

Literature And The Poet.

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Professor Norman Macleod

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Among the authors listed in this paper there is one in particular that will be discussed in detail. He is a very important writer, although to some he may be unknown. He has earned his place among the great contemporary writers, and his name should appear wherever the names of the great writers of the twentieth century are written. The writer of this paper feels honored to know this writer personally. It has been her pleasure to be a student of his, and to gather unforgettable knowledge from him. He is a true genius, and gives of himself unselfishly wherever he is needed. The writer of this paper has learned much from this literary figure, Professor Norman Macleod.

Professor Macleod is not only a writer of novels, but a writer of poetry as well. His poetry rings with a beauty that is in every way as beautiful as the novels, and he has a way of reading his own poetry, and other writer's poetry, with a beauty that makes the voice of Robert Frost sound like that of an amateur. He is truly a great writer and the literature of the forties is richer for having some of his great works among the great literature of that decade.

This paper is to a large extent the product of the personal contributions and encouragement of Professor Norman Macleod. His assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

Literature And The Forties

Historians have divided literature into many different periods. These periods have been given many names. Some have been called "The Age of Faith," "The Age of Skepticism," "The Age of Renaissance," "The Age of Classicism and Reason," to name a few. The decade of the forties has its own distinctive characteristics, but it too has been called many different things. The decade of the forties has been called "The Period of Survival," "The Period of Hesitation," "The Period of New Criticism," etc. But, there is one thing for sure, the literature of this period, though unique in its own way, has its own kind of importance. It is filled with beauty and entertainment. Like the literature of any period, it records the time and reflects its culture. It gives the reader an understanding of the decade, and reveals a part of those writers who helped to create it. It is timeless to the extent that it tells about the past, present and future. In many respects the literature of the forties has some of the same characteristics as literature of other periods, but it is unique in its own right because each period has a special way of producing its own kind.

Each decade of the twentieth century has produced its own kind of literature. Professor Norman Macleod speaks of the decade prior to the forties as having been a period of fear, defeat, suffering, and unemployment. Fascism and Nazism were threatening democracy, and there was danger everywhere of a second world war. During the

thirties the depression was an ever-present threat to mankind. Men who had survived World War I were now attempting to survive the tormenting days of depression. Many writers of the thirties had taken left-wing positions because of the 1929 stock-market crash and its after-effects. These writers stressed social criticism and many of them chose to become communists. John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath is an example of the social criticism that appeared in some of the writer's contributions to the thirties. The literature of the thirties came to a close with the publication of this great novel.

In 1939 the Nazi-Soviet Pact was signed, and war broke out in Europe. Inevitably, the United States became involved in a world conflict. America had entered into an era of false prosperity. Under the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, men had come to feel secure and on their way up. All of this brought about the death of the thirties, and with this death a new era was born, the decade of the forties. But in the midst of all the delight and prosperity came some of the darkest days in history our country has ever known, and this was to play an important part in the literature of the forties.

On December 7, 1941, America suffered a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Once again man was faced with fear and despair. The United States was not only a powerful nation, but by the middle of

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the forties she held the most powerful weapon the world had ever known, "The Atomic Bomb." The discovery of atomic energy was perhaps an important event in shaping the temper of the times. The hope that man had felt because of comparative prosperity was fast being replaced by fear.

On April 12, 1945, Franklin D. Roosevelt, the political leader to whom many people gave credit for their prosperity, died in Warm Springs, Georgia. This was a shock to a world already in trouble. His office was filled by Harry Truman, the vice president. Mr. Truman became the thirty-third President of the United States. On August 6, 1945, with permission of the President, an atomic bomb was dropped over the Japanese city of Hiroshima. This marked a day in history the world will never forget. August 15, 1945, V. J. Day, marked the surrender of Japan and the end of World War II. These events also played an important part in the literature of the forties.

