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Apr 5th, 5:30 PM - 6:30 PM

Mythos und Symbol: Ernst Jünger in der „Konservativen Revolution“

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Digging Beneath the Rubble: Ernst Jünger's *Kriegsmythos*

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Submitted to the Department of German
and Romance Languages and Literatures
of the Johns Hopkins University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for Honors
in German

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April 23rd, 2013

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I. Introduction

“Knorpel aus rötlich-schwarzem Fleisch [glänzend],“¹ “der Verwesungsgeruch,”² and “Fleisch als rotbraune Gelatine von den Knochen [fließend]”³ mark the battlefield of Ernst Jünger, the front soldier, novelist, and political philosopher. After leaving his German bourgeois family at the age of seventeen and joining the military two years later, Jünger’s time in the First World War, as described in his war journals, essays, and novellas, shaped his worldview and political orientation, alongside the other writers of the “Generation of 1914.” He was a part of a broader political philosophical movement in Weimar Republic Germany known as the *Konservative Revolution*. The ideologues of this loose movement varied in their prescriptions for the future of their troubled nation, but had several important characteristics in common which defined their movement.

First, these “conservative revolutionaries” shared a common desire to see the end of parliamentary politics in the Weimar Republic, but dismissed the idea of returning to the traditional political structure of pre-war Wilhelmine Germany. (It is from these juxtaposing beliefs that they receive their seemingly paradoxical name, “conservative revolution”). Second, the Conservative Revolutionaries were in most cases former soldiers or military officers, who sought to model the post-war society in one way, shape, or form after the militaristic hierarchy they experienced on the front. In many cases, this new model for society was described as a new form of “German socialism” or “socialism of the blood”.⁴ Far from being an isolated, esoteric

¹ Jünger, Ernst. *In Stahlgewittern*. 3rd ed. Berlin: E.S Mittler & Sohn, 1922. *Projekt Gutenberg*.11

² *ibid.* 58

³ Jünger, Ernst. *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis*. 4th ed. Berlin: Verlag E.S. Mittler U. Sohn, 1943. p. 15

⁴ Woods, Roger. *The Conservative Revolution in the Weimar Republic*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, 1996. 2

intellectual movement, the Conservative Revolution succeeded in spreading its ideas broadly among the middle classes, as well as the intellectual elites with anti-democratic sympathies.⁵ Indeed, many works of these ideologues were bestsellers in the tumultuous Weimar Republic 1920s and 30s.

Unsurprisingly given the militaristic orientation of the Conservative Revolutionaries, Jünger propagated his political philosophy through his descriptions of war and how he values the experience. Rather than limiting his writing to political essays, however, such as those featured in the periodical of the right-wing paramilitary organization, *Stahlhelm*, Jünger used literature—memoirs in particular—to circulate his radical ideology. Several of his works, including the war memoir, *In Stahlgewittern* became bestsellers, securing the place of Jünger as an influential public intellectual of the Weimar Republic.

The goal of this literary analysis is to dissect the myths and symbols that Jünger employs in his works, and to place them in the context of his political philosophy. Identifying and unpacking these fictive elements of Jünger’s writing is critical for two main reasons. Firstly, this is important given the nature of his intended audience. Since Jünger sought to disseminate his ideology widely, rather than limiting the scope of influence to an elite circle of intellectuals, imagery and storytelling could play an even more significant role in the impact of his writing. Viscerally attractive or horrifying images, and compelling or pleasing narratives can appeal to emotion of a mass audience, helping to root Jünger’s worldview in psyche of his readers.

Second, Jünger’s use of myth and symbolic imagery is not only used to resonate with the reader but can be seen as a part of a larger political process of building a “cultural system.” Nations, theorized by historian Knud Krakau, in order to cope with politically, ethically, and

⁵ Woods 3

technologically challenging eras—such as the 1920s Weimar Republic—tend to create a collective perception of themselves and a cohesive cultural system to maintain this self-perception:

Jede Nation hat ihre spezifischen kollektiven Erinnerungen, Wertvorstellungen, Institutionen usw. Will sie als Nation überleben, muß sie intellektuelle und emotionale Energien mobilisieren, um die vielfältigen geistigen, moralischen, politischen, technologischen und sonstigen Herausforderungen zu bewältigen. Sie muß Formen sozialer und politischer Organisation und Kontrolle entwickeln, welche ein ihren Wertvorstellungen entsprechendes menschliches Zusammenleben, Entfaltungsmöglichkeiten und Schutz gewährleisten. Die Nation konstituiert sich mithin als ,kulturelles System...'⁶

This cultural system clarifies the role of the individual within the larger society, and in the reproduction of a set of values and perceptions, myths and symbols can serve to express a collective “meaning”:

...Es produziert die Mythen und Symbole, in denen diese erklärenden und orientierenden Sinngebungen ihren Ausdruck finden.⁷

Thus, mythmaking and the deployment of symbolic images are not only literary tools, but are part of a political orienting process. Since Ernst Jünger sought to influence the political ideology of his time, his writing—self-consciously or not—harnesses the power and importance of these tools described by Krakau. A critical task faced by the German people during the time of the Weimar Republic was to come to grips with the experience of World War I. Therefore, the accounts and theoretical discussions of war of Jünger and his contemporaries carried considerable weight in this era. A close analysis of Jünger’s writing can reveal his philosophical

⁶ Krakau, Knud. "Einführende Überlegungen zur Entstehung und Wirkung von Bildern, die sich Nationen von sich und anderen machen." *Deutschland und Amerika, Perzeption und historische Realität*. Berlin: Colloquium Verlag. 1985. pg 11-12.

⁷ *ibid.* 12

aims by identifying what he says, and *how* he expresses those ideas. Recognizing his literary methods will broaden our understanding of his beliefs.

In order to closely home in on Jünger's use of these types of literary methods, this literary analysis will focus on three of his 1920s war journals and essays: the first and most well-known, *In Stahlgewittern*, as well as *Der Kampf als Inneres Erlebnis*, and *Sturm*. The analysis will be broken up into three larger sections. The first will focus on his view towards battle, based on the metaphors and symbols he uses to describe the experience, and the second will speak to Jünger's views on the nature of man *within* the context of war. The third section will place these images of war within the myths of war that Jünger develops in his writing, and evaluate the implication of these myths. The metaphors and symbols that Jünger employs feed into (or at times contradict) his broader mythological beliefs about the war experience. After pulling out passages of these three works that represent his use of metaphor, symbol, and myth, I will also then synthesize these observations with the scholarship of previous literary analyses on Jünger and his fellows.

Another important aspect of Jünger's writing that will also be addressed throughout is his philosophical interaction with Friedrich Nietzsche. An analysis like this cannot ignore the role of Nietzsche's influence for three main reasons: First, Nietzsche is widely understood to be the ideological forerunner to the Conservative Revolution as a whole. As some have argued, the movement would have been "unthinkable without Nietzsche."⁸ Second, the influence of Nietzsche's philosophy is seen to be even more profound in the works of Ernst Jünger in particular. David Ohana explains the significance of Nietzsche in the worldview of Jünger:

⁸ Mohler, Armin. *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918-1932*. 3rd ed, vol. 1. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989. p. 29.

In the writings of his youth, Jünger seized on the war as an ‘existential moment’ in terms derived from Nietzsche. Unlike many thinkers who betrayed Nietzsche when they took Zarathustra into the trenches, he had a profound understanding of the Nietzschean *Lebensphilosophie* and an intense sympathy for the progenitor of the ‘will to power.’⁹

Lastly, the very act of radical mythmaking can be seen as a sign of Nietzschean influence on Jünger’s works. Thus, Nietzsche not only ideologically inspired Jünger but helped determined his approach to political writing which we are examining. Again Ohana: “In place of the philosophy of reason Nietzsche sets up the myth of the will to power; in place of the search for objective truth, he extols subjective creativity; in place of universal rationalism, he encourages creative aesthetics.”¹⁰ Instead of trying to justify or interpret the world as the old philosophers had, Jünger and his contemporaries “were trying to create a world ex nihilo in their own image. This style of mythical creation, which has profoundly shaped modern civilization is a product of that kind of aesthetic imagination first embraced by Nietzsche.”¹¹

Now that we have clarified the historical context of the writings of Ernst Jünger, established the importance of myth and symbol in political writing, and alluded to Jünger’s chief philosophical inspiration, we can move onto unpacking Jünger’s images of *Krieg*.

II. Imagining War

In this next section, we will discuss the types of metaphors and symbols that Jünger uses to describe the experience of battle, and what he is trying to accomplish. First however, we will address *how*, within a broader theoretical framework, metaphor acts as the descriptive tool for

⁹ Ohana, David. “Nietzsche and the Fascist Dimension: The Case of Ernst Jünger” in *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism?: On the Uses and Abuses of a Philosophy*, By Jacob Golomb, and Robert S. Wistrich. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2002.

¹⁰ *ibid.* 265

¹¹ *ibid.* 265

Jünger's war. Then, we will examine three different metaphors and symbols Jünger employs, war as nature, war as a blacksmith, and the "worthy" opponent.

a. Metaphor as photograph

Throughout his works, Ernst Jünger expresses skepticism towards the ability of a participant or spectator of war to communicate any sort of objective truth about the experience. Indeed, he clearly should not believe this to be possible, since according to him, war, or the fight (*Der Kampf*) does not proceed entirely as an external observable phenomenon. This is obvious in the title of his 1922 war essay *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*—"the battle (or fight, struggle) as an internal experience". Jünger expresses more literally the impossibility of objectively imaging war in *Sturm*, the lesser-read, fictionalized counterpart to his bestseller, *In Stahlgewittern*. The main character and narrator of this novel is Lieutenant Sturm, a highly intellectual former doctoral student, who, like Jünger himself was studying zoology and biology. The tension between the observable and non-observable representations of war is demonstrated through this highly conflicted protagonist. On several occasions, Sturm reveals the paradigm of modern scientific intellectualism grounding his pre-war worldview, and how this contrasts to his new way of life:

Das Erstaunliche war, dass er, Sturm eben versucht hatte, einen anderen zu töten, kalt, klar und äußerst bewusst. Und wieder drängte sich ihm die Frage auf: War er noch derselbe wie vor ein Jahr? Der Mann, der noch kürzlich an einer Doktorarbeit 'Über die Vermehrung der Amoeba proteus durch künstliche Teilung' geschrieben hatte? War ein größere Gegensatz denkbar als zwischen einem Menschen, der sich liebevoll in Zustände versenkte, in denen noch das flüssige Leben sich um winzige Kerne ballet, und einem, der kaltblütig und höchstentwickelte Wesen schoß?¹²

¹² Jünger, Ernst. *Sturm*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1978. Pg 25.

