of Americans."

Nell's work is, in one sense, a correction of Revere's engraving: The historian "unveils" an altogether different rendition of the American Revolution for the "public eye"—one decidedly inclusive of blacks. However, *Colored Patriots* stands as more than counternarrative. Nell hoped his book—replete with acts of valor, bravery, and heroism equal to those of whites—would serve as a "passport" allowing black Americans entry into the very nation they had faithfully served, undeterred by its continuing refusals. Although a fictionalized treatment of war by an African American would not appear until after the Civil War, thirteen years after Nell's publication, African American war literature as a whole finds its genesis in Nell's endeavor. With few exceptions, war becomes a site upon which black writers contest exclusionary historical narratives, battle notions of racial inferiority, and fight for their rights as American citizens. War, at home or abroad, serves as a trope for the "wars" for equality blacks continued to wage within the borders of their own nation.

In 1868, Frances Harper's first Civil War novel, *Minnie's Sacrifice*, appeared in serialized form in *The Christian Recorder*. A prominent nineteenth-century poet, activist, and feminist, Harper (1825–1911) turned to the novel to create idealized portraits of "live" black men and "earnest, lovely" women who could serve as models for African Americans struggling with their newly found status as freed people. Heavily influenced by conventions of sentimental women's fiction, *Minnie's Sacrifice* is essentially a melodramatic romance of passing: the tale of Minnie, a mulatta heroine, and Louis, a mulatto hero, whose black ancestral roots have been hidden from them by friends and relatives who wish to spare the two from slavery. Upon discovering the truth of their identities, they decide to "suffer" with their "own branch of the human race," marry, and join the war efforts as "pioneers of a new civilization." Harper's second war novel, *Iola Leroy* (1892), revises and expands upon the plot of the earlier work. The heroine, Iola, becomes reduced to slavery when her blackness is revealed; she, too, joins the war—as a nurse—and marries a "black" man as white as she. Despite these points of convergence, Harper's shifting attitudes toward the Civil War make these two works decidedly distinct from one another, a distinction due, no doubt, to the era in which *Iola Leroy* was published. Historians have dubbed the 1890s the "Black Nadir," a decade marked by lynch law, Jim Crow, poll taxes, and numerous other tactics threatening advances blacks had gained since Emancipation. Thus, while both novels flout their protagonists' patriotism, noble characteristics, and "whiteness" as evidence of blacks' readiness for citizenship, the increasingly urgent tone Harper adopts in *Leroy* attests to the author's growing doubt that the nation would make good on the promises made during wartime.

*The Fanatics* (1902), by **Paul Laurence Dunbar**, has little in common with Harper's works. Aside from "Nigger Ed," the town bell-ringer, the main char-



acters in Dunbar's fictional community of Dorbury are white, and to Dunbar, this means they view blacks as merely pawns in an elaborate, destructive game of war. Dunbar drives this point home by emphasizing the negligible change in "Nigger Ed's" status after the war.

Though blacks undoubtedly produced many first-person Civil War narratives, only two major works have been recovered: Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes, or Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* (1868) and Susie King Taylor's *A Black Woman's Civil War Memoirs* (1902). Keckley (1818–1907) devotes less than one third of her fascinating postbellum autobiography to her life in bondage and instead focuses on the four years she spent serving the White House as Mary Todd Lincoln's modiste, the years of the Civil War. Writing out of dire financial necessity (aiding Mrs. Lincoln after the assassination rendered her penniless), Keckley fully exploits the most private details of the Lincolns' lives; in those details, however, lie invaluable insights into the president's frame of mind during the war. Regrettably, Keckley's own thoughts about the events engulfing the nation are far too brief—her only son's enlistment in the Union army and death in battle are mentioned in two short sentences, buried in pages describing the Lincolns' loss of their son Will.

Susie King Taylor's *Memoirs* might help elucidate what army life held for men like Keckley's son. Taylor (1848–1912), a laundress and soldier-teacher with the 1st South Carolina Volunteers, begins her slim volume with a preface written by **Thomas Wentworth Higginson** (*Army Life in a Black Regiment*), who lauds her contributions to the troops he commanded and welcomes her unique point of view. "Actual military life is rarely described by a woman," he writes, adding that her perspective is "wholly different" from his. In *Memoirs*, Taylor strives to minimize that difference, portraying herself as a woman fit to be a soldier. She boasts, for instance, of her ability to clean and shoot a rifle: hardly "feminine" behavior. Though the book is primarily autobiographical, Taylor offers frank analysis of the difficulties black men and their white commanders faced in an army still questioning the decision to engage African American troops.

Toward the end of *Memoirs*, Taylor also remarks on America's negative depictions of black Cubans during the Spanish-American Wars. Indeed, at the turn of the century, black newspapers and periodicals rippled with debates over the issue of imperialism. The wars divided blacks into two major camps: those who believed that the United States should be supported in their efforts to "democratize" and "civilize" Cuba and the Philippines, and those who felt that American imperialism amounted to little more than a disguised form of racial subjugation. **Theodore Roosevelt's** conflicting accounts of the role black troops played in the famed battle of San Juan Hill complicated matters even further, first praising their performance immediately after the war, then later condemning them as "peculiarly dependent."

F. Grant Gilmore's Spanish-American War novel *The Problem: A Military Novel* (1915) seeks to restore full glory to the troops' tarnished image. To ac-