What qualities does a literary text need to elevate it beyond being just a good read, a popular novel, even a best-seller? What is required for a novel to become a lasting, a classical work of literature? These questions underlie this essay, in which I contrast two German novelists who wrote about the times in which they lived, in particular about life as exiles escaping Fascism in WW II Europe. One, Erich Maria Remarque, wrote immensely popular novels, the other, Anna Seghers, at least one great one.¹ A great novel is a book that can – indeed, must – be read more than once, with each reading discovering new depths and nuances of meaning, association and pleasure. Lasting literature opens the reader to a greater understanding of life. This essay focuses on a specific example of the rewards waiting to be gleaned by the close reader of a multifaceted novel. Anna Seghers’ *Transit* is such a novel; it is, to use her own words, «die sogenannte Widerspieglung der Wirklichkeit, nie ein braves Spiegelbild.»² To date no one else has written about – seemingly no one has even noticed – the connection between Anna Seghers and Erich Maria Remarque. This essay proposes to rectify that oversight and, along the way, to offer insight into Seghers as an author, particularly with respect to *Transit*. It is my thesis that in the course of her novel she takes jabs at Remarque and what he represented, more precisely, at what his writing failed to represent, i.e., the «Widerspiegung der Wirklichkeit.» In contrast to Seghers, Remarque remained an author whose best works constitute «ein braves Spiegelbild» of reality. In demonstrating how greater awareness of the extent of Seghers’ satire adds a further level of pleasure to reading *Transit*, I begin with the «when,» «where,» «what» and «how» of her parody of Remarque and then proceed to the question of «why» she did it. Regarding the rather redundant Remarque, who made bundles of money by writing what his public expected,³ I include Seghers’ prescient, inadvertent yet uncanny projections about Remarque’s literary legacy. This extensive comparison leads to my conclusion concerning the role of ethics in literature as reflected in Seghers’ writing.

The connection between Seghers and Remarque starts, naturally enough, with their proximate birth dates. Contemporaries, they were both born at the turn of the twentieth century: Seghers in 1900, and Remarque in 1898. Each died with renown well established, especially on their respective sides of the
Iron Curtain. Seghers, in the perverse way of women, outlived Remarque by more than a decade: her death in 1983, to his in 1970. In 1933, Remarque’s books were burned and Seghers’ were put on the Nazi blacklist. Both immediately fled Germany via Switzerland and then eventually via France to America; neither returned to Europe until after the war. It is the middle years of their lives as writers in exile which I examine here, and my argument is grounded in differentiating these lives and their writing.

*Transit* demonstrates how Seghers, who was to become the GDR’s «classic» author of «socialist realism,» responded with uncommon literary verve and stylistic variety to the crises perpetrated by the Fascists and their *bellum magnum.*\(^4\) Along with Heinrich Böll,\(^5\) Peter Härtling\(^6\) and others – including my students in a recent honors course on European emigration/immigration – I consider this novel, *Transit,* Seghers’ «schönster» and «spannender.»\(^7\) My rereading of this more than sixty-year-old novel with my students revealed two things of concern in this essay. First, *Transit* remains relevant and engaging for a contemporary readership. The second factor, however, is even more germane here, i.e., one particular character seemed oddly familiar – Achselroth, a writer of popular plays. He reminded me of what I knew about Erich Maria Remarque. Indeed, *Transit* is the key to the Seghers-Remarque connection. Specifically, I argue that in her refugee novel, *Transit,* first published in English and Spanish in 1944, Anna Seghers pillories Erich Maria Remarque by creating a character resembling the «Hollywood-style» glamour boy Remarque was for much of his life (see illustrations 1, 2 and 3 – photos of Remarque in Hollywood [1930], Paris [1940] and Berlin [1956]).
Did Anna Seghers and Erich Maria Remarque know each other? Not personally; there’s no evidence they ever met. But certainly each was familiar with the other’s considerable professional accomplishments as German authors. Seghers’ novels and short stories had been critically well received since 1928, i.e., before she fled from Germany in 1933, then from France to Mexico in 1941. As for Remarque, already by 1930, the royalties from *Im Westen nichts Neues* plus the Hollywood film of the book had made him a very rich man with a villa in Switzerland, one filled with Van Goghs, Cézannes, Picassos and other paintings bought primarily as aesthetically pleasing investments. This is the Remarque whom Seghers, a committed and involved member of the Communist Party since 1928, pillories in *Transit*. As an expression of her own priorities, Seghers, with a PhD in Art History, covered her walls not with expensive paintings, but rather with books. Her *Bildung* stands in marked contrast to Remarque’s scant *Ausbildung* as an elementary school teacher, and the difference is obvious throughout their respective oeuvres. Their lifestyles differed even more. Seghers’ was characterized by her quietly steady marriage to the Hungarian social scientist Laszlo Radvanyi, her modest home environment, and being a mother to her two children (illustration 4), while remaining an active socialist. Remarque was, in contrast, a lover of fast cars and beautiful women, of luxurious living and glamour in seemingly equal measure, a man responsible principally to his own pleasures, known for his very public and multifaceted love life. He consistently denied intending to make any political statement, even in *Im Westen nichts Neues*, praised by the world and condemned by the Nazis as an «antiwar» novel. Although the subject matter of these two Nazi-refugee authors not infrequently bears striking re-
semblance – more about this intersection later – their writing styles were as disparate as their lifestyles. Relevant to my argument, Remarque evidenced neither talent nor inclination for caricature, but, at least in Transit, Seghers certainly did.