Jünger further illustrates the intellectual frustration of Sturm, by showing his attempt to record human experience through fiction:

Er schrieb an einer Reihe von Novellen, in denen er versuchte, die letzte Form des Menschen in ihren feinsten Ausstrahlungen auf lichtempfindliches Papier zu bringen. Gern hätte er seine Kraft in einen Roman versammelt, doch schein ihm das bei diesem Hexenkessel von Erscheinungen noch zu früh.¹³

Two things are of interest in this passage. First is the clear reference to Nietzsche's Last Man (der letzte Mensch) from Zarathustra's *Vorrede* of Also Sprach Zarathustra. The second is Jünger's metaphor of the photo paper. Sturm would like to objectively record the acts of war he is observing in careful and accurate detail (*in feinsten Ausstrahlungen*) through his characters, but the experience is proving far too overwhelming, disorienting and mystifying. In his failure to "photograph" through novel, he is accepting the futility of his project to objectively recount experience. Just as Sturm cannot capture his experience through his characters, Jünger is indicating the futility of objectively, empirically, and externally capturing the war, given the extent to which it is an "internal experience" (inneres Erlebnis).

For Jünger, the experience of war seems to thus lie to some extent in the imagination, leading to the use of metaphor to bridge this gap between the tangible, or "factual," and the imagined. In a quote from Kittler's theoretical discussion of new media technology, *Gramophone, Film and Typewriter*, Ernst Jünger expresses how his memories of World War I had taken on a kind of imaginary form, as if the whole ordeal had been merely a fantasy.¹⁴ In his book, *Watching War*, Jan Mieszkowski explains that this view on the representation of war is not limited to Ernst Jünger, and was not new at the time of *Sturm*. *Watching War* outlines a critical

¹³ *Sturm* 31

¹⁴ Mieszkowski, Jan. *Watching War*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ., 2012. Pg. 6

history of the observation of war, pointing out a shift that occurred during the Napoleonic era and that has survived to this day.

According to Mieszkowski, it was at this time, in the first decade of the 1800s, that the mass reading public was born, and suddenly war became an “observable” spectacle through descriptions of battles in widely disseminated newspapers. Mieszkowski describes an immaterial dimension of war, what he calls the “Napoleon war imaginary,”¹⁵ that resulted from the gap between the physical, violent incidence of war in battle, and the overall campaign and purpose of the war. This supposed “spiritual dimension” of battle was then left to the descriptions of the creative writers and journalists:

Under the influence of this military mythology, what one “saw” with one’s mind’s eye—how the waves of men and arms should have appeared...was deemed at least as reliable as what could be seen with one’s retina. In turn, the ideal war spectator was characterized not as an eagle-eyed firsthand witness but as an individual with unique creative faculties, such as a novelist thousands of miles away, writing about what the battle must have been like.¹⁶

Thus, in place of literal description, metaphor and symbol serve to convey what even a photograph of the battle scene (or a video, in terms of today’s technology) would be unable to communicate. This “imaginary” and “spiritual dimension” of the battlefield is an inescapable theme throughout the work of Jünger, especially the highly expressionist narrative, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*.

b. “*Tut, tut, looks like war*”

The most obvious and ubiquitous use of metaphor seen in the war literature of Ernst Jünger is the comparison of battle to nature, especially volatile weather events. This comparison

¹⁵ *ibid.* 5

¹⁶ *Watching War* 5

is impossible to ignore, especially given the titles of two works we are analyzing, “In Stahlgewittern” and “Sturm.” In this section we will examine the use of “nature” metaphors, focusing first on the novel *Sturm*, then *In Stahlgewittern*, and briefly, *Der Kampf als Inneres Erlebnis*.

Sturm, as *In Stahlgewittern*, features an ever-present comparison of the condition of battle to devastating natural disasters and dangerous encounters with nature. At the end of the novel, for example when Sturm and his comrades are under siege, he compares the experience to a ship in a dangerous ocean: “Das Wilde der Szene wurde gesteigert durch die unaufhörlich sich folgenden Detonationen, unter deren Erschütterungen der Keller bebte wie ein Schiff im Orkan.” In addition to such comparisons, there are three particularly interesting metaphors that I am going to focus on, that offer distinct interpretations of the experience. The first two represent the dominating power of “nature” (war) over the individual warrior, and the third acknowledges the interaction between nature and man.

Firstly, the narrator, Lieutenant Sturm expresses his frustration at the relative weakness and vulnerability of any given man in the path of a violent storm:

Wozu alles Prachtige, dessen man sich erfreute, wenn es so in die eisige Versenkung schoss, wenn es sinnlos im Abgrund zersplitterte wie ein geschliffener Kelch? Gewiss, diese Zerstörung war keine Ausnahme im großen kosmischen Schwung. Krieg war wie ein Sturm, Hagel und Blitz, er stampfte ins Leben, achtlos wohin. In den Tropen gab es Wirbelwinde, die wie wilde Tiere durch die ungeheuren Wälder rasten...Sie fegten die großen, nach Vanille duftenden Orchideen von den Zweigen und töteten Scharen der funkelnden Kolibris. Sie schwemmen unsäglich bunten Schmetterlingen den Schmelz von den Flügeln und warfen die jungen Papageien aus dem Nest. Und doch nahm die Natur diese Verwüstung ihres Bildes gleichmütig hin und brachte neue und schönere Wesen hervor...¹⁷

¹⁷ *Sturm* 53

Jünger clearly chose the tropical images in this passage for the acute vulnerability they symbolize. For example, the sweet and delicate orchid flowers, the tiny and light hummingbird, and the wispy butterfly are designed to represent some of the most delicate and ornate aspects of nature. Jünger demonstrates Sturm's deep feelings of existential insecurity through the use of these weak and delicate animals as metaphors for the men who find themselves in battle, rather than that of a sturdy, 100-year-old oak, for instance. Moreover, despite the note of stoic optimism at the end of the above quoted passage—the prospect of the *neue und schönere Wesen* blooming following the destruction of the storm—Sturm expresses the dread of death experienced by the individual: "...Aber war das ein Trost für den Einzelnen? Der lebte nur einmal im Licht, und wenn er verging, dann erlosch mit ihm auch das Bild seiner Welt."¹⁸ Sturm sees the individual at the mercy of this tremendous and arbitrary force, and is isolated by its magnitude and his relative weakness as an individual: "Doch wenn der Tod als Wetterwolke über den Gräben hing, dann war jeder für sich; allein stand er im Dunkel, umheult und umkracht, von aufschießenden Blitzen als grenzlose Einsamkeit."¹⁹

Secondly, Lieutenant Sturm also alludes to war as a dreadful hailstorm of fire and steel, for which an individual must be prepared in order to remain psychologically intact:

Lenkten nicht Fixsterne seine Bahn, Ehre und Vaterland, oder war sein Leib nicht gehärtet durch die Lust am Kampfe wie durch ein Schuppenhemd, so trieb er als Molluske, als zuckendes Nervengeflecht im Hagel aus Feuer und Stahl.²⁰

Here the focus is on representing the individual under fire as lacking agency, pathetic in a way, unable to respond in a powerful way to the onslaught of battle. They are clearly not doomed,

¹⁸ *Sturm* 53

¹⁹ *ibid.* 8

²⁰ *ibid.* 9-10

however, as the narrator is suggesting the proper psychological orientation (convictions of honor or nationalism) can serve as the “armor” (*Schuppenhemd*) protecting against the hailstorm.

Lastly, Jünger includes a unique metaphor early on in the novel *Sturm*, distinct through its depiction of a more active interaction between warring men and the natural landscape of the battlefield.

“Die Flora des Landes hat sich seltsam verändert, seitdem nicht mehr die Sense darüber ging. Sturm hatte genau beobachtet, wie manche Gewächse, die bislang an Ruinen und Wegrändern ein kaum geduldetes Dasein geführt, allmählich von den weiten Flächen Besitz ergriffen hatten, auf denen hier und da noch Erntemaschinen wie ausgestorbenen Tierarten verwitterten...Und die Tierwelt machte diese Verwandlung mit...Die Weißlinge und Schwalbenschwänze schaukelten über den Mauerresten des Dorfes...Der Maulwurf wurde seltener, seitdem der Boden immer fester und verwurzelter wurde, dafür siedelten sich Schwärme großer, stinkender Ratte in den Gräben und Kellern de Dorfes an...Das alles hatte der Mensch gemacht. In seiner Seele ging eine Wandlung vor, und die Landschaft bekam ein neues Gesicht. Denn hinter allem wirkte der Mensch, nur war diese Wirkung so oft gewaltig, dass er sich selbst nicht mehr erkannte darin.”²¹

In this interesting passage, rather than men being dominated by an unpredictable and devastatingly powerful natural phenomenon, the modern agricultural man had previously asserted mastery over the landscape. With the onset of war, however, man is again at the mercy of the “natural” cycle of war, and the landscape reorients itself to this condition. Indeed, man and nature seem to be intrinsically connected, as the landscape changes as a mirror to the transformation of the soul of man in the environment of war: “Und doch gaben diese Nächte der Wüste, vom Gezuck der Blitze umfaßt und vom ungewissen Schimmer der Leuchtbälle überstrahlt von seiner Seele ein treues Spiegelbild.”²² Thus, this seems to represent a dynamic interaction, a feedback loop between man and his environment—at the mercy of natural

²¹ *Sturm* 22-23

²² *ibid.* 23

phenomenon on one hand, while attempting to master and dominate his surroundings on the other.

