

# Killing without Remorse

## Ernst Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern* and War Legitimation

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### Título / Titre / Titolo

Matar sin remordimiento. *In Stahlgewittern* de Ernst Jünger y la legitimación de la guerra  
 Tuer sans remords. *In Stahlgewittern* d'Ernst Jünger y la legitimación de la guerre  
 Uccidere senza rimorso. *In Stahlgewittern* di Ernst Jünger e la legittimazione della guerra

### Abstract / Resumen / Résumé / Riassunto

Discussing the role of war and what in Marxist theory is called false consciousness, this article strives to create a better understanding of how the individual in war can be led to kill without remorse, even though the human empathic faculty should prevent this. By delving deeper into the history of the war novel in the interwar period, this article highlights the main theories of war legitimation, whilst showing that *In Stahlgewittern*, Ernst Jünger's controversial account of First World War, does not fit into any of these theories. Based on a comparison of *In Stahlgewittern* with *Der Friede*, another of Jünger's texts, and the historical use of the storm-motif in literature, it is concluded that Ernst Jünger tries to legitimize his deeds by putting them in a theological-apocalyptic framework.

Discutiendo el papel de la guerra y lo que en la teoría marxista se llama falsa conciencia, este artículo se esfuerza por crear una mejor comprensión de cómo el individuo en guerra puede ser llevado a matar sin remordimiento, a pesar de que la facultad empática humana debería evitarlo. Profundizando en la historia de la novela de guerra en el período de entreguerras, este artículo resalta las principales teorías de legitimación de la guerra, al tiempo que muestra que *In Stahlgewittern*, el controvertido relato de Ernst Jünger sobre la Primera Guerra Mundial, no encaja en ninguna de estas teorías. Sobre la base en una comparación de *In Stahlgewittern* con *Der Friede*, otro texto de Jünger, y el uso histórico del motivo de la tormenta en la literatura, se concluye que Ernst Jünger intenta legitimar sus acciones al ponerlas en un marco teológico-apocalíptico.

Discutant du rôle de la guerre et de ce que la théorie marxiste appelle la fausse conscience, cet article tente de mieux comprendre comment l'indi-

vidu peut être amené à tuer sans remords, même si la faculté empathique humaine devrait l'empêcher. En approfondissant l'histoire du roman de guerre dans l'entre-deux-guerres, cet article met en lumière les principales théories de la légitimation de guerre, tout en montrant qu'*In Stahlgewittern*, le récit controversé de Ernst Jünger sur la Première Guerre mondiale, ne rentre dans aucune de ces théories. À partir d'une comparaison entre *In Stahlgewittern* et *Der Friede*, un autre texte de Jünger et l'utilisation historique du motif orageux dans la littérature, on conclut qu'Ernst Jünger tente de légitimer ses actes en les plaçant dans un cadre théologique-apocalyptique.

Discutendo il ruolo della guerra e la nozione marxista di falsa coscienza, questo articolo cerca di raggiungere una migliore comprensione di come l'individuo in guerra possa essere portato a uccidere senza rimorso, anche se la facoltà umana dell'empatia dovrebbe impedirlo. Scavando nella storia del romanzo di guerra nel periodo interbellico, l'articolo esamina le principali teorie sulla legittimazione della guerra, e al contempo dimostra come *In Stahlgewittern*, il controverso resoconto di Ernst Jünger sulla prima guerra mondiale, non rientri in nessuna di queste teorie. Alla luce di un confronto tra *In Stahlgewittern* e *Der Friede* (un altro testo di Jünger), e dell'uso storico del motivo della tempesta in letteratura, si conclude che Ernst Jünger cerca di legittimare le sue azioni interpretandole da una prospettiva teologico-apocalittica

### Keywords / Palabras clave / Mots-clé / Parole chiave

Jünger, *In Stahlgewittern*, Marxism, war, false consciousness, storm

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## 1. Introduction

During the First World War, Ernst Jünger – one of Germany’s most controversial authors, due to the unwanted appropriation attempts by National Socialists and his support for the Conservative Revolution – kept a diary of his war experiences. This diary formed the basis for his book *In Stablgewittern* (1920/2014), which became hugely popular. The text is not just a simple account of the First World War but shows the individual’s position in and his interaction with that war. The I-narrator and protagonist Ernst Jünger finds himself amidst an “orgy of destruction”<sup>1</sup> (Jünger, 2014: 104). He kills and is constantly confronted with death and the destructive power of war. In the following, I will investigate the position of the individual as a cog in the machinery of war, as depicted by Jünger. The main focus of my investigation will lie on the apparent lack of doubt or even ethical conflict which characterises Jünger’s account: How does Jünger justify this lack in his text? What is it that enables him to overcome any ethical barrier and to kill without remorse?

