

Ernst Jünger and Individualism in the Age of Technology

Ernst Jünger e o Individualismo na Idade da Tecnologia

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Abstract

Ernst Jünger, in the dystopian novels to which we dedicate this paper, *On the Marble Cliffs* (1939), *Heliopolis* (1949) and *Eumeswil* (1977), always comes to identify the same casualty arising from the action of government: the individual. From the rise of National Socialism up until the triumph of parliamentary democracy, Jünger combats the unrelenting asphyxiation of the individual by resorting to inner emigration. Nevertheless, this is only an option available to a minority: the members of a mature intellectual elite who stand above the parties and the masses, and who manage to position themselves above the general mediocrity of the times. In Jüngerian terms, these individuals are ultimately represented by the anarchist, an individual who finds an alternative to the leveling world brought about by technology and its side effect of dehumanization. The purpose of this paper is to explore Jünger's use of fiction and show the path Jünger carefully designs to denounce the order of things, regardless of any possible political ideologies. Inner emigration is ultimately revealed as an ascension of metaphysical intensity focused on the preservation of the realm of individual freedom and the world of values.

Keywords: anarchist, individualism, inner emigration.

INTRODUCTION

In 1984, during the ceremonies marking the Battle of Verdun, standing by the French President, François Mitterrand, and the German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, stood an old man, one of the last surviving witnesses to the most dramatic moments of the history between those two nations. This man was Ernst Jünger. Neither his presence in those solemn ceremonies, nor the meaning and value of his thought or his literary career, can be fully understood without a brief biographical synopsis.

Born in Heidelberg (March 29, 1895), and raised within a bourgeois family, Jünger showed signs of an intense feeling of adventure from early in his youth. After the declaration of war in 1914, on the very first day, Jünger enlisted as a volunteer in the army and before the year's end he was at the French front. Always filled with curiosity, and led by a desire to satisfy his innate interest for observation, he never missed a chance to write everything that he could observe and experience in his diary. His published diary would eventually result in a title with surprising mystical undertones – *War as an Inner Experience* (1922).

During the course of the First World War, Jünger realized his ideal of living dangerously and was wounded on fifteen different occasions; he fought with remarkable heroism, was awarded the highest medals and was soon acknowledged as one of the bravest and best-known heroes of that war. From his experience of war came one of his most celebrated works, *Storms of Steel* (1920), or *Stahlgewittern*, rightly considered as one of the finest exaltations of the war spirit which would later inspire the German nationalist sentiment. The plot of this novel, and Jünger's cold vision, stresses its fundamental difference from another renowned war novel of that time, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1927) also by a German author, Erich Maria Remarque.

After the end of the First World War, Jünger remained in the army until 1923 during which time he was able to lead a life devoted to passionate reading. We know that between the wars he read, among many other works, Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* which would leave an indelible mark on Jünger's thought. From this book, Jünger would engage with the distinction made between the man of action and the contemplative man. During this period, he would also keep in touch with the different cultural movements that were spawned during this time of cultural upheaval and revolution. Between 1923 and 1925 Jünger became a student at the Universities of Leipzig and Naples and dedicated himself to the study of natural sciences with all the zest that he naturally possessed.

At this stage of Jünger's literary career, and in the face of the collapse of humanism and the subsequent feeling of fragmentation at all levels, it was evident that war created an undeniable feeling of community or, rather, comradeship in adversity, due to the total mobilization of human and industrial resources into one single objective: victory. Through self-sacrifice, it was believed that man could reach fulfillment, perfection and transcen-

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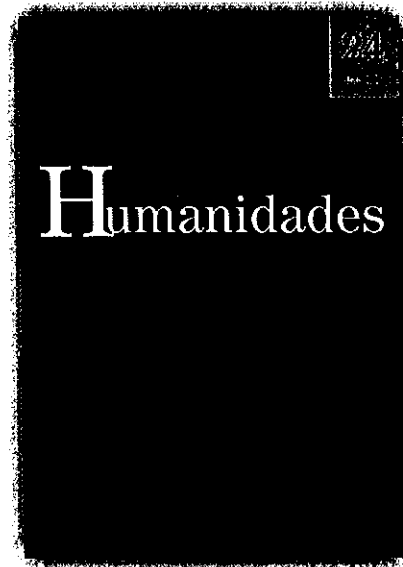
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dence, and thus could beat all the challenges with which he could ever be confronted. Jünger developed with enthusiasm the concept of “total mobilization”¹ which he had already outlined in his *Storms of Steel*. Coinciding with the breakup of the idea of truth, it is worth mentioning the appearance of several “totalizing” terms, such as the concepts of “total art” proposed by Wassily Kandinsky² and, in politics, the appearance of totalitarian ideologies, both on the left and on the right, proclaiming one unquestionable truth: their own. Nevertheless, and without any doubt, one of the fundamental events in the degeneration of the conception of truth was the advent of the First World War. This war, to a great extent, marked the dissolution of the kinship between the world and language due to the effort of all the contending parties to hide the real proportions of the carnage of the war. Jünger would refer to this cataclysm of language³, and its deep implications for the modern world, in his novel *Eumeswil*,⁴ by means of the grammarian Thofern:

The decay of language is not so much a disease as a symptom. The water of life is dwindling. Words have meaning still, but not sense. They are being replaced largely by numbers. Words are becoming incapable of producing poetry and ineffective in prayer. The crude enjoyments are supplanting the spiritual ones. (*E*, 83.)

