

# ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

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## Civil War Literature

By **Coleman Hutchison**, University of Texas at Austin

Perhaps because of the ongoing relevance of the issues raised in and addressed by the American Civil War, scholarly and popular interest in the topic has never waned. Today, readers remain riveted by studies of and stories about this great internecine conflict. Estimates suggest that there have been at least 60,000 Civil War-related books published since 1865.<sup>1</sup> That is a publication rate of more than a book a day, every day, since the cessation of hostilities. Literary representations of the war are a particular obsession for critics and lay readers alike. For instance, the Civil War poetry of Walt Whitman (1819–1882), Emily Dickinson (1830–1885), and Herman Melville (1819–1891) are mainstays in high school and college curricula, while postwar narratives such as Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* (1936), and Shelby Foote’s *The Civil War: A Narrative* (1958–1974) prove steady sellers decade after decade. This is to say nothing of works by contemporary writers like Geraldine Brooks (1955–), James McBride (1957–), George Saunders (1958–), and Colson Whitehead (1969–), who continue to produce new literature about the war a century and a half after Appomattox. Thus, the Civil War remains not just a watershed historical event but also one of American literature’s great, recurrent themes.

In response to this seemingly ceaseless literary boom, scholars from a range of academic disciplines—English, history, American studies, African American studies, and southern studies, to name a few—have produced a lively and at times contentious critical conversation about the literary representation of the conflict. But theirs is a capacious definition of Civil War literature, one that extends from the mid-nineteenth century all the way into the third decade of the twenty-first century. In truth, Civil War historians, literary critics, and editors rarely limit their purview to the years 1861–1865, choosing instead to address literary works from before, during, and well after the actual conflict.

Such an expanded definition by no means minimizes the quantity or even the quality of the writing produced during the fifty-one months of direct conflict between the United and Confederate States of America. But much of that writing was short in form, occasional in nature, and popular in orientation—three features that litterateurs tend to disparage. (The Great American Novel about the Civil War would have to wait until the war itself was over.) It was also produced under extraordinary material conditions. At every stage of its production—composition, printing,

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<sup>1</sup> See James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), ix.

and distribution—literature about the war confronted the material realities of life during wartime. This was especially true in the Confederate South. On the eve of the war, the country’s major publishing hubs were located above the Mason-Dixon line. After secession, the South had to rely on its own literary resources. Among the persistent and structural problems faced by Confederate writers and publishers were severe shortages of paper, ink, type, skilled labor, and printing presses—“in short, everything needed to produce a successful publishing industry.”<sup>2</sup> As a result, northern and southern book production was different not in degree but in kind.

Nonetheless, as Kathleen Diffley has demonstrated, the periodical was a particularly welcome home for short fiction during the Civil War era.<sup>3</sup> In addition to familiar east coast periodicals (i.e., *Atlantic Monthly* and *Harper’s Weekly*), stories about the war also appeared in more far-flung venues like the *Southern Field & Fireside* (Augusta), *Lippincott’s* (Philadelphia), *The Southern Magazine* (Baltimore), *Lakeside Monthly* (Chicago), and *Land We Love* (Charlotte). If we are to give an account of what contemporary readers actually read, then we had better start with the periodicals, where writers both known and unknown—Rebecca Harding Davis (1831–1910), Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888), Constance Fenimore Woolson (1840–1894), and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (1844–1911), to name a few—labored to capture in words the whirligig experience of war. Each found ingenious ways to address the strange days and uncertain futures that the war both promised and threatened, what Robert Penn Warren would call a century later the “blind ruck of event.”<sup>4</sup>

Fiction was not the only literature crowding the pages of Civil War era newspapers and magazines. A number of wartime editors, both northern and southern, complained about the glut of unsolicited, patriotic poems. As one beleaguered editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* lamented in July 1863, “We are receiving too much trash in rhyme. What is called ‘poetry,’ by its authors, is not wanted. Fires are not accessible at this time of year, and it is too much trouble to tear up poetry. If it is thrown out of the window, the vexatious wind always blows it back.”<sup>5</sup> This is to say nothing of popular poetry’s close cousin, popular song, which was so ubiquitous during the Civil War that critics took to calling the decade the Singing Sixties. While criticism has tended to privilege individual and well-known Civil War poets like Whitman, Dickinson, and Melville,

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<sup>2</sup> Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861–1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 5. Yet, as Michael T. Bernath and Coleman Hutchison have demonstrated, southerners produced a surprising wealth of literary materials during the war. See Michael T. Bernath, *Confederate Minds: The Struggle for Intellectual Independence in the Civil War South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) and Coleman Hutchison, *Apples and Ashes: Literature, Nationalism, and the Confederate States of America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> See especially Kathleen E. Diffley, *The Fateful Lightning: Civil War Stories and the Magazine Marketplace, 1861–1876* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War: Meditations on the Centennial* (New York: Random House, 1961), 108.

