

# The analysis of the film "the grand illusion"

Sociology, Identity



## Twentieth Century World

Film Worksheet - The Grand Illusion (1937) Please type a full paragraph each to the following questions. Please submit them on Moodle before 11. 30am, September 28th, and bring a copy to class to have for discussion. Make sure to cite at least one example (preferably more) from the film for each of your answers. With this assignment I am not testing you on getting the " correct" answer. I am seeing what kind of effort you put into paying attention while watching the film and how much effort you put into organizing your thoughts around the following questions. You don't need to do any outside research for this assignment. If you do use outside/online sources, you MUST cite them and offer a link to where the information comes from. You will be turning this in to Turnit. In on Moodle, so any instance the program finds of the use of outside sources that are not cited will result in an automatic 0 for the assignment without the chance of a rewrite.

What sense do you get about the animosity between the warring parties/factions from the film; the French, German, British, Russian? What message do you think the filmmakers were trying to convey about the Great War? To me, this movie kind of contradicts the preconceived notion that nationalism was a cause of the war. I think the filmmaker is almost mocking the idea that everyone from all different parties did not like each other. You can see that people from different war sides engaging in meals together, like when Rosenthal would receive his packages and share amongst the men. You can also witness them agree over certain things like that the war is lasting too long and sharing common desires for when they escape/ are

released. I think the representation of all of the friendliness and misconception of hatred is a way for the filmmaker to say that this Great War was either unnecessary or should be the last of any major war.

What different social groups/classes do we see depicted in the film? What do you think the purpose of the director was to show such a variety of different characters to the audience? Within the prisoners alone are a vast array of social classes. Since World War 1 was not exclusive to a certain type of man we see people of ample religions as well as occupations. At the end of the day they all ended up at the same German POW camp. There were men of workers, some men who were classless, and some who believed they were above the war. For example, one of the prisoners, Boeldieu was a French aristocrat while we also had Rosenthal, a flamboyant Jewish man.

Whenever it was meal time at the POW camp it was very apparent the differences between class, whether it was through the accepting race difference by the respect of aristocracy or any type of language barrier since they all were sitting at one round table. I think the purpose of this was to show how drastic the idea of World War 1 was. I think he was truly trying to show that no one, despite wherever they may be in the hierarchy of society, they are not immune from the war. To me, this was seen when Boeldieu was shot while Marechal and Rosenthal escaped. The fact that the aristocrat suffered at the sake for "commoners" blurred the lines of who was in control of the war. Viewers of the movie got a sense of not just the differences between all of the soldiers in the war but also the overall unity and barrier breaking that the war provided.

The film also depicts people from a variety of different nationalities where language is of course an important factor. Some characters can understand multiple languages while for others language can be a barrier against understanding. What can we learn from the film about the importance of language and what it can tell us about the characters? I think a lot of the language barrier came with the social class of the people in the film. For example it seemed that the aristocrats were able to speak and understand more languages, like when Von Rauffenstein spoke to Boldieu in english sometimes.

As well as when the English prisoners could not understand the French prisoners proved that language was true barrier throughout the war, in terms of both helping and hurting the war front. The POW camp is a perfect place to prove that fact since all men from all nationalities are there. I also think their language was a mark of their individuality which is really seen when Maréchal is in isolation and pleads to hear French. Isolation alone strips someone of their basic rights but he did not even have the opportunity for human interaction either. I think the overall importance of language in the film is to depict the differentiation among the soldiers but also how relationships can build outside of language complexity, basically addressing as well as dissolving the differences among the men in the war.

What do you think is, " the grand illusion"? To me, while watching the film in class and also while answering these questions I think the " grand illusion" is the fact that there is something separating these men besides the borders of their countries. I feel like while watching this film, you can witness

throughout how their differences dissolve while their patriotism remains intact. You never really see genuine hatred in the movie either. If you think about it, all acts of violence were diluted by some sort of heartfelt gesture. When Maréchal is in isolation and the guard gives him the harmonica, when Von Rauffenstein pleaded with Boldieu, and even the offer from Boldieu. I think through being submerged in a situation where they were with others from all over showed them that they all were not very different at all, hence the "illusion".

### **Works Cited:**

1. " Jean Renoir, Grand Illusion / La Grande Illusion (1937)." Norman Holland on " Repulsion", [www.asharperfocus.com/GrandI.html](http://www.asharperfocus.com/GrandI.html).
2. Renoir, Jean, director. Grand Illusion. Compagnie Jean Renoir, 1937.