MYTHS OF WAR: CONSTRUCTING AND CHALLENGING LITERARY MYTHS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN GERMANY, 1914-1930

by

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the role of literature in interpreting the First World War in Germany from 1914 to 1930 and the myths of war that were manifested within and created by such narratives of war. Beginning with an exploration of 'myth' and its relationship to the Great War, it progresses to a consideration of the role of war in the Weimar Republic and the enduring myths that the war had spawned. A detailed analysis of Walter Flex's *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten* (1917), Ernst Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern* (1920), Ludwig Renn's *Krieg* (1928) and Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1929) considers the presentation of the war experience thematically, focusing on the 'spirit of 1914', the aestheticisation of war, combat, comradeship, fate and the fallen, identifying productive tensions in each text to a certain degree. Although such literature is still largely categorised as either 'nationalist' or 'anti-war', I argue that this is an oversimplification of their complexity and, as such, has limited validity from a literary perspective.

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Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The scale and nature of the 1914-1918 conflict transformed the First World War into an event that continues to inspire enormous popular and scholarly interest to this day. In terms of scale, more than double the number of lives were lost in this war than in all the major wars from 1790 to 1914 combined.[1] Of the 13,250,000 Germans mobilised in the First World War, 2,044,900 were killed with a further 4,148,158 men wounded.[2] In terms of its nature, this was the first truly modern war, which saw technology dominate the battlefield, leading to the unanticipated static and attritional trench warfare that characterised the Western Front. It was also the first instance of 'total war', where entire nations, rather than simply standing armies, were caught up in the hostilities, and civilian morale came to be recognised as a key factor for military success.[3] The unprecedented scale of the conflict, its longevity, and its cost in terms of men and resources all helped to make the First World War into an event that needed to be rationalised and explained in propaganda and public consciousness in order to give the war some sense of meaning and to maintain a sense of national pride.

During the war itself the interpretation and representation of the war was controlled by the censors in all the belligerent nations in an attempt to sustain national morale. This led to the establishment of relatively homogenised images about the nature and purpose of the war which were propagated in the propaganda and media in every participant nation. As such, the enthusiastic and uplifting sense of national unity that emerged in German cities in August

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[1] See George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 3.

[2] See Leo Grebler and Wilhelm Winkler, *The Cost of the World War to Germany and to Austria-Hungary* (New Haven, 1940) - figures reprinted in Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 195.

[3] See, for example, Cate Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning: Propaganda in the First World War* (London: Allen Lane, 1977). The concept of 'total war' is controversial - see, for example, David Welch, *Germany, Propaganda and Total War, 1914-1918. The Sins of Omission* (London: The Athlone Press, 2000) and Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (eds.), *Great War, Total War: Combat and Motivation on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

1914 became an important symbol of Germany's stated war aims -- national defence and self-assertion -- and was one of the first German war myths to be propagated by the censors and the media. Myths such as these were created and exploited in propaganda in order to promote a sense of enduring national identity and to boost morale. Others, such as Germany's 'defensive' war, focused on vilifying the enemy.

The connection between myth and the war was also important in the aftermath of the Great War, when the need to reinterpret the events and the losses of 1914-1918 in a new context, of either victory or defeat, came to the fore. The national humiliation of defeat and the harsh terms imposed by the peace settlement of 1919 made the interpretation of the war more important than ever for the German nation. Literature published after 1918 was therefore 'engaged in an effort to create a rubric of understanding capable of filling the abyss caused by defeat, abdication and the social experience of mass death'.[4] With increasing distance from the events of the war, the myths that had been dominant during it did not go uncontested in the Weimar Republic, where the hegemony of the 'nationalist' and right-wing literary myth of the war experience for Germany was called into question by the defeat in 1918 and later challenged by the 'anti-war' texts which ignited the so-called 'war book boom' of the late 1920s and the intense political and cultural debate over the meaning of the war that followed. War texts were perceived as doing one of two things: 'they show it either as a heroic event or as senseless torture'.[5] It is the establishment of the 'nationalist' myth of the First World War in German literature from 1914 onwards and the challenge to that myth that the 'anti-war' books were perceived as representing in the late 1920s which will be

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[4] Wolfgang Natter, *Literature at War, 1914-1940. Representing the "Time of Greatness" in Germany* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 27.

[5] Roger Woods, 'Ernst Jünger, the New Nationalists, and the Memory of the First World War', in Karl Leydecker (ed.), *German Novelists of the Weimar Republic: Intersections of Literature and Politics* (New York: Camden House, 2006), p. 127.

explored in this thesis. It is, therefore, essential to discuss the problematic term ‘myth’ at the outset.

‘Myth’

‘Myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form’.[6] This classification of ‘myth’ by Roland Barthes as a mode of signification in his authoritative work on the subject advocates a semiological approach to the study of myth and refers to it as a ‘type of speech’ which can be broken down into its component parts. The usefulness of linguistic theory as a means through which myth can be analysed has also been promoted by Lévi-Strauss.[7] In contrast, Bruner employs a different metaphor in his characterisation of myth as ‘a programmatic drama to be tried on for fit’ and relates the subject to the search for internal identity.[8] Each of these theoretical approaches to the study of myth places some emphasis on the *motivated* construction of myth as a systematic encoding, and often as a simplification of a complex, or indeed problematic, reality. This idea that myth makes reality more manageable and more acceptable for the general public is significant with regard to the relationship between myth and the memory of the First World War: ‘in times of war all nations need myths’.[9] Both Barthes and Bruner also stress the role of the media in the creation and dissemination of myth in popular culture and collective memory. The function of propaganda, film, literature, news reports and political discourse may all, therefore, contribute to the process of myth-making. There is, however, an important qualification to be made,

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[6] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Vintage Books, 2000).

[7] See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

[8] Jerome S. Bruner, ‘Myth and Identity’, in Henry A. Murray (ed.), *Myth and Mythmaking* (New York: George Braziller, 1960), p. 284.

[9] Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 133.

namely, that a myth itself need not be a lie, only a distortion or amplification of certain aspects of reality. It is even more important to note that myths may function negatively or positively and are a normal part of a nation's social fabric and sense of identity.[10]

The process of encoding the First World War with a simple set of symbols is something that can be recognised in British collective memory of 1914-1918 to this day.[11] Despite an increasing amount of research which discredits many of our collective ideas about the war, our remembrance of it continues to be dominated by a single set of images and concepts, many of which come from the most celebrated pieces of war poetry. For example, the image of the poppy, immortalised in John McCrae's poem 'In Flanders Fields' (1915), is now ubiquitous in our annual commemorations.[12] Moreover, recent novels about the First World War display a remarkable tendency to focus on an infantry officer fighting on the Western Front.[13] The division of the modern British memory of the Great War tends to be divided into only six dominant categories -- mud, death, donkeys, futility, poets, veterans -- which is perhaps justifiable, given the prevalence of these components in Britons' general understanding of the events of the First World War, although this has not always been the case.[14] Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) has shown how the understanding of the war was shaped by literary preconceptions and suggests the presence of

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[10] See Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2005), p. xiii.

[11] The term 'collective memory' was coined by Maurice Halbwachs. See Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980) and Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory. Edited, Translated and with an Introduction by Lewis A. Coser* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[12] 'In Flanders fields the poppies blow / Between the crosses, row on row…' 'In Flanders Fields' is often the first poem to appear in anthologies of poetry from the First World War, as it is in *Poems of the Great War, 1914-1918* (London: Penguin Books, 1998).

[13] See, for example, Sebastian Faulks, *Birdsong* (London: Vintage, 1994) and Susan Hill, *Strange Meeting* (London: Hamilton, 1971).

[14] This is the approach taken by Todman in *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (2005). The modern interpretation of the role played by generals in the First World War as foolishly and blindly sending so many men to their deaths has not always been the accepted interpretation of their role, but was established in the 1960s. Indeed, in the 1920s Douglas Haig was idolised by the British public.

a paradigmatic war memoir in contemporary British literature.[15] Given that there was a need to mythologise it, it is perhaps inevitable that a single version of the war has become so hegemonic in Britain and undoubtedly a range of media has been instrumental in promoting that outlook. The key influence of the war poets, and the central role that they continue to occupy, points to the influential role that war literature has played in shaping it, especially when such literature was also accompanied by the apparent authority that came from having seen military service during the war *and* supported the collective interpretation. Indeed, the First World War produced 'more literary responses than any previous war'.[16] Acts of remembrance such as commemorations and the symbolism of war memorials have also played their role in shaping the memory of the Great War. In contrast to this, the First World War is relatively unimportant in German collective memory, being overshadowed by the collective trauma of the Second World War and the Holocaust.[17]

This thesis will explore three main areas connected with the nature and function of literary myths of the First World War in Germany. Specific examples of myth-making during the war itself and in the interwar period will first be examined in Chapter Two, including the 'spirit of 1914' and the *Dolchstoßlegende* (stab-in-the-back myth), alongside the place of the war in German public consciousness prior to the 'war book boom' of 1928-1930. Second, the creation of, and distinction between, the 'nationalist' and 'anti-war' myths of the First World War will be discussed and analysed. These are the two categories into which German war

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[15] See Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

[16] Scott D. Denham, *Visions of War: Ideologies and Images of War in German Literature Before and After the Great War* (Bern; Berlin; Frankfurt; New York; Paris: Lang, 1992), p. 71.

[17] For further discussion of this question, see Ulrich Baron and Hans-Harald Müller, 'Weltkriege und Kriegsromane. Die literarische Bewältigung des Krieges nach 1918 und 1945 – eine Skizze', *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik*, 19 (1989), H. 75, pp. 14–38.

literature is invariably pigeonholed. Chapter Three will move on to analyse in detail the central themes of the war experience, as presented in four representative examples of German First World War writing: Walter Flex's *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten* (1917), Ernst Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern* (1920), Ludwig Renn's *Krieg* (1928) and Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1929).[18] It will explore the connection between these texts and the dominant myths of the time, the individual interpretation of the war provided by each text as well as the reception of each of these texts in the politically charged climate of Weimar Germany. All four authors served in the First World War and, of the four, only Remarque did not volunteer for military service. As both Flex and Jünger's war texts have generally been located within the 'nationalist' myth of the *Fronterlebnis* (war experience), whilst Renn and Remarque are linked to the 'anti-war' interpretation, the selection of these four texts is intended to demonstrate a range of literary responses to the First World War. The analysis of these texts will seek to illuminate the complexity and individuality of literary war myths, and the extent to which these were shaped by the political uncertainty of the Weimar period. The analysis will also suggest that the categorisation of German war books as either 'nationalist' or 'anti-war' has limited validity with regard to the literary presentation of war in these important texts and is instead more applicable to their political reception.

[18] *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten* will henceforth be referred to as *Der Wanderer* and *Im Westen nichts Neues* as *Im Westen.*

CHAPTER 2: THE IMPORTANCE OF MYTH

Although the process of encoding the past into a simple and manageable narrative was important for every nation involved in the war, this was particularly true of Germany where the national sacrifice had to be reconciled with the fact that this sacrifice appeared to have been in vain. It was 'designed to mask war and to legitimise the war experience; it was meant to displace the reality of war'.[19] Yet the process of mythologising the war had begun even before its outbreak in 1914, when it was 'quickly stylized […] as the "time of greatness" [*die große Zeit*] and numerous individuals and institutions embarked on a multilayered enterprise to preserve its greatness'.[20]

Wartime Myth-Making

A desire for war as a means of eradicating the perceived inherent weakness of the German nation had been articulated prior to 1914. Georg Heym's 1912 poem, 'Der Krieg', is a revealing example of this desire.[21] Such enthusiasm for military action was expressed more widely when war broke out in August 1914, as the German nation took to the streets to celebrate the advent of war and rushed to sign up for military service.[22] Such *Augustbegeisterung* (August enthusiasm) was promoted in the media and by intellectuals as

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[19] Mosse, p. 7.

[20] Natter, p. 4.

[21] 'Über sturmzerfetzter Wolken Widerschein, / In des toten Dunkels kalte Wüstenein, / Daβ er mit dem Brande weit die Nacht verdorr, / Pech und Feuer träufet unten auf Gomorrh.' The idea of the cleansing of sin is expressed here in the reference to Gomorrah, which is synonymous with impenitent sin and its destruction by the wrath of God. See Thomas Anz and Joseph Vogl (eds.), *Die Dichter und der Krieg. Deutsche Lyrik 1914-1918* (Munich; Vienna: Hanser, 1982).

[22] 250,000 Germans volunteered in August 1914, an impressive figure in view of the fact that 36.5% of the country's military aged manpower had already been conscripted. See Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 45.

having ushered in a new era of German unity and was reinforced when all the German political parties, including the Social Democrats, voted in favour of war credits on 4 August, thus creating the *Burgfrieden* (domestic truce).[23] Indeed, the Kaiser's famous declaration that he no longer recognised any political parties, only Germans, became a slogan of this united enthusiasm -- the 'spirit of 1914' -- and was reproduced on postcards. Yet the unity of 1914 was always a myth. In fact, the *Burgfrieden* had only papered over cracks that had been evident long before war had been declared. The Left saw the war as an opportunity to introduce extensive social reform, whilst the Right saw the vote as a legitimisation of the monarchy. Nor was the enthusiastic, jingoistic atmosphere on the streets indicative of a new sense of German unity. Indeed, recent scholarship has emphasised the localised nature of such enthusiasm, which was found predominantly amongst the educated youth that resided in urban areas and was by no means as widespread as the media suggested at the time.[24] There was, therefore, no uniform experience of the 'spirit of 1914'. Nevertheless, this 'spirit' became a national myth and was seen to embody the German national purpose for the duration of the war. This distortion of reality provides an example of German myth-making *during* the First World War, which spawned further myths in the interwar period. That the complex reality of 1914 was reduced to a single narrative of optimism and enthusiasm demonstrates the role that myth-making was to play in shaping the understanding of the conflict.

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[23] The vast majority of German intellectuals were in support of the war when it broke out in 1914, included in this war enthusiasm was Thomas Mann, whose *Gedanken im Kriege* (1915) voiced the sentiments of the 'spirit of 1914'.

[24] See Verhey. The myths of 1914 have also been exposed by Benjamin Ziemann and Wolfgang Kruse, who brought the fact that 750,000 people had participated in peace demonstrations shortly before the war to light again in his *Krieg und nationale Integration. Eine Neuinterpretation des sozialdemokratischen Burgfriedensschlusses 1914/15* (Essen: Klartext, 1993). See also Niall Ferguson, 'The August Days: The Myth of War Enthusiasm', in *The Pity of War* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), pp. 174-211.

The importance of myth to the German public's understanding of the war can also be identified in the myth of Langemarck. Unlike the victory of the Battle of Tannenberg, which was also mythologised during the war, Langemarck was a military disaster which resulted in the loss of many young men's lives.[25] Nevertheless, this fact was marginalised by the 'Heeresbericht' (army bulletin), which largely invented the idea of heroic volunteers storming enemy trenches whilst patriotically singing 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles'. Whether this was in fact the case remains highly debatable,[26] yet the tale of patriotic sacrifice at Langemarck was a recurring theme in war literature and was elevated to a national symbol in the war, the Weimar Republic and into the Third Reich.[27] These two examples therefore indicate that the process of mythologising the war began long before the Western Front fell silent in November 1918.

Interwar Myth-Making

The process of myth-making was not restricted to the conflict itself and the end of the war did not spell the end of the war experience for Germany. In fact, it was the only the start of a 'process in which that experience was framed, institutionalized, given ideological content, and

[25] The Battle of Tannenberg was a famous German victory over the Russians in August 1914, masterminded by Hindenburg. As a location, Tannenberg was significant as it had been the scene of a Polish-Lithuanian victory over the Teutonic Knights, now widely thought of as German, in 1410. Langemarck was the site of a failed attempt by German forces, many but by no means all of them student volunteers, to break through British defences at Ypres in Belgium in late October and early November 1914. The German aim was to capture Ypres and then the Channel ports. Ypres was the scene of bitter, bloody fighting throughout the war. The town remained in Allied hands until the Armistice.

