

**THE BROKEN PAST: WORLD WAR II IN ERNST
JÜNGER'S LATER WORK**

by

Jan Jaap ter Haar

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the impact of World War II on the wartime and postwar works of Ernst Jünger. It demonstrates how the destruction caused by the war convinced Jünger of the immense danger of technological domination and was key to his conclusion that history had ended. Jünger's critique of the nihilistic postwar world is linked to similar claims made by prominent nineteenth and twentieth century French and German critics of modernity and his philosophy of history is traced back to the ideas of Vico, Burckhardt, Nietzsche, and Spengler. His interpretations of the causes and consequences of the war are placed into the larger context of the shifting interpretations of Germany's problematic past and linked to the ideas propounded by conservatives immediately after the war and those expressed by revisionists in more recent years.

DEDICATION

To Johanna and Willemmina

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INTRODUCTION

“From such a defeat there can be no recovery.” This sentence, penned by a lonely man in his study on the day that victorious American forces entered the small town of Kirchhorst, captured a feeling of loss and pessimism that was to mark the postwar work of one of Germany’s foremost twentieth century authors. Grief-struck by the loss of his son and the destruction of Germany’s cultural, political, and intellectual legacy, Ernst Jünger developed a controversial interpretation of the causes, consequences, and meaning of World War II. This interpretation stressed the suffering of Germans and forcefully attacked the notion of collective German guilt for the unparalleled atrocities committed by the Nazi regime. The arguments he developed throughout his postwar works reflect the immediate postwar conservative interpretation of the causes and consequences of World War II and anticipate debates about German responsibility and suffering that continue unabated today.

Jünger’s works have been the object of sustained academic attention since the Second World War. However, in the attempt to connect his ideas to Nazism, this academic attention has focused almost exclusively on his interwar production, creating the mistaken impression that Jünger is to be understood as a glorifier of war and technology. This not only fails to do justice to his *oeuvre* as a whole, it also overlooks the historical significance of his war and postwar production. Besides

encapsulating essential revisionist arguments, these works are also representative of the tremendous impact of World War II on the German people. Jünger's argument that history had come to an end reflects a much more widespread perception of 1945 as *Stunde Null*. Moreover, the concern he began to express about the problems and dangers of technology, coupled with his turning away from the contemporary world in favor of a nostalgic immersion in the past is representative of attempts by conservatives throughout the postwar years to overcome the experiences of the twentieth century and reconnect to a meaningful, pre-twentieth century German past in order to once again restore the pride and self-confidence of the German people.

Since the most significant aspect of Jünger's postwar work is how it both reflected and helped lay the basis for revisionist interpretations, the four chapters progressively build towards a discussion of this. Chapter 1 begins by providing a basic introduction to Jünger's life and describes various key works before discussing the existing secondary literature and the methodological approach used in this thesis. Jünger's more general *Weltanschauung* is the subject of Chapter 2. The dichotomy between a meaningful past and a meaningless present, the ambiguity in Jünger's interpretation of modernism, his arguments for the necessity of a strong, authoritarian government, his particular concept of personal freedom, his fascination with nineteenth-century city life, and his concern about the dangers of technology are discussed in light of his experiences of World War II and his debt to a number of significant nineteenth century German and French intellectuals. Chapter 3 focuses on Jünger's particular approach to the past, in which myth played a dominant role and

which further demonstrates Jünger's intellectual debt to philosophers of history such as Vico, Burckhardt, Nietzsche, and Spengler. The key thrust of this approach is that history must be meaningful and inspiring. In light of this assumption, critical contemporary approaches to the past are dismissed as damaging since they sever the 'organic' links to the past by judging it instead of preserving and enhancing historical consciousness. Jünger's notion of an 'end of history' is also discussed in this chapter, the argument being that it must be understood in light of his view of World War II as a history-shattering experience. Chapter 4 deals most explicitly with Jünger's interpretations of World War II, outlining his understanding of the roots and consequences of the war and placing the shifts in Jünger's own focus within the larger context of the shifting interpretations and reinterpretations of Germany's problematic past. The similarity of Jünger's ideas and those of revisionist historians such as Ernst Nolte, Michael Stürmer, and Andreas Hillgruber are particularly emphasized, while the relevance of his arguments to current debates about German victimhood are highlighted to illustrate the continued importance of his claims.

CHAPTER 1: JÜNGER'S LIFE AND WORK

Ernst Jünger was born in Heidelberg in 1895. His father was a chemist and, from what one can gather from Jünger's own reflections, an eminently practical man. His mother was a more romantic spirit. Instead of the traditional bedtime stories, she raised her children on the poetry of Goethe, Novalis, and Hölderlin, reading these works with such emotion that tears streamed down her face. Although (and perhaps because) Ernst was a bright, inquisitive, and above all imaginative youngster, he was a less than average student in his school years. He hated the stuffy, Wilhelmine system of education and preferred to explore the forests and countryside with his younger brother, Friedrich Georg.¹ Like many romantic youths of their day, they joined the *Wandervögel* movement, "trying to recapture a past which appeared to them simple, colorful, and filled with meaning."² Always the adventurer, Ernst ran away from home in 1913 and joined the French Foreign Legion, hoping to desert once he reached Africa. This escapade ended rather abruptly when his father managed to obtain a discharge on the basis of his minority, but it helped lay the foundation of a lifelong wanderlust. With the outbreak of World War I a much greater 'adventure' beckoned. Like millions of young Europeans, Jünger immediately volunteered for military service

¹ Friedrich Georg himself became a gifted poet, who unfortunately remains almost completely unknown in the English-speaking world.

² Gerhard Loose, *Ernst Jünger* (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1974), p. 21.

and entered the trenches of the Western front as fusilier of the 73rd Hanover Regiment. He fought with almost unparalleled distinction. Wounded fourteen times, he was one of a mere handful of soldiers who won the *pour le mérite* during the war, and, to top it off, he was the youngest recipient ever of this very exclusive award.³ Unlike other well-known contemporaries such as Erich Maria Remarque who decried the terrible, pointless slaughter of trench warfare, Jünger found grand meaning and a feast for his seemingly insatiable visual desires, meticulously depicting both the horror and bloodthirsty ecstasy of the war in his journals. Throughout his long life, he continued to look back at the actual fighting with something approaching fondness. More than seventy-five years after the war, when he visited a war museum in France, a journalist asked him what his “most terrible” experience had been in the war. Jünger’s answer summed it up: “the fact that we lost it.”⁴

In spite of the disillusionment of defeat, the experience of trench warfare was a double success for Jünger. Besides winning the *pour le mérite* (which he clearly perceived as a personal victory) he turned his experiences into a best-selling work. *In Storms of Steel: The Diary of a Storm Trooper* remains the best known of his works. Translated into seven languages, it quickly sold well over 100,000 copies. Although Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* now overshadows it in popularity, *Storms of Steel* continues to be regarded as one of the greatest literary

³ In 1994, he was awarded a second *pour le mérite* (now for his literary merit) by the German government.

⁴ Ernst Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht V* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1997), July 16, 1992, p. 75.

productions of the war.⁵ Although initially aloof from politics, Jünger stepped onto the political stage when he began writing articles for reactionary right-wing journals in 1923.⁶ From this point until the late 1920's, he was active in both extreme right and left-wing circles, predicting the demise of and viciously attacking the democratic Weimar regime, while publicly praising a number of extremists, including Hitler.⁷ His *Weltanschauung* as a whole during this era can be summed up (in a phrase coined by Jeffrey Herf) as 'reactionary modernist.'⁸ He prophesied, embraced, and praised the total domination of technology over all aspects of life, all the while holding on to arch-reactionary views about the need for iron discipline, continuous warfare, and an authoritarian government to be led by revolutionary groups of disciplined veterans such as himself. *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt* brought this view to its apex. Published in 1932, this work is essentially a blueprint for a militant, totalitarian world-state, in which man and machine unite to reach new levels of creativity through a process of total mobilization. In this mechanistic utopia everything is geared to a strictly disciplined production that takes on a super-human meaning of its own and thus re-infuses a nihilistic world with meaning.⁹

⁵ See Michael Minden, "The First World War and its Aftermath in the German novel," *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern German Novel*, ed. Graham Bartram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 138-151.

⁶ See Nikolaus Wachsmann, "Marching under the Swastika? Ernst Jünger and National Socialism, 1918-33," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1998, 33 (4): 573-589 for a detailed discussion of these articles. Wachsmann argues that although Jünger cannot be faulted for his behavior during the Third Reich, the articles he wrote attacking the Weimar Republic and praising Hitler make him guilty of aiding the rise of Nazism.

⁷ He sent an autographed copy of *Storms of Steel* to Hitler and received an autographed *Mein Kampf* in return.

⁸ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

⁹ Ernst Jünger, "Der Arbeiter," *Werke: Band 6* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1960-65).

By the time this work was published, however, Jünger had already distanced himself from the Nazis, declining an offer of a seat in the *Reichstag* in 1928 and becoming increasingly disdainful of the movement as a whole. He particularly disliked the racist element of Nazism, repeatedly rejecting it as nonsense. When, in 1933, the *Völkischer Beobachter* published a portion of one of his essays, he penned an angry letter to the editor in which he clearly explained that he was not in accord with Nazi policy or ideology. In spite of repeated attempts by Goebbels to enlist his pen for the Nazi cause, Jünger (unlike his friends Carl Schmitt and Martin Heidegger) adamantly refused. His critics, however, maintain that by then the damage had been done. Jünger's aesthetization of violence and war, coupled with his virulent attacks against the Weimar Republic, make him one of the gravediggers of the Republic. Moreover, it has been charged that in spite of his "supposedly" anti-Nazi stance, his work continued to be suffused with a "fascist style."¹⁰

After the war Jünger himself stubbornly refused to apologize for or retract anything he wrote, arguing that he was merely recording what he envisioned the future would hold.¹¹ However, the triumphal tone of works such as *Der Arbeiter* essentially nullifies this argument. As Eliot Neaman argues in *A Dubious Past: Ernst Jünger and the Politics of Literature after Nazism*, authors bear responsibility for everything they produce, and even if someone were to only bear a tiny fraction of

¹⁰ Andreas Huyssen levels this charge in his relentlessly hostile article "Fortifying the Heart—Totally: Ernst Jünger's Armored Texts," *New German Critique*, 59 (1993): 3-23.

¹¹ At the same time, he substantially re-edited many works before re-issuing them in a ten-volume set in 1965, and did not include any of the controversial journal articles.

responsibility for the rise of Nazism, the load of guilt remains immense. Arguing that Jünger's Weimar works "put him at an unimpeachable remove from Nazism" as another historian does is simply untenable, especially in light of his favorable statements about Hitler and his incessant attacks on Weimar democracy.¹² Thus the hostility of his critics is clearly not without grounds. On the other hand, it is often forgotten by these same critics that his behavior during the years of the Third Reich was irreproachable. Clearly one of the most gifted writers that remained in Germany, he (much to the chagrin of Goebbels) refused to lend his pen to the Nazi movement. Moreover, he played an active role in the conservative opposition against Hitler and was one of the very few well-known intellectuals that had the courage to challenge the Nazi optic.

In 1939 Jünger published a short novel, *On The Marble Cliffs*, which was widely perceived as being allegorically anti-Nazi.¹³ This, as Gerhard Loose notes, is a difficult, complicated work: *On the Marble Cliffs* "has remained a challenge to critics owing to its baffling complexity... [It] cries out political protest, expounds a philosophy of history, is an exercise in autobiography, knits a web of symbols, and exemplifies 'surrealism.'"¹⁴ The plot concerns two brothers (Ernst and Friedrich Georg?) who once aided a revolutionary movement but have since retired from public life, now spending their time peacefully botanizing. Their idyllic life is

¹² Thomas Nevin makes this argument in his work, *Ernst Jünger and Germany: Into the Abyss, 1914-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

¹³ Ernst Jünger, *On the Marble Cliffs*, trans. Stuart Hood (New York: Duenewald Printing Corporation, 1947).

¹⁴ Loose, *Ernst Jünger*, p. 57. For another useful discussion of this work, see Ronald Spears "The German Novel During the Third Reich," *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern German Novel*, pp. 259-262.

threatened, however, by the ascendancy of 'the Chief Ranger,' a dark, mysterious demagogue. On an expedition in search of a rare flower, the brothers stumble upon a concentration camp where unspeakable atrocities are committed. This is the sign for them to join an active resistance, which includes notable aristocratic and clerical figures. A plot against the life of the Chief Ranger ends in failure, however, and the leading aristocrat is gruesomely executed.¹⁵ This is the sign for open conflict, in which the two brothers and their hunting dogs are pitted against the mastiffs of the Chief Ranger. Defeated and forced to retreat to their residence on the marble cliffs, they are rescued by the interference of the large vipers that made their home here. This is only a localized victory, however, as the surrounding countryside is plunged into an orgy of fire and destruction. Rather than continuing a hopeless resistance, the two brothers (echoing their 'inner migration') move away to a mythical country in the North, where true freedom still is possible. Although this work was seen by many to be a direct attack on Hitler and Nazism, Jünger's most strident critics have maintained that it is only another example of his 'fascist style.'¹⁶ Jünger himself (rejecting 'superficial' political readings of the novel) argued that the novel was not about Nazism per se, but rather symbolic of totalitarianism as a whole.¹⁷ Regardless of what critics said or the author intended, the work was widely perceived as an attack on the Hitler regime. Translated into French, it became a bestseller during the years of occupation and helped found Jünger's enduring legacy in France.

¹⁵ Jünger later repeatedly emphasized the similarity between his figure and von Stauffenberg, claiming that he had written the book with remarkable prescience.

¹⁶ Andreas Huyssen makes this argument in "Armored Texts."

Conscripted into the *Wehrmacht* as a captain, Jünger participated in the invasion of France but saw little action.¹⁸ From 1941 to 1944 (with the exception of a few months in late 1942 to early 1943 when he was sent on an inspection tour of the Eastern front) he was stationed in Paris, where he was given the mundane task of censoring mail. This occupation gave him plenty of spare time in which to explore and fall in love with the city, peruse old bookshops, and rub shoulders with the social elite, including Celine and Picasso.¹⁹ It also provided him with the time to write extensive diaries, collectively published under the title of *Strahlungen* after the war.²⁰ This work was again immensely popular in France, in part because Jünger expressed himself as an unambiguous Francophile and, as Neaman has argued, because “a figure like Jünger could help erase the shame of defeat and create an illusion of shared suffering.”²¹ *Strahlungen* is, in many ways, fundamental to this thesis, as it captures the shattering impact of the war on Jünger’s *Weltanschauung*, an impact that resulted in major changes to his views, which critics, who prefer to focus on *Der Arbeiter*, tend to ignore. At the same time, it is also important in that almost all the arguments brought up by revisionists in the *Historikerstreit* of 1985-86 and the current debates about German victimhood can be found back in these diaries.

¹⁷ Ernst Jünger, “Die Hütte im Weinberg” *Werke: Band 3*, May 8, 1945, p. 451.

¹⁸ He did, however, win another Iron Cross during the *Sitzkrieg*.

¹⁹ He was clearly taken aback by the anti-Semitism of the former—see “Das Erste Pariser Tagebuch” *Werke: Band 2*, December 7, 1941, p. 292. In this case, Merline is the pseudonym for Celine.

²⁰ This compilation included six subsections: *Gärten und Strassen*, (April 3, 1939 to July 24, 1940,) *Das Erste Pariser Tagebuch* (February 18, 1941 to October 23, 1942,) *Kaukasische Aufzeichnungen*, (October 24, 1942 to February 17, 1943,) *Das Zweite Pariser Tagebuch* (February 19, 1943 to August 10, 1944,) *Kirchhorster Blätter*, (August 14, 1944 to April 11, 1945,) and *Die Hütte im Weinberg: Jahre der Okkupation* (April 11, 1945 to December 2, 1948).

²¹ See Elliot Yale Neaman, “Warrior or Aesthete? Reflections on the Jünger Reception in France and Germany,” *New German Critique*, 59 (1993): 121-122.

Jünger was aware of the July 20th plot to assassinate Hitler (though not its details) and has been credited with creating the intellectual basis of the proposal that the plotters wanted to present to the Allies after Hitler had been eliminated.²² He barely avoided the bloody purge that followed upon failure, and was dismissed from the *Wehrmacht* in October of 1944. In November of the same year, his son, Ernstel, died on the Italian front under circumstances that pointed to an SS execution. This was the only event in Jünger's life that clearly penetrated his armored aloofness and, combined with his witnessing of the incessant bombings of German cities, was key to his skewed perspective that the Germans were as much the victims of the war as the Jews.

In spite of his passive resistance against and obvious distaste for the Nazi regime, Jünger did not welcome the defeat and occupation of Germany. In "Die Hütte im Weinberg" he paints a stark picture of the breakdown of law and order, and rumors of the Russian atrocities figure much more prominently than the revelation of the extent of Nazi criminality. Refusing to appear before a de-Nazification tribunal, he was banned from publishing for a number of years. By 1948 this ban was lifted, and in the following year Jünger published *Heliopolis*.²³ This is a futuristic novel, set in a world-city that has just emerged from the ravages of a nuclear war. The plot concerns an aristocratic captain, Lucien de Geer, who is caught in a power struggle between

²² Jünger later turned these ideas into the essay "Der Friede," *Werke Band 5*. Rommel apparently was very pleased with the proposals in it, claiming that it was something with which one could work. While virtually mum about it in his war diaries, Jünger repeatedly stresses his role in the plot in *Siebzig Verweht III-V*.

²³ Ernst Jünger, "Heliopolis: Rückblick auf ein Stadt," *Werke Band 10*.

two major forces: the *Landtvogt* (a demagogue modeled in many ways on Hitler) and the *Proconsul*, a military leader. De Geer seeks to maintain his autonomy, but when he falls in love with Budur, a young Parsee (a member of an ethnic group that is clearly modeled on the Jews) he is forced to choose sides. After a Parsee assassinates an official, an orgy of destruction ensues, as mobs ransack Parsee stores and homes in an attack reminiscent of *Kristallnacht*. The *Landtvogt* imprisons Budur's father, and De Geer rescues him in a daring commando raid authorized by the *Proconsul*. Although this raid is successful, De Geer wastes precious time ensuring that no innocent lives are lost, something for which the *Landtvogt*, who no longer adheres to 'outdated' notions of chivalry, cannot forgive him. Consequently, De Geer decides to leave the city (and the world) in a spaceship piloted by a mysterious personage named Phares. These actions take up about a quarter of the book; the other three quarters are devoted to long philosophical discussions, observations of nature, and drug-induced visions. The problem of technology reappears over and over again, clearly demonstrating that Jünger was having serious doubts about the viewpoint he expressed in "Der Arbeiter," while elements of the idea of an 'end of history,' which figures so prominently in his later works, are clearly present as well.

After *Heliopolis*, Jünger published a number of travel diaries, including "Am Sarazenturm," a brilliant reflection on his stay in Sardinia. This work stands in marked contrast to his interwar production in that it bemoans the inexorable

encroachment of modern technology on the still pristine island. The problem of technology is also central to *The Glass Bees*, a novel published in 1957.²⁴ As in *Heliopolis*, the protagonist is a military officer who cannot adapt to the loss of values (particularly honor) brought about by the domination of technology. In dire straits, he finally decides to seek employment at the massive plant of Zapparoni, a technological wizard. After a harrowing examination, he is offered the job, accepting it with a general sense of doom. Like almost all of Jünger's novels, there is little plot or action. Most of the work is filled with speculation about the dangers and possibilities of technology, and the ultimate judgment remains ambiguous. In 1965 Jünger began *Siebzig Verweht*, his last run of diaries, stretching from then until 1995. The first volumes highlight Jünger's growing alienation from the world around him, the general notion that he was passé contributing a great deal to this distancing. However, in 1977 (when he was already 82) he published *Eumeswil*, a work that all but his harshest critics agree was a major accomplishment.²⁵ Dubbed by Lutz Niethammer as "the most developed 'posthistorical' novel that can be read today,"²⁶ it was key to the revival of Jünger's importance and popularity in both Germany and France.

Eumeswil is in some ways a much-improved elaboration of *Heliopolis*. Like its predecessor, it has a futuristic setting and is essentially built around a power struggle. Manuel Venator, the protagonist, is an unobtrusive historian who also works as a night

²⁴ Ernst Jünger, *The Glass Bees*, trans. Louise Bogan and Elizabeth Mayer (London: The Noonday Press, 1957).

²⁵ Ernst Jünger, *Eumeswil*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1993).

