

## INTRODUCTION



Very few, if any, critics of German literature would rank Ernst Jünger among the greatest writers of the twentieth century. He simply does not compare, as a novelist, with giants like Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, or Robert Musil. His signature work, *Auf den Marmorklippen*, has been often justly praised for its chiseled language and allegorical imagination. But for later generations raised on soaring flights of science fiction, Jünger's 1939 work must seem brief, rather stilted, and now somewhat dated. In any event, it pales beside *Buddenbrooks* and *Der Zauberberg*, *Das Urteil* and *Das Schloss*, or *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. True, the political implications of Jünger's fiction merit scrutiny, but that does not vitiate the commonplace that truly great literary conceptions always transcend the time and place of their authorship.

If Jünger should not be placed in the first rank of German-language novelists, then, he nevertheless surely belongs among the most prolific and perceptive keepers of a journal. Neither "memoir" nor "diary" quite captures the flavor of his published *Tagebücher*, which were frequent and scattered essays worked up from entries he jotted into a small notebook that he ordinarily carried on his daily rounds. The resulting journals were thus self-conscious literary products, carefully edited, written, and rewritten for maximum effect, much as any scholar composes an account based on archival notes with the ultimate intention of publication. Jünger did not write the journals for himself but for a public. To be sure, it is instructive to compare his original versions with the elaborated final text, but he must ultimately be judged on the reconsidered statements that form the corpus of his published work. As he put it himself, "the best record of a first impression is the fruit of repeated efforts, passionate rewriting."<sup>1</sup>

That said, the reader should be aware of the technical difficulties involved in evaluating Jünger's published writings. He was forever tinkering with his

prose. His early account of life and death in the trenches of the First World War, *In Stahlgewittern*, appeared between 1922 and 1952 in at least eight different versions.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, his writings concerning the Second World War evolved through several stages of revision before their printing in the late 1990s as part of Jünger's *Sämtliche Werke*. The German Literature Archive at Marbach am Neckar, near Stuttgart, contains the various manuscripts that preceded a final edition. Despite some overlaps, these versions may be divided into four distinct phases of composition.

*Notes:* These comprise seven *Notizbücher* (1939–1945) and six *Taschenkalender* (1942–1944), plus a seventh of the latter from 1946. Obviously Jünger carried these pocket-sized notepads with him or had them in his bedroom at night, and scribbled in them randomly to remind himself of quotidian occurrences or thoughts.

*Diaries:* Seventeen *Tagebücher* (1939–1945) were worked up concurrently or belatedly from the first notations. They assumed the form of logbooks with a day-by-day format that in effect constituted an initial rough draft of what was to follow.

*Journals:* On the basis of his diaries, Jünger then constructed a fuller edited version that tended to strain out many personal details and include more abstract or philosophical reflections. These handwritten *Journale* are now collected into three leather-bound volumes (1941–1944) at the Marbach archive.

*Strahlungen:* Under this title the first printed editions of Jünger's wartime observations appeared. They include six sections: one published already in 1942 and called "Gärten und Strassen," describing Jünger's travels in France before reaching Paris; the two "Pariser Tagebücher," recounting his activities in the French capital during the German Occupation; the "Kaukasische Aufzeichnungen," which portrayed a brief interval when he was stationed in Russia; the "Kirchhorster Blätter," entries concerning Jünger's return to spouse and hence Germany near the war's end (these four were initially printed 1949); and finally "Die Hütte im Weinberg," his immediate postwar recollections added to the canon in 1958. Apart from a few interesting amendments and omissions (considered in Chapter 8 of this study) the text of the *Journale* remained essentially the same in the printed *Strahlungen*, which have been given their final resting place in Jünger's collected works published by Klett-Cotta Verlag in Stuttgart.<sup>3</sup>

The unavoidable complications in tracing Jünger's writing through these successive phases should not obfuscate the fundamental fact that his ultimate purpose was to publish his journals, which of course helps to explain many of

the changes he made in pursuit of that goal. In reference to all of his wartime recollections between 1939 and 1945, the use of the simple English expression “journals” seems entirely appropriate and harmless enough so long as this more complex background is kept in view.

