ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

(U.S., 1979, 131 Minutes)

“This story is neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. 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”.

This prologue, taken almost verbatim from Erich Maria Remarque’s best-selling 1929 novel (Im Westen Nicht Neues), appears at the outset of the 1979 remake of *All Quiet on the Western Front (AQWF*). The title is taken from a German High Command communiqué for one day in the Fall of 1918. The film is a devastating story of war and a generation destroyed by it. It follows a group of idealistic young men as they volunteer for the German Army during World War I and are assigned to the Western Front, where their sense of idealism and patriotism are slowly destroyed by the harsh realities of trench warfare as the boys become as sullen as veterans. *AQWF* stresses the futility of war and the psychological pressure on the men who fight it. For these men, there is no glory, only death and disillusionment.

The film uses the flashback technique in four basic areas: education and recruit training; experiencing the cruelties and horrors of trench warfare; home on leave; return to the front and ultimate death. Pay particular attention to the dialogue among the soldiers in various moments of reflection, especially as the bonds of comradeship are forged by common traumatic experiences.

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Made for television and directed by Delbert Mann (*Marty*, *Separate Tables*, *Mr Buddwing*), the 1979 remake of *AQWF* retains the power and poignancy of the

1929 original with the addition of color. Familiar actors in the film include Ernest Borgnine, Richard Thomas, Donald Pleasance, and Patricia Neal.

*AQWF*  the book was part of a trilogy of Remark novels. It was followed by The Road Back (Der Weg Zueruck) in 1931 about the early Weimar Republic and Three Comrades (Drei Kameraden) about life in late Weimar Berlin in 1937. All examine the ethos of *Kriegskameradschaft* (war comradeship), a uniquely German sense of spiritual bonding between men when their lives are on the line in wartime. This ethos continues in postwar Germany when the homogeneous body of wartime survivors comes face to face with postwar social and political disintegration.