<sup>5</sup> *Southern Literary Messenger*, 37, no. 7 (July 1863): 447.

little-known and anonymous poets and lyricists enjoyed a broader readership. Thus, the literature produced between 1861 and 1865 suggests a more accessible version of nineteenth-century literary culture, one to which a wide range of Union and Confederate sympathizers could both respond and aspire.

Whitman's *Drum-Taps* (1865) and Melville's *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866) often compete for the title of best contemporary collection of Civil War poetry. But it is William Gilmore Simms's anthology *War Poetry of the South* (1866) that best represents the robust poetic culture of the period. The antebellum South's leading literary light, Simms (1806–1870) saw his life and career upended by secession, war, and reconstruction, and he spent his last years struggling to make sense of Confederate defeat. While his support of the Confederacy proved quixotic, his editorial work on *War Poetry of the South* was not in vain. In addition to being one of the largest and most diverse contemporary anthologies of the poetry of the Civil War South, it is also, by a significant margin, the most important. Simms drew poetry from all the Confederate States, as well as several Border States; he also included a good deal of his own verse. Not surprisingly, then, the 205 poems in the nearly 500-page volume vary greatly in tone, topic, and literary quality. The result is a generous and more or less representative sampling of Confederate literary culture.

Given the chaos and catastrophe of the war, it is perhaps unsurprising that most canonical Civil War literature was produced after the physical combat had ended. To take one recent example, Ian Finseth's invaluable anthology, *The American Civil War: A Literary and Historical Anthology*, concludes in 1902, when the "living memory" of the war and its aftermath began to vanish.<sup>6</sup> But why stop there? William Faulkner (1897–1962), Robert Penn Warren (1905–1989), and Natasha Trethewey (1966– ) experienced the conflict from an increasing historical distance, and yet these twentieth- and twenty-first century writers also produced Civil War literature. Indeed, Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), Warren's *The Legacy of the Civil War* (1961), and Trethewey's *Native Guard* (2006) remain three of the most urgent meditations on the ongoing relevance of the war.<sup>7</sup>

As this suggests, Civil War literature is ineluctably bound up with Civil War memory—that is, how it has been remembered and rewritten over time. As the conflict shifted from the field of battle to the field of cultural memory, literary texts didn't simply memorialize wartime sacrifice. For instance, having lost a physical struggle for independence, former Confederates sought to win a new, ideological struggle over the causes and costs of the war, its legacies and meanings for a newly re-United States. Such struggles are responsible for foundational American myths like the Lost Cause and the fundamentally progressive nature of the Union—myths that continue to define contemporary American life and letters.

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<sup>6</sup> Ian F. Finseth, ed., *The American Civil War: A Literary and Historical Anthology* (London: Routledge, 2013), xiv.

<sup>7</sup> Such an expanded definition of Civil War literature is also sympathetic with recent work in literary studies that puts pressure on our practices of historical periodization. See, for instance, Christopher Hager and Cody Marrs, "Against 1865: Reperiodizing the Nineteenth Century," in *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists*, 1, no.2 (Fall 2013): 259-84.

Of course, literature doesn't merely represent myths or memories; it also functions as an exquisitely sensitive barometer of shifting historical and cultural pressures. The literary historian Elizabeth Young sees just such instrumentality in the literature of the Civil War:

As it shifts from lived experience into memory, the Civil War changes over time, becoming an increasingly attenuated presence. Yet there is no simple progression away from an immediate version of the war offered in the 1860s to increasingly remote war stories from later years. The Civil War is remote in some texts of the 1860s and urgent in, for example, many works of the 1890s and 1960s, when its memory and symbolism become freshly energized. The memory of the war is as much a political as a temporal phenomenon, and a Civil War novel of the 1890s is as much about the 1890s as it is about the 1860s.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, literary representations of the Civil War need to be read bifocally, with both distant and near vision available in the same frame.

