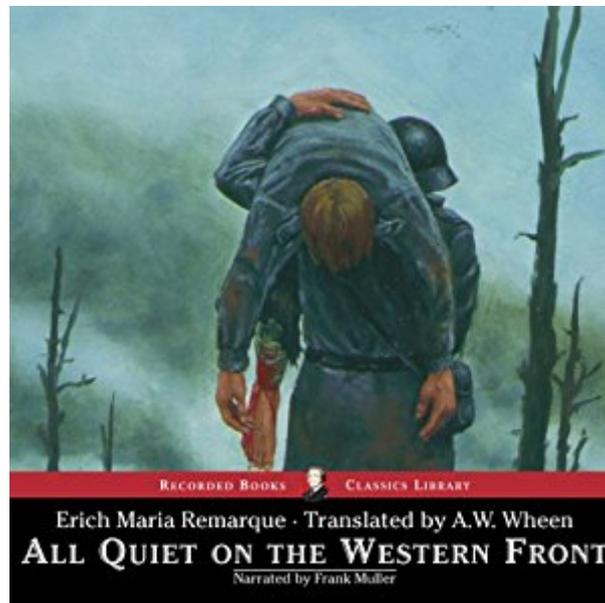


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All Quiet On The Western Front



Synopsis

Paul Bäumer is just 19 years old when he and his classmates enlist. They are Germany's Iron Youth who enter the war with high ideals and leave it disillusioned or dead. As Paul struggles with the realities of the man he has become, and the inscrutable world to which he must return, he is led like a ghost of his former self into the war's final hours. *All Quiet* is one of the greatest war novels of all time, an eloquent expression of the futility, hopelessness and irreparable losses of war.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 6 hours and 55 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Recorded Books

Audible.com Release Date: October 15, 2010

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B0047CGNGC

Best Sellers Rank: #1 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature > Drama #1

in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Study Aids #2 in Books > Audible Audiobooks >

Fiction & Literature > Literary Criticism

Customer Reviews

Erich Maria Remarque (1898-1970) served in World War I, where he received wounds five times in battle. The searing images of trench warfare left indelible scars on Remarque, who then attempted to exorcize his demons through the writing of literature. "*All Quiet on the Western Front*" is Remarque's most memorable book, although he wrote nine others dealing with the miseries of war. "*All Quiet on the Western Front*" is the story of Paul Baumer, a young German soldier serving in the trenches in France. Baumer's story is not a pleasant one; he volunteered for the war when his instructor in school, Kantorek, urged the class to join up for the glory of Germany. After a rigorous period of military training (where Paul and his buddies meet the hated drill instructor Himmelstoss, a recurring character throughout the book), Baumer and his friends go to the front as infantrymen. Filled with glorious ideas about war by authority figures back home, Baumer quickly discovers that the blood-drenched trenches of the Western Front are a quagmire of misery and violent death. As soon as the first shells explode in the mud Paul and his friends realize everyone back home is a liar,

that war is not the glorious transformation of boys into men but rather the systematic destruction of all that is decent and healthy. As Paul's friends slip away one by one through death, desertion, and injury, Paul begins to wonder about his own life and whether he will survive not only the war but also a world without war. Remarque's book exposes all of the insanities of war. The incongruities of violent battle versus long periods of boredom repeatedly appear throughout the book. On one day, Paul and his friends sit around discussing mundane topics; the next day they are bashing French skulls during an offensive. It is these extremes that caused so many problems with the psychological disposition of the men. In one chapter of the book, Paul and several new recruits, hunkered down in a dugout, withstand hour upon hour of continuous shellfire until one of the green recruits snaps and tries to make a run for freedom. Where else but in a war could one walk through a sea of corpses while enjoying the sunshine and the gentle cadences of the birds in the trees? That such an unnatural activity as mass murder takes place surrounded by the natural beauty of the world is a theme found in many World War I authors and poets. Remarque's book is noteworthy because he does a better job of showing this strange duality than other writers. Also of interest is that this book views the war from the German side. From what I read recently, the Germans had a tough time throughout the war with rations, troop rotations away from the front, and supplies. This is apparent in Remarque's treatment of the German war effort, especially toward the end of the book when Germany begins to retreat in the face of overwhelming American military power. Paul's remarks about the evil presence of tanks are an interesting insight into the effect those iron behemoths had on the ill-equipped and exhausted Germans. The cover of this edition trumpets this as "the greatest war novel of all time." And so it is, but not in the way some people might think. This is the greatest war novel ever because Remarque's book is anti-war. Those that read "All Quiet on the Western Front" will see warfare stripped of its flag waving, parades, and John Wayne glory. War is death, with the glory going to the few who survive. Remarque makes a brilliant contribution to world literature with this riveting novel.

I was supposed to read this novel around 25 years ago, for a high school English class, and decided to skip it and just read the back cover and take notes in class. Turns out the joke was on me. I finally got around to reading this classic book, and let's just say that it's all the good things you've heard about and will read about below. The story is told simply but powerfully. One memorable scene follows another, and the battle scenes are particularly strong and at times even overpowering. But somehow the strongest scenes describe our protagonist--Paul's--thoughts when he realizes, during quieter moments, such as when on leave, that the war has changed him and

made him no longer able to fit into society. And the scene where Paul shares a shellhole with a dying French soldier, and contemplates on the brotherhood of man, and on our universal commonality, and of the utter uselessness of war, is so memorable that...well, if you don't get a lump in your throat while reading this scene, you're better than me! Me recommending this book to you is like someone saying "Citizen Kane" is a good movie or that the Beatles were a swell group. Let's just say that if you deprive yourself of this emotionally moving reading experience, as I did for so many years, you'll really be missing out. 'Nuff said.

I never suspected that when I began reading *All Quiet* for my 10th grade History class, it would completely revolutionize my perspective on war. This novel flawlessly captures the confusion, bitterness, futility, and hopeless loss of human life on the battlefield. At the same time Remarque eliminates the false perception that war is glorious and honorable. The way in which the author accomplishes this is, in my opinion, without a single flaw. Written through the narrative of a young German soldier, Paul Baumer, this book succeeds in revealing an entirely new perspective to the reader. To an American reader, Baumer is "the enemy" since he is a German soldier in WWI. But through the expression of Baumer's thoughts and emotions, one quickly realizes the harsh commonality between soldiers of both sides, and the inevitable futility of war, with scores of men dying for a few inches of dirt. The images are intense and painful- choking in poison gas, trembling with fear of being shelled, and the eternal loss of faith in life itself once one has been forced to kill and be killed namelessly, facelessly, and heartlessly. The impact it has on the reader is beyond words- one has to read this book to understand the reasons why war is not all what we have been led to believe. I have never been a fan of war novels, but this book goes beyond being just another war novel. Besides offering a revolutionary new perspective on the grim truth about war, it taught me much about the sanctity of safety, peace, freedom, and life. Although I could never truly feel what soldiers undergo physically and emotionally in war, this book is as close as one can get. *All Quiet on the Western Front* is a truly phenomenal novel, and I feel that everyone should read this book. It will change the way you think.

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