In Transit, Seghers creates a minor but pivotal character, Herrmann Achselroth, fleshed out with many of Remarque’s notorious traits. The Anna Seghers I had gotten to know in the 1970s and 1980s was the dour doyen of DDR antifascism and socialist realism (see illustration 5, a grim-faced Seghers near the end of her life). But it is another Anna Seghers who takes aim – with Brechtian humor (see illustrations 6 and 7) – at Achselroth. He, like Remarque, is a handsome, wealthy, debonair German author on his way to exile in the US at the beginning of WW II. Seghers plays freely with the Achselroth figure with respect to historical fact because he is clearly a representative rather than a real figure. He stands for those privileged refugees who, like Remarque, used their money to smooth the way into exile.

In the course of Seghers’ novel, Achselroth progressively takes on more of Remarque’s distinguishing peculiarities, most obviously that of the flam-
boyant lover of many beautiful women. Among the more famous actresses in Remarque’s gallery of conquests were, for instance, Delores del Rio, Lupe Velez, Tarzan’s Maureen O’Sullivan, two-time Oscar winner Luise Rainer, Paulette Goddard, whom he married in 1958, and Greta Garbo. However, it is another two of Remarque’s special beauties who are recognizable as part of Achselroth’s entourage in Transit. One is Jutta Zambona (illustration 8), Remarque’s first wife (1925–1930) whom he later remarried (1938–1957) to help her get to America, having left her behind in Switzerland when his Hollywood life began with the filming of Im Westen nichts Neues (1930). The other is Marlene Dietrich, with whom he had a complex, on-going relationship until he died (see illustration 9). Indeed, when Remarque took the final prewar voyage of the Queen Mary from Cherbourg on June 2, 1940, Dietrich charged him with looking out for her only child, the teenager Maria Riva, né Sieber, a fellow passenger.

Seghers makes literary plays only on these last two women, Jutta Zambona and Dietrich. In Transit, while the character based on Jutta is significant for the novel’s plot, the part the young «Dietrich» character plays relevant to Achselroth is minor but recognizable, providing opportunity for extra parody. Seghers’ pure, but subtle persiflage of Remarque shows Achselroth in schematic involvements reminiscent of Remarque’s. These entanglements not only offer Seghers opportunities to demonstrate a witty ability to caricature, but at the same time she makes these colorful figures essential to her narrative. Certainly, the process of analyzing Achselroth has left me with another, radically different image of Anna Seghers (see illustration 10 – a mature Seghers laughing). In the course of Achselroth’s four appearances in Transit, he evi-
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dences not only striking similarities to what was generally known about Remarque, but, more significantly, he functions as a polar opposite of Seghers’ protagonist who corresponds generally to her own literary and intellectual awareness as well as her political principles, although, as Walter states, Transit is not to be read as autobiographical. First, I’ll establish some of the more amusing Achselroth/Remarque parallels, similarities that are indisputably too numerous to be coincidences. In Chapter 1 of Transit, for instance, Seghers introduces Achselroth as «[e]in ausnehmend schöner Bursche, der besser in eine Offiziersuniform gepaßt hätte.» In Nov. 1918, a photograph of the «faux-Leutnant» Remarque, «who had never risen above the rank of private,» appeared in his hometown newspaper, the Osnabrücker Tageblatt, because he had been «strutting around» Osnabrück (Tims 23) wearing not only the Iron Cross First Class, which he actually had been awarded, but also the Second Class medal and the Verwundetenabzeichen, neither of which he had earned (see illustration 11). Remarque had added the Schäferhund, at least in part, as a further fashion statement. The canine acoutrement also enhanced the man-about-town image the 21-year old Remarque cultivated pretty much from the start. «Ein schöner Bursche,» to be sure.