Jünger would soon naturally become associated with the nationalist circles of the so-called *Conservative Revolution*:⁵ during those inter-war years, he published noteworthy works in which he announced the substitution of the old 19th Century bourgeoisie and the rise of the worker. The

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1. A reading of Jünger’s essay “Die Totale Mobilmachung” (1930) will reveal his ambiguity, or even paradoxical stance, towards total mobilization. Especially so if we consider the role of the individual in an action of the masses.
 2. Vassily Kandinsky (1866-1944) Russian painter and one of the pioneers of abstract expressionism soon became attracted to the theory of form. From 1922 to 1933 Kandinsky taught at Bauhaus. His anti-naturalism in art and his search for a pure language led to one of the major currents of oriental inspiration.
 3. Language is revealed in its full capacity for distortion and manipulation in the period of the Great War. See Paul Fussell (1979: 178, 316).
 4. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *E*.
 5. An assorted group of intellectuals, with political affiliations raging from the right to the left, and their extremes, made up part of this movement, amongst which were the writers Ernst Niekisch, Edgar Jung and Ernst Jünger. It also counted intellectuals Anton Drexler, Karl Harrer, Martin Heidegger, Oswald Spengler, Gregor and Otto Strasser among its outstanding members. Their attitudes and actions reveal a common opposition to the Weimar Republic and its brand of liberal and parliamentary bourgeois democracy.

essay *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt* (1932), or *The Worker Mystery and Model*, a study somehow under the influence of Futurist ideals, highlights the celebration of the dynamism of Modernity and its effects on the human spirit. Here, the worker is clearly created in a similar vein to Nietzsche's "ubermensch" and, appropriately enough, constitutes an example of what human will, when allied with technology, is able to attain. The worker is, thus, seen as the perfect symbiosis between the soldier-technocrat and the man of contemplation, or intellectual. He is part of the industrial mechanism but, at the same time, stands in opposition to it. The worker, by means of the total mobilization towards the creation of a new civilization, and as a quasi-metaphysical entity, becomes the hero of a revolution.⁶ Jünger's interest in the inner world, represented by the worker, would make him the focus of attention for the revolutionary movements of the time: both the political left and the right would try to draw him into their fold. As an enemy of all types of demagoguery, Jünger opened up his own path that would eventually lead his spirit towards a quest for metaphysics.

Jünger's nationalistic positions both as an intellectual and as a figure of political bearing contributed, without any doubt, to the creation of a climate favorable to National Socialism. His friend Ernst Niekisch, a suspected communist, wrote: "Jünger felt great aversion towards National Socialism. It was the plebeian spirit of the movement what he despised most, the aristocratic spirit of Jünger was of superb subtle delicacy."⁷ Elitism is at the heart of Jünger's rejection of any of the approaches made from the rightist or leftist fields of the political spectrum and this attitude becomes more than evident after the publication of his essay *The Worker*. With the passage of time, his increasing disenchantment with *Volkish Romanticism* becomes evident: on the one hand, he embraced the future promised by technology and, on the other, he considered any racial supremacist tendencies as reductive. The term *race* is to be applied to a new metaphysical type that can be incarnated in any individual regardless of the ethnic background. The Parsis, so greatly admired by Jünger, seem to represent positive conceptions or stereotypes of the Jewish people. In *Heliopolis*,⁸ for example, Lucius de Geer is in love with Boudur Peri and ends up risking his own life in order to save her uncle

6. This preoccupation with the individual in the period has led some critics to consider it as an authentic "metaphysics" of the hero. See, Dagmar Barnouw (1988: 206).

7. *Ibid.*: 20.

8. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *H.*

Antonio Peri. At a personal level, during this period, it is worth mentioning a fact that affected him harshly and which profoundly altered his personality. Nazi thugs beat up his then girlfriend, German writer Else Lasker-Schüler, a fact that forced Jünger to abandon Berlin in 1933. In 1938 Jünger was banned from publishing by the Gestapo. Soon afterwards, and after the publication of his novel *On the Marble Cliffs* (1939), *Auf den Marmor Klippen*, Jünger was considered as *persona nongrata* by the regime. By 1939 he had already declined the leadership of the guild of writers, *Deutsche Akademie der Dichtung*, a move that had been interpreted as a clear rebuff: Adolph Hitler, from at least the 1920's, had been trying by all means possible to cultivate his friendship and Jünger had even dared to reject a seat in the Nazi Parliament. After the divorce between the army and the Nazi party had taken place, Jünger was considered as one of the possible moral perpetrators of the attempt on the life of Adolf Hitler (July 20, 1944) and soon afterwards he was discharged from the army; his son, as a consequence of having been involved in political activities, was sent to a penal battalion and shortly afterwards was killed in action in Carrara (a region well-known for the quality of its marble⁹).

THE AFTERMATH OF THE WAR

From the Second World War onwards, Jünger drew on a completely different vision that can easily be inferred by the reading of his works. The extermination of large groups of the civilian population and the subsequent, if we may say so, dehumanization of war, in which the value of the soldier in the face of technological progress ceased to have any importance, seems to have completely erased his past exaltation of war. The triumph of the technician heralds the death of humanism and any hopes for a true humanistic government. This is something that Jünger will explicitly mention in the last volume of his trilogy, *Eumeswil*:

[...] The last time must have been after the Second World War – that is, after the final triumph of the technician over the warrior: Just as flames keep blazing on the edges after vast conflagrations, isolated feuds keep going after peace treaties. (*E*, 128.)

