

All Quiet on the Western Front Study Guide

All Quiet on the Western Front by Erich Maria Remarque

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Plot Summary

All Quiet on the Western Front tells the story of Paul Baumer, a nineteen-year-old school graduate who, along with his entire class, enlists in the military to fight for Germany in World War I. Paul is both the narrator and the main character, and the book begins when Paul's unit –Second Company –is at rest a few miles behind the front lines.

Paul tells a little about his friends and the group of soldiers he socializes with and introduces the reader to the crudity and odd humor of military life. Paul also writes about how they all joined up because of the glorious talk about war and country from their old schoolmaster. But war, they all discover, is not glorious. Second Company has lost nearly half its strength on the front lines, and reinforcements have been brought up. From rest, the refitted Second Company returns to battle on the Western Front.

There, they deal with constant bombardments and French infantry assaults. Battles and events blur together. Paul is given leave, and he returns home for fourteen days to visit his family. But his mother is sick, and Paul feels isolated from the peace and quiet of his home. He wants desperately to return to that place of peace before the war, but he knows he has changed, and he can never fully do so after experiencing everything that has transpired since his war experience.

He reflects how his generation has been defined by the war and is unnecessary in the grand scheme of things. The older generation of soldiers will return to lives, careers, and families when the war ends. The next generation will not care about war. Paul's generation has been totally consumed by military conflict.

He returns to the front, is wounded, given medical leave, and returns to the front lines. One by one, his friends are killed off until Paul is the sole surviving member of his social circle and of his graduating class. On a day of relative peace along the entire Western Front, Paul is killed.



Chapter 1-2

Summary

Chapter 1 – Five miles from the front lines, Paul Baumer's unit in the German infantry, the Second Company, is resting and refitting. They have just completed two weeks on the front lines and have experienced heavy losses. Paul, who narrates, tells a little about the members of the group of soldiers he socializes with as the men prepare to eat. The company consists of only eighty men, down from one hundred-fifty. Rations of food are handed out to the men.

The members of Second Company also receive their mail and their news. Albert Kropp reveals to Paul and the others their old schoolmaster, Kantorek, sends his regards. Paul, Kropp, Muller, and Leer are all nineteen and all members of the same class. Paul reflects unhappily on those in society who send others to make sacrifices without making any sacrifices of their own, such as Kantorek.

Paul and several others go to the field hospital to see Kemmerich, who is another member of Paul's class. It turns out the Kemmerich's foot has been amputated, and he is not expected to survive. Muller asks for Kemmerich's boots, but Kemmerich does not wish to give them up, and keeps them instead.

Chapter 2 – Paul reflects on the position of himself and the men around him. Most of them are young, and are somewhere between parents and home, and girls and careers. Paul remembers when his entire class of twenty went to enlist. The class was split up across different units. Paul recounts training camp and being continually at odds with the commander, Himmelstoss. Himmelstoss was a strict disciplinarian who made those under his command rough and vicious –and in so doing, Paul admits, ready for the trenches to some degree.

Paul goes back to visit Kemmerich. Kemmerich is looking worse, and wants Muller to have his boots. Paul attempts to comfort and encourage Kemmerich, but the man knows he is dying. Paul remains by Kemmerich, watching him die. Paul dutifully and sadly takes the boots back to Muller.

Analysis

In chapters one and two, Paul Baumer introduces himself and a group of other men in the Second Company of German infantry. The reader sees in the first chapter the after-effects of battle. The Second Company, properly formed, has one hundred-fifty men, but is now down to only eighty. Among the wounded is Kemmerich, who later dies at a field hospital. Paul describes in morbid detail the agonizing physical condition of Kemmerich before Kemmerich dies, planting in the reader the secure understanding that war is not the glorious thing schoolmasters have made it out to be.



At rest, the regiment enjoys hot meals, the peace and quiet of empty, green fields; and the regiment also enjoys mail and news, which is not always readily available on the front lines. Simple things like mail and peace are tremendously valued by the soldiers in the Second Company.

