

The War Theme in the European Literature

Sahariar Alam Shawon

Junior Researcher, Graduate in English Literature and Language Teaching, Department of English,
Hamdard University Bangladesh, Gazaria, Bangladesh

sahariaralambd@gmail.com

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v6i4.1873>

APA Citation: Shawon, A. S. (2024). The War Theme in the European Literature. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*. 6(4).1-15. <http://doi.org/10.36892/ijlls.v6i4.1873>

Received:

14/09/2024

Accepted:

29/10/2024

Keywords:

Literature, War,
Poetic
Revolution,
Communalism,
Modernism,
Brutality, Loss
and Grief,
Patriotism,
Social upheaval.

Abstract

This research paper investigates the profound impact of war on European literary traditions, focusing on key events for example World War I, World War II, and the Spanish Civil War. Through a qualitative analysis of sensational novels and poems, the paper explores the representation of war's brutality, trauma, and societal effusions. The study portrait into *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque, *In Flanders Fields* by John McCrae, and *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot discusses the portrayal of World War One. For World War Two, works such as *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank and *Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night* by Dylan Thomas are analyzed, while *For Whom the Bell Tolls* by Ernest Hemingway is explored within the context of the Spanish Civil War. These works explore key themes such as disillusionment, loss, resilience, and patriotism, and critically examining of political and social structures. The paper emphasizes how literature serves as a mirror for the emotional and psychological toll war takes on both individuals and society, shaping our collective memory of war's aftermath. The study concludes that war literature not only captures the human experience during conflict but also provides enduring perspectives on the wider social and political changes that war brings.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Literature and war have a complex and multifaceted relationship, with each impacting and being told by the other in colourful ways. War can also shape literature itself. Writers who have endured war firsthand frequently draw upon their experiences in their writing, whether through direct retellings of their stories or by using war as a conceit for broader themes and issues. In times of war, literature plays a crucial role in conveying the deeds of soldiers and civilians to the world. War novels, biographies, and poetry provide insights into the physical and emotional realities of conflict, encompassing the brutality of combat and the effects of loss and trauma. Furthermore, literature often serves as a tool for propaganda during wartime, aiming to endorse specific narratives or influence public perception. Throughout history, governments and military organizations have leveraged literary works to garner support for their agendas and vilify their opponents.

1.2. Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to exhibit an unusual view of war in the European literature.

The War Theme in the European Literature

War can be defined in other ways too. This research will help people to see war differently. The sole purpose of this research is to exhibit the war theme in European literature.

1.3. Research Questions

1. How does European literature represent and explore the effects of war on individuals and society?
2. How does the writer respond to the political, social, and cultural upheavals caused by war?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section is going to exhibit the war theme of European literature encompasses a rich and diverse range of literary traditions, styles, and themes across various countries and periods. The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of some key works, movements, and authors in European literature, highlighting their significance and current state of knowledge on a specific subject, identify gaps, controversies, and trends in the existing research, and establish the context for the research that conducted by the researcher.

2.1. Plot of World War One in European Literature Novels and Poems

World War One had a major impact on European literature, inspiring the creation of numerous great novels and poems that portrayed the war's experiences, emotions, and consequences. During the First World War, literature showcased various perspectives, including Rupert Brooke's patriotic '1914' sonnet sequence, which portrayed military service and death as noble and purifying. Many British soldiers carried copies of Brooke's poems with them during training. However, after years of devastating losses, poets like Wilfred Owen's gloomy 1917 "Anthem for Doomed Youth" and Siegfried Sassoon's 1918 piece "Counter-Attack" began to depict the hard reality of soldiers' experiences. These pieces depicted the battlefield as a place rotten with dead, with corpses facing downwards in the mud. The literature of the time was often concerned with the disappointment, trauma, and sense of futility that defined the conflict. This period's writing not only served as a strong form of artistic expression, but it also functioned as a lasting monument to the enormous changes and human suffering brought about by the war. World War One played a significant role in the formation of the "Lost Generation". A collection of authors and artists, many of them were ex-patriots who lived in Paris and were among the best writers America ever produced, including Hemingway, the Fitzgeralds, and Gertrude Stein. They felt "lost," partly because they had gone so far from home, but perhaps more because, while the Allies had won World War One, it had been a sad event that had done nothing except lay the stage for World War Two. There is undoubtedly a big impact on one of Hemingway's most famous writings, "A Farewell to Arms," as well as his subsequent book, "For Whom the Bell Tolls." Novelists and poets alike responded to the conflict by writing works that reflected on the war's underlying consequences and impacts on men and women. Hemingway described himself as a "manly man" who enjoyed the macho characteristics of battle while also seeing its devastating consequences. Propaganda posters frequently persuaded men to join the British Army by appealing to masculinity, heroism, pride, and loyalty principles. These extensively distributed posters depended on a viewer's positive reaction to images of healthy, brave warriors or British national symbols. A propaganda poster encourages its audience to identify with what is represented, which is frequently about political, gender,

and/or social identity. Propagandists sometimes hide more realistic parts of battle or service to make such an appeal. World War One would also have a tremendous impact on a writer who would go on to become extremely famous: J.R.R. Tolkien, who had personally lost several close school friends to the "Great War." As Tolkien himself acknowledged in his writings, the reality of such a lethal conflict influenced the more graphic depictions of warfare in Middle Earth. These writers contended that men and women had gotten estranged from the concepts of honor and grandeur that had propelled previous generations.

