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War without Glory

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War without Glory

DOROTHY B. JONES

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All Quiet on the Western Front is unique among Hollywood war films and remains today one of the few motion pictures ever made anywhere which sets out to examine the cost of war purely in human terms and without taking sides in the conflict. The film does this by picturing with relentless realism the effects of war upon the young men who do the fighting. One would expect that this picture's scenes of trench warfare would appear unimpressive after the many World War II films (including documentary records of actual battles) which have been shown. Nevertheless, because of its unflinchingly realistic portrayal of the effects of war on individual human beings, *All Quiet* remains a document of staggering force with startling relevance today when nations are, for the first time in history, struggling on a collective basis to restrict warfare and to devote themselves earnestly to developing workable alternatives for settling disputes among nations. For it is self-evident that the effects of war upon the bodies and minds of men must be known and understood if we are to have the vision, the will, the strength, and the patience to surmount the serious obstacles which still stand in the way of a world-wide rejection of war.

Based on Erich M. Remarque's famous novel, first published in Germany in 1929, *All Quiet on the Western Front* was released as a motion picture in 1930. Like the book, the film relates the war experiences of Paul Baumer and others of a group of young German soldiers during World War I. When we first see the boys in the classroom, their youthfulness, their naïve faith in their

schoolmaster's perfervid words about the glories of war, their eagerness mingled with youthful uncertainty at the thought of joining up are fully apparent. From this point on, the motion picture shows with unremitting honesty what happens to these boys when they go to war. We are introduced to the ruthless discipline and rigorous training of military life which toughen them for combat. We get our first glimpse of life "up front" as they detrain in a village near the fighting lines. Pictures of the muddy streets, full of the confusion of moving men and equipment, are intercut with close-ups of the strained, bewildered faces of the boys as the smoke of battle darkens the sky and the big guns rumble ominously in the distance. As the film proceeds, we share with the boys a sense of deepening apprehension; we feel ourselves being drawn closer and closer toward the center of the conflict.

Each of the three sequences which picture the boys' experiences at the front rises to a climax of human agony more intense than the one which preceded it; the fighting is shown at greater length and becomes more ruthless and savage. The initial sequence shows the boys' first night under fire when they are sent out under the veteran Katczinsky to lay barbed wire along the front: their apprehension as the truck departs after delivering them to the front, their terror at the screaming shells, and their appearance as frightened children to the brusque but warmhearted Kat who teaches them how to fall and burrow in the earth when the shells come over.

On this first night of action comes the first death. Ironically, Behm, who had been the last and the most reluctant to join up, is the first to be killed. Through the smoke and dust following an exploding shell we hear his muffled, inhuman cries. Then as the smoke begins to clear we see him struggling to his feet, his face smeared with blood and mud, crying out, whimpering, moaning in a wild frenzy of terror: "I'm blind! I'm blind! I can't see! My eyes! Oh, God! I can't see! I'm blind!" The flash of an exploding shell lights up the camera's close view of the horrified faces of his

friends as they watch him. Then, from behind the bomb crater where most of the group are crouching we see Behm, still screaming, as he staggers out of a shell hole and into full view of the enemy. A brief round of machine-gun fire is heard as Behm does a wild, reeling dance; then he falls to the ground, and his cries are heard no more.

Thus war with its seemingly endless tide of death begins for these boys. There follows the sequence in which a group of starving soldiers after five days of continued bombardment are seen in a dugout in the front lines. A series of close-ups reveal what days of hunger and unrelieved terror have done to these boys. The fury of the bombardment increases, and Franz Kemmerich, his hands pressed to his ears in a futile attempt to shut out the sound of falling bombs, starts to scream—frenzied shrieking almost unbearable to hear—as he makes a dash to get out of the dugout. Paul manages to keep Franz from running out, and Kat strikes the hysterical boy in the face with his fist. When one of the timbers over the dugout crashes amid a rain of smoke and dust and dirt, several of the boys begin to scream. In the confusion, Franz, who is again shrieking wildly, rushes out into the trenches where, as he tries to climb over the sandbags, he is shot in the leg by an enemy sniper.

