Historical/Biographical Lens:

All Quiet on the Western Front
by Erich Maria Remarque
The Great War

- 1914-1918 (World War I)
  - Transformed political landscape
  - Changed forever the values and perception of civilized Western society
  - Considered a “total war”- populations of entire nations were caught up in the war
  - Birthed a “lost generation” of young people
Hegemonic Struggle

- The “isms”:
  - **Militarism**: the more one nation built up its army and navy, the more other nations felt it had to do the same (i.e., Great Britain vs. Germany)
  - **Imperialism**: competition to amass more colonies (Britain and France had many colonies in Africa and Asia—Germany and Italy wanted colonial empire as well)
  - **Nationalism (Patriotism)**: competition between European nations for largest army and navy and greatest industrial development; also influenced oppressed people to form independent nations
Alliance System - Peaceful Intentions

- Twenty-year alliance system prior to the war:
  - Thought to promote peace
  - Countries would protect each other in case of a war
  - Made it foolish for one country to wage war on another

- Divided Europe (alliances prior to the war):
  - Central Powers: Germany, Bulgaria, and Austria-Hungary
  - Allies: France, Great Britain, and Russia (among others)
Alliance System Cont. . .

- Summer of 1914:
  - The Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy)
  - Triple Entente (France, Britain, and Russia)
The “Tinderbox of Europe”

- **June 28th, 1914**: Gavrilo Princip, a nineteen-year-old Serbian revolutionary, fired two pistol shots. One killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the nephew of Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary and heir to the Austrian throne. The other killed Sophie, his wife.

- Austria-Hungary held Serbia responsible. On July 5th Austria asked for and received from Germany a "blank check" of support for any action Austria-Hungary might take against Serbia.

- On July 23rd Austria sent a series of demands to the Serbians. The demands were designed to humiliate and virtually destroy the Serbian nation. Still, Serbia agreed to most *but not all* of the demands.
Austria reacted on July 28th by declaring war on Serbia:
- Russians prepared to defend Serbia.
- Germany sent a warning to Russia to stop mobilizing its army for war; the Russians ignored the warning, and Germany declared war on Russia on August 1st.
- France came to the aid of its Russian ally by declaring war on Germany.
- The British hesitated, but when the Germans marched into Belgium, they declared war on Germany as well.

Italy, the third member of the Triple Alliance, refused to back Germany and Austria-Hungary. Italy claimed the Triple Alliance was for defensive purposes only and Austria's declaration of war against Serbia was not defensive.

August, 1914: the guns of the war went off. The system of alliances for keeping peace had brought the great nations of Europe into war with one another.
War Powers

- **Allied Powers**: France, Great Britain, Russia (eventually the United States)
- **Central Powers**: Germany, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Ottoman Empire
Europe Before and After World War I

After World War I, the map of Europe changed a great deal. Under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany gave up territory to Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, and Poland. Those countries, as well as Romania and Yugoslavia, received land from Austria-Hungary, which existed no more. Most Arab lands, formerly part of the Ottoman Empire, were placed under French and British rule.
German War Strategy

- Was leading industrial power in Europe at the time of the war
- Quickly embarked on a war of expansion: fighting on two fronts (France in the west, Russia in the east)
- Stopped in Paris where new weaponry and violent attacks broke the organized attacks of the Germans and forced them into *position warfare* (1915):
  - Trench warfare from Belgian coast to Swiss border
  - Stationary war, rather than movement and defense
  - A “stalemate” war—mission was to hold ground at any cost
Effects of the War

- Broke up the four empires of Europe, leaving Europe unstable
- Brought more deaths and causalities than in any other war in the previous one-hundred years (approx. 8.5 million deaths; 21 million wounded), including death of civilians
- Profound psychological effects on survivors (“lost generation”)
- Food shortage
The Lost Generation

- Those who survived the war or came to age in its wake
- Pessimistic view of life and society after the war; a feeling of fear and uncertainty
- Traditional values before the war (honor, duty, glory, and discipline) seemed hollow
- Blamed the older generation for permitting a war of destruction
- Felt the old order was morally corrupt and no one had emerged to provide hope and stability for the younger generation that fought
All Quiet on the Western Front