[26] It has been suggested that the men may well have been singing as a means with which to locate and identify one another rather than out of a deep sense of patriotism. See Mosse, p. 70.

[27] See, for example, an article by the nationalist writer Josef Magnus Wehner on the occasion of the consecration of the 'Deutscher Soldatenfriedhof' at Langemarck in 1932 (Josef Magnus Wehner, 'O Gräber fern in Flandern! Dem Andenken unserer toten Helden', unidentified and undated newspaper article, Wehner-Mappe, Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach am Neckar).

relived in political action as well as fiction'.[28] Germany in particular had suffered the hardships of the war with food shortages and the notorious 'turnip winter' of 1916-1917. Although every nation involved with the war had to come to terms with its cost, the German sacrifice also had to be reconciled with the fact that Germany had been defeated, something that the vast majority of the population was unprepared for, believing the 'over optimistic estimates of the war situation that had been systematically put about by official propaganda' until the very end.[29] Consequently, the nation in general and even many of the political figures were unaware of the desperate situation that Germany faced after the failure of the spring offensive in 1918 when Germany had had a real opportunity to end the stalemate on the Western Front.[30]

Perhaps the most powerful myth spawned by the war was the *Dolchstoßlegende* (stab-in-the-back myth). Although the senior figures of the German High Command, including Ludendorff and Hindenburg, had taken the key steps towards seeking an Armistice, it was crucial that the military transferred power back to the government in October 1918. This was a 'tactical maneuver that would ensure it was the civilian authorities, and not the military, to which the blame for the defeat would be attached'.[31] In fact, the German High Command had known that Germany could no longer win after the failure of the *Kaiserschlacht* in the spring of 1918.[32] Nevertheless, according to the stab-in-the-back myth, 'the soldiers remained in the field, valiant and in good order, until the home front collapsed in the fall of 1918 amid a bitter

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[28] Eric J. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. xi.

[29] Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), p. 5.

[30]For more information on the *Kaiserschlacht* see, for example, Martin Middlebrook, *The Kaiser's Battle* (London: Allen Lane, 1978).

[31] Leydecker, p. 2.

[32] See Middlebrook.

harvest of subversion and agitation by pacifists, socialists, slackers and Jews'.[33] The *Dolchstoßlegende* was one of the most powerful myths of the Weimar Republic, which was vigorously promoted by the political Right and the army.[34] It freed the Imperial regime from responsibility for Germany's defeat, simultaneously passing this responsibility onto revolutionaries, republicans and leading figures of the Weimar Republic.[35] This myth was something that the civilian government did little to discredit. On 10 December 1918 Friedrich Ebert, the chairman of the Council of People's Representatives, who was later to become the first President of the Republic, welcomed troops back to Berlin with the assertion that they remained unvanquished on the field of battle. As a supporter of the war who had lost two sons to the German cause, even he found himself unable 'to critique war as a tragic waste of human lives and material resources'.[36] The German army was, therefore, beaten only by the superior (material) resources of the Allies; in a moral and spiritual sense it had 'remained undefeated in battle'.

The unexpected nature of the declaration of defeat also made the process particularly painful with 'many officers [finding the return] to the Fatherland humiliating and traumatic', a sentiment which was to colour the image of demobilisation provided by the Right for years to come.[37] Local officials had actually made every effort to give the returning soldiers a warm welcome -- they 'often were greeted by a civilian population doing its utmost to express

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[33] Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War,* p. 190.

[34] See Boris Barth, *Dolchstoßlegenden und politische Desintegration. Das Trauma der deutschen Niederlage im Ersten Weltkrieg*, 1914-1933 (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2003). See also Paul von Hindenburg's testimony delivered on November 18, 1919, reprinted in Anton Kaes et al., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* pp. 15-16.

[35] See Kolb, p. 35.

[36] Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 7.

[37] Richard Bessel, 'The Great War in German Memory: The Soldiers of the First World War, Demobilization, and Weimar Political Culture' *German History*, 6:1 (1988), p. 20.

thanks and appreciation'.[38] However, the image of the despondent war hero returning to the ungrateful civilians was thought to be much more powerful for the political Right and, crucially, it was a myth that the veterans' organisations had an interest in perpetuating.[39]

The implications of defeat in the First World War for Germany extended further than the humiliation of defeat and assertions that the sacrifices made by the nation had allegedly been in vain. The peace settlement itself, the Treaty of Versailles, in which the German delegates had had little influence, was drawn up in the summer of 1919. The harsh terms it prescribed were, perhaps, to be expected, but the burden that it placed on the fledgling democracy of the Weimar Republic was immense. Germany was to lose large areas of land amounting to one seventh of its territory including Alsace-Lorraine, West Prussia, Upper Silesia, Posen, the so-called 'Polish Corridor' and Danzig, which was to become a free city under the protection of the League of Nations. German colonies had to be relinquished, the German army was restricted to 4,000 officers and 100,000 men and an air force was not permitted. The scale of the reparations to be paid was not announced until January 1921 when total reparations were set at 269 thousand million gold marks, although this sum was reduced to 132 thousand million gold marks at the London Conference held in the spring.[40] Yet the most damaging aspect of the Treaty of Versailles was Article 231, the 'war guilt clause', which stated that Germany had to accept full responsibility for the war.[41] Unsurprisingly, this

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[38] ibid.

[39] ibid., p. 32.

[40] See Detlev J. K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic - The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 53.

[41] '*Article 231.* The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.' First published in *The Treaty of Peace Between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1919). Reprinted in Anton Kaes et al (eds.), *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1994), p. 8.

clause provoked strong feelings in Germany and was to remain a bone of contention in domestic and international politics throughout the 1920s.[42] In fact, the peace treaty 'incessantly kindled the anger and resentment of virtually all Germans, and it was the republic that was saddled with the blame for its harsh provisions'.[43] Unexpected defeat, the sudden collapse of the imperial regime and the abdication of the Kaiser, the establishment of a republic that only a minority were in favour of and the severe terms of the Treaty of Versailles were, therefore, inextricably linked. The simplification of these events into the *Dolchstoßlegende* was all too easy in such circumstances.

Weimar Instability[44]

The Weimar Republic rose from the ashes of the Imperial regime that had immolated itself in the defeat of 1918. The new Republic was hardly a phoenix, however, because it was cursed from the outset with the legacy of that defeat, namely, national humiliation and the terms of the Versailles Treaty. However, during its fourteen-year existence it also faced the obstacles of near-civil war conditions in 1918-1919, and an unstable economy from 1919-1923 and again from 1929 following the Wall Street Crash. Frequently branded a 'makeshift democracy', the Weimar Republic was, from the very beginning, based on a series of compromises that

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[42] Even the German signatories at Versailles were appalled by the terms of the Treaty and declared: "we emphatically deny that the people of Germany, who were convinced that they were waging a war of defense, should be burdened with the sole guilt of that war… Germany was not the only one that erred… The hundreds of thousands of noncombatants who have perished since November 11 because of the blockade were destroyed cooly and deliberately after our opponents had won a certain and assured victory. Remember that when you speak of guilt and atonement." Quoted in Kaes et al. p. 10.

[43] Weitz, p. 83.

[44] The scope for providing a detailed and thorough contextualisation of war literature in Weimar Germany here is, regrettably, limited. For more detailed information on the Weimar Republic see Walter Laqueur, *Weimar: A Cultural History, 1918-1933* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974), Detlev J.K. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic* (London: Penguin Books, 1993) and Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007).

satisfied neither Left nor Right. The result was that from 1918-1919 the culture of violence established during the war resurfaced around the country. In January 1919 Spartacist uprisings in Berlin were suppressed by the Freikorps and a series of political figures including the Left-wing radicals Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht were murdered. April 1919 saw another attempted revolution with the proclamation of a Soviet Republic in Munich, which was also suppressed by paramilitary forces who had initially been accepted by the Social Democrats who were in desperate need of a security force, but these paramilitaries were never on the side of democracy.[45] Moreover, there was never a dominant political force with a majority in the Reichstag, partly as a result of the Republic's cumbersome system of proportional representation, which led to the formation of a succession of ineffective coalitions. Even in the first set of elections in January 1919 the SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) only managed to win 38% of the vote and were forced into a coalition with the Catholic Centre and the DDP (Deutsche Demokratische Partei), who all supported the Republic.[46] However, the government continued to be challenged by Right-wing forces, as the infamous although failed Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch of March 1920 showed.

A further crisis in domestic and international relations occurred in 1923, when the shortfall in the German reparation deliveries of coal and wood to France were used to justify the French occupation of the Ruhr, the most industrialised area of Germany, where French troops 'supervised' production with Belgian and Italian support. The adoption of passive resistance -- workers simply refused to work -- damaged the economy, already suffering with inflation, even further. In an attempt to overcome the problem, the decision was made to print paper money, resulting in hyperinflation with prices escalating out of control. It is

[45] See Weitz, p. 97.

[46] ibid., p. 31.

unsurprising that this resulted in further loss of confidence in the Republic. 1923 was also the year of the attempted Munich Putsch, led by Adolf Hitler, which was poorly organised and easily suppressed.

In contrast to the turmoil of the early years of Weimar, the period 1924-1929 was one of remarkable stability that witnessed the steady growth of the economy and also saw an improvement in international relations. The introduction of the Dawes Plan in 1924 provided the country with a more manageable system of paying reparations and helped to stabilise the economy, although this stability was always illusory as it was paid for with massive US loans. The Treaty of Locarno was signed in 1925, with the Western borders established by the Treaty of Versailles being accepted as permanent. Weimar Germany was permitted to join the League of Nations in September 1926. The Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 represented a further development in international relations. However, there were still many in nationalist parties such as the DNVP (Deutschnationale Volkspartei) and *Stahlhelm*, its veterans' organisation, who 'continued to regard the republic as a virtually treasonable system planted on Germany by her enemies' and rejected Versailles, Locarno and the League of Nations.[47]

The 'stability' was soon shattered by the Wall Street Crash in 1929 and the collapse of the German economy, which relied on the influx of foreign and particularly American funds. If the Republic had been fragile at its inception, then it was pushed even closer to the brink by events after October 1929 when unemployment drastically rose, helping to pave the way for the National Socialist seizure of power in 1933. The instability of the Weimar Republic, coupled with the fact that it was viewed as being the result of defeat in the First World War, meant that the war, and how the war was interpreted, would always be an important political

[47] E. J. Feuchtwanger, *Germany 1916-1941* (Bedford: Sempringham, 1997), p. 60.

and social issue. As Weitz has noted, 'the legacy of World War I was perhaps the republic's greatest obstacle'.[48]

The War in Public Consciousness

The terms of the Treaty of Versailles and widespread dissatisfaction with the Republic meant that the issue of the war was never far from the political agenda. Indeed, the cost of war pensions and the issue of providing for those wounded in the war was a key political issue.[49] However, the war retained a role in German public consciousness more generally. Wounded veterans begging on the streets became part of the social fabric of the cities with such images also appearing in paintings by Otto Dix and George Grosz.[50] The establishment of memorials to those who had sacrificed their lives for Germany along with the commemorations that became part of state practice all contributed to fixing the war in the minds of the German people. The *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge* was established in 1919 and the *Volkstrauertag* that it inaugurated was officially adopted by the Republic in 1925.[51] Langemarck Day was also celebrated in many universities, an event which was 'glorified during the Weimar period as a symbol of German honour and unity'.[52] A national memorial had been planned in 1924 which was to take the form of a *Heldenhain* (heroes' grove) to glorify the sacrifice of the fallen, but rival local interests meant that plans for the memorial

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[48] Weitz, p. 127.

[49] In 1926, 792,143 disabled veterans, 361,024 widows, 849,087 fatherless children and 62,070 orphans were benefiting from war-related pensions. See Robert Weldon Whalen, *Bitter Wounds: German Victims of the Great War, 1914-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 156-7.

[50] See Bessel, 'The Great War in German Memory', p. 29 and Weitz, p. 13.

[51] See Mosse, p. 82.

[52] Richard Bessel, *Germany after the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 266.

were continually put on hold.[53] The Tannenberg Memorial in East Prussia, which was not inaugurated until 1927, was constructed like a fortress and incorporated a tomb with twenty unknown soldiers and the Neue Wache, an eighteenth-century building in Berlin, was not inaugurated as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier until 1931.[54] Right-wing associations and paramilitary groups also influenced how the war was remembered and they marched alongside one another in events such as 'German Day' established in 1921.[55] A further indication of the lasting influence of the war was the election of Hindenburg, a figure closely associated with Imperial Germany and the First World War, as the President of the Republic in 1925 after the death of Friedrich Ebert. This was thought to be 'indicative of widespread yearnings for the old days of Imperial Germany'[56] and was damaging for republicans. Ironically, Hindenburg's association with the First World War was predominantly with the German victory at Tannenberg in 1914 and not with the large part he had played in bringing about defeat and humiliation in 1918. Each of these represented a continued manifestation of the First World War in the Weimar period and, as such, helped to shape the impression of the war in the minds of the nation.

The war, which had been the topic of the vast majority of literature published between 1914 and 1918, 'saturat[ing] the book market and displac[ing] all the other genres',[57] continued as a literary subject although to a lesser extent. Immediately after the war many

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[53] See Mosse, p. 89.

[54] ibid.

[55] See Weitz, p. 114.

[56] Mary Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany* (2nd ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 171-172.

[57] Andrew Donson, 'Models for Young Nationalists and Militarists: German Youth Literature in the First World War', *German Studies Review,* 27:3 (Oct. 2004), p. 582.

high-ranking officers published their memoirs which focused on justifying their own actions in the war and insisting that Germany had not been defeated on the battlefield.[58] Lower ranking officers such as Ernst Jünger also published their memoirs in the early 1920s and war novels written during the conflict continued to sell, but their popularity was limited, with reviews of such texts appearing only in military periodicals until the late 1920s.[59] The 'boom' of literature on the First World War did not occur until the late 1920s when publishers decided that people would want to read about the war again and a selection of 'pacifist' and 'anti-war' novels became established on the literary scene. It is well documented that many authors struggled to get publishers to take on their war writings in the early 1920s,[60] but their central place in the reinterpretation of the war experience from 1928-1933 is undisputed. The publication and popularity of the 'anti-war' narratives was countered by the publication of many staunchly nationalist texts that sought to 'correct' the negative interpretation of war now being offered. It is, perhaps, no coincidence that this happened a decade after the declaration of the Armistice or that it happened at roughly same time as the Great Depression which 'dealt a severe blow to a nation that had achieved only limited stability after 1923'.[61] In any case, the first time that German war literature truly became locked in a ideological struggle over the memory of the First World War was at the end of the 1920s. Until then, wartime censorship had restricted what could be published and although the war did feature in

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[58] Admiral von Tirpitz and Erich Ludendorff's memoirs were of particular influence. See David Midgley *Writing Weimar: Critical Realism in German Literature, 1918-1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 229.

[59] See Hans-Harald Müller, 'Politics and the War Novel: the Political Conception and Reception of Novels about the First World War', in Richard Dove and Stephen Lamb (eds.), *German Writers and Politics, 1918-39* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p. 107.

[60] For example, von der Vring's *Soldat Suhren* (1927) and Ludwig Renn's *Krieg* (1928) were both written in the early 1920s. See Midgley, *Writing Weimar,* p. 229.

[61] Ann P. Linder, *Princes of the Trenches: Narrating the German Experience of the First World War* (Columbia: Camden House, 2005), p. 162.

literature throughout the 1920s, ‘those who attempted to promote views which were critical of Germany’s wartime leadership faced repressive measures’.[62]

Conflicting Myths of War

The Weimar Republic was a period of politicisation when writers and intellectuals were arguably more directly engaged than ever before in political events.[63] The political circumstances surrounding the end of the First World War and in the Weimar Republic undoubtedly meant that ‘any treatment of the war -- literary or otherwise -- was automatically political’.[64] Although it was rare for war literature to discuss or comment on the most important political questions -- the question of war guilt and the revision of the Treaty of Versailles --, the interpretation of the war experience was still perceived as a comment on the political state of the German nation.[65] For example, whilst *Im Westen* does not discuss the post-war world apart from expressing a general anxiety about what the future will bring for the protagonist and his young comrades, part of Remarque’s purpose when writing the novel appears to have been to explain and work through his post-war woes.[66] In short, war literature was engaged in locating the meaning of the war and explaining its immense impact on German social and political life. It follows that it is important to consider how each of these

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[62] Midgley, *Writing Weimar*, p. 231. For example, the author of *Vier Jahre Lügen* (1919), E. J. Gumbel, found himself stifled with law suits throughout the 1920s.