The years 1941-1945 were relatively unproductive years in literature, according to the Literary History Of The United States. This was not due to lack of talent or writers, but because writers were in the armed services and had no time to write. It is possible that the decade of the forties could have been one of literature's richest decades if World War II had not developed. Men and women gave of their time by serving in the armed forces, working in factories,

war plants and in many other necessary positions during the war years. How could art flourish in times like these? It was a busy world, and there was hardly enough time to plan for anything other than survival. This is not to say that there was no literature produced during the years 1941-1945, but that there was a decrease in the quantity.

A few war novels appeared before the war was over, but most of them have appeared since. Many of the writers of these novels fought in the war; some were newspaper or magazine correspondents. Even though the first part of the forties was slow in producing literature, the latter part of the forties was more than productive. According to Spiller, Thorp, Johnson and Canby in Literary History Of The United States, the years of 1945-1953 produced a quantity of literature that was all the literary world could ask for and more than the critics could intelligently discuss. Some of the old writers returned to writing and many new writers came on the scene. Each group of writers had something new to say, and they not only produced quantity, but they produced a quality that was reassuring.

Often it is true that when men write, they are compared with those who have written before them. They have to live in the shadow of the past. New writers are not only compared, but they are criticized and evaluated by the values and standards of the men who have written before them. As the early forties took men into a new decade

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of history, they seemed to turn away from cares of the past in order to build a new world of ideas. Writers seemed to write more independently. They established their own styles and created their own ideas and ideals. There must have been many times that writers questioned themselves and wondered why they even tried to write. They were living in an atomic age and knew not what day the end might come. But in the midst of a troubled world men still found hope. The United States survived a second world war only to find itself involved in another war, "The Korean War," and then the "Cold War." Although crises came, there was no stopping for ^{some} men and their great minds. They continued to write in an effort to contribute to the world of literature. The decade of the forties was by no means composed of lost years. Men wrote from their hearts and many wrote searching to the depth of their humanity. Writers sought to express themselves, their times, their culture and their country. The forties were truly prosperous years in literature, but they were years that were cut short in the literary world because of a war that took men away from their typewriters and placed them in fox holes in foreign fields. The shelves are bare of many books that might have been there had this not happened.

By the end of the forties the writers of that decade had not burned themselves out. Many did not stop writing at the end of the decade, but continued to write and pour their hearts into their

work for many years after the forties had passed away. The forties may be characterized by the names that critics have given them, but they are not lost years. Literature as a business prospered during the late forties as it had never prospered before, according to many ^{Publishers} ~~literary critics~~. The world began to move forward and has continued to do so.

The writers expressed themselves more openly during the decade of the forties than they had ever done before. There was a frankness in the language of both old and new writers. Carson McCullers was one of the women writers of the early forties who expressed herself frankly in writing about sexual experiences and problems of girls. Her famous book, The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter, presents sexual experiences and thoughts of adolescent girls much more frankly than women writers had previously done.¹ The frankness of expression was said to have reached its height by 1956.²

The literature of the forties was different from the literature of the thirties. The literature of the thirties was ^{ALMOST} completely dominated by the necessity for social protest. Writers assigned themselves the task of writing about the social and economic problems of the working class.³ By the early forties writers were no longer concerned with social injustice. They were concerned with the inward self.

lc Literary criticism became an important part of literature in

the early forties. The greatest work of criticism of the forties was The New Criticism (1941) by John Crowe Ransom. The New Criticism had a powerful impact in the literary world, and became a prominent influence during the forties. The decade has also been called the "Age of Criticism," because many of the new writers were influenced by the new criticism.⁴ According to Salzman in The Survival Years, it has been called the "Age of Prose Fiction," because of the steady output of talented writers of fiction. Salzman says that Robert Lowell, Jean Stafford, Peter Taylor, and Richard Wilbur, along with other great writers, were influenced by some of the new critics such as Allen Tate, R.P. Blackmur, Brooks, Warren, and Ransom.⁵ Mr. Chester E. Eisinger backs Mr. Salzman in calling the forties an "Age of Prose Fiction." Mr. Eisinger writes that the forties has been given many different titles. He writes that the forties were years of hesitation, years of survival, and years of criticism, but no matter what the decade of the forties has been called, the main literary form of that era is fiction, and it reveals more about the forties than does any other kind of literature.⁶