2.1.1. Plot of *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque in WWI

The novel's premise follows Paul and his companions as they face the harsh reality of fighting in the trenches on the Western Front. The tale depicts the constant danger of death and the harsh circumstances in the trenches, demonstrating the physical and mental toll on troops. They face adversity, see the deaths of friends, and live in continual terror and anguish. Amid the crisis of war, Paul and his fellow soldiers seek meaning by arguing against authority figures and military propaganda. They are also dealing with the loss of their pre-war ambitions as well as their separation from civilian life. The noble delves into the intimate bonds that soldiers create, notably with Kaczinsky as a mentor and father figure. As the war progresses, they experience chemical attacks, trench warfare, and close-quarter fighting, as well as comparable foes, provoking contemplation on the futility of the battle. This story builds with a devastating finish as Paul deals with mourning, including Kat's death, and the gloomy reality around him. Finally, Paul is killed in combat, sending a chilling message that violence erases the youth and humanity of those participating.

2.1.2. Plot of *In Flanders Fields* by John McCrae in WWI

The poem reflects on the tremendous impact of the war and the death of warriors on the battlefields of Flanders, an area in Belgium that saw some of the deadliest conflicts of the war. The poem is a heartfelt and moving homage to those who died in the conflict. The poem opens with a vision of flowers blossoming among the graves of dead soldiers, reflecting both nature's tenacity and the soldiers' sacrifice. It then addresses the living, imploring them to pick up the torch and carry on the fight for which their companions died. The final line of the poem expresses a feeling of obligation and remembering, underlining that the greatest way to memorialize the dead is to continue the battle for freedom and justice. "In Flanders Fields" has become a lasting emblem of remembering for military personnel and a reminder of the human cost of war. The poem is frequently performed at memorial ceremonies and on Remembering Day in numerous countries, and poppies have become a common representation of remembering.

2.1.3. Plot of "*The Waste Land*" by T.S. Eliot in WWI

Eliot employs a wide range of references, from ancient mythology to modern literature and languages, to create a rich and demanding poetic environment. The poem is frequently seen as a reflection of conventional values disintegrating and a yearning for purpose and order in a chaotic and fractured world. There are five sections in the poem: "The Burial of the Dead," "A Game of Chess," "The Fire Sermon," "Death by Water," and "What the Thunder Said."

"The Burial of the Dead": This portion opens with a depressing depiction of a desolate and lifeless environment that represents a decaying planet. The speaker laments modern people's incapacity to connect effectively and meaningfully.

The War Theme in the European Literature

"A Game of Chess": This portion is based on the narrative of the adulterous Queen Dido from Virgil's "Aeneid." It examines themes of sexual desire, jealousy, and betrayal in a modern environment, emphasizing the superficial and destructive characteristics of human relationships.

"The Fire Sermon": dives on the issue of desire, portraying a society devoured by lust, greed, and moral rot. It makes references to mythical and theological characters such as Tiresias, Tammuz, and Buddha to underline the lack of spiritual guidance in the modern world.

"Death by Water": is a brief and meditative segment that addresses themes of death and metamorphosis. It tells the story of a sinking sailor and muses on the fleeting nature of life.

"What the Thunder Said": The concluding portion provides a ray of hope and salvation. It incorporates religious and mythical aspects, implying the prospect of regeneration and rebirth, yet it remains cryptic and subject to interpretation.

2.2. Plot of World War Two in European Literature Novels and Poems

World War Two had a significant influence on European writing, and it is a recurring topic in numerous works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and memoirs. The war as well as its aftermath provided ideal ground for authors to investigate the human condition amid a period of enormous change, sorrow, and perseverance. Many writers were compelled to escape their native nations during the war owing to political persecution or the destruction of their homes. The exodus of European authors, notably to the United States, inspired literary style and idea cross-pollination. We heard stories of bravery, self-belief, and hope in the face of adversity. In literature, "Modernism" or "Postmodernism" were divided by the interwar period. Literature has reached a new level of maturity and diversity. Following World War II, a new generation came, each with its own ethnic, regional, and social characteristics. Among the younger authors were children of immigrants, many of whom were Jews only a few generations removed from enslavement and, later, women, who would speak in a new voice with the emergence of feminism. Even though the postwar social atmosphere was conservative, if not conformist, some of the most fiercely debated writers were gays or bisexuals. There was also a desire to reestablish national status and regard, which was evident in the works. Poetry in the postwar period followed a variety of interconnected courses, most notably those emerging from surrealism or philosophical and phenomenological issues stemming from existentialism, the relationship between poetry and the visual arts, and ideas about the boundaries of language. To represent the turmoil and dislocation of the period, several writers are experimenting with novel forms and storytelling strategies.