As *In Stablgewittern* is a stylised autobiography, based on Jünger’s own diary, one needs to take into account that the text has a certain function. It is both a form of self-fashioning and self-legitimation towards the general public of his time and a means to grasp the ungraspable, to structure the war in order to deal with its horrors (Kiesel, 2014: 42-44). This structuring of the war and Jünger’s own role in it ultimately leads to its legitimation. As Edwin Praat has noted, the sociology of literature, as made famous by Pierre Bourdieu, is the unravelling of myth (Praat, 2014: 31). Similarly, this article will strive to unravel, albeit in a primarily Marxist way, the myth Jünger uses to legitimate his own deeds and the war in general. This enables one to counter the myth of, in this case, war legitimation. Of course, the outcome of this analysis of *In Stablgewittern* is not representative of all war legitimation in literature, as will also be highlighted

in this paper, but it does show an atypical and still relatively unknown form of it, adding to a better understanding of the complexity of war legitimation.

I will depart from the notion of false consciousness, as developed in Marxist theory, and project this notion onto the individual’s position within war. This leads to a discussion of predominant forms of justifying horrid deeds in war, as having been depicted in literature of the Interbellum. I will then show that *In Stablgewittern* contrasts with such standard lines of argument and is based upon a very specific and complex idea of Jünger, which is centred around the characterization of war as a “storm”. I will analyse this motif in *In Stablgewittern* in the light of literary history and discuss the ideological connection with Ernst Jünger’s essay *Der Friede* (1945/1992).

## 2. False consciousness and modernity

Human history has always been filled with death and destruction. Still, their scale in the age of modernity has been unique in history, despite the optimism that accompanied the ever faster development of the world. As St. Just cynically put it in Georg Büchner’s play about the Jacobin terror after the French Revolution:

Humanity’s steps are slow. One can only count them in centuries. Behind each one lie the graves of generations. Reaching even the simplest of inventions or ideas has cost the lives of millions who have died along the way. Isn’t it therefore normal that in times in which history proceeds at a faster pace, more people should get out of breath?<sup>2</sup> (Büchner, 1980: 41).

As Georg Simmel already seemed to foresee in his well-known reflections on the modern city, *Die Großstäd-*

<sup>2</sup> My translation. Original text: “Die Schritte der Menschheit sind langsam, man kann sie nur nach Jahrhunderten zählen, nach jedem erheben sich die Gräber der Generationen. Das Gelangen zu den einfachsten Erfindungen und Grundsätzen hat Millionen das Leben gekostet, die auf dem Wege starben. Ist es dann nicht einfach, daß zu einer Zeit, wo der Gang der Geschichte rascher ist, auch mehr Menschen außer Atem kommen?”

<sup>1</sup> My translation. Original: “Orgie der Vernichtung”.

*te und das Geistesleben* (1903/2008), the growth and industrialization of mass society also brought with them possibilities for growing and industrialised destruction. The following World Wars proved him right.

The development of mass society has also changed the role and influence of the individual within societal structures. As Theodor W. Adorno noted in *Standort des Erzählers im zeitgenössischen Roman* (1954), only shortly after the Second World War, it has become impossible for the individual to grasp the world or to “stand above” it (Adorno, 2002: 172). Many works of art even reflect the idea that the human individual has lost all forms of influence on the world and is being crushed by the powers of modernity. In Fritz Lang’s movie *Metropolis* (1927), for instance, the main character, Freder, visits the workers’ world, where he witnesses an accident with a machine. That machine then morphs into Moloch<sup>3</sup> to whom a vast amount of workers is sacrificed (Lang, 1927). Another movie of this time, Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times*, also contains a scene which on some level resembles the man-eating Moloch/machine of *Metropolis*. One of the most famous scenes of the movie shows Chaplin falling into a machine, almost being crushed/eaten by its wheels (Chaplin, 1936). This idea has been prevalent in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and especially in the interbellum period.

This idea of the fully disempowered individual is problematic, though, as it depicts the individual as stripped of any form of sovereignty, making it just a playball of external forces. This depiction ultimately frees individuals of the responsibility for their deeds and will make them apathetic towards injustice. In reality, however, the individual remained an actor rather than a lifeless puppet. Due to the exponential growth of society, individuals might no longer grasp their own actions, but they still act. To use the imagery of Chaplin’s *Modern Times*, individuals are not so much imbibed

<sup>3</sup> A Canaanite God, who in Western culture has been often associated with evil and hell. In John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* he is among the chiefs of Satan’s army: “Moloch, horrid king, besmeared with blood of human sacrifice and parents’ tears.” (Milton, 2005: 14)

or crushed by the machine, as they become part of the machine, a cog.