9. According to Elliot Neaman (1999: 47), Jünger always harbored the suspicion that his son may have been murdered.

Contributing to Jünger's new dystopian vision, between 1941 and 1944 he wrote the essay *Der Friede: Ein Wort an die Jugend Europass und an die Jugend der Welt* or *The Peace: a Word to the Youth of Europe, a Word to the Youth of the World* (1945), where he proposes a Christian base as a unifying and agglutinating factor for a peaceful Europe and analyzes the failure of National Socialism. This consubstantiates a warning that Jünger would again point out in his postwar novel *Eumeswil*:

The contemporary man provides only fact-making strength. He is quantified as a vote, as a payer and payee, as a species that survives in the registers of government offices and ministries. Any memory of him sinks into the grave with his grandchildren. (*E*, 179)

It is precisely at the end of the Second World War (a war that, incidentally, Jünger considered to be the first real world war), that he found himself, once again, banned as a writer due to his refusal to participate in the de-Nazification trials. As a consequence, Jünger was rendered silent between 1945 and 1949. He, nevertheless, wasted no time and dedicated himself to the satisfaction of his personal curiosity for geology, botany and biology. It is worth mentioning his particular passion for the study of entomology: he collected some 40,000 beetles and his name was given to several species.

ON OPACITY, WHAT OPACITY?

In all of Jünger's novels of political character, especially in the three novels to which we dedicate this paper, *On the Marble Cliffs* (1939), *Heliopolis* (1949) and *Eumeswil* (1977), Jünger created a mythical universe related to the external reality, that existed during his time, which he was able to communicate by means of a tenuous and delicate series of formulations. The social and political setting forced Jünger to make use of opacity, by means of transpositions of either mental or aesthetic character. It is in these novels that we find a complex and gruesome data demanding interpretation, combined with all the difficulties that a work of this character both assumes and demands. It is in this way that narrative action was tackled, not by a diaphanous and translucent layer but by a thick and profoundly opaque layer that makes these novels not easily understandable by the common reader.

In some literary works, such as those by Jünger, the concept of *transparency* implies the insinuation, or making something apparent, without

expressly mentioning that particular something. The objective is to let the readers become aware just by means of a subtle hint by the author. The author, therefore, relies on a competent reader who eventually will be able to uncover whatever the author chooses to leave hiding, to whatever degree. One of the risks run may very well be that thoughts can be hidden in such a way that there is risk of being misinterpreted or not understood in the way originally desired. Jünger's works, whenever concealing his thoughts, are clear enough to be able to "tell without telling." Or, better, according to Henry James, to show without telling. Regarding the position of the writers during National Socialism, German writer and oppositionist Werner Bergengruen expressed, in 1947, an opinion that was no doubt useful, despite their differences, for approaching Jünger's writings: "it is impossible for anyone who is not familiar with a system of terror and censorship of the National Socialist type [and] who has grown up taking for granted the enjoyment of freedom of speech and of the written word, to understand the technique of allusions and cue words, the technique of indirect clear expression. It is impossible for such a person to understand the more and more refined art of writing – but also of reading – between the lines."¹⁰

It is needless to mention that Jünger makes use of all the literary resources at the disposal of any author, especially so if we consider that Jünger's prose is highly elaborate and intricate. His use of different resources extends a layer of beauty over the literary text: a diaphanous layer that while diaphanous still remains perceptible, always wrapped around the text, which in this way gains a certain indirect degree of expressivity which converts Jüngerian thought into something highly mysterious, even exoteric. Adding to the difficulty of these texts, Jünger practiced in his works an inner emigration¹¹ as a way of resistance to external threats. This makes Jünger something of a migrant, always on the boundary between the implicit and explicit meanings of language. Quite often his symbolism, of a very personal nature, creates in the reader an inexplicable subjective emotion: Jünger does not speak, rather he suggests.

Far from attempting to force any preconceived ideas onto his readers, Jünger's novels constitute colossal parables that hide from the ordinary

10. Cited in Karl-Heinz Schoeps, ed. (2004: 227).

11. On the concept of inner emigration see Stephen Brockmann, "Inner Emigration: The Term and its Origins in Postwar Debates," in *Flight of Fantasy: New Perspectives on Inner Emigration in German Literature*, Neal H. Donahue, Doris Kirchner (Ed.), (2008: 11-26).

reader the true identity and reality of the protagonists of the action. It is important, therefore, to decipher the parables, to study the relations and the similarities they establish, particularly those between Evil and Nazism or, for that matter, between Evil and any totalitarian regime. Evil is not a concrete act; Evil, certainly, is not just about injustice or hypocrisy. For Jünger it acquires a metaphysical dimension which rapidly reveals itself as irrational: Evil for Evil's sake, and, despite everything, it turns out that there is always a possible realm for human freedom, or for the search of truth that must be conquered as the only possible way, albeit limited, for human redemption in the face of totalitarianism. In Jünger's *On the Marble Cliffs*,¹² the multiplication of Evil has a counterpoint in the study of language:

While evil flourished like mushroom spawn in rotten wood, we plunged deeper into the mystery of flowers, and their chalices seemed larger and more brilliant than before. But, above all, we continued our study of language, for in the word we recognized the gleaming magic of word, liberty and spirit. (OMC, p. 63)

Beyond the use of parables, Jünger makes a masterful use of scenery often with images of appalling terror, and this constitutes an element of vital importance in the Jüngerian technique of revealing to the readers the abominable crimes and horrors caused by National Socialism. Jünger takes his time to weaken and, even wipe out, the clues that would lead us to direct recognition of any singled-out historical figure. Thus, at the same time that transparent data is offered, a complete series of data not so quite transparent is also put forward. Sometimes, in order to mislead, Jünger makes use of a deliberate change of details, such as when dealing with Adolf Hitler. Changes are applied to such an extent, that the subject focused and submitted to criticism is almost unrecognizable or, at least, made easily mistaken amongst others with similar ethical behavior: Stalin or Goëring. For some, he is one of the most dangerous fascist ideologues, even after he strongly denounced fascism in the cultural magazine *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* on September 12, 1930.¹³

All these factors, in the end, make the study of Jünger's works difficult: his thought is variable, instable and always under constant mutation, reveal-

12. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as OMC.