2.2.1. Plot of "The Diary of a Young Girl" by Anne Frank in WWII

During the Second World War, the author wrote about her experiences escaping from the Nazis. Anne got a diary as a 13th birthday gift on June 1942, just a few weeks before her family fled to Amsterdam to avoid Nazi persecution of Jews. Anne's work offers a unique and intimate viewpoint on the Holocaust and the tragedies of the time. Her journal is not only a monument to her strength and the indomitable human spirit, but it also acts as a historical artifact that sheds on Jewish experiences throughout the Holocaust. Anne Frank and her sister Margot were finally found by the Nazis in August 1944 and transported to concentration camps. Anne perished at the Bergen-Belsen detention camp in early 1945, only weeks before the camp had been liberated with the forces of the Allies. Her father, Otto Frank, was the only member of the family to survive during the conflict, and following the war, he published Anne's journal,

realizing her childhood ambition of becoming a writer. "The Diary of a Young Girl" has subsequently been translated into various languages and has become one of the most extensively read and studied novels in the world, providing essential insights into the human experience during one of history's worst moments.

2.2.2. Plot of "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas in WWII

The poem is a villanelle, a highly organized poetry form of 19 lines that follow a specified rhyme pattern. In the poem, the speaker encourages his father to battle death rather than accept it meekly. He also encourages individuals from all walks of life to reject the inevitability of death and to live their lives with passion and energy till the end. The poem examines various mindsets towards death, with the speaker praising those who "rage, rage against the dying of the light." The repetition "Do not go gentle into that good night" emphasizes the poem's major topic of resisting death with force and tenacity. Overall, the poem is a plea to live life to the fullest and to oppose submission to death's inevitability. The poem's emotional power and timeless message during the Second World War made it a celebrated work in English literature.

2.3. Plot of Spanish Civil War in European literature

The Spanish Civil War, which lasted from 1936 to 1939, had a significant impact on European literature. Spanish author Ernest Hemingway wrote about the war from personal experiences or observations. Foreign correspondents, such as George Orwell and John Dos Passos, travelled to Spain to report on the conflict, often published in newspapers, magazines, or books. Poets from around the world wrote about the conflict and its human cost! Literature as propaganda was also used by writers aligned with political ideologies, such as Adolf Hitler's "The Crusade in Europe" and Franz Borkenau's "The Spanish Cockpit." Witness literature focused on the experiences of civilians caught in the crossfire of war, providing harrowing depictions of suffering and survival. The Spanish Civil War left a lasting imprint on European literature, influencing subsequent generations of writers and shaping their understanding of war, politics, and human nature. The themes of ideology, resistance, and sacrifice continue to resonate in literature today. Overall, the Spanish Civil War remains a pivotal moment in European history, reflecting the complexities and tragedies of the conflict.

2.3.1. Plot of "For Whom the Bell Tolls" by Ernest Hemingway in Spanish Civil War

"For Whom the Bell Tolls" by Ernest Hemingway explores the theme of war, which is closely tied to European literature the Spanish Civil War and World War II, highlighting the author's ability to effectively convey historical events. The plot follows Robert Jordan, an American dynamite fighting on behalf of the Loyalists, a faction that opposes fascist troops. Jordan's job is to blow up a bridge behind enemy lines, and the story analyzes his experiences, the characters he meets, and the moral and ethical challenges he faces along the way. "For Whom the Bell Tolls" is a novel written by Ernest Hemingway about an American volunteer during the Spanish Civil War who is entrusted with blowing up a critical bridge to help anti-fascist troops. Jordan becomes firmly involved with the guerrilla group and falls in affection for Maria, a Spanish lady. Jordan must negotiate interpersonal issues, political views, and war hardships as tensions increase. The title is a pun on John Donne's remark, "Any man's death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." The moral ambiguity of war mirrors the moral complexity of real-life conflicts. Despite the horrors of war, the novel emphasizes humanity and solidarity, reflecting the humanistic values found in European literature.

2.4. Plot of Poetic Revolution

World War One had a tremendous impact on the world, and it had a huge impact on poetry and literature both during and after the conflict. In the context of the First World War, this period is usually known as the "Poetic Revolution." Here is an overview of the essential components of the Poetic Movement during World War One:

Rejection of customary Themes: Many poets of the period rejected the customary themes of battle and heroism that had been predominant in earlier war poetry. Instead, they emphasized the brutal reality of contemporary combat, the futility of the battle, and the profound psychological and emotional toll it exacted on individuals.

New Poetry Forms: During World War One, poets experimented with new poetry forms and approaches to portray their feelings. These innovations included free poetry, broken tales, and unorthodox rhyme systems. The form of the poems frequently resembled the confusion and chaos of conflict.

Impact on Modernism: The Poetic Revolution of World War I had a tremendous impact on the modernist movement in literature. It paved the door for new literary expressions of human emotions and lived experiences.

