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All Quiet on the Western Front and the Fate of a War

Between 1928 and 1930 Germany and Great Britain especially, and France and America to a lesser extent, experienced a sudden and remarkable 'boom' in war books, plays, and films. For a decade after the end of the war, publishers, theatre directors, and film makers had treated war material gingerly, viewing it as a poor commercial propositon, on the assumption that the public wished, contrary to annual remembrance day exhortations, to forget the war. In the course of 1928, and then particularly in early 1929, it became abundantly clear that the war had become a saleable subject, and cultural artifacts dealing with the war began to pour forth. What some felt to have been a 'conspiracy of silence' was shattered with a vengeance.

During the second half of 1929 and in early 1930 war novels and war memoirs dominated the lists of publishers; the stage readily made room for war dramas; the cinema joined in with a rash of war films; galleries exhibited paintings and photographs from the war; and newspapers and periodicals gave much space to discussion about war, past and future. By late 1930 the wave had begun to abate, and although war material continued to appear at a steady rate during the following decade, the frenetic outpouring had ceased.

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What provoked the sudden revival of interest in the war at the end of the twenties? Charles Carrington, a veteran of the Great War who himself published a memoir of the war in 1929 under a pen-name,[1] has, more recently, called the war boom 'a hysterical phase as well worth the attention of social scientists as the hysterical phase of 1914.'[2] Interestingly, no one has, to date, taken up this suggestion and investigated the war boom. This article will do so, but from a particular vantage point; that of a novel which stood at the centre of the war boom, in popularity, in spirit, and as a source of controversy — Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (*Im Westen nichts Neues*).

Remarque's novel was released in book form in January 1929, and it quickly met with a success hitherto unheard of in the publishing world. While a number of war books had appeared immediately before it, *All Quiet* clearly triggered the explosion of war material in 1929 and unleashed a bitter and acrimonious debate on the essence of the war experience.

Why had relatively little war material, apart from official histories and the odd memoir and novel, appeared in the previous decade? Was this the doing solely of commercial interests? Explanations usually revolve around the state of nervous exhaustion from which nations suffered after the war. There is much to this. Edmund Blunden, for example, tried to write his war memoir immediately after the war but found that he simply could not. In general, the memory of the war was too painful; moreover, the task after the war, it was felt, was not to wallow in the tragedy but to build a better future. Stanley Casson deliberately tried to 'put the war into the category of forgotten things' by immersing himself in his archaeological work. Robert Graves and T. E. Lawrence had an understanding at Oxford that the war should not be mentioned in their conversations. The wider public was in a similar mood. Ilya Ehrenburg, when he arrived in Berlin in the autumn of 1921, found an atmosphere which was clearly trying to repress the memory of the war, even though the scars of war were everywhere. He saw, as he put it, 'castastrophe...presented as a well-ordered existence', and noted that

> The artificial limbs of war-cripples did not creak, empty sleeves were pinned up with safety-pins. Men whose faces had been scorched by flame-throwers wore large black spectacles. The lost war took care to camouflage itself as it roamed the streets.[3]

In this atmosphere it was natural for publishers, film-makers, and stage directors to shy away from the subject of the war. The public, unsympathetic to painful reminders, was more interested in a release of pent-up tensions, through jazz, the black bottom, treacly or risqué films and flippant revues. The war would not sell; frivolous and sentimental entertainment would. The war, however, was not forgotten; it was merely buried.

Yet, underlying this natural desire to forget and to look to the future was also a sense of confusion, confusion as to the meaning of the war. Already during the war this confusion had become increasingly noticeable. The war had been presented on one side as a struggle for civilized values against tyranny and aggression; and on the other side it had been seen as a war for *Kultur* against enslavement by materialism. But the total dehumanization of the conflict, as it became a gruesome war of attrition, cast a pall of irony over all ideals and all values. Soldiers noted the absurdity of the situation; they took 'Auld Lang Syne' and gave it the lyrics 'We're here because we're here because we're here because we're here...' The armistice and peace merely papered over the difficulties; the public as a whole decided for the time being to ignore the problem of the meaning of the war. A decade after the armistice, however, Remarque helped to unearth the whole question and sparked off an intense debate.

Prior to the publication of *All Quiet* Remarque had led a moderately successful, though unsettled, life as a dilettante intellectual and aspiring author. He was born on the 22 June 1898 in Osnabrück, the son of a Catholic bookbinder, Peter Franz Remark, and his wife Anne Maria. Christened Erich Paul, he adopted a pen-name after the war by dropping the Paul — the main character in *All Quiet* is called Paul and dies toward the end of the war— adding his mother's name, and Gallicizing his surname.[4] Remarque did not have a happy childhood. His lower-middle class milieu apparently depressed him. He was, he said later, deeply moved as a youth by the sorrows of Goethe's sensitive and splenetic Werther; he professed to be a romantic; and he often toyed with the idea of suicide.[5] This mood of existential doubt was never to leave him. It pervades his entire oeuvre.

