

# ERICH MARIA REMARQUE

## *LIFE AND WORKS*

A Summary by

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Dear Reader,

For millions of readers around the world *All Quiet On The Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque is the quintessential antiwar novel. It captures the horrific reality of war like only few others have. In 2014 when the world will be commemorating the outbreak of World War One publishers will have a unique opportunity to promote this classic novel to their audiences.

*All Quiet* will continue to be Remarque's most popular novel, so we would like to point out the fact that this great writer published a total of fifteen novels, diaries, letters, screenplays, stories and essays. Many of them were international successes, most of them are just as gripping as his most famous one. In fact, two of his novels are sequels to *All Quiet* and can be promoted around the WWI centenary, also. At the time of writing this document, film and TV options are being negotiated.

We have commissioned this summary from one of the most respected German scholars of Remarque, PD Dr. habil. Thomas F. Schneider. He directs the Remarque Peace Center at the University of Osnabrück. He has published numerous papers on Remarque, and edited Remarque's letters, diaries and essays. His text was translated into English by Ross Benjamin whose work has appeared in *The New York Times* and who previously translated works by Hölderlin, Joseph Roth and Thomas Pletzinger.

We are proud to represent world rights (except US) on behalf of New York University and we hope that you will find this documentation useful in continuing to spread the work of Erich Maria Remarque in your territories. Please feel free to order further copies.

Yours sincerely,

Sabine Ibach and Sebastian Ritscher

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## **I n t r o d u c t i o n**

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*All Quiet on the Western Front* ("Im Westen nichts Neues") is among the most famous antiwar novels and the most significant literary works of the twentieth century. Its author, Erich Maria Remarque, wrote a total of fifteen novels, as well as plays, screenplays, stories, poetry, diaries and letters. His writings, which were published internationally, can be regarded as a chronicle of European history in the first half of the twentieth century.

Against the backdrop of the significant political and economic events of that period, Remarque tells stories of human fates, lives and loves. His works are written grippingly and sensitively in a style without modernist features but nonetheless multilayered and compelling.

Remarque consistently opposes the oppression and persecution of minorities and vehemently champions the right to self-determination and peace. His life's motto was "Independence, Tolerance, Humor."

During his lifetime, Remarque's works were translated into over sixty languages and provoked intense discussion. To this day, they are published throughout the world, for they deal with timeless themes and are devoted to the problems of simple people struggling for their humanity and for the last spark of life.

## **L i f e**

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Erich Maria Remarque was born Erich Paul Remark on June 22, 1898 in Osnabrück in impoverished circumstances. In 1916, during his education to become an elementary school teacher, the artistically gifted eighteen-year-old was conscripted into the military, and in 1917 he was sent to the Western Front, where he was severely wounded. The end of the First World War he witnessed in an army hospital.

After the war he completed his teacher training, but left the profession in 1920 and worked as a journalist first in Osnabrück, later in Hannover and finally in Berlin. He was extremely successful, published more than four hundred articles, and became an editor.

When *All Quiet on the Western Front* appeared, he abandoned that career overnight. The book became the greatest success in German literary history and raised a controversy in the Weimar Republic about the First World War. Remarque was personally attacked and criticized.

The book was translated into many languages, and the author achieved worldwide fame. In the face of the National Socialist threat, he went into exile in Switzerland in 1932. In 1933 his books were publicly burned in Germany, and in 1938 his German citizenship was revoked. He immigrated first to France and in 1939 to the United States. In 1947 Remarque became an American citizen and lived alternately in Switzerland, the United States and Italy. He died as a world-renowned figure on September 25, 1970 in a hospital in Locarno.

## F i c t i o n

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"The WWI Trilogy"

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### **All Quiet on the Western Front (novel) 1928**

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*Im Westen nichts Neues*

This international classic of antiwar literature describes the fate of a group of simple soldiers on the Western Front in the First World War from the point-of-view of Paul Bäumer, who voluntarily and enthusiastically leaves school to enlist in the German army and grows disillusioned by the horror of trench warfare. At the heart of the novel lies the question of how the experience of modern industrialized war changes the lives of simple young soldiers and whether they can ever reintegrate into civil society. Paul Bäumer is certain that the culture of millennia has been rendered worthless and all civilized values placed in question when such a horrific war is possible. On the front, only survival and the cohesion of the group count.



