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Defeated Heroes:

Constructions of Masculinity in Weimar Republic Battlefield Novels

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**Defeated Heroes:
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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

August, 2006

For Mark Southern

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my entire dissertation committee. To David Crew, for his flexibility to support the defense and the commentary he offered. To John Hoberman, for his helpful suggestions concerning questions of conceptual clarity. To Janet Swaffar, for her willingness to join the dissertation committee at such short notice, as well as for her brilliant idea to restructure this dissertation. To Pascale Bos, for her careful editing and valuable suggestions for improvement. But first and foremost, to Katie Arens, whose kindness, patience, and fabulous editing skills gave me the support I so often needed. Thank you, Katie. I could never have done this without you.

Ausserdem möchte ich mich bei A. für ihre Unterstützung bedanken. Mein ganz besonderer Dank gilt aber Klaus und Lena. Ohne Euch hätte ich das ja alles gar nicht mehr geschafft.

Defeated Heroes:
Constructions of Masculinity in Weimar Republic Battlefield Novels

Publication No. _____

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2006

Supervisor: Katherine Arens

Drawing on fifteen battlefield novels written in Weimar Germany between 1928 and 1930, this dissertation examines various models of masculinity construction in terms of their cultural and political significance. A pioneer work, Erich Maria Remarque's best-seller, *Im Westen nichts Neues* (*All Quiet on the Western Front*) (1928/1929), was a major provocation that unleashed a Culture War. The *Dolchstoßlegende*, designed to account for the defeat of the German army, had not convinced everyone, so war veterans waited for a better explanation, which Remarque and other leftist-bourgeois novelists provided. Remarque's group also included Ludwig Renn's *Krieg* (1927/28), Edlef

Köppen's *Heeresbericht* (1930), Ernst Johannsen's *Vier von der Infanterie* (1930), Ernst Glaeser's *Jahrgang 1902* (1928), Georg von der Vring's *Soldat Suhren* (completed 1923, published 1927), Karl Federn's *Hauptmann Latour* (1929), and Arnold Zweig's *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* (1927).

Extreme opposition in this Culture War came from the right-wing militarists, including Franz Schauwecker's *Aufbruch der Nation* (1929), Werner Beumelburg's *Die Gruppe Bosemüller* (1930), Joseph Magnus Wehner's *Sieben vor Verdun* (1930), and Hans Zöberlein's *Der Glaube an Deutschland* (1931), who all sought to validate the war experience through disproportionate magnification of the German warrior-man.

Alternative literary models, including Adrienne Thomas' *Die Katrin wird Soldat* (1930), one of the rare war novels by a female author, as well as Theodor Plivier's *Des Kaisers Kulis* (1930), and Adam Scharrer's *Vaterlandslose Gesellen* (1930), reveal the war in its senseless inhumanity affecting men and women alike, thus serving as rare counterpoints to the dominant masculinist constructions.

What this dissertation contributes to existing research is a new interpretive approach about how a text may play into public discourse. The prevailing images of German masculinity that had guided generations of German males were destroyed in the trenches. For ten years thereafter, war literature offered very little that individual male readers could use to reconstruct a positive image of the German man as a social and political being. Since traditional perceptions of masculinity had been shattered, literature had to take up the same war and rework its memory to have a therapeutic effect and fill this gap.

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Introduction

The Weimar Republic (1919-1933) was a brief, yet culturally fecund intermission between the two World Wars. While Germany had experienced four comparatively calm decades between the founding of the German Empire and the outbreak of World War I (1871-1914), the Weimar years were charged with passionate cultural and political debate. In fact, the opposing factions were so fiercely at loggerheads with one another that it is apt to speak of a Culture War: wave after wave of economic and socio-political upheaval washed over Germany's already brittle national bedrock and ultimately broke it apart. After 1918, little was left of the smug confidence and the political sedateness the Empire had rested on before the war. The catastrophic losses and dire consequences of the war and the revolution left the nation traumatized for the next decade or more.¹

Die gute alte Zeit, the golden age of Bismarck and the Empire, including Germany's ambition to establish itself among the other colonial powers, was irretrievably lost. Instead of securing for itself a "place in the sun," building up its military and commercial fleets, and getting rich from colonial trade, Germany had shrunk in geographical size, fallen into bankruptcy, and become a pariah loathed by its neighbors.

¹ For detailed overviews of political, cultural, and economic developments between the end of World War I and the beginning of Hitler's dictatorship, see Detlev Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1987); Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988); Gerhard Schulz ed., *Ploetz Weimarer Republik: Eine Nation im Umbruch* (Freiburg, Würzburg: Verlag Ploetz, 1987).

Since wartime censorship and propaganda had kept the population ill-informed about the actual state of affairs, especially during the second half of the war, many Germans, not only right-wingers, perceived the new status quo as an unbearable humiliation.² The common people continued to believe that Germany -- in 1914 -- had mobilized troops to defend the country against the threat of allied invasions, so they failed to see the justice or the moral justification behind the harsh terms of the Versailles Treaty.³ With the exception of pacifists and certain left-wing intellectuals, the nation felt so brutally subjugated by the peace conditions imposed upon them by the allies that rebellion against the new reality, embodied by the parliamentary government, began to ferment

² The terms “left-wingers” and “right-wingers” need clarification. The political left wing of the Weimar Republic consisted of the *SPD* (Social Democratic Party), the *USPD* (Independent Social Democratic Party), and certain splinter groups like the *Spartakus Bund* (Spartacus Group), which blended with the *KPD* (Communist Party) on Jan. 1, 1919. The *DDP* (German Democratic Party) was a leftist liberal party that recruited many of its members from the *Bildungsbürgertum* (educated bourgeoisie). Apart from political parties, millions of blue-collar workers organized in unions, which gained fundamental importance in Weimar Germany through political involvement and the implementation of workers’ rights. However, not all unions were ideologically leftist; ones that harbored conservative-nationalist or anti-semitic ideas existed as well. Right-wing ideology is associated primarily with the right wing of the *Zentrum* (Center Party), the *Deutsche Volkspartei* (German People’s Party), the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* (German National People’s Party), its affiliated paramilitary organization, *Stahlhelm* (“Steel Helmet,” founded 1918 in Magdeburg by Franz Seldte, reached 500.000 members by 1930), and the *NSDAP* (National Socialists) with its militant organizations *SA* (*Sturmabteilung*, “Storm Division”) and *SS* (*Schutzstaffel*, “Protection Squad”). German society during the Weimar years displayed huge readiness to organize itself. Thousands of clubs and associations existed for every conceivable interest, be it athletic, religious, artistic, or political. The extreme right-wing adhered to neo-nationalist ideology and consisted of *Freikorps* (paramilitary units), veterans and rifle clubs, and other *völkische* associations. As the cultural historian Walter Laqueur explains, it was nearly impossible to keep track of all the organized activity because the socio-political landscape of the Weimar Republic was so complex: “[...] both left and right are split into countless factions and groups, almost constantly engaged in internecine quarrels” (Walter Laqueur, *Weimar: A Cultural History* [New York: Capricorn Books, 1976], 43).

³ Unfortunately, most Germans continued to believe that other nations had caused World War I until the 1960s, when the historian Fritz Fischer documented German hegemony, annexionism, and warmongering in his book *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag 1964). The revelation of the truth shocked the nation. The German historian Konrad H. Jarausch stated in a recent interview with *Der Spiegel* that the Fischer controversy also involved a generational conflict. Older historians, some of whom had been soldiers in the war, denounced Fischer’s revelations as libelous. Egmont Zechlin, one of Fischer’s adversaries at the time, exclaimed that he was not about to “let that guy rob him of his war experience” (“er lasse sich von dem ‘Kerl’ nicht das Kriegserlebnis rauben”). See Karen Andresen, “Ein Buch wie ein Sprengsatz,” *Spiegel Spezial: Die Urkatastrophe des 20. Jahrhunderts*, No. 1, 2004, 135-36.

immediately.⁴ Even though the Republic survived a period of civil war (1919-1923), galloping inflation and subsequent currency reform (1923-24), as well as many smaller crises in between, the escalation of unemployment after “Black Friday” (October 25, 1929) on top of widespread political corrosion eventually led to the collapse of the republican system, which had been fragile to begin with.⁵

In the late twenties, the National Socialists seized the moment to scoop up many of those who felt frustrated and angry. They managed to imbue Germans with a new sense of hope, purpose, direction, and national *völkisch* identity.⁶ Many Germans did not

⁴ Reactionary forces blamed the social democratic government under Ebert for accepting the Versailles treaty too easily. According to them, the *Novemberebrecher* (November Criminals) had betrayed the nation when they proved unable to negotiate more favorable peace terms with the allies. For a detailed account of the various groups that brought their anti-democratic potential to bear, see the first chapter of Michael Gollbach, *Die Wiederkehr des Weltkriegs in der Literatur: Zu den Frontromanen der späten Zwanziger Jahre* (Kronberg/Taunus: Scriptor Verlag, 1978) 6-36.

⁵ In a nutshell, these are the circumstances and problems the fledgling republic had to face. Studying the Weimar Republic one sees, not without sadness, great potential for positive development that did not come to fruition. One cannot help but wonder what might have been if history during those fourteen years had taken a slightly different course. If there had been more willingness among the population to accept the loss of the war, as well as the new reality resulting from it, maybe the republic might have had a chance to prevail. If Germans, like other European nations, had had a democratic tradition, they might have put more faith in the ability of the Social Democrats and the varying coalitions in charge of the Weimar government. If the economic depression had not devastated everything that had just been rebuilt, the outcome might have been a different one. If the population had not been largely deceived about what had really caused the outbreak of World War I, or who had really lost it, reactionary forces would have found it more difficult to scapegoat their enemies for Germany’s ostensive demise.

⁶ The historian Eberhard Kolb describes several expert opinions on the question why the Nazi movement was so successful in Germany. Two of these opinions are particularly convincing. Martin Boszat is quoted as saying that “mass appeal of the NSDAP seems ‘undramatic’ and ‘sudden in appearance only’, because the new, anti-Marxist and anti-liberal, catch-all party to a great extent simply took over and united ‘what had already existed far and wide, though in a scattered form, in the way of ideology and sectional interest with a political potential’. The watchword of a ‘national community’ (*Volksgemeinschaft*) proved the most effective element of National Socialist propaganda, and the party became highly popular with the younger generation, in particular, thanks to widespread social discontent.” And J. Kocka, another historian, claimed that the NSDAP’s allure was “primarily due to its ‘Janus-like character.’ ‘National Socialism made it possible to be simultaneously, on the one hand, radical and anti-élite, opposed to capitalists and ‘big shots’, and, on the other, fiercely anti-socialist, nationalistic and conscious of one’s social standing.’ The fact that large sections of German society were attracted by this dualism – National Socialism was both dynamic and anti-modern, reactionary and revolutionary, opposed to capitalism and also to socialism – is

need much convincing but readily succumbed to the Nazis' allure. Before the Republic was finally dead, however, there was a period of exciting public debate about the front lines and "the truth."

