

:All Quiet on the Western Front”

Dr. Alan Haffa

Please Silence Cell Phones

Erich Maria Remarque (1898-1970)

- German, Middle Class Family
- Drafted 1916
- Published in 1926
- Realistic account of War, rather than heroic idealization
- Attacked by Nazis in 1930s as unpatriotic
- *The Road Back*, 1931
- Fled Germany; Books burned

Remarque and Goddard; With Dietrich



- Immigrated to US
- Marlene Dietrich—*Arch of Triumph*
- Married Paulette Goddard and moved to Switzerland

Judgement on Patriotism

- Patriotism and Nationalism
- Paul writes regarding Kantorek and Himmelstoss: “While they continued to write and talk, we saw the wounded and dying. While they taught that duty to one’s country is the greatest thing, we already knew that death-throes are stronger... We loved our country as much as they; we went courageously into every action; but also we distinguished the false from true, we had suddenly learned to see. And we saw that there was nothing of their world left. We were all at once terribly alone; and alone we must see it through.”

“Iron Youth” and the Psychological Impact of War

- After watching Kemmerich die, the friends discuss a letter from their teacher, Kantonek
- “What has Kantorek written to you?” Muller asks him. He laughs. “We are the Iron Youth.” We all three smile bitterly, Kropp rails: he is glad that he can speak. “Yes, that’s the way they think, these hundred thousand Kantoreks! Iron Youth! Youth! We are none of us more than twenty years old. But young? Youth? That is long ago. We are old folk.”

“Lost Generation”

- “Albert expresses it: ‘The war has ruined us for everything.’”

He is right. We are not youth any long. We don't want to take the world by storm. We are fleeing. We fly from ourselves. From our life. We were eighteen and had begun to love life and the world; and we had to shoot it to pieces. The first bomb, the first explosion, burst in our hearts. We are cut off from activity, from striving, from progress. We believe in such things no longer; we believe in the war.”

Muller Reflects on Kemmerich's Boots--Pragmatism

- “Though Muller would be delighted to have Kemmerich's boots, he is really quite as sympathetic as another who could not bear to think of such a thing for grief. He merely sees things clearly. Were Kemmerich able to make any use of the boots, then Muller would rather go bare-foot over barbed wire than scheme how to get hold of them. But as it is the boots are quite inappropriate to Kemmerich's circumstances, whereas Muller can make good use of them. Kemmerich will die; it is immaterial who gets them. Why then, should Muller not succeed to them? He has more right than a hospital orderly. When Kemmerich is dead it will be too late. Therefore Muller is already on the watch.”

Observations on Kemmerich's Boots as Symbol

- Passed from one friend to another they represent cheapness of life in war
- A good pair of boots is more durable and valuable than a human life
- The question of who will inherit them is more significant than the death of the owner
- Represent need to act pragmatically in war in order to survive

Animalistic Nature in War

- “At the sound of the first droning of the shells we rush back, in one part of our being, a thousand years. By the animal instinct that is awakened in us we are led and protected. It is not conscious; it is far quicker, much more sure, less fallible, than consciousness. . . . It is this other, this second sight in us, that has thrown us to the ground and saved us, without our knowing how. . . . We march up, moody or good-tempered soldiers—we reach the zone where the front begins and become on the instant human animals.”

Insanity and Brutality of War Realistically Depicted

- “We see men living with their skulls blown open; we see soldiers run with their two feet cut off, they stagger on their splintered stumps into the next shell-hole; a lance-corporal crawls mile and a half on his hands dragging his smashed knee after him; another goes to the dressing station and over his clasped hands bulge his intestines; we see men without mouths, without jaws, without faces... The sun goes down, night comes, the shells whine, life is at an end.”

Psychological Disassociation Necessary to Survive

- “Just as we turn into animals when we go up to the line . . . so we turn into wags and loafers when we are resting. . . . We want to live at any price; so we cannot burden ourselves with feelings which, though they may be ornamental enough in peacetime, would be out of place here. Kemmerich is dead, Haie Westhus is dying . . . Martens has no legs anymore, Meyer is dead, Max is dead, Beyer is dead, Hammerling is dead . . . it is a damnable business, but what has it to do with us now—we live.”

Gerard Duval: Universal Brotherhood over Nationalism

- Comrade, I did not want to kill you. . . . But you were only an idea to me before, an abstraction that lived in my mind and called forth its appropriate response. . . . I thought of your hand-grenades, of your bayonet, of your rifle; now I see your wife and your face and our fellowship. Forgive me, comrade. We always see it too late. Why do they never tell us that you are poor devils like us, that your mothers are just as anxious as ours, and that we have the same fear of death, and the same dying and the same agony—Forgive me, comrade; how could you be my enemy?

Love and Sex; Romantic Love is Tarnished by War

- Chapter 7 begins with a Movie poster of a beautiful woman and man—represents Romantic idealization of Feminine
- Visit to French Women
- Thinks of army brothers and then the French woman kisses him
- “I want it all to fall from me, war and terror and grossness, in order to awaken young and happy; I think of the picture of the girl on the poster, and for a moment, believe that my life depends on winning her. And if I press ever deeper into the arms that embrace me, perhaps a miracle may happen...”
- But after he is unhappy

Leave Home Juxtaposes Two Realities

- His mother questions him about the war and he lies
- Mother: “Was it very bad out there, Paul?”
- “Mother, what should I answer to that! You would not understand, you could never realize it. And you shall never realize it. Was it bad, you ask—You, Mother—I shake my head and say, ‘No, Mother, not so very. There are always a lot of us together so it isn’t so bad.’”

Death of Paul

- “He fell in October 1918, on a day that was so quiet and still on the whole front, that the army report confined itself to a single sentence: All quiet on the Western Front. He had fallen forward and lay on the earth as though sleeping. Turning him over one saw he could not have suffered long; his face had an expression of calm, as though almost glad the end had come.”
- Unemotional and detached narration by an unnamed narrator—impersonality of death in war
- Army Report wipes out the individuality of Paul’s life and death and sacrifice—it is as if he never existed

Summary

- Paul is last of the boys in his class. His death marks the end of a generation
- Some soldiers may have survived the war, but Remarque portrays the conflict as having symbolically eradicated an entire generation.
- We see how war changed the men and sapped their humanity
- Duval scene shows the senseless of the war—the two soldiers were brothers and more alike than different
- Novel is an indictment of War