This treatment of Ernst Jünger’s career concentrates on his experience during the Second World War and, specifically, on his role in the German Occupation of Paris, for which his journals constitute the main source along with his extensive correspondence. When correlating and contemplating these primary documents, there are certain basic questions concerning Jünger’s comportment before and during the war years that need to be addressed. How far was he willing to go in support of right-wing causes? To what extent did he actually abet those who were sworn enemies of parliamentary democracy? What were his core beliefs in regard to fascism and in particular to Nazism? Moreover, in his personal life Jünger has been accused of an unmistakable coldness toward others. Was that true of his attitude and bearing as a military officer toward his superiors? His inferiors? Toward the French? Or the Jews? If so, did that same chilly disposition color his relationship with women, or did he treat his romantic attachments with a tenderness reserved for them alone? Clearly these are complex personal matters that do not allow simple conclusions or facile formulations. It is surely well for the would-be biographer not to settle prematurely on hard and fast judgments before the relevant evidence has been gathered and pondered. Yet, granted that all readers should reserve the right to form their own opinions, the author of a volume like this has an indispensable responsibility to propose some plausible conclusions while qualifying or rejecting others.

How to proceed? The structure of this book is basically chronological. The first two chapters introduce Ernst Jünger as a young man and retrace the path by which he made his way to Paris in 1941 as a German army captain assigned to the Occupation of France. Chapters 3 and 4 then follow Jünger’s footsteps around Paris, considering both his professional and personal contacts, as well as his innermost perceptions that were expressed either in unconscious apparitions while sleeping or in conscious ruminations regularly entered into his journals. Chapter 5 describes the brief but significant episode of Jünger’s disturbing experience in Soviet Russia in late 1942, a time that must have removed any uncertainty he might still have entertained about the bestiality of conditions on the eastern front. Chapters 6 through 8 then portray Jünger’s return to Paris at the outset of 1943, a period when he became more than ever focused on his relationship to the Nazi regime and to the undeniably charismatic figure of the German Führer. This analysis ineluctably recounts Jünger’s marginal involvement in the assassination attempt against Hitler in July 1944, which had immediate and perilous repercussions in Paris. The final two chap-

ters are retrospective, dealing with Jünger's recollections of his Paris years and of the personalities, both German and French, whom he had encountered there.

Finally, a crucial postscript has been added that peers into Jünger's private life during the Occupation. Permission, for the first time, to employ the revealing private correspondence with his intimate Parisian friend Sophie Ravoux enables us to remove many of the ambiguities about Jünger's amorous adventures, ambiguities that previous scholarship had not been able entirely to unravel. This delicate subject of course deserves a reserved and respectful historical treatment, but it is nevertheless an indispensable complement to any biographical account of Jünger's Paris years.

If it is true that Jünger cannot be considered among the greatest German authors of the twentieth century, he was doubtless the most controversial, and the number of articles, essays, and books devoted to appraisals of him is already beyond count. Only a few of them can be mentioned in this introduction; others appear in the endnotes and bibliography.

The earliest German works about Jünger stretched from the frankly harsh recriminations of Peter de Mendelssohn to the learned, albeit somewhat belabored defense of him by Karl-Heinz Bohrer.<sup>4</sup> Positioned between them were two outstanding general studies of the Weimar intellectual scene before 1933 by Kurt Sontheimer and Hans-Peter Schwarz. Sontheimer identified Jünger as one of the many anti-democratic polemicists who emerged after 1918 and who could not escape the charge of thereby becoming gravediggers of the Republic. Casting Jünger as a "conservative anarchist," Schwarz critically analyzed both the style and content of his writings to arrive at much the same conclusion. Together, this pair all but demolished the claim in Jünger's defense that he was merely producing a seismographic record of his time; rather, he actively helped to shape that record.<sup>5</sup> It is no putdown to refer to these early examinations of Jünger's career as pioneering, and their influence was still evident at the end of the twentieth century when more biographical treatments began to appear, such as those by Martin Meyer, Paul Noack, and Steffen Martus, all of whom concentrated less than their predecessors on the problematic ethical aspects of Jünger's activity before 1933 and more on his political and philosophical bent thereafter. They arrived therewith at evaluations of Jünger that can fairly be called balanced.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, by the beginning of the twenty-first century there was still no full-scale biography of Jünger. That scholarly lacuna was soon filled in 2007 by the simultaneous appearance of two 600-page tomes by Heimo Schwilk and Helmuth Kiesel. Without suggesting a whitewash of Jünger, both of them were manifestly well disposed toward their subject, although their estimations of him differed in approach.<sup>7</sup>

