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THE REPRESENTATION OF WORLD WAR ONE IN LITERATURE:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO NOVELS

SHREYOSÉE DASGUPTA

M.A. English

Email: shreyosee.dasgupta@gmail.com



SHREYOSÉE
DASGUPTA

ABSTRACT

The Great War altered the traditional notion of war literature where war was assumed to be a cause for glory and pride. New technologies were unleashed, and for the first time a major war was fought not only on land and sea but below the sea and in the skies as well. Not only was the geographical landscape altered by the war but it also changed the lives of the soldiers. This thesis will look at two novels to detail how the representation of war in literature was transformed by World War I.

All Quiet on the Western Front by Erich Maria Remarque is one of the most influential novels in World War I literature. Mulk Raj Anand's novel, *Across the Black Waters* is a rare World War I novel written from an Indian perspective. Both are post-war novels. Remarque's novel was first published in 1929, while Anand's novel came out in 1939. The titles of the novels reveal an ironic undertone, emphasizing a connotative meaning, which outlays the undertones of the Great War.

Both novels locate the horror of war but from different angles. Lives of the soldiers were dependent on the mode of survival by disconnecting their emotional capability. Both novels are realistic and draw a real picture of the catastrophe that the war creates in terms of violence, misery, plight, terror and repression.

The purpose of this study is to show how the two novels differ in their representation of war literature and also, how this very representation is different from the novels that were written in pre-World War I era. So, the thesis will constitute an in-depth look into the battlefield. Historical material will be studied and analyzed along with the critical readings.

Keywords: Post-war novels; Historical background; Disillusionment; Colonizer and colonized; Socio-cultural domain

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In his poem 'Dulce Et Decorum Est', one of World War One's greatest poets Wilfred Owen described the soldiers fighting the war as 'knock-kneed', 'coughing like hags,' blood-shod...' These disturbing images sum up the gruesome nature of World War One very succinctly. World War One was known as the war to end all wars. Because of the brutality it unleashed, which was without precedent at the time, it was dubbed the Great War. (It only became World War One after World War Two.) It is the war that ushered warfare into the machine age¹ and changed the way war is depicted in literature forever.

Before World War One, warfare had not emerged as a major theme for literature. It existed as part of a larger canvas, at times, even an off-stage rumble. Take Tolstoy's 1869 classic *War and Peace* where peacetime preoccupations are at least as prominent as wartime calamities. Or Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*² (1901) where the relationship between the Irish orphan Kim and the Tibetan lama is at least as central as the backdrop of The Great Game³ against which the novel is set. Or, for that matter, A.E.W. Mason's *The Four Feathers*⁴ (1902) which focuses on disgrace and redemption against the backdrop of the Mahdist War⁵ in the Sudan in the 1880s and 1890s... Moreover, in the predominant literary narrative of the day, war was synonymous with adventure, patriotic duty and glorious sacrifice. Of the three novels mentioned above, only Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is a rare pre-World-War-One novel that departs somewhat from the beaten track with its graphic description of combat. In the epilogue, Tolstoy mentions that 'history is not made by great men but by countless tiny factors' (Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, p. 1742). In the novel, he creates a horrifying depiction of the misery of war and the effect that dislocation and death have on common Russians. Warfare is brutal, savage and animalistic. It is also chaotic and the very anti-thesis of human reason and rationale.

Twenty-six years after *War and Peace*, in 1895, the American writer Stephen Crane published *The Red Badge of Courage*. While warfare is one of many themes in *War and Peace*, it is the main preoccupation of *The Red Badge of Courage* which investigates the notion of courage while focusing on the American Civil War⁶ that took place from 1861-65. In his essay titled 'The British novel and the War', David Trotter refers to British literary figure A.P. Herbert's essay on *The Red Badge of Courage*, where Herbert states that its protagonist 'must perform or be branded as a coward, so does the novel' (Trotter, 'The British novel and the War', *The Cambridge Companion to The Literature of the First World War*, p.43). Such a theme makes *The Red Badge of Courage* the first modern war novel.

Crane depicts the warfront as a place where the only way to live is with the survival instinct, while barring oneself from emotional ties altogether. On the one hand, death is an integral and unremarkable part of

¹ The Machine Age is an era that includes the early 20th century, sometimes also including the late 19th century. An approximate dating would be about 1880 to 1945. Considered to be at a peak in the time between the first and second world wars, it forms a late part of the Industrial Age. By the mid-to-late 1940s, the atom bomb,^[4] the first computers, and the transistor came into being,^[6] beginning the contemporary era of high technology and thus ending the intellectual model of the machine age founded in the mechanical and heralding a new more complex model of high technology.

² Kipling's *Kim*: The novel is notable for its detailed portrait of the people, culture, and varied religions of India

³ The Great Game was the name given to the rivalry that frequently sparked conflict between the British Empire and the Russian Empire for supremacy in Central Asia. It is generally believed to run from the Russo-Persian treaty of 1813 to the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907.

⁴ *The Four Feathers* is a novel set against the background of the Mahdist War. Its main character Faversham disgraces himself by quitting the army, which others perceive as cowardice, symbolized by the four white feathers they give him. He redeems himself with acts of great courage.