Trench Poetry: During World War One, the trenches provided fertile ground for a new type of poetry. Soldiers who lived through the horrors of trench warfare frequently created poetry that described the bleak and frightening situations they faced. These poems gave a personal description of the war's atrocities.

In the context of World War Two literature is not a commonly recognized or established word or idea. However, it is possible to investigate the importance of poetry and literature during World War II, as well as the cultural and creative transformations that happened throughout the conflict. Poetry and literature played an important part in communicating the experiences, feelings, and perspectives of individuals and cultures touched by the conflict. Here's a possible plot or narrative based on the notion of a poetic revolution in World War Two:

Poetry as a Response to War: As the battle progresses, the poets reply with lyrics that reflect dread, fury, patriotism, and optimism. Investigate the works of poets such as W. H. Auden, Langston Hughes, Anna Akhmatova, and others from many nations, demonstrating the wide spectrum of responses to the war.

Setting the Stage: The poem and novels open with a global overview of the years building into World War Two, showing political tensions, the growth of totalitarian governments, and the approaching battle. Introduce the primary characters: poets and writers from around the world who will play important parts in the "poetic revolution."

Legacy and Impact: Conclusion of the story by reflecting on the poets' and their works' long-term influence on postwar society. Investigate how World War II impacted the world of literature and poetry, resulting in new forms of expression and creative movement.

In the 1930s we saw a significant period of literary/political interaction, particularly during the Spanish Civil War. The war in Spain heightened the political involvement of writers but also contributed to its destruction. The British people were experiencing a period of intense revulsion from war, with the hope that the League of Nations would resolve disputes. This study aims to investigate the political ideas of British writers before, during, and after the Spanish Civil War, focusing on young, politically aware poets, novelists, dramatists, and critics. The study aims to demonstrate the interdependence of politics and literature in the Thirties and the importance of literary figures in political movements. The study aims to show

that writers became important and influential on the eve of a crisis, but their experience of their impotence during the war led them to become politically indifferent.

2.5. World War theme in European Literature

World wars have a massive influence on civilization. This influence spawned a new approach to art, literature, philosophy, and religion. In terms of literature, it gave rise to a brand-new war genre. As a consequence, the wars had a significant influence on the genre and style of novels that were published. The majority of what was published back then was about the war and its aftermath. The experience of war disappointed authors, and although they did not write explicitly about the war, their literature displays an anti-authoritarianism derived from their experiences. From the beginning of World War One to the end of World War Two, literature evolved into what it is today. It shifted people's perspectives, authors' themes and literary approaches shifted, and readers' tastes and expectations shifted. It has had several notable impacts on American literature. T.S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land," for example, which he likened to post-war Europe, communicated pain about life through a variety of historical, theological, and literary connections. Eliot observed the social upheaval and revolution that accompanied World War One. The modernist movement strongly inspired his work, and his works became the most eloquent exposition of the modern mind's worldview. In his poem The Waste Land, Eliot emphasizes that the Fire Sermon is equivalent to the Sermon on the Mount in significance. After the Second World War, the globe became smaller and quicker with fewer scientific and geographical wonders and, ironically, less time to enjoy them. It was said that literature was superior in the pre-war time; yet, literature in the past was not available to as many people as it is today. After all, each epoch has its literary preferences.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, "The war theme in the European literature" is the topic. This topic refers to literature. So, to accomplish all the requirements, the researcher chose to acquire the qualitative method for the research.

3.1. Qualitative Method

Qualitative research is a scientific method of observation to gather non-numerical data. This type of research refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things. Qualitative research is a methodological technique used to investigate and comprehend in detail individuals' experiences, viewpoints, and societal phenomena. In contrast to quantitative research, which is concerned with numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research is concerned with non-numerical data such as words, narratives, and observations. Qualitative research is adaptable and allows researchers to delve deeply into complicated phenomena, yielding rich and culturally integrated insights. It is commonly utilized to discover the intricacies of human behaviour and experiences in domains like as anthropology, sociology, psychology, education, and health sciences.

3.2. Sample

As the researcher selected the "Qualitative Method" for the research, he had to go through

The War Theme in the European Literature

various kinds of literature during the First and Second World Wars. There is a large amount of literature on the selected periods. So, the researcher mainly conducted three novels and three poems that were written during the First and Second World Wars including Spanish Civil War plots. These are: *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Novel by Erich Maria Remarque), *In Flanders Fields* (Poem by John McCrae), *The Waste Land* (Poem by T.S. Eliot), *The Diary of a Young Girl* (Novel by Anne Frank), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Novel by Ernest Hemingway), *Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night* (Poem by Dylan Thomas).

3.3.Sampling

The researcher used non-probability Convenience Sampling so that the samples could serve the main purpose of the research. Convenience sampling is a common approach in the field of literature research, especially in qualitative studies or when the researcher faces practical constraints. In literature-related research, convenience sampling may be employed for various reasons, each with its own set of advantages and limitations.