The battle sequence which follows is the culmination of all that has gone before—the recruitment, the training, the arrival at the front, the first detail under fire, and the long bombardment which directly preceded it. This battle sequence itself builds to an overpowering climax of violence and brutality. From the doorway of the dugout, the camera moves slowly back along the top of the trenches recording the scene from a high angle, as one by one the boys take their places in the trenches. This long moving shot is intercut with short scenes of the advancing enemy, as the sounds become cumulatively louder and more frightening—the distant rumble of guns, the whine of enemy shells coming over, and the increasingly loud explosions of enemy bombs. A series of brief shots in rapid succession reveal the charging enemy coming

nearer and nearer the German lines and the rising fury of the encounter. At the height of the attack a shell hole in no man's land, where many French soldiers have just taken refuge, blows up before our eyes. Another shell explodes among the onrushing men; the smoke clears away; a pair of hands blown off at the wrists still hangs from the barbed-wire entanglement; and Paul's head bends over his gun as he sickens at the sight.

The fierceness of the fighting is suggested by the way in which the shots are combined. For example, long moving shots showing French soldiers charging toward the German barbed-wire entanglements and being mowed down by machine-gun fire are repeatedly intercut with quick front views of a German machine gunner firing furiously. The effect of this series of alternating still and moving shots of the gunner and his victims, to the accompaniment of the rat-tat-tat of the machine gun, expresses not only the ruthlessness but the wild ferocity of this mass killing. But still the attackers come and finally begin to pour into the German trenches. Now, again, the camera moves, this time along the top of the trenches as it reveals the wild hand-to-hand fighting which follows. The men's shouts intermingle with the sound of battle as they fight with the desperate brutality of men who must kill or be killed. The presence of few familiar faces heightens the raw animalistic nature of this fighting. Since our sympathies are not with one side or another, nor with one man or another, we see only the carnage, the brutality, the desperation of this fighting; and thus, we overwhelmingly feel the horrible waste and bestiality of war itself.

There is no glamour in this film's portrayal of war, no false heroics, no attempt to gloss over ugly facts. On the other hand, there is no sensationalism in the way that the scenes of war are handled, no attempt to shock for the sake of shocking. Nevertheless, as the camera with unfaltering objectivity records the naked and violent facts of war, we cannot but be shaken by the elemental quality of the scenes themselves. We experience with these boys their shock and disbelief as they witness the first death of one of

their group; the unnerving, unmanning effect of seeing a comrade break after five days and nights of terror and hunger; the almost unbearable tension that precedes an attack by the enemy; the nightmarish din and smoke, blood and confusion which pervade the battlefield; and finally, the fierce animalistic brutality of hand-to-hand fighting.

After the first third of the film has taken us into war with Paul and his group, the picture turns to showing more fully some of the devastating results of these war experiences. The first and most obvious result is what war does to the bodies of men. The widespread maiming, crippling, and dying of men in war is pictured in several hospital sequences. We see Kemmerich die of his wounds; we watch Albert learn that he must face life as a cripple; and we observe Paul, although seriously wounded, recover to return home on leave. That the shattered boys like Paul will find only their war-damaged selves at home is suggested by our first glimpse of Paul's home-coming: as he comes down the street, looking about hungrily at the familiar sights, a one-legged soldier on crutches hobbles across the square. Although the home-and-mother picture which follows is oversentimentalized in the manner of the 'twenties, this sequence of the film still makes unremittingly clear that the home which meant so much to Paul will never be the same. The loved and familiar are colored by the bitterness of being forever removed by a world of horror which stands between him and those whom he loves most, a world of which they know nothing, one which they cannot even imagine. We realize, as Paul does, that the war has given him nothing and has taken everything from him.