In his work, *Writing and Rewriting the First World War*, Ernst Jünger scholar John King makes a fascinating observation about Jünger's use of metaphor relating to water. King claims that the significance of these metaphors lie with their relation to flux — the dynamic *Sturmwelle*, the constant flow of water, the ship quaking in a hurricane, and waves of sand in the desert. King sees in the fluidity of these “un-mappable spaces” a rejection of classical modernist epistemological claims, into what he characterizes as a proto-post-modern acceptance of plurality and ontological doubt:

Furthermore, the ocean can also be seen, metaphorically, to be without ground, and indeed Sturm complains of ‘den Drang, sich in das Wesen der Welt zu bohren, die er niemals ergründen konnte’ (p. 45). In other words, these metaphors carry with them a departure from the positivist imperatives of classical modernity...The departure is away from certain cognitive categories and representation, away from metaphysics and meta-narrative, away from measuring reason to a world of preliminarity and difference...²³

Indeed, Jünger's depiction of the transformation of the protagonist through battle and war experiences serve to support this claim. At several points in the novel, Sturm recognizes how his world-view has dramatically shifted, and seems to be questioning the assumptions of his pre-war way of life:

Auch Sturm erkannte, wenn er auf seinem Anstand lag, daß er ein anderer geworden war. Denn der Mensch, der hier hinter einer Distelschaude lag und scharf über das Korn des Gewehres nach Beute spähte, war nicht derselbe, der noch vor zwei Jahren mit Selbstverständlichkeit durch den Formenwirbel der Straßen geschritten und mit jeder letzten Äußerung der Großstadt bis in die

²³ King, John. "Writing and Rewriting the First World War: Ernst Jünger and the Crisis of the Conservative Imagination 1914-1925." Thesis. University of Oxford, 1999. *Ernst Jünger in Cyberspace*. 239

Fingerspitzen vertraut gewesen war.²⁴

Here, as with other works of Jünger, “die Großstadt” seems to stand for modern culture. In this passage, we can sense the confidence with which Sturm “navigated” his pre-war existence, represented by his ease and certainty (“*mit Selbstverständlichkeit*” “*bis in die Fingerspitzen vertraut*”) with which he “navigates” the city. Thus, by volunteering to join the war, Sturm is seen as turning away from this modern certainty to the unpredictable “storm” of war. Shown as being a highly cosmopolitan intellectual, Sturm explains that he did not join the war out of a sense of patriotism, however. Later in this analysis we will discuss the myths of war that Jünger develops to explain this surprising phenomenon, this “drive” to reject the ordered certainty of civilian life.

Similarly to *Sturm*, Jünger’s *In Stahlgewittern* communicates the power of war through the use of metaphor relating to nature and weather. However, *In Stahlgewittern* expresses subtly different ideas through this similar use of metaphor. Namely, Jünger not only conveys the strength of this force of war, but also its magnificence and majesty:

Und doch hat auch dieser Krieg seine Männer und seine Romantik gehabt! Helden, wenn das Wort nicht wohlfeil geworden wäre. Draufgänger, unbekannte, ehrene Gesellen, denen es nicht vergönnt war, vor aller Augen sich an der eigenen Kühnheit zu berauschen. Einsam standen sie im Gewitter der Schlacht, wenn der Tod als roter Ritter mit Flammenhufen durch wallende Nebel galoppierte.²⁵

At least in this passage, Jünger is self-consciously and nostalgically romanticizing the war. He is also using the image of the thunderstorm (*Gewitter*) and the pre-modern galloping knight (*Ritter*)—two viscerally emotion-laden symbols, to aestheticize the battle experience. In this image, the heroes of war valiantly face oncoming death while surrounded by the “storm of steel” of battle. In that sense, he is using metaphor to illustrate the grandeur of war, and the glory of

²⁴ *Sturm* 23

²⁵ *In Stahlgewittern* 1

those soldiers brave enough to face it.

Again, in this passage Jünger expresses his pride in the unrelenting bravery of his platoon, as they face the violent “storm” of battle. In this case, the storm metaphor is further amplified into a roaring hurricane:

Während des uns umbrausenden Orkans ging ich den Abschnitt meines Zuges ab. Die Leute standen in steinerner Unbeweglichkeit, das Gewehr in der Hand, am vorderen Hange des Hohlweges und starrten in das Vorgelände. Ab und zu beim Scheine einer Leuchtkugel sah ich Stahlhelm an Stahlhelm, Seitengewehr an Seitengewehr blinken und wurde von dem stolzen Gefühl erfüllt, einer Handvoll Männern zu gebieten, die vielleicht zermalmt, nicht aber besiegt werden konnten. In solchen Augenblicken triumphiert der menschliche Geist über die gewaltigsten Äußerungen der Materie, der gebrechliche Körper stellt sich, vom Willen gestählt, dem furchtbarsten Gewitter entgegen.²⁶

In this passage, Jünger admires the stoicism of his fellow soldiers, as they confront the “most terrible” storm of battle, shoulder to shoulder. In this bravery he sees the “triumph of the human spirit over matter,” a bravery which would be impossible to demonstrate without the emergence of the battle.

Jünger also elevates the majesty of the fight through what Eva Dempewolf names *Hochseemetaphorik*. At several points throughout *In Stahlgewittern* (and *Wäldchen* 125 and *Feuer und Blut* as Dempewolf points out) Jünger describes battle as though it were a journey across a tumultuous ocean. This metaphor reveals two key aspects of the war experience: First, the disorienting nature of battle as the fighter “empfand den Boden dementsprechend als ‘rollende Schiffsplanke,’”²⁷ and struggled to find his footing. Secondly it offers another romantic image of the war campaign, with Jünger taking the role of captain on a great voyage. At one

²⁶ *In Stahlgewittern* 37

²⁷ Dempewolf, Eva. *Blut Und Tinte: Eine Interpretation Der Verschiedenen Fassungen Von Ernst Jüngers Kriegstagebüchern Vor Dem Politischen Hintergrund Der Jahre 1920 Bis 1980*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1992. 158

point in *In Stahlgewittern*, the war campaign is triumphantly and romantically referred to as an Odyssey across the “stählernen Meer.”²⁸

Past interpretations of Jünger’s work have often emphasized this romanticized, aestheticized reading of his work—claiming that Jünger unambiguously “glorifies” war. As we will continue to see, however, this is an incomplete analysis of his writings on war, and represents only one aspect of its representation in Jünger.

In addition to showing the force of power, and the strength of those soldiers who must survive it, this recurring weather metaphor in *In Stahlgewittern* seems to suggest this outside “spiritual dimension” of battle we discussed in reference to Mieszkowski’s *Watching War*. The most important physical aspect of a natural weather event, like a thunderstorm or a hurricane, in terms of depicting battle, is the indifference with which weather events choose their victims. The choice to continually employ this metaphor seems to suggest that this dimension of battle exists outside of the nationalistic or territorial ambitions of men and their states, and impacts both sides with equal and indifferent force. In the works of Jünger, the “Gewitter” is not the French or British allied force, rather, it represents war itself. As a weather event, this spiritual dimension of war impacts both the Allied and Central Powers troops with equal arbitrariness, and does not originate from either side. This interpretation of the storm metaphor can be clearly understood through the descriptions Jünger offers of the enemy troops throughout *In Stahlgewittern*. Besides off-hand remarks about the hygiene and strange burial practices²⁹ of the French, Jünger never refers to enemy troops in the hateful disparaging way you would expect. Indeed, at one point Jünger explicitly and unambiguously praises an English regiment, praising their bravery and

²⁸ *ibid.* 158

²⁹ Jünger encounters an abandoned French emplacement, where a rotting corpse was left unburied and unattended to. *In Stahlgewittern* 11

their leader:

Sollte ein Angehöriger der 1st Hariana Lancers diese Zeilen lesen, so sei ihm hier meine Achtung ausgesprochen für eine Truppe, die solche Führer ihr eigen nennt wie diesen Oberleutnant, gegen den ich die Ehre hatte zu kämpfen.³⁰

In calling it an “honor” to face this enemy in battle, he is placing the origin of the fight outside of either party, as if they are pitted against each-other by the random external “storm” of war. This passage, in addition to reflecting this external immaterial aspect of war, also refers to two other aspects of the fight articulated by Jünger: the symbol of the worthy opponent, and the changing role of the individual within an increasingly industrialized battle. Both of these characteristics will be dealt with in greater length later in this analysis.

Since we have already thoroughly examined the use of “natural” metaphor within *Sturm* and *In Stahlgewittern*, I will now only briefly address how this is seen in *Der Kampf als Inneres Erlebnis*. *Der Kampf*, the most expressionistic of the three books, also draws on the violence of nature in describing war, but does so in a way that emphasizes the drama and spectacle of the natural world. This text tends to draw more on images of fire and explosions of light on the battlefield:

Jetzt saust das Wetter auch auf uns herunter. Die Artillerie unserer Division schießt vorzüglich, der erste Einschlag stimmte auf die Sekunde. Immer dichter und vielstimmiger wird das Heranheulen der Eisenklötze, um drüben in einer ständig schwellenden Flut von böartigen, reißen, betäubenden Geräuschen zu ertrinken. Minen ziehen ihre perlenden Funkenbögen über uns und zerschellen in *vulkanischen*³¹ Explosionen. Weiße Leuchtbälle überschwemmen das blitzende Gewölk von Rauch, Gasen und Staub, das als kochender See über dem Gefilde brodelt, mit grellem Licht.³²

Here the metaphor of nature is amplified to a spectacular volcanic explosion. The compact

³⁰ *In Stahlgewittern* 57

³¹ My emphasis

³² *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis* 72

collection of descriptive imagery—streaks of sparks, howling, volcanic explosion of lighting clouds of smoke, dust, and gas, seething, glaring light—are intended to impress upon the reader the overwhelming intensity of the battlefield. Again, this “storm” of battle takes on its own independent facet, metaphysically transcending the material clash of forces.

According to King, the use of metaphor in *Der Kampf als Inneres Erlebnis* distinguishes itself from our other two works of study in its sheer excess:

Jünger’s use of extravagant metaphor in this book has the effect of contributing to that sense of absurdity. Metaphors of storm-tossed seas, frozen wastelands and deserts tend, for all their much-criticized naturalizing direction, not so much to make the War harmless, as to transpose it into a language which vividly suggests exposure and absence of meaning and life.³³

In *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis*, Jünger ramps up the violent “spirit” of war. This illustrates not only the arbitrariness and indifference of war as a “natural” phenomenon, but almost suggests a conflict between man and war itself: The extremity of the metaphor in this book lends an independent and violent character to war: “Der Kampf äußerte sich als riesenhafter, toter Mechanismus und breitete eine eisige, unpersönliche Welle der Vernichtung über das Gelände. Das war wie eine Kraterlandschaft auf totem Gestirn, leblos und sprühend vor Glut.”³⁴ King argues that Jünger’s use of metaphor in *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis* elevates this autonomous spirit of war to the point of absurdity.

c. *War as a Blacksmith*

In addition to the rich “natural” *Metaphorik* showcased throughout the work of Jünger, he frequently characterizes war as a “blacksmith,” transforming and forging new men in battle. Again, we can understand this technique by referring to Mieszkowski’s analysis of being a

³³ King 209

³⁴ *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis* 104

spectator to and reporting on war. Jünger sought to characterize the intangible “spirit” of war, by referring to this outside force, which “smiths” the men through the war experience:

Der Krieg ist nicht das Ende, sondern der Auftakt der Gewalt. Er ist die *Hammerschmiede*, in der die Welt in neue Grenzen und neue Gemeinschaften zerschlagen wird. Neue Formen wollen mit Blut erfüllt werden, und die Macht will gepackt werden mit harter Faust. Der Krieg ist eine große Schule, und der neue Mensch wird von unserem Schläge sein.³⁵

It is interesting to see how war, in addition to reflecting features of “nature” is now compared to the work of men. The image here, however, is not of a pensive and reflective sculptor, molding warriors in battle, but of a powerful hammer mill, a fist, pounding and packing the soldier into a battle-hardened warrior. The spirit of war takes on the characteristics of a mythological god that violently tests the strength of human warriors (“Der Krieg, aller Dinge Vater, ist auch der unsere; er hat uns gehämmert, gemeißelt, und gehärtet zu dem, was wir sind,“)³⁶ and re-forms them in the crucible of battle:

Material, das ist der richtige Ausdruck. So ungefähr wie Kohle, die man unter die glühenden Kessel des Krieges schleudert, damit das Werk im Gange bleibt. „Die Truppe wird im Feuer zu Schlacke gebrannt“, lautet ja auch eine elegante Formel der Kriegskunst.³⁷

It is important to note how this metaphor contrasts to that of war as a phenomenon of “nature.” In the image of war as a blacksmith, the battle is ultimately a productive, rather than destructive force. While the storm arbitrarily descends on any given landscape, the blacksmith deliberately reshapes its material into something new.