Perhaps this duality helps to explain literature's privileged position in the historiography of the conflict. The Civil War Semicentennial (1911–1915), Civil War Centennial (1961–1965), and Civil War Sesquicentennial (2011–2015) all gave rise to major debates over how to remember an increasingly distant historical event. As we will see, at each memorial moment, literature played a crucial role in such adjudication. And literature is proving increasingly helpful to contemporary historians of the Civil War. In the wake of David W. Blight's magisterial *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (2001), a new generation of historians has turned its attention to the often vexed relations between history and memory. This has resulted in exciting new work on the memory of specific Civil War events or people; reburial efforts, monuments, and statuary; and memorial holidays and reenactment culture. Predictably, literature has played an outsized role in these reconstructions of Civil War memory. Blight himself relies heavily on literary sources (broadly conceived) in both *Race and Reunion* and *American Oracle* (2011), a fascinating study of the Civil War Centennial and the ways Robert Penn Warren, Bruce Catton (1898–1978), Edmund Wilson (1895–1972), and James Baldwin (1924–1987) brought the Civil War era into close conversation with the Civil Rights movement.

The preceding suggests the central role literature has played in the history and memory of the Civil War, but what impact did the conflict have on American literature? First and foremost, the Civil War gave American literature a unique and seemingly evergreen topic for reflection and representation, providing both inspiration and opportunity for successive generations of writers. While the United States of America was far from the first nation to experience civil conflict, its writers have made the most of that four-year historical experience. Among other things, Union victory and Confederate defeat buoyed the prospects of a distinct and distinctive American literature. The Civil War came after several decades of literary-nationalistic debate: Could

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<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation: Women's Writing and the American Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 21.

America produce a self-reliant literary culture? In his iconic 1837 Harvard University address, “The American Scholar,” Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) made a series of bold pronouncements about American literary nationalism. Urging that “We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe,” Emerson declared: “Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions, that around us are rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests. Events, actions arise, that must be sung, that will sing themselves.”<sup>9</sup> While the Civil War wouldn’t begin for another quarter century, it would provide an abundant harvest of events, actions, figures, and themes for generations to come. This is to say nothing of endless Civil War metaphors, including a war between brothers, a house divided, and the like. Walt Whitman, whose poetry Emerson famously if ambivalently endorsed, picked up his mentor’s argument, observing in an 1879 lecture on the death of Abraham Lincoln, “Strange, (is it not?) that battles, martyrs, blood, even assassination should so condense—perhaps only really lastingly condense—a Nationality.”<sup>10</sup> It certainly helped to consolidate a *literary* nationality, thanks in no small part to Emerson and Whitman’s endless boosterism.

In an oft-quoted 1888 essay, Albion W. Tourgée (1838–1905)—novelist, Civil War veteran, and ardent advocate for color-blind justice—made one of the first cases for the literary importance of the American Civil War. Tourgée saw scattered amid the ruins of Richmond the seeds of a vigorous national literature: “The history of literature shows that it is those who were cradled amid the smoke of battle, the sons and daughters of heroes yet red with slaughter, the inheritors of national woe or racial degradation, who have given utterance to the loftiest strains of genius.” We must look, he argued, to the “children of soldiers and of slaves to advance American literature.”<sup>11</sup> Tourgée, whose service in the U.S. Army resulted in his wounding and capture by Confederate troops, knew of what he spoke. His prognostications also proved spot-on. The memory of the Civil War informed and inflected several major literary movements of the nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first centuries, including American literary realism, modernism, and postmodernism. While these three movements share very little in common, they do evince an abiding interest in the Civil War. Thus, despite increasing historical distance, each generation of American writers reimagines and repurposes the Civil War to fit their specific literary agenda. Such persistence argues for the ongoing relevance of the Civil War while also underscoring its plasticity.

The Civil War also seems to have changed the character of American literature. As early as 1879, the novelist Henry James (1843–1916) could claim that the “great convulsion” had “left a different tone from the tone it found, and one may say that the Civil War marks an era in the history of the American mind. It introduced into the national consciousness a certain sense of proportion and relation, of the world being a more complicated place than it had hitherto seemed,

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<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Sacks, *Understanding Emerson: “The American Scholar” and His Struggle for Self-Reliance*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 145.