⁵ The Mahdist War (1881-99) was a British colonial war that took place in the late 19th century. It was fought between the Mahdist Sudanese of the religious leader Muhammad Ahmad bin Abd Allah, who had proclaimed himself the "Mahdi" of Islam (the "Guided One"), and the forces of the Khedivate of Egypt, an autonomous tributary state of the Ottoman Empire

⁶ The American Civil War, widely known in the United States as simply the Civil War as well as other names, was a war fought from 1861 to 1865 between Northern and Southern states of the American Union.

nature; on the other, there is the vain belief that human life is comprised of values such as courage and honour. Finally, there is the stark realization that all human life meets the same end. At one point Crane states this with an affecting directness: 'He had been to touch the great death and found that, after all, it was but the great death' (Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*, p.24). The title of the novel represents Crane's protagonist Henry Fleming's desire to prove his courage in combat which is clearly illustrated by the envy with which he views wounded soldiers: 'He conceived persons with torn bodies to be peculiarly happy. He wished that he, too, had a wound, a red badge of courage' (Crane, p. 59).

Yet Fleming, increasingly, becomes cynical about the war and questions his own decision to join the army. His obligation to fight for his nation clashes with his desire to stay alive. His home-sickness pulls him to his hometown: 'He wished, without reserve, that he was at home again making the endless rounds from the house to the barn, from the barn to the fields...' (Crane, p. 17). So, while his present life is at the warfront, his mind is constantly in the past as he ruminates on his family and friends: 'From his present point of view, there was a halo of happiness about each of their heads, and he would have sacrificed all the brass buttons on the continent to have been enabled to return to them' (Crane, p.17).

Unlike the heroic protagonists of most fiction dealing with war before World War One, Crane's Fleming is unheroic. He has no extraordinary capabilities. He is an ordinary man who is fighting unwillingly. At the front, he suffers from isolation and considers fighting to be irrational and insane as it risks lives. He characterizes a warrior as a 'devotee of a mad religion, blood-sucking, muscle-wrenching, bone-crushing...' (Crane, p. 63). Through Fleming, Crane questions conventional views of courage while focusing on the reality of life on the warfront.

The philosophical underpinnings of the war do not motivate Fleming, neither does the sense of right or wrong. He desires greater social status in society by joining the army but finds it hard to focus on his goal to build a healthy reputation: '...it was difficult to think of reputation when others were thinking of skins' (Crane, p. 147). The journey of the soldiers begins with the youthful struggle in the war and ends up in reflective musings of manhood. Their victory in the war rings hollow.

Thirty-four years after the publication of *The Red Badge of Courage*, Erich Maria Remarque⁷ revisited similar themes in his World War One novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*. This 1929 novel has a monograph that says: 'This book is neither to be 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' (Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*). This monograph sets the mood for the novel which is an out – and- out anti-war novel. Told in the first person, its protagonist is a young German soldier by the name of Paul Baumer.

Remarque's novel is a denunciation of the notion of unquestioning patriotism for one's nation that is unleashed through raw description. In her essay 'The Great War in twentieth-century cinema' Laura Marcus refers to Andrew Kelly in whose opinion Remarque's novel is most influential in laying the foundation for a new view of war as 'brutal, pointless waste' (Marcus, 'The Great War in twentieth-century cinema', *The Cambridge Companion to The Literature of the First World War*, p.292). Ariela Halkin echoes this point in her essay 'The Flood' where she quotes Arnold Bennett stating that the 'finest war novels were the product of defeat, not of triumph: sadness not exhilaration...' (Halkin, 'The Flood', *Bloom's Modern Interpretations*, p. 108). Halkin goes on to say that in such novels, of which *All Quiet on the Western Front* is a prime example, 'war was being romanticized inversely. The very horror and violence fascinated' (p.

⁷ During World War I, Remarque was conscripted into the army at the age of 18. On 12 June 1917, he was transferred to the Western Front, 2nd Company, Reserves, Field Depot of the 2nd Guards Reserve Division at Hem-Lenglet. On 26 June, he was posted to the 15th Reserve Infantry Regiment, 2nd Company, Engineer Platoon Bethe, and was stationed between Torhout and Houthulst. On 31 July, he was wounded by shrapnel in the left leg, right arm and neck, and was repatriated to an army hospital in Germany where he spent the rest of the war.

121). The novel consists of descriptions that are brutal and overt. However, at the same time, the readers become interested in knowing about the soldier's fate and find sympathy for him.

There are multiple episodes in the novel where death lurks close to the soldiers' lives. Through the voice of Baumer Remarque even goes on to say: 'Death is working from within' (Remarque, p. 7). The combatants have no assurance that they will survive the next moment or not; so death becomes a part of their psyche. Along with the spectre of death they have to deal with atrocious living conditions. During the first few chapters of the novel a mortally wounded soldier called Kemmerich lies dying. The author describes his face as already bearing 'the alien lines...there is no life pulsing under the skin anymore' (p. 19). This episode is replete with ironic juxtapositions where Kemmerich's pitiful condition is overlapping with the impersonal atmosphere of hospital deaths. Baumer reflects later on this dehumanizing aspect of war: 'A hospital alone shows what war is' (Remarque, p. 114).

As the novel proceeds death pervades Kemmerich. A lifelessness appears on his face as he subconsciously accepts death as his ultimate fate: 'Trenches, hospitals, the common grave - there are no other possibilities' (Remarque, p. 123). A little later in the novel, he dies a peaceful death where 'he could have not suffered long; his face had an expression of calm, as though almost glad, the end had come' (Remarque, p. 129). In the novel's closing pages, Baumer echoes the same sentiment when he says, '...we are without hope' (Remarque, p. 251).