The reader will also notice a dichotomy that exists in Paul's mind, between Kantorek the schoolmaster and Himmelstoss the drill instructor. Kantorek was well-respected and as an authority figure, admired. Kantorek told Paul and his class that fighting for one's country was glorious, so Paul and his classmates enlisted. Himmelstoss, and a strict disciplinarian, butted heads with the recruits under his command, but nevertheless prepared Paul and his classmates for the trenches. In retrospect, Kantorek is remembered with disdain while Himmelstoss is remembered with grudging respect.

Vocabulary

Voracity, quartermaster, requisitioned, propositions, synthetic, unimpeachably, trifling, embittered, pettifogging, discomfiture, carbolic, gangrene, convalescent, saveloy.



Chapter 3-4

Summary

Chapter 3 – Reinforcements are brought in to replenish the Second Company. Many of them are seventeen and eighteen, and Paul –at nineteen –feels like a grizzled veteran. Paul reflects on Katczinsky, believing him to be the smartest man in the unit because Katczinsky is resourceful. The Second Company is bunked in small huts, and Paul remembers once when Katczinsky finds some horse flesh and two loaves of bread to eat.

Kropp and Katczinsky argue about war. Katczinsky believes if all men were given the same pay and the same job to do, including generals, the war would be over quickly. Kropp believes wars should be fought between politicians and generals, as in a boxing ring. The others reflect on drilling and training, and then Tjaden reveals Himmelstoss is on his way to the front.

Tjaden has a grudge against Himmelstoss. Tjaden was a bed-wetter. Himmelstoss took this for laziness and put another bed-wetting soldier in the bunk above Tjaden, rotating both nightly. One night, in revenge, Tjaden and the others hid and jumped Himmelstoss, covered his face, and Tjaden whipped his rear repeatedly.

Chapter 4 – Members of the Second Company are sent out to put down barbed wire, because they are preparing to return to the front. Returning to the front means civilized men become human animals, Paul explains. Instincts take over. A combined British and French bombardment begins, making working conditions for the Second Company difficult.

They lay the barbed wire and then huddle down to wait to return to their transports. The new recruits are terrified. The bombardment slackens and finally stops. Out on the road, Paul and the others hear inhuman cries. Several horses have been severely wounded. Detering, the farmer, is horrified the military would use horses for war.

Second Company heads back to meet the transports, and another bombardment begins. Paul and the others are forced to take cover in a cemetery. The bombardment is a gas attack, and the soldiers scramble to put on their masks. By daylight the bombardment ends. The wounded are treated as skillfully as possible.

Analysis

While still on rest, new, young recruits are brought up to supplement Second Company. Their rest period ends, and Second Company heads back into their trenches. Their first job back on the front lines is to lay down fresh barbed wire, but an Allied bombardment begins which leaves Second Company relatively unharmed. (Five men are dead, eight are wounded from the bombardment.)



The reader, in chapter three, assumes the role of a new recruit. Everything experienced from chapter three on will be a firsthand experience of battle, rather than the recollections of others about the front lines. The reader's introduction to battle is the graphic description of a combined British-French bombardment of German lines. The reader is then subjected to the horrors of a gas attack, from which Paul and the Second Company must scramble to protect themselves with cumbersome gas masks. Paul spares no effort to describe the horrid conditions of gas attack victims. Second Company then returns to the trenches to await more fighting.

Erich Maria Remarque also makes sure to explain to the reader, through the eyes of Paul, and the unhappiness of Detering, that even animals are not spared in the fighting, because they are drafted into labor and slaughtered in battle.

Vocabulary

Retaliate, indefatigable, remonstrance, fatigue, aspirants, acrid, embowered, martyred, baseness, monotonously.