*All Quiet on the Western Front* depicts the reality of modern war, the horror of trench warfare, the incomprehension of the people back home and the humanization of the enemy. In a famous scene, Bäumer witnesses up close the death of the French soldier Duval, whom he has stabbed. That moment invalidates any justification of war. On both sides of the front fight people with the same hopes and fears, who want only to survive.

Bäumer dies shortly before the end of the war on a day when so little of consequence occurred on the front that the situation report confined itself to the statement, "All quiet on the Western Front." But Remarque's antiwar classic is above all a postwar book about "a generation that was destroyed by war, even when it escaped its shells." The themes of *All Quiet on the Western Front* are thus applicable to any war. That's why the novel remains so extraordinarily popular to this day.

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## The Road Back (novel) 1930

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### *Der Weg zurück*

*The Road Back* picks up where *All Quiet on the Western Front* leaves off. The group of former soldiers around the protagonist Ernst Birkholz returns from the Western Front to their hometown in Germany and encounter the changed political, social and economic situation. The war has had an impact on everyone, whether they were on the front or at home. Marriages have failed due to the long absence of the men. Economic hardship affects social relations. Ernst Birkholz tries to find his place in this society, but fails in his original occupation as an elementary school teacher when he discovers that he can no longer teach his pupils the old prewar values as required by the curriculum. Other members of the group look again to military contexts, joining paramilitary units or the regular army, which seeks to suppress revolutionary uprisings by force, so that former comrades shoot at comrades. With the exception of former soldiers who become involved in the black market or war profiteering, almost all the members of the group of soldiers fail to reintegrate; some commit suicide. After a nervous breakdown, Ernst Birkholz finds himself on his own: only of his own volition, with his own strength and with a return to the basic values of life can he achieve a new beginning. Yet in the final scene of the novel, in which Birkholz encounters a group of young men during a paramilitary exercise, it becomes clear that a new war is already in preparation.

*The Road Back* shows that every war has long-term consequences for the individual and society. Like *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the novel thus points beyond the historical events of the immediate postwar period of the First World War and is just as relevant to contemporary conflicts and their consequences.





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## Three Comrades (novel) 1936

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### *Drei Kameraden*

Three former soldiers, Robert, Gottfried and Otto, have remained together after the war and run a car repair shop in late-1920s Berlin. Their milieu is that of the unemployed, the impoverished middle class, unsuccessful artists and prostitutes. Despite the economic crisis, the protagonist Robert finds something to hold on to in his love for Patricia. When she falls ill with tuberculosis, the three comrades sell their repair shop so that Patricia can stay in a sanatorium. Gottfried is murdered during a political rally, Patricia dies, and the comradeship between the men dissolves. In this third novel of the trilogy about the First World War and its consequences, Remarque

describes Weimar society at a time of global economic crisis and rising National Socialism. This novel also deals with the theme of death, its inevitability and its significance as the basis of life. Their comradeship no more helps the three soldiers in civil life than love is a way to defy death. In the chaotic situation in the wake of the war, nothing remains but love, friendship and death. In 1936 this pessimistic work was the first of Remarque's novels to appear in exile. It's one of Remarque's most important and popular novels.



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## The Enemy (story collection) 1930/1931

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### *Der Feind*

These six short stories about the First World War, which originally appeared in an American magazine, are as high in quality as the famous novels. Long forgotten, they were first published as a book in 1993, twenty years after Remarque's death. The event of their posthumous publication was a literary sensation.