In their essay, 'All Quiet on the Western Front', Charles R. Barker and R.W. Last state: 'The novel (*All Quiet on the Western Front*) is regarded as aspiring to present the "truth" on a literal, autobiographical level' (Barker-Last, 'All Quiet on the Western Front, *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations*, p. 8). It chronicles the journey of common men who are supposed to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of their nation. The concept of the 'hero' is redefined where valor is shown along with the disillusionment that the soldiers face during the fighting. There is a contrast between the lives of the soldiers on the front and behind the lines. On the one hand, there is the struggle for survival on the front in a climate suffused with shell shock, firing and the constant risk of death; a climate that demands one cut oneself off from emotional ties in order to survive. On the other hand, there is the inability to connect with society when soldiers go back home! The conditions at the front have marked them for the rest of their lives. They face isolation and mental breakdown, losing all sense of belonging to the places where they were born and grew up.

Modris Eksteins, in his essay 'Memory' says that, 'The simplicity and power of war is shown as demeaning and wholly destructive, nihilistic...' (Eksteins, 'Memory', *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations*, p. 63). So the Great War causes stress, rotting and scars that can never be healed. Eksteins goes on to argue that '*All Quiet on the Western Front* can be seen not as an explanation but as a symptom of the confusion and disorientation of the postwar world' (p. 64). In this world there is 'the amalgamation of prayer, desperation, dream, chaos, wish and desolation' (Eksteins, 'Memory' p. 73). Remarque pens down this novel in the hope that the vivid description of savagery and suffering might help lessen his own pain. As Ekstein points out, 'For Remarque the war had become a vehicle of escape' (p. 64). He goes on to say the war may have been fought collectively but it affected people in their personal lives as an 'individual experience' (Eksteins, 'Memory' p. 70).

Hans Wagener disagrees with the claim that war has been presented as an individual experience. In an essay on the novel, he claims that 'Remarque intends to describe neither a linearly developing action nor a psychological development' (Wagener, 'Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*' p. 81). Instead, the author has tried to show a series of events that includes the crucial circumstances and situations in the trenches and their aftereffects. The novel is concerned with a generation of men whose lives got devastated during and after the war. Remarque paints a gloomy picture for them through the voice of Baumer: '...men will not understand us - for the generation that grew up before us...had a home...war will be forgotten - and the generation that has grown after us will be strange to us...' (Remarque, p. 128). Hence for Remarque surviving the war can 'at best be a physical survival and can never be an emotional or psychological one' (Wagener, 'Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, *The Cambridge*

Companion to The Literature of the First World War, p. 85). The mental turmoil and anguish will stay with the soldiers until their dying breath. Their ability to lead a normal life has been lost forever. And the men that joined the army as innocent youths have been transformed into 'old folk' (Remarque, p. 9). War has become a 'kind of fever or disease' (Remarque, p. 94).

Remarque depicts the battlefield as a place devoid of emotional attachment. For instance, when Kemmerich is about to die after being severely injured his boots catch the attention of Muller who wishes to own them. Muller's logic tells him that after Kemmerich's death, he can take them conveniently. As Remarque states through the voice of the protagonist Baumer: 'At the front only the facts count' (Remarque, p. 86). The boots gain a symbolic significance where they are passed on from soldiers who die to those who are alive. They finally come to Baumer, foreshadowing his death.

Soldiers go to their deaths displaying 'a kind of quiet heroism, a heroism that was created perhaps for the wrong reasons' (Remarque, p. 89). Remarque puts circumstances at stark contrast to each other. As Wegener points out that there is a 'skilful interspersing with action and rest' (p. 90, 'Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*') where the scenes of combat are skillfully interspersed with the peaceful scenes of soldiers in the camps. As Wegener states, humour emerges as the weapon for survival: 'It's all rot that they put in the war-news about the good humour of the troops, how they are arranging dances almost before they are out of the front-line. We don't like that because we are in good humour: we are in good humour because otherwise we should go to pieces. Even so we cannot hold out much longer; our humour becomes more bitter every month' (Remarque, p. 66).

Wegener notes that 'high-ranking officers do not appear in Remarque's novel' (Remarque, p. 98). Baumer belongs to a military unit who carry out the orders of their superiors and have no say of their own. They work as mere puppets and grow more disillusioned with the passage of time. It is an iron law that soldiers must be occupied all the time. Otherwise they become sick and tired because of the de-humanizing aspect of war: 'War is just a dirty, life-threatening force...war is only experienced as a gigantic destructive force against which the soldier fights for survival' (Remarque, p. 98). At the end of the novel, Remarque does not disclose the identity of the new narrator. The moot point is that the focus is on Baumer's facial expression which shows him as someone at peace who cannot suffer any more.

The soldiers' private lives have been illustrated in Helmuth Kiesel's essay, 'Introduction to Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*'. Before joining the war Baumer was very close to his mother. In spite of her obvious dismay, he insists on joining the army. In the midst of the war he realizes that war makes the soldiers hollow from within and gradually leads to unending suffering and pain: 'I am nothing but an agony for myself, for my mother, for everything that is so comfortless and without end' (Remarque, p. 77). After visiting his hometown, Baumer fails to recognize himself in the mirror and feels alienated from himself: 'I look at myself in the glass. A sunburnt, overgrown candidate for confirmation gazes at me in astonishment' (Remarque, p. 66). The town has not changed since he went off to war. Baumer feels disconnected from most of the townspeople. His father asks him 'stupid and distressing' (Remarque, p.78) questions about his war experiences, not understanding 'that a man cannot talk of such things' (Remarque, p. 78). When he dies at the end of the novel, the situation report from the frontline states, 'All is Quiet on the Western Front' (Remarque, p.138), symbolizing the insignificance of one individual's death during the war.