Among numerous other Remarque-related leitmotifs Seghers gives «dem schönen Burschen» Achselroth is «Geld.» A mutual acquaintance of Achselroth and Transit’s nameless narrator tells what happened after he, together with another German inmate and Achselroth had escaped a work camp in occupied Northern France. To facilitate the trip to Marseille, Achselroth buys, at great cost, an in-service Militärauto. Although the source of his money remains unspecified – «Wir hatten keine Ahnung, daß Ach-
selroth soviel Geld in der Tasche hatte» (13) – Achselroth’s supply of money remains inexhaustible throughout the novel, as did Remarque’s after Im Westen nicht Neues.

Early in Transit, the reader learns how utterly ruthless Achselroth is: «[Mit dem Militärauto] sei [er einfach] abgerauscht, er habe ihnen nicht mal zugewinkt» (13). The leitmotif of «Abrauschen» develops into a major theme of Seghers’ novel: «Imstichlasserei.» She repeatedly condemns various characters, not just Achselroth, characters who, out of individualistic motives, leave their comrades in the lurch.17 From early on Remarque, too, made sure all his assets and personal safety were secure, patriotic and personal loyalties being of as little consequence to him as they are to Achselroth.

The second time Achselroth appears is in Chapter 6, i.e., at the center of Seghers’ novel. Here his rakish womanizing is the focus. In the «Café Rotonde» in Marseille, the narrator encounters Achselroth with entourage: «Es gab [an seinem Tisch] eine junge Person, die so schön war, daß ich sie noch und noch einmal ansehen mußte, ob sie wirklich so schön war mit ihrem zarten Hals, ihrem goldenen Haar, ihren langen Wimpern. […] Sie war auch völlig reglos» (104; cf. illustration 8). Although the «junge Person» remains unnamed, the woman Remarque wed twice, Jutta Zambona, has been described as a «Nordic blond, slim, with the statuesque poise of a mannequin, delicate, almost fragile features […] and an innate sense of style in dress» [emphasis added].18 Jutta was a celebrated model whose life centered around her clothes, a detail that Seghers makes integral to her plot in a way that will become clear subsequently. In the same café scene, Achselroth is described as «ein ausnehmend prächtiger, großgewachsender, aufrechter Bursche» (104) – no longer «schön» but at least still «prächtig» (cf. illustration 2 of Remarque in Paris in 1940). In addition to linking him to the leitmotifs «Abhauen» or alternatively «Abrauschen» and «Imstichlasserei» among others (104), the narrator describes Achselroth as an arrogant man, «der über uns wegsah mit einem dünnen Lächeln von Macht und Hochmut» (104). Owing to Achselroth’s «Macht und Hochmut,» the delicate beauty sitting at his table had been de facto demoted, but, nevertheless, kept in reserve. She is referred to as Achselroth’s «Freundin bis vor kurzem» (105). Achselroth had jettisoned his «former» love but didn’t really let her go. Remarque had behaved similarly with Jutta. The rationale Seghers attributes to Achselroth’s behavior is wickedly sarcastic: «Auf einmal erklärte [Achselroth], daß er es satt hat, noch länger «schönste Paar an der Cote d’Azur mit ihr zu spielen» (104). Like Remarque, Achselroth had found a new favorite. This replacement is «ein strichdünnnes, aber zähes Mädchen mit großem frechem Mund» (104; cf. illustration 12). Seghers’ description of Achselroth’s second enamorada recalls the vamp/femme
fatale Marlene Dietrich of 1930s films such as *Morroco, Dishonored, Blond Venus, The Devil Is a Woman* and *Desire*. Dietrich had made these films in the US, where actresses were expected to be much thinner than the voluptuous Lola of *Der Blaue Engel*. And indeed, Remarque had begun his long, open affair with Marlene Dietrich in 1937 in Europe, to which she frequently returned.19

In relating how Achselroth and his train of attendants had finally gotten to Marseille from Paris, Seghers plays on another well-known attribute of Remarque’s – his lifelong love of fast cars, particularly Lancias – one figures prominently in *Der Himmel kennt keine Günstlinge* (1961).20 Seghers uses this trait to emphasize Achselroth’s superficiality, and superficial is a term German critics have used from the outset to characterize Remarque’s novels. The fast car trip south in *Transit* is described by a nameless man who writes music for Achselroth’s plays. He is referred to as the *Musiker* and he, like other associates of the writer, speaks sarcastically when talking about Achselroth.

