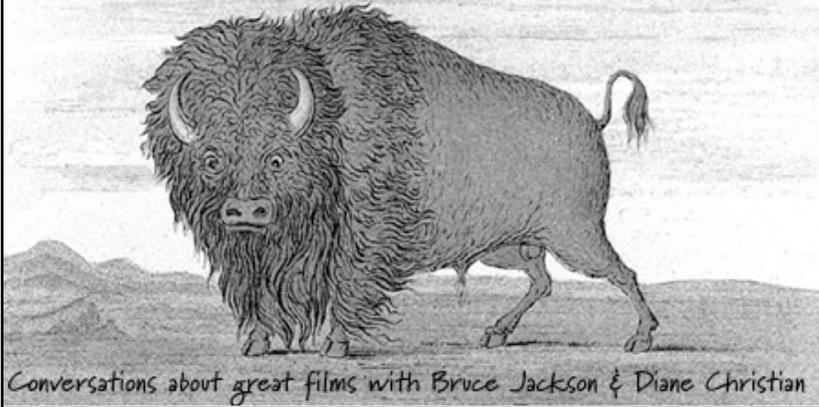


# The Buffalo Film Seminars



*Der Weg Zurück* (1931; *The Road Back*), about the collapse of Germany in 1918. He moved to Switzerland in 1932. The Nazis banned his books a year later and took away his citizenship in 1938. He moved to the US in 1939 and was naturalized in 1947. He married actress Paulette Goddard and lived in Switzerland until his death. Some of his other novels were *Three Comrades* (1937), *Arch of Triumph* (1946), *Spark of Life* (1952), *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* (1954), and *Heaven Has No Favorites* (1961), which was filmed as *Bobby Deerfield* (1977).

**GEORGE ABBOTT** (25 June 1887, Forestville, New York—31 January 1995, Miami Beach, Florida, stroke) wrote 45 screenplays almost as many stage plays, among them *Damn Yankees!* (1958, also play), *The Pajama Game* (1957, also play), *Where's Charley* (1952, play).

**ARTHUR EDESON** (24 October 1891, New York, New York—14 February 1970, Agoura Hills, California) shot 135 films, among them *Casablanca* (1942), *Across the Pacific* (1942), *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *They Drive by Night* (1940), *Each Dawn I Die* (1939), *Nancy Drew... Reporter* (1939), *They Won't Forget* (1937), *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935), *The Invisible Man* (1933), *Frankenstein* (1931), *Stella Dallas* (1925), and *The Dollar Mark* (1914).

**GEORGE CUKOR** (7 July 1899, New York, New York—23 January 1983, Los Angeles, California, heart failure) directed 64 films, among them *My Fair Lady* (1964, Academy Award, Best Director), *Born Yesterday* (1950, Academy Award nomination Best Director), *A Double Life* (1947, Academy Award nomination Best Director), *The Philadelphia Story* (1940, Academy Award nomination Best Director), and *Little Women* (1933, ditto).

**LOUIS WOLHEIM** (28 March 1880, New York, New York—18 February 1931, Los Angeles, California, stomach cancer) acted in 58 films, usually playing a heavy. Some of the others were *The Sin Ship* (1931), *Gentleman's Fate* (1931), *Condemned* (1929), *The Awakening* (1928), *Two Arabian Knights* (1927), *America* (1924), *Little Old New York* (1923, in which he played The Hoboken Terror), *Orphans of the Storm* (1921, in which he was Executioner) and *The Warning* (1914).

**LEW AYRES** (28 December 1908, Minneapolis, Minnesota—30 December 1996, Los Angeles, California, complications from a coma) acted in 94 films, though his career went into a tailspin for a while after he announced he was a C.O. at the start of WWII. He served in with distinction on the front lines in the army medical corps. His Best Actor nomination for *Johnny Belinda* (1948) helped resurrect his film career. He last appeared in a 1994 episode of "Hart to Hart." He did a lot of television in the 1970s, but he was best known for his years playing in the Dr. Kildare film series (he acted in nine of them) in the late 1930s. Some of his other films were *Damien: Omen II* (1978), *Battle for the Planet of the Apes* (1973), and *Advise and Consent* (1962).