The change which has come over Paul and his comrades becomes most apparent in the sequence of Paul's return to the schoolroom.¹ Walking down the street, Paul hears the schoolmaster's voice through the open schoolroom window. We see Paul in his uniform framed in the window of the schoolroom. In the

¹ This very effective sequence was one which was added to the screenplay; in the novel when Paul returns home he finds that the schoolmaster has been drafted into the army.

film's opening sequence many marching soldiers were framed in this same window; now, there is only one soldier, but one with whom we have lived through the war. Over this view of Paul alone we hear the familiar words of the schoolmaster as he speaks of the glories of war. And then, exactly as in the earlier scene, the camera slowly moves back to take in the schoolmaster behind his desk delivering a lecture about war to the youthful pupils. Suddenly the vague sense of a scene repeating itself is abruptly broken, and we see Paul standing in the doorway and hear the welcoming words of the schoolmaster as he draws the young man forward saying proudly to his students, "Here is one of the first to go . . . look at him." Now the camera takes in the eager faces of the children (in a series of close-ups) as the teacher's voice describes Paul to them in these words, "sturdy, bronze and clear-eyed." The words are, of course, intended by the teacher to describe Paul, but hearing them as we look upon the faces of the children, we cannot but realize that the words describe the children themselves and that these boys are Paul and his comrades as they were before the war. Thus, the contrast between the freshness and eagerness of Paul as he once was and his bitter hopelessness in the scenes which follow is pointed up at the very beginning of the sequence.

The parallel between this and the earlier classroom sequence is a telling one in several ways. Not only is there a repetition of place, people, and situation, but of the manner in which image and sound are combined. The movement of the camera in particular subtly creates in the observer a strange dreamlike sense of having relived the scene before, the same sensation which Paul himself obviously feels. This sense of events repeating themselves also has an objective significance. As we look upon the faces of the boys, realizing that they are indeed as Paul and the others were when we first saw them, we know that what we have seen happening to Paul and his comrades will inevitably happen to these lads. We become tragically aware that these boys, and boys like them everywhere, are caught up in a cycle of killing which is being repeated and repeated endlessly.

However, the never-ending process of killing involved in war is best expressed cinematically by the way in which this motion picture follows the history of a single pair of boots. Early in the film, Franz Kemmerich proudly shows his friends in the barracks the new pair of boots of “genuine imported leather” which his uncle has given him. After Franz has been wounded, Paul and the other boys visit him in the hospital where he lies dying. We do not witness Franz’s death; instead, we see a close-up of Paul’s boots, poised at the top of a flight of steps. These boots slowly descend the stairs of the hospital, another pair held in Paul’s hand comes into view, and the camera tilts up to take in Paul’s grief-stricken face.

Paul delivers the boots to Mueller, as Franz had requested before he died. Moments later we see another close-up of Franz’s boots, marching in a column with those worn by other soldiers; and again the camera tilts up to show that the boots are now worn by Mueller. Then, we see this boy falling; a bullet in his shoulder, he lies writhing on the ground. This picture dissolves into another close-up of Franz’s boots again marching in a column with others, and once more the camera tilts up to reveal that the boots are now being worn by another member of the group, a lad named Peter. It is clear from the way he smiles and glances down at his feet that he is proud of his newly acquired possession. Once more the picture dissolves into another in which Franz’s boots are seen in the foreground of a low shot of the firing step of a trench; beyond, down the trench, the boots of other men are seen in a long unbroken row. A whistle is heard, and Franz’s boots along with the others are pulled up the side of the trench as the boys go over the top. The camera holds the empty trench for a few seconds; then, an explosion is heard, and in a flash of light Franz’s boots fall back on the firing step; and Peter’s body slithers down past the camera, leaving the boots again in close-up as they come to rest awkwardly on the step. A view of the dead boy’s face, blood trickling out of the corner of his mouth, is followed by a repeated close-up of the boots which we now know to be worn by a dead man.

So it is that the story of a pair of boots, passed on from one boy to another, becomes the story of the successive death of three boys, Franz Kemmerich, Mueller, and Peter. Every lad who takes another's place—or, as the film expresses it, every lad who steps into another fellow's boots—is doomed. As each boy is maimed or killed, there will be another youth, fresh, full of life, who will take his place. The cherished boots of Franz Kemmerich, worn by each boy in pride and comfort and pleasure, will (as the countless other boots worn by so many nameless boys) come in time to rest, empty symbols of the many strong, vitally alive young men who wore them. Thus, does the story of a single pair of boots, told without a word of dialogue, show eloquently of the slaughter of youth which goes on in war.