[63] See Leydecker, p. 1.

[64] Michael Minden, ‘The First World War and its aftermath in the German novel‘, in Bartram (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern German Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 138.

[65] Müller, ‘Politics and the War Novel’, pp. 104-5.

[66] See Axel Eggebrecht, ‘Gespräch mit Remarque. Zur Diskussion über Im Westen nichts Neues. / Die Entstehungsgeschichte des Buches. / Die inneren Motive. / Faktoren des Erfolges. / Weiteres Schaffen’. *Die literarische Welt*, 5 (1929), no. 24 (14 June 1929), p. 1-2.

texts was received and interpreted in Weimar Germany in order to consider fully the implications of the presentation of war provided by the narratives to be analysed later.

Neither *Der Wanderer,* published in 1917, nor *In Stahlgewittern*, published three years later, challenged the accepted conventions of war literature. Written and published before the end of the war, the optimistic tone of *Der Wanderer* may be considered a representative example of the interpretation of the war which would continue to dominate public consciousness in Germany in the early interwar period. Flex's sentimental and glorified image of war and comradeship was entirely in keeping with the sentiments that German propaganda was attempting to uphold during the war.[67] It became the sixth most purchased book between 1915 and 1940.[68] The fallen Flex was also adopted as a key figure for the idealistic youth movement, the *Wandervogel*, in the interwar period and quotations from *Der Wanderer* were used by the Nazis during the Second World War.[69]

In Stahlgewittern is a 'typical' example of war literature from the years immediately after the Armistice when the memoirs of officers and generals were published with a view to justifying their personal war experience and actions, although Jünger's detached, auto-fictional style does distinguish *In Stahlgewittern* from other literature of this type. He was a leading Conservative Revolutionary, who 'became the major innovative interpreters of the

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[67] Indeed, Flex had been commissioned to write about the Russian offensive of March 1916 by the German authorities. See Denham, p. 73.

[68] See Hans Wagener, 'Wandervogel und Flammenengel. Walter Flex: Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten. Ein Kriegserlebnis (1916)', in Thomas F. Schneider and Hans Wagener (eds.), *Von Richthofen bis Remarque. Deutschsprachige Prosa zum I. Weltkrieg*, Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik, 53 (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2003), p. 17.

[69] See Mosse, p. 204.

First World War for the Right' in the Weimar years,[70] and an influential member of the veterans' association, *Stahlhelm.*[71] Politics also influenced his war writing to a certain extent and the 1924 edition of *In Stahlgewittern* was notably more nationalist and aggressive, following the French occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. From 1929 these nationalist overtones were removed.[72] The stress on Jünger's own heroic endeavours, coupled with the fact that Jünger chose to conclude his 'diary' in September 1918, which indirectly supported the idea that the German army was undefeated on the battlefield, meant that, like *Der Wanderer, In Stahlgewittern* was an acceptable and useful piece of war literature, particularly for right-wing activists. Indeed, Jünger's war writings, his association with the Conservative Revolution and the veterans' organisation, *Stahlhelm*, meant that Jünger was later courted by the National Socialist movement. Although Jünger only ever flirted with the ideology of National Socialism,[73] it is worth mentioning that he sent Hitler a signed copy of one of his later war books, *Feuer und Blut*, in 1925, receiving a signed copy of *Mein Kampf* in return.[74] The acceptance of these texts indicates that neither *Der Wanderer* nor *In Stahlgewittern* was perceived as challenging the central tenets of the nationalist interpretation of the war experience and may even be said to have directly assisted its construction. Both were therefore part of the nationalist paradigm for the understanding of the Great War. It was not,

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[70] Roger Woods, 'Ernst Jünger, the New Nationalists, and the Memory of the First World War' , in Leydecker, p. 125. For more information on the Conservative Revolution, see Armin Mohler and Karlheinz Weissmann, *Die Konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918-1932. Ein Handbuch* (Graz: Ares Verlag, 2005) and Roger Woods, *The Conservative Revolution in the Weimar Republic* (Basingstoke; London: Macmillan, 1996).

[71] *Stahlhelm* was one of the largest right-wing paramilitary organisations that enjoyed much support in the early 1920s.

[72] See Gerda Liebchen, *Ernst Jünger: seine literarische Arbeiten in den zwanziger Jahren: eine Untersuchung zur gesellschaftlichen Funktion von Literatur* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1977) for information on the changes made to *In Stahlgewittern* in the 1920s.

[73] See Nikolaus Wachsmann, 'Marching under the Swastika? Ernst Jünger and National Socialism, 1918-33', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 33:4 (1998), pp. 573-589.

[74] See Heimo Schwilk, *Ernst Jünger: Ein Jahrhundertleben* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 2007), p. 289.

then, those ‘nationalist’ texts which forced the issue of the ‘correct’ interpretation of the war experience into the realm of political debate at the end of the 1920s, but rather the more ‘problematic’ interpretation offered by ‘anti-war’ texts.

By the time that the war was ‘rediscovered’ in German literature in the wave of war books published at the end of the 1920s, war literature was essentially engaged in an ideological struggle over how the war was to be remembered and interpreted. The Wall Street Crash in 1929 and the collapse of the economy brought an end to the so-called ‘golden years’ of stability in the Republic, and the renewed sense of economic and political crisis opened the memory of the First World War to reinterpretation once again. The publication of books which came to be seen as representing a challenge to the nationalist interpretation of the war experience came towards the end of the 1920s as publishers began to see war writing as a marketable genre once more. The most controversial war novel by far in Weimar Germany was, of course, the best-selling *Im Westen* by Remarque, which caused a political storm, known as ‘der Streit um Remarque’, in 1929-1930. Ullstein even published a special ‘Kampf um Remarque’ issue in 1930.[75] However, *Im Westen* was by no means the first book to question the nationalist myth of the war experience; texts such as Arnold Zweig’s *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* had been published earlier.[76] The reception of ‘anti-war’ novels published in Germany towards the end of the 1920s was, initially, mixed. However, it was clear that the arrival and success of these books on the literary scene represented a shift in the way the war was being represented in contemporary literature. It was significant that the First World War was now being written about from the perspective of the ordinary soldier, rather

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[75] See Hans-Harald Müller, *Der Krieg und die Schriftsteller. Der Kriegsroman der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986), p. 66.

[76] Arnold Zweig, *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* (Berlin: Büchergilde Gutenberg, 1927).

than the officer's account of the experience which had justified the war experience and loss of the war in the immediate post-war period.[77] These 'anti-war' texts were generally popular, selling more copies than their 'nationalist' counterparts, and even right-wing critics found aspects of these texts to be in keeping with the nationalist interpretation of the war. *Im Westen*, for example, was thought to be 'subtle propaganda in favour of militarism'.[78] Indeed, the right-wing critic Walter von Molo famously referred to *Im Westen* as 'das Denkmal unseres unbekannten Soldaten'.[79] Renn's *Krieg* was even praised by Peter Kropp in his vituperative attack on the authenticity of Remarque's book.[80] In fact, it is debatable whether all the 'anti-war' books of the 'war book boom' were making a conscious and deliberate attempt to discredit the right-wing version of the war. Remarque consistently stated in interviews that he and *Im Westen* were unpolitical,[81] a sentiment which was also expressed in the text's epigraph: 'Dieses Buch soll weder eine Anklage noch ein Bekenntnis sein'.[82]

Nevertheless, of all the 'anti-war' books, it was the success of *Im Westen* that crystallised the intense ideological issues surrounding the memory of the war. However, only after the success of *Im Westen* with left-of-centre critics had been established, did the nationalist press '[overcome] its initial uncertainty and [begin] denouncing the book with

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[77] It has been suggested that it was the *Frankfurter Zeitung* which suggested that the author of *Krieg* should be the protagonist of the book, Ludwig Renn, with a view to making it more marketable. See Hans-Harald Müller, '"Herr Jünger thinks war a lovely business" On the Reception of Ernst Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern* in Germany and Britain before 1933', in Franz Karl Stanzel and Martin Löschnigg (eds.), *Intimate Enemies: English and German Literary Reactions to the Great War, 1914-1918* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1994), p. 329 and Müller, *Der Krieg und die Schriftsteller*, pp. 186-7.

[78] J. Knight Bostock, *Some Well-Known German War Novels, 1914-1930* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1931), p. 9.

[79] Quoted in Bärbel Schrader (ed.), *Der Fall Remarque: 'Im Westen nichts Neues'. Eine Dokumentation* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1992), p. 95. Ullstein reproduced this epithet on the front cover of subsequent editions of *Im Westen.*

[80] See Peter Kropp, *Endlich Klarheit über Remarque und sein Buch* (Hamm/Westf: Selbstverlag des Verfassers, 1930).

[81] Müller, 'Politics and the War Novel', p. 111.

[82] Erich Maria Remarque, *Im Westen nichts Neues* (27th ed.) (Cologne: Verlag Kippenhauer & Witsch, 2007).

increasing vehemence as a pacifist tract'.[83] Many texts were published with a view to discrediting Remarque's presentation of the First World War, ranging from parodies of *Im Westen* and attacks on the authenticity of the novel to staunchly pro-war novels such as Schauwecker's *Aufbruch der Nation* (1929).[84] The fact that the publication of Remarque's 'unpolitical' novel prompted such a range of responses and that so many tried to discredit the content of *Im Westen* indicates not only how charged the political climate was, but also the radical nature of the challenge *Im Westen* presented to those who championed more established, 'nationalist' myths of the First World War.

The 'nationalist myth' of the war essentially 'looked back upon the war as a meaningful and even sacred event',[85] and proved to be particularly potent in the defeated nations where it was most needed to displace the uncomfortable reality of the present. The power of this version of the war has led Mosse to classify it as *the* 'Myth of the War Experience'. The interpretation of the war as a meaningful event frequently entailed the glorification, romanticisation and sanitisation of the individual and national experience. As such, the 'nationalist myth' was not necessarily accurate, but was nevertheless an important means through which to make the memory of the war more acceptable. The main themes of the nationalist myth of the war experience were comradeship and community, the cult of the war dead, soldierly virtue and the heroism of the 'new man' as well as a focus on rebirth and

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[83]Müller, 'Politics and the War Novel', p. 113. However, pacifist journals did not universally praise it. For information on the Nazi reaction to the release of Lewis Milestone's 1930 film, *All Quiet on the Western Front,* and the burning of *Im Westen* in May 1933 see Peter Dörp, 'Goebbels' Kampf gegen Remarque. Eine Untersuchung über die Hintergründe des Hasses und der Agitation Goebbels' gegen den Roman *Im Westen nichts Neues* von Erich Maria Remarque', *Erich Maria Remarque Jahrbuch*, 1 (1991), pp. 48-64.

[84]Franz Schauwecker, *Aufbruch der Nation* (Berlin: Frundsberg-Verlag, 1929). For a parody of *Im Westen* see Emil Marius Requark (Max Josef Wolff), *Vor Troja nichts Neues* (Berlin: Brunnen-Verlag, 1930). For an attack on the authenticity of the novel, see Kropp.

[85] Mosse, p. 7.

rejuvenation.[86] An excellent example of the 'nationalist myth' in war literature can be found in Schauwecker's *Aufbruch der Nation*, which is littered with political comments. Its title was later to become a Nazi *Schlagwort* and focused on taking something positive from the experience of war: 'Wir mussten den Krieg verlieren, um die Nation zu gewinnen'.[87] There are many examples of literature published in the 1920s which also embody these sentiments to some extent.[88]

Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu* (1917) is widely considered to be the first example of a popular anti-war interpretation of the conflict.[89] It is of crucial importance that the 'anti-war' interpretation of the war seems to have publicly developed in the victorious nations first, where it would not be so damaging. Indeed, Linder has linked the liberal experience with the British myth and has suggested that Remarque's *Im Westen* has more in common with the British myth than it does with the German equivalent which was predominantly nationalist throughout the war and in the popular culture of the 1920s.[90] The distinction between anti-war, or pacifist, literature and nationalist literature lies in the fact that the former views the war as the collapse of humanity and tends to focus on the futility of the experience, which must never be allowed to happen again. As such, 'anti-war' literature stresses 'the loss of youth, the death, horror and pollution of war'.[91] Although the signifiers used to construct a literary version of the First World War are likely to be the same, the stress placed upon the

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[86] See Mosse, p. 200.

[87] Schauwecker, p. 382.

[88] See, for example, Hans Zöberlein, *Der Glaube an Deutschland. Ein Kriegserleben von Verdun bis zum Umsturz* (Munich: Eher [Zentralverlag der NSDAP], 1931).

[89] Henri Barbusse, *Le feu* (Paris: Flammarion, c1917).

[90] See Linder, p. 2.

[91] Leed, p. 25.

experience of war itself is very different. For example, even texts which find themselves firmly located under the ‘anti-war’ heading, also tend to embrace comradeship, one of the key aspects of the ‘nationalist’ myth. In spite of this, the ‘nationalist’ and ‘anti-war’ accounts of the First World War are generally presented as ‘diametrically opposed visions’,[92] a distinction which fails to acknowledge the individual nature of every experience, and subsequently any literary representation of the war, whilst also dismissing any potential overlap between the two categories. In short, a German narrative on the subject of the Great War was categorised by critics as either nationalist or anti-war. It could not be both.

[92] Woods, ‘The Conservative Revolution and the First World War: Literature as Evidence in Historical Explanation’, *The Modern Language Review*, 85:1 (Jan., 1990), p. 79.

CHAPTER 3: CONSTRUCTING AND CHALLENGING THE 'NATIONALIST' AND 'ANTI-WAR' MYTHS

Four of the most significant pieces of German literature to emerge on the First World War were Walter Flex's *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten* (1917), Ernst Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern* (1920), Ludwig Renn's *Krieg* (1928) and Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1930). Using sales figures as evidence of their popularity, the influence of these four bestsellers is clear. By 1940, *Der Wanderer* had sold 682,000 copies and *In Stahlgewittern* a less impressive but still respectable c60,000 copies.[93] Although *Krieg* was not published until the late 1920s and was less nationalist than many popular representations of the war experience at the time, 155,000 copies had been sold by 1931.[94] However, none of these texts could match the success of *Im Westen* which sold phenomenally well. 900,000 copies were sold before the end of 1929.[95]

Although all four texts focus on the experience of the war, each narrative is different in terms of purpose, content, style and political slant, whether explicit or implicit. *Der Wanderer* and *In Stahlgewittern* belong to the 'nationalist' branch of German war literature, yet, whilst both may be regarded as a celebration of the heroic individual, the two texts offer a different perspective on war. Essentially a literary monument to his comrade, Ernst Wurche, Flex's narrative has been described as an 'ethical-religious treatise on war',[96] whilst the semi-autobiographical *In Stahlgewittern,* based largely on Jünger's war diaries, was partly an

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[93] See Donald Ray Richards, *The German Bestseller in the Twentieth Century. A Complete Bibliography and Analysis, 1915-1940* (Berne: Herbert Lang, 1968), p. 55, p. 84.

[94] ibid., p. 62.

[95] ibid., p. 55. *Im Westen* was the bestselling German novel of the twentieth century and, to date, has sold over 20 million copies worldwide.