<sup>10</sup> Walt Whitman, *Prose Works, Volume II: Collect and Other Prose* (New York: NYU Press, 2007), 508.

<sup>11</sup> Tourgée, Albion W. “The South as a Field for Fiction,” in *The Forum* 6 (December 1888): 404–13, 413.

the future more treacherous, success more difficult.” James would go on to forecast the future character of American literature: “At the rate at which things are going, it is obvious that good Americana will be more numerous than ever; but the good American, in days to come, will be a more critical person than his complacent and confident grandfather” . To James’s mind, the Civil War had forced that “good American” to eat “of the tree of knowledge” . The postwar world was, then, postlapsarian, and the new American writer would need to adjust accordingly—with wandering steps and slow, as it were. Realism, James averred, might provide one way out of Eden.<sup>12</sup>

Since nearly the end of Reconstruction, literary critics and historians have consistently argued that the war and its aftermath either encouraged or demanded more accurate modes of literary description and that postwar readers were, in turn, increasingly eager consumers of realist texts, be they fictional or nonfictional.<sup>13</sup> And indeed, the mature vision James identified in 1879 is borne out by a wave of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century realist texts by John W. De Forest (1826–1906), Augusta Jane Evans (1835–1909), William Dean Howells (1837–1920), Sam R. Watkins (1839–1901), Ambrose Bierce (1842–1914?), W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), and Stephen Crane (1871–1900). Civil War-era sectionalism also helped spur the emergence of regional writing, a crucial subgenre of American literary realism exemplified by writers such as Mark Twain (1835–1910), Bret Harte (1836–1902), George Washington Cable (1844–1925), Sarah Orne Jewett (1849–1909), Kate Chopin (1850–1904), Charles W. Chesnutt (1858–1932), and Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906). For all the above writers, the Civil War proved a useful limit experience for literary representation. The conflict challenged writers’ ability to accurately describe the experience of war: combat, courage, and cowardice; victory and defeat; pain and trauma. Not surprisingly, then, the Civil War proved of signal importance to both the theorization and the practice of American literary realism well into the twentieth century.

Two of these realist texts deserve further commentary: Bierce’s *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1892) and Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). Bierce’s yoking of the battlefield and the home front was especially innovative, as was his sardonic approach to Civil War memory. Like Tourgée, Bierce was a veteran of the Union Army; his experiences at the Battle of Shiloh were particularly harrowing and foundational for his later art. *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* includes two often-anthologized stories, “Chickamauga” and “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge.” Both are considered masterpieces of short story form, and both offer decidedly unromantic images of life during wartime. As for Crane’s short novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*

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<sup>12</sup> Henry James, *Hawthorne*. (1879), 144.

<sup>13</sup> Representative arguments include those of Wilson, Aaron, and Fuller. See Daniel Aaron, *The Unwritten War: American Writers and the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 1973); Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962); Randall Fuller, *From Battlefields Rising: How the Civil War Transformed American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Phillip J. Barrish is especially good on the Civil War as a social and historical context for the genre. See *The Cambridge Introduction to American Literary Realism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), especially 23–25 and 32–35.

is one of American literature's most enduring texts. Often taught in secondary schools as a highwater mark for American literary realism, the novel is deceptively artful. Contemporary reviewers often celebrated Crane's realism, even suggesting that the author must have experienced Civil War battle firsthand. But, unlike Bierce, Crane never saw combat in the Civil War. Indeed, he wasn't born until more than five years after the end of hostilities. Instead, Crane relied on contemporary written accounts of the conflict, including those published in *The Century Magazine's* "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War" and "Memoranda of the Civil War" series. With its emphasis on the tension between the individual and the collective, between the soldier and the unit, the novel can also be read—with those bifocal lenses at hand—as an allegory of post-Civil War industrialization and incorporation. In any case, Bierce and Crane's hugely provocative fictions remind us that realism and authenticity are not always the same thing, that, per James, the world is indeed "a more complicated place than it had hitherto seemed."