Death and darkness are ever present in *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Our first view of the war front is a small village on a dark day. The streets are full of mud; there is a confusion of men, mounted troops, and hospital trains, while exploding shells in the distance throw up dirt and debris; night comes on, and a pouring rain makes the scene even more dismal. The boys' first assignment to action is to lay barbed wire just beyond a graveyard at night. Here the first death of their group occurs. The big battle is fought in a dull and desolate light which is neither day nor night. In a later sequence, a graveyard serves as the place of battle; and Paul, digging frantically to secure himself from enemy fire, is horrified to find that he has dug himself into a coffin and is lying beside a corpse. Toward the close of the film, as the men march into battle on the eve of the great offensive, they joke grimly about the coffins piled up by the roadside.

In contrast to the depressing darkness, raw brutality, suffering, and death of the war scenes, *All Quiet on the Western Front* gives us in other scenes glimpses of sunlight, untroubled youth, love, and the joy of living. Early in the film, the freshness, fun, and eagerness of youth are fully expressed in the picture of Paul and his comrades. In the classroom, although they are wide-eyed and earnest, they are also full of gay and noisy enthusiasm; in the

barracks, before Himmelstoss makes his appearance, they are exuberant, obviously proud of themselves. This same untroubled youthfulness—this time in counterpoint to the dull, darkened spirit of Paul who has returned from the front—is again seen in the classroom toward the close of the film.

But youth and a love of life in contrast to death are most strikingly dramatized in a brief scene after the death of Franz Kemmerich. Paul, holding Franz's boots in his hand, stands shocked and grief-stricken at the top of the steps leading from the terrace of the hospital. For a moment he remains motionless, quietly absorbed by his inner feelings; then, his features begin to relax. From a deathlike mask of grief his face comes to life before our eyes, expressing deep relief and the joy of being alive, as he descends the stairs and begins to walk, slowly at first (the camera traveling with him), then faster, faster (past the camera), his mood and step growing lighter until he is running swiftly down the pathway through a little wood (away from the camera). The sun is shining on the path, and several young soldiers strolling toward the hospital call to him as he runs past them. "What's your hurry?" one asks, adding to his companion half-jokingly, "I bet he stole those boots." They both laugh and look after him, as the picture fades from view.

This brief scene captures perfectly the feeling experienced by almost every soldier at the death of a comrade. After the first shock there immediately follows the natural relief felt by the survivor, a poignant sense of joy at finding himself alive. He cannot help feeling glad that someone else, even though a friend, rather than he has died; and suddenly he becomes acutely aware of his own aliveness, infused as he is with relief and joy and a sense of his own well-being. So Paul, running down the sunlit path, running away from death, expresses this intense, deeply felt urge to live. And the boys who call out to him, by their secure air of normalcy, by their very casualness, heighten our understanding of the intensity and the meaning of Paul's behavior. Unfortunately, Lewis Milestone followed this scene by another in which Paul,

returning to his quarters, tells Mueller how he felt after Franz's death. Coming directly after the scene just described, Paul's speech is merely a verbal repetition of an idea which has already had eloquent cinematic expression.

All Quiet on the Western Front tells us that even during war-time, people of the warring nations, taken as individuals, can have feelings of love and compassion for one another. This idea is expressed in two scenes which are among the most effective in the entire film. Paul has found shelter in a shell hole when a French soldier descends upon him. Paul stabs his enemy with his bayonet. Finding himself alone with the groaning Frenchman, Paul tries to escape, but the fighting is still too heavy overhead. Horrified, he sees that his hands are covered with blood, and he tries to wash off the blood in the water hole at the bottom of the crater. Now it is night, and we hear the Frenchman groaning in the dark. The flash of exploding shells now and again lights up the crater to reveal the Frenchman lying against the side of the hole and Paul hunched over, his hands covering his ears to shut out the man's agonized moans. The morning light finds Paul disheveled and frantic. He tries to get the Frenchman to drink and realizes that he is dead. With his half-smiling lips and staring eyes, he appears to look accusingly at Paul.