[96] Denham, p. 60.

exercise in self-congratulation, presenting a 'spectacularly aestheticised version of life in the trenches'.[97]

At the other end of the political spectrum, both *Krieg* and *Im Westen* offer a fictionalised version of the author's experiences of the First World War and deliberately refuse to subscribe to the 'nationalist myth' of the war experience. Yet there are also discrepancies between these texts. In terms of myth-making, *Krieg* is a particularly interesting text as at the time it was 'rather extravagantly […] praised as the only book that tells the whole truth about the war'.[98] Although both texts are now firmly located under the banner of anti-war literature, *Krieg* was initially praised by the Right for its portrayal of the *Fronterlebnis* and *Im Westen,* now regarded as the definitive anti-war novel, was even praised by one critic for being propaganda in favour of militarism.[99] The fact that these 'anti-war' texts were initially embraced by some on the political Right indicates the complexity and the political sensitivity of the time and the genre of war literature itself. In short, it can be argued that the 'nationalist' myth and the 'anti-war' myth are not mutually exclusive.

Focusing on the construction of 'nationalist' and 'anti-war' myths of the First World War, I shall argue that the construction and perpetuation of both myths in literature was infinitely more complex than is often suggested. The exploration of these texts as examples of 'nationalist' and 'anti-war' literature will adopt a thematic approach, looking at the issue of fictionalising the war experience, the 'spirit of 1914', the aestheticisation of the war, combat and heroism, *Kameradschaft,* fate and fortune, and the presentation of death and the fallen.

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[97]Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 72.

[98] Bostock, p. 16.

[99] ibid.

Fictionalising the War

The question of authenticity was central to contemporary criticism of war books. The classification of war literature as either autobiography or fiction was, therefore, significant, although the distinction between them was often unclear. Even when the basis of the text was a war diary, it is important to consider that 'all writing from memory implies of necessity a fictionalizing process'.[100] Whilst *Der Wanderer* and *In Stahlgewittern* were accounts of the authors' war experience, this was, in some respects, fiction posing as reality. Although *In Stahlgewittern* relies heavily on Jünger's wartime diaries, was subtitled 'Aus dem Tagebuch eines Stoβtruppführers' until 1934, and contains much empirically verifiable detail, the text incorporates fictionalising strategies such as a third-person narrator. Fictional qualities can also be identified in *Der Wanderer*, the structure and style of which resembles a *Bildungsroman*.[101]

In contrast, both *Krieg* and *Im Westen* are the products of a more deliberate process of fictionalising the experience of war. Ludwig Renn is the pseudonym of the aristocrat Arnold von Golβenau, who served in the war as an officer yet the protagonist of *Krieg* is a private soldier, with a writing style that corresponds accordingly. The true identity of the author was concealed until later. However, *Krieg* is now generally viewed as having its literary roots in Golβenau's diary of the war which he began in 1916. As a result, *Krieg* was subjected to more than one stage of transformation: from diary to memoir and from memoir to novel.[102] However, the distinction between author and pseudonym/narrator is unclear. It has been

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[100] Bruno Schultze, 'Fiction and Truth: Politics and the War Novel', in Franz Karl Stanzel and Martin Löschnigg (eds.), *Intimate Enemies: English and Germany Literary Reactions to the Great War, 1914-1918* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1993), p. 297.

[101] See Natter pp. 145-6.

[102] See Müller, *Der Krieg und die Schriftsteller: Der Kriegsroman der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986), p. 200.

suggested that after the outbreak of the war he found himself 'no longer able to identify with his aristocratic and Prussian background.'[103] Golβenau even wrote his memoirs of the Spanish Civil War using the name Ludwig Renn. There is, therefore, a complex interplay between fact and fiction in this text that was initially concealed from the public. In many ways *Krieg* is a typical example of how autobiography and fiction are merged in war novels, which tend to abound with autobiographical facts and often incorporate strategies more akin to non-fiction whilst autobiographies are able to employ fictionalising strategies with ease.[104]

Im Westen is also a heavily fictionalised reworking of Remarque's own war experience in which he claims to express the accusatory voice of his generation. The 'authenticity' of the text was hotly disputed by critics, mainly on the Right, who largely glossed over or ignored its literary qualities. A series of accusations were made including the assertion that Remarque had never served at the front during the war.[105] Several texts were published with the intention of discrediting the authenticity of *Im Westen*, which had actually been subtitled as 'novel' from the beginning. Indeed, the approach that Remarque adopted in order to convey his view of the war was rather formulaic with fighting being interspersed with more light-hearted scenes and the deaths of the narrator's comrades occurring at strategic points in the narrative. In fact, one of the main characteristics of *Im Westen* is the 'thoroughness with which he assimilated his war-obsession to fictional form.'[106]

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[103] Broich, 'World War I in Semi-Autobiographical Fiction and in Semi-Fictional Autobiography - Robert Graves and Ludwig Renn', in Franz Karl Stanzel and Martin Löschnigg (eds.), *Intimate Enemies: English and German Literary Reactions to the Great War, 1914-1918* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1994), p. 320. Renn went on to become a member of the KPD.

[104] See Broich, 'World War I in Semi-Autobiographical Fiction and in Semi-Fictional Autobiography', p. 314.

[105] Other accusations levied at Remarque included the assertion that he was a Jew called Kramer (Remark spelled backwards).

[106] A. F. Bance, '*Im Westen nichts Neues.* A Bestseller in Context', *Modern Language Review,* 72 (1977), p. 360.

Writing about the war experience through the medium of fiction is not, per se something which should discredit the content of the narrative or how effectively it is able to fulfil its purpose. Indeed, the subjectivity of fiction may be equal to that of autobiography, as in both genres reality can be altered and certain aspects of the experience enhanced thus underpinning the process of myth-making. It is nevertheless significant that both *Krieg* and *Im Westen* can be regarded as war fiction, whilst *In Stahlgewittern* and *Der Wanderer* seem to be much closer to autobiography. Nevertheless, authenticity was still regarded as a crucial facet of *Im Westen,* which was marketed with the claim that this was the book that would, finally, tell the truth about the war. It was widely criticised as a lie.

The 'Spirit of 1914': Enthusiasm and Disillusionment

The so-called 'spirit of 1914' and the national enthusiasm, which greeted the outbreak of war in Germany but was not sustained throughout, is a central theme in many war novels, regardless of their ideological stance. In view of the fact that recent scholarship has shown that this 'spirit' was by no means as common as was suggested at the time, but rather that it was most widespread amongst the educated youth in urban areas,[107] the issue of how this theme is treated in each text is of particular interest. The 'spirit of 1914', then, is pertinent for the nationalist rendering of the experience, especially in view of the fact that the National Socialist movement would later appropriate the *Fronterlebnis* and 'spirit of 1914' as its own.[108] A key aspect of this myth is the portrayal of enduring enthusiasm, an aspect

[107] See Verhey.

[108] The importance of the First World War in National Socialist ideology is explored in Karl Prümm, 'Das Erbe der Front. Der antidemokratische Kriegsroman der Weimarer Republik und seine nationalsozialistische Fortsetzung' in Horst Denkler and Karl Prümm (eds.), *Die deutsche Literatur im Dritten Reich. Themen - Traditionen - Wirkungen* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1976), pp. 138-164.

demonstrated in both *Der Wanderer* and, to a lesser extent, in *In Stahlgewittern*. Neither the possibility nor the reality of defeat is explored by either text, yet this is much more remarkable in *In Stahlgewittern* which was published in 1920.[109] Instead of concluding with the Armistice, Jünger ends his war experience on 22 September 1918, seven weeks earlier, when he is awarded the prestigious *Pour le Mérite*.[110] Such an omission has the effect of reinforcing Jünger's personal sense of achievement and individual heroism whilst simultaneously indirectly supporting the idea that the army was 'im Felde unbesiegt'.[111]

As Flex, Jünger and Renn were all *Kriegsfreiwillige,* we expect to encounter a certain amount of enthusiasm in how each text recalls the 'spirit of 1914'. Yet this 'spirit' is most prominent in Flex's work. As several letters written before the outbreak of war testify, Flex had been a firm advocate of war and the virtues of that experience for some years. Indeed, as early as 1905 he had resolved to 'write tragedies about the sacrifice of the individual for the good of the state', firmly believing that 'das Volk braucht einen Krieg'.[112] In one letter he stated:

> Ich wünsche ihm [dem deutschen Volk] auch gar keinen raschen, leichten Sieg, der vielleicht der Korruption durch Genuβ vollenden würde, ein zähes jahrelanges durch Verluste, Schmerzen und nationale Erbitterung auf

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[109] The possibility of defeat is only considered towards the end of the text: 'Die Groβe Schlacht bedeutete eine Wendemarke auch in meinem Inneren, und nicht nur deshalb, weil ich von nun an den Verlust des Krieges für möglich hielt', *In Stahlgewittern,* p. 288.

[110] The *Pour le Mérite,* also known as the 'Blauer Max' was awarded only to officers 533 were awarded in the First World War, and only 70 of these went to to junior infantry officers (lieutenants and captains).

[111] The patriotic, nationalist sentiment of *In Stahlgewittern* was much more explicit in the foreword that accompanied the first edition in 1920. 'Wir haben viel, vielleicht alles, auch die Ehre verloren' can be interpreted as a reference to both the *Dolchstoβlegende* and the war guilt clause of the Treaty of Versailles. See Ernst Jünger, *In Stahlgewittern. Aus dem Tagebuch eines Stoβtruppführers* (Hannover: Selbstverlag des Verfassers, 1920), p. ix.

[112] Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), p. 48.

> peitschendes Ringen, das uns den Gegner am Ende wie am Anfang gegenüber stehen läβt, nur wachsamer, begeisterter, verantwortungsbewuβter und idealistischer, das ist's wohl, was uns am besten wäre.[113]

It is clear that Flex not only adopted a pro-war stance, but that he also perceived war as an opportunity to change German society for the better; the war was to be welcomed as a moral test and a chance to eradicate weakness. This sentiment may be regarded as typical of the educated youth movement in Germany in 1914 and others,[114] who believed that 'in place of greed and egotism the war experience would validate humility, sacrifice, and courage'.[115] This high-minded attitude to war is also found in *Der Wanderer,* where these noble sentiments are coupled with a boyish thirst for adventure: 'die Zukunft war voller Geheimnisse und Abenteuer'.[116]

The initial enthusiasm that we encounter in *In Stahlgewittern* is much closer to this anticipation of adventure than to the moral dimension of *Der Wanderer*. This may well be attributed in part to the generational gap between the two men as Flex (b. 1887) was several years older than Jünger (b. 1895). Consequently, 'sein Weltbild war 1914 gefestigt', whereas Jünger remained an impressionable youth.[117] Indeed, at the beginning of *In Stahlgewittern* it is the young man's desire for adventure and danger which is instantly made apparent as Jünger writes of 'die Sehnsucht nach dem Ungewöhnlichen, nach der groβen Gefahr'.[118]

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[113] Quoted in Raimund Neuβ, *Anmerkungen zu Walter Flex: die "Ideen von 1914" in der deutschen Literatur. Ein Fallbeispiel* (Schernfeld: SH-Verlag, 1992), p. 43.

[114] See Heym 'Der Krieg', in Anz and Vogl (eds.), *Die Dichter und der Krieg*.

[115] Verhey, p. 101.

[116] Walter Flex, *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten* (new ed.) (Kiel: Orion-Heimreiter-Verlag, 2007), p. 22.

[117] Koch, Lars, *Der Erste Weltkrieg als Medium der Gegenmoderne. Zu den Werken von Walter Flex und Ernst Jünger* (Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), p. 17.

[118] Ernst Jünger, *In Stahlgewittern* (45th ed.) (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007), p. 7.

Jünger's presentation of the purpose of war at the beginning of *In Stahlgewittern* focuses on his individual quest for adventure rather than what the experience of war would mean for the German nation. Yet it is significant that Jünger employs the first person plural in order to demonstrate the collective nature of the experience and the emotion: 'da hatte uns der Krieg gepackt wie ein Rausch'.[119] It might even be fair to say that Jünger perceived the war as a rite of passage, especially given that he had run away to join the French Foreign Legion in 1913. Nevertheless, in many ways the initial enthusiasm for the war and the war experience as exhibited by Jünger reflects an important component of the 'spirit of 1914' in Germany. As Verhey has pointed out, many young men were happy to have 'a goal, a meaning, and a purpose in their lives, even if it was only a vaguely defined thirst for adventure'.[120]

The initial mobilisation of the German army and the general enthusiasm of 1914 is also acknowledged in *Krieg*, which includes some 'typical' images of the 'spirit of 1914' and a widespread enthusiasm in which Renn himself appears to be equally caught up:

> Helle Sonnenschirme waren aufgespannt, darunter Damen mit groβen Hüten. Auf einmal sah ich rechts meinen Onkel aus der Menge ragen. Er schwenkte den Hut über seinem Kopf und lachte mich an. Ich wußte nicht, wie ich wiedergrüßen sollte, und war verlegen. Aber ich freute mich.[121]

Not only does the image of the crowds of people out in the sunshine correspond with the 'typical' picture of the 'spirit of 1914', but it is clear that the protagonist feels involved in the enthusiasm and is able to take some pleasure in it. Moreover, this joyful atmosphere is sustained over the following pages as Renn notes that some of his peers are planning not to

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[119] *In Stahlgewittern*, p. 7.

[120] Verhey, p. 99.

[121] Ludwig Renn, *Krieg* (Berlin: Das Neue Berlin, 2001), p. 11.

shave until the war is over.[122] This reference to the naiveté of the young men exposes one of the many half-truths that were promoted by contemporary propaganda -- that the war would be over by Christmas -- thus forcing the reader to question the optimistic sentiments of 1914. Consequently, although Renn admits to some personal enthusiasm, the 'spirit of 1914' is undermined by the context, making this aspect of the text entirely congruent with the 'anti-war myth'.

Despite this admission of initial enthusiasm for the war experience, we expect to encounter the shattering of such optimism in the 'anti-war' novel, which perceived war as being without meaning. The reality of the *Fronterlebnis* had little connection with the dreams of adventure held by Flex, Jünger and Renn before they left for the Front. As Renn states:

> War ich gestern so gewesen, wie ich mir mein Benehmen in der ersten Schlacht geträumt hatte? Hatte ich nicht von Heldentum geträumt, dass ich einen Offizier aus dem Feuer zurücktrage oder in furchtbarem Kampf einen Schwarzen niederstoße?[123]

The dream of glorious heroic deeds is, therefore, quickly swept aside by the harsh reality of war. A similar sense of disillusionment and disappointment can also be identified in *In Stahlgewittern* where:

> Statt der erhofften Gefahren hatten wir Schmutz, Arbeit und schlaflose Nächte vorgefunden, deren Bezwingung ein uns wenig liegendes Heldentum erforderte. Schlimmer noch war die Langeweile, die für den Soldaten entnervender als die Nähe des Todes ist.[124]

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[122] See *Krieg*, p. 17.

[123] ibid., p. 43.

[124] *In Stahlgewittern*, p.16.

The reality of the war that Jünger finds thus revolves around dirt, work and sleepless nights rather than adventure. Such 'fictional' disillusionment with the war experience might be regarded as typical, as the expectation had been a short, victorious war like that of 1870-71, and it was difficult for many to sustain the 'spirit of 1914'.

This sense of disillusionment, although typical, is absent from *Der Wanderer*, where Flex's enthusiasm is unwavering. The *Nachwort* of *Der Wanderer* states:

> Mein Glaube ist, daß der deutsche Geist im August 1914 und darüber hinaus eine Höhe erreicht hat, wie sie kein Volk vordem gesehen hat. Glücklich jeder, der auf diesem Gipfel gestanden hat und nicht wieder herzuabsteigen braucht.[125]

Although it is entirely possible that Flex chose to omit a sense of disillusionment in order to create a more powerful myth of the war experience, it is also possible that he genuinely did not experience the disillusionment expressed by Jünger and Renn. Indeed, as Banzhaf has pointed out, 'immer und immer wieder ist in seinen Briefen zu lesen, welch wunderbares Erlebnis es ihm ist, seine Kräfte für sein Volk einzusetzen und ein Glied dieser eisernen Bruderschaft sein zu dürfen'.[126] However, such a portrayal is remarkably different to the one which can be found in the majority of war literature and Flex has been criticised for illustrating 'eine reine Idylle soldatischen Nichtstuns' rather than the bitter reality of war.[127] The fact that Flex served mainly on the Eastern Front may well be a factor here as, from the beginning, 'service on the Western Front gained a reputation among German soldiers as far more stressful than the more mobile fighting in eastern theatres'.[128]

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[125] *Der Wanderer*, p. 122.