Considerable mystery surrounds Remarque's war experience. Aged sixteen when war broke out in August 1914, he was conscripted two years later, in November 1916, while training as

a teacher, and he first saw front-line action in Flanders in June 1917. At the front he was wounded, according to his own testimony either four or five times but, according to other evidence, only once seriously. The army minister was to inform his cabinet colleagues in December 1930 that Remarque had been wounded in the left knee and under one arm on 31 July 1917 and that he had remained in a hospital in Duisburg from 3 August 1917 to 31 October 1918. Groener dismissed as false reports that Remarque had been either decorated or promoted.[6] Little else is known about Remarque's days as a soldier. After he was catapulted to international renown, he proved reluctant to provide interviews let alone precise information about his career during the war. He showed little interest in countering any of the scurrilous rumours that circulated about his earlier life, and many of his critics found his aversion to publicity suspicious. There was a sustained attempt in 1929 and 1930 to uncover the 'real' Remarque, especially to disprove the claim of Ullstein, his publishers, that he was a seasoned soldier. A man called Peter Kropp maintained that he had spent a year in hospital with the author during the war and that one of the characters in *All Quiet*, Albert Kropp, was modelled on him. The leg wound which hospitalized Remarque, Kropp alleged, was self-inflicted, the product of a *Heimatschuss*.[7] While many of the allegations of Remarque's critics and opponents were malicious and prompted by envy, opportunism, and political intent, there do appear to be grounds for suspecting that Remarque's war experience was not as extensive as his successful novel, and particularly the promotional effort surrounding it, implied.

After the war Remarque returned briefly to the Osnabrück Catholic seminary for teachers and early in 1919 he became a village school-master. This occupation was, however, soon abandoned for free-lance journalism and odd jobs taken on out of financial necessity. He published articles on cars, boats, and cocktail recipes; he worked for a while for Continental Tyre manufacturers in Hanover writing advertizing jingles; and eventually he became a picture editor in Berlin on Scherl's glossy high-society magazine *Sport im Bild*. All the while he tried to write seriously, working at novels, poetry, and a play. Two of his novels were published, *Die Traumbude* in 1920 and *Station am Horizont* in 1928, but he appears to have derived little satisfaction from them. Trite sentimentality relegated the first work to the rank of pulp fiction. Remarque was to say of *Die Traumbude* later:

> A truly terrible book. Two years after I had published it, I should have liked to have bought it up. Unfortunately I didn't have enough money for that. The Ullsteins did that for me later. If I had not written anything better later on, the book would have been reason for suicide.[8]

In 1921 he sent a number of poems to Stefan Zweig for comment and attached a letter of near despair: 'remember that this is a matter of life and death for me!' An attempt to write a play left him in deep depression.[9]

The leitmotiv of suicide here is, of course, striking. Together with the derivative romanticism and the itinerant existence it points to a deeply disconsolate man, searching for an explanation for his dissatisfaction. In this search Remarque eventually hit upon the *Kriegserleben*! The idea that the war experience was the source of all ills struck him, he admitted, suddenly. 'All of us were,' he said of himself and his friends in an interview with Axel Eggebrecht in 1929, 'and still are, restless, aimless, sometimes excited, sometimes indifferent, and essentially unhappy.' But in a moment of inspiration he had at least found the key to the malaise. The war![10]

That he was not genuinely interested, after his discovery, in objectively exploring the war experience but that his main purpose now was simply to announce the deleterious effects of the war on the generation that grew up during it, is revealed in a review which he did of war books by Ernst Jünger, Franz Schauwecker, and Georg von der Vring for his magazine *Sport im Bild* in June 1928.[11] It is even possible that these books were the source of his inspiration. Jünger's exuberant intoxicating vitalism and brutal grandeur, Schauwecker's breathless mystical nationalism, and von der Vring's lyrical simplicity were lumped together in a rather bland discussion which displayed little appreciation for these distinctive interpretations of the war experience. Remarque was, one must conclude, more interested in explaining away the emotional imbalance of a generation than in any kind of comprehensive or even accurate account of the experience and feelings of men in the trenches.

In July 1928 Remarque published another article in *Sport im Bild* which throws further light on his frame of mind at the time.[12] This was a short, rather ingenuous, piece about modern photography, in which he regretted the injustice that most professional photographers did to reality. By isolating their subjects from a wider context, by turning the world into a neat and rosy '9 × 12 or 10 × 15 format',

photographers created an illusionary world. The point was a simple and honest one, but coming from a picture editor of a snobbish and expensive magazine, it had a rather pathetic poignancy. It indicated how very unhappy the author was in his environment.

Having fixed upon the *Kriegserleben*, Remarque sat down in mid-1928 to write. Working in the evenings and at weekends he completed his book in six weeks. The suddenness of the inspiration, the speed of composition, and the simplicity of the theme, all indicate that Remarque's book was not the product of years of reflection and digestion but of impulse born of personal exasperation.

Remarque stated the purpose of *All Quiet* in a brief and forceful prefatory comment:

> This book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure... It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped its shells, were destroyed by the war.[13]

The story then recounts the experiences of Paul Bäumer and his schoolmates, who move from the classroom to the trenches, bursting with energy and conviction, enthusiastic paladins of a personal and national cause. One by one they are ripped apart at the front, not only by enemy fire but also by a growing sense of futility. The war is transformed from a cause into an inexorable, insatiable Moloch. The soldiers have no escape from the routinized slaughter; they are condemned men. They die screaming but unheard; they die resigned but in vain. The world beyond the guns does not know them; it cannot know them. 'I believe we are lost,' says Paul. Only the fraternity of death remains, the comradeship of the fated. At the end Paul dies, presumably by a sniper's bullet, forlorn and yet strangely at peace with his destiny. Peace has become possible only in death. The final scene of Lewis Milestone's 1930 film of *All Quiet* was to be a masterful evocation of the mood of Remarque's work: the sniper's bullet finds its mark as Paul is reaching from the trench to touch what the war has rendered untouchable, a butterfly.

The simplicity and power of the theme — war as a demeaning and wholly destructive force — are reinforced effectively by a style which is basic and even brutal. Brief scenes and short crisp sentences, in the first person and in the present tense, evoke an inescapable and gripping immediacy. There is no delicacy. The language is frequently rough, the images often gruesome. The

novel has a consistency of style and purpose which Remarque's earlier work had lacked and which little of his subsequent work would achieve again.