Referring to himself as «wir,» that is, as part of Achselroth’s coterie, the *Musiker* mentions a man named Weidel in his cynical account of the trip: «Herr Achselroth hat uns bereits in Paris herausgefischt und in besagtes Auto verstaut, zusammen mit dieser Dame und ihren Koffern, so daß kein Platz mehr für Weidel war» (106). The «Dame» is, of course, the swan-necked beauty who has by Marseilles become «die Freundin bis vor kurzem.» Weidel, another Achselroth reject, is, however, a key figure in Seghers’ novel. He is modeled on the writer Ernst Weiß, whom Seghers knew and respected. Left alone in June 1940, in a Paris filling rapidly with German troops, Weidel, like Weiß, committed suicide. In *Transit*, Achselroth’s «Imstichlasserei» – his not taking Weidel along to Marseilles despite his promise to do so, i.e., his taking the clothes instead of the man – was thus partly to blame for Weidel’s death. From the outset of the novel, Weidel – introduced as «ein großer Dichter» (15) – has played an essential role in the narrator’s life. It starts when the latter ends up with the dead Weidel’s *Handkoffer* containing an almost finished manuscript and two letters. These texts prove instrumental in the narrator’s ethical transformation into a responsible member of society. And so the chain reaction to Achselroth’s *Imstichlasserei* grows, simultaneously furthering Seghers’ plot.

Achselroth’s insensitive self-centeredness is the source of the *Musiker’s* cynicism: «Uns aber brauchte er [Achselroth], für uns war Platz [im Auto],
wir schrieben ihm die Musik für sein neues Stück, er fuhr wie der Teufel selbst vor den Deutschen her, er rettete uns mitsamt der Musik für sein Stück. Kein Mensch kam so rasch hier unten an wie er mit uns» (106). With this snide travel report, the Musiker exposes more of Achselroth’s ruthlessly selfish opportunism. Seghers’ pillorying is proceeding apace.

The third time Achselroth appears is in Chapter 9, his Remarque-like leitmotifs now firmly established. The narrator encounters him and his party in another Marseille café, the Café Source. He describes the group as consisting of Achselroth, «der Imstichlasser, das dünne Mädchen, um dessentwillen er jenes andere Mädchen im Stich gelassen hatte [und] das im Stich gelassene Mädchen» (154). Seghers develops her leitmotifs to the point that they resemble a recurring musical chorus, thereby adding a satiric lilt to her negative images. Transit’s narrator-protagonist and Seghers’ surrogate then adds disparagingly, «Sie waren sich selbst genug und keineswegs glücklich über meine Begrüßung.»21 By now, Achselroth, whose «schönes Gesicht ein wenig verhärtete» (154), has chosen Weidel’s widow, Marie, the woman the narrator is in love with, to become the next member of his harem of beauties. At this point the narrator describes Achselroth’s relationship with Marie, observing that she is his newest object of interest and «daß dieser Mensch [Achselroth] in seinem Gedächtnis ein klares Bild von Marie bewahrt hatte, so wie sie in Wirklichkeit beinahe war. Wahrscheinlich war das Gehirn dieses Menschen so angelegt, daß es alles ganz klar verzeichnete, auch das Zarteste und Stillste, so daß er es später aufschreiben konnte» (155; emphasis added).22 Like Remarque, Achselroth lives with an eye toward utilizing his human contacts as grist for his literary mill.

Seghers’ narrator has only disdain for the way Achselroth collects people and their experiences in order to use – to exploit – them as subjects to write about: «[Achselroth] hatte sicher […] die unwahrscheinlichsten und geheimsten Vorgänge registriert. Er würde in seine unermeßliche Leere hinein immer neue Menschen ziehen und anlocken und nie, nie ein Opfer finden, über dem sich sein eigener Abgrund schließen würde» (155). These observations amount to impressive literary insight on the part of a narrator who starts out as a book-hating mechanic (Monteur, 12). But when he read Weidel’s manuscript, he saw how truly experienced and artistically shaped «realism» in literature made all the difference and he was won over by it, a work by a «Dichter,» who wrote about people whose «Handlung» the narrator «begriff» (19).23 Seghers thus sets Weidel up against Achselroth and Achselroth loses. With eerie prescience, in Transit Seghers wrote about the type of writer embodied by Achselroth, which is the type of writer Remarque remained throughout his career, regardless of where he lived and regardless of the historical times he
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experienced. As fine and principled an author as Edgar Hilsenrath praises Remarque for his abilities to create «Handlung, […] genau eingefangene Atmosphäre, […] Dialoge und […] erzählerische Spannung» (3), but he concedes Remarque’s own lack of character, which, I contend, marks the lack of substance in Remarque’s writing.