[126] Johannes Banzhaf, *Walter Flex. Ein Bild seines Lebens* (Berlin: Acker-Verlag, 1943), p. 21.

[127] Wagener, p. 20.

[128] Watson, p. 23.

The approach of Remarque to the 'spirit of 1914' in *Im Westen* is entirely different to the other three texts analysed here. Indeed, in contrast to Renn, Remarque elects to marginalise any optimism about the war and there is no sense that the protagonist, Paul Bäumer, or any of his comrades had ever been enthusiastic about joining up. Instead, they are portrayed as victims of the older generation, embodied by the former schoolmaster, Kantorek, who bullies the young boys into signing up to be part of 'die eiserne Jugend', an image which Bäumer and his friends soon mock once they experience the reality of war:

> Eiserne Jugend. Jugend! Wir sind alle nicht mehr als zwanzig Jahre. Aber jung? Jugend? Das ist lange her. Wir sind alte Leute.[129]

In this case, then, there is a criticism of the values of 1914 and the expectation of their generation almost immediately. The reader is only exposed to the 'spirit of 1914' through the character of Kantorek who is regularly mocked by Bäumer and his comrades. Rather than enthusiasm, it is a sense of distrust and betrayal which permeates *Im Westen* from the beginning of the narrative, which opens in 1916. The 'spirit of 1914' is therefore relayed to the reader in flashback, with the enthusiasm of Kantorek being consistently undermined by the reality of Bäumer's disillusioned present. This may be related to Remarque's personal experience of the war as, unlike Renn, Jünger and Flex, he was not a *Kriegsfreiwilliger,* but had been conscripted in November 1916.[130]

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[129] *Im Westen*, p. 22. Both central to the *Materialschlacht,* iron and steel were key to the representation of the soldier in the First World War and were featured in many war landmarks. Werner Sombart's *Händler und Helden* had portrayed the knight in armour as the archetypal man of steel and the concept of iron resilience provided the war's veterans with a collective narrative of their heroic endurance in the interwar period. See Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance, and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 158-164.

[130] See Christine R. Barker and R. W. Last, *Erich Maria Remarque* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1979), p. 7. Although not a volunteer himself, three of Remarque's classmates had volunteered in 1914 - one of these young men had had his arm amputated following a war wound.

The presentation of the ‘spirit of 1914’ is, therefore, a topic with which all four texts are concerned in some way, although they all cast a different light on it. Whilst Flex upholds the ‘spirit of 1914’ as the best of times for the nation and seems to find his hopes and dreams fulfilled rather than destroyed by the experience of war, Jünger’s quest for adventure is initially thwarted, before later finding that he is able to adapt (self-)constructively to the experience. Such discrepancies can also be identified in the way *Krieg* and *Im Westen* approach the topic. In the same way that Bäumer and his comrades are betrayed by the lies of 1914, Renn acknowledges that he, too, was swept up in the enthusiasm of the time. In terms of questioning the nationalist myth of the war experience then, Remarque’s approach is the more direct, although the account offered by Renn appears to be a more balanced rendering of it.

The Aesthetics of War: The Natural and the Grotesque

Although the issue of aestheticising and romanticising the war is often more concerned with style than substance, it is nevertheless useful to contrast the different styles and the impact of that style on the ‘message’ of each text. One of the most significant aspects involved in constructing a literary myth of the war is the romanticisation and aestheticisation of the experience, which is often closely associated with the ‘nationalist’ war myth. However, the way the aesthetics of war are interpreted by the author and conveyed to the reader is important for any narrative dealing with this subject and aestheticisation and romanticisation of the material can also be identified in the ‘anti-war’ novels *Krieg* and *Im Westen*.

An abundance of natural imagery can be found in both *Der Wanderer* and *In Stahlgewittern* and is used to aestheticise the experiences of the authors. The soldierly ‘idyll’

that Flex portrayed is an excellent example of how the war experience could be romanticised in literature. A range of natural images are used throughout the text with the leitmotif of wild geese recurring throughout: 'Wildgänse rauschen durch die Nacht'.[131] The influence of nature is made clear from the opening sentence: 'eine stürmische Vorfrühlingsnacht ging durch die kriegswunden Laubwälder […], wo monatelanger Eisenhagel jeden Stamm gezeichnet und zerschroten hatte'.[132] The idea of the storm of iron hail anticipates Jünger's 'storm of steel'. In fact, the 'notion of iron endurance provided able-bodied veterans with a welcome collective myth which underscored their special station in post-war German society' and the image of the steel-helmeted German soldier and 'man of iron' was reflected in many war landmarks as it became a defining literary and political trope.[133] It is this very idea of the 'iron man' which is rejected in Remarque's *Im Westen.*[134]

Flex's description of the war experience has much in common with the *Wandervogel* movement, whose ethos was a return to nature and freedom, rather than with the *Fronterlebnis.* Although Flex himself had not been a member of the *Wandervogel* movement, his comrade, Ernst Wurche, had been involved with the movement before the war. Natural pursuits and the character-building virtues of those pursuits are emphasised throughout *Der Wanderer*: 'denn das seien die sieben ritterlichen Künste der neuen deutschen Jugend: Singen, Wandern, Turnen, Schwimmen, Fechten, Tanzen und Reiten'.[135] The sense of enjoyment that they derive from their experiences is made apparent:

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[131] *Der Wanderer*, p. 8.

[132] ibid., p. 7.

[133] Goebel, p. 158.

[134] See n. 37 above.

[135] *Der Wanderer,* p. 42.

> Im Waldesdunkel intonierte die Kompaniekapelle, deren Instrumente zumeist sehr sinnreich aus Blechbüchsen und Telephondraht hergestellt waren, das “O Deutschland, hoch in Ehren!”, und Gruppe um Gruppe fielen die Mannschaften ein. Unter Lachen und Singen ging es der ungewissen Zukunft entgegen.[136]

The juxtaposition of the enthusiastic, patriotic singing with the experience of war reflects an impossibly idealistic version of events. The military experience of war is thus integrated by Flex into ideas of nature, indicating a romanticisation and idealisation of a situation in which war and the natural world are equated.

An emphasis on nature is also to be found in *In Stahlgewittern*, where there is an attempt to ‘integrate war into nature, [creating] a military pastoral’.[137] Jünger links the changing of the seasons to the war: ‘mit jedem Frühling begann auch ein neues Kampfjahr; die Anzeichen eines Groβangriffs gehörten ebenso dazu wie Himmelsschüssel und junges Grün’.[138] Jünger describes the falling of shells and gunfire with meteorological analogies: ‘ein Hagel von Splittern fegte wie ein Regenschauer über das Land’.[139] More significantly, Jünger seems to revel in the destructive forces of war and finds beauty on the field of battle: ‘über weiβlichen Dampfschwaden tanzten Wolken von Splittern’.[140] The landscape of war plays a significant role throughout *In Stahlgewittern*, demonstrating that Jünger interpreted it as a natural event, subscribing to the Heraclitean idea that ‘der Krieg ist der Vater aller Dinge’.[141]

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[136] ibid., p. 69.

[137] Michael Hofmann, ‘Introduction’ in *Ernst Jünger, Storm of Steel,* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. xx.

[138] *In Stahlgewittern,* p. 216.

[139] ibid., p. 159.

[140] ibid., p. 157.

[141] Jünger, ‘Vorwort’, in *In Stahlgewittern. Aus dem Tagebuch eines Stoβtruppführers* (Hannover: Selbstverlag des Verfassers, 1920), p. viii.

This integration also has the effect of presenting war as a natural, and therefore inevitable, event. Both Flex and Jünger therefore frequently incorporated natural imagery into their narratives of the First World War with many detailed descriptions of the landscape of war. The emphasis on nature is used by both to suggest that war itself was a natural and worthwhile pursuit.

The aesthetic portrayal of war in *Der Wanderer* and *In Stahlgewittern* can also be identified in the references to the supernatural found in both texts. Throughout *In Stahlgewittern* Jünger regularly uses phrases such as 'wie durch Zaubermacht' to illustrate the perceived supernatural dimension of his war experience.[142] This idea is extended in statements such as 'es war wie in einem labyrinthischen Traum'.[143] The imagery here again helps Jünger to demonstrate the positive aspects of the experience with the mythological references in the language highlighting the uniqueness of Jünger's experience and the idea of having transcended the world of civilisation. Such references can also be found in *Der Wanderer,* often in juxtaposition with nature 'wie Myriaden von Junikäfern die Sumpfwiese zwischen uns und dem Feinde nächtlicherweise zum Märchenland machten'.[144] The effect of using this kind of language and imagery is that the narrative becomes an aestheticised and romanticised portrayal of war, yet it also highlights the unique and individual experience of the author.

Although the syntax and language used in *Krieg* is often deliberately much less sophisticated than the two 'nationalist' texts, to correspond with Renn's rank, the use of imagery is, at times, strikingly similar to the imagery of *Der Wanderer* and *In Stahlgewittern*.

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[142] *In Stahlgewittern,* p.156.

[143] ibid., p. 216.

[144] *Der Wanderer,* p. 41.

Many of the scenes are narrated with particular attention to detail, with the evocative descriptions 'imitat[ing] the noise made by the shells with a meticulous care that is almost comic'.[145] Once again, the changing of the seasons is a device by which time and the experience of battle is tracked.[146] However, although there is an appreciation of nature for the duration of the text it is not viewed as being an intrinsic part of the experience:

> Die Natur ist nicht gefühlvoll, auch nicht, wenn man gefühlvoll ist. Sie ist ganz kalt und hart, und das ist so schön an ihr.[147]

In this way, the experience of the individual is alienated from the experience of the countryside in which he is fighting, diminishing the aesthetic appreciation of war that can be identified in many other treatments of this subject. A similar sense of distance is used by Jünger to the opposite effect. Renn appears to concentrate more on narrating the experience of war faithfully rather than by overtly romanticising his experience and it is this deliberate lack of romanticisation that has been praised by critics and which can be taken as a hallmark of *Krieg.* Indeed, Linder describes it as 'simultaneously so personal and so detached that it defies easy categorisation, except perhaps as a realistic war narrative'.[148]

Although the war was 'bereft of all beauty' for Remarque,[149] there is evidence of an aestheticisation of the experience within *Im Westen,* with natural imagery again playing a significant role. Images from the German countryside are used throughout the novel to represent pre-war society and the lives of the soldiers before the war broke out in 1914. For

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[145] Bostock, p. 16. See *Krieg* p. 125.

[146] For example, 'Der Winter verging' p.130; 'Ein neuer Frühling kam' p. 142.

[147] *Krieg*, p. 136.

[148] Linder, p. 167.

[149] Barker and Last, p. 60.

example, there are several references to poplar trees, which represent Bäumer's innocent childhood, and it is the sight of cherry blossom that finally drives Detering to desert. It is the contrast between peaceful scenes of life before the war and the sheer horror of the war itself that makes Remarque's description of life in the trenches so effective.[150] The deep and unbridgeable gulf between the two worlds is therefore used to highlight their isolation from their homes and everything that they had grown up with.

Despite the gulf between the experience of fighting in the war and the former lives of the soldiers, there are, however, occasional intrusions. For example, Detering's memory of the cherry blossom at home is triggered by the sight of cherry blossom behind the lines in France. The most significant example of this is, however, that of the butterflies seen in the trenches:

> Einen ganzen Vormittag spielen zwei Schmetterlinge vor unserm Graben. Es sind Zitronenfalter, ihre gelben Flügel haben rote Punkte. Was mag sie nur hierher verschlagen haben; weit und breit ist keine Pflanze und keine Blume. Sie ruhen sich auf den Zähnen eines Schädels auf.[151]

The juxtaposition of the yellow butterflies and the skull of a dead soldier is deliberately jarring, but illustrates that nature and war are able to coexist momentarily. It was thought that butterflies represented the souls of the departed and the yellow of the butterflies may even offer some kind of hope as they show that there is still some beauty in the world, no matter how many friends are lost on the battlefield. Yet the fact that the butterflies are yellow, a colour traditionally associated with cowardice, is interesting, although brimstone butterflies were common on the Western Front. It is this powerful, romantic image of the yellow

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[150] See Michael Gollbach, *Die Wiederkehr des Weltkrieges in die Literatur : zu den Frontromanen der späten Zwanziger Jahre* (Kronberg/Ts : Scriptor-Verlag, 1978), p. 66.

[151] *Im Westen,* p. 93.

butterfly which was used at the end of the 1930 film *All Quiet on the Western Front* with Bäumer's hand reaching up out of the trench to the butterfly before he is shot by a French sniper. The same image has also appeared on the cover of some editions of the book.

The greatest obstacle to presenting a romantic view of the war was the presentation of its carnage, a feature that is largely disregarded in Flex's soldierly idyll. An excellent example of how horror is marginalised can be found in the presentation of Wurche's death, who is killed by a single gunshot, offering the reader a 'ritual and an heroic sublimination of the grim physicality of war' that we do not find in the other texts.[152] Indeed, Minden has described Flex's approach to the war as being 'with the aesthetic of the nineteenth-century *Novelle*', an aversion to the portrayal of horror which is not replicated by Jünger or Remarque.[153] Throughout *In Stahlgewittern* Jünger seems to embrace the grotesque rather than to marginalise it as he confronts the horror of mutilation head on:

> Aus zerschossenem Gebälk ragte ein eingeklemmter Rumpf. Kopf und Hals waren abgeschlagen, weiβe Knorpel glänzten aus rötlich-schwarzem Fleisch.[154]

Indeed, for Jünger, the 'experience of horror was an artistic pleasure and violence was a source of self-transcendence' and his clinical approach to describing the carnage of the war is one feature of his twentieth-century modernist attitude.[155] With regard to the death of men whom he knew, Jünger's approach is similarly detached but much less gruesome - the death of Leutnant Brecht is documented with a simple 'er liebte die Gefahr und fiel im Gefecht'.[156]

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[152] Martin Travers, *Critics of Modernity: The Literature of the Conservative Revolution in Germany, 1890-1933* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 90.

[153] Minden, p. 139.

[154] *In Stahlgewittern*, p. 29.

[155] Whalen, p. 25.

[156] *In Stahlgewittern*, p. 48.

However, in both cases the use of language clearly demonstrates an aestheticisation of the war experience, although this is achieved in different ways. It follows that the complexity of the 'nationalist myth' can be identified in the different approaches that Flex and Jünger adopted when dealing with the slaughter of the war.

Throughout *Im Westen*, it is the grotesque rather than the natural which is given priority and Remarque seems to revel in sensationalist gruesome imagery:

> Wir sehen Menschen leben, denen der Schädel fehlt; wir sehen Soldaten laufen, denen beide Füße weggefetzt sind; sie stolpern auf den splitternden Stümpfen bis zum nächsten Loch…[157]

The grotesque imagery employed by Remarque throughout *Im Westen* highlights the horror of war, as Remarque perceived it. Yet this is not restricted to human suffering as the crying of the wounded horses, 'der Jammer der Welt',[158] is one of the horrific scenes of carnage to which the reader is exposed. Although such images stress the physical trauma of the First World War, it is important to note that Remarque is 'given to sensational touches and macabre effects to intensify the horrors'.[159] The images themselves sometimes border on the ridiculous as some of the scenes that Remarque conjures cannot reasonably have happened. In this respect, the aesthetics of *Im Westen* might be said to be more reminiscent of Gothic horror than of a war narrative. This is not the case with *Krieg* where the descriptions of the wounded and death display a similar detachment to that of *In Stahlgewittern*. The fact that both Jünger and Renn display a similar clinical detachment from the carnage of war provides a useful point of comparison, in view of the fact that these texts have been interpreted as being at

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[157] *Im Westen,* p. 97.