According to Mr. Eisinger the writers of fiction reached deep into the hidden pockets and brought out more about the inward self, the struggle for survival, the picture of the times, and revealed more about the secrets of man himself, than did the writers called poets, critics, or sociologists. The fiction of the forties not

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only gave us a history of the age, but it gave us an insight into the depth of the "self." The fiction writers wrote in an effort to gain an understanding of man himself.⁷

One of the first books to be published in the forties was The Ox-Bow Incident (1940) by Walter Van Tilburg Clark.⁸ The Bitter Roots is another book that was published in the early forties. It was written by Professor Norman Macleod, a writer who has proven himself worthy of many honors. The New York Times carried a review of this book. Mr. Fred T. Marsh wrote the following statement concerning the book: "It is one of those original and engaging yarns of an American town boyhood which are practically the best sort of thing our novelists do. This like all the good ones, is an original. It has a pawky way with it that makes one grin with recognition..... An appealing book with its unheroic boy hero, its ironic subtleties, its serious intent." The Bitter Roots is a beautiful book. Only a master could have accomplished in a short novel what this author accomplished in The Bitter Roots. Although the book describes the times during World War I, a reader has only to use his imagination and substitute World War II to bring it closer to a later time. It could be any war. The book is timeless, but that is only one of the beauties of this great work. The author of this paper had only to read a few pages to recognize incidents and characters that reflected knowledge she had gained

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about the author himself. Upon discussing her thoughts with the author she was assured that he had drawn upon many of his own experiences, as almost all great writers do. The characters in this book are so real a reader can close his eyes and see them laughing, running, and playing.

The Bitter Roots centers around the author's high school, relatives and friends, townspeople he once knew, the place where he grew up, class struggle and World War I. Pauly Craig, the protagonist in The Bitter Roots, could have been any boy growing up in any western town, or any town in the country. But Pauly is none other than Professor Macleod when but a boy. Stiff Sullivan was a star athlete in the high school where Pauly attended school. Augie Storm, the pastor's son, was another boy whom Macleod knew. Betty Darling was none other than Macleod's first *adolescent* love in real life. The doctor, Pauly's stepfather, reflects many true characteristics of Macleod's real stepfather, who was a doctor in real life. The same applies to the mother of Pauly. She was real in every moment of the story. The writer of this paper is not saying that The Bitter Roots is an autobiography of Professor Norman Macleod, but she is saying that the author of The Bitter Roots took real moments from his life and wrote about them with a style and manner of his own, and made each moment live with a realness that captures and fascinates a reader's imagination.

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The Bitter Roots is one among many accomplishments of Professor Norman Macleod. A Man In Midpassage was published in 1947, We Thank You All The Time in 1941, and Pure As Nowhere in 1952. The thirties stakes claim to a big portion of Professor Macleod's work. All of his work has not ^{as yet} been published. Not only has he work waiting to be published, but he has work that is now in progress, and no doubt the work he is now holding will help to make true in the future, the statement made about him in Life and Letters Today (London, England) Spring, 1936: "A certain nominee for the hall of fame is Norman Macleod. In Japan, Belgium, Czechoslovakia; everywhere he is translated and admired. His name can serve as a starting point of conversation in any international congregation of younger writers." A great writer of the thirties and forties (and fifties) and still a great writer, this is Professor Norman Macleod.