Though Remarque grapples with the First World War, his actual theme is the memory of the war and its consequences. In the title story, a former soldier, visiting the battlefields in northern France, recalls an episode from the war in which the soldiers on both fronts established a fraternal bond. In the no man's land between the trenches French and German soldiers exchanged gifts and made a private peace. An overzealous officer then ended this ceasefire by killing a Frenchman who had ventured trustingly into the no man's land. The narrator hopes for an end to war through understanding among nations. As he passes by the war memorials of the victors, he fears that the inscription "Never Again" has been forgotten. By portraying individual fates, Remarque reveals the senselessness of war. In the story "Josefs Frau" ("Josef's Wife"), a visit to the former battlefields helps bring a former soldier out of a state of shock so that he can process the traumatic event long after the end of the war. The confrontation with the horror he suffered makes a fresh start possible. Remarque's stories are poignant and multilayered. They are outstanding writings on war and its consequences.



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**The Black Obelisk (novel) 1956**

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*Der schwarze Obelisk*

Ten years after the end of the Second World War Remarque returned once again to the Weimar Republic of the early 1920s with the novel *The Black Obelisk*. During the period of hyperinflation in 1923, Ludwig Bodmer works as a seller of tombstones in a small German city. On Sundays he plays organ in the chapel of the city insane asylum. He meets there the schizophrenic Isabelle, who draws him into confused dialogues. She embodies a counter-world to the economic and social chaos of the city. Remarque describes with humor and precision various aspects of life in the city and juxtaposes them with Isabelle's philosophy, the asylum director's rationality and the priest's faith. Bodmer's conversations with these people are inspiring and make this novel one of Remarque's most multilayered writings. In the end Isabelle is "cured" and no longer recognizes Bodmer. At that point, he leaves the small city for the big city. In his introduction Remarque places this novel in the context of the Cold War as a warning against a Third World War. A concluding chapter sketches the different fates of the novel's characters under National Socialism. *The Black*

*Obelisk* warns against a repetition of history. It sees the causes of National Socialism and the Second World War in the disorientation and declining values of society during the economic crisis. Thus the novel tells an exemplary story for many societies that find themselves in a crisis of declining values and disorientation. That was why it experienced a renaissance in the early 1990s in various regions of the world. It shows how timeless Remarque's novels are. Though they use historical events as a backdrop, they depict universal human problems that retain their validity in other eras and cultures.



## Flotsam (novel) 1939/1941

### *Liebe Deinen Nächsten*

Remarque wrote four novels on exile and escape from National Socialism. The theme preoccupied him for more than thirty years. At the heart of these writings lies the fate of a simple emigrant trying to survive and preserve his dignity. Sentences like "It takes a strong heart to live without roots" or "A person without a passport is a corpse on vacation" encapsulate the theme. They still apply today to millions of refugees and expellees around the world. *Flotsam* is the first novel in this tetralogy and deals with exile in Austria, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland and France before the outbreak of the Second World War. It describes the fate of the German political emigrant Steiner and the Jewish students Ludwig Kern and Ruth Holland. They wander through Europe without papers between deportation and detention, are confronted in each country with a pitiless bureaucracy, encounter helpful people and fanatics and try with the help of other emigrants to cope with their situation. They're

in constant flight from expanding fascist Germany. Steiner ultimately returns to Germany from France to see his dying wife one last time, knowing well that he will not survive the visit. In the hospital he drags his former Nazi tormentor down with him into death. With this end of Steiner's story, a new leitmotif appears for the first time in Remarque's work: the possibility of revenge and the moral and ethical dilemma bound up with it. In all his subsequent novels, Remarque's protagonists grapple with this question: How can the individual attain justice in a lawless and corrupt state? Is he obligated and permitted to take the law into his own hands and resist barbarity?