3.4.Limitations

First of all, the researcher was dealing with only three novels and three poems. So, there were some gaps in data analysis. Besides, the resources are also limited.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section tends to find the research questions. The researcher selected three novels and poems to dig out the war theme in European Literature:

All Quiet on the Western Front (Novel by Erich Maria Remarque), *In Flanders Fields* (Poem by John McCrae), *The Waste Land* (Poem by T.S. Eliot), *The Diary of a Young Girl* (Novel by Anne Frank), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Novel by Ernest Hemingway), *Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night* (Poem by Dylan Thomas). He focuses on the impacts of the First and Second World Wars on European Literature and their consequences. Answers to the research questions are given below.

4.1.Research question No.1

- How does European literature represent and explore the effects of war on individuals and society?

Exploring the effects of war on individuals and society is a complex and multifaceted task that requires a nuanced understanding of the cultural, historical, and literary context. European literature, with its rich and diverse tradition, offers a wealth of perspectives on the impact of war. From the classical works of Homer to the contemporary novels of the 21st century, European literature has continually grappled with the human experience of conflict. In this discussion, we will examine how European literature represents and explores the effects of war on individuals and society, drawing on examples from various periods and genres. The representation and exploration of the impacts of war on individuals and society in European literature has a long heritage. Different historical periods and authors tackle this issue in different ways, reflecting Europe's varying historical situations and views. Here are some

prevalent themes and approaches to war's impacts found throughout European literature. War has been a recurrent theme in European literature, serving as a backdrop for exploring the depths of human nature, the consequences of violence, and the resilience of the human spirit. Whether through epic poems, novels, or plays, European authors have depicted the physical, emotional, and psychological toll of war on individuals and communities. To comprehend the portrayal of war in European literature, it is critical to study the historical environment in which these works were created. The two World Wars of the twentieth century, in particular, had a tremendous influence on the continent, altering the collective consciousness of its people. European literature has been a significant tool in capturing the profound effects of war, particularly during World War I and II. European writers have explored the psychological trauma experienced by those affected by war, such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Erich Maria Remarque respectively. War has also been portrayed as a catalyst for the loss of innocence and the shattering of idealism, as seen in the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway.

European writers have also critiqued political authority and nationalism, questioning the motives behind war and its impact on society. Examples include George Orwell's "Homage to Catalonia" and Erich Maria Remarque's "All Quiet on the Western Front." Cultural and social transformation is also a significant theme in European literature, with writers often depicting the upheaval in societal structures, gender roles, and class dynamics as a result of war. Humanism and solidarity are also prominent themes, with writers like Albert Camus' "The Plague" and Irène Némirovsky's "Suite Française" highlighting the resilience of the human spirit in the face of war. Post-World War II literature, influenced by existentialist philosophy, grapples with the absurdity of human existence in the aftermath of war, with writers like Samuel Beckett and Albert Camus exploring themes of meaninglessness, alienation, and the search for purpose. Writers such as Erich Maria Remarque, who wrote "All Quiet on the Western Front," conveyed the disillusionment and agony suffered by troops during World War One. The destruction and instability of World War II, as shown in Anne Frank's diary or Primo Levi's "If This Is a Man," examined the dehumanizing impacts of battle further.

Trauma and Psychological Impact: Many works of European literature explore the psychological impact of war on individuals. The pain, stress, and emotional scars inflicted on troops and civilians alike are frequently explored by authors. Works such as Erich Maria Remarque's "All Quiet on the Western Front" (1929), which shows the psychological toll of World War I on German troops, are examples. "All Quiet on the Western Front" is a classic novel that provides a brutally honest portrayal of the experiences of German soldiers during World War I. It highlights the trauma, alienation, and loss faced by the younger generation. Exploration of psychological damage caused by war is a frequent topic in European literature. Virginia Woolf's writings, notably "Mrs. Dalloway," dig into the psychological repercussions of World War I, presenting individuals coping with the consequences of shell shock and the broken illusions of prewar aspirations.

Disillusionment and the Lost Generation

Following World War One, there was a prevalent sense of despair and loss throughout European literature. The terrible events of World War I loomed large over the interwar period. The Treaty of Versailles' unsolved difficulties and severe circumstances fostered discontent and prepared the foundation for the establishment of totalitarian governments, laying the basis

The War Theme in the European Literature

for World War Two. Writers frequently depicted the generation that grew up during or after the war as having lost trust in conventional values and institutions. The phrase "Lost Generation" was coined by American writer Gertrude Stein and later adopted by Ernest Hemingway in his novel "The Sun Also Rises" (1926) to characterize the post-World War One generation.

Political Criticism

Some European authors utilize their writings to criticize the political reasons and repercussions of war. "In Flanders Fields" by John McCrae (1915) is one example that tackles the dystopian effects of unending conflict and authoritarianism.

