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All Quiet on the Western Front

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All Quiet on the Western Front

By Susan Van Kirk

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- Learn about the ~~Life and Background of the Author~~
- Preview an Introduction to ~~the Novel~~
- Explore themes, ~~character development, and recurring images in the Critical Commentaries~~
- Examine in-depth ~~Character Analyses~~
- Acquire an understanding of the novel with ~~Critical Essays~~
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How to Use This Book

This CliffsNotes study guide on Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* supplements the original literary work, giving you background information about the author, an introduction to the work, a graphical character map, critical commentaries, expanded glossaries, and a comprehensive index, all for you to use as an educational tool that will allow you to better understand *All Quiet on the Western Front*. This study guide was written with the assumption that you have read *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Reading a literary work doesn't mean that you immediately grasp the major themes and devices used by the author; this study guide will help supplement your reading to be sure you get all you can from Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*. CliffsNotes Review tests your comprehension of the original text and reinforces learning with questions and answers, practice projects, and more. For further information on Remarque and *All Quiet on the Western Front*, check out the CliffsNotes Resource Center.

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Theme

Reveals the underlying themes in the work.



Character
Insight

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Literary
Device

Uncovers elements such as setting, atmosphere, mystery, passion, violence, irony, symbolism, tragedy, foreshadowing, and satire.



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Language

Enables you to appreciate the nuances of words and phrases.

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LIFE AND BACKGROUND OF THE AUTHOR

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The following abbreviated biography of Remarque is provided so that you might become more familiar with his life and the historical times that possibly influenced his writing. Read this Life and Background of the Author section and recall it when reading Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, thinking of any thematic relationship between Remarque's novel and his life.





To the biographer and student of literature, Erich Maria Remarque, who has been called the “recording angel of the Great War,” was an enigma, a man rife with contradictions and contrasts. He admired stylish women, Impressionist art, an antique Lancia convertible and a racy Bugatti, and Chinese art from the Tang dynasty and was obsessed with pacifism, free speech, and privacy. Following the overnight success of his landmark war protest novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Remarque was able to indulge numerous sensualistic tastes and escape the mundane hometown that he so vividly describes in his prose. Expunging his middle name—Paul—and replacing it with Maria, his mother’s name, he immortalized the name Paul in Paul Bäumer, the speaker of his novel, who lives out the neorealistic horrors of trench warfare—chlorine gas, bayonets, tanks, flamethrowers, mangled messenger dogs and horses, hunger, dysentery, lice, longing, confusion, and despair.

A member in good standing of Gertrude Stein’s “lost generation,” Remarque, in life and literature, witnessed the cataclysm of the two world wars. Like Hemingway, with whom he is frequently compared, Remarque centers on the fighting soldier, the victim who bears the horror of war’s uncivil onslaught. Characterizing his contemporaries as “hard . . . afraid of feelings, without trust in anything but the sky, trees, the earth, bread, tobacco that never played false to any man,” he attempted to exorcise his own postwar trauma by re-creating on paper the amorphous hell of the western front, where his high school graduating class was thrust from pubescent patriotism into callous cynicism before completing their second decade.

Early Years

Born Erich Paul Remark (he later changed his name out of embarrassment over a novel he published in 1920), the novelist was the son of bookbinder and master machinist Peter Franz Remark and his wife, Anna Maria Stallknecht Remark, both descendants of devout French Catholic expatriates to the Rhineland following the French Revolution. He was born June 22, 1898, in Osnabrück, Westphalia, a prosperous industrial town in northwestern Germany, twenty-five miles from the Netherlands. As members of the hard-pressed lower end of the working class, the Remarks shuffled almost annually among a series of quarters between 1898 and 1912, once residing in rooms above Prella, the publishing company where his father was employed.

A bookish lad known affectionately as Schmierer, or “Smudge,” to his contemporaries, Remarque was the third child of a family of four. His older sister Erna was followed by Theodor Arthur in 1896, who died at the age of five. In 1903, Elfriede, his ill-fated baby sister, completed the family. The Remark children, brought up in a strict Catholic household, attended the local Präparande, a parochial school where Erich often got into scrapes with school authorities, particularly Professor Konschorek, whom he later skewered in the serio-comic character Kantorek. To pay for school books, fish for his aquarium, and a few boyhood niceties, Remarque, a talented pianist and organist, gave piano lessons to young girls who often seemed more drawn to his Aryan good looks than to his pedagogy. When time allowed, he collected butterflies, stones, and stamps, joined a gymnastics club, fished for sticklebacks in the Poggenbach River, performed magic tricks, and composed poems and essays.