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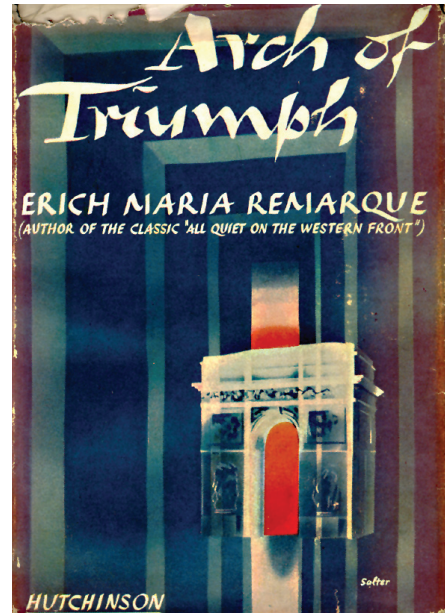
## Arch of Triumph (novel) 1945

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### *Arc de Triomphe*

Paris, 1938: The German doctor Ravic works illegally as a surgeon for a French doctor. He lives in a hotel for emigrants and attends to French prostitutes. His wife was tortured to death by the Nazis, but he managed to escape from a concentration camp. Ravic has repressed his past, even his own name. Only his love for the singer Joan Madou gives him a new enthusiasm for life and a fresh outlook. By chance he catches a glimpse on the street of Haake, his wife's murderer, who tortured him as well. Ravic is obsessed with the idea of revenge. He plans the murder of Haake and finally carries it out. In the process, Ravic doesn't notice how Joan Madou slips away from him; she dies at the hands of her new lover. When the Second World War breaks out and France is at war with Germany, Ravic is interned as an enemy alien; in the early morning haze even the Arc de Triomphe can no longer be made out – it's a multilayered symbol for monumental human hubris. Europe has descended once and for all into the darkness of barbarity.

*Arch of Triumph* was Remarque's second great worldwide success after *All Quiet on the Western Front* and cemented his reputation as a significant author. The love story between Ravic and Joan, the political context, the moral problems and the ease with which Remarque turned these themes into gripping literature have earned *Arch of Triumph* the status of a cult novel and a key work of the twentieth century throughout the world.



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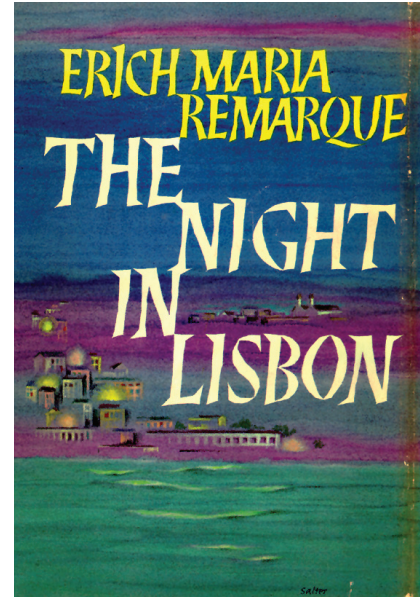
## **The Night in Lisbon (novel) 1961**

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*Die Nacht von Lissabon*

A night in Lisbon in 1942: The German emigrant Josef Schwarz persuades a nameless fellow emigrant to listen to him for a night so that his story is not forgotten. In return Schwarz promises his listener his passport and his ticket for a ship to the United States. That night Schwarz tells the story of his secret return to fascist Osnabrück to see his wife Helen again and take her with him, of exile in France, the outbreak of the Second World War, internment in a French camp, the adventurous escape over the Spanish border and finally Helen's death in Lisbon, which makes Schwarz's plan of escape to the United States pointless for him. In the end the nameless emigrant receives the passport and becomes a new Josef Schwarz, the third – for the passport originally belonged to another emigrant, an art dealer. In the twentieth century names and papers are exchangeable, but each fate must be remembered and preserved as a warning for future generations.

*The Night in Lisbon*, first published in 1962, is Remarque's most ambitious novel in terms of narrative technique, and it shows more clearly than any of his other writings the importance of remembering the fates of individual human beings. The great significance and quality of the novel were immediately recognized. Its advance publication in a newspaper in 1961 was already translated into various languages and remains available throughout the world alongside the book version, which Remarque substantially revised.