## From World Film Directors VI. Ed. John Wakeman. H.W. Wilson Co., NY, 1987, entry by Philip Kemp

[Milestone's] family, though liberal and cultured in their outlook, were not pleased to find that their adolescent son was developing a taste for acting. In 1912, after he finished high school, he was sent off to a college at Mitweide, in Saxony, to study engineering.

At Christmas 1913 his father sent him money for a trip home; Milestone used it instead for a passage to the United States, along with two equally adventurous (or equally bored) classmates. They arrived in Hoboken, New Jersey, with six dollars between them. At first an aunt who lived in New York provided Milestone with money; when that ran out, he optimistically cabled his father for more funds. The reply came: "You are in the land of opportunity—use your own judgment."

Having little choice, Milestone followed the parental advice, and found work sweeping floors for a raincoat manufacturer. He subsequently worked as a janitor, door-to-door salesman, and machine operator in a lace factory, before landing a job as a photographer's assistant in 1915. Finding himself, for the first time, in a congenial profession, he eagerly sought experience of both the technical and aesthetic aspects of photography, and then moved closer

to his hopes of a stage career by becoming assistant to a theatrical photographer, at seven dollars a week. In 1917, when the United States entered the war, Milestone enlisted, and after basic training was assigned to the photographic division of the Army Signal Corps. Posted to Washington, he helped to make training films, edited combat footage, and took an occasional acting role. Among his colleagues were Victor Fleming, Wesley Ruggles, and (as he then was) Jo Sternberg.

**LEWIS MILESTONE** (Lev Milstein, 30 September 1895, Kishinev, Russia—25 September 1980, Los Angeles, California, after surgery) directed 48 films, among them *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1962), *Ocean's Eleven* (1960), *Pork Chop Hill* (1959), *The Red Pony* (1949), *Arch of Triumph* (1948), *A Walk in the Sun* (1945), *The Purple Heart* (1944), *The North Star* (1943, aka *Armored Attack* 1943 USA recut version), *Of Mice and Men* (1939), *The General Died at Dawn* (1936), *Anything Goes* (1936), *Rain* (1932), *The Front Page* (1931), and *The Toothbrush* (1918).

**ERICH MARIA REMARQUE** (22 June 1898, Osnabrück, Germany—25 September 1970, Locarno, Switzerland.) wrote 16 film scripts, some based on his own novels. In WWI, he was drafted into the German army at 18 and was wounded several times. He followed *Im Westen nichts Neues* (which sold more than 50 million copies in dozens of languages) with

*Der Weg Zurück* (1931; *The Road Back*), about the collapse of Germany in 1918. He moved to Switzerland in 1932. The Nazis banned his books a year later and took away his citizenship in 1938. He moved to the US in 1939 and was naturalized in 1947. He married actress Paulette Goddard and lived in Switzerland until his death. Some of his other novels were *Three Comrades* (1937), *Arch of Triumph* (1946), *Spark of Life* (1952), *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* (1954), and *Heaven Has No Favorites* (1961), which was filmed as *Bobby Deerfield* (1977).

Discharged in February 1919, Milestone took American citizenship, acclimatizing his name to mark the occasion. After the excitement of making movies, portrait photography seemed tame, and at the first opportunity he headed for Hollywood, arriving there flat broke. A friend from the Signal Corps, Jesse D. Hampton, now an independent producer, gave him a job as cutting room assistant at twenty dollars a week. In between sweeping floors and running errands, Milestone acquired further filmmaking skills, and in 1920 became general assistant to Henry King, working with him on *Dice of Destiny* (1920) and *When We Were Twenty-One* (1921). Later in 1921 he moved to the Ince Studios where he perfected his editing technique, and began a four-year association with one of Ince's directors, William A. Seiter. Seiter, a fluent director of unremarkable light comedies, employed Milestone as general assistant on *The Foolish Age* (1921), soon promoting him to screenwriter and assistant director.