Although this metaphor is far more prevalent in *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis*, Jünger makes this comparison in *In Stahlgewittern* as well. As Jünger describes the prospect of an upcoming raid, he is glad, “die Rolle des Ambosses mit der des Hammers vertauschen zu

³⁵ *ibid.* 70-71

³⁶ *Der Kampf als Inneres Erlebnis* 3

³⁷ *ibid.* 76

können.³⁸ In this case, the metaphor of the anvil and hammer does not serve quite the same purpose as in *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis*. In this case, their side of the conflict is assuming the role of the blacksmith, rather than being subject to this greater war-force impacting both sides.

d. Der würdige Gegner

The last metaphor to be addressed relating to the experience of war is that of the “worthy” opponent. In comparison to the symbols previously addressed, this relates to the soldier’s experience of the struggle, rather than the soldier being acted on by war. Jünger celebrates the idea of a laudable and powerful enemy, as opposed to an easily dominated adversary. In the chapter “Gegen Inder” of *In Stahlgewittern*, Jünger describes the success of his division when they faced a skilled Indian regiment of the British army:

Unsere Leistung erregte berechtigtes Aufsehen und wurde im Divisionstagesbefehl lobend besprochen. Wir hatten mit 20 Mann einer um das Mehrfache überlegenen Abteilung, die uns schon in den Rücken gekommen war, siegreich widerstanden. Ein solcher Erfolg ist natürlich nur durch eine glänzend disziplinierte Truppe von hoher moralischer Qualität zu erzielen. Ich selbst konnte mir mit Befriedigung sagen, daß ich durch Überlegenheit über die Situation und persönliche Einwirkung auf meine Leute dem feindlichen Führer eine arge Enttäuschung und ein frühzeitiges Grab bereitet hatte. Wir beiden hatten unsere Fähigkeiten in derselben Weise gemessen, wie es bei kleinen Offiziersübungen in der Garnison üblich ist; nur hatten wir nicht mit Platzpatronen geschossen. Sollte ein Angehöriger der 1st Haryana Lancers diese Zeilen lesen, so sei ihm hier meine Achtung ausgesprochen für eine Truppe, die solche Führer ihr eigen nennt wie diesen Oberleutnant, *gegen den ich die Ehre hatte zu kämpfen...*³⁹

In this passage, Jünger declares the “honor” in fighting this worthy opponent, and how their skill compounded the accomplishment of defeating them. Furthermore, Jünger sees a strong opponent

³⁸ *In Stahlgewittern* 81

³⁹ *In Stahlgewittern* 56-57

as necessary for a “good” fight. Following this passage, Jünger then directly cites Nietzsche as his inspiration for this principle:

...Was sagt Nietzsche vom Kriegsvolke? „Ihr dürft nur Feinde haben, die zu hassen sind, aber nicht Feinde zum Verachten. Ihr müßt stolz auf Euren Feind sein, dann sind die Erfolge des Feindes auch Eure Erfolge.“⁴⁰

Indeed, the concept of the worthy enemy was vehemently advanced by Nietzsche, for example in the chapter “Warum ich so weise bin” in *Ecce Homo*:

Sie [starke Natur] braucht Widerstände, folglich sucht sie Widerstand...Die Stärke des Angreifenden hat in der Gegnerschaft, die er nötig hat, eine Art Maß; jedes Wachstum verrät sich im Aufsuchen eines gewaltigen Gegners—oder Problems: denn ein Philosoph, der kriegerisch ist, fordert auch Probleme zum Zweikampf heraus...über gleiche Gegner...Gleichheit vor dem Feinde—erste Voraussetzung zu einem rechtschaffenen Duell.⁴¹

This symbol, employed by Nietzsche in a more metaphorical context (“warring” philosophers, for example) is made literal through Jünger’s appropriation of it. Jünger draws on this idea from Nietzsche, celebrating the challenge in a man-to-man struggle, and the act of fighting for fighting’s sake, and brings the metaphor into the literal realm of warfare.

III. Imagining the *Krieger*

In Jünger’s war novels, the metaphors he employs to describe the battle and the warrior often overlap, and are related in their significance to the expression of his war myth. For the sake of clarity however, in this section we will unpack the Jünger’s use of symbol to describe specifically the *Krieger*—both as an ideal and in the heat of battle. Three metaphors and symbols will demonstrate Jünger’s conception of the soldier in war: the “bestial” primordial man, the “steeled” warrior, and man as a bridge.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Ecce Homo*. „Warum ich so weise bin“ *Urheberrechtsfreie Ausgabe*.

a. Der „tierische“ Urmensch

As alluded to previously, Jünger's protagonist Lieutenant Sturm is drawn into war, volunteering, despite his cosmopolitan lack of patriotism, and his general deference to the value of life. Jünger describes how this is the result of an inner drive to war that lies dormant in all men. Jünger employs several different symbols and metaphors to describe this phenomenon, including that of *das Tierische*—the animal or bestial—, and *der Urmensch*—the primordial man. Jünger believes that despite the alleged progression of the modern man through reason, culture, and evolving societal formations, man is still, in part, a primitive beast, and this beast will always be driven to the *Kampf*.

Zwar hat sich das Wilde Brutale, die Grelle Farbe der Triebe geglättet, geschliffen, und gedämpft, in den Jahrtausenden, in denen die Gesellschaft die jähren Begierden und Lüste gezäumt. Zwar hat zunehmende Verfeinerung ihn geklärt und veredelt, doch immer noch schläft das Tierische auf dem Grunde seines Seins. Noch immer ist viel Tier in ihm, schlummernd auf den bequemen, gewirkte Teppichen einer polierten, gefeilten, geräuschlos ineinandergreifenden Zivilisation, verhüllt in Gewohnheit und gefällige Formen...⁴²

Here again Jünger reveals his skepticism towards the project of modernity. While “civilization” has succeeded in “polishing,” “buffing,” and “dampening” the inner drives of men, they still cannot be moderated, through cultural norms or *Aufklärung*. Thus, despite the comfort of his pre-war life Sturm is drawn into war out of these “bestial” drives:

Was hat ihn damals gepackt, ihn, den Menschen der Bücher und der Kaffeehäuser, den Geistigen mit dem nervösen Gesicht? Was hatte ihn zur Armee gerissen, mitten aus der Doktorarbeit heraus? Das war schon der Krieg gewesen, den er im Blute trug wie jeder ausgesprochene Sohn seiner Zeit, lange bevor er als feurige Bestie sich in die Arena der Erscheinung schnellte. Denn der Intellekt hatte sich überspitzt, er sprang als paradoxer Seiltänzer zwischen unüberbrückbaren Gegensätzen hin und her. Wie lange noch, und

⁴² *Der Kampf als Inneres Erlebnis* 7

er musste im Abgrunde eines irrsinnigen Gelächters zerschmettern.⁴³

In this passage, Sturm is conscious of this inner “drive” to the fight, noting how his modern scientific intellectualism proved to be inadequate. Here *der Krieg* had always been, as with the other young men of his time, coursing through his “bloodstream,” ready to burst forth like a “fiery beast.” Pure intellect alone failed to incorporate or rationalize this beastly facet within the nature of man. With his allusion to Nietzsche’s metaphorical tightrope walker, Jünger illustrates how Sturm’s intellect negates itself, unable to reconcile the contradictory forces and drives within him.

Jünger also emphasizes the enormity of this animal nature within man, describing it as irresistible, overwhelming, and ravenous:

Im Kampfe, im Kriege, der all Übereinkunft von Menschen reißt wie die zusammengeflickten Lumpen eines Bettelmannes, steigt das Tier als geheimnisvolles Ungeheuer vom Grunde der Seele auf. Da schießt es hoch als verzehrende Flamme, als unwiderstehlicher Taumel, der die Massen berauscht, eine Gottheit über den Heeren thronend.⁴⁴

Jünger is also convinced of the permanence of this bestial force within man: “Das wird bleiben. Solange Menschen Kriege führen und Kriege werden geführt, solange es noch Menschen gibt.”⁴⁵ He uses imagery of the bestial and the primordial nearly interchangeably, and they both describe this same ravenous drive, bound up below the thin layer or “mask” of sophistication:

...doch wenn des Lebens Wellenkurve zur roten Linie des Primitiven zurück schwingt, fällt die Maskierung; nackt wie je bricht er hervor, der Urmensch, der Höhlensiedler in der ganzen Unbändigkeit seiner entfesselten Triebe. Das Erbteil seiner Väter

⁴³ *Sturm* 25

⁴⁴ *Der Kampf als Inneres Erlebnis* 8

⁴⁵ *ibid.* 8

flammt in ihm auf, immer wieder, wenn das Leben sich auf seine Urfunktionen einstellt.⁴⁶

This passage also features a recurring pattern that Jünger uses to explain the emergence of war: the dichotomous, repeating occurrence of war. Here life “swings” back to a primitive state (war), just as earlier Sturm draws on Nietzsche’s tightrope walker metaphor, who struggles between two “unüberbrückbaren Gegensätzen.“ Sturm elaborates on this symbol, and describes a pendulum located within every living being that swings between reason and the drive for a new, violent path through the explosiveness and destruction of war:

da schlug wohl jenes geheimnisvolle Pendel, das in allem Lebendigen schwang, jene unfassbare Weltvernunft, nach der anderen Seite aus und suchte durch die Wucht der Faust, durch Entflammung einer ungeheuern Explosion in das erstarrte Quaderwerk eine Bresche zu schlagen, die zu neuen Bahnen führte.