13. Jünger had previously derided antisemitism in the periodical *Das Tagebuch*, September 1929.

ing his mastery of occultation and camouflage as the only way of preserving the integrity of his self. Another reason for the difficulty of his texts stems from the fact that his texts are philosophical and, sometimes, there are sections which in their own right can be perceived as essays or, even, sequences of essays. For instance, in *Eumeswil*, there is a small political section directly quoting American anarchist Benjamin Tucker (*E*, 330).

PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICAL PRAXIS

The dystopias Jünger composes with meticulous care are reflections upon human destiny and, at the same time, constitute a unique testimonial indicating a possibility for salvation by means of a conscious exercise of personal autonomy.¹⁴ What Jünger narrates in his profoundly allegorical, and even metaphysical, works is, in the end, his own personal experience gathered by learning, while persevering on the path to freedom. Freedom that Jünger, no doubt, finds compromised and endangered within a more mechanical and standardized world. When other writers were exploring, for the first time, the entrance to the tunnel of the future, Ernst Jünger was already looking for a way out, openly rejecting technology.

In 1939, Jünger begins his trilogy with *On the Marble Cliffs* where he explores his initial certainties and offers the image of an impossible happiness. It is a parable that can be directly related to the German state of affairs, but it also goes beyond and deals with the essential problem posed by freedom. In this novel, classical bucolic reminiscences are apparent: the ideal community of Marina is balanced, happy, wise and a shelter to a school of esthetes – learned men devoted to contemplation – which ends up being destroyed and occupied by an overwhelming will-to-power which emanates from the Forest, and from lands without tradition, where the lack of referentiality of words is but a symptom of deeper and darker threats:

One morning I looked out on to the Marina from the terrace, her waters appeared to me deeper and more translucent, as if I were seeing them for

14. This quest for the preservation of personal autonomy reminds us of American writer and naturalist Henry David Thoreau and his fight against the “machine of government”. In a parliamentary democracy, Thoreau is forced to say in his essay *In the Duty of Civil Disobedience* (Thoreau 2001: 212) and as a vindication of the individual: “Any man more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one”.

the first time with unclouded vision. At the same moment I felt, almost with anguish, words and phenomena springing apart like the cord from an over-taut bow. (OMC, p. 31-32)

The carefree life, the life without worries, described in *On the Marble Cliffs*, is eradicated by the dictatorial force that emerges from darkness. It constitutes a rather sharp criticism of National Socialism and totalitarianism, embodied by Chief Ranger, who will take as his own the task of eliminating all of the solar islands, one by one, until he imposes an order as brutal as it is mediocre. Once the acronychal mask and mythical semblance is removed, nobody can deny that the historical context was sufficiently eloquent in order to suggest that there should not be any doubts: Adolf Hitler was its main target.¹⁵ Both the German readers, as well as foreign critics, were able to discern this, regardless of the possible consequences it could eventually bring about to the author. This book soon became extremely successful, even in Germany where it widely circulated underground. The novel is, beyond doubt, an anti-totalitarian parable not exclusively addressed towards Nazism, since any of the modelled characters can clearly refer to both the Soviets and the Fascists. For a witness, as independent and indifferent towards economic matters as Jünger was, the Soviets and the Nazis possess equivalent ideologies, their features are those of any dictatorship.¹⁶

In 1939, Hitlerian barbarity makes difficult the noble attitude of resolve and independence that Jünger would like to see preserved and, consequently, everybody is drawn, against their will, into the generalized turmoil set out by Hitler and his henchmen. *On the Marble Cliffs* expresses the same setting; the two brothers of the novel have to contend with the Chief Ranger and with his men of action. It is thus that some of those afraid of the Chief Ranger may paradoxically prefer accommodation: "It is better to fall with him than live with those who grovel in the dust from fear" (OMC, p. 35). In order not to forget the overpowering and perverse influence of the cunning Chief Ranger upon the character of his subjects, Jünger becomes overly explicit:

15. We have to agree with Thomas Nevin (1996: 76): "at crucial junctures, Jünger rejected Hitler, ridiculed the Nazis and defended those targeted by their virulent racism".

16. Jünger clearly separates National Socialism from Bolshevism, due to its protestant leanings, its rigor, civility and its national specificity; but most especially because of its lack of interest for the proletariat and an elitist scorn for the masses. We should also stress Jünger's personal attitude reflected in his hostility towards the Nazi nomenclature.

I was scarcely disturbed by the inflexibility of his nature, for all Mauretians acquire with time something of the nature of an automaton. This characteristic is particularly marked in their glance, and so the eyes of the Chief Ranger, too – especially when he laughed – gleamed with terrifying mirth. Like those of hardened drinkers, they were touched with a red flame, but expressed both cunning and unshakeable power – yes at times majesty. Then we took pleasure in his company and lived in arrogance at the table of the great ones of the world. (*OMC*, p. 33)

If this were not enough, in one of the turns of a trail, the skulls – as much as Köppels-Bleek's quartering table – implicitly remind us of the heaps of corpses produced by the Nazis:

Over the dark door on the gable-end a skull was nailed fast, showing its teeth and seeming to invite entry with its grin. Like a jewel in its chain, it was the central link of a narrow gable frieze which appeared to be formed of brown spiders. Suddenly we guessed that it was fashioned of human hands fastened to the wall. So clearly did we see this that we picked out the little peg driven through the palm of each one. (*OMC*, p. 75)