This is one of the scenes of the film which Lew Ayres, in his first important screen role as Paul, is not quite able to handle convincingly.² Nevertheless, its effectiveness is felt because of the powerful truths which are expressed as the German youth speaks to the Frenchman he has killed. War demands that men kill one another. But a man can feel compassion for another human being, regardless of his nationality. Face to face with the Frenchman

² Lew Ayres was only twenty years old when he played the part of Paul in this film. It was not until some years later in the middle 'thirties, when he traveled extensively in Europe, that his convictions as a pacifist were definitely formulated. However, he states that his first big screen role in *All Quiet on the Western Front* made a tremendous impression upon him and was undoubtedly an important factor in determining his attitude toward war. When called into service in World War II, Lew Ayres declared himself a conscientious objector and was interned. However, he agreed to serve in the U. S. Army Medical Corps and in this service distinguished himself on battlefields in the South Pacific.

whom he has mortally wounded, Paul is overcome by pity and remorse. From "the enemy," whom he has been taught by the necessities of war to fear, hate, and kill, this Frenchman becomes simply another human being, a man like himself, for whom Paul feels great compassion. In a small crater in the midst of the battle, Paul is overcome by these emotions, and we know that each man who kills so ruthlessly on the battlefield is essentially capable of these same emotions.

Love between the children of the warring nations is also expressed in a tender love scene between Paul and a French girl. Paul, Albert, and Leer pay a night visit to three French girls across the river, bringing them bread and wine. They sit with the girls around a table and watch them eat and drink. Later, from a close-up of a victrola turning unheeded at the end of a record, the camera draws back to take in the quiet, deserted room. Then a bedroom is shadowed on the wall. We see only the shadows of the head of the bedstead and a water pitcher on the table, as we overhear Paul and Suzanne talking quietly together. Paul speaks to her gratefully; but Suzanne, who cannot understand his words, interrupts him repeatedly with a whispered "Poor boy—this terrible war!" We know that in the arms of this girl the youth has found momentary escape from war; whereas, the French girl, in giving her love, grieves at what has happened to this German boy, just as millions of women—mothers and wives the world over—grieve over what war does to their men.

Here with taste and simplicity has been recorded one of the most eloquent love scenes ever filmed. The motionless shadows on the wall are expressive of the quiet mood of the lovers. At the same time since we cannot see them we listen the more intently. Yet, the words which this boy and girl speak are unimportant. The gentle tone, the tenderness in their voices are what matter; although they speak in different tongues, their language is a universal one. The effectiveness of this scene stems in part from its appeal on a primary level of experience: like children, we listen outside a forbidden door; and, like children, we hear not

so much the words as the tone. What we hear are the universal intonations of love as a boy and girl of the warring nations express their love for one another.

The ending of this motion picture summarizes with beauty and imagination all that has been said by the film as a whole. In the death of Kat (which occurs shortly before the last sequence of the film) Paul has lost not only a comrade, but a brother. That Paul looked to the man as to an older brother was touchingly suggested by Paul's affectionate regard and admiration for Kat throughout the picture. A broader significance (the brotherhood of all men) is suggested at the time of Kat's death. Believing that Kat is only wounded, Paul brings him water; but, as he puts the glass to the man's lips, he realizes that Kat is dead (paralleling exactly the circumstance under which Paul, in the earlier sequence, came to realize that the Frenchman was dead). Paul stares at Kat's blood on his own hand (is he remembering the Frenchman whose blood also stained his hands and whom, after death, he spoke of as a brother "just like Kat"?). As if sensing the boy's thoughts, the officer asks, "You're not related—are you?" Paul, recalled from his inner thoughts, replies dully, but not without bitterness, "No, we're not related."

It has been a joke between Kat and the boys that the war will not be over until the enemy gets Katczinsky. Now that the older man is gone, Paul is desolate. This we sense from the image which immediately follows the scene of Kat's death, for we are shown a cold, barren, and desolate wasteland pitted with the ugly marks of war. Here, indeed, is no man's land—no man is seen, no sign of life, not even a growing thing. Here is how the world would look—covered with hideous scars and deserted of all life—if man were to destroy it with his final, most violent of all wars. This image pictures clearly Paul's feeling at the death of Katczinsky: this is not only the end of the war, but the end of the world for Paul. This feeling of emptiness and utter hopelessness shows in his face as he sits in the trench, leaning against the sandbags. The only sound is the softly played music of a harmonica, a small

plaintive kind of tune which runs like a thin but steady stream of life through the quiet and otherwise desolate scene.