²⁶ Lutz Niethammer and Dirk Van Laak, *Posthistoire: Has History Come to an End?*, trans. Patrick Camiller (New York: Verso, 1992), p. 26.

steward for the Condor, the dictator of Eumeswil. His father and brother are liberals; they oppose the regime and condemn the fact that he is part of the Condor's inner circle. Manuel dismisses them as simply being uncomfortable with any "outstanding personality."²⁷ He is not interested in political intrigue as his only concern is maximizing personal freedom. Working for the Condor has major benefits in this regard, as it provides him with access to a top-secret database known as the 'luminar,' a virtual reality computer which not only puts all historical documents ever created at his fingertips but also allows him to interact with historical figures and places. By immersing himself in past worlds, where real 'values' still existed, Manuel comes to see the emptiness and nihilism of his contemporaries. This is strengthened by the inspired tutelage of Vigo, a much-maligned professor.²⁸ Vigo is despised by his colleagues and mocked by his students (with the exception of a few initiated) because of his espousal of myth. His most inspired lectures, life-changing for Manuel, fall flat for his ungrateful students, who cannot tolerate anyone who does not privilege the 'now' over the 'then.' Manuel, however, is enthralled by the meaning of myth and concludes that it is key to overcoming the hollow pretentiousness of his age. This conclusion is strengthened by the conversations he overhears at the night bar. A mysterious doctor named Attila (an obvious allusion to the barbaric Huns) regales his listeners with tales of great journeys through ancient lands and ultimately organizes a hunting party into a dark, mythical region. Manuel's decision to join results in an out-

²⁷ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 18.

²⁸ Vigo is a thin pseudonym for the famous Italian philosopher of history, Giambattista Vico, whose ideas were key to Jünger's own approach to the past.

of-body experience, which furnishes him with proof that there is existence beyond matter. No one returns from the expedition. Manuel and his adventurous partners are themselves swallowed up into myth.

Eumeswil was key to reviving Jünger's fortune. From that point on right to the end of his life, he was increasingly lavished with honors and praise. In 1982, he was awarded the highest German literary honor, the Goethe Prize for Literature. This touched off a stormy debate in the German press, as opponents argued that with his anti-democratic views and proto-fascist past he should never have been so honored. Defenders, on the other hand, argued that he had in fact opposed Nazism and was the most important living German author.²⁹ The renewed interest (both positive and negative) in his works seemed to galvanize Jünger, as he wrote a number of shorter essays and two novels in the following three years. The first of these novels was *Aladdin's Problem*, which, though relatively short, is Jünger's most thorough, complete, and interesting discussion of the problems and opportunities created by modernity.³⁰ Themes that are present in less complete forms in earlier works are pulled together into a united *Weltanschauung*. Unlike his previous fiction it has a contemporary setting and deals directly with issues of contemporary concern, and although not free from occasional diversions into obscurantism, it is one of his most accessible works.

²⁹ See Eliot Yale Neaman, *A Dubious Past: Ernst Jünger and the Politics of Literature after Nazism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) for a detailed account of this controversy.

³⁰ Ernst Jünger, *Aladdin's Problem*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1992).

The plot of *Aladdin's Problem* is relatively simple. The protagonist, Friedrich Baroh, is a German of an old noble Silesian family. The redrawing of the borders after World War II placed this region under Polish rule, and as a result he is conscripted into the People's Army. His hope of quietly completing his service is dashed when a sergeant viciously bullies him. After suffering an accident while training, Friedrich obtains permission to leave the army. Rather than embracing this opportunity, he "tilts at windmills" and insists on staying. Over time, he climbs up in the ranks, revenges himself on the sergeant, and ultimately obtains a posting in Berlin from where he decides to defect to the West. Here he attends university, gets married, and after numerous efforts to find different work ends up at the funeral business of his uncle. His interest in history and the requirements of his new job lead him to a deep exploration of the symbolism of the cemetery. In the process, he is increasingly bothered by a problem. The emptiness of his existence haunts him; he compares it to "a spot on a suit, the kind of spot that gets bigger the more it is rubbed."³¹ This emptiness is reflected in the contemporary world, where 'chauffeur style' dominates and graves, so symbolic of eternal peace, are often relocated or plowed under after a few decades. To overcome this nihilism, Friedrich arrives at the idea of creating eternal resting places, with the goal of restoring the dignity of which death has been robbed, and, echoing Vico, recreating the foundation of culture. This idea is transformed into immediate commercial success, as a widespread, fundamentally human desire has been tapped into. However, the success only increases the intensity

³¹ Jünger, *Aladdin's Problem*, p. 14.

of his personal nihilism, especially as the capitalist who funds the project sees it purely in terms of profit. As a result of this crisis, Friedrich's personal life deteriorates rapidly, to the point where he wishes to break away from all society and remerge with the earth. Phares (also present in *Heliopolis*) again offers redemption, this time as a mysterious personage who knows 'the primal text' and aims at "bridging, if not overcoming, dualism and reaching back through the dichotomies."³² The novel ends with Friedrich leaving for his first meeting with this being, which, he notes, at last satisfied his nihilism.

After *Aladdin's Problem*, Jünger wrote one more full-length novel, *A Dangerous Encounter*. This detective story set in *fin de siècle* Paris met with wide critical acclaim, and further helped the resurrection of his popularity. It was followed by a collection of aphorisms published as *Autor und Autorschaft*, in which Jünger lashes out against political correctness and argues that any political involvement on the part of the author was bound to damage the integrity of their work.³³ During these last years he continued to travel as much as possible and was in many ways a good-will ambassador between Germany and France, presiding over the Verdun Remembrance Day ceremonies in 1979 and 1984 and meeting repeatedly with the French President, Jacques Chirac in the 1980's and 1990's. In February of 1998 he passed away, fit in mind and body almost to the very end.

³² Jünger, *Aladdin's Problem*, p. 123.

³³ Ernst Jünger, *Autor und Autorschaft* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987).

Because of its lack of structure, Jünger's work is not easy to analyze. Diaries are really his forte, as their format allows him to raise numerous ideas without having to concern himself with the overall coherence other types of literature demand. His novels follow the same format; they are suffused with numerous ideas and insights, but tend to lack plot and character development. That does not mean that his thought as a whole is incoherent. By examining a wide range of his works, certain patterns become evident. Many ideas are constantly reiterated and continue to develop over time. By focusing on these recurring ideas, a representative picture of his thought can be created.

The focus of this thesis is, as already indicated, primarily on Jünger's post-war works. Most of the evidence presented is taken from his diaries and major novels. *Strahlungen* provides insights into Jünger's interpretation of World War II and its immediate legacy as it was developing. *Siebzig Verweht I-V* are invaluable sources for insights into Jünger's postwar *Weltanschauung*, as they illustrate his continued concern about nationalist issues and capture his revived interest in the legacy of World War II during the 1980's and 90's when more critical approaches towards German history came under revisionist fire. From the various novels *Eumeswil* and *Aladdin's Problem* were chosen because of their representativeness. They are in many ways the culmination of Jünger's life-long philosophical journey and capture almost all the major themes of his post-war thought. Moreover, the oblique references that Jünger makes to World War II throughout his postwar novels are most evident and developed in these two works. References to other novels, travel diaries, and

philosophical essays are made wherever they help to further demonstrate important aspects of his postwar *Weltanschauung*.

Jünger has received sustained attention in Germany since the end of the Second World War. Unfortunately, the major studies (besides focusing almost exclusively on his interwar work) tend to be either idolizations or marked by endlessly hostile polemics. Helmut Kaiser's *Mythos, Rausch, und Reaktion* and Wolfgang Kaempfer's *Ernst Jünger* are of the latter sort.³⁴ They stress the pervasion of violence in Jünger's thought and, although Kaiser provides a cogent critique of Jünger from a Marxist perspective and Kaempfer's work provides a useful synopsis of Jünger's works, both are filled with polemical assaults that distract from their actual thesis. Not surprisingly, the focus is very much on the Weimar years, and the very real changes in Jünger's perspective are not acknowledged. Two more recent biographies, Martin Meyer's *Ernst Jünger* and Paul Noack's *Ernst Jünger: Eine Biography*, on the other hand, do not adequately address the controversial aspects of Jünger's thought.³⁵ Noack's work is cogently described and dismissed by Eliot Neaman as resembling the "apologetic hero-worship" of Jünger's admirers.³⁶ Meyer's massive tome provides an extensive discussion of Jünger's life and associates his work with the production of other important figures, but does not adequately deal with Jünger's association with Nazism, nor his attempts to reinterpret the origins of World War II. So far, no major

³⁴ Helmut Kaiser, *Mythos, Rausch, und Reaktion: Der Weg Gottfried Benns und Ernst Jüngers* (Berlin-Ost: Aufbau Verlag, 1962); Wolfgang Kaempfer, *Ernst Jünger* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1981).

³⁵ Martin Meyer, *Ernst Jünger* (Munich: Hanser, 1990); Paul Noack, *Ernst Jünger: Eine Biography* (Berlin: Alexander Fest Verlag, 1998).

³⁶ Neaman, *A Dubious Past*, p. 11.

German work has bridged the controversies surrounding him and given a balanced account of Jünger's entire career.

Jünger was generally ignored in the English-speaking world until the 1990s. J. P. Stern's *Ernst Jünger*, published in 1953, is a rare and significant exception. Stern argues that Jünger is the most important living German author (though he lacks true genius)³⁷ and deems that his entire work "is a highly intellectual project to work out a new style of assent to death and total warfare."³⁸ This work remains perhaps the best assessment of *Storms of Steel* and "Der Arbeiter," but clearly falls short in its assessment of *Heliopolis* and *Strahlungen*, both of which reflect a clear change in sentiment in that they are much more critical of technology and warfare. This is largely the result of Stern applying his definition to Jünger's work (up to that point) as a whole, whereas it only accurately defines the Weimar stage. A prime example of a similar oversight was made thirty years later in Jeffrey Herf's classic *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*. In this work, Herf devotes a chapter to Jünger and makes a compelling argument that his Weimar works are representative of the strange mix of reactionary ideology and futuristic technology that constituted Nazism. Although Herf does mention that Jünger never joined the Nazi Party, he argues that his proto-fascist, pro-technology views did not change, basing this assertion solely on an essay published in 1934[!]³⁹ No mention

³⁷ The question of whether Jünger was a first or second-rate author has been intensely debated. Ultimately, (as Nevin puts it) this is a rather fruitless question, as there are no clear, objective criteria as to what constitutes true greatness.

³⁸ J. P. Stern, *Ernst Jünger* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1953), p. 7.

³⁹ Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 107.

is made of any of Jünger's later writings, even though by 1934 he was only fourteen years into a writing career that would span another six decades. Gerhard Loose, who published *Ernst Jünger* in 1974, does not make this mistake. He sees Jünger as a disparate character: "His posture is that of the radical nationalist *and* the cosmopolitan, the revolutionary *and* the conservative."⁴⁰ His literary analysis of the works Jünger had produced up until then is evenhanded, a rare feat in Jünger scholarship.

In the 1990's the previous neglect of Jünger in the English-speaking world was largely rectified, as three major academic studies that focused on his works and importance were published in English. The first was Alan Bullock's *The Violent Eye: Ernst Jünger's Vision and Revision on the European Right*. Published in 1992, this work is a literary analysis of Jünger's entire *oeuvre*, with the main focus being *Das Abenteuerliche Herz* (published in two forms during the 1930's). Bullock argues that while he finds Jünger's politics distasteful, his ideas are of major importance as he represented the last surviving intellectual of the right wing. He draws out a number of major themes in Jünger's works, all of which he links to a pervasive violence in his *Weltanschauung*. Such an argument is, once again, very successful when applied to the Weimar period, but no longer convincing with reference to his war and post-war diaries or *Eumeswil* and *Aladdin's Problem*, which Bullock basically ignores. This work was followed four years later by Thomas Nevin's *Ernst Jünger and Germany: Into the Abyss, 1914-1945*, which, as the title indicates, focuses on Jünger's uneasy

⁴⁰ Loose, *Ernst Jünger*, p. 7.

relationship with Nazism. Although a good discussion of Jünger's works (particularly of *Strahlungen*), this work is too apologetic. Nevin not only claims that Jünger's writings "put him at an unimpeachable remove from Nazism," he makes the unsupported claim that Jünger defended the Jews against persecution.⁴¹ Moreover, it is unfortunately lacking in background research for a biographical work. Nevin rarely goes beyond what Jünger wrote about himself in his diaries.

The best study so far of Jünger's post-war significance is Eliot Yale Neaman's *A Dubious Past: Ernst Jünger and the Politics of Literature after Nazism*. This is essentially a reception history, as Neaman argues that the changes in Jünger's popularity in various stages after World War II are indicative of wider shifts in German culture and politics. He connects the reception of Jünger to the formation of a collective memory of the Nazi past, argues that the canonization of Jünger was indicative of a major shift in culture and politics during the 1980's, and explores the relationship between the thought of Jünger and two contemporary intellectuals, Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt. Overall, Neaman does an excellent job of linking Jünger's postwar career with the changing fortunes of conservatism and the new right in Germany.

While Neaman tentatively links some of Jünger's ideas to the revisionist claims made during the *Historikerstreit*, he does not work closely with Jünger's actual

⁴¹ Thomas Nevin, *Ernst Jünger and Germany*, pp. 1 and 76. One of Jünger's brothers did hide a Jewish family during the war, but there is no real evidence that Jünger himself (although he was no anti-Semite) did anything to protect the Jews before or during the war.

production.⁴² For instance, his discussion of Jünger's reaction to the Conservative *Wende* of the 1980's centers around two small donations that Jünger made to a right-wing organization. However, as this thesis demonstrates, Jünger's actual writings during this time period reveal a much more dramatic shift, as the cultural pessimism that pervaded his work during the 1960's and 70's becomes much less strident and he begins making increasingly obvious attempts to present himself as a respectable nationalist. This is representative of the more general difference between the focus of this thesis and Neaman's work. Instead of concerning itself with the wider politics of literature (which Neaman ably covers), this thesis seeks to outline the representativeness of Jünger's personal response to World War II. The arguments he made throughout his war and postwar works clearly demonstrate how the revisionist claims that caused such uproar in the German public sphere from the 1980's onward were not new. Jünger's work captures private perspectives and interpretations of the war that survived beneath the level of official public discourse and were only waiting for the opportunity to erupt into the public sphere. Many people blamed Jürgen Habermas for starting the explosive debate that became known as the *Historikerstreit*. However, to end with a quote from Jünger "when a powder magazine explodes, one overestimates the importance of the flint."⁴³

⁴² One of the weaknesses of *A Dubious Past* is that Neaman only works with selections of Jünger's postwar writings. The biographical data he presents ignores or even conflicts with evidence in *Siebzig Verweht I-V* while his discussion of the novels Jünger wrote is rather thin and fails to note the revisionist themes present in them.

⁴³ Jünger, "Die Hütte im Weinberg," May 7, 1945, p. 445. Jünger used this quote in a different context, claiming that the events of the past twelve years were meaningless in light of the more general nihilism of the modern age.

CHAPTER 2: FROM FUTURISM TO NOSTALGIA

"In those days, great personal freedom must have been possible." Eumeswil, p. 100

"But this will no longer concern me, as I believe that each change, whether from right or left, from above or below, from West or East, only brings us closer to the abyss."
Letter to Henri Plard, *Siebzig Verweht III*, February 5, 1983

It is generally acknowledged that World War II represented the major break in modern German history.⁴⁴ The massive destruction, the moral opprobrium, and foreign occupation left an indelible stamp on not only all those who consciously were involved in it, but also on the generations that followed. One of the interesting and important aspects of Jünger's works is that they capture this shock: World War II and its aftermath forced him to fundamentally alter major aspects of his *Weltanschauung*. Rather than continuing to hail the coming demise of the individual in the face of technological domination (as he had done in *Der Arbeiter*), Jünger became a champion of individual worth and freedom, a fierce (yet paradoxically ambiguous) critic of technology, and a relentless opponent of the nihilism and emptiness that he claimed dominated the post-war world. In the process, he increasingly reached back into an idealized past for intellectual ammunition and artistic inspiration. Searching for the roots of the developments that led to World War II and drawing on the works of French and German critics of modernity, including Stendhal, Baudelaire, Flaubert,

⁴⁴ See Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

Huysmans, Le Bon, Burckhardt, Nietzsche, and Spengler, Jünger arrived at a deeply pessimistic perspective of the twentieth century as a culturally dead, 'a-historical era,' in which the freedom and worth of the individual was gravely threatened on all sides.

This chapter aims at providing an overview of Jünger's post-war *Weltanschauung* with a particular emphasis on the strong dichotomy that existed in his view of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It begins by briefly outlining Jünger's increasing withdrawal from the contemporary world after the onset of World War II before discussing his idealization of nineteenth century city life, which, as will be demonstrated, is key to his concept of radical personal freedom and individual worth. In Jünger's view (and he borrows heavily from earlier cultural pessimists for this argument) this ideal time period was disrupted by the rise and domination of the bourgeoisie, the masses, and parliamentary democracy that transformed the process of modernity from one of emancipation and inspiration to one of enslavement and monotony. Outlining the roots of this interpretation helps to establish a crucial link between his work and that of anti-democratic thinkers of the nineteenth century. From there, his ambiguous perspective on technology is discussed. Although technology (like the entire project of modernity), held great promise in the early nineteenth century, Jünger claimed that it had broken loose, threatening humanity with physical obliteration and playing a key role in the levelling of society and the concomitant demystification of the world. However, he did not completely reject technology, even arguing that it may hold the key to overcoming the existing nihilism.

It would not be going too far to say that over the course of his long career Jünger went from being a man of the twenty-first century to being a man of the nineteenth century. In the Weimar years, Jünger was a decided futurist, rejecting the past while predicting (and celebrating) the demise of the individual in the face of machine domination. In the post-war years, conversely, Jünger increasingly looked back to the nineteenth century as an ideal time period and seemed to lose all interest in contemporary events, with the notable exception of his abiding concern about the divided Germany.⁴⁵ This turning away from developments in the world around him began during the war. For example, Jünger's diary presents the launching of Germany's attack against Russia as merely an afterthought in an entry devoted to describing a cathedral and the art of gardening.⁴⁶ After the war this distancing became even more marked; for instance, in the more than six hundred pages of *Siebzig Verweht I* (1965-1970) there is only one minor reference to the Vietnam War, virtually no discussion of the lunar landing, and only the occasional (hostile) comment about the student protesters. His lifestyle reflected this change, as the prophet of a technocratic future now lived in self-imposed isolation in Wilfingen, a tiny village in the Swabian Alps. No television or radio disturbed the ambiance of his eighteenth century home; instead Jünger surrounded himself with old books, hourglasses, African statues, and other paraphernalia.⁴⁷ His low regard for twentieth-century scholarship and knowledge is aptly summed up in the claim that for every question regarding

⁴⁵ Discussed in Chapter 4

⁴⁶ Jünger, "Das Erste Pariser Tagebuch," June 24, 1941, p. 266.

⁴⁷ See Neaman, *A Dubious Past*, p. 58.

culture or history he referred to nineteenth-century encyclopedias.⁴⁸ In his many travels he sought out and immersed himself in small, remaining pockets of pristine, pre-technological ways of life.⁴⁹ Conversely, he avoided the *Autohölle* (as he dubbed the modern big cities) as much as possible, making an exception only for Paris, his *liebste Stadt*.⁵⁰

This turning away from the contemporary world was coupled with an almost total intellectual immersion in older literature during the war and post-war years. Jünger shows very little interest for anything published by his contemporaries.⁵¹ Instead, his diaries are replete with references to Vico, Heine, Burckhardt, Nietzsche, Spengler, Stendhal, Flaubert, Le Bon, Balzac, Huysmans, and Baudelaire along with a host of other pre-twentieth-century authors. Although these thinkers are by no means a homogeneous group, their respective outlooks on life were (in most cases) marked by the conviction that the world was in decline. Stendhal's criticism of the post-French Revolution world,⁵² Burckhardt's idealization of the Renaissance, Flaubert's open disgust with his age as expressed in *Madame Bovary*, Nietzsche's relentlessly hostile attacks against virtually all aspects of life in his era, and the pervasive sense of

⁴⁸ Ernst Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht I* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1981), September 4, 1965, p. 172.

⁴⁹ For the best example of this, see "Am Sarazenturm," *Werke, Band 4*, which is an eloquent, nostalgically tinted account of the pristine way of life in Sardinia. Its sequel, "Serpentara," *Werke Band 4*, describes the detrimental impact of modern technology on the culture of this island.