Yet, this is a primitive type of horror and, if we may say so, still hand-crafted. It does not possess a technocratic quality yet. Nonetheless, and more importantly, it serves as a ratification of the sinister rumors circulating in the Marina. Other places devoted to Evil illustrate the coincidence between the National Socialist atrocities and the mythical and fantastic imagery of Jünger. Flayer's Copse, in *On the Marble Cliffs*, is one of those sites about which the narrator candidly mentions:

Now we knew the hell kitchen from which the mist drifted over the Marina – since we were determined not to give way, the old man of the forest had shown us it a little more clearly. Such are the dungeons above which rise the proud castles of the tyrants, and from them is to be seen rising the curling savoury smoke of their banquets. They are terrible noisome pits in which a God-forsaken crew revels to all eternity in the degradation of human dignity and human freedom. In such times the muses are silent, and truth begins to flicker like a torch in a current of foul air. (*OMC*, p. 76)

Characters, such as that of the narrator and his brother Otto, directly suggest the Jünger brothers:¹⁷ intellectuals, independent from any political

17. Friedrich Georg Jünger (1898-1977) was also a writer and keen naturalist too. As essayist, his "Die Perfektion der Technik" (1946) expresses a rejection of technology not unlike the one his

party, former army officers converted to more meditative activities and to an ideal life threatened by a leader, the Chief Ranger, whom Jünger eloquently and masterly describes with these words:

He administered fear in small doses which he gradually increased, and which aimed at crippling resistance. The role he played in the disorders which were so finely spun in the heart of his woods was that of a power for order; for while his agents of lower rank, who had established themselves in clans, fostered anarchy, the initiated penetrated into the civic offices and the magistracy, and there won the reputation of men of deeds who would bring the mob to its senses. Thus, the chief ranger was like an evil doctor who first encourages the disease so that he may practise on the sufferer the surgery he has in mind. (OMC, p. 47)

The theme highlighted by the Marina, seemingly all too perfect and ideal, will appear once more in the second science-fiction novel, *Heliopolis, Rückblick auf eine Stadt*, or *Heliopolis, A Look Back on a City* (1949): a city-state of an unspecified future in which man has already come to control the subtlest forces of energy, and reached the stars. The city, however, is the stage for the confrontation of two antagonistic forces: those representing military aristocracy and those representing the people by means of a Tribunate. We have, then, the military caste, in its most noble conception and the leader of the masses of people.

The Proconsul and his soldiers manage to encroach upon the ruins of the old aristocracy, while the Chief Ranger and his men take up their place in the ruins of the old popular parties. The first selects a skilled elite, self-controlled, with the proper sense of discipline and duty. The popular leader, in his turn, settles for technology and organizes a technocracy, in order to be served and make use of it. He also cultivates connections with the masses, which he is always able to manipulate in order to attain his goals: mainly power for the sake of power. He uses the red banner and lives in a pentagon-shaped cement bunker. The Proconsul displays the eagle and the snake, (Jüngerian symbols representing both strength and intelligence), and lives in an old castle adapted to the new function of headquarters for the newly established political and military power. Amidst the daily confrontation between these two elites, Heliopolis carries on with its ordinary life at the same time that a new elite attains total triumph by resorting to

brother would eventually reach in time.

secret services and the police. The dispute highlights the problem of human destiny.

Always aware of the sterility of the proposals of the Chief Ranger, the protagonist Commander Lucius de Geer, – well-positioned before the war-mongering aristocracy of the Castle – , is progressively drawn away from the warrior model and enters into a search along a path leading him to a life of knowledge and enlightenment. Lucius, by means of his personal inner effort, through the study of metaphysics together with his rapport with the sages, is finally able to outdo the two antithetical positions of his world. He is able to create, in the arena of the city, a profoundly human open spirit which will ultimately distance him from his own people.

In *Heliopolis*, nothing can be taken as a result of mere chance or at face value. The city is on the outskirts of a stellar empire, ruled by the tutelary figure of a Regent sage who, as if mysteriously empowered to narrate history, delivers to the large population its own history.

Any men who manage to position themselves above the general mediocrity, who are above the parties and the masses, and who, for that matter, are found to be a nuisance and hard to contend with by either of the two parties of the strife are able to pass tests with flying colors and are ultimately accepted into the Empire of the Asters. The pilots with a long career, the emissaries of the all-powerful Regent, heedful of the evolution of the city and with privileged contacts, proceed in the manner of recruiting officials. The stellar navigator confesses to the freshly recruited protagonist, already estranged from the military ethics of the Castle, the secret of the intangible empire, the far-flung horizon of the man of courage:

We believe that it is possible to select from the world an elite molded in pain. One that has been purified in the battles and fevers of history as a tissue in which any will to salvation lies concealed. We try to cultivate and develop this tissue so as to eventually graft it into the body as a vital force endowed with precise and clear ideas. From this perspective, the retreat of the Regent is but leave-taking with the purpose of coming back. (*H*, p. 415)¹⁸

The arena of the world fortifies men, and those who insist on making an effort and keep on trying, those who are able to improve themselves and who, in the end, uphold themselves as human beings and transcend pain:

18. Lacking access to any translations into English of *Heliopolis*, all quotations are translations of its Spanish version made by the author of this essay.

these men constitute the sole hope for humanity. Jünger envisions a mature elite, culturally formed by metaphysical intensity, loyal to freedoms and hostile to the scrawny hordes intent on homogenization. The ideal world of the Empire, as opposed to the undifferentiated, decadent people of the masses, is made up by elite men: it is a world where power does not resort to violence because its legitimacy is evident to all, as much as the indispensable function of a regent. We cannot be too surprised to discover that such a world is a universe of profoundly transformed men.