Except for school teaching, few professional choices lay ahead for men of Remarque’s social class. Accepting necessity, he entered elementary education courses at the Lehrerseminar in 1913. In 1915, he and several other idealists formed a literary brotherhood around mentor Fritz Hörstemeier. The following year, his essay about young cadets, “From the Time of Youth,” a poem titled “I and You,” and a short story, “The Lady with the Golden Eyes,” were printed in the Osnabrück newspaper.

The Great War

On November 26, 1916, shortly after winning thirty marks in an essay contest, Remarque was drafted as a musketeer, or infantryman, and completed basic training at Osnabrück’s Westerberg Camp. He then was transferred to Celle, from which he visited his mother, hospitalized for cancer, which ended her life on September 9, 1917.

Earlier that June, as a “sapper,” or lineman in an engineering unit, Remarque had begun building bunkers, pillboxes, and dugouts behind the Arras Front, east of the Houthulst Forest and south of Handzaeme, frequently working at night to avoid sniper fire.

On July 15, 1917, Remarque’s company advanced to Flanders for some of the most savage fighting of World War I. Trench warfare dispelled his youthful idealism, particularly after he carried his buddy Troske out of enemy fire and Troske died like the fictional character Kat. He was treated for minor shrapnel injuries and later died of a head wound from a shrapnel splinter while he was being carried to a medic.



During five months of heavy rain, the Allied and German armies hammered away at each other, gaining little ground; in four months, the two armies chalked up 770,000 casualties, many of them non-combatants. Spattered with grenade splinters in his neck, left knee, and right wrist, Remarque exited the fray on July 31, evacuated by troop train from the aid station in Thourout to St. Vincenz Hospital, Duisburg, outside Essen. A competent, respected soldier, Remarque was treated well and worked briefly as an orderly room clerk. On his off hours, he dated an officer's daughter, began writing his first novel, and set the poems of Ludwig Bäte to music. Rejoining the 78th Infantry in October, he was declared fit for duty only four days before the armistice.

Postwar Life

After mustering out on a medical discharge in 1918, Remarque suffered postwar trauma and disillusionment, complicated by regret that his wounds ended his hopes for a career as a concert pianist, and by grief over his mother's death. For a time, he posed illegally as a much-decorated first lieutenant, accompanied by Wolf, his shepherd dog. Occasionally, Remarque dressed extravagantly and wore a monocle. For the next ten years, he would cast about for a life's work, but for now he settled into a special veteran's seminary, where he chaired a student association that rebelled against the practice of treating war veterans like teenagers.

With average grades, Remarque graduated on June 25, 1919, having specialized in Goethe's verse and Herder's folk songs. During this year he wrote three poems—"C Sharp Minor," "Nocturne," and "Parting"; three sketches, "Ingeborg: An Awakening," "Beautiful Stranger," and "Hour of Release"; and two essays, "Nature and Art" and "Lilacs." He also received his first assignment as a substitute teacher from August 1 to March 31, 1920, in Löhne, where he boarded with a local family. Once again the Osnabruck newspaper published a poem of Remarque's titled "Evening Poem." He also published a novel that he would later regret called *The Dream-Den*. It described Remarque's prewar literary circle and was so sentimental that the embarrassed author requested that his publisher, Ullstein, buy up all unsold copies. Following a month's unemployment, Remarque accepted a second substitute post from May 4 to July 31, 1920, in Klein-Berssen, where he lived in the teacherage. On August 20, he accepted a post in Nahne; however, he soon became bored and disgruntled with schools and resigned permanently on November 20.

Making do with minor jobs, including playing the organ at the Michaelis Chapel (a mental institution), selling fabric, writing art reviews for *Die Schönheit*, and carving tombstones for Vogt Brothers, Remarque moved to Hannover in October 1922 to work for Continental Rubber as a test driver and as an editor and writer of humor and verse for the in-house magazine, *Echo Continental*. Part of his responsibilities included travel throughout Europe as far south as Turkey. During this era, Remarque evolved his pseudonym, replacing his middle name, Paul, with Maria. Partly to distance himself from his sophomoric first novel, *The Dream-Den*, published in 1920, he adopted the spelling of his last name used by his great-grandfather, Johannes Adam Remarque. Three years later he published a poem, "To a Woman." In 1925, Remarque got his first break in writing as reporter and assistant editor for *Sport im Bild* (Sports in Pictures). His snobbish, stilted stories, including instructions for mixing cocktails, caused German critics to view these early writings as proof that Remarque was not serious about his art. Eager for social prominence, Remarque paid Baron von Buchwald to adopt him so that he might add a noble lineage, crest, and calling card to his résumé.