The Civil War played an underacknowledged role in the literary movement that succeeded American literary realism. After all, the Civil War Semicentennial (1911–1915) neatly aligns with the beginning of American modernism.<sup>14</sup> And writers of both the Southern Renaissance and Harlem Renaissance—crucial sub-movements of American modernism—thought long and hard about the conflict's meanings. The memory and legacy of the Civil War haunts the work of Katherine Anne Porter (1890–1980), Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960), Langston Hughes (1901–1967), and Tennessee Williams (1911–1983) in particular. Likewise, many of the New Critics, who helped to canonize literary modernism, got their start as Fugitives and Agrarians, writing about southern history and the purported dangers of post-Civil War urbanization. Ironically, then, the Civil War past figured prominently in a movement that urged artists to "make it new." Carl Sandburg (1878–1967), Evelyn Scott (1893–1963), F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896–1940), and especially William Faulkner: these American modernists returned again and again to the Civil War, just as many British modernists returned again and again to World War I. The critic Paul Fussell famously argued that the death and destruction of the latter war led to the birth of a disillusioned and ironic modern consciousness. But, as Drew Gilpin Faust has observed, the death and destruction of the American Civil War served a similar function, changing fundamentally how Americans thought about a suddenly modern world.<sup>15</sup>

It is Faulkner who looms largest here, especially when compared to his fellow southerner Margaret Mitchell (1900–1949). The war gets at least a passing reference in nearly every one of Faulkner's novels, but it dominates *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) and the collection of linked stories *The Unvanquished* (1938), which were written consecutively. Mitchell, meanwhile, only published

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Kreyling is especially good on the Civil War Semicentennial. See *A Late Encounter with the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013). In describing the early years of the twentieth century not as a "progressive era" but as an "era of race suicide," Kreyling shows how an obsession with blood and race purity "dominated ritualized recall of the war's meanings"—meanings very much mediated by the wartime bloodletting that was still fresh in many people's minds (12).

<sup>15</sup> See Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), especially 194.

one novel during her lifetime, *Gone with the Wind* (1936), but said novel remains one of the bestselling titles in American literary history—and one of the most insidiously influential memories of the Civil War. Both *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Gone with the Wind* were finalists for the 1937 Pulitzer Prize in fiction, and both emphasize southern resilience in the face of hardship. But these disparate novels suggest radically different ways of remembering the American Civil War during the Great Depression. *Absalom, Absalom!* offers very little of the nostalgic, “moonlight and magnolias” representation of the Old South so often associated with *Gone with the Wind* and its 1939 film adaptation. Faulkner’s novel is also deeply unromantic about the war, which one character describes as a “stupid and bloody aberration in the high (and impossible) destiny of the United States.”<sup>16</sup> Read contrapuntally, these at-odds novels stage contemporary historiographical debates about the causes and costs of the war, in particular the importance of slavery and race. They also argue for a more nuanced understanding of how the “burden of southern history” (in C. Vann Woodward’s endlessly evocative phrase) was borne.<sup>17</sup>

The Second World War is generally seen as an accelerant for the Long Civil Rights Movement.<sup>18</sup> As a result, it, too, has a sinewy connection to the American Civil War. Between 1945 and 1968, the United States experienced the most effective social movement in its history, as a broad swath of Americans agitated for the end of racial segregation and discrimination, as well as the full incorporation of African Americans into the body politic as promised by the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments to the U.S. Constitution—also known as the Civil War amendments. The activists and artists of that movement used the memory of the American Civil War to great effect, especially as the Civil War Centennial (1961–1965) provided an occasion to reflect on how far the country had come (or not come) since Emancipation. A range of writers saw a clear connection between the Civil War and Civil Rights eras, including Robert Penn Warren, James Baldwin, Eudora Welty (1909–2001), Margaret Walker (1915–1998), Robert Lowell (1917–1977), Flannery O’Connor (1925–1964), Malcolm X (1925–1965), and Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968). Although from diverse backgrounds and of diverging politics, these writers deftly manipulated Civil War memory to better address Civil Rights-era realities.

Two of these writers merit special consideration. Like William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren seems to have been inexorably drawn to the American Civil War. Indeed, with the approach of the Centennial in 1961, Warren turned his attention fully to the war. During a remarkably productive decade, Warren produced a novel, *Wilderness* (1961), a critical study, *The Legacy of the Civil War* (1961), and a wealth of poems (1960–1968) about the conflict and its memory. This resurgent interest in the war seems connected to Warren’s midlife change of heart about racial integration and civil rights, and *The Legacy of the Civil War* in particular offers a powerful meditation on Faulkner’s old dictum in *Requiem for a Nun* that “The past is never dead.

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<sup>16</sup> William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011), 118.

<sup>17</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968).