Historically, Seghers criticized literature lacking in experienced truth. This was her concern in two letters she wrote to Georg Lukács in 1938 and 1939 deliniating her position in the «Realismus-Debatte.» The 1938 letter is especially relevant to the narrator’s assessment of Achselroth as one who writes about others’ experiences. Germane to the Achselroth/Remarque parallel is Seghers’ criticism of authors, who, in times of crisis, write only about what they have observed and not about what they have experienced themselves and transformed into literature.24 For Seghers the essential ingredient of realism in literature is that «was, auf die Künstler einwirkt.» She cites Lukács’ definition of the writer’s «doppelte Aufgabe» in times of crisis, when the philosopher maintains: «Diese Realität der Krisenzeit, der Kriege usw. muß also erstens ertragen, es muß ihr ins Auge gesehen und zweitens muß sie ge-staltet werden» (34). The criticism of Achselroth’s observed but not lived approach to writing echoes the generally negative criticism Remarque’s writing has consistently had in Germany, where his work is recognized mainly for its historical documentation and melodrama.25 Seghers’ Transit brings the historical context to life, a fact to which Peter Härtling unequivocally attests: «In manchen Büchern habe ich gelebt, lebe ich [noch…]. Eines von ihnen ist der Roman Transit der Anna Seghers.» (8) But even great novels that live on in the reader come to an end.

Late in the last chapter of Transit, Achselroth appears a final time, ensconced in his now-familiar leitmotifs of «im Stich lassen,» «einen Haufen Geld» und «sang- und klanglos abziehen» (183). The novel’s frame begins with the sentence «Die ‹Montreal› soll untergegangen sein zwischen Dakar und Martinique» (5). And it closes with a variation of this introductory image by stating that rumor has it that «die ‹Montreal› sei untergegangen» (186).26 By now we know that Achselroth has bought passage on the «Montreal» in order to sail with Marie. For his part, Remarque had comfortably made it back to Hollywood before the Nazis marched on Paris. By the time Transit was published in 1944, Seghers would have been aware that Remarque was safely ensconced in the United States, where he continued publishing and making movies throughout the war.

But targeting an individual fate, be it Achselroth’s or Remarque’s, was never Seghers’ point in Transit. What she could do in her novel, however, is satirically to imagine a fateful end to refugee writers of Remarque’s opportunistic
ilk, especially those ostensibly representing German literature outside Germany. She could imagine that their ship had sunk.27 Furthermore, in Transit, Seghers plays with the alternative possibility that it was the Dichter Weidel/Ernst Weiß, and not the Boulevardautor Achselroth/Remarque, who actually lived on, at least in Marie.28 Weidel comes to embody for Transit’s narrator the humanistic values of social, indeed of socialist responsibility that Seghers esteemed in realistic literature as in real life.

In describing Weidel’s ethical consequence, she implies parallels with her own fate, sitting in Mexico City completing her novel Transit in 1943.29 His/her values are respectfully conveyed to the narrator by Achselroth’s «im Stich gelassener» Musiker, ironically left behind when the «Montreal» sailed because he was of no more use to the playwright. The Musiker cogently contrasts Achselroth with Weidel, and the words he uses describe Seghers, as well:

[Weidel] hat um Besseres gekämpft. […] Um jeden Satz, um jedes Wort seiner Muttersprache, damit seine kleinen, manchmal ein wenig verrückten Geschichten so fein wurden und so einfach, daß jeder sich an ihnen freuen konnte, ein Kind und ein ausgewachsener Mann. Heißt das nicht auch, etwas für sein Volk tun? Auch wenn er zeitweilig, von den Seinen getrennt, in diesem Kampf unterliegt, seine Schuld ist das nicht. Er zieht sich zurück mit seinen Geschichten, die warten können wie er [wie Seghers] –, zehn Jahre, hundert Jahre. (184)

It appears that in Transit not only is Achselroth decked out with Erich Maria Remarque’s attributes, but that Weidel is actually Anna Seghers’ surrogate, as well as Ernst Weiß’. That, however, would be another essay.30

The conclusion I have reached about Transit is, in summary, that Achselroth’s four appearances are in effect crucial points on which not only the narrative structure of the novel turns, but they also bring into focus Seghers’ ethical and literary theoretical principles.31 As Hans-Albert Walter has so ably demonstrated, Seghers’ novel contains all that and so much more. The novel’s open ending constitutes another of its strengths. In the preface to the 1950 Czech translation of Transit, Seghers wrote of the narrator’s undecided «Schicksal,» «Das soll der Leser entscheiden, wenn er diesen Roman gelesen hat» (quoted in Fehervary 287). Therein lies perhaps the novel’s greatest strength, i.e., that the author involves the reader’s mind and concern/interest. While Unterhaltungsliteratur, such as Remarque’s novels, spoon-feeds the reader, in Transit Seghers engages and challenges as well as informs and entertains. These qualities were perceived and esteemed by my recent class, as they read Transit. Great and lasting literature elicits such response.

