

**ALL QUIET
ON THE
WESTERN
FRONT**

BY **ROBERT
WATERHOUSE**

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY **ERICH
MARIA REMARQUE**



DRAMATISTS
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ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT
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*For Private William Farrar, Yorkshire Regiment,
killed in France, 1917.*

And for Mike and Guy, fallen collaborators.

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT premiered at the New Phoenix Theatre on the Park (Richard Lambert, Founder and Executive Director), Buffalo, New York, on September 19, 2014. It was directed by Robert Waterhouse, the set design was by Michael Lodick, the sound design was by Tom Makar, the lighting design was by Chris Cavanagh, the videography was by Jim Bush, the costume design was by Katherine Pizzuto, the puppet design was by theatreFigüren, and the stage manager was Virginia Leary. The cast was as follows:

PAUL	Geoffrey Pictor
KROPP	Jimi Konidis
MÜLLER	Nick Lama
KAT	Guy Wagner
BEHM	Cameron Garrity
VOICE	Christian Brandjes

CHARACTERS

PAUL. Our narrator. A young man and poet with a keen sense of irony, loss, and a love of language.

KROPP. A bookish and awkward adolescent. His book smarts have earned him the rank of lance corporal, although he seems barely aware of his responsibilities.

MÜLLER. Although he projects a brash confidence derived from physical strength and the fact that he has a steady girlfriend, Müller is fiercely loyal and good humored.

KAT. “The old trench hog.” A seasoned veteran in his forties with a survivor’s tenacity. His roughened exterior does little to conceal his affection and pity for his young comrades.

BEHM. A virginal boy with no aptitude for combat and a fatally keen conscience.

All but Paul assume the following as needed:

COOK	PAUL’S MOTHER
KANTOREK	PAUL’S FATHER
KEMMERICH	FRAU KEMMERICH
DETTERRING	MAJOR
HIMMELSTOSS	FRENCHMAN
DOCTOR	SISTER LIBERTINE
ORDERLY	VOICE
WAGON DRIVER	PUPPETS: Two war cripples
YOUNG RECRUIT	(grotesques), rats, a goose, butterflies, etc.

DOUBLING

The play can be performed with five male actors (or by four males and one female). Suggested doubling is as follows:

ACTOR 1: Paul

ACTOR 2: Müller/Officer/Paul's Father/Orderly/Major/"War Cripple"
Puppet A

ACTOR 3: Kropp/Kemmerich/Dettering/Paul's Mother

ACTOR 4: Kat/Kantorek/Doctor/Sister Libertine

ACTOR 5: Behm/Himmelstoss/Wagon Driver/Young Recruit/Frau
Kemmerich/"War Cripple" Puppet B

Other combinations are conceivable. One or more female actors can of course take the female roles and/or some of the others, but drag works well for the remembered female characters.

NOTES

Paul, as our narrator, is at the outset dead, so his presence may be spectral, at least at first. By extension, this is a memory play evoked by Paul, so scenes should melt into one another, with characters interacting or not as each scene demands. Paul's four friends, as participants in his memory, are more solidly realistic than the others they represent, which may be rapid sketches with costume pieces.

The various locations and environments might be assembled with ammunition boxes, military crates, and so forth, which can be moved by the actors as needed. (Period-style school desks might also serve.) In any event, transitions should be seamless and visible.

At least three puppets are suggested: the "Cripples" in the hospital scene, and Kat's goose. (These can be manipulated by ACTORS 2 and 5, or by others.) The hospital puppets should be inhuman, nightmarish caricatures, products of the war machine, and might resemble the grinning grotesques painted by Otto Dix. They are here called "Cripples" as they should in no way be "human" in the sense of realistic or sympathetic. Other puppets might complement the production, e.g., shadow puppets of rats, butterflies, etc. Or not.

This text assumes the optional use of projections: both stills from the war and archival footage of German soldiers in action. If projections are not used, the various images mentioned might be evoked in other ways, and the attack might be staged stylistically.