Very few contemporary reviewers noted, and even later critics have generally ignored, that *All Quiet* was not a book about the events of the war — it was not a memoir[14] — but an angry postwar statement about the effects of the war on the young generation that lived through it. Scenes, incidents, and images were chosen with a purpose to illustrate how the war had destroyed the ties, psychological, moral, and real, between the front generation and society at home. 'If we go back,' says Paul, 'we will be weary, broken, burnt out, rootless, and without hope. We will not be able to find our way any more.' The war, said Remarque in 1928, had shattered the possibility of pursuing what society would consider a normal existence.

Hence, *All Quiet* is more a comment on the postwar mind, on the postwar view of the war, than an attempt to reconstruct the reality of the trench experience. In fact that reality is distorted, as Jean Norton Cru and others insisted.[15] A man with his legs or his head blown off could not continue to run, they protested vehemently, referring to two of the images Remarque used.

All Quiet is in fact then a symptom, rather than an explanation, of the confusion and disorientation of the postwar world, particularly of the generation which reached maturity during the war. The novel was an emotive condemnation, an assertion of instinct, a *cri d'angoisse* from a malcontent, a man who could not find his niche in society or the professions. That the war contributed enormously to the shiftlessness of much of the postwar generation is undeniable; that the war was the root cause of this social derangement is debatable, but Remarque never took part in the debate directly. There are, moreover, sufficient indications, as we have seen, that his own *agonie ennuyeuse* had roots predating the war.

Despite the opening declaration by Remarque of impartiality — that his book was 'neither an accusation nor a confession' — it was in fact both. It was a confession of personal despair, but it was also an indignant denunciation of an insensate social and political order, inevitably of that order which had produced the horror and destruction of the war but particularly of the one which could not liquidate the war and deal with the aspirations of veterans. Through characters identifiable with the state — the schoolmaster with his unalterable fantasies about patriotism and valour, the

former postman who functions in his new role as drill sergeant like an unfeeling robot, the hospital orderlies and doctors who do not deal with human suffering only bodies — Remarque accused. He accused a mechanistic civilization of destroying humane values, of negating charity, love, humour, beauty, and individuality. Yet Remarque offered no alternatives. The characters of his *generazione bruciata* do not act, they are merely victims. Of all the war books of the late twenties — the novels of A. Zweig, Renn, Mottram, Tomlinson, Aldington, Hemingway, and the memoirs of Graves, Blunden, Sassoon, to name but a few of the more prominent works — Remarque's made its point, that his was a truly 'lost generation', most directly and emotionally, indeed even stridently, and this directness and passion lay at the heart of its popular appeal.

According to Remarque, his completed manuscript lay in a drawer for six months. His employer, the Scherl firm, an important part of Hugenberg's nationalist press empire, could not even be considered as a potential publisher of the work. Finally Remarque approached the S. Fischer Verlag, the most reputable literary publisher in Germany. War material was now beginning to appear, but Samuel Fischer was still convinced that the war would not sell. He turned the manuscript down. Through an acquaintance who had met Franz Ullstein and who was told by the latter that it was time books on the war were published, Remarque was directed to the Ullstein Verlag. There the manuscript was duplicated and distributed to various editors. Max Krell was 'gripped by the unusual tone'; Cyril Soschka, head of the production department and a war veteran, was convinced that it would be a great success because it told 'the truth about the war' — a phrase which would become the hinge for the controversy about the book; Monty Jacobs, *feuilleton* editor of Ullstein's *Vossische Zeitung*, accepted the novel for serialization. The Ullsteins developed great confidence in the book, and, led by Franz Ullstein, they proceeded to launch an advertizing campaign on a scale never before witnessed in German publishing. Berlin's advertisement pillars were plastered with posters, each week a different one. First week: 'It's coming.' Second week: 'The great war novel.' Third week: 'All Quiet on the Western Front.' Fourth week: 'By Erich Maria Remarque.'[16]

All Quiet appeared in serialized form in the *Vossische Zeitung*

from 10 November to 9 December 1928. While the paper's circulation did not skyrocket dramatically, as has been claimed,[17] sales did rise slightly and daily editions usually sold out. At the end of January 1929 the book was published. By then about 10,000 advance orders had been placed. The rush now began. Within three weeks 200,000 copies had been sold, and within three months 640,000. The sale of 20,000 copies in a day was not unusual. English and French translations were hastily prepared. The English edition appeared in March, the American at the end of May, and the French in June. The American Book-of-the-Month Club selected the novel as its book choice for June and ordered 60,000 copies for its 100,000 subscribers. By the end of the year sales neared a million in Germany, with the Ullsteins using six printing and ten bookbinding firms to try and keep abreast of demand, and another million in Britain, France, and the United States together. In Britain the Barrow public library announced in November that *All Quiet* had been reserved in advance for two years. Within the year the book had been translated into about twenty languages, including Chinese and Esperanto, and the Ullsteins, in their energetic promotional effort, even had a German braille edition prepared and sent gratis to every blind veteran who reported.[18] The book trade, which had suffered throughout the decade but was now showing signs of exceptional sluggishness paralleling the general downturn in the economy, gave thanks. 'Remarque is our daily bread,' quipped booksellers in Berlin. By April 1930 the sales for twelve of twenty known editions stood at about 2.5 million. In October 1930 the *Nouvelles Littéraires* referred to Remarque as 'the author today with the largest audience in the world'. When sales in Germany had reached 500,000, one reviewer had exclaimed: 'Remarkable! and a war book to boot, especially a war book! Who would have read war books a year ago.'[19]