In Marxist theory, the concept of false consciousness is used in order to analyse how the masses are following the ideology of the elites, even though this ideology is turning the masses into slaves of a system, which only benefits the elites (Mandel, 1988: 36-37). People sheepishly become the cogs in the machinery of capitalism without even realizing it. According to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2000: 146-147), false consciousness is planted into their minds through mass culture and media.

As Ernest Mandel (1988: 116-117) has noted, war can strengthen this false consciousness. According to him, wars are mostly started in defence of (economic) interests of the elite and obscure class consciousness, replacing it with nationalist false consciousness. Lenin once agreed to Carl von Clausewitz’ famous definition of war as a continuation of politics with other means, referring to the revolutionary character of war as evolving from communist politics against pre- or anti-revolutionary systems (Lenin, 1972: 443-444). In most cases, though, war is the continuation of non- or even anti-revolutionary politics. This form of war and the nationalistic-imperialistic propaganda that comes with it even force “the end of anti-war propaganda, the propaganda for social revolution, and the total abandonment of defending even the direct interests of the proletariat”<sup>4</sup> (Mandel, 1988: 116-117). Thus, war as the continuation of capitalism, imperialism and nationalism is rather to be seen as the continuation of mass deception.

### 3. Circumvention of empathy as false consciousness

Assuming that the human capacity for empathy is a barrier, which withholds humans from perpetrating vi-

<sup>4</sup> My translation. Original: “das Ende der Antikriegs-Propaganda, die Propaganda für die sozialistische Revolution und die völlige Aufgabe der Verteidigung selbst der unmittelbaren Interessen der Arbeiterklasse.”

olence, it is necessary for the nationalistic-imperialistic elites that some form of false knowledge is created in order to legitimate violent and destructive acts in war situations.

This interrelation of war and justification by means of false consciousness was a very present theme in German Interbellum literature. This presence is two-sided. On the one hand, literature, as for example *In Stahlgewittern*, (re)produced this false consciousness. On the other hand, literature also had the power to reveal false consciousness. In Hans-Harald Müller's monograph on the war novel, its popularity in the interwar period is described as being the cause for it to become a major platform for public and political debate on war, historically almost unique in its widespreadness (Müller, 1986: 1-3). Through these novels, a better understanding of the interwar period and in general the legitimization of war can be reached.

It should be made clear, however, that this debate is not limited to this period. Almost from the beginning of modern German literature, the legitimization of war has been discussed. In the works of 18th century German author Jakob Michael Reinhold Lenz, we can already find an early, albeit partial, legitimization. In his plea for opening marriage to soldiers, *Über die Soldatenehen* (1992 [1776]), one of his main arguments is the importance of family for creating a disciplined army: "In order to defend himself, a soldier must know what he is defending. He must feel it with all his senses in order to fully dedicate himself"<sup>5</sup> (Lenz, 1992: 794). Fearing the death of his family if the war was lost, a soldier would fight with more conviction and discipline. While this legitimization does not actually make killing easier or solve the "problem" of empathy, it does present killing as the better of two evils.

Empathy as a potential barrier remained, thus creating the need for the elite to circumvent it. Dehumanisation of the Other was one of the techniques for this. By not acknowledging the humanness of the Other, empa-

thizing with that Other becomes harder, if not impossible. As Jeff Lewis notes, post-9/11 rhetoric framed the terrorists and often Arabs in general as a devilish Other, denying them their humanity. This enabled and justified the horrors of the Abu Ghraib prison and Guantanamo Bay (Lewis, 2011: 382-387).

In the First World War, a similar form of dehumanisation was a common legitimization for murder. The enemy remains anonymous as the bullets are fired from trenches, artillery shoots from a faraway distance and gas is death brought by the wind, making it easy to not perceive the humanness of the enemy. This strategy is strengthened by the often near-satanic portrayal of the enemy in propaganda as baby-torturing monsters (Ponsonby, 1928). The enemy's human qualities are taken away.

This dehumanisation is discussed and countered in Erich Maria Remarque's famous First-World-War novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1929/2010). Paul Bäumer, the main character, is seeking shelter in a shell-hole in No Man's Land, only to discover a wounded soldier there. Due to the darkness, he cannot identify this other soldier nor evaluate the severity of his wounds. When the sun rises, Bäumer sees that the other soldier is dying. At that point, the reader does not yet know to which side the unknown soldier belongs and will only find out after the strongly empathic and humanising efforts of Bäumer, when he uses French words in order to make contact with the soldier: "I want to help you, comrade. Camarade, camarade, camarade"<sup>6</sup> (Remarque, 2010: 195). Bäumer remains with the soldier, supporting him, until his dying breath. He not only sympathises and empathises with the French soldier, but also with his family. Bäumer finds pictures of his wife and children and at some point even the name of the soldier: Gérard Duval. The unknown soldier has become a comrade, a human being. So when Bäumer leaves, he says: "Today you, tomorrow me. But if I happen to escape all this, comrade, I will fight this, which has broken us both. [...] I promise you, comrade. This must never happen

<sup>5</sup> My translation. Original: "Um sich aber verteidigen zu können, muß der Soldat wissen, was er verteidigt, es sinnlich lebhaft fühlen um sich davon begeistern zu können."