That same year, on October 14, Remarque married twenty-four-year-old dancer and actress Jutta Ilse Ingeborg Ellen "Jeanne" Zambona, an attractive, fashionable woman of Italian-Danish descent. Drawn to local social events, he developed a reputation for an upscale lifestyle. In 1927, he serialized a trivial car lover's novel, *Station on the Horizon*, in the company magazine.

Career as a Writer and Filmmaker

During this same era, concealing postwar trauma beneath public shows of wit and elitism, Remarque began confronting wartime torments, which he had incubated for a decade in his thoughts and dreams.

Within five weeks, Remarque, keeping alert on strong coffee and cigars, composed *Im Westen nichts Neues* (literally, *In the West Nothing New*), which was serialized in the magazine *Vossische Zeitung* from November 10 to December 9, 1928, then appeared in novel form the next year in English as *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Although publishers were skeptical that the postwar reader was still interested in World War I, Remarque's pacifist bestseller sold a million and a half copies that same year and in time was translated into twenty-nine languages. His countrymen, who bought most of the first printing, raised a confusing

barrage of enthusiasm and criticism, stating that Remarque simultaneously dramatized pacifism by overstating wartime dangers, enriched himself by glamorizing the German battlefield, and promoted communism. The German Officers League, on hearing talk of a Nobel Prize nomination for Remarque, challenged the Swedish committee's wisdom in considering the proposal. The strongest voices against Remarque belonged to the National Socialist party, an ultranationalist group, who accused him of deliberately creating an antihero to denigrate war and of degrading Germany by victimizing manufacturers and medical staff as incompetent and opportunistic. Refusing his critics the satisfaction of verbal confrontation, Remarque rejected interviews, labeling his work nonpolitical so as to allow readers to draw their own conclusions. However, Remarque had touched a nerve, and the themes and ideas of this first best-seller would echo through his writing for the rest of his life.

The next decade brought further turmoil to Remarque's life. Long a seeker of affluence, he bought a Lancia convertible and dressed the part of the bon vivant. In 1930, he ended his formal marriage to Jeanne; the two remained together, however, and moved to Casa Remarque in Porto Ronco, on Switzerland's Lake Maggiore.

It was during this year that Remarque made his first move toward cinema with Universal Studio's black-and-white version of *All Quiet*, which used a 930-acre ranch in Irvine, California, for its battlefield setting. Starring Slim Summerville, 2,000 extras, and unknown actor Lew Ayres as Bäumer, the film, featuring real howitzers, land mines, and flamethrowers, received Academy Awards for best picture and for direction. In addition, scriptwriters Del Andrews, Maxwell Anderson, and George Abbott, as well as photographer Arthur Edeson, who melodramatically concludes with a close-up of Paul's hand clutching at a butterfly when he is hit by a sniper's bullet, also received Academy Awards. Labeled by critics as an American landmark and a major coup for Universal, the film was touted by the National Board of Review and named picture of the year by *Photoplay*. *Variety* magazine commented that the League of Nations should "buy up the master-print, reproduce it in every language to be shown to every nation every year until the word *war* is taken out of the dictionaries." The movie reached vast audiences and caused the growing Nazi party great concern. In the early 1930s, Hitler youth, prodded by propagandist Goebbels, rattled German movie audiences by overrunning theatres, releasing white mice, and tossing beer bottles and stink bombs. Within weeks, the movie was banned.