The heated public debate began shortly after the newspaper version of *Im Westen nichts Neues* by Erich Maria Remarque (1898-1970) was published by the *Vossische Zeitung* in the fall of 1928 (November 10 – December 9), and ended with Hindenburg's famous handshake, handing power over to Hitler on January 30, 1933. After Hitler had been appointed Chancellor, it became increasingly dangerous to voice dissident opinions, but before 1933, alternative views could still be injected into the public discourse. That is what Remarque did when he published *Im Westen nichts Neues*. It caused a huge stir.

Debate over this battlefield novel became heavily politicized almost immediately. It was clear that the critics from opposite ends of the political spectrum argued over much more than the literary merits the novel did or did not have.⁷ Critics of every political color vied with one another to sway public opinion, and many searched in unlikely places for "evidence" which would corroborate their personal interpretation of this incredibly popular book. What was the truth? Did Remarque describe things truthfully, or did he simply invent this gut-wrenching story for the sake of popularity? Was this a heartfelt outcry against the atrocities of war, a book to end all wars, as the liberals thought, or was it really a weakling's act of treason, as Remarque's opponents said? The reactionaries,

attributed by Kocka to the persistence of strong pre-industrial, pre-capitalist and pre-bourgeois traditions" (*The Weimar Republic* [London: Unwin Hyman, 1988] 187-188).

⁷ As Hans-Harald Müller asserts, "the general social significance that *All Quiet on the Western Front* gained in the late twenties can certainly not be attributed to the literary competence of the author or the personal problems he sought to resolve with his writing" (*Der Krieg und die Schriftsteller: Der Kriegsroman der Weimarer Republik* [Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986] 60).

mostly nationalists and militarists, denounced both the novel and its author, and soon blacklisted both. Some liberals and pacifists, on the other side of the spectrum, hailed book and author but, unfortunately, did not manage to forge one coherent position among themselves. In fact, there were also critics on the far left who debunked Remarque's novel as bourgeois and pro-war. Therefore, these discordant voices lost the power struggle over who would come to dominate public discourse about the book's messages.⁸

What this dissertation contributes to existing research about *Im Westen nichts Neues* and other German battlefield novels is a new interpretive approach about how a text may play into public discourse. Virtually all the present research on the phenomenon of war novels in this era is based on the journalistic reception of *Im Westen nichts Neues* and other war novels, as these novels were received in the years of their publication. Researchers have, for example, analyzed possible reasons why Remarque's book became so successful, and why critics from all political corners responded to it the way they did.⁹

⁸ For a detailed analysis of the contradictory reception *All Quiet on the Western Front* received from leftist critics, see Michael Gollbach, *Die Wiederkehr des Weltkrieges in der Literatur: Zu den Frontromanen der späten Zwanziger Jahre* (Kronberg/Taunus: Scriptor Verlag, 1978) 305-313.

⁹ Thomas Schneider points out that the journalistic reception of *All Quiet on the Western Front* had ceased to focus on the actual text only four months after the book came out: "Am Text selbst wurden diese Urteile bereits seit Frühjahr 1929 nicht mehr entwickelt, sondern die stark aufeinander rekurrierenden Rezeptionszeugnisse verdeutlichen, daß seit diesem Zeitpunkt nurmehr vorgefaßte Vorurteile vorgebracht wurden. *Im Westen nichts Neues* hatte den Status eines Symbols mit nicht von ihm zu lösenden Konnotationen erreicht: kriegskritisch, desillusionierend, überparteilich. Je nach Vor-Urteil wurde diese allgemein konsensuelle Lesart des Textes entweder als positiv und produktiv im kriegskritischen Sinne interpretiert oder als den deutschen Frontsoldaten diffamierend" (Thomas F. Schneider "Krieg ist Krieg schließlich" - Erich Maria Remarque: *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1928)," Thomas F. Schneider, Hans Wagener, eds., *Von Richthofen bis Remarque: Deutschsprachige Prosa zum I. Weltkrieg, Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik*, 231). For detailed discussions of Remarque's stormy journalistic reception, see Johannes Brautzsch, "Die Publikumswirksamkeit der Romane 'Im Westen nichts Neues' und 'Der Weg zurück' von Erich Maria Remarque vor 1933" (Dissertation phil. Pädagogische Hochschule Potsdam 1969); Michael Gollbach, *Die Wiederkehr des Weltkrieges in der Literatur: Zu den Frontromanen der späten Zwanziger Jahre* (Kronberg/Taunus: 1978); and Hans-Harald Müller, *Der Krieg und die Schriftsteller: Der Kriegsroman der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986).

The present project is my initiative to enter that particular academic discourse from another perspective on reception and to agree or disagree with a number of existing findings by taking a different intellectual course.

My work repositions the debate on German battlefield fiction in a productive and important fashion. It takes into account that popular fiction is, above all, a commodity, or a product, that is consumed (= read and interpreted) by a mass audience for very specific reasons. My thesis is that, in 1929, these reasons had to do with the male readers' destroyed sense of self; or, one could say, with their inability to position their personal war experiences within the vast and contradictory memory of the Great War: it did not seem to make sense. I claim that nobody at the time read Remarque or the other war novelists for the purpose of political education. Everyone's political position regarding the war had been fully formed years before that, in a series of memoirs and novels about World War I reaching back over a decade, and that I will call to witness in deciphering Remarque.

The war experience, I argue, was a huge, unassimilated trauma both on the personal level (for most of the veterans) and on the national level, since the havoc was so obvious, yet the Weimar Republic failed almost completely to address that trauma. Weimar had very little healing power, not only because of the hated Versailles Treaty. In terms of politics, Weimar was forward-looking, progressive, and concerned with getting on with life. Millions of veterans balked at that. They resented the fact that their large collective wound, which Klaus Theweleit refers to as a "narcissistic wound," was given no chance to heal, that it was not even seen or appreciated. This irked veterans from both

ends of the political spectrum: their wounds, disfigurements, sacrifices, and lost comrades had become as worthless as the German currency by 1923. This oversight on the part of the new men in power had serious consequences, as students of the period's politics have long known. Yet a number of the psychological consequences of that war left traces in memoir and fiction of that era that have not yet been called to witness. This project aims to fill that gap.

In so doing, I will assume that this war fiction was written by men for men, specifically by veterans for other veterans -- it is an insiders' discourse -- although there is evidence that the younger generation of men, born around 1910, also felt drawn to it. Women play only minor roles in it, and there is scant information on women as readers. Moreover, these novels are fictionalized accounts of the war. Authors used the war novel, in the guise of the old *Bildungsroman*, for therapeutic reasons, as a free medium to blend personal experience, historical verisimilitude, and a variety of male fantasies. The many nuances on the same issue add up to a kaleidoscopic picture of German men in crisis.

If my basic position is right, then most of the research that was done on these novels so far missed the target. It seems to me that many researchers, especially the German ones, focused too heavily on the war novels' critical reception, and take it for a "truth" about the novels and their public. It is tempting to do so because such analyses yield clear black-and-white results. On the other hand, the critical reception might well reflect nothing other than the political standpoint of the critics at the time (or of the newspapers and periodicals they worked for). In point of fact, detailed discussion of the various books' literary qualities did not even take place: critics tended to bypass whatever

literary merits a book had, and instead attacked it on political grounds. Hans Harald Müller does, to be sure, pay attention to literary strategy: he describes *Im Westen nichts Neues* as a new poetic matrix, when compared with the older genre of officers' memoirs and factual war diaries. Michael Gollbach, on the other hand, simply puts the different novels in different camps. Both critics focus exclusively on the resultant political controversy. What images these novels offered their readers remains comparatively unknown.

I want to accomplish something different than a simple political diagnosis of these texts. In approaching these novels, I do not want to posit any particular theory *a priori*, but treat them with appropriate sensitivity as narrative gestures -- as books that did or did not speak to their audiences, judged by sales figures as a crude index to popularity. I want to recreate, to the degree possible, at least one original perspective that would have been familiar to German male readers in the late 1920s. My goal is to explore the personal level on which these texts resonated, the matrix of expression and representation that their original readers would have recognized and that mark these texts as "authentic" for the World War I experience.

For this reason, I will apply the reception (or reader-response) theory developed by Iser and Jauss in the late 1960s. Iser and Jauss, the central figures of the Constance School, revealed that traditional literary history and criticism had focused too heavily on either the authors or the texts themselves, but blotted out the reader. They argued, and I agree with them, that the actual meaning of a text is constructed through the reader's interaction with it. Depending on his cultural and intellectual environment, every reader

has a particular horizon of expectation that the text acts upon and answers to.¹⁰ Iser created the concept of *Leerstellen*, blank spaces, that the reader fills in or interprets according to what he knows.¹¹ These battlefield novels are excellent examples of the explosive power that such an interaction can release when appropriate *Leerstellen* are provided to a readership that had earlier not had a voice or a chance to identify with what is perceived as the truth and what is not, or what eventually emerges as the dominant discourse on the war experience.

Iser's theory of aesthetic response (*Wirkungstheorie*) differs from other theories of reader response (*Rezeptionstheorie*). Significantly, Iser does not analyze actual readings of texts, but proceeds from an ideal "implied reader." For Iser, the reader does not mine out an objective meaning hidden within the text. Rather, literature generates effects of meaning for the reader in a virtual space created between reader and text. Although reader and text assume similar conventions from reality, texts leave great portions unexplained to the reader, whether as gaps in the narrative or as structural limits of the text's representation of the world. This basic indeterminacy "implies" the reader and begs his participation in synthesizing events of meaning throughout the process of reading.

Such a theory of aesthetic response denies the simple dichotomy of fiction and reality. According to Iser, fiction proposes alternate worlds created within the virtual reality of the text's meaning. In other words, in literature the actual and the possible can

¹⁰ Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bathi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1982), 21.

¹¹ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins U P, 1978), 125.

exist simultaneously. Literature thus takes on a greater human function of imagining beyond the given constraints of experience. For example, in the political sphere, Iser's theory of reading might commend a critical democratic politics that urges constant re-examination of social and individual conventions by "deforming" and defamiliarizing accepted perspectives. After *The Act of Reading* (1976), Iser began exploring these broader implications of reading for human experience and constitution.

