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All Quiet on the Western Front

Erich Maria Remarque depicts *All Quiet on the Western Front* as antiwar-novel since it describes the process of suffering and eventual death of the young men who joined the war through thoughtful convictions from the schoolmaster, family, and the government. Kantorek is a schoolmaster who convinces Paul Baumer, the protagonist of the novel, to join the war describing it as an adventure though it later turns out to be a disaster (Murdoch 23). All the youths die in the war, and Remarque is the only man who survives to tell the story. Most of the soldiers are young though the experience in the war turns them into old geezers. The war swallows the youths from the face of the earth at the prime age, and they do not enjoy the youthful adventure simply because of the war. Some die in the battlefield or because of amputation, suicide, lethal wounds, among other causes. The few soldiers who survive the war suffer from posttraumatic stress, and they cannot do meaningful things in life (Murdoch 34). Therefore, Remarque depicts the war impeccably and very realistically, and this makes *All Quiet on the Western Front* one of the most powerful anti-war novels in the history of literature. Other authors should adopt the approach in order deter future occurrences of such wars.

Remarque depicts the war as a devastating experience that robs the youth's lives and dreams. The brutality of war is clear in every corner of the text. Initially, war writers used to

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romanticize the war giving it some weird attributes such as honor, duty, patriotism, and adventure. The text portrays war contrary to the prior expectations of people. The author says that the war is meaningless, inexperienced, and butchery and, therefore, there is nothing to praise or glorify the war. In various ways, World War I required this depiction more than any other war before. The war entirely altered the concept of military conflicts and associated catastrophic levels of violence and carnage (Murdoch 45). The battles lasted for many months, and the gruesome new technology, such as poison gas, machine guns, and trenches, made killing easier than ever before. Remarque text dramatizes the main three aspects of World War I and portrays the mind-numbing savagery and terror with the relentless focus on the psychological and physical damage associated with the war. At the end of the novel, almost every character is dead epitomizing the devastating effects of war on that particular generation of young people who involuntarily joined the war (Murdoch 49).

The plot is set among the soldiers who are fighting in the frontline (infantry). The main focus is the ruinous impact that the war has on the soldiers involved in fighting. These soldiers are prone to occasional physical danger since they may be bombed or shot at any moment. The intense physical threats serve as unceasing attacks on the nerve forcing the soldiers to cope with the instinctive fear whenever they wake up. Moreover, the soldiers live in appalling conditions, in filthy, waterlogged holes full of decaying bodies, lice, and rats. These conditions predispose many soldiers to diseases, and many of them succumb to infections (Murdoch 56). The soldiers frequently go without sleep, food, adequate clothing, and sufficient medical care. These conditions increase the chances of getting sick. The soldiers also have to deal with sudden deaths of their close friends and comrades often in close ranges and violent modes. Remarque depicts these experiences as crippling loads of despair and panic. The only way these soldiers can

survive is through suppressing their emotions and disconnecting them from the inner feelings. However, the emotional disconnection has a huge destructive impact on soldiers' humanness. For instance, Paul is unable to imagine the future without war, and he is unable to remember the feelings of the past. Moreover, he loses his ability to speak to his family; the fact that alienates him entirely from the family (Murdoch 60).

The soldiers lose their humanness, and they do not mourn for the fallen soldiers. At the beginning of the novel, Kammerich is at the deathbed, and the most disturbing question among his fellow soldiers is who will inherit his boots that he inherited from the British aviator. However, among the living soldiers, Remarque depicts intense bonds of friendship and loyalty that appear due to the shared experiences of war. These feelings are the only elements of romantics in the novel, and they are virtually the only positive emotions that the soldiers have (Murdoch 64).

The war changes the soldiers to mere animals since they depend rather on instincts than on their skills and sight. Remarque asserts throughout the text that the only way the soldiers can survive in the war is by turning off their minds and using the instincts. Therefore, Paul views himself as a human animal as well as the other soldiers who survive multiple battles. The experiences in the battle are more animalistic, and the soldiers have to trust their instincts if they have to survive at all. The aspect of soldiers becoming more like animals contributes to the larger motif of the loss humanity amongst the soldiers (Strauss 103).

Remarque depicts the war as an agent of destroying generations of young people. For instance, in the autumn of 1918, Paul Baumer, who is a twenty-year-old soldier, contemplates on his future. In his contemplation, he says, "Let the months, years come, and they will take nothing from me anymore. I am alone and without hope and, therefore, I will confront them without fear"

(Remarque 139). These are the final melancholic thoughts that occur before the untimely death of Paul Baumer. Remarque asserts that Paul is an illustration of the historical men known as the lost generation. They died in their prime age having not fulfilled their goals in life and without families (Strauss 103). During World War I, approximately eight million people died, twenty-one million were injured, while over six and a half million non-combatant men killed in the commonly known Great War. After the clearing of the smoke and burying the bodies, the world wondered why all that had to happen. Remarque writes the text to reason along with the likes of Paul and asks why the entire population perished. Teachers, government, and families betrayed these people. He creates a story of unspeakable horror and inhumanity to depict the extent the war went to deprive people of their rights (Strauss 103).

The author prefaces his story saying, "[I will] try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped its shells, were destroyed by the war" (Remarque 1). Throughout the text, the reader realizes that the particular generation discussed lost the chance of getting back to their childhood. In chapter 2, Paul Baumer differentiates his generation and that of the parents or even the older soldiers. They had a desirable life before the war where they felt comfortable and secure. However, Paul's generation never got the chance to have that good life. He continues to assert that the little knowledge they had, had a limitation and directed to death. Moreover, at the beginning of the novel, Paul is already aware of the fate that will befall him and he awaits it in desperation. His friends are only nineteen and twenty-years-old, and even the young recruits get some fatal wounds in the course of fighting. The weird experiences force Kat to agree painfully that the recruits are simply a bunch of innocent kids who lose their lives and dreams in the war (Strauss 103).

Paul wonders how the future could be possible even if they had a chance to survive. Paul says that he cannot imagine laying in the muck and seeing everything in confused and hopeless dimension. Moreover, other soldiers also feel that life has taken everything from them. For example, Albert loses all his hopes for the better future after the leg amputation. Kroop adds that the life in the war field has made them old while they are just teenagers (Murdoch 78).

It is clear that the text is anti-war since it describes the ills and losses that emanate from wars. The young men die at the prime of their age; the fact that engraves pain in their hearts. All the author descriptions not only show how brutal World War I was but also criticize the very idea of wars. For instance, the death millions of people is not a tale but rather a disaster. This occurrence is devastating and the future attempts are worth deterring.

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