IMAGES OF WAR 1930 AND 1988 ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT AND JOURNEY'S END
Preliminary Notes for a Comparative Study

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The German novel, Erich Maria Remarque's Im Westen nichts neues, (misleadingly translated by Hollywood as All Quiet on the Western Front) and Journey's End, an English play by R.C. Sherriff first staged in 1928, are two of the best-known fictional accounts of conditions on the Western front in World War One. Both are anti-militarist and are regarded as major anti-war texts. The first appeared in 1929 in the midst of a much studied outburst of memoirs and fictions condemning many aspects of that war experience. Both stories first were made into motion pictures in 1930, with All Quiet on the Western Front eventually having an even greater exposure than the book itself, the first fictional blockbusting international best seller. All Quiet on the Western Front was made by an American company (Universal) with a largely American cast, while Journey's End was filmed by a British company (Gainsborough-Walsh-Pearson) with an all-British cast, but in Hollywood because of superior sound facilities. Both films were released in New York City in April 1930 within 20 days of each other. All Quiet on the Western Front won Oscars at the third academy ceremony for Best Picture and Best Director. Surprisingly the film was not even nominated for Best Sound Recording; today the soundtrack is the most compelling and innovative feature of a great film.

Both stories were remade in the last decade, All Quite on the Western Front (1979) as an undistinguished, but very expensive, American TV film (an Anglo-US-Czech coproduction) and Journey's End (1988), as a high quality British TV film. For the historian they offer scope for research into the creation of these four films, into the way they were received, their political impact, and their use as texts to teach how films reflect the climate in which they were made. The 1930 versions had some common influences, interpreted through German, British and American prisms. The new All Quiet on the Western Front is post-Vietnam, but is a nationally anonymous product and apparently has less to tell us than Journey's End made nine years later, in the aftermath of the Falklands war and Great Britain's continuing Ulster engagement.

Remarque and Sherriff, two very different authors, wrote very different works on a common theme, the horror and the futility of modern warfare. Eric Maria Remarque was born in 1898 in Osnabruck in Westphalia. Educated at Catholic schools, he trained to be a schoolmaster. Called up in November 1916, he was in the war zone for less than
two months and received but one wound from a British grenade in July 1917, despite his claim to significant front line service and five wounds. He was hospitalised for many months, never returning to active service. His later personal uncertainties included: (1) a claim to be an officer with an Iron Cross first class, a claim he rescinded under investigation by the Osnabruck authorities in 1919; (2) a short career as an unsuccessful schoolmaster in several schools, before he took up journalism and writing; (3) changing his name from Paul Remark to Eric Maria Remarque in 1923. After the success of All Quiet on the Western Front, his third novel, had aroused widespread nationalist hostility, Remarque left Germany for Switzerland and Paris and eventually America, taking out citizenship there in 1947. In the 1930s his German bank accounts were closed for non-payment of taxes.

R.C. Sherriff was a simpler character. Born in Kingston, Surrey in 1896, he became an insurance clerk. He had an effective but unspectacular military service in the East Surreys, an unfashionable infantry regiment, reaching the rank of captain. After the war he returned to the insurance company. He wrote stage pieces for amateur dramatics. Journey's End was his first success and was written from Sherriff's own modestly told experiences, but with no claim to autobiographical content. Remarque was nearer in style to Oliver Stone than was Sherriff. After two try-out performances with Lawrence Oliver in the leading role, Journey's End transferred to the Savoy Theatre, without Oliver (who was no longer available). Thanks in part to Winston Churchill's widely publicised recommendations, the play became a hit with 594 performances in London, 495 in New York and translation and production around the world.

All Quiet on the Western Front, purchased by Carl Laemmle of Universal Pictures shortly after the novel appeared, was directed by Louis Milestone, a Russian American film-maker with a mainly American cast. Shooting began on Armistice Day, for publicity purposes, at 11 a.m., November 11, 1929, and the final extra shots were completed on March 30, 1930. The film was screened on April 30. Journey's End was bought by George Pearson soon after its successful opening on Broadway in Spring 1929. It was shot in Hollywood at the Tiffany Studios, as the first of a series of hoped-for Anglo-US co-productions. It was made quickly, with a simpler treatment and smaller budget than All Quiet on the Western Front, opening on April 10 in New York, and on April 14, 1930 in London. The director was English, James Whale, who had directed the stage version, and had an all British cast. Whale stayed on for a Hollywood career (as did the star, Colin Clive), including the direction of Frankenstein to prove that peace, as well as war, can be hell.

All Quiet on the Western Front is a mixture of spectacle and human relationships, both conveying the horror of trench warfare for young men driven to fight for the honour of the Fatherland. The story presented a group of young German soldiers, played by young American actors, led by Lew Ayres, a typical clean but all-American college boy, with whom American audiences readily identified. The young soldiers
struggled against inhuman German officers and NCOs as much or more than against French troops in a similar dilemma. High level crane camera shots, outstanding sets and location shooting, in addition to brilliant sound effects presented warfare as never before on the screen. In real war sound is the most terrifying experience; you cannot see death coming, but you can hear it. All Quiet on the Western Front made cinema audiences hear it for the first time.

Journey’s End is a smaller scale study of five British officers, trapped in a dugout at the front. They have not only to conquer their own fear but to persuade the troops to conquer theirs. The leader, Captain Stanhope, is exhausted by his responsibility. His main support is an older, sensitive ex-schoolmaster, and three subalterns, two of which are from public schools, one a coward and one fresh in the line. The non-officers are played as typical pre-1939 English stage and film working class Cockney stereotypes. (A sustained study brings out the national contrasts between the films, overlaid by a common revulsion against the indignities of war.)