Remarque's spectacular success brought on the flood of war books. Mouldy manuscripts were rushed into print; new books were quickly written; old books were brought out in new editions and in translations. Publishers and authors scurried madly to profit from the tide before it ebbed. Some plunged to risible depths to capitalize on the Remarque phenomenon. In Germany a feeble skit entitled *Vor Troja nichts Neues* was written by someone calling himself Emil Marius Requark in which Remarque was compared to Thersites, the most deformed and narrow-minded of the Greeks during the Trojan war. 'Quark' means rubbish, and although the

quality of the satire was no better than this crude play on words, the volume sold 20,000 copies.[20] In England the firm of A. E. Marriott published Helen Zenna Smith's bitterly ironical piece of opportunism *'Not So Quiet. . . ': Stepdaughters of War*, which told of the slaughter of a corps of women ambulance drivers. This black satire had three British editions in two years, was published in French translation by the reputable firm of Gallimard, was turned into a play and staged, and had a sequel in 1931 entitled *Women of the Aftermath*.

The initial critical response to Remarque's novel in the press was very enthusiastic, not only in Germany where Carl Zuckmayer wrote the first review for the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung* and called *All Quiet* a 'war diary',[21] but also when it then appeared in English and French translations. Remarque's supposedly frank portrayal of human responses to war and the depiction of a pitiful dignity under suffering were praised with gusto. 'The greatest of all war books' was a phrase which appeared in numerous reviews. Its 'holy sobriety' would bring about 'the rehabilitation of our generation', predicted Axel Eggebrecht. Herbert Read heralded Remarque's account as 'the Bible of the common soldier' and struck a religious note which would recur frequently. '. . . it has swept like a gospel over Germany,' wrote Read, 'and must sweep over the whole world, because it is the first completely satisfying expression in literature of the greatest event of our time.' He added that he had by then read the book 'six or seven times'.[22] Bruno Frank, Bernhard Kellerman, Daniel-Rops, G. Lowes Dickinson, Christopher Morley, and Henry Seidel Canby were others among the early enthusiastic audience. Several people even suggested that Remarque be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.[23] In the initial reviews, then, there was rarely a note of vigorous criticism, and there was near unanimity that the book presented 'the truth about the war', or, as the London *Sunday Chronicle* put it, 'the true story of the world's greatest nightmare'.[24] The exuberance, especially the extravagant use of superlatives and absolutes, and the shrill insistence that this book told 'the truth', indicated how sensitive a nerve Remarque had struck and how completely many people shared his frustration — his postwar frustration. The tone of the novel and the tone of the early reviews were very similar.

But what was this 'truth' to which almost all referred? That the

war had been in vain? Few said so outright, but the liberal left and moderate socialists throughout Europe, and even to some extent in North America, and the Dominions, were indeed now inclined to view the war as, in the end, a tragic and futile civil conflict in Europe which need not have occurred. They, as a rule, supported the novel from the outset, as did pro-Europeans and pacifists.

However, as sales mounted through the spring and summer of 1929, an opposition began to organize and to voice its opinions as shrilly as the supporters. The extreme, communist left derided the novel as an example of the sterility of bourgeois intelligence: the bourgeois mind, incapable of locating the real source of social disorder, resorted, in its treatment of the war, to tearful sentimentality and regret. The book was seen as a fine illustration of the 'decline of the west' mentality.[25] To the other extreme, the conservative and fascist right, Remarque's work was pernicious because it threatened the entire meaning of postwar conservatism. It is here on the right that the main opposition to Remarque, and indeed to the whole wave of so-called 'negative' war books, assembled. If the war had been an absurdity, then conservatism as a mentality was an absurdity; then fascism, which glorified the 'front experience', was an absurdity. Consequently, *All Quiet* had to be rejected: as deliberately 'commercialized horror and filth' and as the outgrowth of a degenerate mind which could not rise above the inevitable horror of war to see 'the eternal issues involved', the grandeur of an idea, the beauty of sacrifice, and the nobility of collective purpose.[26]

Traditionalists were incensed by what they saw as a completely one-sided portrait of the war experience. They objected to the language in the novel, to the horrifying images, to the frequent references to bodily functions, and, especially, to a scene involving a jovial group perched on field latrines. Little, Brown and Co. of Boston, the American publishers, actually deleted the latrine scene at the instigation of the Book-of-the-Month Club, as well as another episode later in the book concerning a sexual encounter in a hospital, and softened certain words and phrases in A. W. Wheen's British translation.[27] While left in the British edition, the latrine passage nevertheless was harped upon by a large number of British critics who began to refer to Remarque as the high priest of the 'lavatory school' of war novelists. In November the *London Mercury* felt the need to editorialize on this school.

> 'Criticism,' wrote Anatole France, 'is the adventure of the soul among masterpieces.' The adventure of the soul among lavatories is not inviting: but this, roughly, is what criticism of recent translated German novels must be... The modern Germans... suppose that lavatories are intensely interesting. They are obsessed by this dreary subject, and they are obsessed by brutality.[28]

An Australian, writing in the *Army Quarterly*, asked how British firms could publish 'unclean war books'; in his view the translation and publication of 'filthy foreign books' was an act of treason.[29] Naturally, this type of criticism was blind to frequent references to bodily functions in American war novels and to the motif of homoeroticism evident in British war literature.[30]