<sup>6</sup> My translation. Original text: "Ich will dir ja helfen, Kamerad, camarade, camarade, camarade."

again”<sup>7</sup> (Remarque, 2014: 191-201). The reader in the Interbellum was slowly sucked into a trap, which created empathy and thus broke the walls of hatred created by the nationalistic propaganda of that time. Interbellum critics have therefore recognised the pacifist potential of this book (Müller, 1986: 73 & 80-82).

In the aforementioned novel, the circumvention of empathy is achieved by taking away the human qualities and therefore the common ground on which empathy can grow. The Other is not acknowledged as someone to empathise with, which is then countered by showing that one can empathise with him. There is, however, another method, as depicted in Ödön von Horváth’s *Ein Kind unserer Zeit* (2001 [1938]). The protagonist of this novel, published in 1938, is an angry young man who has joined a Nazi militia. Blindly believing in the conspiracy theories of Nazi propaganda and the importance of military discipline, he combines both forms of legitimation discussed above. The conspiracy against Germany, “led by dark supranational powers”<sup>8</sup> (Horváth, 2001: 15), makes the enemy part of something evil, with which one cannot empathise. “‘Love your enemies’ – That does not make any sense to us anymore. We say ‘Hate your enemies’. With love you will go to heaven; with hate we can go on”<sup>9</sup> (Horváth, 2001: 23). Furthermore, he stresses the need to defend the Fatherland by any means necessary.

Another justification strategy can be discerned when it comes to the protagonist’s denial of his own individual capacity for empathy. When perceiving empathy in a subject-object relation, in which the subject is the person who empathises and the object the person who is empathised with, empathy is broken off in this example on the side of the subject rather than on the side of the

object. The militaristic discipline of the soldier makes him willingly become a cog in the machinery of the army, giving him the possibility to not think for himself, thus also limiting his capacity to empathise with another. His thoughts are mainly recitals of military speech and Nazi-propaganda, as Traugott Kruschke shows (in Horváth 2001: 224-236). In *Achtung Europa* (1935), a speech cancelled due to safety reasons but published just shortly before the Second World War, Thomas Mann discussed this attitude. Referring to the younger generation of his time, he wrote “that they no longer know anything about ‘Bildung’ [...], self-improvement or individual responsibility [...], but instead make themselves comfortable in the collective”<sup>10</sup> (Mann, 1939: 78). The protagonist of *Ein Kind unserer Zeit* belongs to the people Mann is referring to. By becoming part of a machinery, the individual is sacrificed to the collective; one could indeed compare this to the scene of *Metropolis* discussed in the introduction. The impact of fascism on the individual, eliminating the capacity for empathy and responsibility, is a recurring theme in Horváth’s work (Keufgens, 1996: 235).

The protagonist has joined the Condor Legion to fight in the Spanish Civil War. There, something strange happens. One day, the officer, for whom the protagonist has, as military rules prescribe, a lot of respect, runs towards the enemy line without any good military reason, without any form of protection. The soldiers are terrified by the prospect of the inevitable death of their officer, of the person who not only leads the troops, but also thinks for them, who makes the cogs of the machinery move. The prospect of actually having to think for themselves leads to panic and the protagonist tries to pursue the officer in order to save him. After both having been shot – the protagonist injured, the officer dead – a letter is found in the hands of the officer (Horváth, 2001: 35-40). The protagonist delivers the letter to the officer’s wife. There, it becomes clear that the officer has actually committed suicide due to the

<sup>7</sup> My translation. Original text: “Heute du, morgen ich. Aber wenn ich davonkomme, Kamerad, will ich kämpfen gegen dieses, das uns beide zerschlug. [...] Ich verspreche es dir, Kamerad. Es darf nie wieder geschehen.” (Remarque, 2010, 201).

<sup>8</sup> My translation. Original text: “von finsternen überstaatlichen Mächten beherrscht”

<sup>9</sup> My translation. Original text: “»Liebe deine Feinde« – das sagt uns nichts mehr. Wir sagen: »Hasse deine Feinde.« Mit der Liebe kommt man in den Himmel, mit dem Haß werden wir weiterkommen.“

<sup>10</sup> My translation. Original text: “daß sie von “Bildung” [...], von der Arbeit an sich selbst, von individueller Verantwortung [...] nichts mehr wissen und sich’s dafür im Kollektiven bequem machen.”

desperation about the nature of modern war: “We are no longer soldiers, but evil bandits, cowardly murderers. We do not fight fairly against an enemy, but treacherously and vilely against children, women and wounded people”<sup>11</sup> (Horváth, 2001: 58). This insight ultimately liberates the protagonist. He starts questioning what he never questioned before and rediscovers his individuality, his own humanity and his sense of responsibility.