According to Milestone, Seiter was more interested in golf than in filmmaking, and was happy to let his assistant take over much of the directing. This suited Milestone perfectly, and he stayed with Seiter when the latter moved to Warners in 1923, and then to Universal in 1925. Besides gaining experience as an uncredited director, Milestone worked nights and weekends as an editor, establishing a reputation as an accomplished “film doctor” for his rescue work on the first Rin Tin Tin feature, *Where the North Begins* (1923). He also coscripted many of Seiter’s films, and worked with Raymond Griffith on the scenario of *The Yankee Consul* (1924), directed by James W. Horne. His first solo writing credit came on *Bobbed Hair* (1925), an adaptation of a satirical farce originally written by twenty different writers.

After five years’ apprenticeship, Milestone decided that it was time to show what he had learned; he offered an original story idea to Jack Warner on the condition that he be allowed to direct....

Warners were now paying Milestone \$400 a week, a substantial salary. He discovered, though, that they were loaning him out at \$1,000 a week as a film doctor, and he demanded to be paid the difference. When they refused, he quit; the studio sued him for breach of contract and won. To avoid payment, Milestone had himself declared bankrupt, and moved into a two-room apartment with his friends David and Myron Selznick. Despite an attempt by Warners to have him blacklisted, he soon found work at Paramount, where he made a film with the silent star Thomas Meighan, *The New Klondike* (1926).

Paramount thought him an up-and-coming talent and assigned him to a comedy with their top star, Gloria Swanson. Star and director clashed during the shooting of *Fine Manners* (1926), and Milestone left the film, which was completed by Richard Rossen. By now he had gained the reputation of being talented but awkward, which could be one reason that he signed a four-year contract with another notorious maverick, Howard Hughes, then just starting out in movies as an independent producer.

Milestone’s first film for Hughes, *Two Arabian Knights* (1927), was also his first excursion into war films. Not that the war featured much beyond the opening scenes, in which two feuding American doughboys (Louis Wolheim and William Boyd) are taken prisoner by the Germans; the rest of the action concerns their escape from a POW camp and some highly improbable adventures in Palestine. The film’s cheerfully coarse tone and bickering buddies

“I shot very little footage on the battles because the film was all figured out,” Milestone told Kevin Brownlow. “Being an editor myself, I pre-edited the thing. . . . The front office was always sitting there waiting for me to say, ‘Tomorrow I want 10,000 men.’ I made the whole battle scene with 150 fellows, 75 Frenchmen and 75 Germans.” He also created in those sequences, some memorably lasting images: Ayres trapped in a shellhole with a dying French soldier (the silent comedian Raymond Griffith, in his last film role); the coveted soft leather boots, passed from soldier to soldier as each successive occupant is killed; Ayres carrying the wounded Kaeczinsky (Louis Wolheim) on his back and chatting cheerfully to him, not realizing that he is already dead; and of course the final, famous shot of the hand reaching out for a butterfly as a sniper takes aim. “The scenes at the front,” Clyde Jeavons observed, “have an authentic feeling of waste, desolation and menace, and the relentlessly grey, chaotic, drawn-out panoramas of trench warfare are justly celebrated.”

Yet much of the film now seems distinctly uneven, lapsing into sentimentality or didacticism—Eisenstein is said to have called it “a good PhD thesis.” The scenes at home with Paul’s mother and sister equal the worst emotional excesses of D.W. Griffith, and equally embarrassing is Paul’s habit of praying out loud (internalized dialogue in the novel) at moments of stress. Despite its weakness, though, *All Quiet*’s technical brilliance and compassionate intensity justify its status as what Richard Cutts called “the most powerful indictment of war’s stupidity, waste, carnage, agony and confusion

were clearly inspired by *What Price Glory?*, Raoul Walsh’s recent smash hit. But despite these derivative elements, the film was received with enthusiasm by public and critics alike, and Milestone was awarded an Oscar for best comedy direction in that year’s first-ever Academy Award ceremony.

