

All Quiet on the Western Front: Important quotations explained

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your response

<p>Kantorek would say that we stood on the threshold of life. And so it would seem. We had as yet taken no root. The war swept us away. For the others, the older men, it is but an interruption. They are able to think beyond it. We, however, have been gripped by it and do not know what the end may be. We know only that in some strange and melancholy way we have become a waste land. All the same, we are not often sad.</p>	<p>What does it mean to stand on the “threshold of life”?</p> <p>What is the difference between the younger men and the older men?</p> <p>Why have they become a “waste land”? What does this mean?</p>
<p>We have lost all sense of other considerations, because they are artificial. Only the facts are real and important for us. And good boots are scarce.</p>	<p>What kinds of other considerations are “artificial”? What matters in the lives of the young soldiers?</p>
<p>I glance at my boots. They are big and clumsy, the breeches are tucked into them, and standing up one looks well-built and powerful in these great drainpipes. But when we go bathing and strip, suddenly we have slender legs again and slight shoulders. We are no longer soldiers but little more than boys; no one would believe that we could carry packs. It is a strange moment when we stand naked; then we become civilians, and almost feel ourselves to be so.</p>	<p>What is the difference between the way soldiers look in their uniforms vs. when they’re undressed?</p> <p>In what way do the uniforms change their identities?</p>
<p>Kropp on the other hand is a thinker. He proposes that a declaration of war should be a kind of popular festival with entrance-tickets and bands, like a bull fight. Then in the arena the ministers and generals of the two countries, dressed in bathing-drawers and armed with clubs, can have it out among themselves. Whoever survives, his country wins. That would be much simpler and more just than this arrangement, where the wrong people do the fighting.</p>	<p>Why would things be different if wars were decided by the mechanism Kropp describes?</p> <p>What does it mean when Baumer says that the “wrong people do the fighting”?</p>

And if you give a man a little bit of authority he behaves just the same way, he snaps at it too. The things are precisely the same. In himself man is essentially a beast, only he butters it over like a slice of bread with a little decorum. The army is based on that; one man must always have power over the other. The mischief is merely that each one has much too much power. A non-com, can torment a private, a lieutenant a non-com, a captain a lieutenant, until he goes mad. And because they know they can, they all soon acquire the habit more or less.

How does power affect men? What parts of this passage reinforce this idea?

Earth with thy folds, and hollows, and holes, into which a man may fling himself and crouch down. In the spasm of terror, under the hailing of annihilation, in the bellowing death of the explosions, O Earth, thou grantest us the great resisting surge of new-won life. Our being, almost utterly carried away by the fury of the storm, streams back through our hands from thee, and we, thy redeemed ones, bury ourselves in thee, and through the long minutes in a mute agony of hope bite into thee with our lips!

This is almost the closest thing to prayer in the book. Who is Paul praying to?

What does the Earth mean to Paul? What does it do for the soldiers?

At the sound of the first droning of the shells we rush back, in one part of our being, a thousand years. By the animal instinct that is awakened in us we are led and protected. It is not conscious; it is far quicker, much more sure, less fallible, than consciousness. One cannot explain it. A man is walking along without thought or heed;--suddenly he throws himself down on the ground and a storm of fragments flies harmlessly over him;--yet he cannot remember either to have heard the shell coming or to have thought of flinging himself down. But had he not abandoned himself to the impulse he would now be a heap of mangled flesh. It is this other, this second sight in us, that has thrown us to the ground and saved us, without our knowing how.

How does the oncoming of the front change the men? Why is this change helpful?

How do the men's bodies react to war?

From the dark group stretchers move off again. Then single shots crack out. The black heap convulses and then sinks down. At last! But still it is not the end. The men cannot overtake the wounded beasts which fly in their pain, their wide open mouths full of anguish. One of the men goes down on one knee, a shot--one horse drops--another. The last one props itself on its forelegs and drags itself round in a circle like a merry-go-round; squatting, it drags round in circles on its stiffened forelegs, apparently its back is broken. The soldier runs up and shoots it. Slowly, humbly, it sinks to the ground.

Why are the soldiers so upset by the killing of horses? Is this different from killing men? Explain?