In addition to the *Trieb* to war that lies supposedly within all men, the potential to be a warrior is, according to Jünger also ever-present, since the dawn of humans. This warrior instinct, as Jünger explains, can be seen through the automatic impulse of soldiers to reach for their weapons in response to a perceived threat:

Dieser Griff aus der Tiefe des Schlafes heraus zur Waffe war etwas, das im Blute lag, eine Äußerung des primitiven Menschen, dieselbe Bewegung, mit der der Eiszeitmensch sein Steinbeil packte.⁴⁷

There are several important implications of this “bestial” nature. The first is the inevitability of war. Since war explodes out of the animalistic, primitive nature of man, war is bound to follow any sustained period of peace. With this, Jünger seems to be playing with Nietzsche’s concept of eternal recurrence. Jünger transposes Nietzsche’s idea, of each possible moment repeating itself for an eternity, onto a literal understanding of human history and its future. The bestial drive to

⁴⁶ *ibid.* 8

⁴⁷ *Der Kampf als Inneres Erlebnis* 23

fight is so deeply rooted in the nature of man, that the moment of its outbreak into physical violence is bound to repeat itself over and over for an eternity.

Klaus Theweleit, in *Männerphantasien*, a psychoanalysis of the literature of Jünger and his contemporaries, perceives another implication of this beast inside. The “escape” of the primordial beast is accepted as a foregone conclusion, and war is thus inevitable. Theweleit points out, however, that the inability or unwillingness of Jünger and his fellow warrior to come to grips with this drive is precisely what results in their “crave” for war. Within Jünger’s description of this beast, Theweleit recognizes “the enormous distance separating Jünger’s own psychic structure from any mechanism of sublimation, or what Freud calls ‘culture work.’ Nothing is ‘transformed’; everything ‘internal’ (or bestial) is retained intact.”⁴⁸ Thus, this violent beast remains untamed, and man can only wait for it to escape in war:

A man structured in the way he describes craves war, because only war allows him to achieve identity with his alien ‘primitive,’ ‘bestial’ interior, while at the same time avoiding being devoured by it...Only war promises to animate the dead within him.⁴⁹

Theweleit also points out an important assumption that Jünger is making in placing the drive to war within the “nature” of man: Jünger’s failure to recognize the (likely sizable) role that culture has in cultivating this supposedly primordial bestial drive. This assumption underscores the inevitability of war, and leaves no room for the transmutation of this “nature” through cultural development.

b. The steel warrior

Possibly the most important metaphor Jünger uses to describe soldiers in war is that of the “steel” *Krieger*. This image is the converse to our previous discussion of the war as a

⁴⁸ Theweleit, Klaus. *Männerphantasien*. Vol. 2. Reinbeck: Rowohlt, 1980. 22

⁴⁹ *ibid.* 2

“blacksmith.” The storm steel of war hammers and reforms the soldier, creating a hardened, idealized, machine-like figure, who engages in battle unfazed by the horror and violence around him. In *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis*, Jünger gives the clearest expression to his idealized warrior:

Der Geist der Materialschlacht und des Grabenkampfes, der rücksichtsloser, wilder, brutaler ausgefochten wurde als je ein anderer, erzeugte Männer, wie sie bisher die Welt nicht gesehen hatte. Es war *eine ganz neue Rasse*, verkörperte Energie und mit höchster Wucht geladen.

In this passage Jünger also offers a physical description of this utopian “new race” of men, and also introduces the concept he formulated to describe this new warrior “race” — *Stahlnaturen*, or “steel-nature”:

Geschmeidige, hagere, sehnige Körper, markante Gesichter, Augen in tausend Schrecken unterm Helm versteinert. Sie waren Überwinder, *Stahlnaturen*, eingestellt in den Kampf in seiner gräßlichsten Form. Ihr Anlauf über zersplitterte Landschaften bedeutete den letzten Triumph eines phantastischen Grausens.

Jünger also combines the two warrior images, that of a steel warrior and beast, by describing the soldiers as “predatory” animals:

Brachen ihre verwegenen Trupps in zerschlagene Stellungen ein, wo bleiche Gestalten mit irren Augen ihnen entgegenstarrten, so wurden ungeahnte Energien frei. Jongleure des Todes, Meister des Sprengstoffes und der Flamme, prächtige *Raubtiere*, schnellten sie durch die Gräben.⁵⁰

In this case, however, this “magnificent predator” of war is not let loose, wild. Rather the image we gain in this passage is of a “master of explosives” and the “poet of death,” racing through the trenches fully in control and fearless. Theweleit describes this capability, to “race through the trenches” in the heat of battle devoid of fear as the elimination of the psyche. According to

⁵⁰ *Der Kampf als Inneres Erlebnis* 34

Theweleit, Jünger is fantasizing about the potential for man to completely master and subdue his inner emotions and drives to the destructive (or productive) force of war:

The new man is a man whose physique has been mechanized, his psyche eliminated—or in part displaced into his body armor, his “predatory” suppleness. We are presented with a robot that can tell the time, find the North and stand his ground over the red-hot machine gun, or cut wire without a sound. In the moment of action he is devoid of any fear as of any other emotion. His knowledge of being able to do what he does is his only consciousness of the self. This is believe, is the ideal man of the conservative utopia: a man with machinelike periphery, whose interior has lost its meaning...The mechanized body as conservative utopia derives instead from men’s compulsion to subjugate and repulse what is specifically human within them—the id, the productive force of the unconscious.⁵¹

In contrast to the metaphor of *das Tierische*, here the inner nature of man is to be controlled and mastered, rather than allowed to escape and run wild. Jünger thus sets up an interesting juxtaposition in his vision of war: as both a liberating and regulating force. On the other hand, Jünger idealizes this regulating force as also freeing—allowing men to defeat the shortcomings of their natural bodies, and be free from their limitations: Here again Theweleit unpacks this notion:

The beauty of the machine lies in its potential to be used to resolve problems of the body... Jünger calls on the machine to take over from the body, to perform functions for which the body is inadequate: to function frictionlessly, quickly, powerfully, brilliantly, expressively—perfectly—and to remain whole despite internal explosions.⁵²

With the introduction of this idealized steel-warrior, Jünger recognizes how the horror of battle can be a productive force—leading to new forms of highly powerful and mechanized men. Throughout *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis*, Jünger refers to the “blacksmith” image of war as a “father” figure, forming the soldier into the ideal armored warrior: “Der Krieg, aller Dinge Vater,

⁵¹ Theweleit 193

⁵² *ibid.* 197

ist auch der unsere; er hat uns gehämmert, gemeißelt und gehärtet zu dem, was wir sind.”

Theweleit pursues the consequences of this image, pointing out how this warrior, born out of the war experience is “created without the help of a women, childless” is now bound to his fellow soldier “siblings” in war.

The image of the steel warrior that Jünger offers is so idealized, that the men do indeed seem to be impossibly capable and machine-like. According to Jünger, his fellow soldiers were not only strong, but also intelligent, fearless, sure-footed, steel-figures with an eagle-eye, and the spirit of militancy flowed through their steel-bodies:

Aber ihre Gesichter, die im Schatten des Stahlhelms liegen, sind scharf, kühn und klug. Ich weiß, sie zaudern vor der Gefahr nicht einen Augenblick; sie springen sie an, schnell, sehnig und gewandt. Sie verbinden glühenden Mut mit kühler Intelligenz, sie sind die Männer, die im Wirbel der Vernichtung mit sicherer Hand eine schwierige Ladehemmung beseitigen, die rauchende Handgranate dem Gegner zurückschleudern, ihm im Ringen auf Leben und Tod die Absicht aus den Augen lesen. Es sind die Stahlgestalten, deren Adlerblick geradeaus über schwirrende Propeller die Wolken durchforscht, die in das Motorengewirr der Tanks gezwängt, die Höllenfahrt durch brüllende Trichterfelder wagen, die tagelang, sicheren Tod voraus, in umzingelten, leichenumhäuftten Nestern halbverschmachtet hinter glühenden Maschinengewehren hocken. Sie sind die Besten des modernen Schlachtfeldes, vonrücksichtslosem Kämpfertum durchflutet, deren starkes Wollen sich in geballtem, zielbewußtem Energiestoß entlädt.⁵³

This symbol of the steel warrior is strongly evocative of another mythologized symbol: that of the *Übermensch*. As we know, Jünger was deeply impacted by the philosophy of Nietzsche, and was likely inspired by the suggestion that humanity has the potential to improve upon itself, and progress into a greater and more powerful mode of being. Indeed, Jünger references the terminology of Nietzsche in the prologue to *In Stahlgewittern*, when he describes the German soldier following World War I:

⁵³ *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis* 69

Das war der deutsche Infanterist im Kriege. Gleichviel wofür er kämpfte, sein Kampf war *übermenschlich*. Die Söhne waren über ihr Volk hinausgewachsen. Mit bitterem Lächeln lasen sie das triviale Zeitungsgewäsch, die ausgelaugten Worte von Helden und Heldentod. Sie wollten nicht diesen Dank, sie wollten Verständnis.⁵⁴

The experience of war transformed these soldiers into a being “above” that of their civilian counterparts, who were thus incapable of understanding these *Frontsoldaten* and what they had seen. As we noted with Jünger’s appropriation of Nietzsche’s Eternal Recurrence, he is not entirely true to the original expression of these concepts. In creating the *Übermensch* out of the German soldier of the front, Jünger renders literal an idea that Nietzsche left only starkly described.

c. The soldier as a bridge

In a more subtle way, Jünger alludes to Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* and the view that man can be surpassed through his frequent reference to the “bridge.” In the prologue of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, Zarathustra proclaims:

Der Mensch ist ein Seil, geknüpft zwischen Thier und Übermensch, - ein, Seil über einem Abgrunde. Ein gefährliches Hinüber, ein gefährliches Auf-dem-Wege, ein gefährliches Zurückblicken, ein gefährliches Schaudern und Stehenbleiben. Was groß ist am Menschen, das ist, dass er eine Brücke und kein Zweck ist: was geliebt werden kann am Menschen, das ist, dass er ein *Übergang* und ein *Untergang* ist.⁵⁵

With this metaphor, man as a bridge, Nietzsche explains that man is in a constant state of becoming, in transition. Man is “zwischen Tier und Übermensch,” no longer animal through the control of our instincts, but is capable of yet another, higher state of development. Nietzsche emphasizes the dynamism of men, and condemns those who see the current capabilities and

⁵⁴ *In Stahlgewittern 2*

⁵⁵ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. Kindle. 1893. Vorrede, 4.

values of men as static and permanent.