While battlefield fiction clearly had the potential to challenge social and individual conventions with regard to the accepted model of masculinity, it ultimately did not succeed in refashioning it. In the chapters which follow, I aim to recreate a likely *Erwartungshorizont* of the German bourgeoisie in the late 1920s. My most important source in doing so is certainly George Mosse, whose research shed light from various angles on the tenacity of the nineteenth-century masculinity stereotype. Like Mosse, I support the conclusion that the ideal of the German warrior-man prevailed in the Weimar Republic and, to the extent that it was reshaped at all, the innovative impulses largely came from writers like Ernst Jünger and other pro-war figures, not from the left. In other words, the old manly ideal of the Prussian and then German-Imperial military of the nineteenth century was not only maintained after the Great War, but actually remilitarized, in consciousness as much as in reality. The left missed its chance to articulate a different version of what that war meant for Germans and for a German future.

One thing is certain: it would have been absolutely crucial for the left to unite and gain the upper hand in the discourse about World War I in order to help stem the growing

influence of those from the right who refused to accept the hard lessons (not) learned about Germany's history. A novel alone could neither start nor resist such strong national sentiments. Yet once the liberals had been muffled or become inaudible, and once the last word in this public debate was ceded to the vociferous militarists and new nationalists, this meant that they had free reign in the propagation of their own version of the historic truth. Essentially, then, what motivated the quarreling over *Im Westen nichts Neues* as a public representation of "the" war experience was the desire to win authority over "what really happened," to "own" the frontline experience. Trench warfare had been a crucible for a generation, and ten years later, public opinion suddenly erupted into a fight over how that crucible actually had affected the nation: did it "destroy an entire generation" – as Remarque claimed – or "forge a new man" – as the new militarists and nationalists wanted to believe.¹²

One of the central elements in the reactionaries' spin on the historic truth was a fabrication that became well-known as the *Dolchstoßlegende*. This myth, first professed by Hindenburg and then adopted by other (para-)military leaders, claimed that the "obedient troops" of the German army had never actually lost the war, but had in fact been stabbed in the back. According to Hindenburg's testimony before an investigative commission in 1919, certain forces at home (meaning the social democrats in power) caused "a secret intentional mutilation of the fleet and the army," from which "the

¹² Gollbach supports this view: "Das Fronterlebnis war für ihn [den soldatischen Nationalismus B.F.] das zentrale Bildungserlebnis, Rechtfertigung und stete Bezugnahme. In den Materialschlachten hatte sich für den soldatischen Nationalismus (so wie er von Ernst Jünger wesentlich mitgeprägt und propagiert wurde) das neue Menschenbild des heroischen Kämpfers herausgebildet, für den Kampf und Krieg absolute Wert- und Verhaltensweisen sind," (*Wiederkehr des Weltkrieges* 33).

obedient troops who remained immune to revolutionary attrition [...] suffered greatly.”¹³ In the aftermath of this outrageous refusal to accept Germany's national -- much less his personal -- responsibility, Hindenburg's charges were expanded, generalized, and sensationalized to include the so-called “bolsheviks” and “the international Jewry” as likely culprits. This myth was far-fetched but circulated widely among those who wanted to believe it. When the Nazi movement gathered momentum in the late twenties, their agitators gladly revived it to support their cause, with special emphasis on the supposed role of the Jews. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that the *Dolchstoßlegende*, like any other conspiracy theory, initially seemed unlikely to many people.¹⁴ *Im Westen nichts Neues* opened up a different vision of what had happened in the First World War, an account different than that of the governments.

The war experience thus became a central negotiating point in Germany's national consciousness between 1918 and Hitler's coming to power, particularly for the frontline veterans who were being left behind. Battlefield novels (*Frontrömane*), which suddenly appeared *en masse* after 1928, play a central role in this context because they touched old wounds that had not healed. *Im Westen nichts Neues* was an instant success and, to many, nonetheless a major provocation.

¹³ Quoted in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg, eds., *The Weimar Sourcebook* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1994) 15.

¹⁴ Willi Wolfradt, one of the early contributors to the leftist periodical *Die Weltbühne*, discusses this very question in an article that was published on June 15, 1922. At the beginning of the editorial, he flat-out rejects the *Dolchstoßlegende*: “A stab in the back from the rebellious homeland caused the army to collapse – no, the preponderance of enemy forces and severe mistakes on the part of the leadership were to blame.” But then he makes a tactical mistake, in my opinion. The mistake is Wolfradt's back-handed admission that a stab in the back is not necessarily a bad thing: “No one has the courage required to own up to the heroic, saving act of a stab in the back. [...] The stab in the back, if it did occur, was self-defense, the desperate act of a people in mortal danger.” Again, presenting a disunited front concerning crucial debate issues weakened the left as a whole. Quoted in A. Kaes, M. Jay, E. Dimendberg eds., *Weimar Sourcebook*, 17.

After outlining the background against which these novels were read (representative officers' memoirs) I will argue in this project that several factors came together to make Remarque's novel such an explosive topic of public discourse. Since the *Dolchstoßlegende* and its offspring, the purported status of Germany as *Im Felde unbesiegt* (undefeated on the battlefield), had the foul smell of a fabrication by a government that had never taken care of its people, millions of war veterans waited for a better explanation of Germany's calamity, which Remarque's book provided -- an explanation that somehow felt truer than any official party line.¹⁵

Im Westen nichts Neues took on this role when it represented the common soldier's response to the *Dolchstoß*, as it were. The new message it offered read: the grunts in the trenches were not betrayed by their folks on the *Heimatfront*, but carelessly tossed into the war by certain arrogant figures of authority.¹⁶ These figures of authority, for example the infamous Sergeant Himmelstoß, are then exposed as cowardly and inept. This establishes a dichotomy between good Germans/soldiers and bad Germans/soldiers. As readers, we understand that the war was lost not by good Germans, but by an incompetent military leadership that wasted the service and patriotism of their troops and their homefront.

¹⁵ I make this assumption because the stereotypes of the war experience presented in Remarque's book become the pattern for the era's war novels -- his novel becomes the "story grammar" which others reflect, a very different kind of narrative than the war memoirs of the immediate post-World-War-I era or nineteenth-century war novels.

¹⁶ It was clear that the last word about the war experience had not been spoken. The accounts of the war that had been published between 1918 and 1923 were almost exclusively officers' reports and diaries, which presented only the officers' perspective, talked about maneuvers and strategies, but contained very little the common soldier could relate to. They were as unsatisfactory as the allegations that the *Dolchstoßlegende* had made against social democrats, Jews and bolsheviks -- the common soldier's experience in the trenches most likely did not support one or the other. See Hans-Harald Müller, *Der Krieg und die Schriftsteller*, 34-37.

Remarque's book filled a void, it resonated, and it offered more believable explanations for the World War I catastrophe -- an imminent cause rather than an abstract conspiracy theory. Moreover, it was written in easy-to-read language, generously larded with sentimentality and kitschy imagery, especially with regard to male bonding and camaraderie. Remarque wrote, be it intuitively or intentionally, what millions of readers wanted to hear, he catered to the needs and expectations of a mass audience that had not yet found a reason for the catastrophic historic moments they had lived through. The timing of the publication was also good because it came after a five-year lull during which not much new had been said about the war, even though national consciousness had found no healthy way of assimilating the trauma the war had caused. In fact, literary consumption throughout the Weimar years up until that point was heavily dominated by simple *Unterhaltungs-* and *Abenteuerliteratur*.¹⁷ *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, a coming to terms with traumatic history, had not yet begun on that level. War veterans were more concerned with bringing their lives back to normal, and trying to forget the terrible losses that the war had inflicted on many of them. Reading about innocent young lads who died senselessly in the trenches touched a nerve with them.

¹⁷ Hagen Schulze points out that of the thirty-four book titles that sold over half a million copies between 1918 and 1933, only three were even written by Weimar writers (Remarque, *Im Westen nichts Neues*, Kästner, *Emil und die Detektive*, and Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks*). Although Schulze forgets Manfred von Richthofen, *Der rote Kampfflieger*, which sold over 700,000 copies by 1933, he makes an important point. Above all, Weimar readers wanted to be distracted or lured into far-away adventures: "Das Publikum liest Hermann Löns, Walter Flex, Hans Carossa, vor allem aber Felix Graf Luckners *Seeteufel*, Gustav Frenssens *Jörn Uhl*, Werner Beumelburgs *Gruppe Bosemüller*, Gorch Focks *Seefahrt ist not!*, Hans Grimms *Volk ohne Raum* oder Clara Viebigs *Wacht am Rhein* – eine Mischung aus gemütvoller Innerlichkeit und nationalpathetischem Kriegserlebnis, stilistisch epigonal bis belanglos. Die größten Auflagenerfolge haben noch immer die Abenteuerromane von Karl May, und Hedwig Courths-Mahler hat nie so viele Leser gefunden wie in dem Jahrzehnt zwischen 1918 und 1928" (Hagen Schulze, *Weimar – Deutschland 1917-1933* [Berlin: Severin und Siedler, 1982] 125. For a listing of the most popular works related to the war, see Appendix I.

The fictional Paul Bäumer and his friends from school, like Remarque himself, were immediately stylized into poster boys of what Gertrude Stein labelled “the lost generation” -- men derailed by the war who would otherwise have enjoyed a safe bourgeois existence. Remarque’s publisher, *Ullstein Konzern Berlin*, launched a major advertising campaign to enhance the impression that this was a story of humanity ruined, not a political tract. Remarque maintained in interviews that he had written the manuscript in about six weeks after coming home from the office, and that is the way the story had been printed, first by the *Vossische Zeitung*, and then by *Propyläen-Verlag*. He repeatedly emphasized that writing down these “events” was a cathartic act, self-administered therapy, an attempt to shake off recurring bouts of depression caused by the traumatic experiences ten years prior. This story of genesis has now been revealed as fiction. Remarque, in fact, reworked his manuscript according to his publisher’s suggestions, which were clearly aimed at de-politicizing the story and making it a commercial success.¹⁸ The publishers then touted the book as “the truth” penned by some “unknown soldier” from “the gray masses” (compare Schneider 228).