In addition to Seghers’ ability to challenge new generations of readers, she clearly had considerable fun weaving her complex tapestry. Walter emphasize-

Finally, I return to my introductory premise that an essential attribute which distinguishes a great work of literature is that it must be read again and again and that it offers new layers of discovery at each reading. I trust that my rereading of Anna Seghers’ *Transit* has demonstrated this premise. My aim has been to depict and analyze one nuance Walter overlooked, but it is one which complements his fine analysis of *Transit*. I’ve given a face to Achselroth, this minor, but pivotal character, this «ausnehmend schönen Burschen,» «dessen Gesicht am Ende verhärtete.» And I hope you’ll join me and Anna in having a last laugh (see illustrations 13 and 14).

**Notes**

1 Seghers’ *Das siebte Kreuz*, her most famous novel (Härtling 8), was published 1942 in German by «El libro libre,» an exile publisher in Mexico and the same year in English. In translation, it was a book of the Month Club selection and was filmed in 1944 in Hollywood by Fred Zinnemann, starring Spencer Tracy and Helene Weigel (Roos 171). Despite this recognition attesting to the book’s accessibility as well as its high quality as a novel about vital subject matter, I contend that it is not as richly complex as *Transit*. 

Early in *Transit*, the narrator describes his spontaneous reaction to reading a literary text that was, in Seghers’ words, a «Widerspiegung der Wirklichkeit, nie ein braves Spiegelbild» Seghers (*Briefe* 42): «Das war nun wieder für mich etwas Neues. [...] All diese Menschen ärgerten mich nicht durch ihre Vertrachtigkeit, wie sie’s im Leben getan hätten, durch ihr blödes Auf-den Leim-Gehen, durch ihr Hineinschlittern in ein Schicksal. Ich begriff ihre Handlungen, weil ich sie endlich einmal verfolgen konnte von dem ersten Gedanken ab bis zu dem Punkt, wo alles kam, wie es kommen musste» (19). Quotations from *Transit* are taken from the Luchterhand collected works.

Charles Hoffmann summarizes: «His books have appeal on several counts. They are generally well-crafted novels with clear plot lines; they are easy to read; and they mix adventure, suspense, social comment, and some violence with a central love story. At the same time, they were clearly intended as documents of their age, telling in presumably realistic fashion what was happening to Germans [...]» (223). Hans Wagener also speaks to the accessibility and allure of Remarque’s novels: «The episodic structure and the prominence of dialogue in his novels render the adaptation to film relatively easy. In addition to these stylistic qualities, all his books are not only action-packed but also feature a love story [...]» (121). More recent writers on Remarque particularly Thomas F. Schneider, but also Tilman Westphalen who writes the «Nachworte» for the Kiepenheuer & Witsch paperback reissues of Remarque’s novels, might be said to be making a cottage industry based on Remarque and therefore predictably try to cast his writing in a more serious light.

The use of the term for «great war» refers to World War II and the various factors in Germany, Spain and Italy leading up to it.

5 «[D]ieser [...] Roman [ist], nach meiner Meinung der schönste, den die Seghers geschrieben hat [...]» (Böll 114).

6 Härtling writes of Seghers’ novel: «In manchen Büchern habe ich gelebt, lebe ich. [...] eines von ihnen ist der Roman *Transit* der Anna Seghers» (8). (see also p. 10 of this essay)

7 Hans-Albert Walter writes that *Transit* belongs «zu den spannendsten der deutschen Literatur.» (120–21. Klaus Sauer refers to *Transit* as «das Buch der Seghers [...]», das die meisten Rätsel aufgibt» (115).

8 An autodidact in matters of art, Remarque used his paintings to impress his girlfriends and others, although he is reputed to have enjoyed them himself as well and eventually to have become something of a connoisseur. Hilton Tims writes that in 1930 «when the art market was depressed [Ruth Albu] introduced him to Walter Feilchenfeld, the Berlin dealer who became instrumental in assembling Remarque’s art collection, one of the finest in private hands. With no serious judgement of his own, merely an aesthetic appreciation, he relied on Feilchenfeld’s» (65).