Undeterred, in 1931, Remarque published *The Road Back*, a study of postwar trauma. Similar in tone and theme to Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, the novel delineates the slow recovery process, which finally reawakens young survivors to nature and healing. But war was to continue haunting Remarque. Because he was a sincere patriot, Remarque was unable to shut out Germany's attempts to kindle another world war. Immersed in antique Egyptian artifacts, Venetian mirrors, music, and priceless paintings by Cezanne, Daumier, Picasso, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, Matisse, Pissarro, Renoir, and van Gogh, Remarque tried to ignore the hatred of Hitler's propagandist, Josef Goebbels, who plotted to punish the author for antiwar sentiments. Goebbels cranked out a stream of lies and innuendo, linking Remarque with bohemians, Jews, and communists. He also charged him with removing money illegally from the country, concealing Jewish ancestry, championing internationalism and Marxism, and besmirching the memory of heroes killed at Ypres, in Flanders, and in France. In 1933, zealots burned Remarque in effigy in the Obernplatz, the ornate plaza facing Berlin's opera house. That same year, in the company of books by Thomas Mann, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Maxim Gorki, Bertolt Brecht, and Albert Einstein, *All Quiet on the Western Front* was reduced to ashes in front of the Berlin Opera House. Ironically, Soviet Russia repeated the ban later in 1949.

Despite the reaction of the book burners, *Three Comrades*, a sequel to *All Quiet* extolling the virtues of battlefield friendships, was published in 1931. This pre-World War II novel showed a glimpse of Remarque's love for Jeanne Zambona and moved beyond male bonding to a sweet, but doomed, romantic interest. In January 1938, to spare Jeanne the loss of her Swiss visa and a forced return to Germany, Remarque married her a second time and negotiated an open relationship, giving each of them the freedom they desired. In June, Remarque was stripped of his German citizenship. Throughout his life, he remained sensitive to his nationality, proclaiming, "I had to leave Germany because my life was threatened. I was neither a Jew nor orientated towards the left politically. I was the same then as I am today: a militant pacifist." Later, he moved farther south, settling in Paris and Antibes with longtime companion Marlene Dietrich, cultivating a coterie of expatriates, and drinking heavily. Publicity about Remarque's lifestyle on the French Riviera boosted sales of his books. In response to growing anti-Nazi sentiment, the 1930 film of *All Quiet* was reissued in the United States in 1939. Padded with voice-overs, prologue, and epilogue, this version proved less emphatic than the original. Shown the world over, it did not appear in Remarque's homeland until 1952, when it was shown in Berlin.

Movies would continue to spread Remarque's pacifism. Two films were made of Remarque's novels in 1937 and 1938. First, Universal Studios filmed *The Road Back*, starring John King, Richard Cromwell, Slim Summerville, Andy Devine, Spring Byington, and Noah Beery. The film so inflamed the German embassy that the director was forced to minimize Remarque's anti-Fascist themes. The following year, MGM released Joseph L. Mankiewicz's version of *Three Comrades*, using a screenplay by F. Scott Fitzgerald and starring Robert Taylor, Robert Young, Franchot Tone, and Margaret Sullavan, whose performance received an Oscar nomination. Reviews from *Time* and the National Board of Review remarked on the film's beauty, skillful actors, and sensitive direction.

Life in America

A new life and citizenship awaited Remarque in America. Shortly before Hitler precipitated war by invading Poland, Remarque, too proud to accept proffered German citizenship, escaped the Gestapo by traveling the back roads through France, sailed on a Panamanian passport aboard the *Queen Mary*, and entered New York as a literary star. To reporters, Remarque predicted World War II and looked to President Franklin Roosevelt as the world's only hope. In 1941, he published *Flotsam* (entitled "Love Thy Neighbor" in German), in a serialized version in *Collier's*. It featured the sufferings of exiles fleeing Hitler's Germany. Remarque collected material for the work from numerous poignant stories that were standard fare among his many expatriate friends. The same year it appeared with a new name as United Artists' *So Ends Our Night*, but it was unsuccessful as a movie and received only one Academy Award nomination, for Louis Gruenberg's music. The film starred Fredric March, Frances Dee, Glenn Ford, Margaret Sullavan, and Erich von Stroheim.

Remarque's time in Los Angeles was followed by a celebrated social life on the east coast. While working for various movie studios, Remarque lived in a colony of German expatriates in west Los Angeles until 1942, when he moved to New York's Ambassador Hotel and eventually to an apartment on East 57th Street, which he considered his permanent home. A lover of beauty, Remarque squired starlets to the Stork Club, *Ciro's*, and 21, making friends with Greta Garbo, Charlie Chaplin, Cole Porter, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway. He felt at home with the style and companionship of the "glittering people." However, even at this safe distance from Hitler's menace,



Remarque was not spared the beheading of his sister, fashion designer Elfriede Scholz, in a Berlin prison. The Nazis' perverted insult to her grisly demise was a bill for ninety marks sent by the executioner to Remarque, the brother whose pacifism had precipitated their unstinting spite.

