

ENGL 281 The Great War in Film and Lit  
Fall 2014  
Tom Slater

**Required Texts:** Course packet from Copies Plus.

Barker, Pat. *Regeneration*.

Hemingway, Ernest. *A Farewell to Arms*.

Remarque, Erich Maria. *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

Trumbo, Dalton. *Johnny Got His Gun*.

(Any editions of these novels will be acceptable).

**Course Goals:** In August 1914, one hundred years ago, the Great War (later to become known as World War I) began. Exactly why still isn't clear. It was a very different world from today in which much of Europe was still ruled by monarchies which had formed alliances and antagonisms that many of them felt bound to uphold. The leaders generally did so without regard for the costs to those who would do the actual fighting. As a result, the war would last for five years, until November 11, 1918 and cost about ten million lives among the soldiers and about twice that many including civilians.

This killing of civilians in such large numbers was one way in which those times are like ours. Now, cities and towns began to suffer great destruction. Another similarity to the present is that the weapons became more powerful. Machine guns could mow down many men at once, and tanks and submarines were used for the first time as well as poison gas. Weapons, as we all know, have only become more powerful and now anyone, anywhere is potentially on the front lines as massive weapons and terrorism can bring death anywhere.

Despite the size of the conflict and the intense peace talks that followed, however, the war settled nothing. It was not the "war to end all wars" and did not "make the world safe for democracy" as popular slogans at the time promised. Yet, not much seems to have been learned from all this. Although it was a horrible, ugly war that became a model for all conflicts since, we continue to glamorize war. Nations continue exploit patriotism to build their militaries and attempt to solve their problems in the same way.

These historical notes and much more of the history are important, but this is not a history course. Instead, we are going to try to understand what the war means to us by understanding some of the writers and filmmakers from that time up until the present who have dealt with the war and the people caught up in it through their creative work. Often, these works can provide greater depth of understanding than historical texts or documentaries because they show us the emotions of the people involved and the people who've cared about what happened. They show us real fears and hopes of individuals caught up in forces beyond their control. They bring history down (or up) to a human level.

Through these works, my hope is that each of you can define some relevance of the war for your lives. That's the real goal of this course, not to learn what happened when, who wrote what, or who made what movie. But to find out how these dramatic experiences and texts speak to us and find something of value for our own lives and times. I've tried to design assignments to

help everyone achieve this goal, and I hope you all enjoy the experience and find that it has been valuable for you.

**Assignments & Grades:** Informal written responses to readings and films, 25%. These should be typed, single-spaced, using a 12 pt. font and approximately one page in length. If your work does not meet all of these criteria, I will not accept it. Make sure you have it printed out and ready to hand in when you come to class. Don't tell me that you'll just run off and print it, you forgot to bring it, you ran out of funds for printing, your printer is broken, you'll simply email it to me, or any other excuses. Don't come to class late and then expect to hand it in either. Getting to class on time with your work properly completed is a primary responsibility. So make sure you do this.

I will give you a writing prompt or series of questions for each assigned writing. Your work should show your own accurate observation of films or reading of the lit and your own thinking. Drawing on secondary sources is not allowed. Sometimes, I'll ask you to find and write about your own interests in relation to literature film or other art about the war. In this way, you'll be able to explore other work in relation to your major project. I might also ask you to use your writing to lead discussion, so that's another good reason to do the best you can at putting down your sincere thoughts about the material.

Two short essays during the semester and an in-class final exam essay, 15% each. The two essays written during the semester should be approximately six double-spaced pages printed in 12 pt. font. I will provide a choice of topics to write about and you can use any material from your free writings, assigned readings, or presented by anyone in class. You should not use any other material from other sources. For the final, you will write on paper using notes and texts to refer to if you wish, and there will not be a required length.

Major project, 30%. This project may be a research paper about a film or literature in relation to the war that we are either studying as part of our assigned work or something that is not on the syllabus. But you might also choose to do a creative project, writing either fiction, poetry, a screenplay, or play, or making your own film. Another option could be to create your own artwork in relation to the war or existing works about the war. These will be due on Dec. 8, the final day of class. I'll provide more info about them during the semester.