Milestone’s first sound movie, *New York Nights*, (1929) was . . . an overwrought backstage gangster story, shot with an immobile camera and a cast elocuting painfully into ill-concealed microphones. After seeing the producer’s cut, Milestone demanded (without success) to have his name taken off the picture.

Erich Maria Remarque’s first novel, *Im Westen nichts Neues* (*All Quiet on the Western Front*), had been published in 1929 and achieved immediate international success. The screen rights were acquired by Universal, whose ambitious young head of production, Carl Laemmle Jr., began looking for a suitable but inexpensive director. On the strength of *Two Arabian Knights*, and thanks to some astute dealing by his agent, Myron Selznick, Milestone was chosen, and given relative freedom from studio interference.

*All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), wrote Clyde Jeavons. “Has become, if not the most praised, then certainly the most reappraised of all war films.” At the time of its release, the film was instantly hailed as a classic, a profoundly humanist and pacifist statement. Closely following Remarque’s novel, the plot traces the progress of a group of young German recruits on the Western Front, from initial recruitment, through increasing disillusionment, to their gradual extermination, one by one. In the film’s final moments the last of them, Paul Baumer (Lew Ayres), is shot dead by a French sniper only days before the armistice.

One reason for the film’s signal success, undoubtedly, was its timing. Midway between the wars, before the rise of Hitler, was the ideal moment for an eloquent antiwar statement, seen sympathetically from a German viewpoint. “But above all,” maintained Kingsley Canham, “it was the technique of Milestone’s film that rightly led to its fame.” Abandoning all the stilted immobility of early sound-movie convention, Milestone restored to the camera much of the freedom of the silent era, shooting and cutting with a fluid rhythmic style and great pictorial elegance. Most effective of all were the battle sequences: filmed with the fast lateral tracking shots that were to become Milestone’s stock-in-trade, they still communicate with fierce immediacy. “Milestone’s eloquent silent editing style and his camerawork,” wrote Karel Reisz in *Sequence* 14 (1952), “generate an overwhelming sense of impersonal horror.” yet captured on film.”

*All Quiet* was awarded an Oscar as best film of the year, with another going to Milestone as best director. His reputation was further enhanced by his next picture, which was also his last for Howard Hughes: *The Front Page* (1931), an adaptation of Hecht and MacArthur’s 1928 Broadway hit. . . .

Milestone filmed the piece at cracking pace, with a relentlessly mobile camera that made not the least concession to sound-recording restrictions. Most of the action is confined to the court newsroom, but Milestone moves outside (as James Shelley Hamilton wrote) “often enough to create a sense of the life of a city.” Lewis Jacobs considered it (with *All Quiet*) “one of the first talkies to recapture the spirit and movement of the silent film.”

In the opinion of many critics, *Of Mice and Men* (1940)—on which Milestone acted as his own producer—ranks with *All Quiet* as the finest of his films. Based closely on the play that Steinbeck drew from his own short novel, it offers, wrote William K. Everson in *The Modern American Novel and the Movies*, “a good case for suggesting that occasionally a movie can improve on and enhance the values of the original fiction.” The film opens with what may well be the first use of a precredit sequence, as George (Burgess Meredith) and his friend, the half-witted giant Lennie (Lon Chaney Jr.), flee from a posse, thus setting the mood and theme of the rest of the action. In the final scene, after Lennie has inadvertently killed a woman and the two men’s fragile plans for happiness are in ruins, the posse

catches up with them—a different posse, except that all posses are the same.

Milestone's direction faithfully served the wider social implications of Steinbeck's melancholy fable. "Under the surface of a western wheat ranch," observed Richard Griffith, "his camera discovered the menace and insecurity of industrialised existence, and the loneliness of men forced to adapt to it."