Remarque refers to the living soldiers as old and dead, emotionally drained and shaken. '...a lance corporal crawls a mile and a half on his hands dragging his smashed knee...we see men without mouths, without jaws, without faces...the sun goes down, night comes, the shells whine, life is at an end' (Remarque, p. 61). Catherine Savage Brosman picks up on this theme in her essay 'French writing of the Great War' by dwelling on 'the unspeakable horror of the trenches defying description' (Brosman, 'French Writing of the Great War', *The Cambridge Companion to The Literature of the First World War*, p. 172). This very degradation leads to death and if one survives the result is detachment from worldly affairs. Paul Edwards echoes more of the same in his essay, 'British war memories', highlighting the fact that trench warfare 'was the mask of a human face which had detached itself from the skull' (Edwards, 'British war

memories', *The Cambridge Companion to The Literature of the First World War*, p. 26). War's destruction is intolerable and beyond the human imagination. David Trotter, in his essay 'The British novel and the war' points out that 'existence before the war and existence after the war has a meaning only in relation to what happened in between: the microcosm of the trenches' (Trotter, 'The British novel and the war', p. 35). The physical and mental suffering is beyond measure and cannot be healed in their lifetime. Trotter cites a quote from W. Beach Thomas: 'Everything visible or audible or tangible to the sense - to touch, smell and perception - is - ugly beyond imagination' (Trotter, 'The British novel and the war', p. 38).

The writings of Brosnan, Edwards and Trotter indicate how universal the state Remarque evokes in his novel is for the combatants of the Great War. Remarque is not merely evoking the sensibility of the common German soldier but of all soldiers of World War One. The damage done by the War is irrevocable and the soldiers are dead either way—physically or, if they survive, left far too mentally shattered to live a normal life.

In his celebrated memoir *A Subaltern's War* Charles Carrington has said that 'the comfort and equanimity of the men come before every exigency save those of actual warfare!' (Carrington, *A Subaltern's War*, p. 50). Here Carrington is pointing out that a common soldier like Baumer has to bear the brunt of the fighting. Hence Baumer's bitterness against high-ranking army officers is understandable. As a common soldier he understands little about the reasons for the war and even less the methods used to wage it. His bitterness stems from the fact that people responsible for all that are hell-bent on thrusting him and his friends into the nightmare of trench warfare. He views other authority figures with the same bitterness. Chief among them is his old schoolmaster Kantorek who urges Baumer and his fellow students to join the army once war breaks out. Kantorek himself is happy to stand on the sidelines and leave the actual fighting to others while remaining a cheerleader for the war. Then there are men like the sadistic Corporal Himmelstoss who takes pleasure in bullying his young charges during training. The British and French soldiers, who Baumer is supposed to be fighting, never take centerstage even though their guns remain a backbeat that sounds right through the narrative. Throughout the novel Baumer's foremost enemy is death. Then come the brutal conditions at the warfront and the noncommissioned officers from his own army. The enemy is never the people he is supposed to be fighting. In fact Baumer's most heart-wrenching experience occurs when he stabs a soldier from the opposing army and is face-to-face with a dying enemy. Baumer is remorseful and tries to ease the man's suffering. After returning to the dugout with his comrades, he confesses to the killing, then calms himself by concluding that 'war is war' (Remarque, p. 109). Deprived of innocence by the nightmarish sounds and sights that they are incapable of articulating to family and friends, the soldiers survive on the edge, never quite in tune with the present and hopelessly detached from the future. They are, as Gertrude Stein told a war-maimed Ernest Hemingway, 'a lost generation'.

In his introductory essay to *Erich Maria Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front*, a book edited by him that contains several critical readings of Remarque's novel, Harold Bloom has pointed out that the novel gives a glimpse of the brutality of the Great War and the drastic change the war brought about in the countries that were part of it. Bloom also notes that since it is not a novel written during the War like Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu*⁸ or right after it like Ernst Junger's *Storm of Steel*⁹, it would be wrong to view it merely as a First World War novel; it is also a historical work that addresses the times in which it was written. According to Bloom, Remarque, while talking *about* the First World War, is also talking *to* the Germany of the Weimar Republic¹⁰ which, as Bloom maintains, was all for an anti-war narrative that depicted the war in terms of gritty realism without affixing any responsibility for it on the participants. At the time *All Quiet on the Western Front* came out, the German literary scene was chockfull of novels about the War told from the points of view of characters on whom little responsibility could be affixed for the war; characters who were stretcher bearers,

⁸ *Le Feu* (*Under Fire* in English) is a French novel based on its author Henri Barbusse's experiences as a French soldier on the Western Front.

⁹ *Storm of Steel* is a memoir based on German officer Ernst Jünger's experiences on the Western Front during the First World War. The book is a graphic account of trench warfare.

¹⁰ *The Weimar Republic* was the representative democracy that was established in Germany after the War and continued until Hitler's ascension to Chancellor in 1933.

women, children and even a horse in Liesl, the mare, who is the narrator of Ernst Johannsen's 1929 novel *Front Line Memoirs of a Horse*. Much like the characters of these novels, Remarque's main character Paul Baumer is a victim of the war. At the war's beginning, he is a schoolboy and far too young to influence, in any way, the mania that gripped Germany at the time. During the war he is a common soldier who can do little to influence the course of the war or the methods used to wage it.

By the end of the book, Baumer realizes that he no longer knows what the future holds for him and comes to the conclusion that he has nothing more to lose. In the autumn of 1918, he contemplates: 'Let the months and years come, they can take nothing from me, they can take nothing anymore. I am so alone and so without hope that I can confront them without fear' (Remarque, p. 139). These melancholic thoughts occur just before his young and untimely death. The war appears to have snuffed out his hopes and dreams, which he feels he can never regain.