To summarise, three typical forms of justification of war brutality have been discerned so far: 1. forcing the individual to cross the barrier of empathy; 2. circumventing the barrier of empathy by dehumanisation of the Other; 3. circumventing the barrier of empathy through the denial of one’s own empathic faculty.

#### 4. The case of Ernst Jünger’s *In Stahlgewittern*

*In Stahlgewittern* is usually considered as a narrative that tries to spread the empathy-eliminating form of false consciousness which dehumanises the enemy and promotes a totalitarian loss of individuality and humanity. Bernd Weisbrod and Pamela Selwyn, for instance, interpret Jünger’s sometimes gruesome descriptions of war as “laconic voyeurism” and an “obscene gesture” (2000: 74). This also applies to seemingly humane or chivalric deeds, such as Jünger saving his brother at the Battle of Langemarck, an act that endangers his military mission (Jünger, 2014: 169-171): In their view, this does not demonstrate that Jünger would choose brotherly love over militaristic discipline, but rather is seen by Jünger himself as a sign of “emotional weakness in the face of danger for which he would have threatened to shoot any of his inferiors” (Weisbrod and Selwyn, 2000: 77). This shame of being human for a second would imply that Jünger values militarism that represses the faculty of empathy. In this interpretation, the act of saving his

<sup>11</sup> My translation. Original text: “Wir sind keine Soldaten mehr, sondern elende Räuber, feige Mörder. Wir kämpfen nicht ehrlich gegen einen Feind, sondern tückisch und niederträchtig gegen Kinder, Weiber und Verwundete.”

brother damaged Jünger’s self-image of being a hero, as it indeed is a weakening of self-dehumanising militarism due to brotherly love.

This interpretation is problematic, though, as Jünger clearly depicts his own actions as a sign of altruistic heroism rather than weakness, claiming that “I felt that I was a representative of my mother and had to answer to my mother for my brother’s fate”<sup>12</sup> (Jünger, 2014: 170). Jünger prides himself for ignoring militarism and shows this by including his brothers’ heroic description of events<sup>13</sup> in the book (Jünger, 2014: 180-185).

Similarly, a lack of military discipline is shown in Jünger’s depiction of the irritation among soldiers, when high officers visit the trenches, knowing that the presence of a high officer will only lead to superfluous tasks and afterwards more English bombs (Jünger, 2014: 51-52). Nowhere can we find the sheepish admiration for officers, which, for instance, characterised the protagonist of *Ein Kind unserer Zeit*.

Also Jünger’s account of an affair with a French woman called Jeanne is typical of his behaviour. Impulsively, he rides away from the city of Croisilles, where he is stationed, in order to see her, even forgetting to take with him his military identity document (Jünger, 2014: 70-71). This scene shows that Jünger, much more than being guided by military discipline, keeps on thinking independently and even forgets about his military vocation.

Departing from these examples, the academic interpretation of *In Stahlgewittern* as a text that supports self-dehumanising militarism appears questionable. This interpretation seems to be mostly based on the way *In Stahlgewittern* has been framed and appropriated by national socialists (Kiesel, 2014: 58), even after Jünger had distanced himself from especially the militaristic and in his eyes anti-revolutionary side of national socialism (Ipema, 1997: 168-169). Jünger’s war enthusiasm and opposition towards order should be character-

<sup>12</sup> My translation. Original text: “Ich fühlte mich zugleich als Vertreter der Mutter und ihr für das Schicksal meines Bruders verantwortlich.”

<sup>13</sup> His brother later also rewrote his account as an epic in Homeric style (Ipema, 1997: 45-46).

ised as bellicose, rather than militaristic (Kiesel, 2007: 209).

Jünger does not argue in favour of self-dehumanisation, nor does he demonise the enemy. He does mention the way some other soldiers are filled with hatred towards the enemy, enjoying bombardments of English camps and thus English suffering (Jünger, 2014: 50-51), but tries to clearly himself from this affect. Jünger claims to not enjoy this suffering, expressing his respect for the English soldiers, whom he does not describe as enemies, but as opponents. This respect is described in the following way:

I have always tried to encounter my opponent in war without hatred and to value him according to his courage. I tried my best, to find him in battle, in order to kill him, expecting nothing else from him. Never have I thought badly of him. When later prisoners were caught under my command, I felt responsible for their well-being and tried to help them by all means available to me<sup>14</sup> (Jünger, 2014: 60).