Using the symbol of the steel-warrior, and repeatedly drawing on the motif of the bridge in his stories, Jünger is nodding to this concept of a state of in-between, transition, and overcoming. For example, in *Sturm*, the protagonist is reading one of his original stories, which features the character Sergeant Kiel reflecting on a bridge:

Erebttes Abenteuerblut in ihm, dem aus alten Stadtchronik Wesenverwandtes dämmerte, wurde jedesmal seltsam gestimmt durch den hellen Vielklang der Kehrreime, die sich wohl seit Jahrhunderten an denselben grauen, gebeugten Giebeln brachen. So durch das Gefühl des Gegensatzes der Zeiten und dahinfließenden Generationen zum Eintagsleben des Einzelnen merkwürdig dunkel und wehmütig gerührt, lehnte er oft am Geländer alter Brücken und starrte in das schmutzige Gewässer des Flusses, der untern feinem Abendnebel um ausgewachsene Mauern spülte.⁵⁶

A few things are important to note about this passage. First, like *Sturm* earlier in the novel, Kiel is shown to be struggling, intellectually troubled by the unresolved contradictions of their time. It is in these moments that he stops on a bridge, leans on the railing, and reflects while staring into the “dirty” river water. This dirty river water can be interpreted as symbolizing the history of people, flowing up to and then beyond the moment in time where Kiel stands. Second, this moment of reflection on the bridge is associated with the “ererbtes Abenteuerblut,” the inherited spirit of adventure that flows through his bloodstream. This *Abenteuerblut*, drives him to adventure, and represents his dynamism, or becoming, towards something greater than his current state.

Similarly, earlier in the novel, *Sturm* also experiences a meaningful moment of reflection while he stands on a bridge, observing a young boy fishing:

Er war auf eine uralten Brücke stehengeblieben und hatte gesehen, wie ein angelnder Knabe einen langen, goldschimmernden Aal aus

⁵⁶ *Sturm* 62

dem Wasser zog. Unter dem leichten Tuch des Anzuges schlug sein Blut warm und jung gegen die Haut. Wie wurde in solchen Stunden das Kleinste bedeutungsvoll. Wohin auch der Blick fallen mochte, der Geist verknüpfte jedes Ding durch schöne und besondere Gedanken mit sich.⁵⁷

It is while he is standing on this bridge that he senses the meaning in the small things. The bridge represents the connection (*verknüpfen*) of different ideas and perspectives—the presence of the moment with the ancientness of the bridge, for example.

Coupled with Nietzsche's theories of the transitory state of man into something grander, he seeks to challenge the Christian belief in the centrality of man in the universe. In the absence of a humanity-loving god, the individual represents a fleeting and insignificant moment. In this passage, the narrator, reflecting on a bridge, represents this as the wind whips leaves into the water:

Dann schreite ich wieder über Straßen und Plätze, die nun in Lichtern schwimmen. Allmählich komme ich in eine Vorstadt, deren Häuserblöcke kahl und düster in den Abend ragen. Nur in weiten Zwischenräumen glimmen Laternen. Ich bleibe am Geländer einer Brücke stehen und starre in den schwarzen Spiegel eines Kanals. Ich bin traurig geworden, alles ist einsam und unbekannt. Der Wind reißt ganze Hände voll Blätter aus den herbstlichen Bäumen, treibt sie raschelnd vorüber und wirft sie ins Wasser. Ein Schleppekahn gleitet unhörbar unhervor wie ein langer, schwarzer Sarg.⁵⁸

As in the previous passage, the narrator observes the passing of time and generations before him in the passing of the canal water. He senses his own insignificance and vulnerability, represented by the fall leaves, blown about by the unstoppable passing of the seasons, and it is the perspective offered by standing atop the bridge that allows for this perspective of clearer understanding and “reflection”. The reader is again reminded of Nietzsche's belief in the

⁵⁷ *Sturm* 51

⁵⁸ *Der Kampf als Inneres Erlebnis* 63

modesty and transience of humans, though we are not left with the sense of humanity developing into something grander. Thus, as is true with many instances where Jünger draws on the symbols first employed by Nietzsche, Jünger plays with the imagery, moving away from an direct appropriation of its meaning, while still deploying some of the same implications. Moreover, the meaning of “the bridge” is also not limited to a single concept. It seems to touch on both the idea of the human *as* the bridge, as in a state of transition, as well as the perspective of reflection that the bridge provides humans (the ability to look below on the passage of time).

In previous instances we have seen how Jünger “literalizes” metaphors borrowed from Nietzsche within the context of war. Here, however, it seems that Jünger is instead attempting to mobilize particular Nietzschean connotations of these metaphors—such as the smallness of the common man and dynamism—in a more abstract way.

IV. Jünger’s War Myth

a. Mythologizing war

Following the end of World War I, Ernst Jünger returned to the volatile Weimar Republic, where violence was rampant on the streets and political polarization threatened the stability of the young republic. After recovering from a shot to the lung towards the end of the war, Jünger continued to serve in the *Reichswehr* in Hannover until 1923. Upon his demobilization, Jünger began his studies of philosophy and zoology at the University of Leipzig. During this time, Jünger began engaging in political activity, writing hundreds of political editorials, and actively participating in *Stahlhelm*, a prominent nationalistic paramilitary association.⁵⁹

Despite Jünger’s disappointment at the WWI capitulation of the German Army and the

⁵⁹ King, John. "Ernst Jünger- Biography." *Ernst Jünger in Cyberspace Iv*.

harsh conditions of the Versailles treaty, he refused to see the war as meaningless. Though many former front soldiers affiliated with the *Friedensbewegung* of the Weimar Republic because of the horrors they had seen in war, Jünger did not believe that the political failures of war rendered the violence fruitless. Through his 1920's journalism, war diaries, and novels, Jünger developed his theories about the nature of war—communicating both its horrors and productive possibilities. In this last section we will examine how Jünger mythologizes war, paying special attention to how his deployment of metaphor and symbol feed into and illustrate these ideas.

First, however, it is necessary to clarify what “mythologizing” war actually means, and how this characterizes the works of Jünger. Mythologizing refers to the process of embodying beliefs about a phenomenon (in this case war) through narrative, giving the experience a legendary and possibly meaningful character. In the case of Jünger in his 1920s writing, he offers an account of war that confers an endogenous quality to the experience, rendering it meaningful independent of the specific political factors that acted as the catalyst for the war. In that sense it is misleading to refer to Jünger's writings as purely “nationalistic,” since the purpose of his account of war is not to justify German militarism for the sake of national goals. Furthermore, Jünger's war myth does not unambiguously “glorify” war as is frequently claimed.

To further unpack Jünger's view on war, we will examine four key aspects of Jünger's war myth. First, the idea that war is natural and inevitable. Second, that war is productive, transformative, and life-affirming. Third, that the nature of modern machine warfare has displaced the individual and rendered him obsolete. Fourth and lastly, that war is more important than culture in shaping the character of nations.

b. Inevitable conflict

At a time when the Weimar Republic *Friedensbewegung* sought to overcome a future

with war, Jünger countered with his firm belief that war is inevitable. Indeed, the frequent use of metaphor comparing battle to a violent storm implies the naturalness of conflict. According to Jünger, war mirrors the inescapability of a storm following any lengthy period of peace. Just as hurricane, tornado or thunderstorm strikes with the same cyclical regularity each year, so will the drive of men to war. In *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis*, Jünger unambiguously argues this point:

In diesem Punkte treffe ich mich mit dem Pazifisten aus Überzeugung: Zuerst sind wir Menschen, und das verbindet uns. Aber gerade, weil wir Menschen sind, wird immer wieder der Augenblick kommen, wo wir übereinander herfallen müssen. Anlässe und Mittel des Kampfes werden sich ändern, der Kampf selbst aber ist eine von vornherein gegebene Lebensform, er wird immer derselbe bleiben.⁶⁰

With this passage, Jünger rebuts the premise of the Pacifist movement, that war can be avoided. This statement crystallizes the symbols of war that Jünger employs throughout *In Stahlgewittern*, *Sturm*, and *Der Kampf als Inneres Erlebnis*: the “storm” of war, and the “bestial” and “primordial” drive to war. War cannot be avoided through political maneuvering or international diplomacy, because it will explode out of man in regular intervals as a natural and powerful phenomenon. Furthermore, war cannot be avoided, since this “bestial” inner drive to war lives within man, even during times of external political peace:

Aber der Krieg ist nicht tot, wenn keine Dörfer und Städte mehr brennen, wenn nicht mehr Millionen mit verkrampfter Faust im Feuer verbluten, wenn man nicht mehr Menschen als wimmernde Bündel auf die blanken Tische der Lazarette schnallt. Er wird auch nicht geboren von einigen Staatsmännern und Diplomaten, wie viele glauben. Das alles ist nur äußerlich. Die wahren Quellen des Krieges springen tief in unserer Brust, und alles Gräßliche, was zuzeiten die Welt überflutet, ist nur ein Spiegelbild der menschlichen Seele, im Geschehen sich offenbarend.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *Der Kampf als Inneres Erlebnis* 44

⁶¹ *ibid.* 39

This quote from *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis* further speaks to Jünger's depiction of the inevitability of war. In his use of the word "mirror" (*Spiegel*), Jünger also draws on a symbol that we noted earlier from *Sturm*, when the narrator described the transformed, war-torn landscape as a *reflection* of the transformed nature of the warriors.⁶²

This aspect of the war myth is important in explaining the ethical orientation of Jünger's accounts of war. From his perspective, war is an unavoidable phenomenon. Therefore, it would be impossible and useless to apply a moral framework condemning war and attempting to avoid its onset. Condemning and trying to halt war would be as successful as stopping an oncoming hurricane. Jünger thus moves on from this impossibility, and attempts instead to study and describe the character and productive potential of the battle, as well as its destructive capabilities. In the next section we will discuss the aspect of Jünger's war myth that lauds its life-affirming spirit.

c. War as transformative, productive, and life-affirming

Alongside his portrayal of war as a natural, inevitable occurrence, Jünger at times argues for its transformative, productive, and life-affirming qualities. It is from these passages in particular that Jünger is seen to "glorify" war. Though as we shall see, he does praise these potential capabilities of battle, this is only one aspect of his war myth interpreted holistically.