First World War (1914-1918):

Anti-War Movements: Many individuals and groups opposed the war from the outset, considering it senseless and driven by imperialistic motives. Socialists, pacifists, and conscientious objectors were prominent critics, arguing for diplomatic solutions and condemning the war as a capitalist endeavor.

Government Repression: Governments, particularly in countries like the United Kingdom and the United States, suppressed anti-war sentiments through measures like censorship and arrests under wartime legislation.

Russian Revolution: The war contributed to the collapse of the Russian Empire, leading to the 1917 Russian Revolution. The Bolsheviks, who came to power, criticized imperialist wars and advocated for peace.

Second World War (1939-1945):

Versailles Treaty Criticism: The harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I were seen as a contributing factor to the rise of Adolf Hitler and the outbreak of World War II. Critics argued that the treaty's punitive measures fueled resentment in Germany.

Appeasement Policy: Critics, both during and after the war, questioned the policy of appeasement pursued by Western powers in the 1930s, and we can see the *Spanish Civil War* started right after the Western powers stepped into Europe. Also, they were suggesting that it emboldened Nazi Germany and allowed the aggressive expansion that led to the war.

Internment and Civil Liberties: In countries like the United States, the internment of Japanese-Americans and the infringement of civil liberties in the name of national security were criticized. The forced relocation and internment were later acknowledged as unjust and driven by wartime hysteria.

Soviet Union Criticism: While the Soviet Union was an ally against Nazi Germany, criticism emerged over Joseph Stalin's policies, including the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Hitler and the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe at the war's end.

Holocaust and War Crimes: The revelation of the Holocaust and other war crimes committed by Axis powers prompted widespread condemnation. The Nuremberg Trials sought to hold Nazi leaders accountable for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Post-War Settlement Criticism: The post-war settlement, including the division of Germany and the beginning of the Cold War, sparked criticism. Disagreements over the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences and the emerging bipolar world order led to ongoing political tensions.

Political criticism during these wars reflected the complexity of geopolitical events and the moral questions surrounding them, from opposition to the wars themselves to critiques of specific policies and actions taken by the major powers involved.

Social Change and Disruption: Wars frequently result in enormous social changes, and

European literature reflects this by depicting the disruption of societal conventions, values, and institutions during and after hostilities. This issue is obvious in works such as T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," which examines the impact of World War Two on European society. Women played an important role in the war effort, taking on tasks normally occupied by men. Women, like in the First World War, had an important part in the workforce, working in factories and offices. The conflict pushed back against established gender norms, contributing to the postwar feminist movement. This aided the suffrage campaign, which resulted in women getting the right to vote in many nations following the war. The conflict caused economic turmoil, with several countries enduring financial difficulties. This economic insecurity fueled social unrest and political turmoil.

Compassion and Humanism: Some European authors stress war's humanistic components, emphasizing sympathy and the fight for empathy amid violence and suffering. Anne Frank's "The Diary of Anne Frank" is a heartbreaking example, presenting a personal description of the human experience throughout the Holocaust.

Patriotism and national identity: War frequently calls into question national identity and patriotism. As shown in works such as Ernest Hemingway's "For Whom the Bell Tolls" (1940), which examines the influence of the Spanish Wars on society, European literature addresses the conflict between individual experiences and national allegiances.

Displacement & Emigration: Displacement and exile are common consequences of war, and literature depicts the sufferings of people or communities compelled to flee their homes. This issue is shown in the works of authors such as W.G. Sebald, who frequently dealt with the aftermath of World War II and its impact on displaced communities.

Morality and humanity: War frequently calls into question the essence of humanity and morality. Authors may delve into the ethical quandaries that people confront during combat, such as the decision between survival and moral integrity.

The consequences of war crimes, the dehumanization of the adversary, and the blurred borders between good and evil in times of warfare have all been addressed in European literature.

Post-War Reconstruction: Both post-World War One and post-World War Two rebuilding programs tried to restore broken economies, develop international institutions to prevent future hostilities, and address the political and social upheavals brought about by the wars. The Marshall Plan, in particular, had a critical role in the postwar recovery of Western Europe, aiding economic stability and avoiding the rise of communism. Works set in the aftermath of conflicts frequently address the difficulties of rebuilding and reconstruction. "The Tin Drum" (1959) by Günter Grass deals with the post-World War Two period in Germany and the difficulty of recreating a broken society. The war had caused significant economic disruptions, including hyperinflation in Germany and economic downturns in other European countries. Reconstruction efforts focused on stabilizing economies and restoring trade. The war led to social changes, including the expansion of women's rights and changes in traditional societal structures. However, the trauma of the war and economic difficulties also contributed to social unrest in some regions.

Overall, European literature explores the repercussions of war in a multifaceted and diverse manner, bringing insights into both individual and communal experiences, as well as the wider societal and political ramifications of armed conflict. These works' themes and views help to a

The War Theme in the European Literature

better understanding of the human condition during times of conflict. Both wars left a lasting impact on societies worldwide, shaping the course of history and influencing social, political, and economic structures for decades to come. The scars of war, along with the lessons learned, continue to resonate in the collective memory of nations and individuals.

