

# Literature of War and Peace

## Major Essay

All Quiet on the Western Front

Line 1 : Jonathan Walker

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Topic: *One of the purposes of this novel is to educate the reader about the reality of war and its effects. What do we learn about war and its impact on soldier through this novel.*

In the novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* we learn a lot about war and it's effect on the soldiers that fight it. War desensitizes the men to violence and alienates them from their pre-war experiences. They are emotionally destroyed, by seeing their best friends shot and blown apart, dead on the battlefield. The men that fight wars, the soldiers don't want to fight them and don't like having to fight them, they just do what they are told and continue with the senseless killing. War is a terrible thing, it forces boys from young and innocent, into ruthless human animalistic killing machines who do nothing but scavenge for food to eat, sleep when they can and kill, in the trenches and then they die in agony in the mud. This is the impact that war has on the soldiers through this novel, and at the end they have all died, gone through this selfless, agonizing and purposeless sacrifice of not just their lives but their entire life.

One of the impacts of war on the young soldiers is to alienate them from their pre-war experiences. Paul thinks it strange that in the drawer of his writing table is a play named *Saul* that he started writing. Their life before the war becomes unreal and incomprehensible to them. *"But that has become so unreal to me I cannot comprehend it any more."*, p19. Before they went off to war, they were so young that they didn't have a job or anything like that, so the war has become their whole lives, they now know nothing else but killing, death and violence. The men who have gone off to war have become emotionally destroyed, their conscious mind raped by the experiences that they have endured. Their friends killed, blown apart, right next to them. The awesome loss and devastation of this terrible situation has stripped them of their youth, which they can never get back *"And even if these scenes of our youth were given back to us we would hardly know what to do."*, p83. Most of the soldiers in the war didn't want to go and fight. They were lured there by false images of romanticism and pressured by their teachers and parents who would ostracize and call them cowards if they didn't enlist. *"There was one of us indeed who did not want to fall into line...he would have been ostracized"* p13. In this way they were forced to join the army and go to be destroyed physically and emotionally in the trenches.

War has different effects on different people. Although war destroys all men emotionally, it does this in different ways for different men. Himmelstoss became power hungry and drilled the men incessantly for the tiniest of details, the power that was given to him by the war was snapped up and abused to enlarge his own petty ego. The new recruits in the trenches are affected far more deeply than this since Himmelstoss hardly spent any time in the trenches. The recruits cried in the first bombardment because they were not used to the sheer terror of the dropping shells, their first emotions being \*\*\*\*\*ripped from their soul. *"Beside us lies a fair headed recruit in utter terror...his head close to my breast."* p45. The more hardened trench soldiers like Paul and Kat already have their sensitivities torn from their psyche and bottle the anguish of the war inside, they are void. From the novel we also learn that practically none of the soldiers want to fight in the war, or understand why they have to go through this pain. Some of the soldiers have their own opinions as to how wars should be fought. *"Then in the arena*

*the ministers and generals of the two countries...Whoever survives, his country wins."* p32/33. If wars were fought in this manner than the impact of the war on people would be considerably less.

Soldiers in war are stripped of all their emotions and transformed into human/animal hybrid killing machines. "*We have become wild beasts*" p78. The young boys, who start out as recruits, so innocent are brutally changed in the trenches into cold blooded animals, so violent that they will kill anyone in their path. "*If your own father came over with them you would not hesitate to fling a bomb at him*". They are drawn to the front line like a vortex, it sucks them into it's inescapable death. "*I feel the whirl of the vortex sucking me slowly, irresistibly, inescapably into itself*" p41. The closer they get to the front the more they are turned from humans into animals, relying on instinct and not intelligence to survive, otherwise they would not. "*We march up, moody or good tempered soldiers-we reach the zone where the front begins and become on the instant human animals*" p42. Like animals, the soldiers in war are forced to scavenge for their food, in competition with the rats. There is so little to eat on the front that they may go days without food, this physically harms them and enhances the intense mental slaughter that they are also facing. In the end, it is useless, the impact of the war on the soldiers is too great. Emotionally and physically damaged beyond repair they die broken, alone in the mud, a shell of their former selves. The war has taken their lives they can be affected no more by the complete and utter devastation of war.

From this novel we learn that war causes an absolutely devastating effect on the people that partake in the war, namely the soldiers. The soldiers that experience war are completely emotionally destroyed and are left alienated from their past, a shell of their former selves. The new recruits don't actually want to go and fight, they are pressured into going by teachers, parents and social convention, if they refuse to sign up they are branded as cowards. When the new recruits arrive at the front, the war impacts them severely, the reality sets in and they are transformed into animalistic killing machines who wouldn't hesitate to destroy their own father. We have learned that war is an immense vortex which sucks in all that is in it's path then spits out a hollow charred skeleton of the former self. That is the impact of war on the soldiers, they are left broken, completely emotionally and physically destroyed, they either die in the trenches in agony, or live the rest of their lives in anguish, whichever way, the end result is the same. They will never get back what they had before, because the war has impacted on them and sucked all their life away.