One should of course keep in mind that this is a stylised account of Jünger's own actions, in which he tries to legitimise what he did. This does prove, however, that Jünger did not want to legitimise his own actions by dehumanising the enemy. Jünger claims to acknowledge both the humanity of the Other and tries to show being unaffected by deindividuation. There is nothing that circumvents empathy with English soldiers. He understands that the English soldiers must be going through the same suffering as he and his comrades do (Jünger, 2014: 104-105).

Confronted with Indian soldiers who are fighting for the British army, Jünger expresses pity for them on multiple occasions. First of all, the idea that "they have come from far across the sea to this godforsaken piece

<sup>14</sup> My translation. Original text: "Ich war im Kriege immer bestrebt, den Gegner ohne Haß zu betrachten und ihn als Mann seinem Mute entsprechend zu schätzen. Ich bemühte mich, ihn im Kampf aufzusuchen, um ihn zu töten, und erwartete auch von ihm nichts anderes. Niemals aber habe ich niedrig von ihm gedacht. Wenn mir später Gefangene in die Hände fielen, fühlte ich mich für ihre Sicherheit verantwortlich und suchte für sie zu tun, was in meinen Kräften stand."

of earth"<sup>15</sup> to fight a war seems unfair to him. Later, after capturing them and bringing them to the German encampment, Jünger describes how "the lamentations of the prisoners mixed themselves with our joy."<sup>16</sup> He then states with disgust that "this is no longer war; this is a primeval scene"<sup>17</sup> and tries to calm the Indian prisoners (Jünger, 2014: 155).

This empathy, however, does not prevent Jünger from killing his opponents. It does not even make it more difficult for him. In one of the most intimate fragments of the book, one that is somewhat similar to the passage from *Im Westen nichts Neues* discussed above, Jünger describes an encounter with a wounded English soldier, left behind after a failed English offensive manoeuvre, who soon dies due to the severity of his injuries. Jünger feels bad for this person, of whom he claims that he must have been an intelligent and brave soldier. He then reads his notebook, finding out more about the English soldier's life. Finally, Jünger digs a grave for the soldier and puts up a cross inscribed with his name (Jünger, 2014: 129).

Following this sequence, Jünger describes a walk through the trenches. When he sees an English soldier who had not yet been noticed by anyone else, Jünger immediately grasps a gun from someone else and kills the enemy without even having a moment of doubt before or remorse afterwards (Jünger, 2014: 130). Of course, again, we must remember that this is a form of self-fashioning which we should approach with caution and scepticism.

This example of self-fashioning does make clear, however, that Jünger does not perceive empathy with the English enemy as being opposed to killing that same enemy nor does he believe that this could create a conflict for the reader. The empathy for the opponent and killing the opponent do not seem to be connected. This brings us to an important problem. The legitimation for

<sup>15</sup> My translation. Original text: "Weit übers Meer gekommen, [...] auf diesem gottverlassenen Stück Erde."

<sup>16</sup> My translation. Original text: "sich das Klagen der Gefangenen mit unserm Jubel mischte"

<sup>17</sup> My translation. Original text: "Das war kein Krieg mehr; es war ein uraltes Bild."

killing seems to come from an ideology which does not disable the faculty of empathy, but which disconnects it from the act of killing.

## 5. *Der Friede* and the Storm-Motif

Jünger's legitimation for killing can be found in his understanding of the nature of war, which is reflected by both his text *Der Friede* (1943, published 1948) and the use of the storm-motif in *In Stablgewittern*. At the end of the Second World War, Jünger wrote an essay about the war and the future of Europe: *Der Friede*. The text consists of two parts, called The Seed and The Fruit. The first part is an analysis of the war which was at that time still ongoing, albeit already lost. In the second part, Jünger pleads for the new order after the war to be beneficial to all.

The text puts an intertextual theological frame around the war, implicitly comparing it to the Book of Revelation. This Biblical book is about the destruction of the world by the beast as ordained by God and the subsequent creation of a new and better world, in which the worlds of God and humanity unite. This destruction of the old world goes hand in hand with war (Revelation. 6.4; 9.15-17; 12.7-9).

Jünger claims that the Second World War can become fruitful for everyone, even though he distances himself from "the persecution, hatred and injustices of our time"<sup>18</sup> (Jünger, 1992: 329), which seems to refer to the Holocaust. He also writes that "this will be seen as the shame of our century for a long time", claiming that "one cannot respect those who lacked heart and eye for what had happened there"<sup>19</sup> (Jünger, 1992: 333). In general, it should be stressed that Jünger always opposed the national socialist form of antisemitism and race theory,

<sup>18</sup> My translation. Original text: "der Verfolgung, dem Haß, den Ungerechtigkeiten unserer Zeit"

<sup>19</sup> My translation. Original text: "Das wird für ferne Zeiten ein Schandfleck unseres Jahrhunderts bleiben, und keinen wird man achten können, dem Herz und Auge fehlten für das, was dort geschah."

rather sharing the questionable views regarding Jews of the Conservative Revolution, which opposed Jewish assimilation, seeing it as treason to the Jewish nation, and strongly supported Zionism (Ipema, 1992: 164).