Throughout the novel, Remarque uses nature in several ways. It revitalizes the soldiers after terrible hardships, reflects their sadness, and provides a contrast to the unnatural world of warfare. For instance, butterflies are depicted as creatures who play gracefully and settle on the teeth of a skull; birds fly through the air in a carefree pattern. This is nature in the midst of death and destruction. This shows a tangible representation of fragility and vulnerability. Like the frail-winged insect, Baumer's life, and the lives of countless other young men, hovers on earth for a short while and ends all too soon.

Remarque's uncanny grasp of mental breakdown suggests a personal involvement with the character — an identification stemming from his own need to exorcise the terrors of war, which, ten years after his military service, continued to plague him. In telling the story of Paul Baumer, Remarque creates a universal portrayal of warfare in all its grimness and hypocrisy, despair and waste. At the end of the novel, we are reminded of the monograph for Baumer appears to be at peace with himself. Because of Baumer's need to kill his kind, personal inner self to survive, he had died emotionally long before body was dead. Throughout the story, while Baumer's body escapes damage, his inner self languishes in the war.

After the alarming experiences that the soldiers face, they lose their individuality and turn into lifeless bodies if at all they survive. 'It is as though we were coins of different provinces; and now we are melted down, and all bear the same stamp. To rediscover the old distinctions, the metal itself must be tested. First we are soldiers and afterwards, in a strange and shamefaced fashion, individual men as well' (Remarque, p. 127). Their self-respect, confidence, happiness, the culture where they used to belong, everything is shattered.

Irony can be located in the fact that Baumer dies on a quiet day, a day where there isn't much action anywhere on the front. Over the course of the novel, the reader has witnessed the hellish bombardment Baumer has survived in which bullets, shells and gas surround him like a swarm of bees. The fact that he dies on a relatively peaceful day suggests that he welcomes death.

Like *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Mulk Raj Anand's *Across the Black Waters* is a novel about the common soldier. It is the second novel in the trilogy¹¹. While being a novel about the First World War, it is also a novel about, what Kristin Bluemel calls, the 'Empire's others'. It is one of the rare novels that looks at the Great War from a colonial perspective. Although almost hundred years have elapsed since the end of the War, the colonial soldier remains largely absent from First World War literature. This, despite the fact, he took part in all the crucial battles. As Santanu Das has pointed out, even by conservative estimates the number of non-white soldiers mobilized in the European and American armies of the First World War exceeded four million. It is safe to assume that in the case of the Europeans the bulk of the non-white soldiers were colonials. Over 1.4 million of these were Indians, of whom more than 74,000 never came home. Yet these soldiers figure nowhere in European literature dealing with the First World War. Before World War I, the Indian soldier did appear in European war literature, albeit as a wallflower or a stereotype. Kipling's novels are a prime example. In the literature of the First World War, however, even this marginal representation vanishes.

¹¹ The first novel in the trilogy is *The Village* (1939) and *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942)

Even though both novels deal with the same subject, they are very different in style and content. Unlike Remarque, Mulk Raj Anand did not serve in the War as a combatant. Hence Anand's novel does not have the feel of a memoir to it. Rather it employs a third-person narrative which is very different from Remarque's first person. Anand's father, Subedar Lal Chand Anand, M.S.M., 2/17th Dogra, to whom *Across the Black Waters* is dedicated, was a noncommissioned officer of the British Indian army from whom Anand gained firsthand knowledge of the life of an Indian sepoy which he translated into his depiction of the soldiers in *Across the Black Waters*. To that he added his own memories of growing up in the cantonments of northern India and his experience of modern warfare as a journalist covering the Spanish Civil War¹² that took place from 1936-39. First published ten years after Remarque's novel in 1939, *Across the Black Waters* departs from Remarque's novel and, for that matter, just about every other World War One novel by looking at the war from an Indian perspective. Its protagonist, Lal Singh or Lalu is a common sepoy who, like many others, is caught in the vicious circle of endless suffering and futility.

Santanu Das in his 'Introduction' to *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* says that the perspective of an Indian soldier on World War One is different from that of the European soldier because the Indian soldier is uprooted from his homeland and dumped in a foreign land to risk his life for a nation that is not even his own. A person taken away from his homeland is akin to someone who has been robbed of his identity. While, Baumer is at least a German who believes he is fighting for his Kaiser¹³, well at least in the beginning, Lalu can boast of no such definition.

In another essay entitled 'The Indian Sepoy in the First World War', Santanu Das talks about the war and its aftereffects. The war to a large extent devastated the lives of the soldiers as well as their families. He defines the sepoy as a 'complex, intelligent individual, negotiating between different institutions and people' (Das, *The Indian Sepoy in the First World War*, p.12). If the soldier survives at the end of the war, he returns mutilated, traumatized, fragmented and in a condition beyond healing.

In the novel, Anand views the First World War from outside a Western perspective. His mouthpiece Lalu looks for answers to questions of identity, destiny and meaning. He is a young man from the village of Nandpur in Punjab. The society to which he belongs is a most conservative one, where fanaticism in religion, superstition and meaningless rituals thrives. Due to the strict control of the landlord, he finds it impossible to survive and as a result runs away and is forced to join the army. He has disgust for the social life filled with obsolete and useless rituals and the superstitious beliefs of the villagers. He is also sad to observe the pitiable financial condition of the rural folk where they are not in a position to pay off their debts and where their lands are confiscated by the landlords and moneylenders.