America's entry into the war allowed Milestone to return to the genre in which he had made his name. None of his later war films, though, maintained the unequivocal pacifist stance of *All Quiet*; as a left, liberal with a Russian Jewish background, Milestone may well have felt that pacifism was no longer appropriate. But for the most part (*Halls of Montezuma* being the glaring exception) he managed to avoid the cruder excesses of gung-ho patriotism, continuing to depict war as a chaotic, tragic (if sometimes unavoidable) waste, in which ordinary individuals find themselves uncomprehendingly caught up.

The great Dutch documentary maker, Joris Ivens, then working with Pare Lorentz of the United States Government Film Service, had acquired 15,000 feet of film from the Eastern Front, shot by Soviet news photographers. He invited Milestone to work with him as editor and coproducer, and together they fashioned a somber, strikingly dramatic 45-minute documentary, *Our Russian Front* (1942), with music by Dimitri Tiomkin and a commentary spoken by Walter Huston. Milestone's next two films also aimed at celebrating the valor of America's allies, but at several further removes from actuality.

Milestone's third and last film scripted by Rossen, whose own directing career was about to take off, was *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946), the director's sole, and remarkably accomplished, excursion into *film noir*. Many of the classic *noir* elements are present: ancient, buried guilt resurfacing; a ruthlessly ambitious *femme fatale* (Barbara Stanwyck, cast exactly to type); self-destructive obsessions; an all-pervasive atmosphere of hopelessness, corruption and greed. In conformity with the conventions of the genre, much of the action takes place at night; Milestone skillfully deploys high-contrast lighting and disconcerting camera angles to enhance the already emotionally charged situations.

In 1946, Milestone had been one of the first to be subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee: of Russian origins, and a lifelong leftist he was an obvious target for the witch-hunters. Citing the Fifth Amendment, he refused to testify, and was not called before the Committee; but over the next few years he suffered sporadic attacks from such strident anti-Communists as Hedda Hopper. Since he continued to work, it seems that he escaped the worst effects of the Hollywood blacklist; but the pressures and tensions of the period may partly explain the depressing mediocrity of most of his later films. "A fear psychosis pervades [Hollywood]," he wrote in *New Republic* in January 1949, "engendered by witch hunts on the national, state, and community level. Producers are asking for and getting pictures without ideas. . . . We ought to . . . get back to making films with content, substance and meaning." In his own case, such aspirations were to remain largely unrealized.

Milestone began the 1950s with three films for Fox. *Halls of Montezuma* (1951), an account of a Marine attack on Okinawa during the Pacific War, is probably the worst of Milestone's war movies; moments of realism and sensitivity are eventually swamped by a blare of patriotic clichés.

He took on some television work "in order to find out what it was all about." What it was about, he concluded, was mostly "slavery," and he returned to filmmaking with his last war movie, *Pork Chop Hill* (1959). Set in the final days of the Korean War, it was Milestone's

first interesting film in ten years, and might even, had it not suffered subsequent distortion, have qualified as one of his best. Like *A Walk in the Sun*, it follows the action of a single infantry platoon, ordered to take a hill of minimal strategic value simply to strengthen America's hand at the Panmunjon peace negotiations. Parker and Schapiro reckoned it one of his most courageous, most thoughtful films...arguably a new kind of war film." Several scenes, in particular a night attack disrupted by an accidentally lit "friendly" searchlight, are visually and dramatically outstanding, and the ironic futility of the men's sacrifice is well conveyed. However, the picture was clumsily recut against Milestone's wishes by its star, Gregory Peck. It ends with a voiceover statement totally at variance with Milestone's intentions, claiming that the costly victory at Pork Chop Hill secured the freedom of "millions."