The denunciation of the book as a piece of propaganda — pacifist, or allied, or German, depending on the critic — was the other main form of attack. Franz von Lilienthal noted in the conservative financial daily, *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung* (9 June 1929), that if Remarque did receive the Nobel Prize, Lord Northcliffe would have to be applauded, because Remarque had nothing to say that Northcliffe, the master propagandist, had not said earlier. To the German military the novel was 'a singularly monstrous slander of the German army' and thus a piece of 'refined pacifist propaganda'. The military everywhere, for that matter, was inclined to support such a view. In November 1929, the Czechoslovak war department banned *All Quiet* from military libraries.[31] Outside of Germany many conservative critics looked on the novel as part of a clever German campaign of cultural dissimulation. In a speech at armistice day celebrations at Folkestone in 1929, a Baptist minister deplored the tenor of the popular novels and plays appearing on the subject of the war. He singled out *All Quiet* for particular contempt and then stated: 'I did not think I should ever live to read books written by my own countrymen which are like the dirty work done by enemy propagandists.'[32]

Earlier in the year Lowes Dickinson had sensed that Remarque's book might be subjected to this type of attack. Urging 'all those' to read the book 'who have the courage and honesty to desire to know what modern war is really like', he added:

> They need not fear German propaganda. The book is far above all that. It is the truth, told by a man with the power of a great artist, who is hardly aware what an artist he is.[33]

But J. C. Squire and the *London Mercury* would have none of this.

'This is not the truth,' they trumpeted, referring to the work of Remarque and other German war novelists, and warned against the apparent tendency among the British public 'to sentimentalize over the Germans' and to neglect the French, and then, with a stunning burst of ferocity, reminiscent of the war itself, they continued:

> We repeat...(being cosmopolitans and pacifists, but facers of facts) that the Germans (many of whom were not even Christianized until the sixteenth century) have contributed very little indeed to European culture... In war we exaggerated the defects of the enemy; do not let us, in peace, exaggerate his merits; above all, do not let us, in a wanton reaction, take more interest in the enemy than in the friend. The cold truth is that the Russians, who are still largely barbaric, contributed far more, in music and literature, to culture in the nineteenth-century than the Germans, let alone the square-head Prussians, have contributed in hundreds of years... Peace with the Germans, by all means; understanding with the Germans, if possible; but let us not out of mere sentimentality, concentrate our gaze upon the Germans at the expense of more cultivated, productive and civilized peoples. Let us welcome, by all means, whatever of good may come from Germany; but the present tendency is to think that anything that comes out of Germany must be good. 'Omne Teutonicum pro magnifico' seems the motto of the publishers and the press; it is a grotesque motto.[34]

Paradoxically, when in February 1930 Wilhelm Frick, the newly appointed Nazi minister of the interior in Thuringia, banned *All Quiet* from schools in that state, a Nazi paper, announcing the decree, commented: 'It is time to stop the infection of the schools with pacifist Marxist propaganda.'[35]

Both the critical praise and the scurrility which *All Quiet* provoked had, in the end, little to do with the substance of the novel. *All Quiet* was a reflection of the postwar mind; the commentary was a reflection of postwar political and emotional investments. Yet everyone pretended to be arguing objectively about the essence of the war experience. The critical dialogue was worthy of characters in a Chekov play. The wider public response was similar.

Remarque's success came at what we now see to be a crossroads in the interwar era: the intersection of two moods, one of vague imploring hope and the other of coagulating fear; the Locarno 'honeymoon' and a fling with apparent prosperity intersecting with incipient economic crisis and mounting national introspection.

Accompanying the efforts at international détente after 1925 was a wave of humanism which swept the west. A wishful rather than

assertive humanism this was, however, permeated by sentimentality and nostalgia. The almost hysterical acclaim which greeted Charles Lindbergh's heroic solo flight across the Atlantic in 1927 must be seen as closer in spirit to a frenzied wake than a genuine celebration. The salute to individuality was actually generated by severe doubt about the autonomous nature of man; the emotional acclaim of individual accomplishment arose in fact from the ruin of initiative. In the same year, 1927, Ilya Ehrenburg noted that twenty-two different films with 'Love' in their title could be seen.[36] And Thornton Wilder ended his Pulitzer prize-winning novel, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, with the sentence: 'There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning.' Melancholy and regret constitute the dominant mood here. Two years later, in 1929, the disastrous economic slump brought the underlying doubt starkly to the surface. The popular cultural activities of the twenties as a whole were, more or less, a bewildered encomium to a by-gone age of individualism.

Most of the successful war books of the late twenties and early thirties fit into this cultural pattern. Almost all were written from the point of view of the individual, not the unit or the nation. Remarque's book, written in the first person singular, personalized for everyone the fate of the 'unknown soldier'. Paul Bäumer became the individual everyman. In the tormented and degraded *Frontsoldat* — and he could just as easily be a tommy, *poilu*, or doughboy — the public saw its own shadow and sensed an evocation of its own anonymity and yearning for security. A very small number of critics perceived this at the time. 'The effect of the book springs in fact,' wrote a German commentator, 'from the terrible disillusionment of the German people with the state in which they find themselves, and the reader tends to feel that this book has located the source of all our difficulties.' An American noted: 'In Remarque the sentiment of the epoch comes to bloom.' *All Quiet* seemed to encapsulate, in popular form, the whole modern impulse: the amalgamation of prayer and desperation, dream and chaos, wish and desolation. 'Il fait beau, allons au cimetière.'[37]

In each country there was a specific variation on this general theme. In Germany after 1925 one noticed a distinct relaxation of political tension, evidenced by the lowest turn-out at the polls in the whole of the Weimar period in the national elections of May 1928, the first since December 1924. The government which was formed

in June 1928 was appropriately a grand coalition, ranging from Social Democrats on the left, who led the government, to the moderate right-wing People's Party. The government began its life in a conciliatory mood. However, in May 1930 it fell, the victim of revived nationalist and conservative sentiment.