[158] ibid., p. 52.

[159] Bance, p. 363.

opposing ends of the ideological scale. Nevertheless, there is a marked distinction in terms of the material which is aestheticised within each 'myth'. The horrific images of war which are marginalised by Flex are incorporated into Jünger's account of his personal triumph against all odds. Although both Renn and Remarque include descriptions of the carnage of the First World War in their texts, the images provided by Remarque sometimes seem overly sensationalist.

Combat and the (Un)Heroic Metaphor

The concept of individual heroism in battle was one of the cornerstones of the 'nationalist myth'. It follows that the demonstration of heroism, or lack of it, in 'anti-war' texts is a key way in which the 'nationalist' concentration on glorifying individual and collective heroism may be undermined and contradicted. Few German texts questioned and contradicted the heroic metaphor as comprehensively as Remarque's *Im Westen.* The experience of combat, indeed practically the entire experience of being a soldier, is not something that is viewed in a positive light in the narrative. It is made clear from the beginning that the small group of comrades that Remarque focuses on are victims and even the prisoners of war: 'die Front ist ein Käfig, in dem man nervös warten muβ auf das, was geschehen wird'.[160] Remarque's focus is not on what the men are able to achieve while they were at the front, but rather on what they have lost:

> Wir sind verlassen wie Kinder und erfahren wie alte Leute, wir sind roh und traurig und oberflächig - ich glaube, wir sind verloren.[161]

[160] *Im Westen*, p. 75.

[161] ibid., p. 90.

This idea of being lost and abandoned is at the heart of *Im Westen,* as is the question of whether these comrades are children or men. The reader witnesses an emotional scene between Bäumer and his mother in which we are told that Bäumer wants to be a child again and cry on her lap, an image which could not be further from the heroic metaphor.[162] Of course, the depiction of the protagonists in this way suits the version of the war that Remarque is seeking to convey. These young men are not naturally heroic and find neither enjoyment nor fulfilment in the experience of war. They are, however, able to bear the experience as long as they are together: 'wir sind ja mit vielen zusammen, da ist es nicht so schlimm'.[163] For men, like Remarque, who joined up or were conscripted later on in the war and were confronted with a war of attrition from the beginning, the experience of combat was 'meaningful only as a demonstration of the superiority of material over men'.[164]

Jünger, on the other hand, often seems to be fighting 'for the joy he finds in fighting',[165] rather than for any higher objective, and he is seen to embrace 'der übermächtige Wunsch zu töten' throughout *In Stahlgewittern.*[166] The 'adventure' and 'sport' of warfare is well articulated in Jünger's approach to combat as he consistently refers to the enemy as 'der Gegner', using 'der Feind' but rarely.[167] Such an endorsement of the virtues of combat can also be found in *Der Wanderer* in the characters of Flex and Wurche, for whom leaving the trench has become the decisive moment before which 'everything possible must be done to ensure that the soldier experiences it in the proper frame of mind "mit hellen und beherzten

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[162] 'warum kann ich nicht den Kopf in deinen Schoβ legen und weinen?', ibid., p. 128.

[163] ibid., p. 114.

[164] Leed, p. 83.

[165] Denham, p. 119.

[166] *In Stahlgewittern,* p. 261.

[167] 'Ich war im Kriege immer bestrebt, den Gegner ohne Haβ zu betrachten…' ibid., p. 105

Augen"'.[168] However, unlike Jünger, Flex and Wurche did not experience the true nature of *Kampfrausch* - fighting purely for the joy of fighting.[169] Not only is the environment in which Jünger and Flex experience the Great War a natural and fascinating place, but their individual experiences of combat are also presented positively. This combination has the effect of making the entire experience seem more of an adventurous trial by combat than a horrific ordeal because both find themselves able to embrace the experience. In itself, such a positive presentation of war would not be problematic yet, 'when the writers extrapolate from personal to national experience, they move into the political realm'.[170] When one considers that the *Fronterlebnis* of Flex and Jünger was widely interpreted to be the experience of a generation, it is clear how these two texts were able to contribute to, or even create, a certain 'myth' of war.

Given that Jünger did not find much of what he had anticipated in the war experience, it is perhaps surprising that Jünger's experience of the First World War, as documented in *In Stahlgewittern,* sustains a largely enthusiastic impression and does not descend into total disillusionment. Indeed, as Whalen has argued, Jünger's postwar objective was to 'modify the heroic metaphor so it would correspond to industrial war'.[171] As such, Jünger sought to articulate the traditional ideal of heroic individualism within the new context of mechanised warfare. The concept of the individual is central to the entire text as the narrative is essentially a celebration of Jünger's personal heroism and the joy that he came to find in the experience of fighting. In many ways it is the background of horror and carnage which makes Jünger's

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[168] Denham, p. 119.

[169] ibid., p. 129.

[170] Linder, p. 109.

[171] Whalen, p. 45.

own heroism appear all the more impressive and led to the concept that war was a ‘supreme test and a last judgement in which modern man’s right to enter his new world […] is being either confirmed or denied’.[172]

Whilst the experience of fighting in the First World War is often portrayed as a horrific and emotionally traumatic experience by ‘anti-war’ texts, both Jünger and Flex seem to celebrate and endorse fighting in their accounts, thus validating the experience. Traditional German militarism was an important factor in how these two men were able to confront the experience of battle, along with their belief that war in general, and specifically this war, had a purpose. For Flex, this was the eradication of weakness and national emancipation. For Jünger, the war created a ‘new man’ cast from a ‘storm of steel’ and was an opportunity for self-realisation. It is noteworthy that Jünger and Flex both seem to glorify the notion of traditional hand-to-hand combat, which was a rare occurrence in the First World War; most deaths in the Great War were caused by the artillery and machine gun fire of an unseen enemy.[173] In this sense, then, these men seek to establish continuity between the nature of this war and earlier ones. At one point in *In Stahlgewittern* Jünger notes that ‘zwischen den Opfern dieses Krieges ruhten dort auch Kämpfer von 1870/71’.[174] In this way Jünger establishes both a tradition of the German warrior and German militarism together with a legacy of victory, lending authority to his personal war epic and stressing that this war is essentially no different from earlier wars.

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[172] J.P. Stern, *The Dear Purchase: A Theme in German Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 187.

[173] Of the German soldiers killed up to the end of January 1917, 54.7% were killed by artillery with a mere 0.3% being killed by ‘edged weapons’. See Watson, p. 15.

[174] *In Stahlgewittern*, p. 215.

Although, as in *Im Westen*, Renn's *Krieg* also resists the glorification of combat and the war experience, it seems to offer a more balanced reflection of the experience throughout. Indeed, Broich has described *Krieg* as 'oscillat[ing] between courage, fear and despair, heroic fighting and total disillusionment about the meaning of the war'.[175] Whilst this statement is an accurate assessment of *Krieg*, the true focus of the text is Renn's personal sense of *Pflicht* (duty). It can be argued that the motto of the text comes at the very beginning as Renn's mother writes 'bleibe treu und halte dich recht'.[176] The escapades and adventurous spirit of *In Stahlgewittern* are not to be found in Renn's writing.[177] Throughout *Krieg*, Renn experiences moments when he finds himself struggling with cowardice: 'Feigheit ist es doch nicht! Ach, ist denn das keine Feigheit, wenn man den Kopf verliert vor ein paar Schüssen!'.[178] Renn also experiences the sense of being trapped that is expressed in *Im Westen*: 'sind wir nicht gefangen von Angst und Schrecken und Todesfurcht?'.[179] Unlike Remarque, Renn does not seem to resent doing his duty in the service of the Fatherland and his bravery is acknowledged as he is awarded the Iron Cross on two occasions before the Armistice.[180] On the contrary, at times Renn is clearly enthusiastic about the experience, crying 'jawohl, Herr Oberstleutnant!' when asked if they are happy to be at the Somme, a sentiment which the Oberstleutnant quickly dismisses as naïve.[181] This attitude to combat might be dismissed as naïveté on the

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[175] Broich, 'World War I in Semi-Autobiographical Fiction and in Semi-Fictional Autobiography - Robert Graves and Ludwig Renn', p. 320.

[176] *Krieg*, p. 9.

[177] See Ernst Keller, *Nationalismus und Literatur, Langemarck, Weimar, Stalingrad.* (Bern; Munich: Francke, 1970), p.77.

[178] *Krieg*, p. 31.

[179] ibid., pp. 72-73.

[180] See *Krieg*, p. 128, p. 293.

[181] 'wenn wir zum zweiten Male eingesetzt werden, wird es nicht mehr sein', *Krieg*, p. 147.

part of Renn, were it not for other examples where he recognises some beauty in the experience. Asked by a doctor whether battle is awful, Renn responds:

> Nein, es war herrlich, wie die alle vorstürmten, alle, - die vorher im Tunnel klagten! Einer hat gesagt - ich hörte es im Vorübergehen -, es wäre ihm gleich, ob er gefangen würde. Und der ist vorgerannt und hingestürzt. Wahrscheinlich ist er tot.
>
> Aber das ist doch nicht herrlich!
>
> Doch, Herr Oberarzt, wie sie auf einmal alle Angst verloren hatten! Dass es sie gepackt hatte und sie angriffen, das war unvergleichlich schön![182]

These statements clearly indicate that Renn is able to appreciate the heroism of German soldiers, a beauty which is also recognised by Jünger. *Krieg*, ostensibly an 'anti-war' text, nevertheless incorporates and affirms the ideals of *Heldentum* as a virtue. It is also worth noting that, had he omitted the final chapter of *Krieg* ('Zusammenbruch'), the ending would have been similar to that of *In Stahlgewittern* with the protagonist receiving recognition for his efforts, while recovering in hospital. Its inclusion, however, offers the reader an account of the war right through to demobilisation. As these examples from *Krieg* have shown, it would be difficult to assert that fear or cowardice are present throughout the entire narrative, as it is in *Im Westen*.

Both fear and cowardice are raised on numerous occasions by Renn in contrast to the more heroic aspects of his personality and experience, but it is made clear, certainly at the beginning of the narrative, that the loyal and heroic side to Renn's character will prevail: 'er

[182] *Krieg*, p. 175.

will ein vorbildlicher Soldat sein', true to his mother's injunction.[183] The reader of *Krieg* is, however, exposed to some of the confusion and disorientation expressed by characters in *Im Westen:*

> Weshalb habe ich jetzt solche Angst? Fürchte ich mich denn vorm Tode? Nein, nicht so sehr. Oder vor einer Verwundung? Nein, kaum. Oder vorm Gefangenwerden. Ach, ich werde ja nicht gefangen. All das ist es also nicht? Was ist es denn?[184]

The questioning stream of consciousness that is seen here would not seem out of place in *Im Westen*. Yet the fact that Renn chooses not to specify what is wrong differentiates his text sharply from the more overt criticism contained in Remarque's.

It is fear rather than cowardice that is addressed most persistently by Remarque throughout *Im Westen.* Even Detering's desertion is presented not so much as cowardice but as a result of the pressure and fear to which the men are exposed. Indeed, the group of soldiers that Remarque focuses on are presented as brave individuals who, for the time being at least, have adapted to and are able to survive in such an alien environment. Moreover, they are contrasted with the younger recruits who have been called up and who have been sent to the front with little training or experience. When a new recruit is on the brink of madness as they are trapped in a dugout, it is Bäumer and Kat who stop him from trying to get out where he will surely be killed.[185]

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[183] Michael Gollbach, *Die Wiederkehr des Weltkrieges in die Literatur Zu den Frontromanen der späten Zwanziger Jahre,* Theorie - Kritik - Geschichte, 19 (Kronberg 1.Ts.: Scriptor-Verlag, 1978), p. 87.

[184] *Krieg*, p. 143.

[185] See *Im Westen*, p. 81.

> Dieses Trommelfeuer ist zuviel für die armen Kerle; sie sind vom Feldrekrutendepot gleich in einen Schlamassel geraten, der selbst einem alten Mann graue Haare machen könnte.[186]

In this manner, the 'achievement' of Bäumer and Kat is emphasised; they have been able to survive at the front, a feat few of the young recruits will manage. Consequently, Remarque's characters are also 'steeled' by the war experience, but for the purposes of survival not self-improvement.

It is therefore clear that although the ideal of *Heldentum,* at least in any glorificatory sense, is questioned or even rejected by both *Krieg* and *Im Westen*, there is also a marked effort to portray the protagonists of both as courageous and heroic in their own way. Bäumer nearly manages to survive the war as the last one left from his group of classmates; Renn survives and is awarded the Iron Cross on two occasions. Essentially, Bäumer fights because he has no other option; Renn fights out of a sense of duty; Flex fights for the German nation; Jünger fights for the joy of fighting.

Kameradschaft

The comradeship and sense of community of the men serving at the front, known as the *Frontgemeinschaft,* was an important part of the 'nationalist myth' of the war experience and a vital component of National Socialist ideology.[187] However, *Kameradschaft* can also be found in a whole range of texts that are perceived as rejecting that same 'nationalist myth'. Indeed, it seems that, regardless of whether one's experience of the war was positive or negative, the comradeship experienced made a lasting impression on the majority of

[186] ibid.

[187] See Prümm.

individuals. Indeed, in *Im Westen* we are told that comradeship was the best thing to come out of the war:

> Das Wichtigste aber war, dass in uns ein festes, praktisches Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl erwachte, das sich im Felde dann zum Besten steigerte, was der Krieg hervorbrachte: zur Kameradschaft![188]

In many ways, *Der Wanderer* is, first and foremost, an account of the friendship between Flex and Wurche rather than a complete account of Flex's experiences in the war, with the experience of comradeship taking precedence over the experience of fighting. The bond between Flex and Wurche is almost fraternal: 'Und zugleich gab es Dank und Freundschaft an ein anderes Herz, das ihm brüderlich nahe war…'[189] Yet there is also a suggestion of sexuality in Flex's admiration for Wurche, which is concentrated on his physical appearance, youth, attitude, and purity: 'was für reine Augen hat der junge Mensch!'.[190] Moreover, Flex and Wurche are able to bond over a shared love of Nietzsche, Goethe and the Bible, from which they draw inspiration throughout the war. At some points in *Der Wanderer* the admiration that Flex has for Wurche seems to border on obsession, as Flex simultaneously celebrates and mourns someone that he clearly loved.

The theme of comradeship also plays a role within *In Stahlgewittern* although the narrative is largely self-absorbed. Only a handful of individuals are mentioned by name in the course of the narrative. There is, however, evidence of a particular paternal bond between the protagonist and 'his' storm-troopers and at one point in the narrative he states that 'es war, als

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[188] *Im Westen*, pp. 27-28.

[189] *Der Wanderer*, p. 53.

[190] ibid., p. 11.

ob ich in den Kreis einer Familie zurückkehrte'.[191] Nevertheless, on occasion *In Stahlgewittern* also demonstrates some instances where loneliness is the dominant emotion. Perhaps more importantly, Jünger uses the first person plural throughout the narrative, implying a sense of collectivity of experience that would otherwise be lacking from the text. Moreover his glorification of the storm-troopers under his command is entirely consistent with the 'conservative ethos of the hardened, disciplined soldier, devoted only to his comrades and his nation', although the sense of patriotic devotion to the German nation diminishes over time.[192] The role of comradeship in both *Der Wanderer* and *In Stahlgewittern* is therefore consistent within the context of the 'nationalist myth', although how comradeship is approached and the extent to which it is the focus of each text is very different. Nevertheless, the *Kameradschaft* and the shared experience are stressed in both narratives.

Comradeship is a significant theme of *Im Westen,* which at times is raised by Remarque almost to the level of a religious cult. Significantly, the first word of the text is 'Wir'.[193] The group of characters is restricted to Bäumer's classmates, with whom he volunteered, and a group of older, less educated men with whom they have forged strong ties. It is interesting that Remarque chooses to mix these two classes together in his novel; the friendship of Bäumer and Kat in particular is something that would not have been possible without the war, yet their shared experiences bind them together and before long '[sie] sind Brüder', like Flex and Wurche.[194] This idea is entirely consistent with the nationalist interpretation of comradeship. The function assigned to comradeship by Remarque is,

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[191] *In Stahlgewittern,* p. 289.