Chapter 5-6

Summary

Chapter 5 – As the men kill lice, which cover their bodies, the rumor that Himmelstoss has come to the front is confirmed. Himmelstoss was too tough on some recruits, and a local magistrate was alerted. Himmelstoss was then transferred. The men discuss what they would do if the war was over. Haie Westhus would continue to serve in the military, retire after twelve years, and live off his pension. The others are amused.

Himmelstoss arrives and is greeted coolly by Tjaden and Kropp. Tjaden refuses to stand and salute, and instead moons Himmelstoss. Meanwhile, Kropp and Muller discover that out of their class of twenty, only twelve are alive and well. Himmelstoss returns with a sergeant-major, seeking Tjaden. Tjaden cannot be found. Paul and Tjaden are called before the company commander, Lieutenant Bertinck, who is much respected. Paul relates the situation between Himmelstoss and Tjaden. Bertinck gives Tjaden three days of open arrest, and Kropp one.

After visiting Tjaden in jail and playing cards, Paul and Kaczinsky steal a goose and cook it, and return to their lines.

Chapter 6 – Second Company officially returns to the front lines hearing rumors of an offensive. They pass a school house with a hundred brand new coffins leaning up against the walls. In the front line trenches, Paul relates that soldiers have only the barest chance of living through war. Days pass by. In the middle of the night, a massive bombardment begins.

Bertinck appears in the trenches with the soldiers, calming the new recruits. Another recruit suffers an attack of claustrophobia but is subdued. The bombardment ends, and a massive French assault begins which overtakes the first trench. Paul and the rest of Second Company retreat and counterattack, driving the French back.

The following days are a series of attacks and counterattacks. Ground is gradually given up to the enemy. Dozens of men are killed, especially the new recruits. Westhus is mortally wounded. Bertinck is wounded. When the time comes for Second Company to fall back for rest, only thirty-two men are present for duty.

Analysis

Rest comes to an end for Second Company. Himmelstoss and Tjaden have it out, for their old antagonism is renewed. Second Company reaches the front lines, where they are bombarded incessantly, and then must face down a massive French infantry assault. The attack is so overwhelming the Germans must give up ground. They then counterattack, and are forced back themselves. This seesaw fighting back and forth has only two real consequences: a few hundred yards have been taken by the Allies, and



almost the entire Second Company is wiped out. Only thirty-two men are present for duty.

Chapter six especially gives the reader an account of the horrors of trench warfare. It is slow and costly. The graphic descriptions are again commonplace, with Paul describing the terrifying spectacle of war. For example, he sees headless men running a few steps before their bodies give out, and he sees men whose feet have been severed running on their bloodied limbs to reach the safety of trenches and bomb craters.

After only a few days, with most of Second Company gone, Paul and the survivors receive a period of rest. Remarque, who had himself served in the trenches in World War I, was determined to depict the horrors of the Great War –and so far has done a thorough job of just that.

Vocabulary

Pensiveness, enquiringly, forebodings, benumbed, annihilation, benediction, equanimity.



Chapter 7-8

Summary

Chapter 7 – Except for Tjaden, Himmelstoss has been accepted by Second Company for dragging the mortally wounded Westhus to safety. Paul runs through a list of names of the dead. Himmelstoss becomes the cook, and has Paul and his group assigned to kitchen duty and makes sure they have extra rations. Tjaden then accepts Himmelstoss. While swimming, Tjaden, Leer, and Paul see three pretty French girls walk along the bank of a stream. That night they visit and make love to the girls. The next day Paul is given leave, after which he is to report to camp for a course on training.

Paul returns home to his eldest sister and his mother, who is sick. Paul hears the idealistic talk of civilians, and feels very disenchanted. Paul wants peace, to forget about the front, but everyone he meets keeps asking him to talk about it. He prefers to be alone. Leave is not the enjoyable experience he'd hoped it would be. He also sees that Kantorek has been called up by the government to serve in a defense unit.

Before Paul leaves, he visits Kemmerich's mother. Kemmerich's mother makes Paul swear on his own life that Kemmerich died instantly. Paul does. He then says goodbye to his mother, and returns.