⁵⁰ Jünger states that even though this city is also threatened by technology, its classical quarters continue to retain their charm. See *Siebzig Verweht II* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1981), June 25, 1979, pp. 488-489. For one of many references to the *Autohölle*, see *Siebzig Verweht I*, April 21, 1967, p. 442.

⁵¹ When he does refer to contemporary literature his comments are almost invariably negative. See for instance *Siebzig Verweht I*, November 2, 1965, p. 218 where he attacks a novel by Mary McCarthy claiming that one of its erotic descriptions "reminds of the work of a dentist drilling a tooth."

⁵² See Raymond Giraud, *The Unheroic Hero in the novels of Stendhal, Balzac, and Flaubert* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), pp. 53-57.

cultural pessimism in Spengler's *Decline of the West* are clear examples of this sentiment, which tended to emphasize and idealize a bygone 'golden age' while decrying the emptiness and artlessness of modern existence. Jünger follows this pattern in his post-war cultural criticism, repeatedly idealizing the past and attacking the present, all the while borrowing from arguments made by these earlier critics.

Before we demonstrate the above, it is important to note that in one major aspect Jünger is different from most of these earlier critics. He not only refused to reject modernity wholesale, he actually idealized its early stages. Hence the term 'anti-modern,' which can be used to describe some of his intellectual forebears, cannot be used in the case of Jünger. 'Reactionary' does not fit the bill either. While cherishing many ideals that may appear reactionary (such as his preference for monarchies over democracy), Jünger is a world apart from "blood and soil" thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth century.⁵³ In fact, he directly attacks their approach: "Blood and soil"—this inspired muttonheads, who amused blockheads," scoffs Manuel in *Eumeswil*.⁵⁴ In his fascination with city life (discussed below) Jünger echoes Balzac rather than Flaubert, Burckhardt, or Nietzsche, all of who were, however, influential in providing ammunition for his criticism of the contemporary world. This idealization of the early stage of modernity is key to an understanding of Jünger's post-war *Weltanschauung* as it helped produce an ambiguous, sophisticated view of

⁵³ In this, he was very different from most leading German reactionaries, who in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century idealized "blood and soil." On these thinkers, see George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964).

⁵⁴ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 317.

technology and is at the root of Jünger's hope that the project of modernity (which to him is encapsulated in the endless possibilities open to humanity during this early stage) can perhaps be rescued.

Jünger makes his love for nineteenth-century city life very clear in a number of his novels. Consider the following selection from *Eumeswil*, where Jünger provides a description of a flaneur:

I picture him, as say, Manet, one of the old artists, might have painted him: with a short, dark beard, a round hat, a cigar in his hand, his features both relaxed and concentrated—that is, silently yet attentively at ease with himself and the world. In those days, great personal freedom must have been possible... no matter how many people go by, he ignores their overtures... Their images move him more profoundly than their fleeting presences... If he were a poet, he would revive the mood for himself and for many others: the harmony of the people and the houses, the paling of the colors and the awakening of tones with the thickening night. Everything flows into everything else and melds.⁵⁵

Similar interpretations of nineteenth-century city life are found in *A Dangerous Encounter*: Gerhardt, a young, dreamy romantic, is clearly enchanted by the magic of Paris, by day and night, in crowds and in solitude.⁵⁶ The anonymity of city life allows for great personal freedom and artistic inspiration. Dobrowsky, the police inspector, likes nothing better than to roam around incognito in the city at night, in the process becoming “intoxicated” by the “kaleidoscopic change in figures.”⁵⁷ These descriptions are important because in many ways the flaneur is a model for Jünger's particular ideal of personal freedom. ‘Flaneuring’ permits the individual to be

⁵⁵ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, pp. 99-100.

⁵⁶ Ernst Jünger, *A Dangerous Encounter*, trans. Hillary Barr (New York: Marsilio Publisher Corporation, 1993), pp. 4-5.

⁵⁷ Jünger, *A Dangerous Encounter*, p. 94.

engrossed in a spectacle without ever being forced to commit to anything. Immense numbers of possibilities come streaming past; the self-confident flaneur is perfectly sovereign in picking and choosing when to answer an overture and “enter reality.”⁵⁸ Such complete freedom of choice combined with endless opportunities encapsulates the promise of this early stage of modernity, a promise that Jünger concludes was snuffed out somewhere between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century.

In light of this conclusion, it is not surprising that a sharp dichotomy between a meaningful bygone era and a graceless contemporary age is a theme in all of Jünger’s post-war novels. Lucien de Geer in *Heliopolis* and Captain Richard in *The Glass Bees* are characterized as anachronisms—their sense of honor and duty becomes a liability in an age where this has been replaced by rational, nihilistic calculation. De Geer (who reminisces about “the good old days of Louis Philippe”⁵⁹) falls from grace when he shows a humane hesitation while on a commando raid, while Captain Richard, trained as a cavalry officer, complains that “the word ‘honor’ belongs to those terms which have become thoroughly suspect.”⁶⁰ In *Eumeswil* Manuel uses the luminar to repeatedly travel back to Berlin: “I visit this city shortly before Hegel’s death, moving about there for roughly two decades—more precisely, until the uprising of 1848 of the Christian era.”⁶¹ Manuel shows little interest in anything that comes afterwards. The twentieth century is dismissed as a time period where “pickings are slim for both

⁵⁸ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 100.

⁵⁹ Jünger, *Heliopolis* p. 50.

⁶⁰ Jünger, *The Glass Bees*, p. 20. Such a complaint is a thinly veiled stab at the situation in Germany in the post-war era, as is discussed in Chapter 4.

⁶¹ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 315.

the historian and the anarchist. Red monotony, even in the atrocities."⁶² In *Aladdin's Problem* Friedrich immerses himself in his family history, but knows little of the period after 1888, which for him marked the onset of the "a-historical era."⁶³ The setting of *A Dangerous Encounter* in *fin-de-siecle* Paris is no coincidence either: to Jünger, this was the last twilight before the cultural night of the twentieth century set in. Explaining the choice of setting in this novel, Jünger argued that this era had "a certain *fin-de-siecle* atmosphere, which we call *Jugendstil*, an atmosphere of decadence, which nevertheless allows a few impressionist gleams to come through."⁶⁴ Such gleams have been progressively eliminated over the course of the twentieth century. In "Am Sarazenturm" Jünger derides the monotonous city, while in *Aladdin's Problem* Friedrich complains, "even the *soiree* is vanishing in Paris."⁶⁵ The exciting elements of early modernity have been swallowed up into monotony while the promising freedom has been replaced by threats of coercion from all sides.

"I wish to defy society not in order to improve it but to keep it at bay no matter what."⁶⁶ This comment made by Manuel in *Eumeswil* accurately reflects Jünger's own consummate, lifelong concern with a radical sense of individual freedom and worth, which he based on a particular nineteenth-century type of freedom exemplified by the flaneur, and which consciously echoed the complaints of earlier critics. In *Heliopolis* for example, he notes that the 'sovereign individual' is the

⁶² Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 187.

⁶³ Jünger, *Aladdin's Problem*, p. 47.

⁶⁴ Ernst Jünger and Julien Hervier, *Details of Time* trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1995) p. 25

⁶⁵ Jünger, "Am Sarazenturm" May 29, 1954, p. 317, *Aladdin's Problem*, p. 39.

⁶⁶ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, pp. 144-145.

central theme of Stendhal, Burckhardt, and Nietzsche,⁶⁷ while in *Siebzig Verweht II* he reflects on nineteenth-century diaries, arguing that they display an ever-growing concern for the threat against personal freedom. He approvingly cites one diarist who claimed that personal freedom (the only worthwhile one) has been virtually eliminated in favor of all other forms of freedom.⁶⁸ Such a commitment to individual freedom is not only at the root of Jünger's a-political stance (which will be discussed in some detail in Chapter Four) but also results in an overt hostility towards everything that he feels threatens if not obliterates individual worth and freedom in the modern world. This includes the bourgeoisie, the masses, parliamentary democracy, state intervention in personal matters, and ultimately the technological rationalism that forms the foundation of these various manifestations of modern existence.

In *Aladdin's Problem* Jünger sets up a caricature of the conformist, artless, and calculating bourgeoisie that echoes widespread nineteenth century anti-bourgeois sentiment expressed by, among others, Balzac, Baudelaire, Flaubert, Huysmans, and, most caustically, Nietzsche. Friedrich's bourgeois aunt and uncle are described as follows:

Their apartment was kept squeaky-clean and was radiant with lack of taste. The atmosphere was thoroughly unartistic. Conversations never got beyond the most banal subjects. Uncle Fridolin was an ordinary man such as one meets everywhere in offices and behind counters, and promptly forgets.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Jünger, *Heliopolis*, p. 93.

⁶⁸ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht II*, December 26, 1971, pp. 56-58. Fürst Schwarzenberg was the diarist.

⁶⁹ Jünger, *Aladdin's Problem*, pp. 50-51.

Fridolin is also described as “heeding a sense of realism that no imagination can dim.”⁷⁰ In *The Glass Bees* Jünger introduces a similar character: Fillmor, a calculating, opportunistic careerist officer who has a mind that “must have looked like a control panel.”⁷¹ In opposition to such archetypal foils, the protagonists in Jünger’s novels are often characterized as anachronistic. De Geer in *Heliopolis*, Captain Richard in *The Glass Bees*, and Friedrich in *Aladdin’s Problem* cannot function properly in a world where calculation has replaced all sense of style, taste, tradition, and honor. Jünger deems the domination of the bourgeoisie dangerous because it threatens to engulf individualistic free spirits with an overwhelming sense of boredom and ennui. Friedrich’s growing nihilism, which eventually threatens his sanity, is evidently the result of the colorless nature of the world around him.⁷² This reflects a central theme in many later nineteenth century novels; for instance, in Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* Emma’s attempt to overcome this boredom leads her on a self-destructive path to suicide while in Huysmans’ *Against Nature* Des Esseintes reacts to the mediocrity of the world around him by engaging in ever more fantastical excesses. Thus Jünger expresses his anti-bourgeois sentiment in a manner that is reminiscent of earlier attacks, which is but one example of his debt to this earlier tradition.

Jünger’s thought about the masses reflects that of earlier critics as well. Gustav Le Bon’s essay “The Crowd” is perhaps the most famous (but by no means only) expression of a widespread concern in the nineteenth century (especially on the right)

⁷⁰ Jünger, *Aladdin’s Problem*, p. 49.

⁷¹ Jünger, *The Glass Bees*, p. 75.

⁷² Jünger, *Aladdin’s Problem*, p. 114.

about the threat that the mass posed to the individual.⁷³ Such sentiments were by no means restricted to conservatives, however. In *Eumeswil* Manuel uses the luminar to visit pre-1848 extreme left-wingers known as “The Free Men” (the Left Hegelians around Bauer) who also rejected the masses and embraced a radical notion of individualism:

“Personal freedom,” they said, “had to be safeguarded on all sides, be it against the state, the Church, liberalism, or the growing socialist movement.” For those men all these things were part of the “masses,” restricting and inhibiting the “absolute emancipation of the individual.”⁷⁴

Echoing more conservative claims, Jünger argues that the rise of the masses was rooted in the ideal of equality, an ideal that swallowed up the more important ideal of freedom.⁷⁵ This leads to the denigration of individuality, which, to Jünger, must be central to any concept of equality rather than vice versa: “In the age of equality one no longer stands before equals, only before anonymous types.”⁷⁶ In other words, the very promise of equality forecloses the possibility of true equality because we can only be equal as individuals. This is essentially what Burckhardt argued a century earlier, claiming that egalitarianism had objectified and atomized individuals to the point where they were reduced to a cog in the machine of modern society.⁷⁷

⁷³ Jünger cites *Le Bon* repeatedly; see for instance *Siebzig Verweht II*, November 12, 1979, p. 538. Other important critics of the masses included Flaubert, Zola, and Burckhardt, whose arguments Jünger was thoroughly familiar with as well.

⁷⁴ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 320. Jünger recounts how Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels visited the meetings at first, but stopped coming when they realized that their ideals conflicted with those of the more radical left.

⁷⁵ Jünger, *Heliopolis*, p. 291, *Eumeswil*, p. 153.

⁷⁶ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht I*, July 24, 1965, p. 93.

⁷⁷ Burckhardt, *Judgment on History and Historians*, cited in John R. Hinde, *Jacob Burckhardt and the Crisis of Modernity* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000), p. 14.

Individuals do not only find their freedom restricted in a world dominated by the masses; being different from the mass in an age of equality can threaten one's very existence. This idea can also be found back in Burckhardt's concern about the "despotism of the masses."⁷⁸ Jünger brings this theme up in his post-war novels: Friedrich must hide his aristocratic past now that "nobility has become burdensome, even potentially dangerous."⁷⁹ In spite of his precautions, the drill sergeant notices something distinctive, and bullies him mercilessly, to the point where Friedrich fears for his life. In *Heliopolis* Jünger recreates a scenario based on *Kristallnacht*, in the process establishing a clear link between the rise of the masses and the persecution of the Jews.⁸⁰ This is repeated in *Eumeswil*, where Manuel claims: "anyone who is different is not equal; that is one of the reasons why the Jews are so often targeted."⁸¹ Jünger also understands this in a personal manner, repeatedly claiming that he was persecuted by the mass media. Reflecting on the controversy around the Goethe Prize, he claims, "When it concerns attacking an individual en masse the Germans are always there; as long as it's not dangerous."⁸²

Such attacks on the bourgeoisie and the masses fit in well with Jünger's controversial disdain for democracy. This became a particularly hot issue when he was awarded the Goethe Prize in 1982. Critics dug up an inflammatory sentence in

⁷⁸ Hinde, *Jacob Burckhardt and the Crisis of Modernity*, p. 130.

⁷⁹ Jünger, *Aladdin's Problem*, p. 16.

⁸⁰ Jünger, *Heliopolis*, p. 230. In *Details of Time* Jünger explicitly states that he modeled this event in *Heliopolis* on the *Kristallnacht*.

⁸¹ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 188. The link Jünger established between the ideal of egalitarianism and the Holocaust is explored in some length in Chapter 4.

⁸² Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht III* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1993), November 21, 1982, p. 209.

his early works (“I hate democracy like the plague”) and touted it as evidence that he did not deserve any award in a democratic republic.⁸³ True to his unbending self, he replied to these charges by claiming that, in light of what he witnesses in the contemporary world “from Moscow to New York,” he prefers to keep holding on to the opinion of Flaubert who had heaped “poison and gall” on the concept.⁸⁴ Jünger provocatively included both Nazism and Stalinism in his concept of democracy since, according to him, they were the ultimate outflows of mass rule. “Equalization and the cult of collective ideas do not exclude the power of the individual. Quite the opposite: he concentrates the wishful thinking of millions like the focal point of a concave mirror.”⁸⁵ This appears to be borrowed from Spengler, who expressed similar ideas throughout his career, warning that the mass-dominated modern age would see the rise of ‘Caesarism.’⁸⁶

Even when Jünger does not include Stalinism or Nazism in his concept of democracy, he still claims that it poses a major threat to the individual. Ultimately, if it does not turn into demagoguery (with all its associated senseless suffering), democracy “ends in monotony.”⁸⁷ Its victory over older political structures such as the monarchy and the aristocracy during the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century was key to

⁸³ The sentence was in the first edition of *Waldchen 125* (1925). Jünger expunged it in the second edition, published in 1930.

⁸⁴ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht III*, February 5, 1983, p. 248. See also October 27, 1982, p. 192, where Jünger links his anti-democratic views to those expressed by Flaubert in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*

⁸⁵ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 234.

⁸⁶ John Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline: Spengler on World History and Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2001), p. 127. Spengler was not the originator of this idea, however. Almost 2,000 years earlier the Roman historian Polybius had arrived at a cyclical concept of history that made similar connections, while Vico (who was a major influence on both Spengler and Jünger) echoed this in his *New Science*.

⁸⁷ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht II*, March 31, 1972, p. 71.

the eventual leveling of society to produce its current condition: an uninspiring mass entity, where all rank, honor, and loyalty have been done away with in favor of uninspiring, rational political calculation.⁸⁸ Mediocre rule leads to a mediocre society, providing very poor soil for artistic creation, which, to Jünger, is the ultimate expression of individuality. This argument has old roots. Herder already claimed that great works of art could only be created under certain, cohesive settings, where a group of people with a common history, style, and tradition lived in a harmonious, organic relationship with those who ruled over them.⁸⁹ The calculating, rational relationship people have with a democratically elected government results in a loosening of the old ties, which has a devastating effect on the arts, since art and calculation are antitheses. Jünger's ideas on this matter echo such sentiments. In *Siebzig Verweht IV* he argues that culture feeds on inherited possessions, which makes the monarchies particularly suited for it.⁹⁰ A character in *Aladdin's Problem* who claims to prefer tyranny over all other political systems observes the following: "Think of the Renaissance: tyrants ruled everywhere, from every small town up to the Vatican. That was the great era for sculpture, for art in general."⁹¹ In *Eumeswil* Manuel makes a similar claim: "The Condor recalls the older tyranny only in that he has taste. As a soldier, he read little; he tries to make up for this lack by having artists

⁸⁸ Jünger, "Die Hütte im Weinberg," June 28, 1945, p. 500. See also *Aladdin's Problem*, p. 54.

⁸⁹ See Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (London: Hogarth Press, 1976), p. 153. Burckhardt was another noted critic of democracy, and used very similar arguments. See Hinde, *Jacob Burckhardt and the Crisis of Modernity*, pp. 17-18 and 81.

⁹⁰ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht IV* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1993), September 4, 1987, p. 209.

⁹¹ Jünger, *Aladdin's Problem*, p. 79.

and philosophers in the Casbah, and also men of science and intelligent artisans.”⁹² Under the equalizing pressures of democracy artistic sensibility is attacked rather than cultivated: “equalization goes downward, like shaving, hedge trimming, and the pecking order of poultry... Pygmies shortened the legs of tall Africans to cut them down to size.”⁹³

These attacks against democracy further explain Jünger’s embrace of nineteenth-century modernity. At this time, the strong, authoritarian political and social order still existed. Although this order was clearly in decline as the century progressed, it had not yet been eliminated completely. Aristocratic birth still retained some of its value,⁹⁴ while army life was still a glorious affair with “the uniforms that the ladies liked so much.”⁹⁵ His preference for despotic rule is grounded in his belief that only under such a rule is everything possible. Jünger is not averse to holding up Nero as a model, quoting him as saying “my predecessors did not know what risks can be taken.”⁹⁶ By extension, Jünger suggests that if the possibilities offered by modernity had been guided by great individual rulers or exemplary aristocrats, the world would have been very different from the monotonous entity it is today. This is corroborated by an entry in *Siebzig Verweht IV* where he claims that if we were currently living under the rule of a Louis XXV we would be better off culturally.⁹⁷ Under democratic rule, all the possibilities offered by modernity were turned into

⁹² Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 95.

⁹³ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 188.

⁹⁴ See *A Dangerous Encounter*, where an old aristocrat is renowned throughout Paris for his sense of taste

⁹⁵ Jünger, *Aladdin's Problem*, p. 24.

⁹⁶ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 235.

⁹⁷ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht IV*, June 28, 1987, p. 172.

rational calculations, channeling the project of modernity down a narrow, calculating course, which ultimately resulted in a monochrome, demystified world.

Ultimately, Jünger idealizes a state that is strong, hierarchical, and authoritarian, but not totalitarian. This is an important difference. Jünger clearly rejects all interference of the state in private life as being injurious to individual freedom, and believes that democracies and totalitarian states are essentially the same in that they both are bent on interfering with all aspects of life. For him, freedom cannot be measured by the opportunity to vote: “one carries freedom inside one’s head.”⁹⁸ Instead, freedom is to be measured by how much or how little the state interferes with private life. In this way, the old monarchies (and similar authoritarian systems of government) were much more conducive to individual freedom. In *Aladdin’s Problem*, Friedrich (with reference to the current levels of taxation) concludes: “today’s exploitation surpasses by far the practices of absolute monarchy.”⁹⁹ Manuel likewise in *Eumeswil* repeatedly stresses how democratic liberal governments, by seeking the welfare of the people, only succeed in burdening them excessively. “The pauper... wishes to see as little government as possible, no matter what pretexts the state may use. He does not want to be schooled, vaccinated, or conscripted; all these things have senselessly increased the number of the poor, and with it, poverty.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Jünger, *Aladdin’s Problem*, p. 39.

⁹⁹ Jünger, *Aladdin’s Problem*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁰ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 215.