Schwilk has produced a rather conventional life-and-times biography from cradle to grave. He sees Ernst Jünger as a perennial outsider who was nonetheless a hard-bitten nationalist and, as such, a committed enemy of the Weimar Republic. Hence, he seems to imply that Jünger was, if anything, rhetorically more radical than the Nazis in his opposition to any participation in the parliamentary process. If there is a weakness in this account, it is the disappointingly hasty treatment of Jünger's activity during the German Occupation of France. The entire period from 1936 to 1943 is handled by Schwilk in a single 25 page chapter in which his geography of Paris is generally fuzzy and sometimes inaccurate (for instance, Jünger's residence in the Hotel Raphael was not located, as he imagines, near the Bois de Boulogne). Still, Schwilk has otherwise made excellent use of Jünger's journals and of the resources at the Marbach archive. He has therewith created a bedrock of Jünger biography that is likely to be budged only slightly in the future.

Kiesel is much more interested in Jünger the writer than Jünger the warrior. As a distinctively literary historian, he tends to move from one of Jünger's published works to another in order to draw a portrait of him as a German *Dichter und Denker*. Thus he devotes nearly sixty pages to an analysis of the composition, revisions, and reception of *In Stahlgewittern* between the two world wars; and the novel *Auf den Marmorklippen* receives twenty pages of summation and criticism. Like Schwilk, he glides over Jünger's four Paris years in less than thirty-five pages, hardly more space than is accorded to his unsuccessful post-war novel *Heliopolis*. It is not surprising, therefore, that Kiesel's main effort is to locate Jünger within the pantheon of twentieth-century European literature by offering extended comparisons with such authors as Goethe, Nietzsche, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Spengler, Thomas Mann, and Gottfried Benn, as well as the French writers Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Maurice Barrès. While he faults Jünger for an all too permissive attitude toward Nazi war crimes, particularly against the Jews, he insists that such a stance was quite typical of German intellectuals and cautions that one should not exaggerate Jünger's negative influence. It remains to be seen whether this somewhat apologetic appreciation of Jünger will withstand the rebuttals that are sure to come, yet the depth of research by both Schwilk and Kiesel is to be commended and will not easily be gainsaid.<sup>8</sup>

As for Anglophone scholarship, three earlier attempts to introduce Jünger to an international audience are worthy of mention. The 1992 study by Marcus Paul Bullock is an unstructured and rambling treatise that posits Jünger's extreme right-wing position of the Weimar years as the essential starting-point for any interpretation of him. Bullock thereby borders on an unacceptable reductionism, but he manages to sprinkle in some arresting aperçus of Jünger's more important writings.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, the well organized 1999 volume by Elliot Y. Neaman, although marred by far too frequent minor errors, succeeds

in presenting a more complex and balanced image of Jünger, which focuses on the political and scholarly reception of his career during the post war era after 1945.<sup>10</sup> These two studies have to some extent crowded out the solid but standard biographical treatment of Jünger's early career by Thomas Nevin, which appeared in 1996 and has now been superseded by Schwilk and Kiesel.<sup>11</sup> In addition, note should be taken of two works by German émigré historians long settled in the United States and writing in fluent English: Klemens von Klemperer and Dagmar Barnouw. Their markedly more critical reading of Jünger is reminiscent of the cluster of German scholars such as Sontheimer and Schwarz, mentioned above. They all place him into the context of anti-republican intellectuals following the First World War, and each chastises him for his cozy relationship with ultranationalism, if not fascism. The ultimate implication of these intellectual histories is cogently stated by Klemperer: "However unwillingly on his part, he was used by the Nazis; however unwittingly, his thought led into the German catastrophe."<sup>12</sup>

In general, one must conclude, despite all the controversy he has aroused in the German-speaking world, and to a lesser extent in France, that Ernst Jünger is a relatively little-known and little-appreciated author elsewhere compared, say, to Kafka or Mann—and he therefore remains a historical personage still to be discovered.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, the intent of this volume is to introduce Jünger to those who have only a faint impression of him, or none at all, and to explain why he deserves our attention. To do so, the focus here has been shifted from a general biography and sharpened to an optic that affords us a more detailed examination of his experience during the Second World War, undoubtedly the high point of his adult life. As a military officer in the German administration of occupied Paris, Jünger was well placed to observe events in wartime France, and his considerable talent as the keeper of a journal stood him—and consequently us—in good stead. Through his work we are thus able to see Nazi Paris from a specific standpoint, as if viewing it through the lens of a microscope rather than a telescope.<sup>14</sup>