Chapter 8 – At camp, Paul pays more and more attention to the peace of nature as he retrains. He also sees Russian prisoners up close, and sees them as people for the first time. He even gives a group of Russian prisoners his cigarettes.

Paul's father and sister come to visit him in camp. They sit together and take a walk. Paul's mother has gone to the hospital, but has sent along jam and potato cakes for Paul. Paul eats some of them and decides to give two of them to the Russian prisoners.

Analysis

Between chapters seven and eight, readers are given a reprieve like Paul. Readers accompany Paul to the stream, where he, Tjaden, and Leer meet three pretty French girls –a wonderful departure from the violent conflict in which they are engaged. But Paul, for whatever temporary peace the girls bring, is unhappy in the end.

Paul is given leave, and he returns home unhappy. Being home does not give him the same joy he had known on leave previously, and before the war. At home, he seeks desperately to be alone, but finds he can never be left alone. Curious friends and civilians all want to know how the situation at the front is, and some of them even go so far as to suggest to Paul possible military strategies for future victory. Paul politely engages them. Things at home are hard. Food is scarce and everything has changed – even down to schoolmaster Kantorek being drafted into a reserve paramilitary force.



While at camp, Paul is also able to see some Russian prisoners firsthand. They are not shooting at one another, and Paul can at last see the humanity in their faces. He senses brotherhood among the prisoners, and realizes that simple orders from officers made them all enemies. The disillusionment in Paul is growing. Furthermore, an ominous undercurrent is felt when Paul swears on his own life that Kemmerich died instantly.

Vocabulary

Demonstrative, apoplexy, tremulous, loftily, destitute, intrigues, furtively.



Chapter 9-10

Summary

Chapter 9 – Upon returning to the front, Paul learns the Second Company has become part of a “flying division” meaning they are put into combat wherever the fighting is hottest. Paul learns in his absence, his unit has suffered very heavy losses. Nevertheless, he meets up with Tjaden, Muller, Katczinsky, and Kropp. They speak ambivalently about the war. If both the Germans and French are defending their respective fatherlands, they cannot say who is in the right. The soldiers also get to see the Kaiser, the leader of Germany, who appears briefly to hand out medals.

As the Second Company heads to the next front, they come across a tree from which dozens of dead are hung, having been blown up there by an explosion. On the front lines, Paul volunteers to go out to help scout the enemy position and strengths. As Paul sneaks forward, a bombardment begins. Paul crawls into a crater and pretends he is dead as a French attack sweeps past, and is repulsed. A French soldier falls into Paul’s crater, and Paul stabs the French soldier three times. Paul then cares for the French soldier as best he can, for Paul cannot escape the crater without being shot.

The French soldier dies, and Paul is left staring at the body. Paul wonders about the French soldier’s family, his wife. He speaks to the dead French soldier, telling the soldier’s body he is sorry. He goes through the dead man’s uniform, finding out that he has killed Gerard Duval, a printer. Katczinsky and Kropp then arrive to take Paul back behind their own lines.

Chapter 10 – Westhus has died. Paul and his small group of friends are assigned to guard a bombed-out village which contains a supply dump. They make a base in a concrete cellar, outfitting it with mattresses. Paul and the others rummage through the rubble to find food, which they then prepare. They do this all the while being under bombardment.

The next day they are sent to evacuate a village. The column of retreating civilians and soldiers comes under fire, and everyone scatters for cover. Kropp and Paul are both injured and are sent to a field hospital. Paul and Kropp are both treated and put on a train and are sent to a Catholic hospital. Paul’s wound is set, but Kropp’s leg is amputated. It heals well. Paul gets medical leave, and then returns to the front lines.

Analysis

The disillusionment Paul has been facing since being on leave comes to a head when he, in a moment of instant human animal response, stabs a French soldier who has fallen into his crater. He then feels remorseful, doing his best to patch up the soldier’s wounds, but the French soldier dies anyway. Later, Paul, Tjaden, Kropp, and the others wonder philosophically just which side is in the right in the war.