With equal justification, Lewis Milestone could be considered unusually fortunate, or unusually unlucky. Early in his career, he directed a film that was instantly hailed as a classic of the cinema—and which, despite its unevenness, still retains that status. On the strength of that film, some writers have suggested, he rarely thereafter lacked work throughout a not especially distinguished directorial career. A more sympathetic view might be that, through a fortuitous combination of circumstances, he peaked too soon, and spent the rest of his life shadowed by unfulfilled expectations that he would repeat his early triumph.

Writing in Richard Roud's *Cinema*, Richard T. Jameson suggested that it "is biographically irrelevant but mythically appropriate that a [Russian-born] director . . . should have cleaved obsessively to an insistently montage-oriented style. . . . But, though Milestone entered movies as a cutter, his first pictorial experience came as a photographer's assistant, and from his earliest films he manifested a commendable concern for integral composition as well as shot juxtaposition. Foregrounds and backgrounds rarely go unfilled, and his frequently moving camera recedes or penetrates almost as often as it drifts laterally. "All the same, as Richard Griffith says, though Milestone at his best had a style of his own, "it would be difficult, even for a connoisseur, to tell who directed the majority of his films."

Like most American directors of his generation, Milestone had to contend with the restrictions of the studio system. But as Joseph Millichap points out, artists like Carpa, Ford, or Huston "could take an unpromising genre idea and turn it into something truly artistic and uniquely [their] own. . . . Milestone never quite manages to transform his material, trash or classic, in this manner. . . . More than most directors of talent, Milestone was the prisoner of his literary property; if it was great he could soar with it, but if . . . mediocre he could only rarely rise above it." Although he earned a reputation for stubborn independence, Milestone often chose to walk away from problems rather than confront them, as with *Pork Chop Hill*: "I didn't agree with the way Mr. Gregory Peck wanted to edit it, so I simply walked out and he edited the way he saw fit."

Milestone's skill and flamboyant technical brilliance are widely acknowledged; his pioneering work in freeing the movie camera from the tyrannical confines of static sound equipment achieved lasting and valuable effects. But all too often his work is undermined by an ultimate disengagement that, at its worst, amounts to indifference: in his own words (about *Les Misérables*), "Oh, for Chrissake, it's just a job—I'll do it and get it over with." Expounding his view of the director's role, he once said: "My approach, my style is governed by the story, not the story by my style. The story is the important thing and the director has no business intruding."

**from *The Parade's Gone By* . . . Kevin Brownlow. U Cal Press, Berkeley & LA, 1968**

One of the greatest films ever made, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (Lewis Milestone), which had begun as a silent, was transformed into a talkie and given new stature; it had all the quality of a silent with few of the defects of a talkie, apart from some awkward delivery from actors unaccustomed to speaking dialogue.

The addition of sound certainly brought a new dimension to motion-picture production, and opened out tremendous new horizons for inventive film-making. It added so much that it changed the basis of motion-picture production. Instead of a gentle grafting, the arrival of sound

acted as a brutal transplanting; the cinema was ripped out of the silent era by the roots, and transplanted into new soil—richer, but unfamiliar. Unable to adjust to the new conditions, some of the roots withered and died, and much strength was lost.

Had the talkies been delayed just a few years, to give the onrush of silent-film technique time to reach its limits and settle down. Had it been possible to use sound with discretion and discernment, instead of plastering dialogue thick over every inch of picture, we might today be seeing commercial films of a far higher artistic and technical level. Silent films of 1929 were so fluid so astonishingly beautiful, and so adept at telling a story in pictures, with relatively few titles, that it seems tragic to have cut the technique off in its prime.

**from Great Movies The World at War. Ed. Ann Lloyd. Orbis, London, 1982**

The Locarno Pact of 1925, effectively readmitting Germany to the community of nations, was followed by a period of reappraisal in the late Twenties, which culminated in three of the greatest anti-war films ever made: Lewis Milestone's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, G. W. Pabst's *Westfront* (1918) (both 1930) and Anthony Asquith's *Tell England* (1931). Milestone's film, remade as recently as 1980 but with less power and less passion, is perhaps the best-known and most admired of all films about World War I. Adapted from Erich Maria Remarque's novel, it tells of the gradual destruction of a group of young recruits, mercilessly stripping the war of its glamour, and further enhancing the pacifist intent by blurring its audiences' preconceptions in inviting them to sympathize with German, rather than American, characters. . . .