On a fundamental level, Jünger seems to draw his belief in these "positive" capabilities of war from the philosophy of Nietzsche, who praises the flourishing of Chaos. In *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, Nietzsche declares: "Ich sage euch: man muss noch Chaos in sich haben, um einen

⁶² See page 11: "...Das alles hatte der Mensch gemacht. In seiner Seele ging eine Wandlung vor, und die Landschaft bekam ein neues Gesicht. Denn hinter allem wirkte der Mensch, nur war diese Wirkung so oft gewaltig, dass er sich selbst nicht mehr erkannte darin."⁶² (*Sturm* 22-23)

tanzenden Stern gebären zu können. Ich sage euch: ihr habt noch Chaos in euch.”⁶³ The chaotic conditions of war, which Jünger compares to a whirling and thundering “storm of steel”, produce the hardened, *übermenschlich* warrior that Jünger so admires among his comrades. Here we see the function of the metaphors of war as a blacksmith and the soldier as the *Stahlmann*. These two metaphors work together to illustrate Jünger’s myth of war as a productive phenomenon. The blacksmith is a productive figure, forming useful and necessary objects out of raw material. Much in the same way, the smithing war forms the soft, pre-war man into a toughened (*übermenschlich*) steel soldier. Just as the searing hot flame (an element of danger) is necessary for the blacksmith to create new forms, the “flame” of war (its chaos, violence) is necessary for the forging of the *Übermensch*, who, in Jünger is characterized by his *Stahlnatur*, his steel nature.

In *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Nietzsche asserts that man must accept and desire the full spectrum of human existence, including pain, fear, and destruction, and recognize their necessity in the full manifestation of life:

Auch die dionysische Kunst will uns von der ewigen Lust des Daseins überzeugen: nur sollen wir diese Lust nicht in den Erscheinungen, sondern hinter den Erscheinungen suchen. Wir sollen erkennen, wie alles, was entsteht, zum leidvollen Untergange bereit sein muss, wir werden gezwungen in die Schrecken der Individualexistenz hineinzublicken - und sollen doch nicht erstarren: ein metaphysischer Trost reisst uns momentan aus dem Getriebe der Wandelgestalten heraus. Wir sind wirklich in kurzen Augenblicken das Urwesen selbst und fühlen dessen unbändige Daseinsgier und Daseinslust; der Kampf, die Qual, die Vernichtung der Erscheinungen dünkt uns jetzt wie nothwendig, bei dem Übermaß von unzähligen, sich in's Leben drängenden und stossenden Daseinsformen, bei der überschwänglichen Fruchtbarkeit des Weltwillens.⁶⁴

⁶³ Also Sprach Zarathustra Vorrede 5.

⁶⁴ Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *Die Geburt Der Tragödie*. 1872. 17

Also interesting to note in this passage from Nietzsche is the use of the metaphor *Urwesen*. This moment of clarity, in which man is able to experience and understand full desire and joy for existence is described as “primordial.” This imagery could also have inspired Jünger in his description of the drive to war as the emerging “bestial primordial man.”

There are several passages in Jünger’s works that call on this Nietzschean acceptance and embrace of the full expression of human existence. For example, in *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis*, Jünger sees the chaos of the near death experience is a revealing and freeing experience for the *Kämpfer*:

Wenn das rote Leben gegen die schwarzen Riffe des Todes braust, setzen sich ausgesprochene Farben zu scharfen Bildern zusammen. Das sind – wir leben mitten darin – Epochen der *Enthüllung*, der *Entfesselung*, abhold allem Feinen, Zarten und Lyrischen. Überall ballt rückschnellendes Leben sich zu barbarischer Fülle und Wucht, nicht zuletzt in der Liebe und der Kunst.⁶⁵

Evocative of Nietzsche, Jünger speaks to exuberance or abundance (*Fülle*) and power (*Wucht*) of this “unleashing” (*Entfesselung*) experience. Furthermore, in *Sturm*, the narrator describes his wonder at the power of war to create new forms. Through the voice of Lieutenant Sturm, Jünger uses the metaphor of a fortress tower in his hometown, built in the chaos of war, to mirror this productive nature of war:

Vielleicht war es auch das Klare und Bestimmte dieser Kampfbauten, was ihn so ergriff. Er erinnerte sich, dass er an einer Uferstraße seiner Norddeutschen Vaterstadt oft und lange einen uralten Stadtturm betrachtet hatte, in dessen fensterlosen, gewaltigen Quaderbau nur schmale Schießscharten geschnitten waren.... allein als feste und geschlossene Einheit empor...Nur der Kampf brachte solche Erscheinungen hervor.⁶⁶

Sturm is in thus in awe of the productive possibilities alive in the chaos and horror of war.

⁶⁵ *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis* 34

⁶⁶ *Sturm* 21

A common related theme in Jünger's war myth is the "renewal" brought about through war, in particular a renewal through destruction and regression. In *Sturm*, Jünger describes through the narrator the experience of war as enlightening:

Hier gebar ein neues Geschlecht eine neue Auffassung der Welt, indem es durch ein uraltes Erlebnis schritt. Dieser Krieg war ein Urnebel physischer Möglichkeiten, von Entwicklungen geladen; wer in seinem Einfluß nur das Rohe, Barbarische erkannte, schälte genau mit der gleichen ideologischen Willkür ein einziges Attribut aus einem riesenhaften Komplex wie der, der nur das Patriotisch-Heroische an ihm sah.⁶⁷

More specifically, war enlightens through the ancient experience of the struggle, completely foreign to civilians in this modern era. The soldier gains a new perspective on the war, through the experience of regressing to the age-old experience of battle.

Furthermore, in *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis*, Jünger offers the image of the *Urwald* (the virgin or primeval forest) to show how destruction and decay lead to renewal in succeeding generations:

So wie der Urwald immer ragender und gewaltiger zur Höhe strebt, seines Wachstums Kräfte aus dem eigenen Niedergange, seinen im schlammigen Boden verwesenden und zerfallenden Teilen saugend, so erwächst jede neue Generation der Menschheit auf einem Grunde, geschichtet durch den Zerfall unzähliger Geschlechter, die hier vom Reigen des Lebens ruhen. Wohl sind die Körper dieser Gewesenen, die zuvor ihren Tanz geendet, vernichtet, im flüchtigen Sande verweht oder vermodert auf dem Grunde der Meere. Doch ihre Teile, ihre Atome werden vom Leben, dem sieghaften, ewig jungen, wieder herangerissen in rastlosem Wechsel und so erhoben zu ewigen Trägern lebendiger Kraft.⁶⁸

The decline, decay, and disintegration of humanity described through the metaphor of the forest can be seen as the cycle of natural war. The destruction of war makes way and prepares for

⁶⁷ *ibid.* 25-26

⁶⁸ *Der Kampf als Inneres Erlebnis* 6

future generations, in the same way that rotting plant matter prepares soil for renewed forest growth. Jünger also seems to celebrate the variation and robustness of life forms within the forest. Just as the *literal* progress of civilization destroys the virginal forest through industrialization, the *intellectual* “progress” of civility, with its “polishing” and “dampening” effects also depletes the wealth of different forms of life. Thus, Jünger turns the concept of “destruction” on its head—positing peaceful civilization as ultimately *destructive*, and war as *productive*. Again, we see undeniable parallels in the symbols employed by Nietzsche:

Es ist an der Zeit, dass der Mensch sich sein Ziel stecke. Es ist an der Zeit, dass der Mensch den Keim seiner höchsten Hoffnung pflanze. Noch ist sein Boden dazu reich genug. Aber dieser Boden wird einst arm und zahm sein, und kein hoher Baum wird mehr aus ihm wachsen können. Wehe! Es kommt die Zeit, wo der Mensch nicht mehr den Pfeil seiner Sehnsucht über den Menschen hinaus wirft, und die Sehne seines Bogens verlernt hat, zu schwirren! Ich sage euch: man muss noch Chaos in sich haben, um einen tanzenden Stern gebären zu können. Ich sage euch: ihr habt noch Chaos in euch.⁶⁹

In this passage of *Also Sprach Zarathustra* Nietzsche sets up this idea, later employed by Jünger, that man can advance upon itself (overcome), as a forest does, in a continual cycle of growth, destruction, decay, and renewal. As Jünger also implies later in his chaotic description of this metaphorical *Urwald*, Nietzsche sees wildness, chaos, robustness, and variation as necessary ingredients for this renewal (“Aber dieser Boden wird einst arm und zahm sein, und kein hoher Baum wird mehr aus ihm wachsen können.“). Thus, the chaos of war reproduces the character and variation of life that Jünger celebrates through his metaphor of the primordial forest.

d. The new material warfare

⁶⁹ *Also Sprach Zarathustra* Vorrede 5.

Despite the productive aspects of Jünger's war myth described in the previous section, Jünger was also clearly troubled by the state of modern warfare. The battlefield of World War I introduced new, technologically brutal means of destruction unheard of before this conflict. Trench warfare changed the nature of war, placing a higher premium on the material and technological capabilities of the warring states, rather than the individual strength of their warriors. In *Sturm*, Jünger bemoans this development:

Eine schwere Verletzung des modernen Staates dagegen bedroht auch jedes Individuum in seiner Existenz, zum mindesten den Teil, der nicht unmittelbar vom Boden lebt, also den weitaus größten. Aus dieser riesenhaften Gefahr erklärt sich die erbitterte Wut, das atemlose 'jusqu'au bout' des Kampfes, den zwei solcher Machtgebilde miteinander führen. Bei diesem Zusammenprall werden nicht mehr wie zur Zeit der blanken Waffe die Fähigkeit des Einzelnen, sondern die des großen Organismus gegeneinander abgewogen. Produktion, Stand der Technik, Chemie, Schulwesen und Eisenbahnnetze: das sind die Kräfte, die unsichtbar hinter den Rauchwolken der Materialschlacht sich gegenüberstehen⁷⁰

He sees this development in warring through technology, chemistry and production as devastating to the individual in war. This is the other aspect of his war myth—tempering his praise of the hardening process that creates his “steel” warriors:

Dieser Zwang, der das Leben des Individuums einem unwiderstehlichen Willen unterwarf, trat hier in furchtbarer Deutlichkeit hervor. Der Kampf spielte in riesenhaften Ausmaßen, vor denen das Einzelschicksal verschwand. Die Weite und tödliche Einsamkeit des Gefildes, Fernwirkung stählerner Maschinen und die Verlegung jeder Bewegung in die Nacht zogen eine starre Titanenmaske über das Geschehen. Man schleuderte sich den Tod zu, ohne sich zu sehen; man wurde getroffen, ohne zu wissen, woher es kam...