All of these characteristics (and machinations within the public’s horizon of expectation) contributed to the novel’s mass success, both inside and outside Germany. *Im Westen nichts Neues* opened up the floodgates, and what starting pouring out were all of the things that had not been said about the Great War. This sudden deluge of belated war writings was certainly therapeutic to the national trauma, a statement of the

¹⁸ For a detailed account of Remarque’s interaction with his publisher, see Thomas F. Schneider “‘Krieg ist Krieg schließlich’ - Erich Maria Remarque: *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1928),” Thomas F. Schneider and Hans Wagener, eds., *Von Richthofen bis Remarque: Deutschsprachige Prosa zum I. Weltkrieg*, *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik* 53 (New York and Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003) 218-232.

heretofore unstated. But, in retrospect, it seems that no one was actually healed. At least those who made a physical recovery and managed to come to terms with the carnage they had seen in the trenches did not manage to convince the rest of the nation that the war was worse than folks at home seemed to think, and so that the talk of new wars needed to be unthinkable. Talk of enduring peace and moderate politics certainly did not win the day. Instead, very quickly people were blinded, bullied, or coaxed along by the National Socialist movement into embracing precisely the kind of war that had brought the nation to its knees once earlier. The insane idea took hold that the damage of the First World War could somehow be undone, and that the nation could regain its former strength, as if the losses of one war could be compensated by waging another war.

Therefore, it was not surprising, but rather to be expected, that *Im Westen nichts Neues*, a huge success as a work of popular literature, would be the catalyst for a fully-fledged Culture War. I will try to substantiate the claim that the book resonated not only on a political, but even more so on a more visceral level, as a kind of objectification of a socio-political trauma that ended up being used in other than therapeutic ways. I intend to show that the Culture War between the various critics and authors was fought principally over two main contentious issues: (1) the political and cultural legacy of the lost World War, a familiar perspective; and (2) an attendant and necessary redefinition of German masculinity which the war experience had brought with it, a cultural concept which had been severed from its nineteenth-century roots due to the horrific failure and lasting disorientation in the aftermath of the war. The gestalt of this objectified war experience - - the representations of these experiential reference points presented in its more distilled

form in *Im Westen nichts Neues* -- were, in this Culture War, actively refashioned for various purposes. The novel thus became more than a topic of conversation, it became the worldview which sponsored many related conversations.

That a war novel formed the center of this particular public discourse is not in itself surprising. It is fair to say that battlefield novels are normally written by male authors with sufficient military knowledge to present a convincing case to predominantly male readers who may or may not be experts on the matter of war. Employing a male code of communication is thus part of the trade, and so creates a context expressive of male concerns. In the historical context of the late Weimar years, the readers of the semi-fictionalized war accounts were certainly experts in the discourse that Remarque's book had again made public; in fact, many of them were probably war veterans who knew more about the war than Remarque did. He and the other war authors had to be aware that their readers already had a subjective realm of experience that might clash with the one they described in their novels (the problem of describing "the right war"). They had to overcome understandable reluctance on the part of the readers to identify with the people and events they depicted, if those events were still painful.

Little wonder that left-wing and liberal war novel authors provoked much outrage and anger. Yet I believe these emotional responses are related to the issue of identification and its political and social consequences, and more deeply than critics dealing with the novels' reception have assumed to this point. As I assess the situation, veterans needed these books, they were overdue; these lost men wanted to identify with the soldiers in the novels to see their own fate in a new light.

What if this identification left a bad taste in their mouth -- what if the familiar references in this discourse took the readers to an uncomfortable place? I am going to investigate the possibility that identification with the fictional characters automatically could, if blocked, actually produce scorn and fury among the readers who were transacting different forces in identifying their new roles in Weimar as soldiers and men and hence were forced to confront (but not necessarily to accept) dichotomies in their roles. Keep in mind that writing about World War I meant in many cases that writers put their fingers directly on open wounds. Veterans were not only officially defeated as soldiers of the German Imperial Army, but also emasculated as German men -- they could no longer be Imperial soldiers or citizens of anything but a defeated nation. Therefore, special attention will be given to the problem of masculinity and its literary renditions in this context.

STRUCTURE OF THE PROJECT

The prevailing images of German masculinity that had guided generations of German males into the ethical and social codes of the nation were destroyed by the events of World War I and its aftermath. For ten years thereafter (in First-Generation memoirs from front generals and politicians), literature about the war offered very little that individual male readers could use to reconstruct a positive image of the German man as a social and political being, specifically, to recast the (defeated) German war veteran as part of a new Germany. They had no *Erwartungshorizont* of images that expressed their

experience in terms that could tie it to the future of the nation. Since traditional perceptions of masculinity were shattered by the war, literature had to take up the same war and rework its memory to have a therapeutic effect and fill this gap, and it was Remarque's novel that did so most clearly.

In general, literature can only have such a popular, therapeutic effect if readers can identify with at least one of the protagonists. That is the reason why First Generation war literature about World War I -- memoirs by officers and politicians -- was both ineffective and unpopular among popular readers, as elucidated in the first section of the project below. A mass readership would be barred from identification with it in many ways, but most often because this literature consisted of officers' diaries or personal memoirs. That first wave of war literature, while a powerful expression of what was lost, thus did not qualify as a literature that could redefine masculinity for a more general public, or for more general social and political purposes. It looked backwards to the world that was lost rather than forward into Weimar.

Starting in 1928, a Second Generation of fictionalized war literature flooded the nation, and these narratives about the war experience proved much more popular than the old-school "factual" accounts of the earlier generation because they dealt with common war experiences, not just the facts of individual lives (heroes, martyrs, or politicians). This fiction provided realistic story-lines and protagonists that acted out archetypal conflicts between "good" and "bad" as experienced in the war *and* as the nation framed it. Because of the general economic downturn and social unrest, war veterans and other German readers whose masculine self-image had been adversely affected by the war were

in the late 1920s in desperate need of positive role-models, positive images of masculinity with whom they could identify in order to reestablish their self-worth *as part of the nation*, warriors for the social and national good. The new generation of battlefield novels provided such images, in a very nuanced fashion, to readers of the entire political spectrum, from the far left (Scharrer, Plivier) to the leftist bourgeoisie (Remarque, Renn, Köppen) to the conservative bourgeoisie (Federn), to the right-wing individualist (Jünger), to the right-wing militaristic collective (Beumelburg, Schauwecker, Zöberlein). But Remarque is the one who remains most visible today, perhaps because he came closest of all to creating something like a community of experience that spanned generations and classes, to a degree at least.

In the Second Generation of war books after World War I, verifiable factual information about the war as a larger historical event is secondary to representations of the roles which many shared in the trenches and on the front lines. Instead, battlefield novels provide a vision of society to their readers by offering them positive and negative images of masculinity that help the male reader reassess his personal self-image and (historic) role as a man in a world transformed by conflict. To make this case, I will discuss a number of novels in which the relevant role models are all German soldiers and whose tacit or overt goal is to tie the experience of World War I into various interwar political needs.

These novels work for their audiences, I argue, because they take up one of the traditional master signifiers of the German nation (military as an honorable career supporting the nation), and offer their readers specifically retailored images of the

German soldier as masculine ideals for the nation. Masculinity, in this context, always is portrayed as equivalent with being a soldier. Because of this commonality, I claim that most of these novels share a number of universals aimed at rewriting the image of the German man for the postwar world, regardless of the particular politics the novel espouses. These universals are the more unpolitical attributes of masculinity, e.g. courage, loyalty to friends/camaraderie, resourcefulness, a crude sense of humor, physical strength, and the ability to endure hardships. These elements of the male code play a positive role in any battlefield novel of this era (and perhaps beyond), regardless of the political orientation of the author. However, there are some attributes that right-wing authors (and critics) reject as effete or un-German, while leftist-bourgeois authors (and critics) value them. These attributes include artistic talent, sensitivity, and above-average intellectual ability.

How these general tropes of masculinity are handled in detail, then, allows these novels to emerge as distinct political statements, despite the fact that they rest on a common perception that Germany needs to redefine the masculine. What distinguishes left-wing war fiction from right-wing war fiction are two main differences: (1) the ideological orientation of the main protagonist(s) with regard to fighting the war; (2) the extent to which the main protagonist displays individuality, independent thinking, and even disobedience.

In right-wing war fiction, for instance, the “good soldier” readily subjects himself to a more competent *Führer*-figure who shoulders the responsibility and takes charge of decision-making in his stead (unless he is a born *Führer*-figure himself, as Ernst Jünger

believes). Left-wing authors, in contrast, like to endow their protagonists with the ability to think critically for themselves, which often leads to ideological repositioning vis-à-vis the war. Male readers across the political spectrum and across social classes mechanically latch on to those soldier-characters with whom they want to identify: characters that are heroic and brave, but otherwise act and think similarly. In this way, I believe, this particular war literature emerges as a distinct contribution to the new nationalist project of Germany, not just as a narrow *Tendenzliteratur*, but as a narrative of postmemory specifically tailored for the larger German cultural traditions.

Chapter one examines the issue of the war experience and German masculinity from the both the right-wing nationalist and leftist-bourgeois points of view. It argues that both mechanisms of masculinity construction share a wider range of traits than one would expect. They also both omit a number of uncomfortable truths about trench warfare the way it had actually taken place. Section two of the first chapter addresses these omissions which, while universally suppressed in both left and right bourgeois war fiction, did surface in the far left proletarian works, as well as in the one better-known war novel by a female author. The literary evidence in support of these findings include Adrienne Thomas' *Die Katrin wird Soldat* (1930), Theodor Plivier's *Des Kaisers Kulis* (1930), and Adam Scharrer's *Vaterlandslose Gesellen* (1929). Section three provides the historical context to these literary models of masculinity construction. Leaning on George Mosse's extensive research on the subject of German manhood between the nineteenth and early twentieth century, I will show that virtually none of the war novels actually covered new

ground. Interestingly, it was only the proletarian protagonists who took an unflinching look at the failure of German masculinity to assume agency.

Chapter two contains an analysis of the right-wing nationalist myth fabrication that ultimately helped the man = soldier equation to prevail. The first section describes the political impact of the *Dolchstoßlegende* as it was propagated by Ludendorff and Hindenburg. It also shows how this myth was incorporated into a body of existing discourse on the demise of German society and the necessity to re-erect German national strength via the creation of a new man. Friedrich Nietzsche, Oswald Spengler, and Arthur Moeller van den Bruck are among the champions of this new masculinity and new nationalism.

Section two focuses on the similarities and differences between authors around Remarque and the right-wing militarists and nationalists who wrote pro-war novels. The most prominent authors in this category are certainly Manfred von Richthofen, with his bestseller *Der rote Kampfflieger* (1917), and Ernst Jünger, who had already written a powerful testimony with his first novel *In Stahlgewittern* (1920), which was based on the events Jünger himself recorded in a diary during the war. Jünger was a prolific writer and a colorful, not to say eccentric, person. In terms of his political views, he cannot be classified as easily as the other *völkisch* right-wing writers this chapter deals with. Most critically, Jünger was an intelligent individualist, able to form his own opinion, and he knew how to write: his prose has a uniquely factual style, and his descriptions are eerily powerful. He was able to move his audience to a level of abstraction that seemed to sublimate the mud, blood, and gore into a surreal landscape.