Alas, the great pacifist films of the Thirties achieved little except getting themselves banned in Italy and Germany. *La Grande Illusion* (1937, *The Great Illusion*), Jean Renoir's idealistic look at life in a prison camp, an unusual subject in World War I movies, and Gance's remake of his *J'Accuse* (1937, *I Accuse*) were deeply influenced by the feeling that it was all going to happen again. Once the impression that all was not well in Europe filtered through to America, it reacted much as it had done before, preparing the public with warnings about the Nazi menace. . . .

Milestone used his facilities with incomparable flair. He brought all the fluidity of silent films to the camera—which freely tracked and panned and soared over the battlefields or the little German town from which the hero and his schoolboy friends march out to war—and to the editing. At the same time Milestone imaginatively explored the possibilities of sound, from the beginning where the bellicose harangues of the schoolteacher are drowned by the noise of a band outside, to the haunting echoes of the battlefield as the dry of 'Mind the wire' goes down the line. (David Robinson)

**from Projections of War: Hollywood, American Culture, and World War II. Thomas Doherty. Columbia University Press, NY, 1993**

The next landmark antiwar film arose from Erich Maria Remarque's international bestseller, *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Originally published in German in 1928, the worldwide success of *Im Westen Nichts Neues* was extraordinary not only because it gave the enemy a human face but because Americans were so disposed to recognize it as their own. In Universal-International's \$1,200,000 adaptation, directed by Lewis Milestone and released in 1930, the avuncular scrounger Kaczinsky (Louis Wolheim) suggests a diplomatic solution to war. "You should take all the kings and their cabinets and their generals, put 'em in the center [of a big field] dressed in their underpants and let 'em fight it out with clubs." His fellow troops, and Depression audiences, grumbled their assent.

*All Quiet on the Western Front* begins in sound and fury. Massing troops and blaring martial music drown out a high school professor's lecture. What looks at first like ironic commentary, the frenzy of war smothering the voice of learning, is in fact complicity not juxtaposition. The teacher exhorts his young charges to be "gay heroes" for the fatherland, to enlist in the name of patriotism and

Once America had entered World War II, World War I lost most of its significance to the cinema as a vehicle for comment. World War II itself, then Korea and then Vietnam offered more contemporary subjects with which to dissect human aggression. Moreover, despite the fact that it is now possible to view it with a certain historical perspective, World War I still stubbornly refuses to be romanticized. Its popular image of futile destruction was expertly exploited in Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957), a grim account of a court-martial in which three French soldiers are executed for cowardice despite the absurdity of the case against them.

Erich Maria Remarque wrote *Im Westen Nichts Neues* to free himself from his memory of the Great War and from 'my thoughts and those of my companions.' Like the leading character in the novel, the author was one of a class of 18-year-olds who enlisted in the infantry and suffered the brutalities of life in the trenches. The book was a best-seller. Soon after it appeared in the United States, the rights were snapped up by Carl Laemmle, head of Universal. Laemmle originally intended to use the story for a silent movie, and a silent version with synchronized music exists—running a reel longer than the complete talkie copy and with ZaSu Pitts in the role of Mrs Baumer instead of Beryl Mercer, who played the part in the sound film.

Lewis Milestone set himself uncompromisingly to reproduce the realism of the novel. It is arguable that no film—whether fiction or fact—has given so lively an account of World War I; and all fragments of *All Quiet* have frequently turned up in later compilations, credited as documentary.

The battle scenes were shot on an area of almost 1000 acres on the Irvine Ranch, 69 miles south-east of Los Angeles. Over five miles of water pipe were laid to provide the authentic water-logged appearance of the battlefields. And 2 miles of road were built for the operation of Universal's new camera crane which was assigned to the picture. In all, 35 different sets were built for the film—those representing frontline France being destined for destruction during filming.

