

The Long Aftermath. Cultural Legacies of Europe at War, 1936-2016

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The Long Aftermath is a collection of documented research essays by twenty-one scholars from various nations and disciplines. The sub-title, *Cultural Legacies of Europe at War 1936-2016*, informs the reader that the book focuses on World War II, its ideological if not military "prequel," the Spanish Civil War (p. 23), and its effects or "aftermath" in the decades under discussion. Several chapters are devoted to each of seven European countries: Spain, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and the USSR/Russia. The term "cultural legacies" is addressed rather broadly, encompassing personal memories, historical, political, and ideological commentary, and analyses of war-related literature and films. The articles focus on specific topics in detail, although some general conclusions emerge.

A Foreword by Richard Overy sketches the context of the aftermath of the First World War. He identifies "ambiguity underlying the memory" of that conflict, seen in "two distinct paths:" One led to "rejection of war" in pacifism and anti-war sentiment. The other viewed the war as "unfinished business" and was based in *ressentiment*, particularly in Germany and the USSR (p. xii). According to Overy, after 1918, both of these contrasting types of "memory cultures" looked outwards, toward international collaboration or toward "a new international order based on war and expansion." He adds, "But following 1945, memory of war was focused much more on issues internal to particular nations, a consequence of the tensions and hostilities generated by collaboration, perpetration (of atrocities) and resistance, a projection inwards rather than outwards" (p. xv).

"The Second World War in Present-Day Polish Memory and Politics" by Andrzej Paczkowski begins thus: "The Second World War is the most traumatic event that the Poles have experienced in modern times" (p. 287). Grim facts follow: Warsaw, the capital, was razed to the ground; 90 percent of Polish Jews perished; millions migrated, and Poland suffered defeat and partition between two totalitarian neighbors. Rather than sharing a unified national memory of the war, studies show that Poles hold a variety of views when asked about it. According to survey data, some conform to popular textbooks, films, and novels that idealize and exaggerate Polish heroism and resistance, but more denounce the war and the ensuing imposition of the Soviet system; some condemn German, Russian, and sometimes Ukrainian roles in the war. Opinions differ on the amount of Polish support of the Third Reich and Polish participation in pogroms against Jews.

An article by Urszula Jarecka examines the history of public discourse on the horrendous Katyń massacre. The massacre produced mass graves of 22,000 Polish officers, found in Russian territory. In the years of communist Poland, mention of this event, and even the Soviet invasion of Poland on September 17, 1939, was long suppressed. Nazi posters blamed the Soviets at the time, but their word was hardly reliable in the context of their propaganda, especially when the Germans were crushing the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. After the war, the massacre was embarrassing to USSR and post-war leaders of Poland, and inconvenient for the Allies. After decades of relative silence about the massacre, it was finally publicized in the early 1990s. The Russian Duma acknowledged Soviet responsibility for the horrendous killings, but not until 2010.

A piece on the Spanish Civil War by Pablo Sánchez León presents a disturbing analysis of recent media and academic accounts. He advances the contention that the conservative, nationalist political climate in Spain since 2000 has resulted not only in pro-Republic bias, but outright distortion of historical facts such as denial of mass killings of civilians by pro-Francoist rebels. He asserts that influential historians Paul Preston and Ángel Viñas endorse "a sort of denialism that is morally unacceptable for a critical and self-aware civic public" (p. 24). The piece is a somewhat bewildering chapter, the first in the book, due to its polemically charged language. Readers, especially those not familiar with the controversies aired, might wish that editors had modified the piece to give it a more scholarly or, if possible, balanced tone in keeping with the rest of the volume.

The near-mythical national hero, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and pride in the British people's strength and sacrifice during World War II, are central in discussion of the United Kingdom. Since the 1960s, however, historians have examined Churchill more objectively and "challenged the view of the unity of the home front" (p. 81) by looking at labor disputes, class divisions, and diversity of war experiences and viewpoints. In the 1980s and 1990s previously neglected aspects of the war were discussed. In particular, more scholarly attention was accorded to the Channel Islands, the only part of the British Isles to be occupied by the Germans. There, Nazi war manufacturing was carried on, using slave labor, Jews were sought out and deported to Germany, and "some islanders collaborated in varying degrees with the occupying forces" (p.88). However, as the authors of this chapter, Daniel Travers and Paul Ward, conclude, such revelations "have a long way to go before they gain the kind of recognition that Churchillian imagery still holds" (p. 89).

Issues involving France are represented by a chapter on a single town, Vichy, where the Germans installed an occupation government. Vichy, already stigmatized years before the war as decadent and hedonistic, came to symbolize collaboration with the enemy and lack of sympathy for others. Here, author Kirrily Freeman defends Vichy somewhat, pointing out that many citizens were indeed victims of the war. He does note that since the war the town has done little to defend itself or show evidence of soul-searching.