Other pro-war writers of the era, such as Franz Schauwecker, who wrote *Aufbruch der Nation* (1929), Werner Beumelburg, who produced *Die Gruppe Bosemüller* (1930), Joseph Magnus Wehner, who authored *Sieben vor Verdun* (1930), and Hans Zöberlein, who penned *Der Glaube an Deutschland* (1931), might not have become known for what they wrote under normal circumstances because their works are very formulaic. What made them so popular was the fact that the German readership of battlefield novels around 1930 was already polarized into pro-war and anti-war factions. It did not matter that these books were often badly written, brimming with clichés, and monodimensional; if you preach to the choir, sometimes all you have to do is support and dramatize the point of view the audience already has.

In this case, the point of view of these right-wing novels hinges on the *Dolchstoßlegende* and the condemnation of the democratic government. These writers make every attempt to shift the responsibility onto their political adversaries – social democrats, communists, pacifists – to exculpate the heroic German fighter, with whom they strongly identify. They insinuate that German soldiers, if they had been left to their own devices, would not have lost the war. The resurrection of such manly virtues as courage and fighting spirit, which had been crushed by the troops' actual war experience, was one of the most important functions of pro-war militarist fiction written at that time. In their minds, the entire heritage of the German nation and its embodiment, the German soldier, was at stake. The new nationalists felt that they had to counter the defeatist notion, propagated by Remarque and others, that civilization and humanity itself had been destroyed by the war. They could not admit that the strongest and ablest members of

the German nation, namely fighting men between the ages of seventeen and thirty, had been annihilated in such vast numbers with no benefit to the country. Just as much as the Remarque alternates, then, these writers felt the urgent need to make sense of the senseless war experience, only that their construction of meaning was largely based on myths and irrationality.¹⁹ They sought to revalue the German soldier as a paradigm.

Das Fronterlebnis, the front line experience, the way the right-wingers pictured it, was a baptism of fire associated with strength, courage, endurance and camaraderie, with everything that was good, noble and “truly German.” They associated the Weimar Republic, in contrast, with everything that was weak, corrupt and decadent. Therefore, the pro-war writers positioned their fiction as a counterpoint to the parliamentary system and linked the virtues of the heroic German warrior to nebulous political principles regarding the new *völkisch* society they envisioned. As writers they form a homogeneous group that played out variations of a main theme: “The German soldier was stabbed in the back. He is really made for fighting and much stronger than it seems after the lost war.” As opposed to those authors like Remarque, the right-wingers, with the exception of Ernst Jünger, do not remain true to their personal war experiences. Their writings are more ideological and overtly motivational (for other men in distress).

Chapter three, then, takes up the most contentious of all the war novels, namely Remarque’s *Im Westen nichts Neues*, including all the details and motivations

¹⁹ Again, the most popular myths were the *Dolchstoß/ Im Felde unbesiegt*, as well as the jubilant excitement of the “August Days” of 1914 when hundreds of thousands of young Germans volunteered for military conscription. The *völkisch* ideas that informed the new nationalism, e.g. viewing the nation as one able body, are actually elements of the old nationalism of the early nineteenth century as propagated by Jahn, Arndt and others.

surrounding its wild reception. It also discusses the ingredients of Remarque's amazingly successful recipe as giving voice to a specific kind of experience. I will argue that his novel made such a powerful impact precisely because it was unpolitical, innocuous and unobjectionable: everything in the book is so general that it is unlikely any reader felt irritated by the specificity of information -- there is no information that would polarize readers into categories. Its message is that "soldiers suffer." In this way, it is fair to say that Remarque created an epitome of *Trivalliteratur* -- "literary fast food" -- a book that aims at mass taste and offers little morsels of pickle, mustard, or tomato to everyone, with no attention to any (intellectual) nutritional value. The magic behind this simple recipe is that every consumer is accommodated, with a high likelihood of similar experiences, so that most readers can relate to the events of the book on some level. His story dovetailed nicely with most Germans' horizons of expectation (*Erwartungshorizont*) at the time.²⁰

Chapter four discusses other authors who seemed to share Remarque's world view and semi-fictionalized the war experience in a comparable fashion. *Im Westen*

²⁰ Hans Robert Jauss created and popularized the term "horizon of expectation." The horizon of expectation varies from reader to reader because everyone has a slightly different disposition toward, say, a new novel about World War I, which is determined by factors like one's previous exposure to literature or one's personal education and life experiences. I claim that Remarque responded masterfully to the horizon of expectation not only of certain individuals, but of hundreds of thousands of war veterans whose war experiences had not been processed or addressed by an appropriate literary form. Jauss suggests three factors that can help an author determine what the *Erwartungshorizont* of an anonymous mass readership may be: "Die Möglichkeit der Objektivierung des Erwartungshorizontes ist aber auch bei historisch weniger profilierten Werken gegeben. Denn die spezifische Disposition, mit der ein Autor bei seinem Publikum für ein bestimmtes Werk rechnet, kann beim Fehlen expliziter Signale auch aus drei allgemein voraussetzbaren Faktoren gewonnen werden: erstens aus bekannten Normen oder der immanenten Poetik der Gattung, zweitens aus den impliziten Beziehungen zu bekannten Werken der literaturhistorischen Umgebung und drittens aus dem Gegensatz von Fiktion und Wirklichkeit, poetischer und praktischer Funktion der Sprache, der für den reflektierenden Leser während der Lektüre als Möglichkeit des Vergleichs immer gegeben ist. Der dritte Faktor schließt ein, daß der Leser ein neues Werk sowohl im engeren Horizont seiner literarischen Erfahrung als auch im weiteren Horizont seiner Lebenserfahrung wahrnehmen kann." See Hans Robert Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Gerhard Hess (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag 1967) 34-35.

nichts Neues clearly stole the show, but other anti-war novels also contributed important psychological insights into the front soldier's growing rebellion against the parent generation and the senseless slaughter of war. *Im Westen nichts Neues* becomes the bellwether for a mini-genre, namely narratives that describe a coming-of-age during wartime, resulting in a rapid loss of innocence, broken dreams, frustration, brutality, cynicism, and occasionally severe estrangement from the bourgeois world, which manifests itself in the rejection of authority -- a narrative appealing to a particular generation, to the young front-line soldier now seeing ahead a disappointed middle age.

In fact, these narratives can easily be considered modern adaptations of an older genre, the *Bildungsroman*, which Goethe popularized with his *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795).²¹ Several of these war-time adaptations of the genre predate Remarque's novel and probably surpass it in literary quality. Ludwig Renn's *Krieg* (1927/28), Edlef Köppen's *Heeresbericht* (1930), Ernst Johannsen's *Vier von der*

²¹ Bernard Selinger refers to Jerome Buckley's helpful description of the *Bildungsroman* in this passage: "A child grows up in the country or in a town where he finds 'constraints' placed upon him. He leaves to make his way in the city -- which usually brings disenchantment -- where his 'real education' begins and he is compelled to 'reappraise his values,' usually after 'at least two love affairs and sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting' [...]. Once he decides, after much 'soul-searching, which sort of accommodation to the world he can honestly make, he has left his adolescence behind and entered upon his maturity. His initiation complete, he may then visit his old home, to demonstrate by his presence the degree of his success' [...]. Although, as Buckley concedes, no one novel follows this pattern exactly, most bildungsroman novels adopt the majority of the genre's principal elements: childhood, the conflict of the generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, and ordeal by love. Also, the child will normally be an orphan or [...] fatherless or repelled by a living father. According to Buckley, 'The loss of the father, either by death or alienation, usually symbolizes or parallels a loss of faith in the values of the hero's home and family and leads inevitably to the search for a substitute parent or creed' [...]. David Miles notes that nature often becomes a central part of the sought-for creed, serving the protagonist as 'protectress and guide, in typically Rousseauian fashion, in place of ill-advised 'bourgeois morals.'" Compare Bernard Selinger, "House Made of Dawn: A Positively Ambivalent Bildungsroman," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 45, No. 1 (Spring 1999), 38-68.

Infanterie (1930), Ernst Glaeser's *Jahrgang 1902* (1928), Georg von der Vring's *Soldat Suhren* (completed 1923, published 1927), Karl Federn's *Hauptmann Latour* (1929), and Arnold Zweig's *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* (1927) were the seven most widely-read novels in this group, and therefore form the basis of my discussion. All of these novels, some of which reached considerable popularity, feature eighteen- or nineteen-year-old protagonists from the middle or lower middle class.

Typically, the coming-of-age process in these narratives unfolds along a certain trajectory that mirrors the structure of the traditional *Bildungsroman*: the protagonist enlists for military service voluntarily and enthusiastically -- with or without high school friends -- goes through basic military training, is sent to the front lines, makes contact with the enemy, sees other soldiers die, loses comrades, experiences the importance of male bonding, rebels against unfairness or frivolous abuse of authority, reflects on the meaninglessness of the war, is wounded and sent home for recovery, feels out of place at home and has difficulty communicating with family members, returns to the front line and eventually reaches an end. That end could be the end of his own life (Remarque), the end of the war (Renn), or the end of his active participation in the war (Köppen). It is usually a first-person narrator who steers the reader through the terrible course delineated by these milestones and invites him to identify with his experiences.

Not surprisingly, women play almost no role in these narratives because women were largely absent from day-to-day existence in the trenches. There are mothers and nurses, of course, who care for the wounded or hungry soldier, but female figures in other roles are conspicuously rare. Episodes of love and sexual encounters are important

components of the traditional *Bildungsroman*. In the battlefield novel, these episodes are replaced with scenes of male-male affection or descriptions of romantic camaraderie. The soldiers' yearning for women, young, clean women in summer dresses, seems to belong to the other world, a world they have left behind. Women are *the other*. The intense male bonding that occurs in the trenches transcends sexual love and rises to a non-sexual level approaching pure love.²² The reader understands that such pure love defies the brutality of the setting, overcomes class distinctions as well as bourgeois notions of shame, and does not require a material basis. That love is also strictly non-verbal; everyone knows it but nobody talks to the others about it. It is a platonic love that shines through in cherished rituals, e.g. smoking, playing cards, stealing food, or using the latrine together, as well as in courageous acts of selflessness and solidarity. These frontline soldiers become each other's brothers, fathers, mothers, and absent lovers. These various functions and types of interaction are also taken up again in chapter one, where I will discuss these issues on the language level to show how masculine code is employed for a nuanced redefinition of masculinity in these novels.