9 For much greater detail about Remarque’s life as a playboy, see Tims.

10 Generally speaking «for Remarque [political] ideology was the enemy and not a solution» (Hoffmann 240). Wagener notes that Remarque’s works do «not deal with post-1945
events in any of his works, except in terms of [appending] mere warnings» (8), adding that «[c]learly Remarque is not a political person» (16). In a short-lived aberration to his apolitical stance, in the 1950s Remarque made a brief foray into the American «Auseinandersetzung mit der nationalsozialistischen deutschen Vergangenheit,» writing a Denkschrift for the American secret service, OSS, *Praktische Erziehungsarbeit in Deutschland nach dem Krieg*, followed by two essays in 1956 and 1957 as «Beispiele der Verwirklichung dieses Programms» and «zugleich auch Zeugnisse seines Scheiterns» (Schneider 312).

11 Wagener writes that Remarque’s «point of view does not yield many insights, but rather enumerates the usual clichés.» However, he adds that, commensurate with Remarque’s tendency to take the part of the isolated individual, his «satire extends to the American business world in general» (108).

12 Walter makes the case that Seghers freely «verfährt » with her historical «Vorlagen,» that she subjects them to «Metamorphose,» and that she presents the facts «in doppeldeutiger Ironie, in Scherz, Satire und in tiefere Bedeutung miteinander verwoben […] kein ‹braves Spiegelbild,› ein Vexierbild vielmehr» (98–99), but he nevertheless failed to notice the delicious way Seghers fleshed out Achselroth with Remarque’s foibles. Because a major theme of *Transit* is the value of faithfully sticking with one’s friends, not to mention to one’s principles, Remarque, who left for Hollywood in 1939, only to return briefly to Europe in 1940, then to take US citizenship in 1941, did not fit into Seghers’ value system. Therefore he was a perfect target for her satire.

13 Remarque’s relationship with Dietrich is documented in, among other sources, Fuld and Schneider’s book «Sag’ mir, dass du mich liebst …»

14 Walter makes numerous references to Achselroth’s «Imstichlasserei» (40, 61, 155). The first time he uses the term, he links the Remarque surrogate to Seghers’ sense of humor: «Denn auch die überaus komische Geschichte, die den ‹Imstichlasser› Achselroth zum betrogenen Betrüger machen, gehört hierher» (40). Böll mistakenly refers to Paul Strobel, a second refugee writer in *Transit*, as Seghers’ only «Imstichlasser.» «Paulchen» however, is one of two «opportunistischen» writers (Sauer 17) in *Transit*. He shares Achselroth’s character flaws – egotism, selfishness, superficiality, «Imstichlasserei,» but is himself less well defined and ends in a fatal refugee’s *Teufelskreis*, not being allowed to stay in France, but also forbidden to leave.

19 Dietrich became a US citizen in 1937, a status which allowed her to travel freely. After Remarque’s death, Dietrich remembered him sentimentally as «the last of the romantics» (Tims 95).
Before he published *Im Westen nichts Neues*, Remarque wrote articles for the magazine *Continental Echo*, which «enabled him to indulge his growing passion for cars – the more powerful the better. Cars and motor racing would become a recurring motif in his novels. [...] Beautiful women, fine wines and automobiles would form an enduring triumvirate of hedonism in his life» (Tims 37, see also 60). Wagner tells of a novel by Remarque, published only in serialized form in *Sport im Bild* (1927–28), which is about a race driver (94). See also Hoffmann 230.

Typical of Walter’s insights into *Transit* is his interpretation of the narrator: «Der Erzähler ist, was Literaturwissenschaftler eine ‹Kunstfigur› nennen. Wie tausend echt die Autorin diese eigentlich miteinander nicht vereinbaren Einzelteile zu einem geschlossenen wirkenden Ganzen zusammengefügt hat, erhellt schon daraus, dass man der hochgradigen Kunstlichkeit dieses Gebildes weder beim ersten noch beim zweiten Lesen [...] unbedingt gewahr wird [...]». Sie hat die lediglich mit einem Gestus ‹realistischen› Erzählens künstlich verdunkelt oder vernebelt. Die Undurchsichtigkeit der Transit-Gestalt war zugleich Teil der erzählerischen Absichten und das bewusst und planvoll benutzte Mittel, um diese Absichten zu verwirklichen. Denn worauf kam es ihr an? Gewiss nicht darauf, einen Schlüsselroman zu schreiben. [...] Ich wage viel-mehr die Behauptung, dass es ihr bei Transit auf ein frei deutendes Verhältnis zur Realität angekommen ist und somit auf einen Roman, der mit dem der sozusagen historisch aktenkundigen Wirklichkeit entnommenen Stoff völlig frei und souverän schaltet und waltet» (89–90). What Walter does not mention is what must have been in part Seghers’ intention to have her narrator also embody her own social values. Achselroth functions as a counterpoint, a strawman, setting the narrator’s values in high, positive contrast. With Sauer, I consider it a «Mißverständnis» to call *Transit* «ein verdecktes autobiographisches Werk» (116). That does not, however, preclude the fact that the novel conveys Seghers’ convictions.