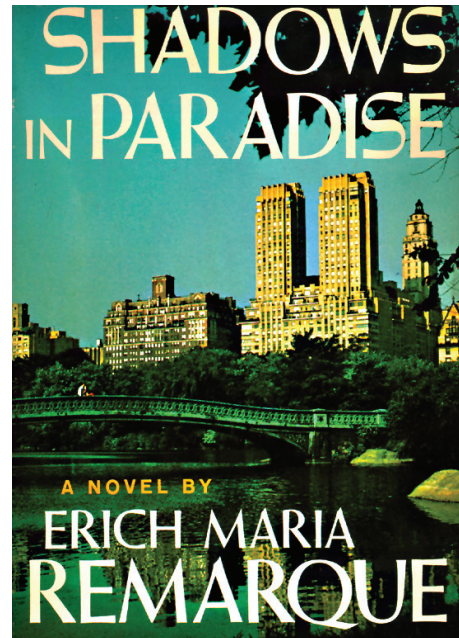
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## **Shadows in Paradise, 1971/The Promised Land (novel) 1998**

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*Schatten im Paradies/Das gelobte Land*

Remarque worked for several decades on this final installment in his story of emigration, exile in the United States during the Second World War and the question of return to Germany in the wake of the war. He died before he could finish the novel. The world wanted a "last great Remarque." Thus *Shadows in Paradise* was published in 1971, a version of the novel taken from his posthumous papers and heavily edited by the publisher. In 1998 the state of the text at the time of Remarque's death in 1970 was reconstructed from his papers and published as an unfinished novel under Remarque's title *The Promised Land*. The two versions differ substantially. The basic plots of the two versions are identical: the German emigrant Robert Ross (Ludwig Sommer in *The Promised Land*) has made it from Europe to the United States and tries to build a life for himself in New York. Remarque depicts a panopticon of exile fates, closely based on the real life stories of German emigrants, some of them well known. He asks how the period following exile might look: is return possible or is integration in American society necessary? What sacrifices must be made? How can the differences between European and American culture be reconciled? What does assimilation mean for the individual? And finally: Are the criminals to go unpunished, and is forgiveness possible? This last question receives a largely positive answer in the early version *Shadows in Paradise*. In the surviving notes on the ending of *The Promised Land*, return is possible only in conjunction with revenge, which raises moral questions. This novel-in-progress poses timeless questions about integration and assimilation, which remain highly relevant around the world today.



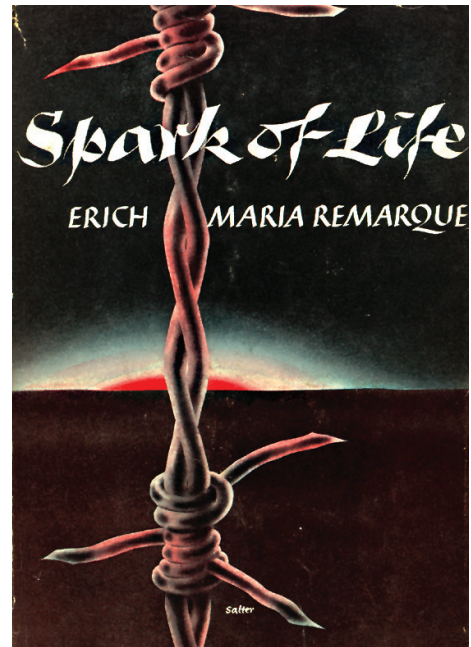
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**Spark of Life (novel) 1952**

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*Der Funke Leben*

A German concentration camp in the spring of 1945, shortly before liberation by the Allies. A group of prisoners in a section of the camp for the dying tries to preserve its human dignity. They make contact with the inmates of the main camp and assume an important function in the preparations for an uprising against the already-demoralized SS. Thus they regain their dignity, and one of the protagonists, known as "Skeleton 509," remembers his actual name. *Spark of Life* is not a documentary account of a historic concentration camp. The novel takes the Buchenwald camp as a model and portrays fictional events. Remarque reveals not only the perspective of the prisoners, but also that of the perpetrators, in particular that of the camp commandant. The story deals with survival in the face of hopelessness in a concentration camp as well as the motives of the perpetrators, who lack all sense of right and wrong. Remarque conducted research for eight years and interviewed countless survivors. Although he himself was never imprisoned in a camp, he succeeded in producing an authentic account, verified by eyewitnesses, of the conditions in a German concentration camp. Many of the facts remain little known today and are the subjects of controversies, such as the conflicts between groups of prisoners, the existence of camp brothels for inmates or the communists' direct conversion of the Nazi camps into camps for political opponents in the immediate aftermath of the war. Because of its difficult subject matter, *Spark of Life*, despite its outstanding quality, did not receive the response it deserved during Remarque's lifetime.