Recently, the main interest of scholars has been in the fate of All Quiet on the Western Front. The film was respected in the US and Britain, reinforcing the new picture of the German soldier first presented by the novel, no longer the Hun, Boche, or Prussian bully, but a human being sharing the same hardships as the Allies. This encouraged post-Locarno reconciliation, contributing in part to the attitudes that led to British appeasement, and American isolation. In France, also anxious to embrace the Locarno spirit, All Quiet on the Western Front showed that Germans and French were the real soldiers of 1914-1918, who had borne the major burden in pointless conflict with each other. The reception in Germany of both book and film has been much discussed and often oversimplified. Initially the film was passed by the censors after a few small cuts. The first showing in Berlin in early December 1930 was disturbed by nationalist and Nazi agitators led by Dr. Joseph Goebbels. Subsequent screenings passed quietly; the Prussian government of Otto Braun and Severing were willing to provide protection, but the Reich cabinet viewed the film and decided to ban it. Despite counter protests the ban was maintained.

Objections to All Quiet on the Western Front came mainly from right wing groups angered by the portrait of German soldiers, but another factor was distaste for the coarse language and behaviour of the characters in the book and film. A British reviewer stressed the “coarseness and frankness...of a type one does not find in English novels, a preoccupation with bodily functions.” Films were more subject to scrutiny in fragile, divided Weimar Germany. A film of a nationalist Stalhelm rally was banned by the censors the day after the banning of All Quiet on the Western Front. Performances in Belgian frontier towns, however, attracted German audiences, on one occasion an excursion train of 3,000 being run into Verviers. Other films were picketed by both left and right wing forces in 1903-31. All Quiet on the Western Front was banned in Austria; the banning in Poland was based on the film being “crass pro-German propaganda”. All
**Quiet on the Western Front** continued to be distributed for over the decade in several versions. Initially, a 160 minute silent version was distributed to cinemas not wired for sound, while the standard sound version was 142 minutes and nearly the same for dubbed foreign sound tracks. Differing cuts were made by national censors, especially in those British Dominions squeamish about some war or sexual scenes. Subsequent reissues in 1934, 1939 and 1954 were shorter. The 1939 version carried a complex voice over commentary relating the film to the current Nazi zeit. **Journey’s End** had the usual limited shelf life of British films at that time and almost immediately sank from sight.

**All Quiet on the Western Front** was remade as an American television movie in 1979 directed by Delbert Mann and starring Richard Thomas, Ernest Borgnine, Patricia Neal, Ian Holm and Donald Pleasence. A Paul Monash adaptation, the film received an Emmy nomination, as did Bomine and Neal before theatrical distribution. The 1988 British TV version of **Journey’s End** is the more interesting of the two remakes, produced in the wake of British-Argentine Falklands war and continuing conflict in Ulster. The sacrificial subaltern is played by Anthony Andrews, who created Sebastian in Granada Television’s production of **Brideshead Revisited** (sans teddy bear), and the film has a Brideshead-style sound track to intensify the pathos and anti-war sentiment. The dialogue of both the 1930 and 1988 versions are taken 95% from Sherriff’s play text, but with significant variations. In the 1988 copy the non-officers are portrayed very differently from the 1930 stage caricature Cockneys. The visual and verbal cliches are now stronger, more in control, changing the style of the play, and looking fresh from the Bogside. This message is carried by dress and deportment.

The anti-war credentials for these two television films are very strong, being far more pacifist in sentiment than any first world war features, and most subsequent films on the two major wars. But like most anti-war films, even Joseph Losey’s **King and Country** (1964), they jib at one major fence. The Tom Courtenay character is unjustly shot for cowardice. The film does not argue that cowardice is natural and no sin. **All Quiet on the Western Front** (1979) and **Journey’s End** (1988) both assume that courage and steadfastness are virtues in war and thus prejudice their message. The enemies are the system and the politicians and high ranking officers who send the soldiers into war: i.e. heroic behaviour is still laudable once in combat. More recent films, such as Oliver Stone’s Vietnam classic **Platoon** still adopted the same stance. **All Quiet on the Western Front** presents the soldier “heroes” as heroes who do their duty doggedly, supporting their comrades oppressed by less heroic officers and NCOs. **Journey’s End** presents one officer as a coward, seeking to evade combat. He is despised by his company commander, and encouraged out into the firing line. The other officers do their duty bravely to support the cause and set an example to the men. The Colonel and Brigadier are presented as vainglorious, unfeeling tyrants, who send troops to death or disfigurement because of faulty ambition or tactics. “Donkeys led by lions” is the suspect message of much anti-war propaganda in literature and film.
* Wenden was a British artillery officer during the Second World War and was awarded the Military Cross in 1945 for heroism during the Ardennes offensive.

Note from Editor: Mr. Wenden 'notes' were formatted for oral presentation and distribution to the conferees at the *War, Film and Society* Conference, Barcelona, 12-15 February 1992. His untimely death prevented him from developing the presentation as he intended. I have edited this material, including adding references, with a view to making it readily accessible to the reader (K.R.M. SHORT).

Bibliographical Note: Extended discussions of *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) are found in Morris EKSTEINS, "War, Memory and Politics: The Fate of the Film *All Quiet on the Western Front*”, Central European Review (March 1980) and Andrew KELLY, "All Quiet on the Western Front: ‘brutal cutting, stupid censors and bigoted politicos’ (1930-1984)", Historical Journal Film, Radio and Television (October 1989). For Robert Cedric SHERRIFF see his autobiography *No Leading Lady* (London, 1968). During World War II, Sherriff went to Hollywood to work with Alexander Korda, co-scripting the Anglo-American propaganda film *Lady Hamilton/That Hamilton Woman* (United Artists, 1941); see K.R.M. SHORT, “That Hamilton Woman (1941): propaganda, feminism and the production code”, Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television (March 1991).