Jünger is decidedly unambiguous about the 'rise of the masses' and everything that accompanied it. As a whole, this development poses a major threat to individual freedom and is altogether lacking in redeeming features. The same cannot be said about his attitude towards what is perhaps the most important manifestation of modernity, that is, the explosive growth and domination of technology. His view on the issue underwent major changes over the course of his career and ultimately appears to be paradoxical. On the one hand, Jünger became convinced during World War II that technology posed a terrible threat to individual worth and freedom in that it was key to the levelling of society and the demystification of the natural world. At the same time, he never completely abandoned the hope that some day technology would be transmuted into a different form, re-imbibe the world with meaning, and provide the basis for a new, unprecedented artistic creativity. In his criticism of technology, Jünger is rather unoriginal, borrowing much from earlier critics, but his hopeful prognosis of a future in which technology and mankind could be united in a harmonious whole is definitely among the most speculative and original aspects of his post-war thought.

Jünger's war diaries provide interesting insights into his radical shift of perspective on technology. From hailing its domination as heralding a new, meaningful way of life, he does an about-face and begins to emphasize the danger that the machine poses to individual worth. In what is in part a personal confession, he argues that the machine is "a beast of prey the danger of which man did not

immediately recognize.”¹⁰¹ Two experiences during the war helped solidify this new perspective. During his visit to the Eastern Front (described in “Kaukasische Aufzeichnungen”) Jünger observed the titanic struggle between the Russian and German forces. The hopelessness of the military situation and the inability of the individual to affect the ultimate outcome of the war became clear to him there. This diary contains some of the most fatalistic of Jünger’s musings:

We are here in one of the great bonemills, the likes of which we have known only since Sebastol and the Russo-Japanese War. Technology, the world of automatons, must unite with the power of the earth and its capacity to suffer for such things to originate... In terms of the history of ideas this Second World War... will probably lead to the greatest discussion of the freedom of will since the Persian wars. One has the feeling of being stuck in a great machine, in which one only takes a passive part.¹⁰²

This is no longer war—it is simply mass slaughter. Technology has come to dominate the battlefield, changing what was once an inspiring, meaningful experience into mass obliteration. Jünger returns to this argument in *Eumeswil*, claiming that the Second World War witnessed “the final triumph of the technician over the warrior.”¹⁰³

The aerial bombardments of 1944-1945 were the second impetus for the development of a much more critical perspective on technology. To Jünger, they revealed a new reality in which the individual human has lost all meaning:

The tremendous energy of the age, usually widely spread out, emerge from the abstract potential, becomes observable to the senses. The impression of the squadrons that continue on unwaveringly, even when machines explode or catch fire in the midst of them, works even more powerfully than the actual

¹⁰¹ Jünger, “Das Zweite Pariser Tagebuch” *Werke, Band 3*, October 16, 1943, p. 117.

¹⁰² Jünger, “Kaukasische Aufzeichnungen” *Werke, Band 2*, December 21, 1942, pp. 481-482.

¹⁰³ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 128.

dropping of bombs. One sees the will to destroy, even at the cost of their own destruction. That is a demonic trait.¹⁰⁴

Jünger's post-war works provide clear evidence that he was now fully convinced of the danger posed by technology. In analyzing this danger, he moves somewhat beyond his war experiences, yet they clearly remain central to his ideas on the matter:

The world is filled with the noise of explosions—from the rapid, diminutive explosions, which set forth in motion myriads of machines, to the explosions that threaten continents. We walk through a panorama of pictures, which, if we have not fallen under its spell, reminds us of a large lunatic asylum—here we see an automobile race in the course of which a car drives among the spectators like a missile, mowing dozens of them down; and there, a “pattern bombing,” by which a squadron of bombers rolls up a city like a carpet, in a few minutes dissolving in smoke a work of art which took a thousand years to complete.¹⁰⁵

The primary concern in these cases is not directly the danger; after all, Jünger himself was never one to shun risks. What concerned Jünger above all else was how the random nature of destruction threatened to obliterate individual worth. Before the domination of technology, people were in control of and responsible for their personal fate. Now things are different: “The fate of people seems to be related to their quantifiability, on the number, for example of an air ticket—and not, as in tragedy, intertwined with their rank, their guilt, or their particular character.”¹⁰⁶

After the war, he continued to pursue his new realization in his novels and diaries. The dangers and opportunities of technology are explored in both *Heliopolis*

¹⁰⁴ Jünger, “Kirchhorster Blätter,” *Werke Band 3*, November 4, 1944, p. 329.

¹⁰⁵ Jünger, *The Glass Bees*, p. 68.

¹⁰⁶ Jünger, *Philemon und Baucis: Der Tod in der mythischen und in der technische Welt* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1972), p. 42.

and *The Glass Bees*, but Jünger's best post-war discussion of the matter is clearly *Aladdin's Problem*. The title of this work is no coincidence; throughout nineteenth-century literature, the analogy of Aladdin's genii was a favored one among novelists concerned about the threat of technology. The possibility of the servant becoming master is repeated again and again in these works.¹⁰⁷ Jünger revives this theme in his novel. Like Aladdin with his lamp, humanity was presented with a golden opportunity to fulfill all its wishes through the discoveries of science and technology; however, they have spoiled their chance. Instead of being masters, they have become servants of this tremendously powerful force. In the process, technology has overthrown whatever used to give the world sense and meaning. "Titanic forces in mechanical disguise are supplanting the gods. Wherever Zeus no longer rules, crown, scepter, and borders are becoming senseless; with Ares, the heroes are making their farewells, and with Great Pan, nature is dying."¹⁰⁸

The worst part of it is that humanity does not realize what they have lost. As Friedrich complains, "we are hoodwinked by the machine world."¹⁰⁹ Jünger makes similar statements throughout his post-war works. With reference to the domination of technology he claims, "Hiding the robbery of happiness is becoming a science."¹¹⁰ In "Am Sarazenturm" he bemoans how technology is destroying a century-old way of life and argues that in spite of the apparent progress "dissatisfaction grows and the

¹⁰⁷ William Leiss, "Technology and Degeneration: the Sublime Machine" *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*, eds. J. Edward Chamberlain and Sander L. Gilman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 149.

¹⁰⁸ Jünger, *Aladdin's Problem*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁹ Jünger, *Aladdin's Problem*, p. 46.

¹¹⁰ Jünger, *Philemon und Baucis*, p. 34.

songs become mute.”¹¹¹ However, the very fact that humanity is not yet aware holds the promise that something might change once they become aware of their current enslavement. This is key to Jünger’s seemingly paradoxical idea that the complete domination of technology can lead to a new, meaningful reality. Jünger already broaches this possibility in his war diaries: “Film, radio, and the entire mechanical sphere will likely lead to a better knowledge of ourselves—of all things we are not.”¹¹² By wiping out the last vestiges of a world that can never be recaptured, technological domination will increasingly force humanity to see the emptiness and enslavement of its current condition. This is a key part of Jünger’s prognosis in *Aladdin’s Problem*. “For years, I have been convinced that we are living in a desert, with technology contributing more and more to its size and monotony.”¹¹³ Jünger continues to hold out the hope that the current cultural stagnation can be overcome. “A propos, I do not think that technology contradicts the great change. It will lead to the wall of time and be intrinsically transformed.”¹¹⁴

Although Jünger is (understandably) rather unclear about this process of transformation, it essentially can be summed up as humanity, upon realizing its loss of freedom, will revolt. Technology will be ‘transmuted’ so that it serves human purposes and creative fantasy:

We could perhaps reach a new spiritual age with different formulations, and an entirely different use of technology: the transformation of technology into pure magic—for instance, the transformation of the telegraph into telepathy,

¹¹¹ Jünger, “Am Sarazenturm” May 29, 1954, p. 319.

¹¹² Jünger, “Das Zweite Pariser Tagebuch” September 15, 1943, p. 160.

¹¹³ Jünger, *Aladdin’s Problem*, p. 120.

¹¹⁴ Jünger, *Aladdin’s Problem*, p. 120.

and things of that nature, like a new method of mastering gravity, or whatever!¹¹⁵

By once again becoming masters of technology (as had been the case in the early stages of modernity, when the promises of technology seemed endless, and when imagination was not yet supplanted completely by calculation) the current stagnation can be broken. In *Eumeswil*, Jünger is somewhat clearer about it; technology, in the form of the 'phonophore' (a special transmission device) creates a new hierarchy. Different stripes indicate different ranks: the gold stripe is only for the top leaders, a silver stripe indicates those in the immediate entourage of the Condor while 'common' people make do with a gray stripe, through which they can only receive official announcements. Thus with one glance, it becomes apparent how important an individual is in the regime and how much access to information they will be permitted. The luminar is another technological device that creates distinction; only those scholars who the Condor completely trusts are given access to this limitless source of historical data. In this way, the world can once again be re-imbibed with some meaning. The proper hierarchy is created by a selective system of information and limitless possibilities via a supercomputer that gives access to limitless data.

Ultimately Jünger's criticism of the contemporary world must be understood within the context of his own experience of the war and his disdain for post-war Germany. This is dealt with in more detail in Chapter Four, but it briefly deserves some attention here. As demonstrated, Jünger's post-war work is marked by a clear dichotomy between a past, inspirational age (that is, authoritarian Germany and *fin-*

¹¹⁵ Jünger and Hervier, *Details of Time*, p. 129.

de-siecle Paris) where variation and personal freedom (in the sense of no state interference in personal life) flourished, and a current flat, monochrome world (that is, post-war Germany) where true personal freedom is threatened from all sides. World War II was a clear breaking point between these two eras. Although Jünger places the onset of the a-historical era earlier in time, the dominance of technology and the masses that led to this era were in his interpretation (as Chapter Four demonstrates) at the root of the war. His about-face concerning technology was clearly a result of the massive destruction of his 'Fatherland' in World War II, while his stringent attacks on the masses, the bourgeoisie, and democracy, although already present in his prewar works, are in part the result of his disillusionment with post-war German politics and society. In launching these attacks, Jünger anticipated and provided intellectual ammunition for a widespread right-wing reaction (that began in the 1970's and culminated in major public, politicized debates in the 1980's) against the left-wing liberal dominance of the West German political scene. This reaction, dubbed the *Wende*, resulted in a widespread questioning of German politics, coupled with calls for a more aggressive, self-assured foreign policy and the need to break away from the burdensome past.¹¹⁶ Moreover, it witnessed (and continues to witness) the call for a more authoritarian political order. Among others, the historian Michael Stürmer has repeatedly emphasized the need for a strong nation-state.¹¹⁷ At

¹¹⁶ See Jan-Werner Müller, *Another Country: German Intellectuals, Unification, and National Identity* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 202.

¹¹⁷ Stefan Berger, *The Search for Normality: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Germany since 1800* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1997), p. 79.

the same time, there have been more frequent references to a meaningful, pre-twentieth century past to provide the foundational myth for this reinvigorated nation stage.¹¹⁸ Figures such as Bismarck, long deemed suspect, have been rehabilitated. These developments have not yet played themselves out, and as they continue to evolve, it is likely that Jünger will increasingly be recognized as one of the most important and relevant intellectuals of post-war Germany.

¹¹⁸ See Berger, p. 216, and Lothar Gall, *Confronting Clio: Mythmakers and Other Historians* (London: 1992).

CHAPTER 3: A 'MYTHICAL' VIEW OF THE PAST

"Children are robbed of their fairy tales, youth of myth, men of history, and the gray-headed of dying." *Siebzig Verweht II*, May 8, 1979

Although Jünger never wrote a conventional work of history, his war-time and post-war *oeuvre* as a whole is marked by a profound interest in the past. His diaries, essays, and novels are replete with historical anecdotes and philosophical speculations. His wartime writings echo his withdrawal from the contemporary world in that they show a typical disdain for twentieth century events (he rarely refers to anything that happened later than the nineteenth century, with the obvious exception of his own experiences). His postwar works, on the other hand, demonstrate an important and powerfully revisionist effort to understand and come to terms with the Second World War. Although this effort is, at times, clearly lacking in academic rigor, it anticipates major debates about how to interpret the German past that continue to provoke controversy to this very day.

Since Chapter Four expressly connects Jünger to these debates, the current chapter aims at setting the stage by providing an outline of Jünger's approach to the past while at the same time expanding on his criticism of the contemporary world. It begins by explaining Jünger's 'mythical' approach, which demonstrates his debt to a long German tradition and is key to his historical philosophy as a whole. From there, Jünger's notion of an end of history is discussed. A direct connection is drawn

between this claim and Jünger's perception of the war years and the post-war world. This is further developed and demonstrated in his attacks on the a-historical nature of the contemporary world, while his cautiously optimistic claim that there is a real hunger for history hiding just below the surface of society reflects his perception that a revival of history is possible. Throughout this analysis, links are made between ideas Jünger expounded and those of earlier philosophers of history, particularly Vico, Burckhardt, Nietzsche, and Spengler. The chapter concludes by linking various elements of Jünger's approach to a more general call for the normalization of German history that began in the late 1970's and continues to provoke major controversy as Germany attempts to come to terms with its problematic past.

Jünger has rightly been described as being one of the "self-confessed twentieth century mythmongers."¹¹⁹ Since myth plays a central role in his historical philosophy, it deserves some attention before we delve into other aspects of his thought. Due to the need to be brief, we limit ourselves to two basic issues. First, the basic framework and justification of his 'mythical' approach is outlined. This is important as it demonstrates the intellectual roots of Jünger's approach, shows where he went beyond his intellectual fathers, and is key to understanding other aspects of his historical thought. Second, the implications of his claim are examined, that is, what Jünger's emphasis on the importance of myth tells us about the function he assigns to history. This is important not only in how it demonstrates his intellectual debt to

¹¹⁹ David E. Cooper, "Modern Mythology: the case of 'Reactionary Modernism,'" *History of the Human Sciences*, 9 (1996): 25.

Nietzsche but, more importantly, is fundamental to his sharp attacks on the modern 'demythologization' of history.

Myth (in the form of ancient German and Greek stories) was of major importance to German thought from the Romantics to Nietzsche and beyond.¹²⁰ It was not only seen as the wellspring of inspiration and analogy, but, more significantly, understood as the substrate of historical events—that is, historical events were, to a large extent, determined by a deeper reality.¹²¹ Given Jünger's encyclopedic knowledge and appreciation of eighteenth and nineteenth century 'mythmongers' (such as Vico, Grimm, Creuzer, and Bachofen) it is not surprising that myth takes a central place in his approach to the past.¹²² Already in his war diaries he argues that mythical imagery underlies all history.¹²³ This claim is repeated throughout his post-war work; for example, in *Siebzig Verweht I* he states: "whoever wants to deal with [historical] substance cannot avoid myth; Vico and Bachofen remain real."¹²⁴ To Jünger, myths are not merely stories; in fact, they are the clearest insights humanity has ever had into a deeper, timeless reality that underlies observable phenomena. With specific reference to Vico's *New Science* (but echoing a much more widespread

¹²⁰ On this topic, see George S. Williamson *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹²¹ Jacob Grimm was the originator of this argument, which over the course of the nineteenth century was developed further (and made much more deterministic) by Friedrich Creuzer and Franz Josef Mone. See Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany*, pp. 82 and 188.

¹²² Jünger was especially indebted to Vico and this is repeatedly expressed throughout his work; most overtly in *Eumeswil* where 'Vigo' is described as Manuel's most important intellectual 'father.' Preeminent among Vico's own works is *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (London: Cornell University Press, 1984). For an excellent introduction to the thought of Vico, see Isaiah Berlin's *Vico and Herder*. Mark Lilla's *Vico: the Making of an Anti-Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) represents a much more critical, but equally useful approach.

¹²³ Jünger, "Das Zweite Pariser Tagebuch," May 23, 1943, pp. 75-76.

¹²⁴ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht I*, May 9, 1968, p. 464.

Romantic sentiment), he expands on this by explaining his preference for mythical insight over scientific knowledge in *Autor und Autorschaft*: "Poetic truth, if one thinks about it rightly, is a metaphysical truth, in contrast to which any physical truth that does not agree with it must be deemed false."¹²⁵ The great poets of the past, who were, as yet, untainted by corrosive rationalism, had profound intuitive insights into this reality, making their creations the 'truest' understanding of the world. Since events in history are also, to a smaller or greater extent, reflections of this reality, myth provides a framework through which we can make sense of these events. It also provides us with a way to evaluate the worth (that is, inspirational value) of historical events. As Jünger puts it, "in general, it can be said that a historical event becomes 'truer' the clearer it reflects a mythical example."¹²⁶

Myth also occupies a central place in the works of Nietzsche and Spengler, both of whom can be counted among the intellectual fathers of Jünger. Nietzsche's influence was particularly significant in that he stressed the inspirational power of myth, which, as will be discussed below, is key to Jünger's view of the past as well. Jünger at times directly borrows examples from Spengler's work; for instance, his claim that Napoleon is the re-manifestation of Alexander (whose mythical archetype can ultimately be found back in Achilles) is already made in *The Decline of the West*.¹²⁷ More generally, Jünger's constant use of analogy to make his points also

¹²⁵ Jünger, *Autor und Autorschaft*, p. 168.

¹²⁶ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht II*, May 1, 1979, p. 469.

¹²⁷ Spengler made this connection in *Decline of the West*, Vol. II. Cited in John Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline: Spengler on World History and Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), p. 39. Jünger reiterates this claim in *Siebzig Verweht II*, December 28, 1979, p. 565.

betrays the influence of this cultural pessimist.¹²⁸ This does not mean that Jünger simply borrowed all aspects of his philosophy of history. In fact, he repeatedly claims that Spengler failed to realize something very important, that is, the inability of his historical framework to deal with events of the twentieth century. In *Siebzig Verweht I* Jünger provides an example of this, arguing that someone like Napoleon still lived in the historical time period and hence can be judged through historical comparison. The new power holders, however, have no precedent in history: “they are Titans, who cannot be found back in Plutarch and Tacitus.”¹²⁹ Jünger explains this further (with direct reference to Spengler) in *Autor und Autorschaft*: “Where the framework of history has exploded, the writing of history must also change or even choose a new name—especially connect itself to the poet, who alone can control the Titanism.”¹³⁰

The destruction of this framework of history necessitates a return to myth, which alone has a framework large enough to understand modern catastrophes. This does not mean that the current age is more inspirational. In fact, this return to myth is necessary because only myth records the example of the struggle between elemental, rational forces (the Titans) and spiritual, creative forces (the gods of Olympus). This epic battle, according to Jünger, has restarted over the course of the past century. The difference between the current situation and the mythical stories is that while in the myths, Zeus ultimately prevails, the current age is witnessing the triumph of the Titans, signaling the ‘death’ or ‘flight of the gods,’ that is, the destruction of the artistic

¹²⁸ On Spengler’s dependence on analogy, see Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline*, p. 29.

¹²⁹ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht I*, June 14/15, 1966, p. 272.

¹³⁰ Jünger, *Autor und Autorschaft*, p. 42.

impulse. This must be understood within the context of the fact that many significant conservative Germans (including Spengler and Thomas Mann) stressed the 'spiritual' nature of the Germans as opposed to the calculating, 'materialistic' nature of the western nations (particularly Great Britain and the United States).¹³¹ Extend this analogy to the struggles of World War I and II, and Jünger's apparently obscure argument about the 'end of history' becomes much clearer.

While Lutz Niethammer understands Jünger's claim that history has come to an end within the context of a post-modern sense of historical exhaustion and boredom, it can in fact not be properly understood without reference to Jünger's interpretation of World War II as a history-shattering experience.¹³² The first elements of this idea are (interestingly enough) already present in *Gärten und Strassen*. Reflecting on the destruction he witnessed during the invasion of France, he states that we carry the centuries as filters through which we understand reality. He continues by claiming: "At the sight of the dead of Montmirail I had the feeling that these filters failed—that is, the image fell from the framework of history."¹³³ This is the foundation of his later claim that a return to a mythical framework is necessary—historical analogies are no longer sufficient. As the war progresses, elements of a definitive break become more and more pronounced. In the summer of 1943 he notes that the bombing is taking on an apocalyptic air, while the lack of statistics after

¹³¹ Spengler's work is suffused with anti-British and anti-American rhetoric; see Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline*, particularly pp. 157-162. Thomas Mann's famous *Betrachtungen einen Unpolitischen* likewise stresses the difference between the deep German spirit or *Kultur* and shallow Western materialism or *Zivilization*.