Two chapters focus on controversies surrounding war commemoration ceremonies. In "Reconstructing D-Day Memory: How Contemporary Politics Made Germans Victims of the War," Harold J. Goldberg examines controversies attendant on the fifth through the sixtieth anniversaries of Germany's defeat in the D-Day battle. Moves toward reconciliation with Germany were accepted or rejected by various European and American leaders in different years. Various interpretations have been ascribed to D-Day; in particular, Goldberg objects to efforts to commemorate "German victims of the war" as advanced by Germans in various years and Ronald Reagan in Bitburg in 1984. Another piece analyzes "History, Politics and the Changing Meaning of Victory Day in

Contemporary Russia."

An article on Italian memories of World War II concludes that, even after seventy years, and a backlash in the early 1990s, allegiance to the resistance against Mussolini is "still alive" and "part of Italian cultural identity" (p. 282), especially in pro-resistance novels and films, many considered "hybrid" novels between the fictional and historical. Largely covered up until the 1980s, uncomfortable truths about the past have been openly discussed since, including anti-Semitic legislation and killings of Jews and Africans by at the hands of the Fascist dictatorship.

Chapters on post-war film discuss examples from several countries. One study analyzes various types of German characters in dozens of British World War II films. Other chapters discuss political and historical significance of German post-war films, the mostly admiring presentation of prosperous America in key Italian films of the 1950s, and a highly detailed and informative history of war and patriotism in Russian film from 1934 to 2006.

Turning to literature, we find Spain well represented by a piece on three female poets who wrote during the war and early years of Franco's rule, and another on a 2001 memoir by Cristina Fernández Cubas. Other chapters analyze several British war and Cold War novels and examples of French fiction set during the Nazi occupation. French literary works of the time include Patrick Modiano's novels emphasizing alienation, displacement, and danger then faced by French Jews and works by Vercors (a pseudonym for Jean Bruller). His 1942 short story *The Silence of the Sea* "became the symbol of literary and intellectual French Resistance" (p. 166). In the area of German literature, only one book is discussed, albeit an important one, and it is actually by an Austrian, Ilse Aichinger. (Many scholars regard Austrian and German literature as distinct branches of literary history.) This novel broke new ground by its combination of autobiographical and fictional material, its mistrust of language, emphasis on experiences of women and children, and its rejection of sober realism for a poetic, even magical approach, despite its grim subject matter, wartime violence and persecution of the Jews. An essay by Marzena Sokolowska-Paryż discusses "Recent Polish Counterfactual and Alternative Histories" on World War II. One such work speculates on whether Poles could have won the September campaign in 1939; two others, a novel and a historical account, argue that Poland should have formed a military alliance with the Third Reich.

In conclusion, this informative volume illuminates numerous, diverse, and in many cases on-going effects of World War II in Europe. At the same time, it gives the reader a sense of the enormity and complexity of the still uncompleted task of assessing its "long aftermath" more than seventy years later. Particularly original in this volume are its emphasis of less studied areas outside of Western Europe (Poland and the USSR/Russia), the decision to include the Spanish Civil War as a first chapter of World War II, and articles on literature and films thematizing war in each of the seven countries studied. These literary and filmic studies conclude each section devoted to a particular country. They represent some important voices and present significant experiences and issues. However, they are somewhat uneven in scope, for they vary considerably in general conclusions and number of works analyzed, and they may seem a bit random if the reader expects them to display connections to the historical topics explored in accompanying chapters.

A strong feature of the book is its Afterword, "Memories of War: From the Sacred to the Secular" by Jay Winter. This thoughtful piece does not merely repeat or recite material from the collected essays. Rather, it presents new ideas that place them in general contexts and looks toward desirable future research. Winter begins, "There is now an abundant literature on the Second World War as a contested field of remembrance" (p. 373). He identifies three "memory regimes:" Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and the non-European world. He notes that religious language, including the term "martyr" has faded from use in Western Europe, superseded by the language of human rights. Religious vocabulary and concepts have remained dominant in Eastern Europe, where churches spearheaded opposition to the Communist world and remain strong. In the West, the Holocaust is an integral part of the history and memory of the Second World War, while it is on the margins in Eastern Europe. Winter concludes that there will never be a unitary "European" memory of the Second World War "as long as the sacred register dominates war narratives in one part of Europe, to the east, and not in another, to the west" (p. 376). He ends with a call for "careful and rigorous study" of "Asian narratives, historical, literary or filmic, of the Second World War" (p. 376). Pointing to future research to be done is a fittingly open end to this volume, which presents aspects, broad and varied as well as long and unfinished, of the aftermath of World War II in Europe.



Sposób cytowania:

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