**Assistance:** Please contact me to set a conference time any time you feel like you'd like to discuss the course material, a rough draft of an essay, or your research. You can reach me by email at [tslater@iup.edu](mailto:tslater@iup.edu) or by my office phone 724-357-4879. I will have regular office hours on T, 3:30-5:30, and MW, noon-2.

**Electronic Devices:** While in class, please turn off all electronic devices such as cell phones, and ipods and keep them out of sight. I will greatly appreciate it, and you will help your performance in class.

**Attendance:** Please provide me with an excuse for any class you miss or know you will miss. Your absence will hurt your grade if you don't because you may miss discussions of important points, useful feedback on your work, and the chance to learn from and contribute to the work of others. So please make sure you notify me by email, tell me in class, or leave a phone message

about your reasons for absences either before or as soon as possible afterwards. You will be allowed three excused absences, which means you won't be penalized for assignments done in class on those days. However, you will receive no credit for work done during a class for which you have an unexcused absence.

With any absence, you are still responsible to be caught up and prepared with the required assignment for the next class session. The syllabus provides a plan for the semester. But I may need to make some changes as we go. So, if you miss a class, make sure you contact a classmate or me to find out what you need to have ready for the start of the next class.

**Plagiarism:** Some people feel that while classmates may have to work hard for grades, they should be rewarded for doing as little as possible. I hope you realize that I don't agree, and I believe I have constructed this class so that plagiarism is not a real possibility. Nevertheless, people may try. If you do, it tells me that you don't have any respect for my efforts, which I don't appreciate, and that you're not really in college to learn, which doesn't make sense. If I do suspect that you have plagiarized, I will confront you about it. If you have in fact plagiarized, you will receive an extremely low grade (such as 0) for that assignment that may ensure your failure in the course.

**Civility:** In this class, we will respect each other's opinions, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual identities. This means that we will not use derogatory language towards any of these aspects in discussion or writing. This does not mean that you can't be critical or express your opinions or beliefs. But if you expect to have your views respected, you must state them logically and without disrespect towards others.

### **Assignment Schedule:**

8/25 Intro to course. Film: *Coward* (David Roddham, 2013).

8/27 Discussion. Film: *Shoulder Arms* (Charlie Chaplin, 1919).

9/3 Discussion. Reading: Pieces by Women Writers in course packet; "Introduction" to *Writing After War*, by John Limon, pp. 1-8 (accessible as an e-book through the library's online catalog).

9/8 Film: *The Big Parade* (King Vidor, 1925).

9/10 Film: *Big Parade*, concl.

9/15 Discussion.

9/17 Reading and Discussion: *A Farewell to Arms*; *Writing After War*, pp. 91-98.

9/22 Film: *Paths of Glory* (Stanley Kubrick, 1957).

9/24 Film: *Paths*, concl.

9/29 Discussion.

10/1 Reading and Discussion: *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Assign Short Essay 1.

10/6 Film: *A Very Long Engagement* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 2004). Short Essay 1 Due.

10/8 Film: *Engagement*, concl.

10/13 Discussion.

10/15 Reading and Discussion: Course Packet material on poems of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owens.

10/20 Film: *The Grand Illusion* (Jean Renoir, 1937).

10/22 Film: *Illusion*, concl.

10/27 Discussion.

10/29 Reading and Discussion: *Regeneration*. Assign Short Essay 2.

11/3 Film: *War Horse* (Stephen Spielberg, 2011). Short Essay 2 Due.

11/5 Film: *Horse*, concl.

11/10 Discussion.

11/12 Videos on poetry and music.

11/17 Film: *Joyeux Noel* (Christian Carion, 2005).

11/19 Film: *Noel*, concl.

12/1 Discussion.

12/3 Reading and Discussion: *Johnny Got His Gun*.

12/8 TV episodes: *Black Adder Goes Forth*.

Final Exam Time, Friday, Dec. 12, 2:45-4:45.