¹³² See Niethammer, *Posthistoire: Has History Come to an End?*

¹³³ Jünger, "Gärten und Strassen," *Werke, Band 2*, June 25, 1940, p. 200.

an air attack on Hamburg is evidence to him that people are dying outside of history.¹³⁴ The clearest hint at a total break, however, is reserved for the last entry of *Kirchhorster Blätter*, which Jünger penned on the day the American troops entered the town: "From such a defeat one does not recover again such as after Jena or Sedan. It points to a shift in the life of nations, as not only countless people have to die, but also much that moves us most deeply goes under in this transition."¹³⁵

This sense of loss and emptiness after the destruction of war is central to Jünger's overt claim, first expressed in *Eumeswil*, that history had come to an end. Manuel insists that the historical substance is used up and that the historian now moves about in a wasteland.¹³⁶ Although World War II appears to be barely discussed in the novel, it is clear that it truly marked the end of history.¹³⁷ With oblique reference to the Russian invasion of Germany, Manuel claims: "when the hordes burst in, historical time is snuffed out."¹³⁸ The war is described as an end in another sense when Manuel states that it was "the final triumph of the technician over the warrior."¹³⁹ Because of this break, *Eumeswil*, which is in many ways meant to represent post-war Germany, "even if a thousand years go by, can never be the

¹³⁴ Jünger, "Das Zweite Pariser Tagebuch," June 25, 1943, p. 89 and August 17, 1943, p. 129. W. G. Sebald in his discussion of the air bombardments likewise stresses the total nature of this destruction: "For most of the victims of the firestorms there are no cemeteries that sink back slowly into nature, no graves where we can place a stone." Paraphrased by Arthur Williams in "Das korsakowsche Syndrom: Remembrance and Responsibility in W. G. Sebald," *German Culture and the Uncomfortable Past*, ed. Helmut Schmitz (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001), p. 85.

¹³⁵ Jünger, "Kirchhorster Blätter," April 11, 1945, p. 415. The reference to the defeat at Sedan is no mistake on the part of Jünger, as he understood the developments of World War II as entailing the destruction of both Germany and France. See particularly "Der Friede" for this argument.

¹³⁶ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 89.

¹³⁷ In Chapter Four the numerous oblique references to the war are discussed in some detail.

¹³⁸ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 289.

¹³⁹ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 128.

subject of history.”¹⁴⁰ The destruction of its essence has left behind a hollow shell, where values “are at best parodied.”¹⁴¹ Hence it is incapable of performing the basic function of Jünger’s ideal of a myth-based history—that is, to provide inspiration for artistic creation.

Jünger’s emphasis on myth is also key to understanding the function he assigns to history. Here he is most clearly indebted to Nietzsche, who inveighed against those that “tirelessly spun [all creation] into webs of history.”¹⁴² As opposed to such an endless sifting through mounds of dry data, Nietzsche argued that history must serve as a wellspring for cultural life. Scientific arguments and approaches only succeed in undermining what is truly vital in the past, changing the pursuit of history from an inspirational enterprise to a culture-stifling burden.¹⁴³ Jünger’s arguments echo this approach, as he repeatedly claims that the pursuit of history is a creative art. This is best demonstrated in his claim that “Orpheus lives in every historian.”¹⁴⁴ Too much detail detracts from the larger vision, and hence must be rejected; the inspirational core of a past event is more significant than its objective details.¹⁴⁵

In *Eumeswil* Jünger outlines his ideal of a historian. Manuel is described as not only a historian by professional tradition, but, more importantly, by virtue of his

¹⁴⁰ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 143.

¹⁴¹ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 52.

¹⁴² Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Use and Abuse of History” *Thoughts out of Season, Part II*, trans. Adrian Collins (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1964), p. 77.

¹⁴³ Nietzsche, “The Use and Abuse of History,” p. 16.

¹⁴⁴ Jünger, *Aladdin’s Problem*, p. 98. According to Greek myth, Orpheus was such a talented poet and musician that he could bring inanimate matter such as rocks and trees to life with his art.

¹⁴⁵ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht I*, July 19, 1965, p. 83.

genetic makeup.¹⁴⁶ History is, as it were, in his blood. This is important in light of Jünger's insistence that the study of history is no mere academic exercise but rather calls for the complete devotion of rational and irrational faculties. Only in this way can history become a worthwhile (that is, inspiring) enterprise. Such an approach calls for the suspension of any sense of moral judgment or even rational understanding. The point of history is not to create a precise system. As Manuel puts it, "the historian must provide images, not explanations."¹⁴⁷ Only through such a process can we submerge ourselves in the past and draw all of its inspirational meaning from it. Jünger eloquently outlines this in *Eumeswil*:

Anyone who takes on the risk of history must, like a Proteus, be transformed within its element, must unreservedly conform to the spirit of the time in which the decision has been rendered and the character that has rendered it. Passion without participation. Life throbs, unbroken by the verdict; the spirit rises with the billow and sinks with it.¹⁴⁸

Jünger repeats this ideal of unreserved identification with the subject of one's study throughout his work: "The historian must become immersed in his milieu—living and feeling along with it."¹⁴⁹ The past can only become relevant and inspiring through such a process; any attempt to merely grasp and understand it with our rational faculties destroys its very essence. Jünger's use of such an approach demonstrates the influence of Dilthey in particular and the German historicist tradition in general.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 18.

¹⁴⁷ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 161.

¹⁴⁸ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 336.

¹⁴⁹ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht III*, September 3, 1983, p. 303. See also *Siebzig Verweht II*, November 18, 1973 and January 6, 1977.

¹⁵⁰ For Dilthey's ideal of *Verstehen* see Hans Peter Rickman, *Dilthey Today: A Critical Appraisal of the Contemporary Relevance of His Work* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), pp. 23-35.

This approach (encapsulated by the term *Verstehen*) implies that human understanding has definite limits and that it is a subjective, personal activity. Hence, there can be no generally accepted method for attaining or testing truth: "We can understand only out of our own special situation and we confront not truth as such, but the personality of concrete human beings or communities with their own subjective limitations."¹⁵¹

In Chapter 2 we outlined Jünger's ideal of the absolute sovereignty of the individual—an ideal that was clearly fulfilled in the flaneur. *Eumeswil* provides plenty of evidence that this analogy can be extended to his ideal of the historian. Jünger described both as absolutely sovereign, absolutely detached, and yet absolutely enthralled and inspired. All the 'inexhaustible surprises' of history are available through the luminal. Like the flaneur, Manuel is free in choosing when to engage or disengage, surrounded by "masterpieces" in the "art gallery" of the past.¹⁵² Jünger stresses how the historian in general is helped by the immense amount of data available today: "We dwell here on a sheltered lagoon, where enormous masses of flotsam and jetsam from shipwrecks have been washed ashore. We know better than earlier generations anything that has ever happened anywhere on our planet."¹⁵³ The flaneur's detached enjoyment of the spectacle clearly applies as well: "That is the historian's delight; he takes part in the squabbles as Zeus does in the battles of gods and men. From under the varnish with which they were dimmed by the

¹⁵¹ Georg Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), p. 111.

¹⁵² Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 96.

Enlightenment, the images emerge in their glory.”¹⁵⁴ Such a viewpoint can, of course, only be achieved through the suspension of judgment. Jünger (as discussed below) repeatedly attacks those who judge the past by moral or political standards. Ultimately, like the flaneur, the historian turns the presented images into artwork: “the true historian is more of an artist, especially a tragedian, than a man of science.”¹⁵⁵ This, then, is Jünger’s ideal manner of studying history: not through a rational, scholarly framework (as Manuel puts it, “what does scholarship have to do with genius?”¹⁵⁶) but rather as an intuitive, non-judgmental immersion in the spectacles and dramas of the past.¹⁵⁷

This ideal of inspirational history is key to Jünger’s rejection of modern historical practices, for which he harbored an intense dislike. Upon hearing that historians were unionizing, he caustically suggested that they should join the garbage collectors.¹⁵⁸ More tellingly, he reflects in *Siebzig Verweht I* on how the process of demythologization stretches far back into time, concluding: “Now other contortions are added: the updating, the socialization, and the moralization of history, and the abhorrence of great men, known as characters, that are now being castrated by the psychologists.”¹⁵⁹ In other words, modern historical practice, by substituting rational analysis and judgment for empathy and admiration has robbed history of its

¹⁵⁴ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 64.

¹⁵⁵ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 160.

¹⁵⁶ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 20.

¹⁵⁷ The notion of history as an amoral spectacle is clearly present in the works of Spengler. See Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline*, p. 44.

¹⁵⁸ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht II*, January 8, 1976, p. 265.

¹⁵⁹ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht I*, May 9, 1968, p. 464. Jünger’s complaints about demythologization reflect the influence of a widespread Romantic sentiment; see Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany*, p. 38.

inspirational meaning, causing it to lose its sense of direction and purpose and turning it into an “anonymous wandering.”¹⁶⁰ Jünger claims that attacks upon historical greats, such as Caesar, Goethe, and Frederick the Great are dangerous because they result in a vacuum into which new idols that do not tolerate anyone beside themselves can step.¹⁶¹ Ultimately, then, Jünger links the rise of demagogues such as Hitler and Mussolini to the destruction of proper reverence and appreciation for the past.

Jünger (like Nietzsche) relentlessly attacks what he perceives to be the modern tendency of judging and moralizing the past.¹⁶² In *Autor und Autorschaft* he expresses his displeasure about this approach: “One of the bad, censurable habits of the contemporary practice of history is that past epochs are criticized with the views or prejudices of nowadays. Here one is also confronted with ‘the master’s typical spirit,’ which one is already weary of from the newspapers.”¹⁶³ This charge is elaborated on in *Eumeswil* as well; Manuel (once again echoing Nietzsche) claims: “the deed must be weighted... beyond good and evil, beyond any conceivable ethics.” Historians who do not abide by this rule are “grave robbers who, for the sake of the market, falsify poems and deeds; so it is better to carouse with Omar Khayyám than to join them in violating the dead.”¹⁶⁴ Although this principle can be applied in a broad manner, Jünger obviously had those who judged German history in mind. This is not only reflected in Manuel’s complaint that “after every overthrow, world history is

¹⁶⁰ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht II*, May 6, 1971, p. 26.

¹⁶¹ Jünger, *Autor und Autorschaft*, p. 42.

¹⁶² See Nietzsche, “The Use and Abuse of History” p. 55. “Ages and generations have never the right to judge previous ages and generations... as judges, you must stand higher than that which is to be judged.”

¹⁶³ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht III*, May 20, 1984, pp. 359-360.

¹⁶⁴ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 26.

rewritten for the sake of the moment,"¹⁶⁵ but is even clearer in *Autor und Autorschaft*: "N. N. wants 'to rewrite German history.' He begins by denying the role of Prince Eugen against the Turks and turning the wars of greed of Louis XIV into German crimes. It peeves him when one also remembers one's own victims or asserts that Kant lived in Königsberg."¹⁶⁶ Thus, in Jünger's opinion, judging and moralizing the past not only robs it of its inspirational substance, it also results in a falsification of history for the sake of current political advantage.¹⁶⁷

Such practices of history have helped destroy the connections to the past, with dire consequences for both society and the individual. Jünger (echoing Burckhardt) frequently complains that the contemporary world is pervaded with a-historical or even anti-historical sentiment.¹⁶⁸ Elaborating on the reasons for this sentiment, he argues that society must be grounded in the past. "A supportive layer must always be available for the continued existence of society. One cannot build on quicksand."¹⁶⁹ Continuity is key; if this is disrupted, the past, and hence the present, loses all coherence. Once again, World War II constitutes a major breaking point. This is hinted at in *Aladdin's Problem* where Friedrich explains how disruptions destroy history: "The heads of statues, as I have witnessed twice [clearly a reference to Jünger's own experiences after World War I and II], would then be replaced.

¹⁶⁵ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 30.

¹⁶⁶ Jünger, *Autor und Autorschaft*, p. 26.

¹⁶⁷ Jünger's repeated claim that the left-wing used the past for political purposes is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

¹⁶⁸ See for instance *Siebzig Verweht I*, August 7, 1966, and *Aladdin's Problem*, pp. 47 and 82. Burckhardt made a similar claim in *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*, arguing that the modern age witnessed a disturbing trend of 'historylessness.' See Hinde, *Jacob Burckhardt and the Crisis of Modernity*, p. 12.

¹⁶⁹ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht III*, May 20, 1984, p. 359.

Likewise, names were deleted and dates changed on street signs and in reference books—in short, there was no more history, just stories.”¹⁷⁰ Taking this argument to its obvious conclusion means that history can only be restored if such a break is overcome. Such an argument is, as Chapter 4 demonstrates, of major importance in the post-war search for a ‘usable past.’

Jünger finds further evidence of the contemporary world’s ahistorical nature in the treatment of its dead. Here especially he stresses a stark dichotomy between a meaningful continuous past and a nihilistic, rootless present. This is most effectively achieved in *Aladdin’s Problem* where he paints an evocative picture of a centuries-old cemetery in the countryside—a description that is rudely disturbed by the simple observation “the place was about to be plowed under. Soon the countryside would consist purely of roads and gas stations.”¹⁷¹ Cutting off the connection to the past in such a drastic manner amounts to cultural suicide and can only lead to nihilism, as it means that one’s own memory will be obliterated in the future. “Any memory of contemporary man sinks way into the grave with his grandchildren.”¹⁷² In *Aladdin’s Problem*, Friedrich seeks a solution for this by creating eternal resting places, guaranteed never to be dug up or modified. This alone can ensure that one’s memory does not disappear. In fact Jünger, echoing Vico, sees this as a way to restart culture since, in his estimation, “culture is based on the treatment of the dead; culture

¹⁷⁰ Jünger, *Aladdin’s Problem*, p. 72.

¹⁷¹ Jünger, *Aladdin’s Problem*, p. 80.

¹⁷² Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 179.

vanishes with the decay of graves—or rather, this decay announces that the end is nigh.”¹⁷³

In spite of this dire diagnosis of the current situation, Jünger never gave up the hope that a revival was ultimately possible. The key to this would be the reestablishment of a proper, respectful history, something for which, as he claims, there is a real hunger. In 1968, at what was in many ways a crest of critical scrutiny of the past, Jünger already argues that the current wasteland has resulted in a new homesickness for history.¹⁷⁴ Fifteen years (and a conservative *Wende*) later, he repeats this argument somewhat more emphatically. After discussing the a-historical nature of modern life, Kornfeld (a friend of Friedrich) claims “and yet something has remained—you discover it when you scratch the polish: a grieving in November, when the leaves are falling and yet seeds are already stirring in the earth. Believe me, a loss is felt here, a need slumbers here, unsettling everyone, moving everyone.”¹⁷⁵ According to Jünger, there is not only a longing; there is also the possibility for revival. In *Eumeswil* he describes (in a typically esoteric manner) how the true historian could provide a basis for a new beginning: “When granting life to the past, we succeed in conquering time, and a subduing of death becomes apparent. Should the latter work out, then it is conceivable that a god will breathe new life into us.”¹⁷⁶ Jünger repeatedly insists (and Niethammer ignores this) that in spite of this ‘end of history’ a

¹⁷³ Jünger, *Eumeswil* p. 109. Burial practices as the foundation of culture is a basic theme in Vico’s *The New Science*, see pp. 9-10 and 97-99.

¹⁷⁴ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht I*, May 9, 1968, p. 464.

¹⁷⁵ Jünger, *Aladdin’s Problem*, p. 82.

¹⁷⁶ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 82.

new, meaningful future remained possible. Manuel (rejecting reactionary and Nietzschean views) makes a claim that clearly demonstrates this: "Incidentally, it is not that I am awaiting a return to the past, like Chateaubriand, or a recurrence, like Boutefeu; I leave those matters politically to the conservatives and cosmically to the stargazers. No, I hope for something equal, nay, stronger, and not just in the human domain."¹⁷⁷ Jünger's argument for an end of history, then, is not a definite claim. It does not preclude the possibility of a revival, which, as the next chapter demonstrates, would have decisively nationalistic overtones.

Although Jünger's approach to the past seems very unorthodox at times, his ideas are not the isolated musings of a fanatical, psychologically-imbalanced fascist eccentric.¹⁷⁸ In fact, central elements of his philosophy of history helped provide the basis for and anticipated major discussions and debates about the past, memory, and identity that continue to arouse important controversies in Germany today. The past twenty years have seen an increasing concern about the lack of a link to the 'true' German cultural past.¹⁷⁹ Michael Stürmer in particular has stressed the lack of a readily available historical identity and the need and significance of a reconnection to the past:

Whether 'the search for a lost past' reflects a positive reawakening of a historical sense and a search for traditional culture or whether it arises from contemporary insecurities is not crucial. 'Both determine the new search for an old history. Loss of orientation and the search for identity are brothers. But

¹⁷⁷ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 97-98. Boutefeu is one of Jünger's pseudonyms for Nietzsche

¹⁷⁸ This is what Andreas Huyssen, one of Jünger's most relentless critics, essentially reduces him to in "Fortifying the Heart—Totally: Ernst Jünger's Armored Texts."

¹⁷⁹ Stuart Taberner, "Martin Walser: Deutsche Geschichte darf auch einmal gutgehen" *German Culture and the Uncomfortable Past*, pp. 61-63.

anyone who believes that this has no effect on politics and the future ignores the fact that in a land without history whoever supplies memory, shapes concepts, and interprets the past will win the future.¹⁸⁰

The nationalist message of this is obvious. For Germany to be a strong, confident, self-interested nation, it needs to revive a respectable past.¹⁸¹ Jünger's own concern about the need for a mythic approach to history obviously ties into these sentiments, as such an approach ultimately is primarily concerned with reestablishing meaningful links to the past. Most significantly, aspects that figure prominently in Jünger's approach to history were, as the next chapter demonstrates, key to major debates concerning the Nazi past; debates that, sixty years after the end of the war, have lost little of their intensity or importance.

¹⁸⁰ Michael Stürmer, "Geschichte in geschichtlosem Land" *Dissonanzen des Fortschritts* (Munich: Piper, 1986). The quoted selection is translated and paraphrased by Charles S. Maier in *The Unmasterable Past*, p. 44.

¹⁸¹ On the question of national identity in German historical practice, see Berger, *The Search For Normality*.

CHAPTER 4: THE SEARCH FOR A 'USABLE PAST.'

"Infamy remains constant. They used to ask about the Jewish grandmother, currently with equal enthusiasm as to whether we used to be a *Pimpf* in the Hitlerjugend."
Siebzig Verweht II, October 28, 1978

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, Jünger essentially turned his back on the contemporary world after the Second World War, understanding it as a definitive break between a meaningful past and a nihilistic present. Yet there is clear evidence in Jünger's post-war diaries, essays, and novels that he continued to be concerned with and burdened by nationalist issues even as he insisted on a resolute apolitical stance and was proclaiming an 'end of history' in his novels. An entry made in his diary more than twenty years after the war is illustrative of his deep-seated nationalist concerns and apologetic interpretation of the existing situation: "The future of the Germans is as dark as that of Jonah in the belly of the whale. Divided up, robbed of its provinces, and surrounded by mistrusting and evil-willing neighbours."¹⁸² A number of years later he makes an even more telling comment illustrating how the legacy of the war continues to burden him: "I do not always think about both lost wars, the fallen son, and the mutilated fatherland, but not a moment goes by without the weight of this burden."¹⁸³ Jünger's attempt to deal with this 'burden' in his post-war works is the subject of investigation in this chapter. It is my

¹⁸² Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht I*, January 1, 1966, p. 236.

¹⁸³ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht II*, October 12, 1973, p. 150.

argument that he is not only uniquely representative of the initial conservative German response to the legacy of Nazism throughout the post-war years but also that, in spite of his avowed apolitical stance, he can be seen as a very significant intellectual father of right-wing revisionist interpretations and approaches in post-war Germany that continue to be of importance to this very day.

Few, if any countries have a historical legacy that is as problematic, charged with emotion, and polarizing as Germany's. Although the arguments vary in intensity, there have been two fairly clearly defined camps in the debates about the Nazi past since the end of the war. The critical camp maintains that since Germany unleashed the Second World War, the German nation continues to bear a certain amount of guilt, and that the foundations of a new Germany can only be based on a complete distancing from the tainted past. Apologists, on the other hand, claim that the German people (and tradition) cannot be held accountable for the crimes committed by the Nazi regime. What is more, they maintain that the German people were themselves victims of the war. Such arguments have clear political implications. Leftists have aimed to break away from the conservative German tradition; their charge that this tradition fed the rise of Nazism makes a powerful weapon in any attempt to halt a move to the right. Conservatives, on the other hand, have tried to rescue the German tradition from the rubble of Nazism by disassociating this tradition from the Nazi movement. They clearly believe that right-wing ideas and politics can never be respectable as long as Germans are burdened by their problematic past.