They have moved beyond prewar idealism to bitterness and anger, and now they have come to a place where war is unnervingly a home of sorts; and they have consigned themselves to chance and fate. They are soldiers, and they must do what they must do. Paul and Kropp, upon being injured, conspire to remain together throughout their treatment until they are at last separated by Paul's medical leave. Kropp becomes unemotional and quiet, talking less and less. Losing the leg –and having to sit out the rest of the war –has taken away something personal from Kropp.

Vocabulary

Provisions, savage, eiderdown, fastidious, surreptitiously, objectionable.



Chapter 11-12

Summary

Chapter 11 – Paul returns to the front lines during the winter, which passes quickly by. Paul recounts how things that mattered before the war –like social class –no longer matter between soldiers. Detering finds a blooming cherry blossom tree, picks some of the branches, and leaves. He is arrested and no one hears from him again.

Muller is killed after being shot in the stomach, and he gives his boots to Paul, who promises them to Tjaden. Food becomes scarce and now the Germans must also face down American regiments. Tanks, once mocked, are now feared as industrial cities produce thousands of them for use in combat. Bertinck falls while defending Paul and a group of others from a flamethrower. Leer is also killed in the same engagement. Airplanes become more heavily employed in combat as well now.

Katczynsky is wounded in another engagement, and Paul helps carry him to the rear. But Katczynsky dies before Paul can get him to the hospital. A splinter from an explosion penetrates Katczynsky's head and kills him outright. Now, Paul realizes, he has no more friends.

Chapter 12 – It is now autumn. Rumors of peace are flooding the trenches. Paul relates how he is the sole surviving member of his class. He reflects on the generations his exists between. The prior generation will return to their occupations after the war and forget the war. The next generation will push Paul's generation aside.

Paul thinks on the peace of better times and the quiet of home, for the battlefield is mostly silent that day. As he stands up, he is killed –one month shy of the end of the war.

Analysis

Paul recounts the summer of 1918 as the bloodiest summer of the war. Massed infantry attacks are now commixed with tanks, heavier artillery, new and improved machine guns, and airplanes. While the technology has considerably advanced, the strategies have not. Trench warfare is still prevalent, and costly, for Paul's entire class is eradicated. One by one, Paul's social circle disappears. Even Bertinck is killed in one engagement.

Paul reflects wearily on his generation, having come of age during the war. Future generations won't care, and previous generations will return to work and forget the war. But Paul's generation, for better and for worse, must live with the war. The war is what has defined their lives – and in many instances, ended it. In the end, not even Paul escapes.

Vocabulary

Prejudices, primitiveness, comradeship, dissolution, emaciated, insensate, acutely, superfluous.



Characters

Paul Baumer

At nineteen years of age, Paul Baumer is both the narrator and main character in *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Paul entered military service upon graduating from school, along with nineteen other classmates. At first he is moved by the idealistic talk of the glory of war, but as time goes on and his friends die, he becomes disillusioned and angry, and ultimately is resigned to accept his fate, whatever it may be. He is ultimately the sole surviving member of his graduating class –and is finally killed himself at the end of the book.

Tjaden

Described as a skinny locksmith, Tjaden is nineteen years old and is the biggest eater of the company. When Kemmerich dies, Muller is promised Kemmerich's boots. When Muller dies, he passes them on to Paul, who promises them to Tjaden.

Muller

Muller is nineteen and graduated in the same class as Paul. Muller carries his old school textbooks and recites physics propositions during battle. He is shot in the stomach and dies, giving Kemmerich's boots to Paul.

Katzinsky

At 40, Katzinsky is the oldest members of Paul's social circle, and the de facto leader of their group. A cobbler by trade, he is shrewd and cunning. He is the most resourceful member of the circle as well. For example, when food is scarce, Katzinsky is able to round up a bag of horse flesh and two fresh loaves of bread. Katzinsky is later wounded and killed by a splinter through his skull.