[192] Linder, p. 2.

[193] Bance, p. 369.

[194] *Im Westen,* p. 73.

however, defined more by its negativity than by its affirmation of the unity of the German nation. The comradeship of *Im Westen* is rather one that protects the individuals from the horror of war and can be viewed as an 'essential means towards self-preservation and the maintenance of sanity in a world gone mad'.[195] Indeed, in conversation with his mother Bäumer states that life at the front is not so bad because 'wir sind ja mit vielen zusammen, da ist es nicht so schlimm'.[196]

The relationship between Bäumer and Kat seems, at times, to go beyond comradeship and could perhaps be said to contain an element of 'adolescent hero-worship' on the part of Bäumer, which goes beyond mere admiration and respect.[197] With regard to Kat, Bäumer declares: 'ich liebe ihn, seine Schultern, seine eckige, gebeugte Gestalt'.[198] Such a statement comes close to Flex's idolisation of Ernst Wurche which can be found throughout *Der Wanderer,* although Bäumer's admiration for Kat is much less pronounced and there is barely any suggestion of homo-erotic feelings. Kat is loved and respected as the father-figure of the group, as their provider and protector.

The theme of comradeship in *Im Westen* is, at times, extended to the soldiers on both sides of the trenches as the men express feelings of solidarity with the enemy. The clearest example of this is the encounter between Bäumer and Gérard Duval, a Frenchman, in No Man's Land. Having killed Duval, the remorse felt by the protagonist is extreme as, looking through Duval's papers, he realises that the 'enemy' is as human as he is:

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[195] Barker and Last, p. 52.

[196] *Im Westen,* p. 114.

[197] Bance, p. 370.

[198] *Im Westen,* p. 72.

> Ich habe gedacht an deine Handgranaten, an dein Bajonett und deine Waffen - jetzt sehe ich deine Frau und dein Gesicht und das Gemeinsame. Vergib mir Kamerad! Wir sehen es immer zu spät. Warum sagt man uns nicht immer wieder, dass ihr ebenso arme Hunde sind wie wir, das eure Mütter sich ebenso ängstigen wie unsere und dass wir die gleiche Furcht vor dem Tode haben und das gleiche Sterben und den gleichen Schmerz -. Vergib mir, Kamerad, wie konntest du mein Feind sein. Wenn wir diese Waffen und diese Uniform fortwerfen, könntest du ebenso mein Bruder sein wie Kat und Albert.[199]

This emotional response to the dead body of an enemy soldier reveals a certain pity of war that we associate with the anti-war novel, the sense of compassion and his identification with Duval being made explicit in the use of the word 'Kamerad' and 'Bruder'. In many ways the effect of the humanity of Bäumer's response is heightened by the fact that he is later forced to forget Duval in order to fulfil his role in the front line whilst maintaining his sanity. The message, therefore, is that the soldier of the First World War, or indeed of any war, is dehumanised by his experience.

Despite the references to comradeship throughout *Im Westen*, this connection between the material and the 'true' nature of wartime comradeship and the *Frontgemeinschaft* has not always been clear to all of the book's readers. Peter Kropp, who allegedly spent some time in a field hospital behind the lines with 'Remark' during 1917,[200] rejects *Im Westen* as an accurate depiction of the experience of the First World War and states that comradeship is not to found within the pages of *Im Westen:* 'das Dreschen einiger schöner dazu noch hohler

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[199] *Im Westen*, p. 152.

[200] Throughout *Endlich Klarheit über Remarque und sein Buch Im Westen nichts Neues*, Kropp refers to Remarque as Remark which was his real name.

Phrasen ist noch keine Kameradschaft'.[201] Kropp goes on to state that in this respect Remarque would be able to learn something from Renn, whose portrayal of the First World War Kropp finds more 'authentic'.

Although the concept of *Kameradschaft* is never referred to as such in Renn's *Krieg*, many of the ideas associated with it are present. As Gollbach states, 'Kameradschaft zeigt sich als direkte, bestmögliche Hilfeleistung für gefährdete oder verletzte Soldaten'.[202] In fact, the idea of a unique and powerful bond existing between the men is made clear from the beginning of the text as Leutnant Fabian declares that 'wir sind ja eine Familie!'[203] This idea of the family unit echoes the closeness of the comrades of *Im Westen*, but also Jünger's relationship with his comrades, although Jünger is the father figure of his storm-troopers. After an attack, Renn always enquires after his comrades and both he and Fabian are clearly affected by the death of Ziesche. Yet *Krieg* does not elucidate the same mental intimacy that is so clearly shown in *Im Westen* as Renn's doubts and concerns about the war are kept to himself.

Another aspect of comradeship explored within *Krieg* is the growing sense of animosity between the Front and the rear area (*Etappe*), something which was not present in 1914 and for which both parties are to blame: 'die hinten verstanden die Truppe nicht mehr, als es zum Stellungskrieg kam, und die Truppe glaubte alles besser zu wissen und wollte nicht mehr gehorchen, weil sie es ist, die die Opfer bringt'.[204] The sense of the community of soldiers is therefore undermined to some extent.

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[201] Kropp, p. 13.

[202] Gollbach, p. 92.

[203] *Krieg*, p. 11.

[204] ibid., p. 240.

It follows that, although comradeship is a common theme in these four texts and all express a positive sense of the close bond formed between the men who fought together at the Front, the approach to the same theme is often different, being conditioned by both personal and political agendas. Once again, it is *Im Westen* that articulates the strongest challenge to the idea of the exclusive comradeship of the German soldiers in Bäumer's expression of solidarity with the enemy.

Chance and Fate

A further significant theme in terms of evaluating the presentation of the experience is the role assigned to chance and fate within the narrative. For example, some texts focus on religion as a means of rationalising the experience and providing an explanation as to why some men are killed whilst others live to see another day. Religion may be a vehicle through which death is transformed into something fundamentally heroic and glorious: *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori,* the phrase famously ironised in Owen's eponymous poem. Indeed, 'in the First World War German army in particular, religious belief was a great source of strength for many men'.[205] Fate and fortune are interpreted with a religious understanding throughout *Der Wanderer* as 'Groβen Seelen ist der Tod das gröβte Erleben'.[206] Essentially, to die for one's country is the glorious and ultimate fulfilment of one's destiny that one must face 'mit hellen und beherzten Augen' as Wurche does.[207] Indeed, the presentation of Wurche's death is highly religious: 'auf seinen jungen Zügen lag der feiertäglich groβe Ausdruck geläuterter

[205] Watson, p. 93.

[206] *Der Wanderer*, p. 97.

[207] ibid., p. 88.

Seelenbereitschaft und Ergebenheit in Gottes Willen'.[208] It is therefore clear that Flex employed religion as a method of rationalising death in the war and was willing to accept the death of a beloved comrade as God's will.

There is a sense of inevitability in *Im Westen* as Bäumer's comrades are killed periodically until finally only Bäumer is left alive. It should come as no surprise to the reader of *Im Westen* that Bäumer dies before the end of the war; whatever light remained at the end of the tunnel is thus extinguished. In fact, there is a sense that the rate at which these men are killed is regulated by the text's structure. Approximately one third of the way through the text 'von zwanzig sind sieben tot, vier verwundet, einer in der Irrenstalt'.[209] Moreover, the fact that all of these men are killed before the end of the war seems to affirm the idea that an entire generation was lost in the First World War, a myth that is undermined by the actual statistics, although the loss of German lives was greater than the loss of British lives.[210] This sentiment corresponds with Remarque's intention in writing *Im Westen*: 'über eine Generation zu berichten'.[211] Bäumer's death comes so close to the Armistice that the futility of the experience which Remarque is conveying is deliberately enhanced even further. His death also mirrors in some ways the death of Wilfred Owen, who was killed in November 1918.

However, although there is a sense of the inevitable for the reader, Remarque constructs a balance between inevitability and hope. Throughout the narrative Bäumer and the others make consistent references to the role of *Zufall* in their lives*:* 'jeder Soldat glaubt und

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[208] ibid.,, p. 94.

[209] *Im Westen*, p. 65.

[210] There were 2,044,900 German fatalities (15.43% of the 13,250,000 men mobilised) compared with 744,702 British fatalities (11.99% of the 6,211,427 men mobilised). See Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War*, p. 195.

[211] *Im Westen.*

vertraut dem Zufall'.[212] It is therefore clear that the soldiers themselves reject the idea of fate and that they almost embrace the fact that whether they live or die is pure chance:

> über uns schwebt der Zufall. Wenn ein Geschoss kommt, kann ich mich ducken, das ist alles; wohin es schlägt, kann ich weder genau wissen noch beeinflussen. Dieser Zufall ist es, der uns gleichgültig macht.[213]

In short, there is very little that these men can do if a bullet or a shell has their name on it. This sentiment is clearly at odds with the regular spacing of the deaths throughout the narrative and it is difficult to reconcile these two seemingly conflicting sets of ideas, although it may be that the soldier needs something to believe in, if not God then *Zufall* is the only available substitute.

The concept of *Zufall* is also important for Jünger, who finds that much of what happens on the field of battle is governed by external forces beyond the control of the individual. However, given that war is understood to be a natural event in *In Stahlgewittern*, this stress on nature has the effect of 'counterbalanc[ing] the notion that chance governs one's fate in war',[214] although there is a productive tension with regard to this topic in *In Stahlgewittern* and 'the possibility of meeting a meaningless death runs, in fact, through the war writing of both groups [Conservative Revolutionaries' treatment of war experience and the 'anti-war' Weimar novels]'.[215] Indeed, throughout *In Stahlgewittern* there are frequent references to the role of 'kleine Umstände' and 'Zufall' in determining one's fate, reflecting an intricate relationship between individual control and meaning and the role of chance.

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[212] ibid., p. 75.

[213] ibid.

[214]Woods, *The Conservative Revolution in the Weimar Republic*,, p. 130.

[215]Woods, 'The Conservative Revolution and the First World War: Literature as Evidence in Historical Explanation', p. 81.

Religion is also rejected by Renn in *Krieg* as he finds himself unable to reconcile the idea of God with the reality in which he finds himself: 'an Gott dachte ich nicht. Höchstens sagte ich mir: Vielleicht gibt es ihn. Aber was wissen wir davon?'[216] God, then, is unable to offer Renn either consolation or hope. However, as *Krieg* is about a simple soldier doing his duty despite the awful conditions with which he is confronted, it perhaps should not be surprising that he devotes less attention to his ultimate fate. Indeed, he declares that it is not the thought of death or of being wounded that is troubling him, but rather something that he seems unable to give a name to.

The treatment of the dual concepts of fate and chance is complex, then, particularly the interplay between the two that is to be found within Remarque's text. However, both *Krieg* and *Im Westen* share a rejection of religion as a means to understand or rationalise the reality of the protagonists and instead put their faith in *Zufall*. This is revealing in itself, as initially in 1914 one way in which the war had been interpreted was from a religious perspective, an idea that *Im Westen* and *Krieg* both thoroughly reject, but which is affirmed by Flex's *Der Wanderer.*

The Cult of the Fallen

Probably the most revealing element of any literary treatment of the First World War published either during the war itself or during the Weimar Republic, was how the text dealt with the subject of the enormous loss of human life which had occurred during the conflict. The 'nationalist myth' needed to endow this loss with a meaning, a feature which we do not

[216] *Krieg*, p. 121.

expect to find in the ‘anti-war’ literature where the futility of war is paramount, although, in a sense, this was the meaning of the war for ‘anti-war’ writers.

The enthusiasm with which Flex and Jünger greeted the war is mirrored in their willingness to sacrifice their young lives for the *Vaterland*. Indeed, at the beginning of *In Stahlgewittern* we are told that there can be ‘kein schönrer Tod auf der Welt’, the important thing being not to be left behind.[217] As it is a literary monument to Flex’s comrade, Ernst Wurche, *Der Wanderer* clearly contributes to the ‘cult of the fallen soldier,’ which was important during and after the war. Although *In Stahlgewittern* is not explicitly a testament to lost comrades, it is nevertheless dedicated to ‘Den Gefallenen’. However, in the original edition of *In Stahlgewittern*, which was first published in 1920, the dedication was more personal and read: ‘zur Erinnerung an *meine gefallenen Kameraden* [my emphasis – AG].’.[218] The importance of comradeship and of honouring those who had fallen for Germany in the course of the war is therefore clear in both texts.

However, death and human sacrifice are handled very differently by Flex and Jünger. Whilst Jünger’s portrayal of the gruesome scenes of destruction in the trenches might be seen as obliterating the notion of *Heldentod* to a certain extent, the trappings of death in *Der Wanderer* seem to be more in line with the concept of a hero’s death. Wurche’s death is ‘ein leidenloser, idealer Tod’ in which he is killed by a single bullet.[219]

> Ernst Wurche war tot. In einer kahlen Stube auf seinem grauen Mantel lag der Freund, lag mit reinem, stolzem Gesicht vor mir, nachdem er das letzte und größte Opfer gebracht hatte, und auf seinen jungen Zügen lag der feiertägliche

[217] *In Stahlgewittern*, p. 7.

[218] Jünger, *In Stahlgewittern. Aus dem Tagebuch eines Stoßtruppführers* (1920).

[219] Wagener, p. 23.

> groβe Ausdruck geläuterter Seelenbereitschaft und Ergebenheit in Gottes Willen.[220]

Wurche's 'ideal' death is of a piece with the tone of *Der Wanderer* and it is significant that the role of God is stressed once again by Flex here. Wurche's burial and grave are similarly idealised as Flex buries Wurche in his uniform holding a sunflower in his hand 'wie eine schimmernde Lanze'.[221] Once again, heroic, natural and traditional imagery are combined in order to give Wurche a glorious burial, worthy of his heroic sacrifice. It is, first and foremost, a soldier's grave but there are also references to 'kitschige Bilder und das Grauen des Todes ignorierende Kriegerdenkmäler'.[222] The presentation of death in *Der Wanderer* is in stark contrast to its treatment in *In Stahlgewittern*:

> Auf den Gesichtern der Toten hatte sich das feine gelbe Ziegelmehl niedergeschlagen und gab ihnen das starre Aussehen von Wachsmasken.[223]

The contrast between these presentations of death could hardly be clearer as Jünger makes no attempt to prettify war whereas Flex seeks to marginalise the horror.

The idea of the 'cult of the fallen' is taken even further in *Der Wanderer* as it turns out that, although Wurche has died, for Flex his spirit lives on. Indeed, 'die Gefallenen des Weltkrieges sind, so der Mythos, für Deutschland nicht tot, sondern marschieren also Geisterheer neben den Lebenden'.[224] In many ways the account of Wurche's death given by Flex in *Der Wanderer* is an extension of the Langemarck myth, particularly with regard to

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[220] *Der Wanderer,* p. 94.

[221] ibid., p. 98.

[222] Wagener, p. 23.

[223] *In Stahlgewittern,* p. 154.

[224] Wagener, p. 29.

Wurche's youthful idealism. In terms of perpetuating a myth then, Flex's belief that Wurche's spirit lives on corresponds to the traditional German war myth that the fallen continue to fight alongside the living. However, reference to the myth of Langemarck can also be found in *In Stahlgewittern:*

> Unsere Spaten stieβen dabei auf Gewehre, Koppelzeug und Patronenhülsen aus dem Jahre 1914 - ein Zeichen dafür, daβ dieser Boden nicht zum ersten Male Blut eintrank. Hier fochten vor uns die Freiwilligen von Langemarck.[225]

The fact that the Langemarck myth is referred to, directly and indirectly, in both of these texts reveals the power of the ideas that were inextricably linked to that myth, namely, willing self-sacrifice and patriotism. In short, death is not something to be feared: 'ein grosses Herz fühlt vor dem Tod kein Grauen, wann er auch kommt, wenn er nur rühmlich ist'.[226]

The 'reality' of death on the Western Front is certainly more explicit in both *Krieg* and *Im Westen* than in Flex's *Der Wanderer.* In both texts, comrades die throughout. Death is more personalised in *Im Westen* than it is in Renn's narrative which adopts a more distanced and detached stance that is not dissimilar to Jünger's. When Ziesche, Renn's comrade and friend, is killed the fact is presented in a rather impersonal way as we learn that 'es hat ihm die ganze eine Gesichtshälfte weggerissen'.[227] The damage that the war has inflicted on Ziesche is therefore much more horrific than the fate that meets Wurche in *Der Wanderer*.