Neither the critics nor the apologists ever in reality achieved the hegemony over the past that they accused each other of possessing, but it is generally agreed that approaches to the legacy of Nazism passed through three distinct stages.¹⁸⁴ The immediate post-war stage was dominated by conservative interpretations which minimized the links between Nazism and the German past and put German suffering in the foreground. Beginning in the early 1960's with the publication of Fritz Fischer's *Germany's Aims in the First World War*, increasingly critical reinterpretations of Germany's problematic past came to the fore. These approaches emphasized the deep roots of Nazism, arguing that Germany's authoritarian political tradition led it down a *Sonderweg* to modernization. In light of such an interpretation, it was obviously necessary for the new Germany to break away from this past and wholeheartedly embrace the liberal Western Enlightenment tradition. Conservatives reacted to such criticism by attempting to minimize the importance of Nazism and World War II. Since the 1980's conservative viewpoints and revisionist interpretations have regained momentum, resulting in widespread debates in German media and academic circles about the origins and legacy of Nazism. Recently, these debates have been given a further boost by the publication of Jörg Friedrich's *Der Brand*,

¹⁸⁴ There is an abundance of literature on the *Historikerstreit*, including Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988), Richard J. Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historian's Debate*, ed. Peter Baldwin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), *Rewriting the German Past: History and Identity in the New Germany*, eds. Reinhard Alter and Peter Monteath (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997). These works and others generally adhere to these three stages of development, although there is some debate about to what extent the left-wing interpretation dominated during the 1960's and 70's. For two valuable treatments of post-unification approaches to Nazism, see *German Culture and the Uncomfortable Past*, ed. Helmut Schmitz (Burlington: Ashgate, 2001) and Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (London: Routledge, 2002).

which describes and condemns the allied air attacks on Germany, implicitly comparing them to the Holocaust, and the 60th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany has once again re-ignited debates about the question of German victimhood.¹⁸⁵

The purpose of this chapter is to place changes in Jünger's writings within the context of post-war German culture, examining their shifts of emphasis and interpretation in relation to the three stages outlined above. A close reading of his writings from 1943-1953 reveal that his response did not only encapsulate the essential conservative post-war interpretation of Nazism (as expressed by leading historians such as Friedrich Meinecke and Gerhard Ritter) but, more importantly, already expounded many of the basic revisionist concepts that were at the center of the *Historikerstreit* and continue to arouse controversy today. When the dominant interpretation became much more critical, and Jünger himself was increasingly marginalized and considered passé, he responded by treating Nazism as a dark, obscure, historically distant and insignificant phenomenon. At the same time, he continued to lace his novels and diaries with thinly veiled barbs aimed at left-wing liberals, implicitly and explicitly attacking the alleged political instrumentalization of the Holocaust, a tactic which again anticipated later debates. The conservative *Wende* of the late 1970's and 1980's (along with the canonization of Jünger as a

¹⁸⁵ See Jörg Friedrich, *Der Brand* (München: Propyläen Verlag, 2003). For two recent discussions about the issue of German victimhood, see Mary Nolan, "Germans as Victims during the Second World War: Air Wars, Memory Wars" *Central European History*, 38 (1) 2005: 7-40, and Thomas Childers "Facilis descensus averni est": The Allied Bombing of Germany and the Issue of German Suffering." *Central European History*, 38 (1) 2005: 75-105.

writer) are clearly reflected in his writings, as the cultural pessimism that reached its most critical point in *Eumeswil* slowly but perceptibly lessens and a correspondingly more hopeful prognosis for the national future appears. At the same time, there is evidence in his last works that Jünger approved of and, to some extent, actively contributed to efforts of the New Right to turn him into an ideal figure around which a new, respectable nationalism could be created.

Demobilized in September of 1944, Jünger spent the last eight months of World War II and the first years of the subsequent allied occupation in the town of Kirchhorst. His experiences during this time are recorded in two diaries: "Kirchhorster Blätter" and "Die Hütte im Weinberg." Together with his tracts "Der Friede" and "Der Gordische Knoten," these diaries form his only sustained reflection on the causes and consequences of the war, although the ideas expounded in them continue to reappear in a more veiled guise in his later works. The various claims and arguments Jünger makes about the origins and meaning of the war can be summed up in five major points. Firstly, he presents Nazism as not being a specifically German phenomenon by linking it back to Enlightenment rationality and the French Revolution. This interpretation is coupled with a brief embrace of Christian humanism as the road out of the existing quagmire. Secondly, he attacks the notion of 'collective German guilt' by highlighting Germany's unfortunate position as a "land in the middle" and claiming that the domination of technology coupled with the rise of the masses (both interpreted as the result of Enlightenment reason) wrested the course of historical development and responsibility out of the hand of the individual. Thirdly,

he attempts to portray the Germans as *the* victims of World War II by combining a one-sided emphasis on German suffering with the claim that Germany did have legitimate national concerns at the outset of the war. Fourthly, Jünger explicitly places the crimes of Nazism and Communism on the same level and interprets the actual manifestation of Nazism in Germany as a reaction to the threat posed by Communism. Lastly, he attacks those Germans who claimed to have opposed Nazism as opportunists and traitors, making an exception only for the 'proper' resistance in which he himself and the conservative officer corps engaged. Discussing these arguments in turn and comparing them to assertions made by conservatives immediately after the war and revisionists during the *Historikerstreit* and beyond brings the representativeness and importance of Jünger's war-time and immediate post-war work into clear focus.

During and after the war, it became obvious to conservative nationalists that if the German tradition was to be saved from opprobrium it clearly had to be separated from Nazism. Friedrich Meinecke and Gerhard Ritter, two leading German historians, contributed significantly to constructing such a separation. Both men began their career in Wilhelmine Germany, and were internationally renowned by the time Hitler gained power. Neither retained his teaching position in the Third Reich, as their conservative ideas increasingly put them at odds with the Nazi regime. Both claimed to have resisted Hitler, if not in fact, then in spirit. After the total defeat of Germany, these respected historians made an effort to come to terms with the past without rejecting the German cultural and political tradition. While Meinecke was too old to

resume a professorial career after 1945, he did write *The German Catastrophe*, an influential early interpretation of the causes and consequences of the war. The younger Ritter ultimately became “the effective leader of the West German historical profession during the Cold War.”¹⁸⁶ Their interpretations of the recent disaster became central to the dominant conservative discourse of the post-war years.

Witnessing how Nazism had done so much to destroy the German cultural and intellectual heritage, Ritter and Meinecke argued that the French Revolution and the subsequent rise of the masses was the real precursor to Hitler. Rather than destroying a supposedly contaminated cultural heritage, “we must recognize,” as Meinecke puts it, “the abyss between the Hitler spirit and the sound German spirit.”¹⁸⁷ Jünger’s arguments echo this interpretation. On August 18, 1944 he decries the destruction of the old world, arguing that it can be traced back to the French Revolution.¹⁸⁸ Extending this argument he claims that Nazism was, above all, a mass phenomenon that only arose with the decline of authoritarian conservative politics. The massive destruction he witnesses is explained as the direct result of “the mass parties of the great cities that are now raging.”¹⁸⁹ Jünger clearly realizes the implications of such an interpretation—that is, post-war Germany cannot be constructed upon liberal political principles. This is most pointedly expressed in “Der

¹⁸⁶ Richard Evans, “Book Review: *Gerhard Ritter: Geschichtswissenschaft und Politik im 20. Jahrhundert*,” *English Historical Review*, 119 (June 2004): 757

¹⁸⁷ Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe, Reflections and Recollections*, trans. Sidney B. Fay (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), p. 47. For a basic overview of Ritter’s very similar interpretation of the issue, see Stefan Berger, *The Search For Normality*, p. 42.

¹⁸⁸ Jünger, “Kirchhorster Blätter” August 18, 1944, p. 308. Cf. “Die Hütte im Weinberg,” July 21, 1945, p. 510.

¹⁸⁹ Jünger, “Kirchhorster Blätter,” March 19, 1945, p. 400.

Friede,” where he argues that the liberal state does not have the answer to the current nihilism.¹⁹⁰ Instead, Jünger proposes that Germany should return to political and cultural values based on the Bible.¹⁹¹

The call for a return to Germany’s cultural and religious heritage was clearly central to more widespread efforts to rescue a usable past from the rubble of Nazism. Friedrich Meinecke proposed that Goethe Communities should be formed which would (via radio) convey “into the heart of the listeners through sound the most vital essences of the great German spirit.”¹⁹² Konrad Adenauer, West Germany’s Chancellor from 1949 to 1963 called for a “deepening of Christian religious conviction” and argued that the “re-Christianization” of Germany was crucial to the process of democratisation and western integration.¹⁹³ Jünger’s own career passed through something like a Christian humanist stage during and immediately after the war as well. While stationed in France during the war years, he read through the Bible twice and occasionally refers to biblical texts in his diaries. This becomes especially overt in “Kirchhorster Blätter” and “Die Hütte im Weinberg” where he repeatedly compares the destruction of Germany to that depicted by Isaiah and Jeremiah.¹⁹⁴ Ernstel’s death was the catalyst for a brief but intense attempt to find meaning and

¹⁹⁰ Jünger, “Der Friede,” pp. 238-239.

¹⁹¹ Jünger, “Der Friede,” p. 241.

¹⁹² Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe*, p. 120.

¹⁹³ Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 216-217.

¹⁹⁴ The title “Die Hütte im Weinberg” is in fact taken from Isaiah 1: 8; “And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard...” This diary also contains a quote that is telling about how Jünger used Scripture texts for his own, rather cynical purpose, as he quotes Lamentations 5: 7-8: “Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities. Servants have ruled over us: there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand.” “Die Hütte im Weinberg, June 10, 1945, p. 483.

solace in the Christian faith. Elements of Christianity (particularly the portrayal of German suffering as redemptive) are also strongly present in "Der Friede," which is clearly the most humanistic of all of Jünger's writings, and, seeing that it is addressed to the youth of the world, obviously is meant as an attempt to exert political influence. Since Christianity essentially disappears from Jünger's writings after these works, one can question how genuine his turn to it was.¹⁹⁵ On the one hand, it would be too much to simply declare the entire turn opportunistic, as he clearly struggled to come to terms with the death of his son and the destruction around him. The diary entries he made in the days and weeks after Ernstel's death are clearly the most personal and touching of his writings. However, the instrumentalization of Biblical passages and the quick abandonment of Christian rhetoric once his message fell on deaf ears is evidence that Jünger's temporary 'conversion' had political motives as well. It seems plausible that the more general German return to Christianity in the immediate post-war years was also the result of a mixture of similar motives.

Responsibility is ultimately based on capability. An individual or a nation cannot reasonably be blamed for developments that are beyond their control, be they ever so entangled by them. Hence it is no surprise that the early apologists for the Nazi past stressed the inability to affect the course of history. By emphasizing fate, geopolitical factors, the rise of the uncontrollable, irresponsible masses, and the demonic aspects of Hitler, conservative nationalists such as Meinecke and Ritter attempted to minimize the guilt of the German people in the early post-war

¹⁹⁵ Thomas Nevin overemphasizes Jünger's 'conversion' to Christianity, ignoring contrary evidence in his

period.¹⁹⁶ In his war diaries Jünger clearly anticipates such approaches, as his fatalism grows with the worsening military situation. His visit to the Eastern Front was a particular catalyst in this regard, as it made the hopeless situation of Germany obvious. While there he observes that the Second World War will generate the greatest debate concerning the issue of free will since the Persian wars,¹⁹⁷ and claims that “one has the feeling of being stuck in a great machine, in which one only takes a passive part.”¹⁹⁸ By the end of 1943 his fatalism reached the point where he argues that if World War II had not happened other forces would have destroyed the world.¹⁹⁹ Such fatalism is also clearly present in “Der Gordische Knoten” (1953), an essay devoted to tracing out the millennia-long, inevitable struggle between the East and the West, where Jünger places World War II into a framework of history that stretches back to the Peloponnesian Wars.²⁰⁰

Besides such general fatalism, Jünger’s repeated references to Hitler under the codename of Kniébolo (a play on Diablo) reflects the wider conservative interpretation by seeking to exonerate the Germans from guilt by claiming they were misled by an otherworldly power. He makes this explicit in “Kirchhorster Blätter”: “After his great fast, the German was led up the mountain by Kniébolo and shown the

later works.

¹⁹⁶ The title of Meinecke’s work is indicative of a strong measure of fatalism, while he repeatedly hints at the demonic aspects of Hitler as well—see pp. 13 and 96 in *The German Catastrophe*. Ritter especially stressed the geopolitical dilemma of Germany.

¹⁹⁷ Jünger, *Kaukasische Aufzeichnungen*, December 21, 1943, p. 481. Cf. “Vorwort” in *Werke, Band 2*, p. 11, where Jünger also raises the question of free will in relation to history.

¹⁹⁸ Jünger, “Kaukasische Aufzeichnungen,” December 21, 1943, p. 482.

¹⁹⁹ Jünger, “Das Zweite Pariser Tagebuch,” December 14, 1943, p. 203.

²⁰⁰ Jünger, “Der Gordischen Knoten,” in *Werke: Band 5*, particularly pp. 391-400.

might of the world. He did not wait long before he worshipped his tempter."²⁰¹ Jünger maintained this position throughout the post-war years, by, among other things, arguing that Hitler was similar to a magma-like eruption.²⁰² Comparing the essentially legally elected German Chancellor to an unstoppable natural phenomenon clearly minimizes any particular German responsibility for the outbreak and crimes of World War II and opens the road to not only saving the German tradition but also to seeing the Germans as victims of the war.

In the 1960's and 70's such fatalistic arguments were increasingly rejected by a new generation of left-wing scholars. They favoured a more critical approach that highlighted the culpability of the German tradition and nation as a whole.²⁰³ Fate, however, in the form of geopolitical factors, has gained ground since the 1980's. Conservative historians such as Andreas Hillgruber and especially Michael Stürmer portray Germany as an unfortunate "land in the middle" which was forced into an increasingly untenable position after the reunification of 1871. Hillgruber finds the roots of World War I and II back in Germany's "oppressive strategic predicament" which constrained it to the point where it had to lash out or cease being a great power.²⁰⁴ Stürmer convincingly outlines the geo-political pressures on the German government in the pre-World War I era, locked between a vengeful France and an

²⁰¹ Jünger, "Kirchhorster Blätter," October 6, 1944, p. 320.

²⁰² Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht II*, May 4, 1971, p. 24.

²⁰³ See for instance Fritz Fischer, *Germany's War Aims in the First World War* (New York: Norton, 1967), which initially aroused bitter controversy for insisting on the aggressive, imperialistic nature of Germany's war aims in 1914. Hans-Ulrich Wehler's *The German Empire, 1871-1918*, trans. Kim Traynor (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1985) attacked the social structure of imperial Germany, powerfully synthesising the notion that Germany's path the modernity was fatally flawed.

expansionistic Russia. He attacks the notion that Germany was different in its ambitions from other nations during this time period, comparing German militarism to “French chauvinism, Russian expansionism, and British jingoism or imperialism.”²⁰⁵ Moreover, he claims that the German militarism was not the result of its authoritarian system as much as the inability of this system to contain mass pressure. The expansionist dreams of the rising middle classes and the truculent mass media forced the German government (against its realistic interests) to expend money on a naval program and colonial ventures that could only antagonize Britain and make it join forces with Germany’s foes.²⁰⁶ This further increased Germany’s strategic predicament as it could not hope to win a war against the combined forces of Britain, France, and Russia. The Schlieffen Plan, far from being illustrative of Germany’s expansionistic dreams, was born of and carried out in desperation. The defeat in World War I and the unjust Treaty of Versailles resulted in widespread resentment, leading to the rise of Nazism and ultimately World War II. In light of this interpretation, Germany was more the victim of the power politics of other countries than an especially aggressive expansionistic nation.

By erasing the boundary between the suffering of persecutors and persecuted, apologists immediately after the war, during the *Historikerstreit*, and during the recent debate on Allied bombing campaigns have tried to wipe out the specificity of the Nazi crimes and any particular sense of German guilt. Jünger clearly shared and helped

²⁰⁴ See Andreas Hillgruber, *Germany and the Two World Wars*, trans. William C. Kirby (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 7.

²⁰⁵ Michael Stürmer, *The German Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000) p. 3.

propagate such a notion of universal victimhood. Reflecting in *Siebzig Verweht II* on the death of Pierre Laval, Jünger claims that he had harboured a notion for many years: "After great catastrophes we must build a common memorial for all whom, in whatever way, were affected by it."²⁰⁷ Such arguments are also expressed in his immediate post-war productions; for example, in "Der Friede" he argues that since every nation suffered in the catastrophe of the war, all should share the fruits of peace equally.²⁰⁸ In making these suggestions, Jünger once again anticipates controversies that erupted in the public sphere in the 1980's and 90's. Ronald Reagan paying his respects to the remains of German soldiers (including some that had served in the notorious *Waffen SS*) buried at Bitburg resulted in widespread, emotional debates about the implications of this gesture. Critics claimed that it wiped out all distinction between perpetrators and victims, while the (usually conservative) defenders of this act argued that in general those who fought for Germany during World War II were not criminals but merely caught up in a desperate situation.²⁰⁹ This clearly echoes arguments raised by Jünger in "Der Friede," where he calls for a careful distinction between the small group of criminal executioners and the massive numbers of soldiers who were simply caught up in the struggle to defend their fatherland and hence deserve respect.²¹⁰ In the 1990's, Chancellor Helmut Kohl's decision to renovate the *Neue Wache* memorial also aroused controversy. The refurbished

²⁰⁶ Stürmer, *The German Empire*, pp. 67-68.

²⁰⁷ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht II*, July 2, 1979, p. 494.

²⁰⁸ Jünger, "Der Friede," pp. 204 and 215.

²⁰⁹ Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, pp. 105-108

²¹⁰ Jünger, "Der Friede," particularly pp. 226-227. Cf. "Die Hütte im Weinberg," May 27, 1945, pp. 473-474 and Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe*, p. 104.

memorial remembers those Germans who died on the front, in bombing raids, and during the expulsions of the eastern territories. While proponents of the plan saw a memorial specifically dedicated to the Germans as a national prerogative, critics again argued that it wiped out distinctions between victims and perpetrators and prioritised German suffering over that of the Jews and other direct victims of Nazi aggression.²¹¹

Besides repeatedly asserting that all who died in the war were victims, Jünger further relativizes German war guilt by asserting that the Germans were not alone in committing war crimes. While maintaining a detached objectivity in the face of air bombardments, Jünger (like Jörg Friedrich in *Der Brand*) makes no effort to differentiate (or even draw a causal connection) between Nazi atrocities and the destruction of Germany's cities. Everything melds into one giant catastrophe.²¹² Moreover, this objectivity falls away when he describes the atrocities committed by the Russian troops (which he hears about but does not witness). For once, the normally ultra-stoic Jünger notes having difficulty containing himself, something he never mentions with reference to any crime committed by the Nazis.²¹³ He takes such equalization one step further by arguing that Germany did have legitimate claims in the sense that the Treaty of Versailles was fundamentally unjust and that war could have been avoided in 1940 if only the British and French had realized the inherent

²¹¹ Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, pp. 197-202.

²¹² For Jünger's descriptions of the air bombardments, see "Kirchhorster Blätter," August 15, October 2, 15, and 20, and November 3 and 4, 1944.

²¹³ Jünger, "Die Hütte im Weinberg," July 30, 1945, p. 516.

legitimacy of the invasion of Poland.²¹⁴ Such an interpretation allows him to conclude in September of 1944 that “the fatherland is like a poor person whose *righteous* cause has been taken over by a villainous lawyer.”²¹⁵ This places the blame for Germany’s predicament on the Nazi leadership and on the foreign policies of other countries, in the process exonerating the German people of guilt and presenting them as mere victims of circumstance.

Related to this relativization of suffering and guilt were efforts by conservatives throughout the post-war period to limit the odiousness of Nazism (and hence the special guilt of Germany) by comparing it with other forms of totalitarianism. While such comparisons became much more muted during the 1960’s and 70’s, they were at the very center of the *Historikerstreit*.²¹⁶ The obvious target for such a comparison was Russian Bolshevism. After all, the Stalinist terror of the 1930’s had caused if not equal, at least comparable suffering. Jünger was clearly among the important initial propagators of this argument, repeatedly comparing the atrocities committed by both movements²¹⁷ and arguing that they flowed from the same nihilistic, murderous source.²¹⁸ This is particularly spelled out in “Der Friede,” where Jünger, after discussing the red and white terror, eliminates all distinction between Nazism and

²¹⁴ Jünger, “Der Friede,” pp. 222-224. Jünger returns to this argument in *Siebzig Verweht II*, claiming that if Britain had not waged two unnecessary[!] wars with the Germans, they would still have their empire. (January 28, 1979, p. 443).