The novel traces the development of Lalu from 'innocence' to 'experience' and also gives voice to Anand's views on war, poverty, religion and various social evils that afflict Indian society. Lalu fights valiantly against the forces of society that try to silence him. He neither succumbs to the rigidities of the caste system nor bows down before the various old-fashioned religious customs. He even becomes a relentless crusader and a dedicated soldier, gearing up his strength to revolt against all the forces of ruthless repression. Soldiers joining the army lose their individual identities while representing a nation as a whole. The distinction between the self and the world collapses. There is a certain amount of emptiness and futility that take them into the realm of doom. As Anand says through Lalu in *Across the Black Waters*, '...he (Lalu) would see the real thing, the war and it was a final reality, and then he could reckon whether he would live or die - because people had been known to die in wars...' (Anand, p. 71).

¹² The Spanish Civil War (Spanish: *Guerra Civil Española*), widely known in Spain simply as The Civil War (Spanish: *Guerra Civil*) or The War (Spanish: *La Guerra*), took place from 1936 to 1939 and was fought between the Republicans, who were loyal to the democratic, left-leaning Second Spanish Republic, and the Nationalists, a fascist group led by General Francisco Franco.

¹³ *Kaiser* is the German word for 'emperor'. Like the Bulgarian, Serbian and Russian Czar it is directly derived from the Roman emperors' title of Caesar.

The title of the novel is representative of a popular superstition according to which whoever crosses the seas and goes to foreign lands will be considered inauspicious and soon face devastation. Anand refers to it when he describes Lalu on the ship sailing into Marseilles. It is 'as if he really expected some calamity, the legendary fate of all those who went beyond the seas, to befall him at any moment...truly, the black, or rather blue, water seemed uncanny, as if God has spat upon the universe and the spittle had become the sea' (Anand, p. 8). Ultimately, crossing the black waters does prove to be devastating for the soldiers. There is the war where the loss of life is inevitable and, even if one survives, the scars left by the tragic experience are indelible.

Lalu is initially excited about going to Europe to fight the war and curious to discover what awaits him overseas: 'He was going to *Vilayat* after all, England, the glamorous land of his dreams...' (Anand, p. 9). As he prepares to arrive in Marseilles he feels 'the pride of the beggar who suddenly finds wealth' (Anand, p. 9). As the novel progresses, though, and Lalu is exposed to the realities of war he rapidly becomes disillusioned and his energetic fervor dissipates: 'Lalu found himself contracting his own skin, till he felt himself reduced to an emptiness...oppressing him' (Anand, p. 47). It is a journey that takes him from an Indian village to Flanders; from being a farmer to becoming a soldier; from living in a field to fighting on the front. Just like Paul Baumer, Lalu has no idea of the harsh reality of the war front. As the novel progresses, he goes from being a nurturer to a killer as he kills on the battlefield in order to save his own life.

The description of war is vivid and intense. The reader feels as if the war is taking place in front of his or her eyes. 'Each moment seemed to Lalu to be his last, for the bullets came whizzing fast, invisible and deadly...' (Anand, p. 90). The chances of survival are remote, yet the soldiers keep their guns in their hands and fire back because they do not have a choice; it's a do-or-die situation. In the process they evolve into soulless creatures who have become numb and insensitive towards humanity.

The readers are put into an introspective mode about a soldier's life during a war. Being away from home adds nostalgia to the soldiers' thoughts but they are left without a choice. They have to grapple with great odds while risking their lives in the process. They are on the front out of compulsion and have a vague idea about the war, which will ultimately bring doom to them. They are like 'ghosts of their own presence, all leading a sleepless, restless, furtive subterranean life in the darkness, unhoused ghosts, the specters of their broodings, apparitions of their shivering sleep, essentially unknown to each other, and only knit together by shouted orders in this world of quaking earth, of shells, and bullets and torn, lacerated limbs' (Anand, p. 129). It is in this aspect that *Across the Black Waters* most resembles *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Paul Baumer is left just as disillusioned by the war and has little idea what is in store for him on the war front where he soon realizes that the reality is very far from the glorious fantasy he has been led to believe.

There are taboos present in every culture but at the front they tend to collapse as survival becomes the prime concern. As Anand writes: '... the strange thing was that the Sikhs, to whom tobacco is taboo, did not object to the Hindu Dogras puffing away with asthmatic coughing' (Anand, p. 156). This incident shows the change in the mindset of the people where they do not care about religious beliefs and choose a practical way of life: 'Half a cigarette is better than a hungry belly' (Anand, p. 101). It is the mode of survival of the adaptable that Anand is trying to convey through the novel.

Similarly in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the world for the soldiers changes completely after the war where they are no longer innocent youth but 'old folk' (Remarque, p.10) who have outlived their lives on the front. The experience gives them nothing less than a scar for the rest of their lives. The connectivity with what is going on in the rest of the world ceases and they are left with hardship, tribulation and agony.

Despite these similarities, *Across the Black Waters* diverges markedly from Remarque's novel. Anand's protagonist is Indian and his history and culture are very different from Paul Baumer's. Lalu and his family are dispossessed off their land. For poor farmers like Lalu land is their only possession. Lalu longs to return to his native place and begin his life from scratch towards a better future. While reflecting on the French he thinks: 'The reason why these people are happier is because they do not borrow money

from moneylenders, but from the bank at a very low interest' (Anand, p.186). This reflection follows as he observes the French living a life of much higher standard compared to the people residing in the rural parts of India. Hence, the weight of happiness is judged in terms of materialistic possessions.

Yet there remains a philosophical touch to the novel that is subtle yet effective. Kirpu, a soldier who Lalu looks up to as an elder, is a character who thinks beyond the shackles of religion and earthly wealth. He maintains: 'Naked we came into the world and naked we will go' (Anand, p. 77). In the material world, one can possess infinite things but at the end of the day, what we take with ourselves is nothing but the soul. That message is inserted subtly into the novel by Anand through the voice of Kirpu. *All Quiet on the Western Front* does not deal with such philosophical issues.