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## **A Time to Love and a Time to Die (novel) 1954**

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*Zeit zu leben und Zeit zu sterben*

After years of fighting in the Second World War, the German soldier Ernst Graeber goes home on furlough for the first time. He has previously witnessed and participated in the crimes of the Wehrmacht against Soviet civilians and reflects on his guilt. He discovers that his hometown has been destroyed by bombings, cannot find his parents and is confronted with a civilian population living in fear of the frequent air strikes and Nazi terror. Graeber realizes that there is no longer any difference between the war on the front and the one at home. It has truly become a total war. In his search for answers to his questions about responsibility and guilt, he encounters a former classmate who has made a career in the local Nazi hierarchy and his former religion teacher Pohlmann, who is active in the resistance and hides a Jew. But even Pohlmann cannot give him a clear-cut answer to the question of when "what is ordinarily called heroism" becomes murder. Graeber retreats with his girlfriend Elisabeth to an "island of hope" (the original title of the novel). But the idyll doesn't last long enough, and Graeber has to return to the Eastern Front. There he saves Russian civilians from an arbitrary murder. In doing so, he kills a Nazi henchman. He cannot decide whether to desert and change sides and is shot dead by one of the civilians he liberated. Remarque's novel depicts in precise detail the war on the front and at home in 1943. It revolves around the question of individual responsibility at a time when all civilized and human values have lost their validity. What possibilities of resistance are available to the individual in this situation and what is the value of private happiness, love and trust in the face of crimes no one can evade? Remarque leaves it up to his readers to find their own answers.

The novel is a humanistic book, marked by Remarque's faith in human values and integrity.

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## Heaven Has No Favorites (novel) 1959/1961

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*Geborgtes Leben* (1959)

*Der Himmel kennt keine Günstlinge* (1961)

In the early 1950s the race car driver Clerfayt meets and falls in love with the tuberculosis patient Lillian Dunkerque in a Swiss sanatorium. They leave the sanatorium to live in Paris, but without prospects: Lillian is deathly ill and Clerfayt, being a race car driver, is constantly in mortal danger. When Clerfayt plans to quit his racing career and establish a lasting bourgeois relationship with Lillian, she is plunged into a crisis. Her decision to leave him is preempted by Clerfayt's death in an accident during a race in Monte Carlo. Lillian returns to the sanatorium and dies. First published in 1959 in the magazine *Kristall* under the title *Geborgtes Leben* (*Borrowed Life*), the substantially revised book version *Heaven Has No Favorites* did not appear until 1961. Both versions are available internationally in translation. Long neglected by the critical literature, this novel's significance as a great love story with a detailed depiction of car racing in the 1950s has been recognized only recently. Most importantly, the novel reflects the quintessence of Remarque's philosophical convictions, because it sums up his most crucial questions: The hopeless confrontation of every human being with death, the unconditional duty and responsibility of every individual for his or her life choices, and love outside of social conventions as a possible way out of an otherwise senseless existence.

Half a century after its first publication, the special quality of *Heaven Has No Favorites* is ripe for rediscovery.



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## The Dream Room (novel) 1920

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### *Die Traumbude*

Remarque's first novel is influenced by the memory of the young author's fatherly Osnabrück mentor, Friedrich Hörstemeier. "Uncle Fritz," as he is called in the novel, has gathered a circle of young disciples around him and tries to impart to them the value of art, literature and philosophy. One of these young men, Ernst Winter, Remarque's alter ego, is torn between rootedness and solidity on the one hand and the desire to create art and to enjoy life excessively on the other. Ernst falls in love with an actress and leaves for the city of Dresden. Only Fritz's death summons him back to his hometown and allows him to glimpse the possibility of connecting art and life.