My conclusion will corroborate the view that the debate about the war, the truth, and German masculinity was never really literary, but, in fact, overtly political and covertly gender-ideological. Authors and critics cared less about the war than about their self-image as men. These are issues that are largely unresolved even today, especially in Germany. For instance, German men are conflicted about issues like patriotism or

²² Theweleit discusses this issue in *Male Fantasies* (vol. I, 52-62), but chooses to approach it in terms of "repressed sexuality" or "latent homosexuality."

military service, and do not know if they can be “proud to be German men” -- many feel burdened or guilty and look for foreign role models. I claim that there is a chink in the “male armor” -- the discourse on German masculinity has not been “intact” since 1918, and the 1920s novels depicting German men at war did little to help restore it. Therefore, it is likely that the analysis of male code can produce important results in other areas and later eras of German (or Austrian) literature as well.

I will suggest instead that history overtrumped public discourse, and that the *Frontromane* were never able to complete the task they set for themselves: the age of modernity accelerated human endeavor in almost every aspect of life, while the development of discourses about modern (German) masculinity was actually *decelerated*, even stymied, by the traumatic experience of losing two subsequent wars.²³ The Weimar years, as well as the periods following World War II and the 1989 German reunification, again assigned to many groups of German men new gender roles that many perceived as powerless and humiliating. In terms of its psychological and social functions, literature (and, after 1989, films) containing viable and positive models of (German) masculinity thus again gained special importance during those times.

Other researchers of Weimar battlefield novels have hitherto largely overlooked that the political positions held by authors and critics at the time reflected their gender ideologies, hence their beliefs about masculinity. Yet in 1928, as my cases show, and as I will return to in the conclusion of this study, the German male public struggled over the power to create -- through war literature -- the dominant male role model, a particular

²³ Compare Kingerlee, *Models of Masculinity*, xiii.

soldier-type, which included the right to write the dominant discourse on the war experience in general. Due to the cultural conditioning that bourgeois and aristocratic German men had undergone since the early nineteenth century, the man-athlete-warrior equation continued to be so powerful between 1919 and 1945 that every criticism of the war, or the German soldier, was a simultaneous attack on the German man and the patriarchal military hierarchy he had erected. At the same time, that self-image had grown so arcane and rigid that it could not easily be modified by the bourgeoisie. During the last five years of the Weimar Republic, then, only certain authors on the far left of the political spectrum started the grinding and painful process to rethink nineteenth century masculine ideals.²⁴

The male cult of the Nazi era sought to stop that process. Yet the Third Reich did not produce any gender role models that German men (or women) could adapt or perpetuate after 1945. This void created a vacuum of acceptable models of masculinity, a repeat of the World-War-I situation after World War II, both in West-Germany and the GDR. The GDR's new model became the socialist worker who readily subordinates his own needs to the benefit of the socialist state -- he is a team player rather than hypermasculine. This model, however, was artificial because it was officially prescribed from the top down; it lost all its relevance after the 1990 reunification. In West Germany, the issue was more complex because men relied on a variety of role models, mostly from

²⁴ As Roger Kingerlee proves with his work on shifting concepts of masculinity during the Weimar Republic, literature was indeed the experimental nexus from which a redefinition of the old gender role originated. His work focuses on Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (vol. I, 1930; vol. II, 1932), and Hans Henny Jahnn's *Perrudja* (1929).

the sports world or from U.S. movie culture. “What kind of man am I supposed to be?” has remained an open question in both the old and the new Germanys.

RELATED RESEARCH AND METHOD

As noted above, much has been written about the reception and mass success of *Im Westen nichts Neues* and other battlefield novels, but very little appeared before the late 1960s. It is as if the literary treatment of World War I as an academic research topic lay dormant for several decades before scholars seized upon it. I believe this neglect has to do with the fact that most of the battlefield novels published by German authors in Germany were essentially pulp fiction. As I mentioned above, these novels seem calculated to fulfill the important function of alleviating some of the trauma caused by the war, but they definitely did not climb to literary heights. Therefore, they were of little interest to old-school literary scholars, whose primary concern was literary analysis. From the other side, the social sciences at that time did not necessarily recognize the importance of popular fiction, either.

Two of the earliest German scholars who published their research on Weimar battlefield novels were Johannes Brautzsch and Michael Gollbach, whose books came out in 1969 and 1977.²⁵ These two dissertations laid important groundwork for later research because they documented and preserved evidence of the original reception very carefully.

²⁵ Johannes Brautzsch, “Die Publikumswirksamkeit der Romane ‘Im Westen nichts Neues’ und ‘Der Weg zurück’ von Erich Maria Remarque vor 1933” (Dissertation phil. Pädagogische Hochschule Potsdam 1969); Michael Gollbach, *Die Wiederkehr des Weltkriegs in der Literatur: Zu den Frontromanen der späten Zwanziger Jahre* (Kronberg/Taunus: 1978) (comp. Müller 61).

They also began to categorize the sheer volume of the stormy reception into politically identifiable camps so that the individual critics' likely motivations became more transparent. Nevertheless, and I agree with Hans-Harald Müller here, both of these seminal works did not provide a satisfactory explanation of Remarque's unparalleled success. Brautzsch rejected the hypothesis that the novel's popular appeal was somehow connected to the devastating economic crisis of 1929, which is an explanation that socialist GDR scholars subscribed to at the time, but he produced no alternative explanation of his own. Gollbach attributed the success to "a re-awakening of popular interest in war as a literary topic," following a period of "repression" from national consciousness (see Müller 61). Müller acknowledges both explanation attempts but sees no evidence to support them. He reminds us that contemporary scholars have the disadvantage of not being able to conduct first-hand empirical research because all the original readers of Remarque's novel are dead. He points out that we have to rely on the critical reception that was published in newspapers and journals during the last years of the Weimar Republic, which means that any of our explanation attempts are not entirely free of speculation (see Müller 62).

With this caveat in mind, Müller formulates three hypotheses that he considers central to our understanding of Remarque's huge success. He claims that: (1) readers at the time had problems that were similar to the problems (they believed) the novel addressed; (2) the novel fulfills a number of elementary demands regarding concepts with which readers could solve their problems; and (3) the novel was hailed as a success by journals (comp. Müller 62, my own translation). What he suggests is that, ten years after

the war, many readers realized that their lives did not measure up to the dreams and ambitions they once had. Many had not reached their professional goals, were impoverished, sick or disabled, and had lost friends and family members. As long as civilian life in the Weimar Republic was marked by a series of social, political, and economic crises, people may not have noticed the crisis in their own lives as much, but when a certain level of stability had been reached, they started looking for explanations. Plausibly, then, with more pressing problems to deal with in their daily lives, war veterans did not have time to think.²⁶

Müller's second hypothesis, namely that *Im Westen nichts Neues* also offered strategies to help readers cope with their own problems, is less convincing. It is true, the novel's simple explanation that "the war destroyed the lives of an entire generation" constitutes a significant "reduction of complexity," as Müller puts it, but, of course, it also reflects a more or less banal perspective (see Müller 63). According to Müller, the therapeutic effect of reading Remarque in the late 1920s was two-fold. First, war veterans were presented with the blanket explanation that the war itself was to blame for whatever may have gone wrong in their lives afterwards. Therefore, they could stop searching for more specific or more uncomfortable reasons behind their plight. Second, they also did not have to feel as guilty in the eyes of society for their postwar failure. The alienating and traumatic circumstances described in *Im Westen nichts Neues* exculpated them from any and all personal failures in civilian life.

²⁶ In fact, it would be interesting to investigate this matter with veterans of other lost wars; Vietnam, for example. It is conceivable that there are parallels between *All Quiet on the Western Front* and whichever book or movie was most popular among Vietnam veterans around 1985.

Arguably, *Im Westen nichts Neues* made identification easy for most veterans from the bourgeoisie or the working class. To the extent that these readers accepted Remarque's "problem-solving concept," they could follow his lead and blame the parent generation for leading innocent youths into a senseless and horrible war. However, Müller's entire argumentation that Remarque's novel was primarily autobiographical, or that Remarque wrote it for the personal benefit of alleviating his feelings of depression and guilt, has been disproved. It is also highly unlikely that he wrote the book in six or eight weeks after coming home from the office. According to Thomas F. Schneider, one of the most eminent Remarque scholars, the author carefully edited the manuscript in order to comply with the marketing strategy suggested by his publisher (Ullstein, Berlin).²⁷ Schneider debunks the myth that the book was particularly "authentic" or somehow expressed "the truth." I share his view that *Im Westen nichts Neues* is a piece of commercial popular fiction that was particularly open to all kinds of interpretations.

The scholarship on Remarque and other Weimar war novelist is only one side of the project. It is complemented by scholarship on the masculinity issue, whose best-known contributor is probably Klaus Theweleit. Theweleit is a German cultural critic and art historian who gained considerable acclaim with his massive two-volume book *Male Fantasies*, originally published in Germany in 1977, then translated into English in 1987.²⁸ This book gave a push to the developing area of masculinity studies, which

²⁷ For more details about the pre-publication history of all *Quiet on the Western Front*, see Thomas F. Schneider, "Krieg ist Krieg schließlich," 219-232.

²⁸ Klaus Theweleit, *Männerfantasien*, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld Verlag, 1977 and 1978); *Male Fantasies* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1987 and 1989). According to Roger Kingerlee,

eclectically combines insights and methods from literary and cultural studies, sociology, psychology, and anthropology. *Male Fantasies* was an illustrated study of the relations between misogyny and the fascist mindset. More precisely, he undertook a Freudian interpretation of the letters, fiction, and propaganda created by members of the *Freikorps*. “Theweleit examines the mind of the soldier and provides a theory of the functioning of the soldierly psyche with special reference to its relationship to power and the struggle for survival” (Kingerlee 2).

He demonstrates that *Freikorps* mercenaries’ militarism, misogyny, and anti-Semitism “were driven by a fear of dissolving boundaries, a reactive need to affirm the body’s hardness and invulnerability, a phobic resistance to the ‘oceanic,’ and to flows and flexibilities of all sorts: these latter being associated with the maternal, the sexual, the feminine, etc.”²⁹ Theweleit tied his analysis very closely to “the particularities of time, place, culture, and social class; *and* suggested how the pathology he uncovered had larger resonances throughout the history of misogynistic Western culture.”³⁰ Essentially, Theweleit produced an extensive Freudian case study. Its results confirm (the early) Wilhelm Reich’s analysis of “the mass psychology of fascism” and of rigidified, repressive “character armor.” In a nutshell, Theweleit’s psychological analysis of the *Freikorps* soldiers yielded the presumption that because they found women threatening, soldiers attempted to banish them from the men’s world.

