

The Changing Face of the War Literature After the 1st World War

Dr. Shrinidhi Madiwalar

English

Abstract

The First World War (1914–1918) reshaped the direction of English literature in a way no earlier conflict had done. The massive loss of life, the collapse of long-held ideals, and the emotional wounds carried by an entire generation forced writers to abandon the heroic and romantic images of war that had dominated nineteenth-century writing. Instead, post-war literature became a space where grief, trauma, and moral confusion were openly explored.

The war poets were the first to mark this shift. Writers such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon challenged patriotic myths by writing directly about the brutal realities of trench life. Owen's *Dulce et Decorum Est* exposes the horrific effects of gas warfare, while Sassoon's *Counter-Attack* condemns the political and military leaders who glorified the conflict. Their work set the tone for a broader literary transformation. After the war, this spirit of disillusionment moved into fiction. Although Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* was written in Germany, its honest portrayal of the psychological collapse of soldiers influenced English writers as well. Ernest Hemingway and Richard Aldington, for instance, used their fiction to challenge conventional ideas of masculinity, honour, and patriotic duty. Aldington's *Death of a Hero* (1929) is a striking example of how post-war writers questioned the values that had sent millions to the battlefield. The rise of modernism also shaped the literary response to the war. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) portrays the lingering effects of trauma through the character of Septimus Warren Smith, whose mental fragmentation mirrors the fractured state of post-war society. Likewise, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) captures the spiritual emptiness of a world drained of meaning after the conflict. In the years following the First World War, war literature shifted from celebration to confrontation. Writers began to examine the emotional, moral, and psychological scars left on individuals and societies. The war not only altered political boundaries but also changed the very language and form of literature, pushing authors to invent new ways of expressing loss, disillusionment, and the search for meaning in a shattered world.