4.2. Research Question No.2:

- How does the writer respond to the political, social, and cultural upheavals caused by war?

The writer's reactions to the political, social, and cultural changes generated by war are complex and diverse phenomena that differ across historical and cultural settings. Warfare has had significant and far-reaching repercussions on cultures throughout history, leaving lasting traces on the collective mind. As chroniclers and interpreters of human experience, writers have frequently wrestled with the problems and complexity provided by war, using their art to reflect, analyze, and make sense of the world in its aftermath. In responding to the political, social, and cultural upheavals caused by the First and Second World Wars, writers played a crucial role in shaping the narrative of the 20th century. Through a diversity of voices and styles, they grappled with the complexities of a world in flux, offering insights into the human condition and the collective psyche. Whether through dystopian visions, explorations of identity, or calls for social justice, writers contributed to a rich tapestry of literature that continues to resonate with readers today. In doing so, they not only documented history but also actively participated in the ongoing dialogue about the nature of humanity and the possibilities for a better future. Responding to the political, social, and cultural upheavals caused by the First and Second World Wars is a complex task that requires a nuanced examination of how writers across the globe grappled with the profound transformations of the 20th century. War is a complex and multifaceted subject that writers grapple with in their works. They often express strong anti-war sentiments, critiquing the political decisions that led to war and depicting the human suffering caused by conflict. This sentiment is evident in both poetry and prose, as they depict the trauma and futility of war. Writers also explore the psychological effects of war, such as PTSD and survivor's guilt, to humanize the individuals affected by war. They also critique social and cultural norms that contributed to the outbreak of war, questioning nationalism and advocating for social change. Wartime experiences often prompt writers to reflect on their personal and collective identities, questioning the construction of national identities and the complexities of patriotism. War also inspires writers to experiment with literary forms and techniques, such as modernist literature, which uses unconventional narrative structures and symbolism to convey the fractured nature of the world. Lastly, some writers emphasize the shared humanity of individuals on all sides, fostering empathy and understanding, aiming to promote peace and reconciliation. The impact of these wars was felt on a global scale, influencing not only political structures but also reshaping societies and cultures. In this exploration, we will delve into how writers responded to these upheavals, drawing on examples from various regions and literary traditions.

I. Political Upheavals: The aftermath of the World Wars saw significant shifts in political landscapes. The collapse of empires, the rise of new nations, and the emergence of superpowers had profound implications for writers. Many responded by engaging with political ideologies,

critiquing existing systems, and envisioning alternative futures.

- **Dystopian Literature:** Writers like George Orwell, influenced by the political turmoil of the mid-20th century, responded with works that explored dystopian futures. Orwell's "1984" is a classic example, offering a chilling portrayal of a totalitarian regime and serving as a cautionary tale against the abuse of power.
- **Existentialism:** In the post-war period, existentialist thought emerged as a response to the absurdity of war and the fragility of human existence. Writers like Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre grappled with the meaning of life in a world marked by political instability. Camus's "The Stranger" and Sartre's "Nausea" are notable works embodying existentialist themes.

II. Social Transformations: The social fabric underwent profound changes during and after the World Wars. The impact on individuals, families, and communities was immense, and writers sought to capture these transformations in their works.

- **Women's Voices:** The wars challenged traditional gender roles as women took on new responsibilities in the absence of men. Female writers, such as Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir, responded by exploring the evolving status of women. Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway" and de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" interrogate societal expectations and gender norms.
- **Post-Colonial Perspectives:** The upheavals of the wars accelerated the dismantling of colonial empires. Writers from colonized regions, like Chinua Achebe and Frantz Fanon, responded by articulating post-colonial perspectives. Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" reflects on the impact of colonialism on African societies, while Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth" examines the psychological consequences of colonization.

III. Cultural Resilience and Innovation: Amidst the chaos, writers also sought to preserve and redefine cultural identity. The wars prompted a reevaluation of artistic expression, leading to the emergence of new literary movements and forms.

- **Magical Realism:** In Latin America, the post-war period saw the rise of magical realism as a literary device. Writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Isabel Allende responded to the socio-political upheavals by infusing magical elements into their narratives. "One Hundred Years of Solitude" is a prime example of how magical realism can be used to explore historical and cultural themes.
- **Beat Generation and Counterculture:** In the United States, the aftermath of the wars witnessed the emergence of the Beat Generation. Writers like Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg responded to the societal norms of the time by embracing a countercultural ethos. Kerouac's "On the Road" and Ginsberg's "Howl" capture the spirit of rebellion and a quest for personal freedom.

IV. Humanitarian Narratives: The wars left an indelible mark on human consciousness, prompting writers to confront the profound moral questions raised by the conflicts.

- **Holocaust Literature:** The Holocaust, a horrific consequence of World War II, prompted a powerful literary response. Writers like Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi provided firsthand accounts of the atrocities in works like "Night" and "If This Is a Man." These narratives serve as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of

The War Theme in the European Literature

unimaginable suffering.