War itself, however, was good, according to Jünger, as the bravest people of all nations died on the battlefields in Europe, creating a fertile soil for a new and better world (Jünger, 1992: 329). Calling the war "a cleansing with fire"<sup>20</sup> (Jünger, 1992: 337), his description shows strong similarities with the use of fire by angels in the Book of Revelation (8.5). He admits that what he holds to be the logic of history might not yet be accepted by all, but "later, when the battle has ended, mankind will understand that reason could recognise and strive for the new order, but that for its creation the interaction of suffering, pain and fire was necessary"<sup>21</sup> (Jünger, 1992: 338).

Despite claiming that the theological approach of *Der Friede* is a one-off in Jünger's oeuvre, Michael Neumann shows that Jünger saw the coherence of his work as that connecting the Old and New Testament (Neumann, 2014: 154-156). This coherence can be found in the strong similarities between the interpretations of the war in *In Stablgewittern* and in *Der Friede*. This theological interpretation is represented in *In Stablgewittern* by the storm-motif.

Weather as a religious motif was (re)discovered<sup>22</sup> and popularised in literature in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Brockstieger, 2017: 120-121). The following examples of storm poems from this time can offer a literary-historical framework for the interpretation of the storm metaphor in *In Stablgewittern*.<sup>23</sup> For instance in the poem

<sup>20</sup> My translation. Original text: "Reinigung durch Feuerflammen"

<sup>21</sup> My translation. Original text: "Und später, wenn der Kampf verstummt ist, wird man begreifen, daß der Verstand die neuen Ordnungen erkennen und erstreben konnte, doch daß zu ihrer Schöpfung das Zusammenspiel der Leidenschaften, des Schmerzes und des Feuers notwendig war."

<sup>22</sup> Of course, the use of weather as a religious sign was also popular among, for instance, pre-Christian Nordic tribes, connecting thunder to the wrath of Thor.

<sup>23</sup> With the following examples I do not wish to imply that Jünger is directly influenced by the poems of Weiße, van Alphen and Bellamy. Rather, I try to show how the storm-motif functions and place it in a genealogy of literary motifs and metaphors.

“Der Sturm” (1758) by Christian Felix Weiße (1763: 19-20), the narrator accompanies a little girl through three stages of the storm, pointing at the coming storm, which is preceded by “a respectful silence,”<sup>24</sup> helping her cope with the fear for the storm and sharing with her the happiness after the storm. Fairly similar is the poem “Het Onweder” (1782) by the Dutch poet Hieronymus van Alphen (1998: 132-133). The basic idea is the same, but the religious meaning of the poem is stressed more. The storm’s divine majesty and beauty are clearly coming forward and in this poem the result of the storm is a world born anew rather than mere happiness, calling the storm a “gift, given by God.”<sup>25</sup> Finally, another Dutch poet, Jacobus Bellamy, wrote a poem called “Het Onweder” (1838: 16-18), in which the reader is reminded of the connection between God and thunder in the Bible (Revelation, 14.2). The storm described by Bellamy, whilst going through the three stages of Weiße’s poem, is connected by Bellamy to war. The last stage, the moment after the storm, when the world feels as if it were reborn, is compared to the appearance of a soldier: “This is the way a hero smiles, after a bloody fight, with tears in his face!”<sup>26</sup> In all these poems, the storm is seen as symbolic representation of the end of the world as revealed to John, leading to a new and better world.

In *In Stablgewittern*, the war is often compared to storms and thunder (Jünger, 2014: 64 & 163). Furthermore, after having been under fire for a long time, Jünger writes the following: “I went through the trenches in a mood that I always had after heavy shootings and which I can only compare to the laid-back feeling after a thunder storm”<sup>27</sup> (Jünger, 2014: 131). This is an inversion of the metaphor used by Bellamy.

<sup>24</sup> My translation. Original text: “ein ehrerbiethig Schweigen.” This is reminiscent of the silence that emerges once the seventh seal is broken (Revelation, 8.1).

<sup>25</sup> My translation. Original text: “een geschenk, dat God ons geeft”

<sup>26</sup> My translation. Original text: “Zoo laght een held, na ’t bloedig strijden, met traanen in ’t gezigt!”