The scale of killing within the war renders death meaningless and eliminates the significance of the individual. Note how Jünger's metaphor of the bridge (also featured prominently in *Sturm*) functions to allow for this perspective on the experience of war. As we discussed previously, the

⁷⁰ *Sturm* 11

protagonist of *Sturm* broods while standing on the top of the bridge, with the passing water symbolizing the passing of time through history, and he “reflects” on the smallness of the individual (“Der Wind reißt ganze Hände voll Blätter aus den herbstlichen Bäumen, treibt sie raschelnd vorüber und wirft sie ins Wasser...“). Therefore, in concert with the superior standpoint offered by the bridge, Jünger speaks to the magnitude and material of war shifting its effects.

Furthermore, despite soldierly camaraderie, the experience Jünger describes in this passage of *Sturm* is one of lonely horror, as the soldier is unable to directly confront his enemy as in wars past:

...Längst hatte der Präzisionsschuss des geschulten Schützen, das direkte Feuer der Geschütze und damit der Reiz des Duells dem Massenfeuer der Maschinengewehre und der geballten Artilleriegruppen weichen müssen.⁷¹

Die Entscheidung lief auf ein Rechenexempel hinaus: Wer eine bestimmte Anzahl von Quadratmetern mit der größeren Geschoßmenge überschütten konnte, hielt den Sieg in der Faust. Eine brutale Begegnung von Massen war die Schlacht, ein blutiger Ringkampf der Produktion und des Materials. Daher kam auch den Kämpfern, diesem unterirdischen Bedienungspersonal mörderischer Maschinen, oft wochenlang nicht zum Bewusstsein, dass hier Mensch gegen Menschen stand.⁷²

This machine warfare of the modern age alienates the soldier from the experience of the *Kampf*.

Notably, this partially undermines Jünger’s vision of war as transformative and productive, since

the warrior is left without the tangible “worthy opponent” that Jünger values. Consequently,

Jünger does see war as partially senseless:

...Es war im Grunde wohl dasselbe Gefühl von Sinnlosigkeit, das aus den kahlen Häuserblöcken von Fabrikstädten zuweilen in traurige Hirne sprang, jenes Gefühl, mit dem die Masse die Seele erdrückt.⁷³

⁷¹ *Sturm* 11-12

⁷² *ibid.* 12

⁷³ *ibid.* 12

Thus, we can see from this aspect of Jünger's war myth that he clearly does not unambiguously glorify the violence of war, since the modern trench warfare can have existentially devastating effects on the individual, and undermine the productive capabilities of battle.

e. Primacy of war over culture

The final aspect of Jünger's war myth to be addressed is the alleged primacy of war over culture in determining the character of humanity and the makeup of the world. Throughout his war depictions and political essays, Jünger describes how the cultural and intellectual "progression" of the modern age is a superficial layer, taming the true nature of the man below this permeable armor. War, not peacetime culture, shapes man:

Der Krieg ist die mächtigste Begegnung der Völker. Während sich in Handel und Verkehr, bei Wettkämpfen und Kongressen nur die vorgeschobenen Spitzen berühren, kennt im Kriege ihre gesamte Mannschaft nur ein Ziel, den Feind. Welche Fragen und Ideen auch immer die Welt bewegten, stets war es der blutige Austrag, der über sie entschied. Wohl wurden alle Freiheit, alle Größe und alle Kultur in der Idee, im Stillen geboren, doch nur durch Kriege erhalten, verbreitet oder verloren. Durch Krieg erst werden große Religionen Gut der ganzen Erde, schossen die tüchtigsten Rassen aus dunklen Wurzeln zum Licht, wurden unzählige Sklaven freie Männer. Der Krieg ist ebensowenig eine menschliche Einrichtung wie der Geschlechtstrieb; er ist ein Naturgesetz, deshalb werden wir uns niemals seinem Banne entwinden. Wir dürfen ihn nicht leugnen, sonst wird er uns verschlingen.⁷⁴

This passage clearly dismisses the "cosmopolitan" moral objectivism orientation of his modern philosophical contemporaries. Furthermore, this passage demonstrates the indifference with which Jünger views questions of morality. For him, the merits of certain religious moral frameworks, for example, is irrelevant given that their dominance can only be achieved through *violent* domination. And since war is an inevitable occurrence outside the scope of ethical

⁷⁴ *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis* 36

calculation, Jünger does not believe that the prevalence of certain cultural or moral norms is determined by their universal applicability or appeal, but rather the ability of those nations to defend their “ideals”:

Gerade deshalb ist es die heilige Pflicht der höchsten Kultur, die stärksten Bataillone zu haben. Es können Zeiten kommen, wo flüchtige Hufe von Barbarenrossen über die Trümmerhalden unserer Städte klappern. Nur der Starke hält seine Welt in der Faust, dem Schwachen muß sie in Chaos zerrinnen.⁷⁵

In this passage, Jünger’s use of the phrase “highest culture” (*höchsten Kultur*) is ironic, as Jünger does not care for civilian adoration of particular “superficial” aspects of daily life. Rather than assigning value to certain cultures or nations, Jünger describes the phenomenon of war and how it relates to culture. Cultures and values spread through force, and the nature of those ideas is irrelevant beyond this fact. Again, this undermines a purely nationalistic reading of Jünger, given that he does not yield primacy to a certain nation, rather to the strongest battalion.

V. Conclusion

With his enthralling accounts of war, iconoclastic philosophy, and fascinating life story, Ernst Jünger is one of the most intriguing German writers of the modern era. In focusing on three of his works from the Weimar Republic era, we have only scratched the surface of Jünger’s writing. *In Stahlgewittern*, *Sturm*, and *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis* are, however, three of the most important texts for understanding Jünger’s myth of war and the orientation of the *Konservative Revolution* movement.

In this literary analysis, we have unpacked his myth of war, primarily through a close reading of the myth and symbols most critically and ubiquitously deployed by Jünger in these three texts. First, however, the works of Knud Krakau and Jans Mieszkowski offered a clear

⁷⁵ *Der Kampf Als Inneres Erlebnis* 37

theoretical framework for analyzing Jünger. From these texts we can understand how myth and symbol contribute to a politically orienting “cultural system,” and how the fantastical nature of war demands a metaphorical representation in the accounts of battle. Next, we discussed Jünger’s alleged “aestheticization” of war through metaphors relating to weather and nature. Then, the image of war as a blacksmith, and the symbol of the worthy opponent further enriched our understanding of Jünger’s accounts of war. In the third section of this analysis, we then moved onto the discussion of Jünger’s symbols describing the soldier—the primordial beast, the steel warrior, and the soldier as a bridge. Lastly, we examined Jünger’s overall myth of war, and how these metaphors and symbols feed into it. Throughout this analysis, the parallels between the metaphoric and philosophy of Jünger and Friedrich Nietzsche allowed us to trace the progression and orientation of Jünger’s war myth.

So, all in all, what have we discovered about Jünger’s war myth? What does Jünger *actually* say about war? As we have seen, Jünger expresses a lot of varying, complicated, and occasionally contradictory things about the experience. On one hand, Jünger sees battle as transformative, life affirming, and natural. Here especially Jünger picks up the philosophy of Nietzsche, by celebrating the chaos of life—even in the horrific instance of war. Jünger also sees war as an escape from certain problems of modernity, in the way that war peels back the patina of culture to reveal the true depth of human nature. Thus, the armor of the soldier contains and protects, but frees his true being.

On the other hand, Jünger does not unambiguously celebrate war. He expresses his concerns regarding the mechanization of the material warfare that leaves the individual abandoned and in a crisis of consciousness, unable to fully grasp the experience of battle. Therefore, the any reading that conflates Jünger’s aestheticization of war with glorification, or

that declares Jünger as a staunch militarist nationalist, should be viewed with careful skepticism. Indeed, in his groundbreaking work, *Die Ästhetik des Schreckens*, Karl Heinz Bohrer thoroughly defends Jünger from the accusations that his early works fascistically glorify the war:

Ernst Jüngers Frühwerk—das ist eine These dieses Buches—ist einer der letzten Versuche gewesen, dem Begriff der Vernunft durch die pure Anschauung des Schönen aufzukündigen. Es wird zu zeigen sein, inwiefern dieser Versuch wider die Vernunft kein Sekundärvorgang ist im Schatten ideologischer Gewährsleute und theoretische Vermittler, sondern als ein von anderen Determinanten her zu begreifender, autonomer Akt ästhetischer Wahrnehmung...⁷⁶

As Bohrer argues, projecting a narrow ideological standpoint onto the works of Jünger is not only a dishonest reading of the literature, but prevents the reader from understanding Jünger's true purpose in constructing his war myth. Our investigation supports this claim, since the war myth we unpacked could not unequivocally support mobilization on behalf of a given ideology. Jünger's war myth, as we have discovered, is too focused on communicating the experience of war with a certain amount of indifference, amorality, and subjectivity, and it also gives weight to war's perils.

Given this multi-faceted war myth that we have uncovered, how can we grapple with Jünger's war myth holistically? From our literary analysis of Jünger's use of metaphor, symbol and myth, we can see that Jünger is not attempting to unequivocally assign a value to, or condemn, war. Moreover, he does not seem to view this as possible, given the complex nature of the war experience. Instead, Jünger is attempting to aesthetically express the experience of the World War I soldier. As Bohrer explains, his war myth is an "act of autonomous perception," (autonomer Akt ästhetischer Wahrnehmung), to understand war "in itself" (das Anschauen der

⁷⁶ Bohrer, Karl Heinz. *Die Ästhetik Des Schreckens*. München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1978.

Dinge an sich)⁷⁷. Jünger is, however, clearly skeptical of a communicable, objective, observable truth. Jünger does not believe that the true spirit, or inner experience of war can be conveyed through a report and a photograph. Rather, Jünger employs metaphor to appeal to the imagination of the reader. After all, the intangible, independent spirit of war—the violent arbitrary storm, the raging, hammering blacksmith—can only truly be grasped in the fantasy.

While recognizing its horror and perils, Jünger asks the reader to re-imagine war also as a kind of vehicle, and uses Nietzsche's *Übermensch* as the spark for this re-envisioning. In this revision, war acts as a storming blacksmith, hammering, and “bridging,” the pre-war man to something grander—the *übermenschlicher Krieger* of steel. The armor of the steel man simultaneously protects and frees the primordial man from the constraints of cultural progression; in Jünger, culture is recast as the destructive force, while war renews through its chaos, catalyzing the growth of extinct forms of life and thinking that explode out of this freed warrior. Even contemporarily, war is almost always studied in the context of the given politics and ideology that spawn it, or the resulting material and human destruction. What Jünger does, however, is dig beneath the rubble, to examine in isolation what war is “in itself”, doing so from the perspective of an individual who emerged from the storm “zermalmt, aber nicht besiegt.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Bohrer. 91

⁷⁸ *In Stahlgewittern* 37

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