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Playwright Urges Writers To Attempt Screen Roles

By *Seymour Topping*

Berlin, Oct. 22 (AP) – Erich Maria Remarque, at the age of 59, has turned actor and thinks every writer for stage *and* screen should try it.

The famous novelist-playwright says facing a movie camera taught that some lines he has written may look nice on paper but they just can't be spoken by actors.

»Every playwright ought to try acting just as every public prosecutor should spend some weeks in jail to find out what he is meting out to others,« he said in an interview.

Remarque *came* to lunch chuckling after seeing himself on film as the German professor in his own World War II screen play »There's a Time to Love.«

The picture, adapted from Remarque's novel »A Time to Love and a Time to Die,« is being filmed in *West* Berlin with Douglas Sirk directing.

Rejected Good Role

»Sirk said I was good,« reported Remarque. »I don't know if he was lying, but he told me that two more days on the set and I would have become a real actor.«

Remarque took on his first small acting part almost three decades after he got his first screen offer.

In 1929 Carl Laemmle, executive producer of the old Universal studios, urged Remarque to play the part of the young soldier in the German-born author's best known novel, »All Quiet on the Western Front.«

»I thought Laemmle was crazy,« Remarque recalled. »I was 30 years old *then* and told Laemmle I could never play the part of a boy of 20.«

Lew Ayres took the role and skyrocketed to stardom.

Age doesn't seem to worry *the* handsome, greying Remarque nowadays as he toys with the idea of new adventures in acting.

»I wouldn't mind getting a small part in a stage play,« Remarque mused. »Just for the experience, you know.«

Waiting Hardest

Telling about his new experience before a movie camera, Remarque said:

»First I got stage fright. And to get five minutes on the screen I had to work hard two days – 12 hours a day.

»One of the most difficult things was just waiting around for the scenes to be shot and seeing those green German army uniforms all around me. It made me remember my own army days.

»When I write my next play I will try to do it without uniforms.«

Remarque is finishing a version of his first stage play, »The Last Station,« due to open in New York in January.

The play tells of the last days of Hitler's Berlin. It was a smash hit on the West Berlin stage in the German version.

Remarque says he wants to go on writing plays, adding: »When you reach my age you should make a few new beginnings.«