Unerringly, Milestone reconciled the realism of the setting with the deliberately lyrical style of the dialogue: 'Our bodies are earth, and our thoughts are clay, and we sleep and eat with death.' He also blended the extreme stylization of some performances with the easy naturalism of Louis Wolheim (Kaczinsky) and Slim Summerville (Tjaden).

school spirit. In a dizzying Eisensteinian montage of close-ups, the boys jump to the bait.

Exploiting the comparative freedom of expression in the pre-Code era, *All Quiet on the Western Front* shoots down the transcendence of storybook battle with the flatulence of ground-level reality. The raw recruits are beset by hunger, rats, lice, and loss of sphincter control. Stringing concertina wire, enduring endless artillery bombardments, marching into machine guns, fighting hand-to-hand and killing up close, the homeroom class is shot, shelled and blasted apart. The horror is relieved by a few incidents of low comedy, dalliance, and an uncomfortable home leave, but the rule is inexorable and inevitable death: files of pack-laden troops mowed down by withering machine gun fire; the noise, smoke, and chaos of forward assault; the lunar landscape of the no-man's-land. As Armistice negotiations drag on, the hero (Lew Ayres)—or rather protagonist—is killed by a sniper while reaching over the parapets to touch a butterfly. A double exposure reprises the earnest young faces marching off to war over another kind of no-man's-land, a graveyard filled with white crosses, row on row.

The creation of a new mythos for the Second World War began with the demythologizing of the first World War. Hollywood had to recast the Great War as a reasonable national enterprise, not as the crazy slaughterhouse depicted in literature and film for the previous twenty years. Despair, meaninglessness, pacifism—the dominant legacy of the suicide of Europe—had to be erased, rejected, or revamped.

Outright obliteration was a prerequisite. In early 1942 both *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *The Eagle and the Hawk* were reissued, apparently under the impression that one war with Germany was as good as another. A line-up consisting of a newsreel showing scenes of a smoldering Pearl Harbor with the commentator snarling "Look at these pictures and get

mad and stay mad!" followed by the pacifist *All Quiet on the Western Front* (billed now as "the timeliest picture ever made!") comprised an unstable staple program. Exhibitors "not cognizant of the violently anti-war character" of the films received protests from befuddled moviegoers. The untimely reissues were called to the attention of the OWI and hastily withdrawn.

In 1930, writing of *All Quiet on the Western Front* in *Variety's* "To the Ladies" pages, Ruth Morris praised the salvific function of antiwar cinema with a standard sex-based fancy: "All the disarmament conferences in the world. . .will not do as much to avert the disaster [of war] as repeated showings of this film. When the next war impends, show *All Quiet* to the women of any nation—and there won't be a next war." Unfortunately, *All Quiet* was banned in Germany and Italy for unseemly peace-mongering.

### **Coming up in Buffalo Film Seminars VIII:**

January 27 Fritz Lang, *You Only Live Once*, 1939

February 3 Preston Sturges, *The Lady Eve*, 1941

February 10 Michael Curtiz: *Casablanca*, 1941

February 17 William A. Bellman, *The Ox Bow Incident*, 1943

February 24 Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, *The Life & Death of Colonel Blimp*, 1943

March 2 John Houston, *The Asphalt Jungle*, 1950

March 9 Stanley Done and Gene Kelly, *Singin' in the Rain* 1952

March 23 Fred Zinnemann, *From Here to Eternity*, 1953

March 30 Akira Kurosawa, *Kumonosu jo/Throne of Blood*, 1957

April 6 Luchino Visconti, *Rocco e i suoi fratelli/Rocco and his Brothers*, 1960

April 13 François Truffaut, *Jules et Jim/Jules and Jim*, 1961

April 20 Sergio Leone, *C'era una volta in America/Once Upon a Time in America*, 1984