Despite considerable weaknesses, this debut novel already deals with certain of Remarque's basic themes: The confrontation with death and the value of art and philosophy as fundamental, indispensable elements of life.



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## **Gam (novel), written 1923, published 1998**

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### *Gam*

Remarque's second novel was written around 1923-24 and was published only posthumously. *Gam* is the female protagonist of this coming-of-age story that takes place in numerous exotic settings. In the confrontation with various men and the various world-views and attitudes toward life that they represent, Gam realizes after a global odyssey that the value of human existence can be found in harmony with one's own individual personality and in a life in tune with nature. This novel, which is strongly influenced by life philosophy, attains special significance as testimony to the aesthetic and philosophical positions Remarque held in the mid-1920s, which run through his oeuvre.

For our understanding of the "great" novels starting with *All Quiet on the Western Front* and the author's underlying convictions, the early novels, particularly *Gam*, are indispensable despite the fact that they are an expression of a particular time.

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## **Station on the Horizon, novel, 1927**

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### *Station am Horizont*

The race car driver Kai is torn between three women: the down-to-earth, rooted Barbara; her foil, the elegant, independent and self-confident Lillian; and the rational, levelheaded Maud Philby, whom Kai will ultimately choose.

Remarque's third novel was first serialized in 1927-28 and did not appear as a book until 1998. It is distinguished by the gripping depictions of car racing and the way the young Remarque grapples with the basic values of human existence between decadence and rationality.

## **D i a r i e s   &   L e t t e r s**

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### **The Diaries, 1935-1955, published in 1998**

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#### *Die Tagebücher*

From 1935 to 1955 Erich Maria Remarque kept a diary in which he wrote almost daily. In those twenty years of exile and return to Europe after the Second World War, he produced several thousand pages of entries in Switzerland, France, Mexico and the United States. These include accounts of Remarque's everyday life as well as the political events of his time and place. The diaries offer insight into the life and work of the author and into the interrelations among significant figures in literature, film, theater, high finance and politics during and after the Second World War. They reveal surprising connections between politics and art, between economics, film and literature, and constitute an outstanding historical document of the twentieth century.

To date only about 10% of the diaries have been published.



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### **Tell Me That You Love Me: Correspondence with Marlene Dietrich 1937-1940 (2001)**

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#### *Sag mir, dass du mich liebst*

Remarque first met Marlene Dietrich in Berlin in 1930, but only in 1937, during a visit to Venice together, did their intense love affair begin. It lasted until 1940, and their friendship continued thereafter until Remarque's death in 1970. In those four years, Remarque wrote hundreds of love letters to Dietrich, applying to them all his creativity. Thus emerged a love story in letters. The letters are brimming with expressive images, surprising turns of phrase, hymns of praise to beauty and mythological allusions, and they are marked by a profound sense of humor. Remarque's letters to Marlene Dietrich are moving testimony to a chaotic relationship between two prominent figures of the twentieth century; but they can also be read as a gripping, ultimately tragic love story.



## **E s s a y s**

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### **A Militant Pacifist Essays and Interviews, 1929-1966**

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*Ein militanter Pazifist*

This collection brings together Remarque's most important interviews and essays on literature and politics from 1929-1966, among them essays on *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Spark of Life*.

## **O t h e r   W r i t i n g s**

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In addition to the works of Erich Maria Remarque described in this summary, which were published internationally, another several hundred texts exist, in particular from his journalistic work of the 1920s and unpublished posthumous writings. To date only a small portion has been republished or appeared for the first time in collections such as *Herbstfahrt eines Phantasten* (*Autumn Journey of a Dreamer*, 2001) or on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Remarque's birth. These writings are extraordinarily wide-ranging: Genres extend from literary short prose, journalistic reportage and essays through poetry and comics to plays and screenplays; themes extend from journalism and car racing through political commentary on the Cold War to philosophical reflections. Remarque's complete works are ripe to be reread and rediscovered.

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## **C o n t a c t**

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