/ in the text denotes when overlaps should come in, but when the direction simply reads "overlapping," a director may choose when overlapping begins.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

ACT ONE

Prologue—The Schoolroom

Paul, Müller, Kropp, Behm. Kat is nearby.

PAUL. I was felled by a sniper's bullet in October 1918, a month before the end, on a day that was so quiet, so peaceful, that the army confined its report to one sentence: All quiet on the western front.

Unlike Müller, or Kemmerich, or Behm, or all the comrades I heard crying all night in No Man's Land, I didn't suffer. I don't even miss the earth I'd come to know so well. Of the twenty classmates who joined up, I was by that time alone, and so there was nothing more to take from me—not even fear. After Kat died, I barely felt anything; not even indifference.

But this play 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 simply try to tell of a generation of young men destroyed by the war.

Behm raises his hand.

That's Behm. He was the last of our class to join and the first to get killed. He was shot in the eye during our first attack and when we fell back to our trench, there was no time to get him. We assumed he was dead, but that night we heard him crawling about in No Man's Land:

BEHM. (*A cry of pain.*) —Help me—

PAUL. But of course he couldn't see, he stumbled blindly about, unsure whether he was groping his way towards the enemy's trench or ours, until:

A shot is fired.

Müller raises a hand.

That's Müller. He fell in 1918, too, hit in the stomach at point-blank range with a Very light. When they got him to the dressing station and the surgeon approached, Müller waved a knife at him and shouted:

MÜLLER. Keep away from me! You're not going to hack any bits off me!

PAUL. He raved and he fought and by the time they got close enough to give him morphine he was gone.

Kropp raises his hand.

That's Kropp. He kept his textbooks with him in his kit. He was the cleverest of all of us, which is why he only made lance corporal. The last time I saw him was in a Catholic hospital. Perhaps he went home, with all the other splintered matchstick men the war made out of youth. It either chewed and swallowed you whole or spat you out, broken and useless.

KAT. (*Singing.*)

*Give 'em all the same grub and all the same pay
And the war would be over and done in a day.*

PAUL. And that's Kat. A bit of shrapnel hit his shin so I carried him to the dressing station, but when we got there, he was gone; my last and wisest friend.

Kat was an old front hog who'd survived the Somme and we looked up to him as a god. And he took care of us. He was only a private, no officer ever noticed him, but he rarely complained, except to say:

KAT. The war wouldn't be so bad if you could just get some sleep and dry clothes.

PAUL. They should have used old Kat in training camp, because the training was useless—it was Kat who taught us everything

important, like how to light a cigarette in the rain, or how to freeze stock-still in No Man's Land at night, because snipers shoot at moving shadows. As soon as new recruits arrived Kat would take away their sawback bayonets—jagged bayonets like hacksaws. He'd wait until the noncoms weren't looking and:

KAT. (*Cuffs a "recruit."*) If Frenchy catches you with one of those, he'll saw your nose off and take your eyes out. You don't even want to use a bayonet at all—it gets stuck in the ribs. Use your shovel. Aim for the neck and you can take a man's head off.

PAUL. And he fed us. Kat could round up grub anywhere, rob the officer's stores or catch geese on abandoned farms or come back with bloody sacks of horsemeat when the cooks couldn't get up to the lines. You'd be sitting in a dugout, wondering whether to risk eating your iron rations, and Kat would wander in and say:

KAT. Champagne and sausages!

PAUL. On this day in 1917, out of the twenty boys who joined from our class, eight are dead, four are wounded, one is in a madhouse, one deserted, and three are lieutenants in other companies—which means as good as dead, because lieutenants carry pistols, and so get picked off quickly. But Müller, Kropp, and I are alive. We are each of us nineteen or twenty, but look and feel like old men. We are crude and sorrowful and lost, but on this day, we are alive. And Kat is alive.

Cook enters, thus beginning the first major transition.

And today is a good day, we're at rest five miles behind the front, we've been in the line fourteen days with hardly any sleep or anything to eat, and we're about to fill our bellies with double rations. This is because of a miscalculation.