The next few years would bring more books and films but also great sadness. When the war ended, Remarque published *Arch of Triumph* (1945), a major novel that depicted the struggles of pre-World War II exiles and was set in Remarque's beloved Paris. The novel highlighted the stoic, existential strength of Ravic, one of his most memorable protagonists. Later, in 1952, he would revisit his sister Elfriede's death in dedicating his next novel to her, a victim of Nazi vengeance. *Spark of Life*, describing concentration camps, was the first of Remarque's works to remain unfiled. In the author's description, he wrote "... if it is a good book it will be widely read and through it, some people who did not understand before may be made to understand what the Nazis were like and what they did and what their kind will try to do again." During the years between these two novels, Remarque saw two more of his books made into film, the recently published *Arch of Triumph* and *The Other Love*. The latter was a 1947 movie about a melodramatic failed romance starring David Niven and Barbara Stanwyck. In 1948, Lewis Milestone again directed a Remarque title when *Arch of Triumph* was brought to the screen by United Artists. Starring Charles Boyer, Ingrid Bergman, Louis Calhern, and Charles Laughton, the teary pre-World War II reflection lost three and a half million dollars. However, like *All Quiet*, it would later be revived for television.

Life became less oppressive for Remarque in his last two decades. In 1954, he published *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*, dedicated to his close friend, and later his wife, Paulette Goddard Remarque. This novel achieved popular success as a Book-of-the-Month Club selection. Its focus, the effect of Gestapo tactics on civilians, bares the scars inflicted by Germans who chose complicity with the Nazis as a means of coping. The abridged German version of this novel incurred controversy because the editors excised the full horrors of Remarque's incisive view of the Nazi perversion of the national soul. In 1955, Remarque scripted Michael Musmanno's *Ten Days to Die* under the title *The Last Act*, which was filmed by an Austrian company to depict Hitler's final days. An effective vehicle, it starred Oskar Werner and earned appreciative comment at the Edinburgh Film Festival. A second Remarque book-to-film, *The Black Obelisk*, quickly followed in 1956, and its setting returned to hometown scenes following World War I. It contains more

ribaldry and humor than Remarque generally incorporated in his writing. That same year, *The Last Station*, Remarque's only play, was performed under the title *Berlin 1945* at Berlin's Renaissance Theatre during a cultural festival. A reenactment of the Russian takeover of Berlin, the play pitted two conquering armies against the greater good of democracy and free speech, one of Remarque's more heartfelt issues. It would be revived in America two decades later.

An American citizen since 1947, Remarque sought an amicable divorce from Jeanne in Juarez, Mexico, in 1957. On February 25, 1958, he married actress Paulette Goddard. A trim, vibrant, virile man, Remarque enjoyed peace and contentment in his final marriage, which appeared to be a match of true love. A reader of Malraux, Proust, Flaubert, Balzac, Stendhal, Poe, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Rilke, London, Wilder, and Zen philosophy, he also devoted himself to book discussions, long walks, and collecting Iranian rugs and Chinese bronze figurines, which his wife later sold to relieve the burden of guarding his costly treasures.

Later Years

During the 1960s, Remarque expanded the short story "Beyond" into a novel, which he titled *Heaven Has No Favorites* (1961). It described a star-crossed love story between a young sanitarium patient and a race car driver. The following year, he wrote *Night in Lisbon*, which centered around the theme of stateless emigrants and captured the rootlessness of many of his compatriots.

Remarque and his work remained close to the film industry during the 1960s. During his entire life he wrote, scripted, and/or acted in ten films and was nicknamed the "King of Hollywood." In 1964, he consulted with other eyewitness experts for *The Longest Day*, a special effects extravaganza that won an Academy Award for Photography. The last work filmed in his lifetime was United Artists' *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*, which was four years in the making. Filmed in 1968, it brought together a youthful John Gavin and Swiss starlet Lilo Pulver, plus Keenan Wynn, Don Defore, Jock Mahoney, and Remarque, who wrote part of the dialogue and played Professor Pohlmann, earning worthy reviews for his acting skills. The movie, although frequently compared to *All Quiet* and to Hemingway's successful *The Sun Also Rises*, failed to meet critical expectations.