

Candidate 2

Discuss the effect of war on the soldiers

In his novel *Im Westen nichts Neues*, Erich Maria Remarque conveys brilliantly the struggles of life in the trenches and the effect that the horrors of war have on young minds. It is widely conceived as an anti-war novel and he explores the impact of emotional and physical trauma through his characters' use of language. The novel describes how the protagonist Paul Bäumer and his fellow soldiers experience the First World War on the western front.

The novel starts with a brief foreword stating "Dieses Buch soll weder eine Anklage noch ein Bekenntnis sein. Es soll nur den Versuch machen, über eine Generation zu berichten, die vom Kriege zerstört wurde – auch wenn sie seinen Granaten entkam." (p. 9)

In this foreword Remarque is already commenting on the fact that war does indeed have a negative effect and "destroyed a generation". Remarque himself was on the western front for 1 and a half months before having to go to hospital after sustaining an injury where he spent 1 and a half years. He himself would have experienced first-hand the atrocities of the trenches, inspiring him to write his bestselling novel.

At the start of the novel, Paul and his peers are excited about the prospect of going to war, motivated by their teacher, "dafür jedoch steckten wir voll ungewisser Ideen, die dem Leben und auch dem Krieg in unseren Augen einen idealisierten und fast romantischen Charakter verliehen." (p.24) This clearly shows the negative effect that war had on him and the other soldiers and that it not just him that is affected but a whole generation of young men. War had a stronger effect on the young soldiers as they had known only school and hadn't started their own lives yet, "wir hätten gerade an der Schwelle des Daseins gestanden [...] Wir waren noch nicht eingewurzelt. Der Krieg hat uns weggeschwemmt." (p.23)

We can also see how the war de-sensitises these impressionable young men, this is seen through the different ways each character reacts to seeing their friend Kemmerich in hospital with his leg amputated. Muller for instance asks if he can have his boots, as he won't be needing them anymore. In civilian life, you would expect a lot more sympathy and comfort from a friend in the circumstance. They all know what death and dying look like as they had to witness it so many times at the western front and they see this now in Kemmerich, "er sieht schrecklich aus, gelb und fahl, im Gesicht sind schon die fremden Linien, die wir so genau kennen, weil wir sie schon hundertmal gesehen haben. [...] Unter der Haut pulsiert kein Leben mehr." (p.19) Seeing one of your friends in such a dire state would negatively impact anyone especially when you have seen hundreds of others in the same way.

Another scene in the novel that shows the effect war had on Paul is when he is on home leave. The relationship between him and his mother has changed, he tries to protect her and worries about her and finds it hard to talk to her despite them having a close relationship before he went to war, "Meine Mutter kommt spät noch in mein Zimmer. Sie glaubt, dass ich schlafe, und ich stelle mich auch so. Zu sprechen, wach miteinander zu sein, ist zu schwer." (p.127)

Bibliography

Remarque, Erich Maria, *Im Westen nichts Neues*, Köln: Kiepenheuer&Witsch 2008 (28th edition)

Stahl-Busch, Marlene, *Interpretationen Deutsch: Im Westen nichts Neues*, Stark Verlagsgesellschaft 2015

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