Albert Kropp

Albert Kropp, the level-headed man in the Second Company, is a lance-corporal. At the age of nineteen, Kropp is from the same class as Paul. Kropp and Paul are both wounded while helping to evacuate a town, and Kropp's entire leg is amputated to save his life. The ordeal affects Kropp greatly, for he becomes removed and quiet as time goes on. He is eventually sent home.



Leer

At the age of nineteen, Leer is full-bearded and from same class as Paul. Leer is killed during the same engagement that claims the life of company commander Lieutenant Bertinck.

Haie Westhus

At the age of nineteen, Westhus is a peat digger and described as huge and muscular. He is mortally wounded in battle.

Detering

A simple peasant, Detering thinks of nothing but his farm and his wife. Ultimately, the pressures of war become too much and he slips away from the trenches. Paul and the others learn he is caught and arrested, but after that, they hear nothing more about Detering.

Lieutenant Bertinck

The well-respected commander of Second Company, Lieutenant Bertinck is straightforward, reassuring, and confident. He is able to calm the nerves of new recruits and handle intercompany disputes easily. Bertinck heroically saves the lives of Paul and several others during an engagement that costs him his own life.



Objects/Places

Rifles/Machine Guns

The basic weapons handled by soldiers on the front lines, rifles and machine guns are utilized at both distances and during hand-to-hand combat. They are particularly deadly against massed infantry assaults. For example, Paul recounts how heavy German defensive fire from machine guns mows down an entire row of French soldiers.

Artillery/Bombardments

A continual fixture in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, artillery batteries unleash bombardments on enemy lines in order to mentally and physically damage the enemy. The effect is tremendous. Artillery shells destroy trees, creating splinters that kill men; explosions rip apart soldiers; and the constant noise and threat of death is psychologically overwhelming. Before major infantry attacks, artillery bombardments increase in intensity.

Kemmerich's Boots

At the beginning of the novel, Paul and his friends bring Kemmerich's belongings to where Kemmerich is staying at a field hospital. Among those possessions is a pair of comfortable boots with laces envied by the others. Kemmerich gives them to Muller, who in turn bequeaths them to Paul. Paul in turn promises them to Tjaden. The boots are especially important in understanding life on the front lines, for quality goods are scarce and difficult to attain. Rather than trading them, the soldiers give away what they have when those possessions are no longer useful or could be exchanged for more important things.

Tanks

Paul describes the summer of 1918 as the deadliest yet in the war. The weapons and devices used in combat have increased in proficiency and deadliness. Tanks, once laughed at, have made a major appearance in terms of quality and quantity as the industrial and technological infrastructures of countries have increased.

Airplanes

Among the reasons Paul describes the summer of 1918 as the deadliest in the war are the emerging use of planes. While they have been used throughout the war, toward the end, they are increasingly employed. The French craft a system of assault that utilizes



artillery, tanks, and airplanes to attack the enemy all at once –a forerunner to German blitzkrieg in World War II.

Trenches

While the early days of World War I consisted of armies moving freely and striking at one another quickly, they eventually dig in and the lines remain locked in near-perpetual stalemates in seesaw fighting that costs millions of lives. The most recent European war had been the quick Franco-Prussian War in the 1870s, and most European commanders were either ignorant of or could care less about the deadliness of trench warfare –first employed extensively in the American Civil War.

Trench defenses were an elaborate system of trenches, tunnels, and dug outs that were difficult to capture and hold. Rats and other vermin were rife in trenches, feeding on rotting food and dead men. Disease, parasitic insects, and psychological trauma were commonplace.

The Western Front

Paul is fighting on the Western Front during World War I, which stretched across France up to the English Channel. There, combined British, French, and eventually American forces combat the Germans. The Germans had also had an Eastern Front against the Russians, but the October Revolution and the deposing of the Czar led to the Russians withdrawing from the war. This freed up hundreds of thousands of soldiers for Germany to transfer west – and continue the war.