Death is personalised by Remarque from the beginning of his novel as the reader is confronted with the emotional 'reality' of Kemmerich's death at the end of the second chapter. Remarque's graphic description is vivid and emotive:

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[225] *In Stahlgewittern,* p. 193.

[226] ibid.

[227] *Krieg,* p. 171.

> Er sieht schrecklich aus, gelb und fahl, im Gesicht sind schon die fremden Linien, die wir so genau kennen, weil wir sie schon hundertmal gesehen haben. Es sind eigentlich keine Linien, es sind mehr Zeichen. Unter der Haut pulsiert kein Leben mehr...[228]

This detailed and sympathetic account of an individual's death contrasts sharply with the callous attitude of the hospital staff, whose concern is only when Kemmerich's bed will become available. Above all, this episode is an 'example of additive detail characteristic of the naturalism that so often is branded brutal and sensational'.[229] However, this image of death must be contrasted with the version of events that Bäumer gives Kemmerich's mother while home on leave. In order to spare her some anguish, Bäumer tells her that Kemmerich was killed instantly by a bullet; the fact that she has difficulty believing him is crucial.[230] It is this image that corresponds with the 'cult of the fallen', yet the reader of *Im Westen* is aware that this is not an accurate description of what happened. In this way, the myth is effectively undermined by Remarque.

Bäumer's death is similarly idealised by Remarque at the end of *Im Westen* and we are told by the narrator that he cannot have suffered for long and lies on the ground as if he were sleeping, satisfied that his life has come to an end.[231] There is a sense that what we learn of Bäumer's death is perhaps not the truth, as Kemmerich's mother was lied to, so is the reader. We are therefore confronted with the idea that the 'cult of the fallen' is a myth: the

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[228] *Im Westen*, p. 19.

[229] J. S. White, *Erich Maria Remarque's All Quiet on the Western Front* ([S.I]: Monarch Press, 1966), p. 16.

[230] *Im Westen*, pp. 126-127.

[231] See *Im Westen*, p. 197.

reality of death on the Western Front was infinitely more horrific and futile than the 'nationalist myth' would have us believe.

In both cases, death is much less dignified than in *Der Wanderer*, as in *Im Westen* Tjaden states 'sei froh, wenn du noch einen Sarg kriegst' with a grin.[232] This rather undignified *Galgenhumor* is not in keeping with the false pathos of the 'cult of the fallen'. The lack of dignity involved in dying is also evident in *Krieg* as we are told that 'wir haben ein Loch für die Toten gegraben', an image that contradicts the image of the hero's death popularised in wartime propaganda.[233] Yet the 'classic' image of the 'cult of the fallen' is also marginalised by Jünger in *In Stahlgewittern* in his detached and unromantic approach to the theme.

This analysis of the 'nationalist' and 'anti-war' myths has demonstrated the complexity of the genre of war literature as well as the complexity of the 'nationalist myth' and 'anti-war myth'. Although both *Der Wanderer* and *In Stahlgewittern* express an attitude to war that is fundamentally an affirmation of the experience, the approach, content and style of Flex and Jünger is different. The disparity between the two texts indicates that these two 'myths of war' are distinct yet related. Whilst *In Stahlgewittern* embraces technology and sees the war as a vehicle for creating a new man forged in the midst of machinery, *Der Wanderer*'s celebration of the romantic, natural world and of an heroic individual, Ernst Wurche, is reminiscent of the style of a nineteenth-century Novelle or pastoral idyll.

The disparity is replicated in the comparison of *Krieg* and *Im Westen* and the categorisation of these two texts under the same 'anti-war' heading appears to be no less problematic. Although both texts challenge some of the central tenets of the 'nationalist

[232] *Im Westen*, p. 74.

[233] *Krieg*, p. 69.

myth', the rejection of these values is not consistent. The sense of disillusionment in each text is expressed to varying degrees and it seems clear that it is Remarque's *Im Westen* which makes the more deliberate attempt thoroughly and exhaustively to undermine the 'nationalist myth'. It is perhaps surprising that with regard to some key themes, notably comradeship and the experience of combat, Renn's narrative appears to share more features with *In Stahlgewittern* than with *Im Westen*. Nevertheless, it is impossible to ignore the fact that both *Krieg* and *Im Westen* question the virtues and merit of this war.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

This investigation of German myths of the First World War has demonstrated the significance of the understanding of myth for any assessment of the way in which the war was understood by the German public during the conflict itself and subsequently as a defeated nation in the interwar period. In terms of literary myths, it is clear that there were two different branches of war literature: nationalist texts, which quickly became dominant, and anti-war texts such as *Im Westen*, which challenged the nationalist paradigm to some extent. Yet the analysis has also shown that the distinction between the two categories is an over-simplification of the literary material.

As a simplification and reduction of a complex or painful event, myth forms part of every nation's social fabric and may play an important role in shaping the public and official interpretation of an event. The modern British myth of the First World War, which focuses predominantly on the 'pity of war', continues to embrace the poppy as its most powerful symbol. The fact that there remains a dominant interpretation of the war in modern society indicates the persuasiveness and lasting influence of myths of the Great War and the changes and shifts that can be identified in the 'British myth', particularly in the 1960s, indicates that the interpretation of an event may change with time.

There are many examples of myth-making during the war itself. These include the so-called *Augustbegeisterung* and the 'spirit of 1914' that had united the German nation to fight for the Fatherland, according to official sources and the media of the time, although recent scholarship on the subject has shown that the image of unity in 1914 was not a true reflection of the social or political situation. Nevertheless, the influence of the 'spirit of 1914' endured into the interwar era and it can be found, at least to some extent, in each of the texts that have been analysed in detail here. The representation of the Battle of Langemarck in the

‘Heeresbericht’ and popular culture as a heroic struggle fought by patriotic young students should also be interpreted as an exercise in German myth-making. Essentially, the version of events promoted in the media during the conflict was aimed at sustaining public morale and keeping the early myths of war alive.

After the German defeat in the First World War and the imposition of harsh peace terms at Versailles in 1919, the issue of interpreting and mythologising the war experience in Germany was more important than it was for the victorious Entente powers, as the 2 million German deaths appeared to have been in vain. Consequently, there was a need to account for the defeat and to restore national pride. Indeed, the process of mythologising the war continued in the Weimar Republic, with the powerful and influential *Dolchstoßlegende* becoming a theme of a decade and a half marked by instability and internal conflict. For many Germans, the Weimar Republic was born out of defeat in the war and could never be viewed as a positive development.

Although the war was to some extent ‘forgotten’ in the literature of the early 1920s, it remained the focus of political debate. The central questions of war guilt and the revision of the Versailles Treaty were key components of the political agenda during the Weimar Republic (1919-1933). By the time the war was ‘rediscovered’ by the ‘anti-war’ literature of the late 1920s, coinciding with the tenth anniversary of the Armistice, the distinction between the ‘nationalist’ myth and the ‘anti-war’ myth was becoming increasingly apparent in the social and political reaction to texts such as Remarque’s supposedly unpolitical *Im Westen*. Crucially, it was Remarque’s ‘unpolitical’ book and its unprecedented success that instigated ‘der Streit um Remarque’ in 1929-30, in which the truth and validity of the novel were questioned in both cultural and political circles. The novel was the catalyst for a renewed ideological struggle over the memory of the war. Nationalist opposition to the ‘anti-war’ *Im*

Westen strengthened further when Lewis Milestone's Hollywood film version, *All Quiet on the Western Front,* was released in 1930. The extreme extension of this reaction was the selection by the Nazis of *Im Westen* as one of the nine most 'anti-German' books for ritual burning on 10 May 1933.[234] The nationalist myth of the war experience focused on representing the war as a meaningful event and frequently glorified, romanticised and sanitised the experience, focusing on ideals of heroism, comradeship and the idolisation of the fallen. As such 'nationalist' war literature was useful for making the memory of the war more palatable for the nation. In contrast, the 'anti-war' version of the First World War focused on stressing the futility of the situation of the ordinary soldier and, by extension, of (the) war itself. Although the reception of many 'anti-war' texts was initially mixed, in the political climate of the Weimar Republic any account of the First World War was classified by the right-wing as either 'nationalist' or 'anti-war'.

The detailed analysis of *Der Wanderer*, *In Stahlgewittern*, *Krieg* and *Im Westen* presented above has demonstrated the complexity of accounts of the First World War, the popularity and influence of which is more than evident from the sales figures. Whilst *Der Wanderer* and *In Stahlgewittern* remain firmly located under the 'nationalist' branch of German war literature, *Krieg* and, especially, *Im Westen* which is now widely regarded as the classic 'pacifist' war novel, are perceived as being rooted in the 'anti-war' tradition. The complexities of writing about the war can be found with regard to the fictionalizing process to which each text was exposed, admittedly to varying degrees, with *Krieg* and *Im Westen* both being presented as novels rather than autobiography -- a crucial clarification in terms of the search for the 'authentic' account of war experience.

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[234] The other eight authors whose writings were burned first that night were Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Thomas Mann, Heinrich Mann, Karl Kautsky, Kurt Tucholsky, Erich Kästner and Ernst Toller. See *Völkischer Beobachter,* Norddeutsche Ausgabe, Berlin, 12 May 1933.

The thematic analysis of the four texts has shown that 'nationalist' and 'anti-war' texts published in the Weimar Republic were not always diametrically opposed and that there were significant departures from both the 'nationalist' and 'anti-war' myths. *Der Wanderer*, *In Stahlgewittern* and *Krieg* all initially embrace the 'spirit of 1914', but the August enthusiasm is sustained only by Flex. Jünger, Renn and Remarque all stress the disappointment experienced by soldiers who had dreamed of adventure and heroism in war, only to have these dreams shattered by its grisly reality. As such, *In Stahlgewittern* also exposes the half-truths of 1914, although *Krieg* and *Im Westen* achieve this in a more direct manner: Bäumer and his comrades are portrayed by Remarque as victims of the 'spirit of 1914'.

With regard to aestheticisation, the distinction between the 'nationalist' and 'anti-war' myths is once again blurred, as each text incorporates episodes of romanticisation and sanitisation of the *Fronterlebnis* in the construction of an individual myth of war. The sugary sentimentalism of *Der Wanderer* is clearly expressed in Flex's description of Wurche's death and in the abundance of natural imagery. Yet this sentimentalism is not replicated in *In Stahlgewittern* and it should be stressed that, in terms of style, it is Flex and Jünger who are poles apart. Although there is also an attempt to equate war and nature with a range of natural metaphors in *In Stahlgewittern*, it is achieved in a different manner. The clinical detachment in Jünger's war writing makes no attempt to marginalise the horror of the experience, but rather aestheticises that horror into something that can be appreciated by the individual. Yet aesthetics and the natural world also play a significant role in *Krieg* and *Im Westen* with the use of imagery in both being, at times, strikingly similar to that employed by Flex and Jünger. There is, once again, an attempt to integrate war into nature, although there is more distance between the two worlds with Remarque in particular using bucolic images of poplar trees and cherry blossom to represent pre-war society and the lost youth of the comrades who are now

trapped fighting in the front line. Nevertheless, nature and war are equated on occasion by Remarque -- for example, the image of the yellow butterflies dancing in front of the trench. The way in which each text approaches the description of the carnage of the First World War is a particularly enlightening area in terms of the extent to which the experience was romanticised. The horror of war that is completely marginalised by Flex in *Der Wanderer* is embraced in the clinical detachment of Jünger, while Renn and Remarque also incorporate horrific imagery in order to emphasise the destructiveness of war. The presentation of the grotesque is a particular theme of *Im Westen*, in which Remarque is seen to revel in the use of sensationalist imagery on occasion, which serves to underline the horror of Remarque's war.

In terms of the presentation of combat and the heroic metaphor within the four texts, it is unsurprising that both Flex and Jünger promote the idea of the heroic individual facing the storm of steel with iron nerves. These nerves of iron are not present for the duration of either *Krieg* or *Im Westen*. Both authors seek to portray their protagonists as dehumanised creatures trapped in the cage of the front line. Yet, once again, it is *Im Westen* which offers the greatest challenge to the 'nationalist' myth as Remarque elects to focus not on what the men are able to achieve while fighting on the front line, but rather on what they lose in the process of doing so. Indeed, the idea of being lost and abandoned recurs throughout the text and, crucially, Remarque's *boys* do not ever seem to have fully made the transition into manhood on the battlefield that Jünger is able to make. While Renn and Remarque's protagonists never shirk their duty, they do both struggle with the experience of fighting and killing. Flex and Jünger, by contrast, celebrate and endorse this experience of battle, partly in order to establish a sense of continuity between the First World War and earlier conflicts.

Whilst there are discrepancies between the respective portrayals of each of the themes considered here, the presentation of the war in the four texts is most closely linked with

regard to comradeship -- according to Remarque, it was the best thing to come out of the war.[235] The idea of a family unit of soldiers is made explicit at various stages and to varying degrees by all four authors. Indeed, Renn and Remarque's presentations of comradeship were initially praised by some right-wing critics. Nevertheless, the definition of comradeship is much wider in *Im Westen* as the enemy soldiers are also referred to as 'Kamerad', indicating an approach to the theme that may have been conditioned by a political agenda of international understanding and class solidarity. Approaches to the themes of chance and fate on the battlefield reveal a similarly complex presentation. The tension between the two is particularly well articulated by Jünger in *In Stahlgewittern*.

Yet it is the differences in the portrayal of death in each of the four texts that are perhaps the most revealing. Flex glorifies death and the experience of dying in his tribute to his fallen comrade. Indeed, in an extension of the Langemarck myth, Wurche's spirit lives on in *Der Wanderer* despite physical death. Death is similarly personalised in the unheroic and inglorious presentation of Kemmerich's death by Remarque at the end of the second chapter. In contrast, death in *In Stahlgewittern* and *Krieg* is notably less sentimental in the deliberately detached style employed by Jünger and Renn.

To some extent there are two opposing ideological stances in these four texts. All four were published at a time when the First World War was a mainstay of collective consciousness and during a period where literature was, arguably, more political than ever before. It is true to say that Flex and Jünger both glorify war, although this is achieved in different ways. It is also fair to say that Renn and Remarque offer different approaches to the memory of the First World War and, in *some* respects, offer a direct challenge to established right-wing myths of war. This challenge is much more prominent in *Im Westen.* However, the

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[235] 'Das Wichtigste aber war, dass in uns ein festes, praktisches Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl erwachte, das sich im Felde dann zum Besten steigerte, was der Krieg hervorbrachte: zur Kameradschaft!', *Im Westen,* pp. 27-28.

‘nationalist’ and ‘anti-war’ myths that are shown in the texts are not consistent -- there are more than two images of war present in the texts -- and there is evidence of some productive tension between the two categories in each. Whilst *Im Westen* praises the virtues of comradeship, a staple of the ‘nationalist’ interpretation, there is also an acknowledgement of the war’s futility in *In Stahlgewittern.* The stylistic similarities between Jünger and Renn present particular problems for any easy categorisation of war literature as either ‘nationalist’ and ‘anti-war’. These similarities undermine the literary validity of such classifications. The thesis has demonstrated that it was, in fact, the political climate of the Weimar Republic, and the right-wing reaction to any text that opposed the nationalist myth, rather than the actual approach of any text to the subject matter that played the most influential role in the creation and longevity of these classifications. The labels ‘nationalist’ and ‘anti-war’ were politically expedient as an over-simplifications of the complex literary presentation of the First World War in fictional or semi-fictional German war writings of the period 1914 to 1930.

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