²¹⁵ Jünger, “Kirchhorster Blätter,” September 18, 1944, p. 316 (my italics).

²¹⁶ See Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, the Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) p. 1.

²¹⁷ See for instance “Kirchhorster Blätter,” February 26, 1945, p. 389.

²¹⁸ Jünger, “Kirchhorster Blätter,” December 19, 1944, p. 359. Typical of his mythical, symbolic approach to history Jünger uses the term ‘Kainitisch’ (which in his use of the term denotes the cold desire for power) to describe both the red banners of the Bolsheviks and the death head groups of Kniébolo.

Communism: “No matter in how many ways one disguises the ideas in whose name heads are taken, the great mass graves are all alike.”²¹⁹ The only reason why there is such a special focus on Nazi atrocities, according to Jünger, is that crimes of the right wing are judged more sharply than those committed by the left.²²⁰ This statement anticipates his later condemnation (discussed below) of the memory of the Holocaust as merely a media tool used to exploit the Germans.

An extension of the comparison between Nazi and Communist crimes formed the basis of what was perhaps the most contentious argument of the *Historikerstreit*, namely the links that Ernst Nolte established between Nazism and Communism.²²¹ There are two basic strands (which do not necessarily complement each other) to his argument. Most contentiously, he claims Nazism was merely an echo and a copy of atrocities first committed by the Bolsheviks, with the Gulag serving as both a *Vorbild* and *Schreckbild*.²²² From this he concludes that, since the threat of Communism was real, Nazism was not lacking in historical legitimacy.²²³ The second strand of his claim is that Nazism and Communism both flowed from the same source. That is, they were both the result of the breakdown of traditional political, philosophical, and social

²¹⁹ Jünger, “Der Friede,” p. 209. Cf. “Der Gordische Knoten,” p. 391, where Jünger, after discussing a variety of symbols (from which the swastika is notably absent), concludes that “regardless of the symbol, the terror remains the same.” p. 391.

²²⁰ Jünger, “Die Hütte im Weinberg,” August 22, 1945, p. 533.

²²¹ See Ernst Nolte, “Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will,” in *Historikerstreit* and “Between Myth and Revision? The Third Reich in the Perspective of the 1980s,” *Aspects of the Third Reich*, ed. H. W. Koch (London, 1985).

²²² Peter Baldwin, “The Historikerstreit in Context,” *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians’ Debate*, ed. Peter Baldwin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990) pp. 4-10.

²²³ Nolte continues to adamantly insist on this in a recently published series of letters between himself and François Furet published as *Fascism and Communism*, trans. Katherine Golsan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2001), pp. 9-11.

frameworks. During the *Historikerstreit* Nolte presented himself as a lone, embattled thinker, and he repeatedly implied that he had been either misunderstood or was the target of a willful defamation campaign in Germany. Neither of his central claims are original, however. During his trip to the Eastern Front, Jünger met an unnamed officer who made the following observation about the origins of Nazism: "Through the slaughter of the Russian middle class after 1917 and the murder of millions in the cellars, the German petite bourgeois were moved in a panicked terror, making themselves terrible. Thus it came from the right what threatened even worse from the left."²²⁴ As subsequent reflections on this issue show, Jünger was clearly convinced by this argument. In "Der Friede" Jünger anticipates the second strand of Nolte's argument. Describing the developments in Russia over the first decades of the twentieth century, he continues by arguing that "the fear that radiated from the East resulted in a practical realization of the nihilism that had prepared itself in Germany over the course of generations."²²⁵ Such arguments appear to have the ultimate goal of making Communism (and by extension the left as a whole) the ultimate source of Nazi crimes, denying the culpability of the 'good' German tradition.

The similarity between the ideas of Jünger and Nolte raises the interesting question of a direct connection. While there is little in the way of overt evidence that Nolte borrowed the idea of a connection between Nazism and Communism (which he clearly considers to be his most significant argument) from Jünger, there is some

²²⁴ Jünger, "Kaukasische Aufzeichnungen," January 1, 1943, p. 496, cf. "Die Hütte im Weinberg," August 22, 1945, p. 532.

²²⁵ Jünger, "Der Friede," p. 234.

circumstantial evidence pointing in this direction. Nolte was a student of Heidegger, whose close acquaintance with Jünger has been well documented.²²⁶ Heidegger even lectured on some of Jünger's works (most significantly "Der Arbeiter") and in the post-war years extensively discussed the question as to whether the existing nihilism could be overcome by using some of Jünger's post-war works as a foil.²²⁷ Besides this (admittedly tenuous) connection, there is an obvious similarity in the approach of Jünger and Nolte to history, as both attempt to understand historical phenomena through their general, timeless characteristics. Nolte, of course, works out the connection between Nazism and Communism to a far greater extent than Jünger. However, considering the above evidence it is quite possible that Jünger was the intellectual father of this idea.

Like virtually all matters connected to the Third Reich, the issue of German resistance against the Nazi regime is at the core of an intense debate that has lost little of its heat after sixty years.²²⁸ Rather than simply praising all forms of open resistance, the initial tendency of West Germans was to emphasize the coup attempt of July 20, 1944, while minimizing the contributions of or even condemning other open resisters (particularly the communists) as opportunists and traitors.²²⁹ There was also a widespread implicit condemnation of those who fled Germany prior to the outbreak of war as equally opportunistic or traitorous.²³⁰ At the same time, there were clear

²²⁶ Neaman discusses the Heidegger-Jünger relationship at length in *A Dubious Past*.

²²⁷ Unlike Jünger, Heidegger did not believe that there was a way out of the existing nihilism.

²²⁸ For a good overview of the debate, see Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, pp. 62-94.

²²⁹ See Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, pp. 255-259.

²³⁰ See Wolfgang Benz, "Warding off the Past: Is this only a Problem for Historians and Moralists?" *Reworking the Past*, pp. 205-206.

efforts to emphasize a type of 'inward' resistance, a conscientious objection to Nazism that did not manifest itself as open 'treasonous' resistance. Jünger's writings at around the end of the war are very representative of such a stance. He explicitly praises the courage of men such as Speidel and Stülpnagel, whom he knew personally and through whom he was aware of the growing power struggle between the Nazis and the *Wehrmacht*.²³¹ However, he harshly condemns those who immediately after the war claimed to have resisted: "When the colossus lies on the ground, a fly swarm begins to surround his corpse; all come and praise themselves for how they contributed to his fall."²³² Jünger repeats this analogy in *Siebzig Verweht*, where he claims he had a dream in which he saw a fallen colossus surrounded by the great animals, and their satellites, the hyena, the fox, the lynx, and the wolf. As the pieces were divided, worms and maggots crept out from the inside, covering it so thickly that its form was maintained.²³³ While condemning such 'traitors,' Jünger also made an effort to present himself as an 'inward' resister, repeatedly emphasizing the importance of his peace manuscript while implying that he took a more noble route by staying in Germany rather than opportunistically fleeing to another country where he would undoubtedly have been more successful.²³⁴

²³¹ For a brief discussion of Jünger's assessment of the plot, see the "Vorwort" in *Werke, Band 2*, p. 18. Further references to this event are made in "Das Zweite Pariser Tagebuch" and throughout the *Siebzig Verweht* volumes.

²³² Jünger, "Die Hütte im Weinberg," September 1, 1945, pp. 543-44.

²³³ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht I*, May 23, 1966, p. 248.

²³⁴ "Die Hütte im Weinberg," June 30, 1945, p. 502. Jünger was later clearly disappointed with the lack of impact of "Der Friede." See the "Vorwort" in *Werke, Band II*, where he argues that he loved the work because of its lack of reception in the way one especially cares for a child that faces extra challenges.

As Jünger's hopes for a conservative revival after the war were increasingly dashed by the political and cultural development of West Germany, his reflections on the importance and implications of the war underwent an important shift. Rather than continuing to overtly comment on and create hopeful apologetics for the Nazi past, he utilized his novels in an increasingly sophisticated attempt to present World War II as a dark, obscure, yet burdensome time period that (as discussed in Chapter 3) separates modern existence from a glorious, meaningful past. Jünger is increasingly clear in implying that the memory of this era must be overcome. At the same time, he continues to lace these works with various other revisionist ideas, the most important of which are highlighted below. The diaries written during this period (1965-1980) contain more overt reflections on the legacy of Nazism, but now focus almost solely on challenging the thesis of collective guilt and arguing for a renewed nationalist self-confidence. Since Jünger's diaries form a backdrop against which his novels can be evaluated, they are a useful starting point from which to begin our discussion of his views during this era.

An argument frequently heard from nationalists and revisionists during the 1980's and 90's was that Germany had to be unburdened from its guilty past in order to once again become a self-confident nation, that is, a nation that could act in a politically self-interested way rather than serving as a pawn of foreign powers.²³⁵ The obvious extension of this idea was that those who insisted on such a remembrance were merely out to keep Germany down. Jünger clearly anticipated such a link

²³⁵ Baldwin, "The *Historikerstreit* in Context," *Reworking the Past*, p. 10.

between war guilt and political advantage. Already in “Der Hütte im Weinberg” he embraces the idea of war guilt being tantamount to moral blackmail and warns of its consequence:

The thesis of collective guilt has two strands that run along beside each other. For the defeated it means: I have to step in for my brother and his guilt. For the victor it gives the practical prelude for undifferentiated plunder. If the bow is overdrawn, the dangerous question can arise whether the brother really was so wrong.²³⁶

The post-war developments convinced Jünger that the question of war guilt had become merely a political propaganda tool. In *Siebzig Verweht I* he claims; “For the victor morality has become a monopolized weapon.”²³⁷ Visiting Japan, he bemoans the ‘moralistic kowtow,’ which has helped erase virtually all sense of tradition and proper ethical obligation and turned the Japanese into a political pawn of the great powers—a comment clearly aimed to include the German situation as well.²³⁸ Attacking President’s Eisenhower’s ‘guarantee’ of German loyalty, he argues that two contradictory ‘fictions’ are interchangeably used for foreign political advantage: one, that the Germans are fully responsible for the misdeeds of their government, and two, that this government was implemented against the democratic will of the people.²³⁹ Anticipating the concerns raised by conservatives in the 1980’s and 90’s, such arguments are clearly aimed at delegitimizing the entire notion of German war guilt

²³⁶ Jünger, “Die Hütte im Weinberg,” August 20, 1945, p. 528.

²³⁷ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht I*, September 24, 1965, p. 206.

²³⁸ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht I*, August 3-12, 1965, p. 111.

²³⁹ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht I*, January 17, 1966, p. 241. Eisenhower made this guarantee in 1953 when (in light of the Korean War) he wanted to convince Congress that re-arming West Germany was not a dangerous move.

by implying that it is simply used for cynical political advantage rather than being driven by a genuine moral concern.

If as Jünger implies the German people are not specifically guilty of the war then the undeniably tremendous suffering they experienced over the course of the war and immediate post-war years makes them victims rather than perpetrators. The question of German victimhood is very problematic. On the one hand, there is no doubt that a very large number of essentially innocent Germans suffered as a result of the war. However, a one-sided emphasis on this suffering can not only lead to a neglect of the suffering of others, but also helps cover up the fact that Hitler was supported by a large portion of the German people, that the German *Wehrmacht* launched a war of aggression that resulted in untold suffering, and that the Holocaust, while aided by anti-Semitic sentiment throughout Europe, was ultimately planned and perpetrated primarily by Germans.

The Holocaust is undoubtedly among the blackest pages of twentieth century history. The willful attempt to wipe out the Jewish people, simply on the basis of a completely irrational obsession with the danger they supposedly posed to the Aryan 'race,' remains one of the least explicable and most despicable of the great crimes against humanity. In spite of the fundamental difference between this crime and whatever suffering the Germans experienced during the war, Jünger repeatedly attempts to draw parallels between the fate of the Jews and the Germans. By implying that the Germans are the 'new' victims of the Holocaust, any distinctly German culpability for the crimes committed against the Jews is wiped out.

Jünger is very explicit about establishing a 'co-victim-hood.' Even before the final collapse of the Reich he drew direct comparisons between the former situation of the Jews in Germany and the current situation of Germans.²⁴⁰ While clearly shaken by the suffering of the Jews (particularly when an eleven-year-old Jewish refugee stays in his house immediately after the war), he maintains this comparison: "Like anti-Semitism, anti-Germanism seems to belong to the prevailing mood of the world, it requires no grounds."²⁴¹ The implication of such arguments is made clear in *Siebzig Verweht*, where he claims to now understand what the Jews must feel like, still being blamed for what happened 2,000 years ago.²⁴² Moreover, he claims that the Germans have replaced the Jews as beasts of burden that can be loaded with all manner of accusation and opprobrium according to wish.²⁴³ In other words, Jünger implies that 'imposing' any sense of collective responsibility on the German people for the Holocaust is akin to the senseless persecution of the Jews that led up to it!

Jünger was not alone in making these comparisons. As Robert Moeller demonstrates in his excellent work *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany*, many Germans in the immediate post-war years sought to find a moral equivalence between the suffering of the Jews and the Germans.²⁴⁴ While this comparison came under intense fire during the 1960's and 70's, it continued to be present in more muted ways in conservative circles. With the

²⁴⁰ Jünger, "Kirchhorster Blätter," March 28, 1945, p. 404.

²⁴¹ Jünger, "Die Hütte im Weinberg," November 20, 1945, p. 603.

²⁴² Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht II*, January 21, 1977, p. 297.

²⁴³ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht II*, June 9, 1975, p. 240.

²⁴⁴ Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) pp. 5 and 32.

conservative *Wende* in the 1980's, the idea was once again revived, touching off the *Historikerstreit*. Jürgen Habermas, a prominent left-wing intellectual, argued that Andreas Hillgruber's *Zweierlei Untergang* (a combination of two essays, one on the destruction of the Jews, and another on the desperate struggle of the German *Wehrmacht* against the Red Army) embodied such an equalization of Jewish and German suffering.²⁴⁵ In spite of the general opprobrium that the German press heaped on this idea in the 1980's, Ernst Nolte has continued to make similar connections, equalizing anti-Germanism and anti-Semitism while claiming that those who see Nazism as a specifically German phenomenon are just as blind as those who saw Communism and Socialism as a specifically Jewish phenomenon.²⁴⁶ It once again made headlines when in a controversial speech made in 1998 the well-known novelist Martin Walser implied that the Jewish victims of the Holocaust were replaced by German victims, in the sense that the latter were now incessantly attacked by its horrible memory in a concerted effort to keep Germans down.²⁴⁷ Debates in the state legislature of Saxony in January of 2005 demonstrate how this idea continues to be at the center of controversies to this day. Erich Iltgen, the Speaker of the House, suggested a motion concerning the remembrance of the Dresden bombing that likened German suffering to Jewish suffering, which, according to James Skidmore, is the "latest milestone in a re-evaluation of collective German guilt."²⁴⁸ While such

²⁴⁵ For one of many discussions of how this controversy evolved, see Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow*, pp. 47-54.

²⁴⁶ Nolte and Furet, *Communism and Fascism*, pp. 29 and 45.

²⁴⁷ Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, pp. 181-183.

²⁴⁸ James H. Skidmore, *The Globe and Mail*, February 12, 2005, A17. (Skidmore is a professor of German studies at the University of Waterloo).

ideas may be new to parliamentary debates, Jünger expressed and helped disseminate them sixty years ago.

Linked to the above, the last important development of Jünger's post-war thought on the legacy of Nazism is his argument that the worst atrocities should not be recorded. This is clearly expressed in *Siebzig Verweht I* where he makes the following plea:

The most unfavorable things that happen to us or even have only been witnessed by us are better kept quiet—not out of consideration for the criminal, but for the species. Every historian knows the attendant circumstances of the great acts that had better not been documented, that one would never, ever, want to observe. In our time the feeling for the unfavorable seems to be growing; there is an excess of documentation, especially through photographs.²⁴⁹

A similar desire is expressed three years later in *Siebzig Verweht II*.²⁵⁰ Such pleas against excessive documentation of gruesome acts made in the context of post-war Germany by someone who clearly is concerned with creating a more 'usable' past must be understood with reference to the Holocaust. This argument was also present in Walser's controversial speech, as he claimed that he often turned away from "the permanent representation of our disgrace" and criticized those intellectuals who by continually emphasizing shame want to "hurt us."²⁵¹

While Jünger's post-war diaries are fairly explicit concerning his interpretation of the recent past, his novels, at first glance, appear devoid of any serious reflection on the war. Instead, Jünger appears to increasingly ignore the Nazi legacy in these

²⁴⁹ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht I*, June 28, 1968, pp. 493-494.

²⁵⁰ See *Siebzig Verweht II*, April 29, 1971, p. 19.

²⁵¹ Müller, *Another Country*, p. 246.

works, only making occasional, oblique comments on it. Yet a close reading of these works reveals that they are interwoven with sophisticated revisionist arguments and reflections on German history. The first major post-war novel, *Heliopolis*, is of particular interest in that Jünger devotes considerable attention to the Holocaust in it. He does this by introducing the *Parsées*, an ethnic group of wealthy, highly cultured people who are the target of growing racial hatred, which explodes into destruction and murder when a leading diplomat is assassinated.²⁵² While this seems to indicate that Jünger wants to come to terms with the past, he in fact interprets the event in classical conservative fashion, blaming the uncontrollable masses for these excesses. His only other mention of the war is a discussion of a retreat in the face of Mongols (a thinly veiled reference to the Russians) who committed the most terrible atrocities, a claim that, as argued above, was clearly aimed at eliminating any notion of specific German guilt.²⁵³ At the same time, the book's ultimate thesis is that only a mix of classical conservatism (embodied in De Geer, who is the ideal disciplined Prussian-type officer) and brave futurism (embodied in Phares) can overcome the existing nihilism. Such an argument is particularly problematic in light of Jünger's interwar proto-fascist writings and marks an important continuity between his interwar and initial post-war work. This 'heroic' remedy for nihilism does not, however, reappear in his later works.

²⁵² In *Details of Time*, Jünger affirms that the *Parsées* represented the Jews. The events surrounding this assassination are described in *Heliopolis*, pp. 229-231.

²⁵³ Jünger, *Heliopolis*, p. 170.

After *Heliopolis* Jünger's novels appear to make even fewer references to the war; however, the hidden revisionist theses remain. While the war is never explicitly dealt with in *The Glass Bees*, it hovers as an obscure, yet *threatening* memory:

A glimmer of our carefree youth came back in a flash... how the world had changed since then! I sometimes thought that this sentiment had something to do with getting older. Each generation, after all, looks back on the good old days. But in our case it was something quite different, something horribly different.²⁵⁴

This reference is only clarified somewhat at the end of the novel, where the protagonist recounts that during the 'Asturian affair' he "passed a butcher shop in which the corpses of monks hung from meat hooks with a sign *hoy motado* meaning freshly killed."²⁵⁵ While this description at first sight seems to succinctly encapsulate the general horror of modern warfare, its reference to atrocities allegedly committed by Communists during the Spanish Civil War once again illustrates how Jünger preferred to highlight the crimes of the left.²⁵⁶ Moreover, the whole legacy of the war is clearly shown as being burdensome to the protagonist, as there is no place for his conservative ideals in the post-war world. With reference to his military past he complains that "the word 'honor' belongs to those terms that have become thoroughly suspect."²⁵⁷ This is clearly meant as a stab at those who argued that the *Wehrmacht* could not be considered as an honorable institution anymore.²⁵⁸ Jünger

²⁵⁴ Jünger, *The Glass Bees*, p. 22.

²⁵⁵ Jünger, *The Glass Bees*, p. 131.

²⁵⁶ Jünger tended to meld the wars of the twentieth century into one 'world civil war,' see for instance "Kaukasische Aufzeichnungen," November 10, 1943, p. 433. Hence he could add themes from the Spanish Civil War while still referring more generally to World War II.

²⁵⁷ Jünger, *The Glass Bees*, p. 20.