Männerfantasien is “the highest-selling doctoral work ever written in Germany” (Kingerlee, *Männliches, Allzumännliches*, 2).

²⁹ Dagmar Herzog, [A liberal studies blog@USF » Blog Archive » BOOKFORUM review of “Sex After Fascism”](http://liberalstudiesblog.usf.edu/blog/2005/09/26/sex-after-fascism/) September 26th, 2005 at 6:55 am, <http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=280>.

³⁰ Ibid.

Most of what Theweleit used as written evidence was solely first-hand non-fictional writing, a relatively specialized genre with limited readership. Moreover, psychological themes of the body that Theweleit uses occlude real sociological and political differences among the populations who might be susceptible to *Freikorps* propaganda -- that the same literature might have had different readings, or that different publics might have very similar texts in the era. Yet my examples argue that we need to look beyond the war and beyond censorship, and at the ways in which first-hand war experiences were fictionalized, to find the important answers.

The present project thus re-examines all of Theweleit's findings and seeks evidence for or against them in the original battlefield novels. In a series of close readings offered as the bodies of the chapters which follow, therefore, primary attention is given to *the male code* embedded in the war discourse on which these novels read, and to the way it would have been read by German men, especially war veterans, in the late twenties. Based on a historical excursion into the nineteenth century, I will reconstruct the basic elements of German masculine ideals leading up to World War I. Combined with the historical knowledge of the traumatic events during and after the war, one can make informed assumptions about the cultural horizon of expectation German readers had vis-à-vis the *Frontrömer* of the late 1920s, and thus add nuance and perception of how the dislocations of the First World War were signaled within to many sectors of the German populace, to condition personal choices and identity politics.

Chapter One:

The War Experience and German Masculinity

This chapter sets the stage for the various manifestations of German masculinity as they appear in the fifteen war novels discussed in the following chapters. In the first section, I will compare and contrast the leftist-liberal construction of the male ideal with that of the right-wing militarist novels. The conclusions of this comparison reveal that there is considerably more common ground between the two than meets the eye. In opposition to most of the existing research on Weimar battlefield fiction, I will argue that novels from politically opposite camps rest on essentially similar masculinity constructions. This means, then, that the left and the right relied on largely the same reference points to establish a dialogue between author and reader, e.g. strength, courage, loyalty, pain endurance – the archetypal recipe of Wilhelminian *Männlichkeit*.¹

Section two examines which aspects of the war were not taken up for the fictionalization of the war experience, hence the construction of masculinity, by any of

¹ Researchers like Johannes Brautzsch, Michael Gollbach, and Hans-Harald Müller, for example, overemphasized the obvious (politically motivated) differences between pro-war and anti-war novels, neglecting that the subtext of positive masculinity construction is virtually identical in all of them. To be popular, leftist bourgeois writers like Remarque had to use the existing (nineteenth-century) repertoire of positive male characteristics; an alternative model of masculinity did not yet exist in 1928.

the bourgeois novelists. These aspects include historical facts like instances of fraternization with enemy troops or the many unheroic attempts made by German soldiers to escape combat duty through desertion, self-mutilation, and even suicide. I will also provide a brief outlook on competing literary models that challenged the bourgeois concept of the war experience and its masculinity construction, including one novel by a female author, namely Adrienne Thomas' *Die Katrin wird Soldat* (1930), as well as two novels by authors advocating revolutionary *Klassenkampf* against the Prussian capitalist power apparatus, which are Theodor Plivier's *Des Kaisers Kulis* (1930) and Adam Scharrer's *Vaterlandslose Gesellen* (1930).

In the third and final section of this chapter, I will draw on George Mosse's *Fallen Soldiers* (1990), and selected other masculinity research to historicize the war experience and its delayed literary processing as cultural necessities from a male gender role point of view. As we will see, the leftist-bourgeois attempts to redefine German masculinity would almost automatically be condemned to failure because the nineteenth-century cultural script that informed the dominant model of masculinity during and after the Great War equated masculinity with obedience, misogyny, and military aggression. It was hence too monolithic and one-sided to be dislodged by leftists using fraternization across social classes and individual emotional reactions rather than emotionally charged symbols, especially in war narratives, which history proved to be the home turf of the right wing.

This synthesis aims to support my original argument that the flood of war novels around *Im Westen nichts Neues* was released and received within a specific historical

constellation in Germany in which the male gender role offered individuals a minimum of security and a maximum of confusion rather than the kind of social scripts which would aid them deal with a rapidly changing present. Out of those floodgates in the late 1920s and early 1930s streamed hundreds of fictionalized war narratives, most of them reactionary, not only because the political climate had become increasingly polarized, but because Remarque's explosive popularity had drawn attention to the fact that the pre-1914 authoritarian model of masculinity had begun to erode since 1918. The left approached this problem by trying to create space for the re-interpretation of social scripts of masculinity and causal narratives about the Great War. In contrast, the radical right reacted to *Im Westen nichts Neues* with such vehemence, even hatred, because it perceived as desperately important the need to counteract the surging pressure of the *Neue Männlichkeit* becoming defined by war critics like Remarque, Renn, Köppen, and others. In their view, the narratives of men in war and about the war itself threatened the image of the nation itself that their politics rested on.

The right-wingers knew that the stakes were high. If they allowed the leftist authors around Remarque to spread their influence unhindered, the malleable next generation of young German men, born around 1910, who had been children during the war and very often grew up fatherless, might yet accept their anti-war message. This would mean, of course, that they would grow into a political opposition, while the militarist right-wing intended to recruit them as followers of a vision of traditional German greatness. This also explains why the pro-war novelists were activist and overtly political while the Remarquians from the left, splintered as they were in their political

opinions about class and individual positions in Germany and about their objectives in addressing them, did not see the urgency of speaking with one political voice.

Overall, as we shall see, Remarque remains an extreme case in his refusal to say anything about politics, but by-and-large, the left wing novelists disempowered themselves through individualism and political subtlety, which sent diffuse messages to the readers and contributed to their disunited model of the new German man being crushed by the right. That is, the left lost the battle of establishing a vision of masculinity to replace that which had been in place essentially since Wilhelminian Germany. The images of masculinity at play in the Remarquian field contrast in significant political as well as psychological ways.

1.1 LEFT VERSUS RIGHT: DIFFERENCES IN MASCULINITY CONSTRUCTION

Novels from both left and right adduced only a very limited number of male social types. Each correlated with a clear position about the war and with explicit class biases; each thus represented a specific vision about what "real men" do in times of difficulty.

(A) Beginning to Think: the Leftist-Bourgeois *Homo Cogitans*

Remarque and the other anti-war novelists painted a picture of the war that depicted it in its senseless brutality and dehumanizing reality. With the exception of

Remarque himself, the Remarque parallels sought to authenticate their narratives through the development of sensitive, psychologically convincing characters.

Only the prototype of the genre, Paul Bäumer, is a bland *everyman*, while all the other novels' protagonists emerge as individuals because they have a particular background and a carefully developed personality. In most cases, authors of war literature adopted the classical model of the *Bildungsroman* as a literary foil to construct their narratives; they are thus anchored in the humanist tradition.² Edlef Köppen's *Heeresbericht* is a special case because it frees itself from the *Bildungsroman* recipe in favor of adopting a modernist montage or collage as his genre paradigm, one that chillingly juxtaposes authentic documents with the actual narrative.³ Similarly, as a *Justizroman*, Arnold Zweig's *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* also emerges as exceptional because the front line experience does not even enter the picture and there is no first-person narrator who becomes "educated" by the war.⁴

Within the spate of novels that will be discussed below, the leftist anti-war camp fictionalized the war theme in a number of ways. Within this spectrum, the various

² See chapter two for details on the various adaptations of the *Bildungsroman*. Von der Vring's *Soldat Suhren* is a *Künstlerroman*, Zweig's *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* is a *Justizroman*, and Ernst Glaeser's *Jahrgang 1902* is a *Jugendroman*, for example.

³ Jutta Vinzent evaluates Köppen's literary strategy as follows: "Da der Roman aber nicht nur aus fiktiver Handlung besteht, sondern in sie Dokumente eingeschoben sind, tritt neben die unmittelbare Erfahrung des Protagonisten die Reflexion des Krieges, dessen Maschinerie entlarvt wird. Die Kritik am Krieg übersteigt das Individuelle oder auch typisch Existentielle. Sie entwickelt sich zu einer kritischen Auseinandersetzung mit der wilhelminischen Politik und geht darin über die Lyrik Köppens, in der nur aus humanitärer und pazifistischer Gesinnung heraus der Krieg verurteilt wird, hinaus" (Jutta Vinzent, *Edlef Köppen – Schriftsteller zwischen den Fronten* [München: iudicum verlag, 1997] 113).

⁴ Precisely because Zweig and Köppen abandoned the *Bildungsroman* mold, I regard their novels as the most successful pieces of war fiction ever written in Germany. Both authors targeted the larger systems that drove and sustained the war effort, and managed to create compelling accounts of the difficulty to escape from these systems. Unfortunately, both *Heeresbericht* and *Sergeant Grischa* are largely unknown today.

reactions to the war experience range from resigned obedience (Von der Vring, *Soldat Suhren*, Renn, *Krieg*) to plaintive lament (Remarque, *Im Westen nichts Neues*) and aggressive refusals to participate in the madness any longer (Frey, *Pflasterkästen*, Köppen, *Heeresbericht*). What they share, however, is their progress from unknowing to knowledge, their *Bildung*: the protagonists each undergo a perversely accelerated learning process that teaches them the reality of war: “Ja, so denken sie, so denken sie, die hunderttausend Kantoreks! Eiserne Jugend. Jugend! Wir sind alle nicht mehr als zwanzig Jahre. Aber jung? Jugend? Das ist lange her. Wir sind alte Leute” (Remarque 24).

However, once the protagonists have reached the point where they reject the war, they fail to channel this new-gained knowledge into a political platform or mission; they remain caught in their original bourgeois mold of obedience.⁵ Not one of the protagonists ever tries to convince his comrades to take collective action against the war. Each first-person narrator thus remains a singular entity, faced with the painful realization that the war is wrong for him, but maybe not for everyone. This results in the novels conveying senses of isolation, hopelessness, and depression rather than offering a political catalyst for analyses of the politics of the post-war generation.⁶ Renn states, in his typical laconic

⁵ The key experience that opens the anti-war protagonists’ eyes is often clearly identified. In *Heeresbericht*, Reisinger’s eye-opener occurs during a minor artillery attack early on in the story. He witnesses how a superior loses his hand: “Reisinger hat ein Zittern in den Knien, das ihn schüttelt. Und im Hals würgt etwas. Das also ist der Krieg! Da steht ein Mensch, laut und kräftig, mit provozierendem Mut. Die Sonne scheint, und es ist blauer Himmel. Plötzlich liegt der Mensch am Boden. Und Blut spritzt. Und der Mensch wird nach Hause gehen und niemals im Leben wieder eine linke Hand haben. Das ist ja ekelhaft!” (Köppen, *Heeresbericht*, 43).

