

12. Conclusion

Ernst Jünger was certainly a very lucky and successful infantry officer and finished the War not only alive and physically intact, but also with the highest decorations of the Prussian state. Nevertheless, he was not immune to the shocking effects of the War — for whilst he certainly did not suffer from shell shock or descend into insanity, an attentive and critical reading of *In Stahlgewittern*^{1,3}, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*¹, the *Militärwochenblatt* articles and his ‘Conservative Revolutionary’ war such as I have undertaken in this thesis shows that he was prone to a persistent sense of absurdity and despair that resulted directly from the deeply and critically disturbing experience of war and defeat. My analysis of newly available material in the form of the unpublished *Kriegstagebuch* has pointed out direct indications of the strength of this sense as Ernst Jünger wrote his own war, the fragile diary form occasionally revealing what it sought to repress in its heroic, pseudo-scientific textual space.

What we see, therefore, are a series of texts that are highly fragmented and fissured. Consequently, readings which tend to oversimplify Jünger and focus solely on selected aspects of them — most notably those aspects which have not lost their capacity to shock readers of a liberal-humanist disposition — have become untenable. Although the fierceness of Jünger’s rhetoric and its baleful proximity to National Socialism have long worked provocatively, this provocation, as we have seen, in fact works frequently to distract critics and conceal ambivalence and contradiction.

Consequently, my prime concern in this thesis has been to develop a way of reading Jünger’s war texts which allows us both to do justice to and to account for their fissures. I have also attempted to retain a concern for both history and current debates in literary and cultural studies, whilst resisting the temptation of gratuitous theorising on a flimsy evidential basis, and maintaining a scholarly rigour. The interdisciplinary model I have set up of ‘classical modernity’, the processes of modernisation, the traumas of the

First World War and the fissured responses of the 'conservative imagination' provides a broad, coherent — and, for Jünger research, radically new — context within which to read Jünger's early texts.

Given this approach, Jünger's war texts are far more than biographical documents. Rather, they are manifestations of a far more general sense of cultural crisis which affected intellectuals at this time all across Europe, and they document the problems facing the conservative imagination when it tried to reinstate the logocentric assumptions of classical modernity despite the war and the shifts in scientific accounts of the world and philosophical and psychological accounts of the self. In his efforts both to do justice to the war experience and to reassert the roles of subjective autonomy, instrumental rationality, and totalising meta-narratives, Jünger created a tangle of contradictory postures and discourses which continuously deconstruct themselves — except, on my reading, in *Sturm*, where he tentatively but unsuccessfully moves beyond the confines of the conservative imagination towards a proto-post-modernism. Elsewhere, Jünger's writing shows that it has much in common with the contradictions of *Marc* or *Unruh*, the failing language of *Stramm*, the search for certainty in extremism of *Becher*, the attempt to recast theory of in the manner of Freud, or the resignation of *Lotz*. Given which, in the light of my definition of modernism in Chapter 3.4.2 (p. 51 above), we can conclude not only that the early Jünger should be considered as a modernist writer, but also that such a multi-perspectival, interdisciplinary approach is required to produce a hermeneutic that can do justice to the complexity of his writing.