1929 was the critical year. That the economic situation deteriorated drastically in a year that marked the tenth anniversary of the Treaty of Versailles was an unfortunate coincidence. Reparations were on the public mind. Alfred Hugenberg, press lord and leader of the ultra-conservative Nationalist People's party, campaigned for his referendum against the Young Plan and accepted Hitler into his camp. The right, in its spirited new offensive against the Republic, blamed Germany's renewed economic difficulties on the draconic peace settlement and on the blood lust of the western allies. Public demonstrations against the 'war guilt lie' grew in number and frenzy through the early part of 1929 and climaxed in a flood of meetings in June. The government declared 28 June, the actual anniversary of the treaty, a day of national mourning. Remarque was able to capitalize on both the remnants of political moderation and on the heightened sensitivity in 1929 to the question of the war.

Remarque blamed the war for his personal disorientation; the German public, too, assumed that its suffering was a direct legacy of the war. Indeed, *All Quiet* actually raised the consciousness of Germans on the question of the war as the source of their difficulties. Ironically, it thus contributed to a mood which Hitler, who in 1929 was beginning to make substantial electoral gains, was able to exploit. Hitler offered an explanation for Germany's defeat; Hitler, furthermore, said unequivocally that the war had issued in Germany's time of troubles; and Hitler promised action and change.

In Britain where the economy took a very bad turn in late 1928 and where unemployment dominated the election campaign in the spring of 1929, Remarque's protrayal of the German front-line soldier as a miserable, downtrodden pawn, striving to retain some dignity and humanity, met with sympathy. By the late twenties much of English opinion had become favourable towards Germany. French pettiness and obstreperousness earlier in the decade, and then the Locarno 'spirit', had drawn the British away from the French and closer to the Germans. '...in foreign affairs the psychological drama of British politics is precisely that we like the

Germans more, and the French less,' the *Fortnightly Review* mused, 'but with the first we fall out and the latter we are obliged to accept as partners.'[38] However, even this partnership with France was under question in some quarters. Baldwin's confidant, J. C. C. Davidson, spoke about the advantages of loosening the tie with France, a 'parochial and highly cynical' nation 'whose population is declining and whose methods are so little in harmony with our own'.[39] Douglas Goldring, who described himself as a 'crusted libertarian and little Englander of ingrained Tory instincts', suggested that some terrible errors had been made by British statesmen before and during the war:

> Any intelligent undergraduate, interpreting the past in the light of recent happenings, would probably arrive at the conclusion that our entry into the war was a blunder and our rejection of the German peace offers a crime.

'My generation,' he concluded, 'was betrayed, swindled, exploited and decimated by its elders in 1914.'[40] And Robert Graves, in his memoir *Goodbye to All That*, which he wrote in the spring and summer of 1929, thought it fit to quote Edmund Blunden's remark: 'No more wars for me at any price! Except against the French. If there's ever a war with them, I'll go like a shot.'[41]

The undercurrent of suspicion and scorn in the Anglo-French alliance naturally did not flow only in one direction. In the twenties Frenchmen were convinced that they, mainly, had won the war; the British contribution had never been equal to the French. How could it have been? The French had held three quarters of the line on the western front. British concerns, moreover, had always been overseas and not in Europe. Already during the war the French were prone to accuse the British of fighting to the last drop of other people's blood. Joffre said of the British in 1915: 'I'd never let them hold the line on their own — they'd be broken through. I trust them only when they are held up by us.' During the mutinies of June 1917 a French soldier was heard to say: 'We have to have the boches on our side within a month to help us kick out the British.'[42] By 1922, even before the Ruhr crisis, General Huguet, the former French attaché to the British armies, could describe Britain as an 'adversary'.[43] As the decade wore on the relationship did not improve, but deteriorated further. So Frenchmen, while generally calmer in their response to Remarque's novel, were nevertheless drawn to a book which portrayed the mutual hell through which

the principal combatants, French and German soldiers, had gone. Perhaps the *poilu* and the *boche* were not irreconcilable. The success of *A l'Ouest rien de nouveau* brought a flood of French translations of German works on the war, and, appropriately, in the initial phases of the war boom at least, British war books were neglected by French publishers.[44]

The great discovery that foreign readers said they made through *All Quiet* was that the German soldier's experience of the war had been, in its essentials, no different from that of soldiers of other nations. The German soldier, it seemed, had not wanted to fight either, once the emotional decoration put on the war by the home front had been shattered. Remarque's novel did a great deal to undermine the view that Germans were 'peculiar' and not to be trusted. Furthermore, *All Quiet* promoted at a popular level what historical revisionism was achieving at an academic and political level: the erosion of the idea of a collective German war guilt.

Who read *All Quiet* with most interest? Veterans and youth appear to have been the most avid readers of war books as a whole. By the end of the decade the disillusionment of ex-servicemen with postwar society had matured into vituperative scorn for the so-called peace, not only in the defeated countries but also in the victor states. *All Quiet* and other war books of 'disenchantment' elicited many a 'bravo' from embittered and saddened veterans. Yet, there were also frequent denunciations from former soldiers who regarded the spirit and success of *All Quiet* as a putrid manifestation of the malaise which had engulfed the postwar world, as a symptom of the spirit which had betrayed a generation and its hopes. Where exactly the balance lay is difficult to ascertain. What is clear, however, is that the interest of veterans in the literary protest was based largely on their postwar experience; they were reacting to the deflation, in the course of the decade, of the apocalyptic bubble which the war had produced.