Lucius de Geer, an officer at the service of the Proconsul, is opposed, as much as limitations will allow, to the gory activities of the Chief Ranger: a tyrant and a filibuster who tries to establish his own concept of power by means of terror. From the very beginning, the Chief Ranger's activities are apparent and are presented in a way in which the impressive character of his actions stand out. A prime example being the exhibition of a corpse in the neighborhood close to the port of Heliopolis. In relation to *Heliopolis*, we must acknowledge that the parables are extremely clear and the, socio-political data are concrete and reflect Jünger's well-known position towards the Parisian Chiefs of Staff at the Majestic. This stance is pointed out in his own diary *Garten und Strassen*, or *Gardens and Roads* (1942), where Jünger mentions his acquaintance, and even friendship, with intellectuals such as Jean Cocteau, François Mauriac, Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso among many others.

In *Heliopolis*, the old fortress of Castel Marino is perceived as the looming evil place where the elder Peri was tortured. In the depths of the island, in a gorge bearing the already ominous name of Malpaso – misstep – we are introduced to the *Institute of Toxicology*, and its director Dr. Mertens. A place frequently visited by the Chief Ranger, “because he felt a certain predilection for this science, as much as for progress in general” (*H.* p.59). The atrocities become systematic and the Chief Ranger, Master of the torture ring, cheerfully makes use of the technology available. We are afterwards introduced to experimentation with drugs, in the “Night of the Laurel,” which allows Lucius to catch sight of the ossuaries and the heaps of corpses in “Distribution Camp 23,” described as mounds of “spongy pallid matter” and “the last throw-outs:”

A pallid and spongy matter piled up throbbing. Crows surrounded it in dense flocks gnarling portions of it. Incessantly, the carts, pushed by motor, horses,

men and dogs rolled adding up loads to this throbbing growing mound. In yellow shirts, human shapes with hooks unloaded carts empty. (*H*, p. 384)

Lucius will eventually enter into the labyrinthine city where both vice and murder reign: it possesses a subterranean atmosphere, with ever-present machinery, spinning in shifts and rounds, and evoking, with its cylinders and rolls, in the most terrible way, a setting of the most absolute mechanical horror. The images of Evil keep extreme coherence, the political attitude has been changed: it is no longer a matter of an aestheticizing withdrawal, but of an explicit resistance within an aristocratic and military group.

MECHANICS OF POWER

In *Eumeswil*, Jünger finished his trilogy with a protagonist imbedded within the circle of the Dictator. The historian protagonist of the novel is skeptical as much as he is calculating, a man with a passion for cultural comparisons, always observing from a distance the more than perceptible oppositions and contradictions of the world in which he lives. A talented academic, Manuel Venator, accepts a position as a night attendant for the dictator, Condor, in order to be able to observe and contemplate the behavior of the powerful – a restricted group of the elite who gather at the top of the small bunker. His efforts are focused on understanding the mechanisms of power and their meaning, whenever they are within the hands of authoritarian leaders:

My goal here is not so much to capture my impressions as to mark the focal points. Here I come back to the meaning of silence. I also have to control the ambiance, and at those times when I sense there is something in the room. I indulge in certain liberties by charging those moments with significance. (*E*, p. 62)

The fight between the Proconsul and the Chief Ranger, mobilizes both interests and violent passions and dutifully serves as an illustration to that which Jünger will present in *Eumeswil* (1977). The Chief Ranger and the Tribune in *Eumeswil* each represent, in this dystopian work, the works of an elite, buttressed on the masses, in order to take over the government. The Proconsul and Condor illustrate, in their different ways, the beginning of the decadence of the military elite and the problem of their legitimacy. They offer us a vision of a degraded hierarchy and power which has lost all legit-

imacy, tackled from two different perspectives. Firstly from those who are intent on preserving the remains of a culture which is structured, complex and packed with classical values, albeit critically wounded and tainted, and, at the opposite end, that of the rising leaders of the masses who simply try to substitute the conservative leaders while inaugurating a new, scientific, technical and bureaucratic world with a largely disconcerting result, precisely because of its predictability:

If some day his pontiffs – and I do not doubt it – topple the Condor then Eumeswil will once again celebrate *liberazione*, the transition, that is, from visible to anonymous power. For a long time now, soldiers and demagogues have been spelling one another. (*E*, p. 92)

We find in *Eumeswil* that a universe of authority is founded solely upon just two elements: the strength and, most importantly, the popularity of the prince. The tyrant rules with paternalism and leaves all aspects concerning daily life to the desires and inclinations of his subjects. He does not impose any ideology, nor does he insist on acclamation. Instead, he takes good care of economic stability and keeps a good and ready police force together, with all the trappings that back up the preservation of tyrannical rule. Thus, we can read in *Eumeswil*:

In *Eumeswil*, the regime is tyrannical but not despotic. The despot enjoys degrading people; it is innate in him – he therefore acts on this instinct even beyond *raison d'état* and his own advantage. Judging by deeds that are constantly tried in courts here, I conclude that this instinct occurs in an especially pure form in certain regions. But is not regionally limited. Young men accost a passerby at night, overpower him, and take him to a lonely place. There they start torturing him and eventually kill him – although the victim has done them no harm and they do not even know him; yet that intensifies their rage. (*E*, p. 152)

Eumeswil portrays a later time of that of *Heliopolis*, where everything is more decadent, a time more prone and favorable to the rigorous selection of elites, according to Jünger's methodology. Decadence is an acquired certainty, a given fact, corroborated by the need to create utopias. Venator follows the doings of the all-powerful, their worries and their obsessions; at the same time, he uses the technology available at the palace to further his research on civilizations and, in this way, asserts his own inviolable room for freedom. This is what profoundly revitalizes the position of absolute

non-commitment of the anarch, that citizen who, regardless of his status in society, always preserves his independence through the exercise of his inner freedom. The self-assumed protagonist of *Eumeswil* is a pragmatic man who, immersed in contemplation, upkeeps the knowledge of a philosopher, poet or historian until he is able to reach the right setting to make it manifest and transmit it. He is somebody who survives through inner emigration. More importantly, there is a fundamental distinction in *Eumeswil*, not in relation to the ruler but in relation to the possible attitude taken by the citizenry, that which establishes the difference between the anarchist and the anarch:

The anarchist, as the born foe of authority, will be destroyed by it after damaging it more or less. The anarch, on the other hand, has appropriated authority; he is sovereign. He therefore behaves as a neutral power vis-à-vis state and society. He may like, dislike, or be indifferent to whatever occurs in them. That is what determines his conduct; he invests no emotional values. (E, 249)

Furthermore, the anarch is a man who knows the rules from the perspective provided by the grounding of history:

The anarch, in contrast, knows the rules. He has studied them as a historian and goes along with them as contemporary work; this makes the fewest waves. (E, 250)

Once again, we find here human masses obedient to a cunning, powerful and cynical man who, despite everything, can also be understanding and who conceives of his power as a balance to the other alternative: the republican force, which rebels against the dictatorial order and plans and attempts to overthrow it by the mobilization of a fairly passive population. Condor cultivates both popularity and balance and not even the secret conspirators within a handful of families can make him give up the heady-heights of his quarters. What will ultimately force him out into the open will be metaphysics, adventure, the longing for the unknown and the exotic – and, also, his premonitions.

If *Eumeswil* can be analyzed as a reflection, without any preconception, towards political phenomena, and based upon an assortment of ideas of one creator, a university professor, it is also true that the reality of this book seems to represent the unraveling of problems already identified since 1939. The liberal charlatans of the novel *Glass Bees* (1957) gather again in *Eumeswil* (1977) but, this time, in the quality of adversaries, and in a way,

that is more representative of the beliefs of Jünger:

If the Condor is overthrown by the tribunes, little will change, for they, too, would need to practice violence. Only the style will differ. The tyrant is replaced by the demagogues. The demagogue remains at the helm by orienting the plebiscite according to his wishes. The art lies in the posing of questions; if they are put successfully, then the response is overwhelming, not only in its massiveness, but also in its intellectual uniformity, which goes all the way to the top. (*E*, p. 185)

In *Eumeswil*, we are, therefore, confronted with the total absence of absolute Evil. Everything, therefore, happens as if the success of parliamentary democracy in Western Europe, despite the author himself, could be reflected in the plot of the novel without having to mention any escape or fight. The departure of the hero, when Condor penetrates deep into the Forest, at the end of the novel, possesses an existential meaning and not a political one. By means of plain opposition, the plaintive, illusory and demanding nature of these Social-Democratic filibusters make the figure and personality of Condor, as a demagogue-tyrant, seem to be quite likeable. When we consider all their shortfalls and flaws we have to recognize that those puppets do not possess any evil traits. Condor himself is unable to evoke any of the tyrants of ancient world politics, no more than he can evoke any traits of National Socialism; he seems closer to Plato than to Hitler.

Moreover, in relation to literary imagination, it can be affirmed that it is not the existence of a populist demagogue dictator in Germany that allows Jünger to draw a plot around an imaginary tyrant, and oppose him to the Social Democratic order of the professors. All the ambiguity and difficulty of *Eumeswil* stems from the fact that this novel is dependent on two levels of interpretation. Whereas in *On the Marble Cliffs* and *Heliopolis*, two real political forces of the referential universe of the author were opposed, in *Eumeswil* one of those forces does not exist. It is due to this absence that the novel is, somehow, imbued with all its strength. Under these conditions, it is easy for the anarchist to find his place for settlement. But it is necessary to observe that this world means the release of a liberal referential universe even when the liberals in this novel do not fare too well and are discredited. Without forcing this point, we can say that for Jünger – despite himself and regardless of all the intrigues, murders and punctual violence – it is in the sphere of parliamentary democracy that the images of absolute Evil fade away. It is, therefore, easy to draw a conclusion on the real position of

Jünger, in the face of totalitarian regimes, in general, and National Socialism in particular. The sinister Forest that spawns a barbarous dictator is the forest that receives the tyrant of Eumeswil and also Venator the historian, a true searcher of a higher relationship of intimate knowledge with the universe. Venator will, thus, end up interning himself, for a last hunt, in the dense forest with Condor as companion. In an entry in his diary, he will provide us with an illuminating clue:

It makes no difference to me whether Eumeswil is ruled by tyrants or demagogues... The most rudimentary step toward freedom is to free oneself from all that. Basically, each person senses it, and yet he keeps voting. (*E*, p. 340)

CONCLUSION

Essays such as *The Worker* (1932), *Der Waldang*, or *The Forest Passage* (1951), complete Jünger's vision of his world and point towards any sources of possible danger and to the possible forms of resistance. The first book deals with the generalization of the cultural crisis brought about by Western Man through a homogenizing technology which creates moral and spiritual voids. It is those wastelands that will be later analyzed in novels such as the *The Glass Bees* (1957), or *Glaserne Bienen*: a technological fantasy, a return to the theme of the de-centering of man and the disappearance of any possible worthy human action. The triumph of the technological spirit, which Jünger places in the period of the First World War, reaches its plenitude in this novel. Furthermore, the replacement of human beings, by the coldest technology and machinery, already herald the coming of times of extreme degradation. Technological advances, first seen in war, become widespread. The reduction of men, with their personalities and ideas, to mere numbers in a formless mass without values, without gentlemanly manners, add up to an existential vacuum and seem to point, for Jünger, to the present-day movement of societies in which, due to massification and egalitarianism, the emergence of powerful individual powers are favored. Accordingly, it seems evident that for Jünger the real problem is the realm of *possible* freedom and the sphere it can cover at any given moment. Therefore, it should not be surprising, that resistance be manifested as a struggle, at all costs, for the preservation of individual freedom, that is, for the preservation of the autonomous sphere of thought and action. This attitude presupposes courage, a sober detachment from what is being observed and from all the

circumstantial factors of being and, above all, a fair amount of indifference towards death. According to Jünger, the substratum for this attitude, the food for courage, comes not only from metaphysics and philosophy but also from religion. It is precisely after a subtle analysis of freedoms that Jünger is able to uncover the roots of hatred under the light of metaphysics and religion.