<sup>27</sup> My translation. Original text: “Ich ging in der Stimmung, die mich immer nach schweren Beschießungen überkam und die ich nur dem aufgelockerten Gefühl nach einem Gewitter vergleichen kann, den Graben ab.”

The title of *In Stablgewittern*, literally ‘In steel storms,’ is according to Helmuth Kiesel (2014: 52-53) most probably a reference to a poem of Hermann Stehr, called *An Gabriele d’Annunzio*.<sup>28</sup> In this poem, it is claimed that modern times speak “in steel storms” and that despite all the destruction “in God’s heart already lies the new ‘becoming’”<sup>29</sup> (Kiesel, 2014: 53). This way, a circle comes into being: The First World War is described as a storm, referring to the destruction of the world, as described in the Bible, whilst the First World War was an almost literal destruction of the world. This circle, though, gives hope, as the Biblical destruction is necessarily followed by a new and better world. This is portrayed in *Der Friede* as a natural law (Jünger, 1992: 332, 338).

From this perspective, the First World War is seen as necessary, following natural-divine laws, ultimately leading to something better. That is why the harmonious state of nature amidst war is described so often by Jünger (2014: 145 and 154), who claims that “it is easier to go into a battle amidst such nature than from a dead and cold winter landscape”<sup>30</sup> (Jünger, 2014: 147-148).

Even though the war can be horrible, as Jünger himself acknowledges a few times (2014: 45-46 & 132), the suffering is needed in order to reach a new and better world. Jünger wrote in the preface to the first edition of the book, which is paraphrased by Kiesel (2014: 49), that *In Stablgewittern* is an almost evangelical assertion that there is a historical reason and justification for the deaths of so many people. Taking part in the war is seen as supporting the destruction of the old world and the creation of a new one. Accordingly, the soldiers of the First World War do not kill, like in Lenz’ *Über die Soldatenehen*, in order to keep their families safe, but they fight to die in order to create a better world for their families. They can empathise with each other, as

<sup>28</sup> I use the first stanza of this poem, as quoted by Helmuth Kiesel (2014: 53).

<sup>29</sup> My translation. Original text: “ruht in Gottes Herzen schon das neue ‘Werde.’”

<sup>30</sup> My translation. Original text: “Es fällt leichter, inmitten einer solchen Natur in die Schlacht zu gehen als aus einem toten und kalten Winterland heraus.”

they all act in accordance with the natural-divine law of this storm of steel.

Jünger's legitimation is a form of false consciousness, too. Still, in this case, it is not based on nationalism or militarism, but on the idea of a religious order in the world. What remains unclear, though, is Jünger's personal position regarding this religious false consciousness. Both texts, *In Stahlgewittern* and *Der Friede*, were written shortly after a major war. Therefore, the religious false consciousness used to legitimate the war is not necessarily coming from a deep and sincere belief in such an order, but could also be interpreted as being self-imposed, as a coping device afterwards, rather than a legitimation before and during the war.

## 6. Conclusion

In this investigation of Ernst Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern*, I have tried to analyse the way Jünger legitimises killing other people without showing any form of remorse, doubt or pain. I started my investigation by discussing the Marxist perspective on modernity and essential role the production of false consciousness plays for keeping a status quo which is merely beneficial for certain elites. War can in this context be used as a means to both strengthen the position of those elites and weaken the opposition, as it reinforces nationalist false consciousness rather than class consciousness.

For war to emerge, however, an important barrier needs to be breached: the barrier of human empathy, which creates remorse and ultimately prevents humans from killing each other. Here too, the production of false consciousness that legitimates war can overcome this "obstacle". This false consciousness either denies the humanity of the Other or it denies the capacity of individual thought and in a way the humanity of the self. Many war novels in the interbellum have raised this theme, either by reproducing this false consciousness or by countering it by means of re-humanisation of both the Other and the self.

*In Stahlgewittern* does not use these forms of war legitimation. Jünger claims to empathise with his enemies whom he prefers to see as opponents. By delving deeper into the storm-motif and analysing Jünger's account in light of his essay *Der Friede*, a different form of legitimation becomes visible. For Jünger, the First World War seems like the end of the world as described in the Book of Revelation. The suffering engendered by the war is seen as necessary in order for a new and better world to emerge. Thus killing is legitimised, as it is a way to take part in the divine process of the destruction of the old world and the creation of a new one.

This understanding of *In Stahlgewittern* leads to new questions. Was this form of religious false consciousness something Jünger genuinely believed in, motivating him to go to war, or was it a mind structure created later in order to make him cope with the horrors of the First World War? Did this book also produce this form of religious false consciousness in the readers' minds? And finally, where *Im Westen nichts Neues* countered the dehumanisation of the enemy, how could Jünger's religious false consciousness be countered?

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