Youths who had matured after the war were naturally curious about the war. Many commentators noted that fathers who had survived the front were reluctant to talk about their experience even with their families. Consequently, young people, wishing to penetrate 'the conspiracy of silence', constituted a sizable part of the readership. Youth at the end of the twenties, having grown up in the shadow of its hero-father, was also obviously fascinated by the 'negative' portrayal of the war which seemed to have gained the ascendancy. The literature of disenchantment offered a less ascetic,

more humane, and hence more interesting, portrait of the warrior father.[45] In a straw vote among senior *Gymnasium* students in Düsseldorf in January 1930 on favourite authors, Remarque topped the poll, outstripping Goethe, Schiller, Galsworthy, Dreiser, and Edgar Wallace. It is interesting to note, however, that alongside war diaries and memoirs, works on economics elicited most interest among the students polled.[46] Obviously the economic insecurity felt by students in depression-ridden Germany and the fascination with accounts of horror and death in the trenches were linked. Youth, too, was prone to blame uncertain employment prospects on the war.

Remarque's novel exuded a mood of dissatisfaction, confusion, and yearning. The events and the international temper of 1929 displayed a similar disorientation. The novel became enormously successful not because it was an accurate expression of the front-line soldier's war experience, but because it was a passionate evocation of current public feeling, not so much even about the war as about existence in general in 1929. It was a poignant cry of 'help' on behalf of a distraught generation.

The 'real war' had ceased to exist in 1918. Thereafter it was swallowed by imagination in the guise of memory. For many the war became absurd in retrospect, not because of the war experience in itself but because of the failure of the postwar experience to justify the war. For others the same logic turned the war into ultimate experience, again in retrospect. William Faulkner was hinting at this process of metamorphosis when he wrote in 1931: 'America has been conquered not by the German soldiers that died in French and Flemish trenches, but by the German soldiers that died in German books.'[47]

All Quiet was not 'the truth about the war'; it was, first and foremost, the truth about Erich Maria Remarque in 1928. But equally, most of his critics were no nearer 'the truth about the war'. They expressed merely the tenor of their own endeavours. Remarque used the war; his critics and the public did the same. Hitler and National Socialism were to be, in the end, the most obsessive and successful exploiters of the war. The war boom of the late twenties reflected less a genuine interest in the war than a perplexed international self-commiseration.

Lewis Milestone's Hollywood film version of *All Quiet* was released in May 1930. It played to crowded cinemas in America, England, and France for almost a year, and was honoured with Academy Awards for best film and best direction. It was banned, not unexpectedly, in Mussolini's Italy; also, however, in Germany and Austria, ostensibly because it was slanderous to the German image but actually because it was regarded as a threat to internal security and order owing to the violent controversy it provoked.

On 11 May 1933, after Hitler's take-over of power in Germany, Remarque's books were among those burned symbolically at the University of Berlin as 'politically and morally un-German'.

> Down with the literary betrayal of the soldiers of the world war! In the name of educating our people in the spirit of valour, I commit the writings of Erich Maria Remarque to the flames.

— chanted a Nazi student crier.[48]

On 20 November 1933, 3,411 copies of *All Quiet* were seized at the Ullstein Verlag by the Berlin police, on the basis of the presidential decree of 4 February 'for the protection of the German people'.[49] In December the Gestapo instructed that these copies be destroyed.[50] On 15 May Joseph Goebbels had told representatives of the German book trade that the *Volk* was not supposed to serve books, but books were to serve the *Volk*; and he had concluded: '...denn es wird am deutschen Wesen noch einmal die Welt genesen.'[51]

Erich Maria Remarque had already sought refuge in Switzerland in 1930.

Notes

1. Charles Edmonds, *A Subaltern's War* (London 1929).
2. *Soldier From the Wars Returning* (London 1965), 264.
3. Ilya Ehrenburg, *Men, Years — Life*, III (London 1963), 11-12. The other examples are from Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War* (London 1928), vii-viii; Stanley Casson, *Steady Drummer* (London 1935), 269-70; Robert Graves, *Goodbye To All That* (Penguin 1960), 263-64.
4. On Remarque's possible Huguenot ancestry, see the letter of Robert Kempner to *Der Aufbau* (New York), 4 December 1970.

5. See the reports on his remarks to Harry Graf Kessler in the latter's *Tagebücher, 1918-1937* (Frankfurt a.M. 1961), 592, entry for 30 September 1929; and also to *The Observer* (London), 13 October 1929.

6. Cabinet minutes, 19 December 1930, Reichskanzlei files, R431, folder 1447, 383, Bundesarchiv Koblenz.

7. Peter Kropp, *Endlich Klarheit über Remarque und sein Buch 'Im Westen nichts Neues'* (Hamm, Westf. 1930), 9-14 especially. See also Mynona, *Hat Erich Maria Remarque wirklich gelebt?* (Berlin 1929).

8. *Der Spiegel*, 9 January 1952, 25.

9. D. A. Prater, *European of Yesterday: A Biography of Stefan Zweig* (Oxford 1972), 140; and the interview with Axel Eggebrecht, *Die Literarische Welt*, 14 June 1929.

10. Ibid.

11. *Sport im Bild*, 8 June 1928.

12. *Sport im Bild*, 20 July 1928.

13. I have used the A. W. Wheen translation for quotations.

14. Hanna Hafkesbrink called it a 'genuine memoir of the war' in *Unknown Germany: An Inner Chronicle of the First World War Based on Letters and Diaries* (New Haven, Conn. 1948), ix.

15. Jean Norton Cru, *Témoins: Essai d'analyse et de critique des souvenirs de combattants* (Paris 1929), 80; Cyril Falls, *War Books: A Critical Guide* (London 1930), x-xi, 294.