For the majority of the war, the lines along the Western Front remained relatively fixed. Major offensives across dozens of miles of ground rarely produced any serious gains.



Themes

Anti-War

Erich Maria Remarque, who had fought in the trenches of World War I, had experienced the horrors and grisly realities of war. A lot of what is written in *All Quiet on the Western Front* is indeed autobiographical and shares Remarque's adamant attitude against war. This is done in three ways.

First, it reveals that those fighting in the trenches are ordinary people –from high school graduates to simple tradesmen to peasant farmers. Each of them, to some degree, has a life they have left behind to go and fight –and possibly die. The failure of politicians and generals leads to the destruction of families and human lives.

Second, the novel graphically depicts warfare. Paul recounts the heads of men beside him being blown off, men running on the stumps of their legs for cover once their feet have been blown off, men are ripped apart and thrown into the air, becoming entangled in trees, and so on. War is not a glorious thing, Paul makes certain to point out.

Third, Remarque illustrates the alienation of soldiers who have been on the frontlines to the quiet peace of their hometowns. Paul explains the older generation will be able to return to their trades once the war is finished. The next generation will not worry about the war and forget about Paul's generation, which grew up in the war. An entire generation of men has been forever scarred and changed by nothing but war.

Friendship

Friendship is a dominant theme throughout *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Even in the military social circles form, and Paul has his own. It consists of educated and uneducated men of all ages, though most of them are nineteen. There is no shortage of camaraderie among soldiers. They give each other the supplies they do not need; they comfort one another; they talk together, they do things together. Friendship is the one constant thing present at the front and in the rear lines. For example, Paul, Tjaden, and Leer meet three French girls and arrange to meet up with them. Later on, Kropp and Katczinsky risk their lives to go out and find Paul, who has become separated during a French attack. They could have left Paul for dead, but friendship compels them to look beyond their own safety for the safety of Paul. When Katczinsky dies, Paul realizes he has no more friends and is ready for death should it come.

Death/Fate

While on the frontlines, the men of Second Company –and on all sides during World War I –faced the constant threat of death. In some cases, death came quickly –such as to Katczinsky –but other times it came agonizingly slow, such as in Kemmerich's case.



There is no shortage of ways men die in the book, from disease to battle wounds to gas attacks to being set on fire. As Paul struggles through the war, he loses the idealism he started with, growing angry, and then consigning himself to his fate, whatever it may be. Paul is ultimately killed on a mostly peaceful day on the Western Front in October 1918 –one month shy of armistice.

Loss of Youth

A predominant theme in *All Quiet on the Western Front* is the loss of youth. Though Paul and most of his friends are only nineteen, they feel as if they are old men because their youth has been taken away. Paul remembers what it was like to dream of life before the war, when his textbooks inspired him, when he dreamed. But instead of beginning a life, or beginning a family, he has come to fight and face down death instead. Whereas the older generation will have lives to return to, and the next generation will not be bothered by the war, Paul's generation has come of age and died during the war. The war is the only thing they have known. It has robbed them of their idealism and most of their dreams. They are faced instead with the very worst humans have to offer one another.

Style

Point of View

Remarque wanted his readers to experience firsthand the things he did, and so he told *All Quiet on the Western Front* through the eyes of Paul Baumer, a nineteen year-old soldier. Paul, who is both the narrator and main character, recounts the horrors of trench warfare and battle, of disease, and the horrible sadness of losing friends. First person allows a more personal relation to the reader than third-person narration does. Readers are much more easily able to sympathize and fear and worry along with Paul.

Setting

The majority of the novel takes place along the Western Front of World War I, which ran across France up to the sea. Because entire cities and towns have been decimated and the landscape forever scarred, the soldiers are not always aware of where exactly they are. Paul's Second Company is stationed along the line somewhere near the sea, for they can feel the cold wind from the water. After that, when Paul's company is reorganized along with other companies into a floating division, all crude understanding of location is gone.