But something catches the boy's eye, and the hint of a smile plays around his lips as he leans forward to look. Now, we see his face from the outside of the trench as he looks through the square gun hole, and the camera moves slowly down the side of the trench to show us in close-up what the boy has seen: a butterfly has settled on the half-open lid of an old tin can. Paul's helmet appears over the top of the trench, and quickly the film cuts to a fallen log on the enemy side where a sniper's head appears. Slowly, the sniper moves into firing position, resting his gun on the log. Then, we see Paul carefully put out his hand to reach for the butterfly; the sniper, with the same deliberate care, takes his aim. There is a close-up of the butterfly on the can as the boy's hand comes slowly into the picture reaching for it. Again we glimpse the sniper, his finger going with careful deliberateness to the trigger of his rifle. There is a final close-up of the butterfly and the boy's hand which almost reaches it when there comes the sharp sound of the rifle. Instantaneously the harmonica music (that steady thin stream of life which has run on unceasingly through these shots) is suddenly stilled; the hand is convulsively and involuntarily drawn back a little; then comes to rest, quiet in death. There follows a scene of boys in uniform walking silently in single file up a hill; this scene is superimposed over the background of row upon row of white crosses. There are many strange faces among the boys, but as Paul, Kemmerich, Behm, Mueller, and the others whom we know pass, each looks back over his shoulder at the audience; each look is sorrowful, bewildered, and even accusing; then, the boys pass on silently up the hill.³

³ The ending of this film which deservedly won high praise was not that originally made for the picture. Carl Laemmle, Jr., recalls that neither he nor Lewis Milestone felt satisfied with the ending as it was originally shot; and one evening, only two days before the picture's world premiere at the Carthay Circle in Los Angeles, they sat around discussing this fact. The well-known cinematographer Carl Freund was among those present, and it was he who conceived the idea of the boy being shot by a sniper while reaching for a butterfly. Both the producer and director immediately saw that this supplied exactly what they had been searching for; and Lewis Milestone worked out, shot, and edited the scene within forty-eight hours.

The paralleling of shots and the paralleling of the slow, cautious movements of the sniper with those of Paul have a multiplicity of meanings. We have seen earlier that Paul has caught butterflies to mount them and preserve their beauty. So eager is he to capture this thing of beauty in an otherwise desolate world that he has completely forgotten where he is. He moves slowly, unaware of his own danger, intent upon capturing and preserving the beauty of a short-lived thing. The sniper moves with the same slowness and caution, but for the purpose of destroying a human life which has not yet begun to fulfill itself. The motives are in full and meaningful contrast: they express a love of life intensely and warmly felt and the drive to kill which is inherent in war. In the series of alternating shots we see two human beings, each moving slowly and intently toward his chosen end. The tension is heightened by the slowness, by the quietness of the movements of these two human beings, and by our anguished knowledge of what the end must be. Yet there is no anger at the sniper, but only a feeling of sadness and resignation; for we know that this is youth reaching for life on the one hand and humanity intent upon death on the other. And when the single shot from the rifle comes at last and the music halts abruptly, the silence which follows has an emptiness and loneliness which endures, as though youth itself had been forever silenced by that shot. Then the sight of the silent uniformed figures, which pass before us, reminds us of the millions of youths who have gone and of the millions who may yet go in this way unless war can be eradicated.

The film *All Quiet on the Western Front*, like the book on which it is based, has a documentary quality. But, whereas the book is the sensitive memory of one soldier, the film is an objective record of the raw facts of war. The autobiography of Erich Remarque's war experiences with its eloquent simplicity tells us, far better than the film, the inner thoughts and emotions of a young soldier. On the other hand, the film with its relentless objectivity is able to give us a much more accurate and powerful

knowledge of actual warfare. We see and hear not only the stabbing bayonets and the screaming shells; but we experience as well the tensions, the unbearable anxiety which precedes the battle, the unmasked brutality of killing, and finally the sense of loss and depression which comes in the wake of a war experience.