Wallace Stegner is another contributor to the fiction of the forties. In 1940 he published On A Darkling Plain. In 1941 he came out with Fire And Ice. In 1943 Stegner published The Big Rock Candy Mountain, and in this novel he was able to paint a picture of identity and the American West. His last book of the forties was Second Growth (1947).⁹ Stegner wrote before and after the war, but according to Harold C. Gardiner in Fifty Years Of The American Novel, John Hersey was the only major novelist to come directly out of the war. John Hersey was said to be a sympathetic reporter

during the war. Much of his sympathetic feeling is shown throughout his work. His Bell For Adano was published in 1944. He is also the author of Hiroshima and The Wall. Hiroshima is a portrait of factual report of the bombing of Hiroshima. The Wall was not published until 1950, but it is said to be considered one of the finest American novels to date about the war, according to Mr. Gardiner.

Among the flood of novels after World War II was Williwaw (1946) by Gore Vidal. Vidal wrote Williwaw when he was only nineteen years old. His style ~~was~~^{is} simple.¹⁰ Added to the list of war novels was The Gallery (1947) by John Horne. The Gallery is an interesting novel, but one of the better war novels is The Naked And The Dead (1948). The Naked And The Dead was written by Norman Mailer, and it describes military action on a Pacific island. In many ways Mailer's work resembles the work of Dos Passos. In this novel, Mailer shows man in the midst of corruption and yearning for a better world. Irwin Shaw gave to the forties The Young Lions (1948). This work of Shaw's has been classified as one of the great war novels.

During the decade of the forties the writers of poetry took their places among the great writers of the literary world. American poetry after the war shines with a new quality. It is bright and dynamic. It is filled with "the now." It is contemporary

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in meaning, because it deals with contemporary things and places. Old views are disregarded and new views become a part of the new poetry.¹¹ Simplicity and clarity are distinguishing marks of the new poetry. After World War II the poets became personal and emotional; they turned to poetry of feeling and experience.

Robert Lowell was one of the writers who contributed to the world of poetry during the decade of the forties. He was moved and influenced by the war, according to Stephen Stepanchev in American Poetry Since 1945. He spent part of the war years in prison, and this played a part in his writing. But it was through his belief in Roman Catholicism that he was able to latch on to symbols and prayers that were later reflected in his poetry. According to Mr. Stepanchev, Lowell was called a "people's" poet because of his grieving concern for the spiritual condition and destiny of mankind.

Randall Jarrell was another poet of the forties. His first collection of poetry, Blood For A Stranger, was published by Harcourt, Brace and Company in 1942. Earlier a group of his poems had appeared in Five Young American Poets (1940). Mr. Stepanchev says that Jarrell's poems are expressive of pain and critical of hypocritical disruption and transformation as well.

Karl Shapiro wrote his best work during the forties. His better works appeared between the years 1940-1948, and in his work

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he points out the shortcomings of society, the religious, the racial and economic injustices that afflict all mankind.¹² Shapiro is the author of "Necropolis," "Buick," "University," "Waitress," "Auto Wreck," "The Conscientious Objector," "Troop Train," "The Gun," "The Jew," "The Leg," "V-Letter," "The Convert," and many other poems. His poetry pulsates with emotions and feelings. In "V-Letter" the reader can almost feel the anguish of war and its separations. The following is a sample of his writing that is compact with the feeling and emotion that is so typical of his work:

I love you first because you wait, because
 For your own sake, I cannot write
 Beyond these words. I love you for these words
 That sting and creep like insects and leave filth.
 I love you for the poverty you cry
 And I bend down with tears of steel
 That melt your hand like wax, not for this war
 The droplets shattering
 Those candle-glowing fingers of my joy,
 But for your name of agony, my love
 That cakes my mouth with salt.¹³

Shapiro wrote about what he saw and felt. He did not seem to care what previous generations had thought. He looked for his own meaning and wrote what he felt and saw.

Marianne Moore is another writer who made many contributions to the literary world of the forties. Miss Moore is known for her strict syllabic stanzaic forms. Her poetry is descriptively perfect, and she believes that anything is appropriate subject matter for poetry.