Kristin Bluemel has called *Across the Black Waters* a diasporic¹⁴ postcolonial¹⁵ novel in her essay 'Casualty of War, Casualty of Europe - Mulk Raj Anand in England'. The fact that these soldiers are in Europe and the fact that Anand himself spent a number of years in England lends it an ambience that is closer to the diasporic postcolonial novels of the late twentieth century even though it was written in an age of Empire. The novel is an attempt to understand a known history from an Indian perspective. The non-Indian characters are portrayed with a sense of superiority and the Indians with an air of inferiority. As Bluemel puts it, the novel unfolds in 'self-consciously class-resistant language' (Bluemel, 'Casualty of Europe-Mulk Raj Anand in England', p. 319). There are many instances where Indian soldiers face alienation. One such instance occurs when Lalu is introspecting after reaching Marseilles: 'He had not felt free at Marseilles, because he had been too humble then to stare at their superior life, immediately after his arrival' (Anand, p. 33). Indian sepoys are fighting in an alien land and this alienation haunts them on the battlefield. The very fact that Indians fight in an alien space speaks of the soldiers' vulnerability and lack of choice, both in the foreign land and in their homeland. These soldiers leave their villages and are brought to Flanders to serve the army and are, therefore, detached from their roots.

P.K. Rajan's essay, 'Anand's Lalu Trilogy and Thalazhis's *Kayar* Saga Novels: A Study of Similarities and Differences' explores the alienation experienced by Lalu while describing him as 'an Indian everyman' (Rajan, 'Anand's Lalu Trilogy and Thalazhis's *Kayar* Saga Novels: A Study of Similarities and Differences, p. 83). His traumatic experience transforms him into a mature person who develops the ability to make wise decisions. *Across the Black Waters* embarks on the changing relationship of the Indians with the land, previously as farmers in their own land and, later, as soldiers fighting in a foreign land.

Lalu and his fellow Indian soldiers experience Western culture which is in stark contrast to the India where they were born and brought up. Although a male-centric novel, there are vivid descriptions of Western women from an Indian perspective. 'Lalu could not keep his eyes off the smiling girls, bright and gleaming with a happiness that he wanted to think was all for him. Such a contrast to the sedate Indian women who seemed to grow old before they were young' (Anand, p. 13). There is, however, a language barrier. Hence, at times, the communication between the Indians and the Westerners is conveyed through sign language. There is a scene where one of the soldiers offers a sweet to a juggler mimicking him and the latter accepts it. Anand comments on this rare moment of intercultural comprehension with the words: 'And, what was strange, the mime worked. And soon there was complete understanding between East and West'(Anand, p.21).

Unlike Paul Baumer who blames his superiors for the sorry state of the common soldier, the Indians are more likely to blame fate when disaster strikes at the front. The cross-cultural dimension in Anand's novel differentiates it from Remarque's novel, where human relations are all among Germans and there is no class or caste differentiation. In Anand's novel, the class and caste divisions among the Indians are

¹⁴ Diasporic literature is concerned with maintaining or altering identity, language and culture while in another culture or country.

¹⁵ Post colonialism both as a body of theory and study of political and cultural change focuses on awareness of social, psychological and cultural inferiority and hybridity, enforced by being in a colonized state.

prevalent along with the difference between the French and the Indians which create disparity and inequality. There is an episode in the novel that occurs after Subah, who used to be Lalu's friend, is promoted and starts bullying the very men who used to be his comrades. Anand catches the shock and dismay of the men in his description of the moment: 'The excitement, the exhilaration in their eyes subsided amidst the furrows of shame carved by the past humiliations inflicted on them by superior officers, and they stood baffled as though struck by an electric shock, because the bullying of an officer, who is an Indian by nationality but is promoted to a higher rank. He was their friend but seemed like a fresh wound in the changed circumstances of their lives, among all the strange things of the West' (Anand, p. 26).

Anand's soldiers also find the West exotic. Here Anand is taking the exoticism inherent in much Western writing about India and turning it on its head. The exoticism of the West is portrayed from the viewpoint of the soldiers who find life in France very different from the Indian scenario. The sepoy see the rivers of Orleans in terms of 'small nullahs' back in India. The constant French drizzle is compared to the 'pissing of a child'. The storms are dubbed 'a mere breeze in the tall grass' Standing in front of a giant statue of Joan of Arc, one sepoy is shocked to learn that the 'Angrez Sahib' and the 'Francis' were enemies at one time. Another is taken aback that a female 'Jarnel' defeated the 'Angrezi army'. In their eyes, Joan of Arc becomes the French version of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi. The Indians are self-conscious about drinking in the same place as the sahibs. When Lalu, the main character, makes friends with a French girl, he is acutely embarrassed by the attention aroused when she takes his arm in public.

Lalu's cherished ideal and values of autonomy and social equality for the peasants are further tested and formulated in Europe. Lalu sees the horror of death which the First World War brought. Lalu's confrontation with the political and social realities and his understanding of life become the theme as well as the crux of the novel. Anand charts out the details of the lives of the soldiers, their anguish and helplessness. The novel delves deeply into the horrors of war and the nausea associated with it. Lalu experiences the geniality of his companions which is short-lived as they die one by one, leaving him disconsolate.

