All Quiet On The Western Front: Baumer Development

“All quiet on the Western front” by Rich Maria Remarque, depicts the reality and hardships faced during World War 1 through the eyes of a German soldier. The story is told through the eyes of Paul Baumer, who, after being persuaded by his teacher decides to enlist into the German Army with his friends. The harsh reality of the circumstances became more and more prevalent throughout the story as his time in the front line become unbearable. It begins to shape and alter his opinions on the morality of war and his glorified vision of what it meant to be a soldier. As the war progresses, Baumer begins to forget his identity outside of the war and allows the development of his new identity. One which comes from both the destruction of war and his will to survive.

To begin with, as a young soldier, Baumer believed that it was a soldier’s responsibility to follow direct orders from his superiors without questioning them. However, as he spends more time in the front lines there begins to be a major shift on his outlook on war and how he perceived his enemy. Baumer struggles to comprehend why so many lives are lost for a war that many of them don’t want to take part in. He is able to draw a comparison between himself and the enemy, realizing that they actually more alike than different. For example, after taking cover in a ditch close to enemy lines Baumer notices that an enemy soldier also takes cover in the same ditch as him. By instinct, he manages to pull out his knife and stab the enemy soldier, severely wounding him which later resulted in his death. Baumer examines his belongings and finds a wallet with a family picture. He states, “After finding a picture of whom he presumes to be Gerard’s wife and daughter, he realizes the true horror of war. He had not just killed an enemy soldier, he had killed someone’s husband, someone’s father” (Remarque pg. 21). This becomes an important realization for Baumer as he is able to draw a comparison between himself and his enemy. It is clear at this point that although they are on different sides, they both face similar hardships and are facing the reality of losing their lives and never coming back home to a family or loved one.

Secondly, Baumers character throughout the story takes a drastic shift from a young motivated Soldier with high morale to a more uneasy, fear driven individual with only the instinct to survive as a driving factor in his journey in the war. This change in character comes through experiences from the war and progressively alters Baumers mindset. One example of this would be after Baumer realizes that most of his close friends have fallen victims to the war in an endless cycle of violence and despair. Baumer states, “I am young, I am twenty years old; yet I know nothing of life but despair, death, fear, and fatuous superficiality cast over an abyss of sorrow. I see how peoples are set against one another, and in silence, unknowingly, foolishly, obediently, innocently slay one another.” (Remarque pg. 263). This becomes a turning point for Baumer who comes to terms with the reality of war, knowing that his previous life is no longer a part of him and has since been replaced by thoughts of survival and remorse. This shift in mentality and persona affect Baumer drastically in ways that he wouldn’t have predicted. His outlook on life, and the morality of war take a mental toll on him, ultimately allowing him to forget his identity outside of the war and develop a new identity which forms from the destruction and horror of war.