Many readers have compared her with Emily Dickinson. She wrote before the forties and she continued to write during and after the forties. "Distrust Of Merits" is one of her famous poems. Published in 1943, the poem is ~~very~~ serious and straightforward. The poet hopes that all mankind will unite under the flag of love. She feels that evils within are what cause the agonies and disruption of the world. In the last few lines of the poem, Miss Moore says that hate will die with us but beauty will last forever.

Professor Norman Macleod paints a vivid picture of ~~the same kind of~~ *another kind of* failure that destroys ~~evils that destroy~~ men in "The Dark Descent," published in A

Man In Midpassage (1947):

The mind is like a mirror, a miracle whose light
 Can drown within the image that blackens out my sight
 Or stops beyond the eardrum to beat its murder in
 Or drives along the fingers taking the tactual to
 The terror that determines what we are and do.

Wherever the nostril nudges or mists upon the bright
 Surface above the handle that held us once upright,
 The taste and all our torture, the touch that
 Brings us through
 The single thought distorts us and blurs
 Our will and good.

O let it all be equal
 To what I might have been
 Before the mind accepted the dark descent within. 14

This paper has named only a few of the poets of the forties. There are many others who are equally as worthy of being named, and they too have made great contributions to literature of the forties that

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will never be forgotten. Poetry had its place among the forties, but poetry was only one aspect of what became a big business during the forties.

Drama after World War II flourished because of some new playwrights. Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and William Inge may be mentioned as being important new dramatists. It has been said that Williams' A Streetcar Named Desire (1947) is a continuation of the psychological explorations of Eugene O'Neill, and Miller's Death Of A Salesman (1949) is an extension of the social probing of the depression dramas of the 1930's. This is the view of many critics, but these plays had something new to offer the American theater. The playwrights did not rely upon the themes and techniques of the great writers of the past. These plays were new and they had something new to say.

According to Jean Gould in Modern American Playwrights, Arthur Miller's first play to be published was Man Who Had All The Luck (1944), but it was not as successful as All My Sons (1947). All My Sons is a study of the results of failure in family and social responsibility. Because of this play Miller was regarded as the dramatist with the most to say during the post-bomb era, according to Miss Gould. His next ^{Production} play was Death Of A Salesman, a play that is to be considered to be dramatically powerful. ~~Death Of A Salesman has been considered a very powerful play.~~

The theme is man's search for identity and honesty in family

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and social relations.

It is impossible for the author of this paper to discuss all the writers of the forties or their works. There are many worthy writers of this period that this paper has not even touched on. This writer wishes apologetically to list a few of them because she cannot report on a study of their works due to lack of time. These writers belong to the forties and it would be unfair not to mention their names. John Berryman ("The Moon And The Night And The Men"), Kay Boyle (The Canals Of Mars), Irwin Shaw (The City Was In Total Darkness), Stanley Kunitz ("Reflection By A Mail-box"), Robert Lowry (Layover In El Paso), Lawrence Crilchell (Flesh And Blood), Edward Newhouse (Time Out), Harry Brown (A Walk In The Sun), Robert McLaughlin (Where You Been, Pal?), Alfred Hayes ("Porte-Cochere") are examples of noteworthy work. All these writers mentioned made outstanding contributions to the literature of the forties and helped to make the decade an outstanding period in ~~the~~ literary history.

According to Spiller, Thorp, Johnson and Canby in Literary History Of The United States, literature was about to become a big business by the end of the thirties. During the wartime years the publishing industry was growing by leaps and bounds. However, it was faced with many handicaps. There was a shortage of paper and binding cloth. Another problem that the publishing industry

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facial was finding a way to distribute the books. Most of the bookstores were located in the larger cities. The industry had to find a way to reach the public. The industry found its answer by turning to small pocket books and placing them on sale in drugstores, department stores and stationery shops. By 1942 there were more pocket-size books for sale than the largest news stands had room to display.¹⁵