<sup>18</sup> See Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” in *Journal of American History*, 91, no.4 (March 2005): 1233–1263.

It's not even past yet." Margaret Walker required no such change of heart or reminder of the past's persistence. Walker was a fierce advocate for African American rights and expression throughout her life, beginning with her award-winning collection of poems, *For My People* (1942), and association with the Chicago Black Renaissance of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. But it was in her 1966 novel, *Jubilee*, that Walker finally placed the Civil War at the center of her art. The 500+ page novel follows Vvry, an enslaved, mixed-race child, through the antebellum, bellum, and postbellum South. An epic comparable in design and scale to Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, *Jubilee* tells a multi-generational story that hinges on the Civil War and centers the experiences of the enslaved and formerly enslaved. It took Walker more than three decades to research and write the book, which incorporated oral histories from her own family and went on to influence later works like Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976).

A range of post-1968 writers used the techniques of postmodernism—in particular, pastiche, metafiction, and intertextuality—to trouble the relationship between Civil War history and memory. In a period that saw the ascendancy of Civil War reenactment culture and an increasing penchant for “alternative history,” Civil War literature took on a deeply reflexive quality, with postmodernists often riffing on previous representations of Civil War memory in an ironic tone. This is perhaps best exemplified by George Saunders's 1996 short story, “CivilWarLand in Bad Decline” (1996), which depicts a down-on-its-luck amusement park that promises to transport its patrons to the 1860s through a series of Civil War-era activities, costumes, and set pieces like the Parade of Old-Fashioned Conveyance. Such self-consciousness is everywhere in the literature leading up to Civil War Sesquicentennial (2011–2015), especially in the work of Michael Shaara (1928–1988), E.L. Doctorow (1931–2015), Barry Hannah (1942–2010), Allan Gurganus (1947– ), Harry Turtledove (1949– ), Tony Horwitz (1958–2019), Alice Randall (1959– ), Kevin Young (1970– ), and the aforementioned Geraldine Brooks, James McBride, George Saunders, Natasha Trethewey, and Colson Whitehead.

Of these writers, Tony Horwitz and Natasha Trethewey are especially remarkable. A Pulitzer Prize-winning war correspondent, Horwitz grew up fascinated by the American Civil War. His brilliant 1998 travelogue, *Confederates in the Attic*, begins with a group of Civil War reenactors crossing Horwitz's property in rural Virginia. Intrigued by their “super hardcore” commitment to historical accuracy, Horwitz musters with the group, before traveling throughout the South interviewing people about the memory of the war. By turns warm and gimlet-eyed, Horwitz's narrative nonfiction is subtitled *Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War*. That would also be an apt subtitle for Trethewey's 2006 Pulitzer Prize-winning collection, *Native Guard*, which refigures nearly a century and a half of Civil War cultural memory. *Native Guard* is an intricately-organized volume of verse that—to crib one of Trethewey's controlling metaphors—*crosshatches* a number of disparate themes: the vicissitudes of memorial work; mixed-race identity; poetic vocation; regional pride; and personal trauma (in particular the murder of Trethewey's mother by her second husband). But the confluence of Civil War history and memory marks the collection's central interest. These poems reflect on the Louisiana Native Guard; Faulkner and the Fugitive Poets; the teaching of *Gone with the Wind* as southern history; and the Siege of Vicksburg and the problem of “living history.” In keeping with postmodern method,

*Native Guard* is also in deep and often ironic conversation with Whitman's *Drum-Taps*, Melville's *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*, and Simms's *War Poetry of the South*.

As the preceding suggests, Civil War literature encompasses a diverse and ever-expanding canon. I have identified a handful of exemplary literary texts that capture well the variety of techniques and cultural politics that have been brought to bear on the memory of the conflict. But this is only the beginning—in several senses of the word. It seems clear that the Civil War will figure prominently in American literature for decades to come. Trethewey's titular crown of sonnets "Native Guard" opens with an epigraph from Frederick Douglass: "If this war is to be forgotten, I ask in the name of all things sacred what shall man remember?"<sup>19</sup> The vision and vigor of the writing discussed above makes such forgetting unlikely. Indeed, the future of Civil War literature seems bright as we go boldly in the direction of the Bicentennial (2061–2065).

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<sup>19</sup> Frederick Douglass, "The Unknown Dead" (An Address Delivered in Arlington, Virginia, May 30, 1871).