Language and Meaning

The majority of the language in *All Quiet on the Western Front* is simple and straightforward. Remarque takes no artistic license in describing the vivid horror of war. The graphic nature of Remarque's writing makes the experiences of both he and his characters all the more striking. But as in all times of turmoil, momentary glimpses of peace reveal more poetic thoughts and phrases, and there is no shortage of these when the opportunity allows Paul the chance to reflect on his condition. There is a dark and tragic beauty to these thoughts, such as when he Paul sees a column of soldiers, horses, and vehicles – the instruments of death – moving along the road under the beautiful glow of moonlight.

Structure

Remarque divides his novel into twelve chapters. Each chapter flows into the next, sometimes confusingly. This is done because the soldiers in the novel lose track of time and place, and so their memories and current experiences often bleed together through one continuous prism. It is as if the reader is drifting through time and space, and Paul is stopping the reader at particular moments that need to be illustrated and explained. This dark, dreamlike effect can be chilling, and reinforces well the horrors of war the novel depicts.



Quotes

The soldier is on friendlier terms than other men with his stomach and intestines. Three-quarters of his vocabulary is derived from these regions, and they give an intimate flavor to expressions of his greatest joy as well as his deepest indignation. (Chapter 1)

Our early life is cut off from the moment we came here, and that without our lifting a hand. We often try to look back on it and to find an explanation, but we never quite succeed. (Chapter 2)

In himself man is essentially a beast, only he butters it over like a slice of bread with a little decorum. (Chapter 3)

To me the front is a mysterious whirlpool. Though I am in still water far away from its center, I feel the whirl of the vortex sucking me slowly, irresistibly, inescapably into itself. (Chapter 4)

Mist and the smoke of guns lie breast-high over the fields. The moon is shining. Along the road troops file. Their helmets gleam softly in the moonlight. (Chapter 4)

My hands grow cold and my flesh creeps; and yet the night is warm. Only the mist is cold, this mysterious mist that trails over the dead and sucks from them their last, creeping life. (Chapter 6)

Attack, counterattack, charge, repulse –these are words, but what things they signify! (Chapter 6)

But look," he announces, "I simply can't believe that an emperor has to go to the latrine the same as I have. (Chapter 9)

It is a great brotherhood... of the desperate loyalty to one another of men condemned to death, of life arising out of the midst of danger... (Chapter 11)

And men will not understand us... We will be superfluous, even to ourselves... the years will pass by and in the end we shall fall into ruin. (Chapter 12)



Topics for Discussion

Topic 1

Discuss the theme of war. What is war? Why does it occur? Do the soldiers in *All Quiet on the Western Front* believe they are in the right? How do they believe wars should be waged? What are wars really like? Who fights them? Why? Why is war glorified? Is there anything glorious about war?

Topic 2

Describe the transition of Paul's character. What was he like when he was idealistic? Why was he idealistic? What changed that? What happened when Paul became angry and embittered? What caused this? When Paul at last becomes resigned to fate, he does not worry about death. Why? What has brought this feeling about?

Topic 3

During war, brotherhood and friendship often helps hold men together. In what ways does friendship exist between Paul and his fellow soldiers? What acts of friendship do they commit for one another? Can this be described as simple obligation to fellow soldiers? Or is there truly a deeper friendship at work, motivating the soldiers to act on behalf of one another?

Topic 4

Describe the theme of loss of youth. What is it? In what ways have Paul and his classmates lost their youth? Why do they consider themselves to be old? What is it about their generation that is different from the generation before them? What is it about their generation that will be different from the generation that follows the war? Why?

Topic 5

The final summer of 1918 proved to be especially deadly. Paul describes some of the reasons why. What are they? How has warfare changed in the time between the beginning and the end of the novel? How have these changes in war made things deadlier?



Topic 6

Remarque decided to write Paul's death in at the end of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. For what reasons did this occur? Why did it occur in the manner in which it did?