Political ideology becomes of no avail once technology reveals itself as the only power, the individual is simply forced to withdraw or to perish. Nietzsche made a point of trying to see the end of metaphysics with the triumph of universal nihilism, a phase that heralded the revelation of the super-man. Jünger does the opposite: takes shelter in that old trench and sees in its preservation a safeguard for the threatened freedoms and for the ultimate blossoming of courage. The protagonists¹⁹ of his dystopias are characters with a remarkable predilection for metaphysics and, in general, for the exercise of thought. In that way, they are able to reach an instance of detachment in their perspectives – something that is also indispensable in any literary option – and understand without any qualms, the degraded order in which they live, and all the shadows of darkness and illegitimacy of a minority who exercise the power they hold captive. Jünger declares himself an adversary to all leveling forces, an enemy of all homogenizing forces, amongst which stands out pure technology, dispossessed of any other attributes and which, according to his way of looking at things, exercises a tremendous impact on such influential and decisive areas as politics, morals, aesthetics, philosophy and human relations. Whoever becomes aware of this will inevitably become a rebel on the way to the Forest. Jünger chose this path and dedicated to it his essay *The Forest Passage*, which would later appear in the magazine *Confluence*.²⁰ The Forest, as a no man's land, provides shelter and constitutes the only room for maneuver still left for the thinning intellectual elites, engrossed in their ways of thinking, and who, with vigor and enthusiasm, resist the dissolution started out by a technological and homogenized world. It is not easy, however, to build up the necessary inner firmness for a duel with the world, nor is it easy to create and nourish any amount of self-control. This is a task that is extremely onerous and, because

19. We should remember here the etymology of this word related to agony as a fight. Thus, the protagonist is the first, the outstanding fighter.

20. *Confluence: An International Forum* was an international relations and cultural quarterly edited by Henry Kissinger while teaching at Harvard. It was published from 1952 to 1958.

it has never been carried out, it leads to the degradation of the elites.

In Jünger's works there is a notorious progressive distancing from the search for a possible better world. The trilogy, as we have seen, is quite skeptical as far as lived reality is concerned. It considers the cities as open jail-houses, arenas where the best find a way out towards freedom. It is evident that the ruling political elite, Jünger observes, is seen as a negative factor but he leaves open the possibility for reformation, or for doing away with it for good. This is the lesson to be gathered out of the three novels. Jünger is very keen to suggest the conditions by which a new elite is to be brought about: an advent lacking political or social meaning since it is reduced to a marginal existence, possessed of psychological plenitude or favored by a possible reintegration into some other phase of life, without any real meaning for those who are living. Clearly enough, in Jünger, a grim vision is evidently present regarding the elites and the effect of their decapitation:

The old tyrants, to be sure, did preliminary work as "blenders of people," not only by destroying the elites and egalitarizing the demos into a mass, but also by deporting people and filling the gaps with foreign mercenaries and workers. From decade to decade, this reduces any domestic resistance that evinces quality. The upheavals become chronic, but alter nothing. The types that follow one another are all alike, especially in their will power. They also use the same big words, as a kind of fireworks that drowns out the live shooting. (*E*, 94-95.)

If the researchers at the Monastery, in *On the Marble Cliffs*, leave for a higher land, Altiplana, beyond the reach of the Chief Ranger and his dogs, in *Heliopolis* commander Lucius de Geer, flees to a stellar world, a place where the strife of the city is rendered meaningless. In *Eumeswil*, Manuel Venator, the academic, ventures into the Forest, a setting where the fight between the Dictator and the Plebeian Tribunes is incapable of drawing any meaning. This constant behavior of withdrawal is a solution for the problem of the elite and one that probably reflects that the real impediment does not lay externally, on the power exercised by the two parties. Jünger discloses, in this way, the hopes he places upon a minority of individuals who reveal themselves as exceptions to the rule in the arena of confrontation, where opposing forces are ready to use any of the all-too-traditional tools of political strife – from deception to the plain use of force. It is in the climate of confrontation, in the escalation of psychological and social tensions, where the man of complete nobility is revealed.

In each one of the dystopias drawn by Jünger, the elite is ultimately able to recognize itself as such and, unlike the masses, always withdraws: the sage monks of the slopes of the Marina flee from those who proclaim their will-to-power, and vanish into the far-off inexpugnable Altiplano; the metaphysical military officer of *Heliopolis* is able to wangle for himself a ticket for the vessels of the Regent; Venator, the tyrant Condor, and his closer collaborators in the paternalistic dictatorship, penetrate the primal Forest. Jünger's dystopia vanishes into nebulous utopia as the dim hope for redemption of the human species emerges as the last possibility for reshaping the spiritual and political realms. Defiance becomes a sign of strength, of belief and certainty. It means a strong, vigorous inner and personal disposition but it is also a destiny available to just a few. Individual and personal resilience, and the faith in man and in his innermost good, still subsist though. The certainty that prevails is that of individual betterment for each rebel who, by a voluntary choice, abandons the worn boundaries of society.

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