The film is episodic like the book. In many ways this fragmentary method of telling the story appears to be better suited to the novel than to the motion-picture medium, for the film falters and appears disjointed in some spots where the connection between one scene and the next is not immediately apparent. All but a few of the incidents pictured in the film have been taken directly from the book; nevertheless, in filming the story, Lewis Milestone showed ingenuity and originality. Although this picture was made during the first years of sound when camera movement was consistently being sacrificed to dialogue, Milestone made the camera the primary means of expression. The moving camera was used to create many of the finest scenes of the picture (notably, as has already been shown, in the battle sequence); and it was also the means by which the director maintained continuity within many individual scenes, thereby helping to build the mood or idea he wanted to express (as in the long, unbroken scene in the barracks when the camera draws back gradually, pausing as it includes one and then another of the boys as they laughingly accost Himmelstoss, and finally takes in the whole barracks as the outraged officer orders the entire group to attention). Nor did Milestone underestimate the power of the silent image, as most directors at that time were inclined to do. We have already mentioned numerous scenes which illustrate this, but to these should be added the wordless farewell in the hospital ward between Paul and Albert: Paul, departing on leave for home, turns back at the door but can find no word to say; and Albert, whose leg has been amputated, glances down at the photograph of himself and Paul, hides the lower part of the picture with his hand, and looks after his departing friend with tear-filled eyes. Mile-

stone also shows that he knows how to combine sound and image to achieve the desired effect. This is particularly evident in his use of sound in building up the tension of the battle sequence.

One of the most remarkable things about the book is its complete lack of partisanship. In the motion picture, as in the book, the story of these young soldiers is told with such deep compassion that they appear to us not so much as Germans but as merely human beings about whose fate we feel a deep and tragic concern. As in the book, too, the conversations of these men as they talk about the war are the words of men who could as easily be French, English, Russian, or Italian, as Americans or Germans. But the film goes even further: it fittingly embodies the spirit of universality expressed in the novel by having Americans play the part of German soldiers. The inherent meaning of this objective fact about the film must not be overlooked in judging its effectiveness.⁴ For in a film in which Americans (who were among the victors of World War I) play with true understanding the role of the vanquished, there can indeed be no enemy and no thought of victory; and we are thus able to achieve an entirely new perspective about war. The impact is particularly great because there is no enemy, as such, in the film. The loud riot of killing is especially shocking since the strong feelings which it arouses in us cannot be discharged, cannot be focused against any enemy. In the battle scenes, the camera with an unremitting objectivity typical of the film's entire portrayal of the fighting, takes no sides in the conflict—for example, a German machine gunner's view of the attacking French soldiers as they fall before his fire is followed later in the same battle sequence with a similar view from behind the French machine gunner as he mows down the counterattacking

⁴ In this connection the spontaneous comment of a noted German sociologist who recently sat in on a screening of this picture is worth noting. He had entered shortly after the picture started and consequently missed the introductory credits. As the lights went on after the conclusion of the film he asked a remarkable question: "Was this picture dubbed in English?" He had known, of course, that the picture was based on the German book; and he explained that he thought there had been a German version of the film made. But that he could, through identifying with the boys in the film, have for one moment believed they were actually German, suggests the remarkable universality achieved in this film by having American boys play sympathetically conceived German roles.

Germans. We accept these boys and completely identify ourselves with them; yet, we can find no enemy to hate and to blame for their suffering. There is only one thing to hate, and that is war itself.

By overlooking the issues of World War I, by making nationality, national interests, and feelings of national pride purely secondary (or by ignoring them completely), *All Quiet on the Western Front* greatly oversimplifies the problems of war which the world faces today. But by so doing, Carl Laemmle, Jr., Lewis Milestone, Maxwell Anderson, George Abbott, Arthur Edeson, and others responsible for the film were able to achieve their aim of making an appraisal of war from a purely humanistic standpoint. Such an appraisal is invaluable in a world which is struggling to unite itself in the name of peace. At some future time when war has been outlawed, *All Quiet on the Western Front* will doubtless be remembered as a milestone in our thinking about war.