The magazine industry experienced prosperity also during the wartime years. They had no problem selling as many magazines as their ^{Paper} quota allowed them. The one who received little benefit from the high sales in literature was the writer himself. Only a few of them received any of the benefits, according to Literary History Of The United States. The writers who were lucky enough to have one of their books sell as a monthly choice by one of the book clubs were the only ones to receive any benefit from big business. A writer who became one of the lucky ones by 1946 received \$50,000 in advance payment and a follow-up of payments if his work was well received by the public.¹⁶ Royalties awaited him also. The pay for magazine writers was less in 1940 than it had been for writers in 1910.¹⁷ But all this had changed by 1946. Records show that The Reader's Digest paid as high as a dollar a word for some of the articles published in its magazine.¹⁸

In Literary History Of The United States we are told also that

commercialism was not the only tendency that transformed the literary world after 1930. Institutionalization and collectivization played their parts well in the transformation too. The institutions that were strong enough to support literary activities held a monopoly of them. The Federal Writers Project became widely known during the thirties. In 1941 there was a conference held and word was put out that the government was making plans to support the fine arts, and this was to include literature. It was believed that support for artists and writers would be better than it had been during the depression years. This dream never became a reality because of the war, the hostility of Congress; and a change of government personnel drew a curtain on these dreams. After 1945 the only support literature received from the government was through research programs sponsored by the Library of Congress and the State Department in the foreign field.¹⁹

American universities assumed the burden that would have been the function of a bureau of fine arts had it developed. The universities were able to become centers of creative activity because of large endowments, government support, and grants from the Carnegie and Rockefeller foundations. The universities offered courses in creative writing, and often these courses were taught by authors that were well known. In the early 1900's teaching and ~~writing~~ *creative writing* had no connection; these activities were worlds apart, but after 1940 many of

the leading universities had placed on their faculties well known critics, novelists, and poets. According to ^{the} Literary History Of The United States, during the forties there existed the largest audience of readers the world had ever known, and there was a better prepared body of writers trained to meet the demands of the reading world. Also, because of the elaboration in technique, the American fiction written during the forties was the most skillfull literature produced anywhere in the world. ^{Writers} ~~They~~ had worked hard, and literature had come a long way.

As one looks back over the decade of the forties, one realizes that these were trying years for both young and old writers. War and disaster consumed men's time during the early forties, but after the war was over men surged forward with a new strength and vigor that was destined to make the literary world of this decade unforgettable. Through hard work, the writers of the forties contributed to the world of literature a kind of writing that is interesting and different. It is alive with realness and it reveals a truth concerning the decade. Truly, many of the writers of this period have made a place for themselves among the great writers of the literature. Their work will live forever, and will make the ten-years span of the forties unforgettable years.

Footnotes

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¹W. W. Tacker William, The Adolescent In The American Novel (Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, Inc., 1964), p.60.

²William, p.59.

³Jack Salzman, The Survival Years (Western Publishing Company, Inc., 1969), p.11.

⁴Salzman, p.12.

⁵Salzman, p.15.

⁶Chester E. Eisinger, Fiction Of The Forties (The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 1.

⁷Eisinger, pp. 1-2.

⁸Eisinger, p. 4.

⁹Eisinger, pp. 325-326.

¹⁰Walter Allen, The Modern Novel (E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1964). p. 293.

¹¹Stephen Stepanchev, American Poetry Since 1945 (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965), pp. 1-3.

¹²Stepanchev, p. 53.

¹³Salzman, p. 153.

¹⁴Norman Macleod, A Man In Midpassage (Cronos Editions, 1947) , P. 16.

¹⁵Robert E. Spiller, Willard Thorpe, Thomas H. Johnson, Henry Canby, Literary History Of The United States (New York: Macmillan Company, 1953), p. 1268.

¹⁶Spiller, Thorpe, Johnson, and Canby, p. 1270.

¹⁷Spiller, Thorpe, Johnson, and Canby, p. 1270.

¹⁸Spiller, Thorpe, Johnson, and Canby, p. 1270.

¹⁹Spiller, Thorpe, Johnson, and Canby, p. 1270.

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