- Anti-War Literature: The anti-war sentiment that emerged in the wake of the conflicts found expression in literature. Kurt Vonnegut's "Slaughterhouse-Five" and Erich Maria Remarque's "All Quiet on the Western Front" are poignant anti-war novels that reflect on the futility and brutality of armed conflict.

In summary, writers responded to the political, social, and cultural upheavals created by the First and Second World Wars by addressing themes of disillusionment, anti-war feelings, totalitarianism, social critique, and the existential consequences of these tragic events on the person and society. Their paintings expressed the complexities and diversity of human experiences during and after these turbulent times.

4.3. Major Findings of the Study

1. The diverse and complex ways in which European writers responded to the cataclysmic events.
2. European Literature reflected the deep social, political, and existential challenges of the time.
3. Human experience in the face of war and its aftermath.
4. Writers reflect on the trauma experienced by individuals.
5. The war led to a sense of disillusionment and loss that was reflected in literature.

5. CONCLUSION

Many authors use writing to convey their anti-war feelings after having seen or observed the horrors of war. War brings out the best and worst in people. Literature frequently reflects on the intricacies of human nature, morality, and the ethical quandaries that occur during war. The effects of losing loved ones, the sensation of emptiness, and the obstacles of recreating life after war's devastation are all explored by writers. Wars are not limited to one location and have a worldwide influence. By depicting universal features of the human experience during times of war, literature helps overcome cultural boundaries. Authors may investigate the difficulties of reconstructing society and people after a conflict. Wars frequently cause a shift in the subjects explored in literature. From the epic poetry of ancient civilizations to current novels, conflict provides a rich fabric for storytelling. Writers use personal experiences, historical events, and societal reflections to create narratives that engage with readers, encouraging empathy and understanding. Furthermore, conflict produces myths of perseverance and courage, highlighting the human spirit amid turmoil. Whether grieving the atrocities or celebrating successes, writing becomes an eternal mirror reflecting the enormous influence of war on the collective human psyche. Literature becomes a reservoir for communal memory, recording the impact of conflict on individuals and civilizations. It promotes discourse about the human costs of war by developing understanding, empathy, and introspection. The imprint of war on literature is a vibrant and dynamic force in the twenty-first century, generating tales that contribute to a greater understanding of the intricacies surrounding combat and its aftermath. Literature experienced a new maturity and rich diversity after World War II, with a new generation of writers emerging with diverse ethnic, regional,

and social characters. Younger writers included immigrants, Africans, and women, who embraced feminism and feminism's rise. Despite the conservative social climate, some writers were homosexuals or bisexuals. The desire to renew national prestige and esteem was evident in the works. Poetry in the post-war period followed interlinked paths, notably deriving from surrealism, philosophical and phenomenological concerns from existentialism, the relationship between poetry and visual arts, and the notions of language's limits.

REFERENCES

Remarque, E. M. (2010). *All Quiet on the Western Front: NOW AN OSCAR AND BAFTA-WINNING FILM*. Random House.

Granfield, L., & Wilson, J. (1997). *In Flanders Fields: The Story of the Poem by John McCrae*. Fitzhenry & Whiteside Limited.

Remarque, E. M. (1982). *All quiet on the western front: A Novel*. Ballantine Books.

Bloom, H. (2007). *T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land*. Infobase Publishing.

Frank, A. (1993). *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. Perfection Learning.

HEMINGWAY, E. (2023). *For whom the bell tolls*. MJP PUBLISHERS.

Thomas, Dylan. *Dylan Thomas Selected Poems, 1934-1952*. New York, New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2003. McCrae, John. *In Flanders Fields: The Story of the Poem by John McCrae*. Toronto, Ca, Stoddart Kids, 1995. All quiet on the western front. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/355697.All_Quiet_on_the_Western_Front

All Quiet On the Western Front by Erich Maria Remarque | Penguin Random House Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/140301/all-quiet-on-the-western-front-by-erich-maria-remarque/9780449911495>

McCrae, J. P. (2004). *In Flanders Fields and Other Poems*. Retrieved from https://openlibrary.org/books/OL8460814M/In_Flanders_Fields_And_Other_Poems

Analysis of the Poem "The Waste Land" by T.S. Eliot. Retrieved from Owlcation website: <https://owlcation.com/humanities/Analysis-of-Poem-The-Waste-Land-by-TSEliot>

Diary of A Young Girl By Anne Frank. Retrieved from <https://pdf-online.website/diary-of-a-young-girl-by-anne-frank.pdf>

Jones, D. (2003). *The Poems of Dylan Thomas*. New Directions Publishing.

AUTHOR'S BIO

Sahariar Alam Shawon is a recent graduate passionate about research analysis. He holds a Master's degree in English Language Teaching (ELT) and a Bachelor's degree in English from Hamdard University, Bangladesh. He has extensive knowledge of English literature and language. Additionally, he has experience in finance and growth analysis. Currently, he is working as a Research Development Manager at a finance company.