16. The legends about Remarque and *All Quiet* are many. One is that he offered his manuscript to 48 publishers. See the obituary in *Der Spiegel*, 28 September 1970. For accounts of the publication see Peter de Mendelssohn, *S. Fischer und sein Verlag* (Frankfurt a.M. 1970), 1114-18; Max Krell, *Das gab es alles einmal* (Frankfurt a.M. 1961), 159-60; Heinz Ullstein's version in a *dpa* release, 15 June 1962; and the remarks of Carl Jödicke, an Ullstein employee, in his unpublished 'Dokumente und Aufzeichnungen' (F501), 40, Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich.

17. Krell, *Das gab es*, 161, exaggerates. See the table on the circulation of Ullstein publications in my book *The Limits of Reason: The German Democratic Press and the Collapse of Weimar Democracy* (London 1975), 314.

18. *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel*, 10 June 1930, 540; Kessler, *Tagebücher*, 584; *Die Literatur*, XXXI (1928-29), 652; *The Publishers' Weekly*, 21 September 1929, 1332; *The Daily Herald*, 23 November 1929; and *E. M. Remarque zum 70. Geburtstag* (n.p. 1968), 40.

19. *Nouvelles Littéraires*, 25 October 1930; Friedrich Fuchs in *Das Hochland*, II (1929), 217.

20. See J. K. Bostock, *Some Well-known German War Novels 1914-1930* (Oxford 1931), 7.

21. See Zuckmayer's *Als wär's ein Stück von mir* (Frankfurt a.M. 1966), 359-60.

22. 'A Lost Generation', *The Nation and Athenaeum*, 27 April 1929, 116. For Eggebrecht see *Die Weltbühne*, 5 February 1929, 212.

23. Reported in *Die Literatur*, XXI (1928-29), 652; and *Tempo*, 29 June 1929. Thomas Mann was awarded the prize for literature and Frank B. Kellogg the peace prize for 1929.

24. Quoted in *Saturday Review*, 1 June 1929, 1075.

25. See Antkowiak's survey of the Communist reviews in Pawel Toper and Alfred Antkowiak, *Ludwig Renn, Erich Maria Remarque: Leben und Werk* (Berlin [East] 1965).

26. See for example Freiherr von der Goltz in *Deutsche Wehr*, 10 October 1929, 270; Valentine Williams in *The Morning Post*, 11 February 1930; *London Mercury*, XXI (January 1930), 238; and *Deutschlands Erneuerung*, XIII (1929), 230.

27. See the reports in *The New York Times*, 31 May, 1 June, 14 July, 29 July, 1929. Ironically, C. Morley, who was a member of the selection committee of the Book-of-the-Month Club, which called for the deletions, had praised 'the fine vulgarity of...language' in *All Quiet* in a prepublication review. In July, Little, Brown and Co. claimed that the English edition was being widely sold in the United States, and because of this infringement of copyright, the commissioner of customs in Washington ordered the seizure of the British edition in the mails. The current American paperback edition, by Fawcett Publications, reprints the original expurgated US edition.

28. *London Mercury*, XXI (November 1929), 1.

29. *Army Quarterly*, XX (July 1930), 373-75.

30. See Stanley Cooperman, *World War I and the American Novel* (Baltimore 1967), passim; and Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York 1975), 270-309.

31. *The New York Times*, 17 November 1929.

32. Reported in 'Attack on War Novels', *The Daily Herald*, 12 November 1929.

33. *The Cambridge Review*, 3 May 1929, 412.

34. *London Mercury*, XXI (January 1930), 194-95.

35. Reported in *The New York Times*, 9 February 1930.

36. Ehrenburg, *Men, Years*, III, 129.

37. Title of a fragment of Emmanuel Berl's memoirs, published together with *Interrogatoire* (Paris 1976). See also W. Müller Scheid, *Im Westen nichts Neues — eine Täuschung* (Idstein 1929), 6; and *Commonweal*, 27 May 1931, 90.

38. *Fortnightly Review*, 1 October 1930, 527.

39. Cited in John C. Cairns, 'A Nation of Shopkeepers in Search of a Suitable France: 1919-40', *The American Historical Review*, LXXIX (1974), 728.

40. *Pacifists in Peace and War* (London 1932), 12, 18.

41. Graves, *Goodbye*, 240.

42. Guy Pedroncini, *Les Mutineries de 1917* (Paris 1967), 177. See also Marc Ferro, *La Grande Guerre 1914-1918* (Paris 1969), 239.

43. *L'Intervention militaire britannique en 1914* (Paris 1928), 231. The book was written in 1922.

44. See the introductory remarks of René Lalou to R. H. Mottram, *La Ferme espagnole*, trans. M. Dou-Desportes (Paris 1930), i-iv.

45. See Christopher Isherwood's *Lions and Shadows: An Education in the Twenties* (London 1953), 73-76; and his *Kathleen and Frank* (London 1971), 356-63; and also Jean Dutourd, *Les Taxis de la Marne* (Paris 1956), 189-93.

46. *The New York Times*, 18 January 1930.

47. *The New Republic*, 20 May 1931, 23-24.

48. *Fränkischer Kurier*, 12 May 1933, cited in Henry C. Meyer, ed., *The Long Generation: Germany From Empire to Ruin, 1913-1945* (New York 1973), 221.

49. Polizeipräsident in Berlin to Geheime Staatspolizeiamt, 4 December 1933, Reichssicherheitshauptamt files, R58, folder 933, 198, Bundesarchiv Koblenz.

50. Geheime Staatspolizeiamt to the Polizeipräsident, 16 December 1933, ibid., 199.

51. *WTB* report, 15 May 1933, in the Neue Reichskanzlei files, R43II, folder 479, 4-5, Bundesarchiv Koblenz.

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