- Published in 1929, ten years after the war
- Spoke to and of his generation
- An eyewitness authenticity of the average soldier’s experience—still relevant today
- Takes place in the last two years of WWI (1916-Nov. 1918)
- Remarque does not name places on the Western Front so that the reader sees a collective experience of all soldiers who fought there
Erich Maria Remarque

- More than any other conflict, the Great War inspired writers of all generations and classes, most notably among combatants.

- *AQWF* is an anti-war novel depicting the horrors of war from the point of view of the ordinary soldier.

  "It is just as much a matter of chance that I am still alive as that I might have been hit. In a bomb-proof dug-out I may be smashed to atoms and in the open may survive ten hour's bombardment unscratched. No soldier outlives a thousand chances. But every soldier believes in Chance and trusts his luck."
born Erich Paul Remark
born in Osnabrück, Germany--June 22nd, 1898
hometown is remembered as the place where a peace treaty was signed to end the Thirty Year War
Father: Peter--lower class, but hard worker
Mother: Anna Maria--had four children, but oldest one dies
Studied at the University of Münster but had to enlist in the German army at the age of 18.

Fought on the Western Front and was wounded several times.

After the war, worked as a teacher, a stonecutter, and a test-car driver.

Became famous after his first novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front*
  - touched a nerve of the time
    - sparked a storm of political controversy
• became a connoisseur of fine art and antiques (Impressionist/Post-Impressionist)
• was seen as a spokesman against fascism during WWII
• numerous, famous Hollywood lovers (ex: Marlene Dietrich)
• numerous, famous Hollywood friends (Greta Garbo, Ingrid Bergman, etc.)
• despite fame was unsure of himself; vulnerable--constantly struggled to define himself as a writer
• voracious traveler--settled down when he met Paulette Goddard
AQWF’s sequel, *Der Weg Zurück (The Way Back/The Road Back)*, deals with the collapse of the German Army after the war and the fate of the surviving heroes.
• In the 1930s Remarque's books were banned in Germany by the government.

• *All Quiet on the Western Front* was among the works consigned to be publicly burnt in 1933 by the Nazis. Stores were ordered to stop selling his books.

• Remarque was accused of pacifism.

• In 1938 Remarque lost his German citizenship; he had moved to Switzerland in 1932, and in 1939 he emigrated to the United States, where in 1947 he became a citizen.

• dies of aortic aneurysm--buried in Switzerland
- descendant of devout French Catholic expatriates (connection to empathy for Duval in the book?)
- nickname was “smudge”
- loved books
- got into trouble with teacher, Professor Konschorek (connection to Kantorek in the book?)
- collected butterflies
- mother died of cancer (connection to Paul’s mother in the book?)
- carried his friend Troske out of enemy fires; Troske dies the same way that Kat does in the book
- Remarque’s dog’s name was Wolf (minor character in beginning of the book)
Remarque cont. ... (more information)

- Remarque was wounded in the war:
  - grenade splinters in neck, left knee, and right wrist
  - left fight on July 31st, 1918
  - reenters fight in October, 4 days before armistice

- Post War:
  - becomes eccentric
  - collects expensive art
  - plays organ at mental hospital
  - poses illegally as a decorated First Lieutenant
  - wears a monocle and furs around town
  - tried to teach but was disgusted by the lingering nationalism and misinterpretations of war
- Nazis and Remarque:
  - burned his book publicly
  - ordered his books to be removed from the shelves of all bookstores
  - accused him of pacifism
  - sent mice and threw stink bombs and beer bottles into the theaters showing AQWF
  - beheaded his sister and the executioner sent him a bill
In Flanders Fields

In Flanders Fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If we break faith with those who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

John McCrae
December 8, 1915
Most Famous WWI Poem: “In Flanders Fields”:
http://www.inflandersfields.be/#gedicht