1. Behind the Lines

KAT. Come on, dole it out, I know the beans are done, I can smell them burning.

COOK. I have to wait till you're all here.

MÜLLER. We are all here!

PAUL. Come on, we're / starving!

KROPP. / We've barely eaten in two weeks!

COOK. I told you, I can't serve anything until the others / are here.

KAT. / The others are in the dressing station or pushing up daisies. Now let's have it, we've been up the line for fourteen days.

COOK. These are rations for Second Company. No one's notified me of / any changes—

KAT. / Wait, wait, wait. You've drawn rations for the Second Company, right?

COOK. *All of Second Company.*

KAT. We're all that's *left* of the Second Company!

MÜLLER. Wait a minute—you've got beans for eighty men?

COOK. I can't serve it out unless—

KROPP. Tobacco for eighty men!

COOK. The regulations say only one issue to one mess tin—

They crowd him, fill their tins, ad-lib.

MÜLLER. Sausage for eighty men!

PAUL. Beer! Cigars!

KAT. What are you going to do with the rest of it?

COOK. All right, take it! See if I care!

PAUL. (*To us.*) We would feel guilty but we're hungry. And the dead don't know hunger.

KAT. He's not a bad sort. Just won't go near the front. Have you noticed? Always finds some excuse.

KROPP. "The horses will get stuck in the mud. My wheel's stuck in the mud!"

MÜLLER. "My wheel's come off!"

KROPP. "My head's come off!"

MÜLLER. "I need to requisition a new arse!"

PAUL. (*To us.*) We are such wits when we're at rest. When we go up to the line, we turn into animals, because that keeps us alive, and when we come back we do nothing but joke, for the same reason. Why them and not us? The front is a cage in which you wait for

whatever might happen, and above the arching shells and bullets hovers the only god the soldier knows: Chance.

KAT. Let me tell you about Chance. A few months ago I was sitting in a dugout playing skat. Then I went along to see some friends in the next dugout. I came back after a bit and the dugout I'd left was just smoke and rubble—a direct hit. Gone. So I went back to the second dugout. Got there just in time to help dig out the bodies. That's Chance.

MÜLLER. Yeah, and now we're stuck with your ugly mug. That's Chance.

During this next, the men shift their scene to the open-air latrines.

PAUL. Seventy-five of our comrades are blown to pieces and if we could save them, then we could show how much we care, but we can't, so we fill our bellies, and when we're done we look for the next best thing—a good place for a shit.

No one is as intimate as the soldier with his intestines. Eating and shitting are what we do most often together and three quarters of our vocabulary are inspired by such things. When a man is frightened, he's lost his arse; when he's killed, he's nipped off a turd. Our teachers and parents would be shocked, but that might be because proper lavatories are simply *hygienic*. The soldiers' latrines, by contrast—

KAT. (*Looking around as though for a picnic spot, and settling on a wooden box.*) Right here.

PAUL. —are beautiful.

The men unbuckle their belts and settle down with contented sighs; Kat farts noisily.

KAT. Beans must be heard as well as eaten.

PAUL. Who needs the white tiles of home on a day like this? The drone of bees drowns out the distant rumbles of the guns, the sky is blue, the puffs of anti-aircraft fire could be little white clouds, and butterflies laze among the poppies. We are delivered from the front, we are full, and Kat can light his pipe and say:

KAT. Did I ever tell you how I got this pipe?

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

by Robert Waterhouse

based on the novel by Erich Maria Remarque

5 men (doubling, flexible casting)

In October 1918, a month before the end of World War I, Paul Bäumer is shot and killed by a sniper on the western front. He is the last of his classmates to fall in a war that will destroy many in his generation and disillusion those who remain. ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT chronicles Paul's observations of life and death in the mud of the trenches and the impossibility of returning to civilian life after living in hell. Paul, Müller, Kat, and Kropp are all brought briefly to life in this adaptation of one of the great anti-war classics of the twentieth century.

"...[ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT] is a frightening, senseless, gory chronicle... a potent reminder of man's inhumanity to man."

—**The Buffalo News**

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