The emphasized passages are typical of Seghers’ subtle use of qualifiers to convey her satiric condemnation of Achselroth, as well as other characters in *Transit*, e.g., the second writer, Paul Strobel. See also Note 17.


Walter writes that Frank Wagner had correctly pointed «auf den ursächlich engen Zusammenhang zwischen dem Imstichlassen Achselroths und seinem ‹Nicht-Realismus›» (130).

In the Preface to Charlotte Brontë’s *The Professor* (first published post-humously in 1857), the author self-reflexively writes of how in this first novel she had recomposed her drafts to the point where she «had got over any such taste as I might once have had for ornamental and redundant composition, and come to prefer what was plain and homely. At the same time I had adopted a set of principles [...] such as would be generally approved of in theory, but the result of which, when carried out into practice, often procures for an author more surprise than pleasure. [...] I find that publishers in general scarcely approved of this system, but would have liked something more imaginative and poetical – something more consonant with a highly wrought fancy, with a taste for pathos»
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[viz. Remarque]. Significantly Brontë adds that she «had adopted a set of principles» with regard to her writing: «[M]y hero should work his way through life as I had seen real living men work theirs» (5). This focus on the importance of principle combined with realism is reminiscent of the contrast between Seghers’ writing and Remarque’s with his consistent avoidance of principle and his tendency to recycle parts of his popular novels in preference to growing through new experience. The early nineteenth-century British author Brontë might well have been contrasting Seghers’ ideas about writing with Remarque’s, the best-selling favorite of publishers. He is a writer who demands little of his readers, one who satisfied the desire for escape, a style so elegantly rejected by Charlotte Brontë.

26 The «Montreal» is a ship invented by Seghers.

27 Walter sets this ending in the larger perspective of Seghers’ novel as a whole: «Die Handlung changierend zwischen Tragödie und Komödie; die Erzählweise ständig umschlagend von Satire in Ernst, wobei das Grausig-Böse scheinbar lustig, das Komische scheinbar ernsthaft und würdig daherkommt; weshalb schließlich die Bauformen dieses Erzählens gleichermassen in Tragödie und Komödie beheimatet sind» (136).

28 The final sentence in Transit plays on the ineradicable quality of Weidel – the wahre Dichter – represented by Marie’s unshakable belief that he lives on: «Ich [the narrator] werde eher des Wartens [auf Marie] müde als sie des Suchens [in allen Städten Europas … selbst in den phantastischen Städten fremder Erdeite] nach dem unauffindbaren To-
ten» (187).

29 Seghers relates the circumstances of Transit’s genesis as follows: «Der Roman ‹Transit› […] ist im ersten Kriegsjahr in Frankreich begonnen worden. Er wurde mitten in der Situation geschrieben, die darin beschrieben ist. Ein paar Seiten entstanden in Hotelzimmer, und Café von Marseille, ein paar in den Pyrenäen, als unsere Männer dort im Lager eingesperrt waren, ein paar auf dem Schiff, das aus Marseille an der spanischen Küste entlang, um das künstlich vernebelte Fort von Gibraltar herum, in endloser, erschöpfender Fahrt auf die Insel Martinique zuführt» (quoted in Fehervary 286). Walter quotes Seghers’ letter to an Aufbau reader: «Das Buch ist in Marseille entstanden, in den erwähnten Cafés, wahrscheinlich sogar, wenn ich zu lange warten musste, in Wartezimmern von Konsulaten, dann auf Schiffen, auch interniert auf Inseln, in Ellis Island in USA, der Schluss in Mexiko» (29). For greater detail see also Fehervary 311ff.

30 Remarque copies Seghers’ frame structure in Transit in his 1963 novel, Die Nacht von Lissabon, which also includes many other examples of his looking over her shoulder twenty years later in his penultimate work. His use even of some of her terminology (e.g., Völkerwanderung) in his wonted recycling manner, is hardly astonishing.


Seghers Pillories a Hollywood Glamour Boy

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