Lalu is more than perturbed to see the horrors perpetuated by war and the sight of maimed bodies evokes his disgust. 'Lalu sat coiled up in the slimy straw in the cave, scraping the mud off his boots and clothes. If he had been told even a fortnight ago that in *Vilayat*, the land of his dreams where he had been so happy and eager to come as an adventurer, the Sahibs, whom he admired so much, were willfully destroying each other, ruining their villages and the cities, he, would not have believed it' (Anand, p. 198). Uncertainty lurks among the soldiers: 'There was an insidious fear spreading over the battalions which, mixed with the oppression of the hard sky overhead, became the unknown fate incarnate, the question mark of death...actions and words, incalculable, tense, hysterical' (Anand, p. 255).

Lingaraj Gandhi in his essay, 'Excursion to Continental Graveyard: A Reading of Anand's *Across the Black Waters*' claims that it is the only Indian novel consisting of a 'continental setting' (Gandhi, 'Excursion to Continental Graveyard: A Reading of Anand's *Across the Black Waters*', p. 112). Gandhi puts a new perspective on the novel as he says that the novel centrally focuses on 'socialistic impulse' (Gandhi, 'Excursion to Continental Graveyard: A Reading of Anand's *Across the Black Waters*', p. 114). In India, Lalu regards the Europeans as 'aloof self-assured, God like people' (Gandhi, 'Excursion to Continental Graveyard: A Reading of Anand's *Across the Black Waters*', p. 114) but in Europe, Lalu realizes that even they are susceptible to human suffering and sorrow. This is portrayed in the episode where cake is distributed among all English and German soldiers in No Man's land. That is the point where Lalu is reminded of his senior officer's words, 'All the rules, the theorems, the ideas, everything has been shattered in the war, buried in the mud' (Anand, p. 222). The soldiers, whether Indian, English or German, share a common fate.

Gandhi highlights the mythical aspect of the novel which helps in connecting the past with the present. For instance, Lalu links his European experience with the Indian mythical gods of Yama and Kali which showcase 'continental reality' (Gandhi, 'Excursion to Continental Graveyard: A Reading of Anand's *Across the Black Waters*', p. 117). His perception of *Vilayat* changes considerably when he explores that overseas life as a soldier in nothing less than hell. The image of the graveyard is used in the novel to focus on the miserable life

of the soldiers as well as the ghostly aspect which lurks over the warfront as an omen. In the end, Lalu realizes that the European war is neither his nor his people's war but as another '*Mahabharata*'¹⁶ (Gandhi, p. 267) where the Indians are used as mere puppets to serve the cause of war. The scattered corpses on the battlefield give the impression that war is nothing but the celebration of death. The soldiers in the novel are crushed by the war machine. Bravery at war is nothing but barbarism. It is clearly expressed by Lalu in one of his casual conversations with Daddy Dhanoo. 'If one who slays one is a murderer then he who slays a thousand is not a hero' (Anand, p. 201). Denunciation of war is the main theme which is an important aspect of social criticism. The soldiers find themselves in sodden trenches and subject to intense artillery barrage and rifle fire 'like a rapid dysentery of lead' (Anand, p. 55).

World War One has been called the 'fog of war' (pg 35) in D.H. Lawrence's novel *The Prussian Officer*.¹⁷ That has proved to be true in the case of European as well as Asian combatants as its disastrous effect has been found in the world on a wide scale. French psychiatrist Theodule Ribot says that, "disgust lies between fight and flight...it is the expose of materiality and formlessness" (Lawrence, *The Prussian Officer*, p. 44). It is a feeling where the body acknowledges a distinction between the self and the world. J.B. Bernstein his essay 'Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*' says that literature becomes a medium to observe the war from a vantage point. 'Literature is an antidote, antithesis to combat, voice men seek in a war' (Bernstein, 'Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*', p. 207). Remarque speaks of the warfare as a skill for a soldier, which becomes a prerequisite to survive. 'Modern trench-warfare demands knowledge and experience; a man must have a feeling for the contours of the ground, an ear for the sound and character of the shells' (Remarque, p. 97).

In terms of their treatment of the War, the two novels are not that far apart. Before the War the soldiers have expectations. During the war, they are like dummies following orders aimlessly and, after the war, they will become walking corpses if they survive. In Remarque's novel, the common man's toil has been projected in a raw manner. There is an aspect of self-discipline when it comes to soldiers on the front which they imbibe quite naturally. '...explain that to a black-smith or a labourer or a workman or a peasant...all he sees is that he has been put through the mill and sent to the front, but he well knows enough what he must do and what not' (Remarque, p. 21).

Anand, however, adds a cross-cultural dimension which distinguishes his novel markedly from Remarque's. He gives a picture of the differences between the European and Indian cultures in terms of the historical event of the Great War. The irony is that the European characters the Indian soldiers encounter in Europe treat them in a far more humane manner than the Europeans in India. That is even true of the British officers who are far more remote within the physical confines of the Raj. There is also an implication of orthodoxy and rigid customs as prevalent in India which 'did not exhibit eroticism so much as they showed extremes of asceticism, obscenity and a mawkish sentimentality which found expression in...maudlin songs or of abuse' (Anand, p. 194).

Anand's novel also shows racial and cultural alienation. Initially Lalu is fascinated by the city life in France and Flanders but at the same time realizes that this life is not meant for him. There is a fine line that separates the Westerner from the Indian even when the two share the same space. These are issues that Remarque does not even begin to investigate in his novel.

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¹⁶ The *Mahabharata* is an epic narrative of the Kuruksheetra War and the fates of the Kaurava and the Pandava princes. It also contains philosophical and devotional material, such as a discussion of the four "goals of life" or purusharthas.

¹⁷ *The Prussian Officer* is a classic story of sexual repression and tension which, when released, explode into maddened violence, D. H. Lawrence examines the psychology of two men, both German soldiers.

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