²⁵⁸ See "Die Hütte im Weinberg," August 22, 1945, p. 531 where Jünger expressly attacks the notion that the *Wehrmacht* was anything but honorable.

also aims a thinly veiled stab at the West German Republic's treatment of veterans when his protagonist claims that "the paradox remained: in the dossiers of the state the fact that I had risked my neck for it was simultaneously listed forever as treason,"²⁵⁹ an issue that Jünger continued to gripe about in his diaries until he was given the honour of representing Germany in the Verdun Remembrance Day ceremonies in both 1979 and 1984.²⁶⁰

In the futuristic *Eumeswil*, the Nazi era is treated in a somewhat different manner. Although portrayed as marking a definitive break between a worthy past and a subsequently nihilistic era, its details are described as historically insignificant. While, as we have seen in chapter 2, considerable space is devoted to the nineteenth century, Hitler and the Second World War are (at least overtly) reduced to the following, semi-cryptic description:

A large-scale demagogue, who turned up when the planet Pluto was discovered, dabbled in painting just as Nero did in singing. He persecuted painters whose works he did not like. He dabbled in other areas too—for instance, as a strategist who doomed many people, but was technically perfect; as a chauffeur in all directions, who eventually had himself cremated with the help of gasoline. His outlines melt into insignificance; the torrent of numbers wipes them out. The pickings are slim for both the historian and the anarchist. Red monotony, even in the atrocities.²⁶¹

If Hitler and Nazism are historically insignificant then the 'obsession' with the Nazi past in Germany that helps undermine the legitimacy of nationalist and conservative

²⁵⁹ Jünger, *The Glass Bees*, p. 20. That this was in fact a criticism of the treatment of German war veterans is borne out by repeated complaints about this matter in *Siebzig Verweht II*. See for instance the entry on June 24, 1979, p. 488, where Jünger argues that the French, unlike the Germans, know how to treat their veterans.

²⁶⁰ In light of the generous pensions provided to German war veterans or their widows, Jünger's concern clearly has to do more with a perceived lack of respect than with material compensation.

²⁶¹ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 187.

values is senseless and can only be explained as resulting from a lack of historical vision or political opportunism. Jünger also implicitly attacks those who presented themselves as resisters to Nazism. The post-war era is described as “a period of decline, when it was considered glorious to have destroyed one’s own nation” while those who claimed to have suffered for an idea in most cases “tried to save their hides just as everybody else.”²⁶²

Thus, World War II plays almost no overt role in *Eumeswil*. However, it (and its aftermath) is undeniably present at a more subtle level. This is especially captured in the four pages Jünger devotes to describing Manuel’s conception and early life, which in fact is a veiled stab at the process by which Germany was created. He was the illegitimate offspring of a liberal father (America) and cultured mother (Germany). Conceived in a map-room (the Teheran conference) his father tries to kill him off in an unspecified but sinister manner prior to his birth (the bombing and invasion of Germany). Shortly after Manuel’s birth, his mother dies (which points to the destruction of the old Germany). This heralds a very difficult time period for Manuel:

I regarded her death as a second birth, an expulsion into a brighter, colder foreign land—this time consciously. The world was transformed by her death... In the house, in the garden, I sought out the nooks. I often huddled on a stairway leading to the attic, a dark oubliette. I was unable to weep; there was a choking that closed up my throat.²⁶³

This discussion of profound sorrow that cannot be expressed (very uncharacteristic of Jünger’s writing as a whole) clearly refers to Jünger’s personal interpretation of defeat

²⁶² Jünger, *Eumeswil*, pp. 84 and 113.

²⁶³ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, p. 54.

at the end of World War II, further demonstrating how his postwar work continued to be informed by this experience.

Eumeswil marks a definitive low point in Jünger's prognosis concerning the contemporary world. It was written at a time when his reputation was decidedly on the wane and it seemed as if he would quietly fade into oblivion. By the time this work was published, he was already eighty-two years old, and it seemed unlikely that he would write another significant work. However, things turned out differently than expected. Over the course of the next two decades, *Eumeswil* received wide critical acclaim, Jünger represented Germany twice at the Remembrance Day Ceremonies in Verdun, was awarded the Goethe Prize for Literature, wrote several more significant works, and had an anthology of essays dedicated to him. Although Neaman covers most of the major political and cultural aspects of this last stage in Jünger's career,²⁶⁴ he does not devote much attention to the works Jünger actually produced during this time period. The only evidence he provides supporting the notion that Jünger actively sought to participate in the conservative revival project are two small donations Jünger made to a right-wing group in the early 1990's.²⁶⁵ However, the three works that Jünger produced during this time period—*Aladdin's Problem*, *Autor und Autorschaft*, and *Details of Time* along with his diaries *Siebzig Verweht III – V*—not only encapsulate further arguments that would cause widespread debate in the 1990's but also reveal a veiled, yet significant effort on Jünger's part to once again bring

²⁶⁴ See Neaman, *A Dubious Past*, pp. 240-267 and "Warrior or Esthete? Reflections on the Jünger Reception in France and Germany," *New German Critique*, 59 (1993): 118-150.

²⁶⁵ Neaman, *A Dubious Past*, p. 267.

nationalist issues to the foreground and, in the case of *Details of Time* and the diaries, to present himself as the ideal, respectable conservative nationalist.

At a subtle level, *Aladdin's Problem* is among the most nationalistic of Jünger's post-war novels. As in *Eumeswil*, Jünger uses Friedrich Baroh's personal and family history to comment on German history as a whole. Baroh's family is described as being full of distinguished achievements in war and peace, in army and government, and in science and scholarship. More tellingly, they used to own land in Silesia. Today, this proud past is completely obscured. "Wars and revolutions, liquidations and expulsions separate us from that time."²⁶⁶ Friedrich can only find solace by searching through this history, which notably ends in 1888. Thus the war years are left more or less obscure. However, the few things that are mentioned concerning this era are clearly significant. Friedrich's father disappeared on the Eastern Front (leaving an important lacuna in his link to the past), while the invading Russians murdered his beautiful aunt. Only his ugly, archetypal bourgeois aunt survives the war and increasingly prospers. The loss of Friedrich's father is representative of the more general break with the past that characterized World War II. Russian atrocities and the destruction of the 'pure' German spirit are summed up in the death of the beautiful, unmarried aunt, while the survival of the ugly aunt reflects Jünger's judgment that only the baser aspects of German culture survived the war. At the same time, the general situation is not altogether hopeless. While the world appears nihilistic, Friedrich repeatedly emphasizes that there is a widespread yearning for

²⁶⁶ Jünger, *Aladdin's Problem*, p. 15.

meaning hidden just below the surface of everyday life. This marks a significant departure from his previous works, in which no mention is made about such a concern beyond the immediate protagonist. Although there is of course no direct proof, it is very plausible that this more positive stance was the result of the more general revival of the nationalist right wing during this time period. The tantalizing, esoteric hints about the possibility for a renewal must, I believe, also be understood in this vein. Although none of these shifts and hints are particularly obvious, they do provide evidence that Jünger welcomed the turn to the right in the 1980's and subtly adapted his work in response to these changes.

Jünger was repeatedly attacked for not having been politically opposed to Nazism, a charge to which he responded by claiming that his opponents were blaming the seismograph for the earthquake.²⁶⁷ Although works such as "Der Friede" seemed to signal a more involved political stance, the failure of its reception caused him to draw back altogether from any political venture. Throughout the post-war years, he refused to lend his name to any political movement, and refused to become involved in any public debate as well, even though, as in the case of the *Historikerstreit*, he was among the first to propound the issues that ultimately led to the debates. In 1987 Jünger published *Autor und Autorschaft*. This work is essentially devoted to outlining his ideal of the apolitical author, while castigating his critics for not following this ideal: "Most of the current reviews do not belong to the realm of art

²⁶⁷ See "Vorwort" in *Werke, Band 2*.

but in that of politics.”²⁶⁸ Moreover, he claims, “the Inquisition is also secularized. As it once sought the confessional, it now seeks out the political deviation.”²⁶⁹ Although this work did not make any significant waves, the central argument was clearly relevant to a growing debate during this time period about the role of the author, a debate that came to a head in the early 1990’s, when Botho Strauß published his essay “Anschwellender Bockgesang” which clearly denounced the previously generally accepted ideal of the intellectual as moral arbiter. Martin Walser joined Strauß by emphasizing the need to de-politicize literature, which would allow for the rehabilitation of conservative, ‘German’ values, and, ultimately, a revival of nationalism.²⁷⁰ The late 1980’s and the 1990’s also witnessed a revival in the use of first-person narrative and diaries (literary methods used by Jünger throughout his career) as a means to achieve this apolitical ideal.²⁷¹ *Autor und Autorschaft* was very timely in this regard as well, as it expressly emphasized the capability of the diary genre to capture objective, apolitical experiences.²⁷² The fact that Jünger published it just as such debates were on the rise represents a clear effort on his part to respond and tap into the rising conservative tide during this period.

While almost totally mum on the topic of resistance in his earlier diaries, *Siebzig Verweht III – V* capture a major change, as Jünger suddenly begins stressing

²⁶⁸ Jünger, *Autor und Autorschaft*, p. 86.

²⁶⁹ Jünger, *Autor und Autorschaft*, p. 31.

²⁷⁰ Bill Niven, “Literary Portrayals of National Socialism” in *German Culture and the Uncomfortable Past*, ed. Helmut Schmitz, pp. 12-13. Strauß essay was printed in *Der Spiegel*, 8.2.1993, pp. 202-207. On Walser’s apolitical stance, see Müller, *Another Country*, pp. 156-160.

²⁷¹ Niven, “Literary Portrayals of National Socialism,” p. 15.

²⁷² Jünger, *Autor und Autorschaft*, p. 73.

his opposition to Nazism and his own involvement in the resistance. After World War II, he had obstinately refused to have his work, *On the Marble Cliffs*, interpreted as being anti-Nazi; now he suddenly felt the need to describe his honorable conduct during the war years. In *Siebzig Verweht III* he attacks his critics as “Beckmessern” who, unlike Jünger, did not risk their neck in World War II but now take liberty to attack him.²⁷³ Dripping with sarcasm, he claims that “the resistance against Hitler is increasing every day,” comparing such after-the-fact ‘resistance’ with the ‘real’ resistance he himself engaged in.²⁷⁴ In perhaps his strongest and most apologetic self-defense, he explains at length how during the war he was a nationalist, not a national-socialist.²⁷⁵ Reacting against the standard interpretation that he led the life of a dandy in Paris, he stresses the danger he was in, rather melodramatically claiming that he was in greater danger in the Second World War than he had been while fighting in the trenches during the First World War.²⁷⁶ Jünger also repeatedly insists on the chivalrousness of his own conduct, claiming among other things that “I always tried to help out to the extent that I could, but there are many things I haven’t mentioned, I don’t want to flaunt my good actions.”²⁷⁷ This attempt to place himself in a positive light developed in step with more widespread efforts to reconstruct a respectable nationalism around the old warrior. New Right essay anthologies such as *Das Echo*

²⁷³ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht III*, February 1, 1983, p. 239. Cf. April 8, 1981, p. 62. “Beckmessern” literally means “mouth-knives.”

²⁷⁴ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht III*, December 1, 1984, p. 466.

²⁷⁵ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht III*, October 22, 1985 pp. 557-558.

²⁷⁶ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht III*, November 12, 1985, p. 566.

²⁷⁷ Jünger, *Details of Time*, p. 22.

der Bilder: Ernst Jünger zu Ehren celebrated his soldierly values,²⁷⁸ while Karl Heinz Bohrer (who was a key figure in the unification debates) expanded his efforts to reestablish the 'irrational' tradition of German thought via Jünger.²⁷⁹ Jünger's attempt to polish up his own nationalist image just as such efforts were underway was more than mere coincidence and provides real evidence that, in spite of his avowed apolitical stance, he actively contributed to conservative nationalist politics in the 1980's and 90's.

Besides such efforts to place himself in a more positive light, Jünger also became increasingly brazen in expressing problematic revisionist ideas in his last works. In *Siebzig Verweht V* he notes that he is occupied and saddened every night with the following notion: "The crime against Europe is the English-German duel—the civil war of the Nordic and Germanic people favors the Slavs. Hitler is, in this way, just as guilty as Churchill."²⁸⁰ Upon receiving the Robert-Schuman Prize for Literature, he made a speech where he not only argued that since the soldiers on the Eastern Front were fighting for their very survival they could not have been expected to rise up against Hitler, but also claims that if this would have happened, we today would have a Soviet Europe.²⁸¹ In other words, the *Wehrmacht* was fighting to protect European culture and civilization from 'Asian barbarism.' Such an interpretation (which is also present in the work of Hillgruber) echoes the propaganda of Goebbels,

²⁷⁸ Helmo Schwilk, ed., *Das Echo der Bilder: Ernst Jünger zu Ehren* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990)

²⁷⁹ Müller, *Another Country*, p. 197

²⁸⁰ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht V*, August 23, 1992, p. 79.

²⁸¹ Jünger, *Siebzig Verweht V*, March 23, 1993, p. 114.

completely ignores the well-documented atrocities committed by the *Wehrmacht* on the Eastern Front, and demonstrates the extent that Jünger was ultimately willing to go in his apologetic interpretation of Germany's problematic past.

This chapter has demonstrated how Jünger's post-war works form a storehouse of revisionist interpretations of World War II. While maintaining an a-political stance and refusing to publicly defend his ideas, he was clearly an important originator and disseminator of ideas that aroused considerable controversy in the post-war years. These debates are by no means over, and continue to take surprising shifts. For instance, while the notion of German victimization was traditionally right-wing territory, the bombings of Kosovo and Baghdad led the left wing to adopt memories of the air war for its own pacifist purposes.²⁸² As these debates continue to shift and develop, commentators will (as they have in the past) likely continue to claim that new milestones in the evaluation of collective guilt have been reached. However, it is more than likely that whatever arguments are raised, they will already have been present in the work of the much praised and much maligned 'sage of Wilfingen.'

²⁸² See Mary Nolan, "Air Wars, Memory Wars," *Central European History*. 38 (2005): 25-26.

CONCLUSION

The 60th anniversary of the end of World War II has shown that this event has lost little of its interest. Once again thousands of war veterans have traveled from Canada and the United States to be part of remembrance celebrations. For many, it will be the last time. The vast majority of those who consciously participated in the war have passed away already. The breaking of this link to the past will undoubtedly affect further evaluations of Germany's problematic history. In the past years, the focus has increasingly shifted from tracing out the roots of Nazism to exploring the legacy of this movement. It is likely that the works of Jünger will be re-evaluated in the process and the focus will hopefully shift away from simply linking his ideas and ideals to the rise of Nazism. While there can be little doubt that he helped undermine the Weimar Regime, it is tiresome to read account after account about the 'rabid warrior' or the 'war-glorifying' Jünger. By examining his entire oeuvre, it will become increasingly clear that the emphasis on only a small portion of Jünger's writings is necessarily distorting. In the process, it will likely become more generally accepted that his thought provides important and challenging insights into the troubled twentieth century as a whole.

Simply dismissing Jünger's *Weltanschauung* as the pipedreams of a reactionary does not do justice to his often profound insights into the problems created by

modernity. His criticism of technology as an alienating, culture-destroying force is insightful and convincing, while his prognosis of its future, although not as convincing, demonstrates Jünger's imaginative powers and shows that he is not simply an 'anti-modern.' His critique of mass society may strike us as elitist; however, in light of globalization there is truth in his claim that the world is becoming an increasingly monochrome place. The repeated emphasis on the problems of and possible solutions to the nihilism of the modern world is especially important and deserves a scholarly study in its own right. Jünger's argument that the rationalist, Enlightenment spirit is the root cause of this nihilism anticipates and reflects widespread debate on both the right and the left concerning the problems created by modern science. Moreover, his claim that the destruction of old ties creates a vacuum that can be exploited in a variety of more or less nefarious ways has been borne out time and again, one important example being the extremely rapid Westernization which almost invariably results when cultures are disrupted.

The value of Jünger's approach to history itself is more difficult to judge. In specific instances he makes admirable efforts to tie a view of the past into philosophy. In *Eumeswil*, for example, his reflection on the continual, inexorable march of time leads to an eloquent and moving exploration of basic questions of sense and purpose:

When we look back, our eyes alight on graves and ruins, on a field of rubble. We are then inveighed by a mirage of time: while believing that we are advancing and progressing, we are actually moving toward that past. Soon we will belong to it: time passes over us. And this sorrow overshadows the historian. As a researcher, he is nothing more than a burrower in parchments and graves; but then he asks the fateful question, with the skull in his palm.²⁸³

²⁸³ Jünger, *Eumeswil*, pp. 20-21.

More generally however, Jünger's approach lacks originality, coherence, and rigor. His arguments in favor of a mythical approach to the past do not progress beyond similar claims made by Vico, Nietzsche, and Spengler. Attempting to understand developments in terms of their mythical antecedents results in the obscuring of causality and agency, hampering attempts to achieve a real grasp of why events occur. In light of this, it is unlikely that Jünger's philosophy of history as a whole will ever be subject to an appreciative evaluation.

At a more specific level, Jünger's writings raise important questions about the politics of history and memory. It is clear that his efforts to trace the development and rise of Nazism to the destruction of old ties through Enlightenment reason, the foreign policies of other countries, the threat of Communism, and Germany's unfortunate strategic predicament is aimed at ultimately exonerating the German people and tradition of any particular sense of guilt. The obvious political aim of such an interpretation is to restore the legitimacy of conservative, authoritarian politics. However, tracing the roots of World War II and the Holocaust to this authoritarian tradition, or to capitalism, or to the anti-Semitism inherent in Christianity clearly has political implications of its own. Tarring anything with the brush of fascism is a powerful way of undermining its legitimacy. This makes the temptation to interpret the Third Reich in a way that suits political purposes especially powerful. Of course, this does not mean that fascism is not to be the subject of historical inquiry. In light of the immense suffering it caused, its roots must be laid bare to the greatest extent

possible, in order to prevent it from ever rising again. However, when dealing with this topic historians must be especially careful to avoid falling into the rut of following the interpretation most suitable to their own political convictions. While true objectivity may remain an unattainable goal, historians must continue to strive for it, constantly questioning and re-examining the premises on which their arguments and interpretations are based.

None of the changes and developments in Jünger's career were more surprising than his astounding comeback in the 1980's. Apparently passé in the early 70's already (again, we must remember that he turned eighty in 1975) he lived another two decades, in the process witnessing and actively participating in efforts to canonize him as a writer and thinker. Reflections on the Nazi past that remained at the fringes of society when he initially published them in works that never enjoyed wide circulation suddenly became mainstream when others, following in his footsteps, insisted on their legitimacy in more public ways. New political realities and the growing conviction that the German people had to come to terms with their past in order to once again take their place among the nations of the world were at the roots of this change. None of the central *ideas* of the revisionists were new; they were waiting beneath the surface of the public sphere. That they suddenly erupted into this sphere is illustrative of how interpretations and memory can lie essentially dormant in the private sphere for long periods of time, waiting for the dominant political discourse and situation to shift in their favor. In other words, memory in the public sphere (which tends to be dominated by one or two interpretations) often does not

accurately reflect the variegated memory of the private sphere. As Alf Lüdtke argues, “Public attention to ways of coping with the Nazi past in Germany tend to focus on gestures or speeches by representatives of the state and society. However, this view from above’ ascribes nothing but a passive role to the audiences of such representational politics.”²⁸⁴ The recent debate about whether Germans were victims of the war is illustrative of this tension between appearances and reality. While according to the dominant discourse the Germans were supposed to consider themselves guilty of the crimes their nation committed, in reality what most remembered (and Jünger’s diaries give a classic insight into this) was their own suffering and the destruction of their country by the invading Russians and the allied air bombardments. Works such as *Der Brand* did not create this debate; they only helped bring to the surface of public discourse what was long felt in the private sphere.

It is not easy to come to a final judgment of Ernst Jünger. On the one hand, there can be no doubt that he was a brilliant writer and an insightful thinker, immensely curious about the world around him, and probably one of the best-read people of the past century. Moreover, one cannot help but admire his independence—anyone that continues to travel the world and produces high-quality literature in their nineties deserves a measure of respect. However, one should not overlook his flaws. Predominant among these was the inability (or unwillingness) to

²⁸⁴ “‘Coming to Terms with the Past’: Illusions of Remembering, Ways of Forgetting Nazism in West Germany,” *Journal of Modern History*, 65 (September 1993): 542.

accept that the Germans bore any specific responsibility for the atrocities of World War II. Although he was already aware of the basic parameters of the Holocaust in 1943, he continued to insist upon the 'righteous' cause of the Germans. What is more, he never accepted any responsibility for his own role in the rise of Nazism. While his personal conduct during the Third Reich was irreproachable, his vicious attacks on the Weimar Republic and his praise of National Socialism in the 1920's make him one of the gravediggers of interwar German democracy, something for which he never even attempted to atone. That being said, one cannot accuse him of political opportunism either. If anything, Jünger was stubbornly true to himself, rejecting the atonement for German guilt as 'moralistic kowtow,' just as he had rejected the siren call of Nazism that successfully lured his close associates, Carl Schmitt and Martin Heidegger. Thus the resolutely individualistic stance of Jünger was ultimately key to the best and the most problematic aspects of his character and ideas.

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