⁶ Renn in *Krieg* and Reisinger in *Heeresbericht* had difficulty integrating themselves into the Frontgemeinschaft to begin with. Renn does not like to play *Skat* and Reisinger hates drinking, which makes them potential outsiders.

manner: “Wenn ich einmal kriegsbegeistert gewesen war, wie nach dem Übergang über die Maas, war meine Begeisterung schnell abgestanden, und ich hatte mich nach anderen Gefühlen geseht” (Renn 164). It is only Paul Bäumer, the victim, who functions as even a potential spokesperson for the whole generation of young men who, as Remarque suggests, were deceived into signing-up; the rest of the protagonists speak only for themselves. They learn to think, emerging as *homo cogitans*, but not to achieve the traditional goal of *Bildung*, since they are not integrated into a new social-political vision.

The leftist *homo cogitans* thus simply deals with a sad emotional reality and learns to make up his own mind about what war really means. Unfortunately, his dawning awareness usually remains somewhat superficial. To be sure, the typical narrative of this sort does have sufficient depth for the soldiers to realize that the French enemies are in the same miserable situation as the Germans, and that their men in the trenches are not essentially different. These are the thoughts that *Heeresbericht's* Reisiger has, for example, when he is in charge of a group of French prisoners: “Das alles überlegt Reisiger, aber er tut nichts. Es fällt ihm ein, daß er 21 Jahre alt ist und daß vor ihm wehrlose Menschen sitzen, die seiner Schätzung nach zum größten Teil gute zehn Jahre älter sind als er. Das beschämt ihn” (Köppen, *Heeresbericht*, 48).

These are also very much the thoughts Paul Bäumer expresses, larded with Remarquian pathos, when he is trapped in the same shell hole as a French soldier: “Vergib mir, Kamerad, wie konntest du mein Feind sein. Wenn wir diese Waffen und diese Uniform fortwerfen, könntest du ebenso mein Bruder sein wie Kat und Albert. Nimm zwanzig Jahre von mir, Kamerad, und stehe auf, - nimm mehr, denn ich weiß

nicht, was ich damit noch beginnen soll” (Remarque 222). Like the good bourgeois humanists that they are, these men know what they do cannot be right, but this knowledge does not help them to envision a new future, a new Germany.

Their “war education” thus never reaches the level of profundity that would be required for sociopolitical analysis. The spectrum of perspectives ranges from Bäumer and Renn, who are totally naïve, to Johannsen’s *Four Infantrymen*, who expose the perverse culture of slavish subordination to German military heroism. Reisiger’s analysis, in Köppen’s *Heeresbericht*, develops a rather keen understanding of the foul game turning fouler, although even he is muffled by his ingrained sense of obedience until the very end (when he is declared insane): “Ich glaube, denkt er, ich hätte gestreikt. – Er zerbeißt sich die Unterlippe: was heißt streiken? – Die Mannschaften fühlen sicher so wie ich. Daß es gemein ist, plötzlich wieder zu schießen. Und sie müssen es doch tun. Wir alle müssen ja doch tun, was befohlen wird” (Köppen 300). Therefore, even Reisiger and Funk (in Frey’s *Pflasterkästen*), as well as the men in Johannsen’s *Vier von der Infanterie*, who are clearly the most rebellious figures created by the leftist bourgeois camp, ultimately do not succeed in breaking free from the authoritarian structure of the military, or from the authoritarian pathways of their own worldview.

The wartime *Bildungsroman* in which they play the starring roles thus ultimately fails them on other than the emotional level. On the one hand, as we have seen, the war experience does “educate” them brutally and at a precipitous pace. They outgrow the beautiful illusions of a humanist education and burst the narrowness of their safely bourgeois pre-war surroundings. They do come to appreciate a radically different social

model as a substitute for family and friends, namely the egalitarian community of the *Frontgemeinschaft*. On the other hand, the wartime brutality stymies their emotional growth and limits their perspective (a process one could describe as *Rückbildung*). The men become bitter, cynical, and pessimistic -- changes they describe as “getting old,” rather than looking for the cause of their distress externally. They found comfort in their circle of *Kameraden*, but unlike their right-wing counterparts, the anti-war protagonists do not invest in the hope that the *Frontgemeinschaft* might be carried home once the war is over. These are the heroes who will be reflected in the existentially terrorized heroes familiar from Expressionist art and drama -- lost and utterly singular.

Therefore, one must posit that the leftist bourgeois battlefield novelists did not construct a viable new model of masculinity for their readers, even as they met them by reflecting their emotional experiences. Their *homo cogitans* hero typically feels, thinks, and suffers (especially Paul Bäumer, the innocent victim), but fails to grasp the collapse of the German bourgeoisie, or to analyse the cultural pressures that compelled him, like hundreds of thousands of other men, to volunteer for military service in the first place. In a broader framework, there is no awareness that the Great War was no accident but the consequence of Wilhelminian culture and politics, including the systematic absorption of young men into the Prussian military power apparatus.

Even with the benefit of hindsight and a temporal distance of ten years, most of the middle-class anti-war writers (exceptions include Edlef Köppen and Ernst Johannsen) seemingly did not understand that the mass slaughter of the Great War could not easily be contained in a nineteenth-century literary form that, in its original concept, actually

prepared the protagonist's successful reintegration to society. Adorno said there could be no poetry after Auschwitz. I would add: "there could be no *Bildungsroman* after World War I." Ironically, authors like Remarque paid lip-service to this in what sounds almost like a parody of the *Bildungsroman*: "Wir lernten, daß ein geputzter Knopf wichtiger ist als vier Bände Schopenhauer" (27).⁷ Nevertheless, he and others opted for what to bourgeois readers would seem to be a realistic, authentic, believable, and pessimistic perspective on the war experience, laid out in relatively harmless bourgeois *Rückbildungsromane* that were condemned to copy the limitations and, ultimately, replicate the failure of the German *Bildungsideal* from the outset. The novels' protagonists, obviously permanently damaged by the war, were victims, not heroes, and victims remain ultimately unattractive for male readers trying to rebuild their sense of self.⁸

⁷ Even Renn in *Krieg* makes several attempts to derive meaning from books amidst the chaos of the war. He reads *Simplicissimus* and a philosophy book but winds up discarding both because they do not give him the answers that he seeks.

⁸ Eckart Koester's analysis contradicts this. In his opinion, the leftist-bourgeois literary production made an important contribution to the anti-war movement despite its failure to provide political directives: "Auch wo es ihnen an konkreten, praktisch realisierbaren Handlungsangeboten fehlte, konnten die schriftstellerischen Äußerungen gegen den Krieg wichtige emotionsbildende Wirkungen auf ihre Rezipienten ausüben, indem sie den inhumanen, gegen die Interessen der Völker gerichteten Charakter des Krieges eindringlich darstellten und so Stimmungen hervorriefen, die zum Widerstand gegen dessen Fortsetzung und zur Auflehnung gegen den deutschen Militarismus disponierten. Von ihrer Anlage her waren wohl am ehesten die künstlerischen – lyrischen, dramatischen, novellistischen – Werke der aktivistischen Kriegsgegner dazu geeignet, Emotionen dieser Art auszulösen und damit, wenn nicht handlungsorientierend, so doch zumindest handlungsstimulierend zu wirken" (see Eckart Koester, *Literatur und Weltkriegsideologie. Positionen und Begründungszusammenhänge des publizistischen Engagements deutscher Schriftsteller im Ersten Weltkrieg* [Kronberg/Ts.: Scriptor Verlag, 1977] 367-368). I believe that Koester underestimates the power ratio between leftist anti-war voices and the massive ideological bloc of reactionary militarist thought. Even in quantitative terms, only Remarque and Renn reached substantial sales volumes between 1929 and 1933.

(B) Refusing to Think: the Right-Wing Bourgeois *Homo Oppugnans*

History suggests that the leftists' right-wing militarist colleagues understood this problem and thus took a different route in drawing out conclusions about German masculinity and the German nation. As will be addressed in chapter two, the right wing successfully constructed positive male figures out of the chaos of the *lost(!)* war. *Homo oppugnans*, the battling man, is portrayed as the world's most formidable warrior, the type who overcomes the limitations of the *homo cogitans* and his bourgeois milieu. The war is his world, waging war his *raison d'être*. In Richthofen and Jünger, killing the enemy thus can be described as the ultimate male sport. This type of soldier-man feels depressed only when he cannot fight, not because he has to fight or because he does not know what he is fighting for. What dismays him is that not all German soldiers belong to the top tier of combat excellence. *Homo oppugnans* endures almost any amount of pain or physical exhaustion, it is always the others who are weak. If not God, at least rectitude is on his side.

These fantasies were invented, of course, but they were not new. In fact, myths and legends about the historical greatness of the German warrior (e.g. Arminius defeating the Romans in 9 A.D.), or the former unity of the German nation (e.g. during the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon, or even during the "August Days" of 1914), formed an integral part of this model of masculinity construction. So did the ancient repertoire of anti-Semitic stereotypes, as well as nineteenth-century racial ideas of white European superiority. Whether or not the tenets of this German masculinity ideology were verifiable was beside the point. First and foremost, right-wing militarist novelists

developed fictionalizations of the war experience that would embolden and fortify their veteran readers politically and psychologically; an end that justified almost any means.

The consequence is that at least one vision for a new Germany was built into the right-wing novels, albeit one that did not necessarily help develop images of a new nation. One central message that was broadcast in these novels to the World War veteran, who was likely to be unhappy and socially unappreciated in 1929 as he read his war novels, was the promise of community. Any pro-war book would reassure him that he was not alone, but in fact a member of a vast *völkisch*-nationalist community that, like he, viewed the “unmanly” Weimar Republic as a temporary historical aberration that could be overcome by a return to the traditions of German warriors.

Another message encountered in the right-wing novels was that this invisible community in the new Germany could be a direct product of the (heavily mythologized) *Frontgemeinschaft* of *Kameraden*, fighting and dying heroically in the trenches, as the veteran himself remembered so well. Pro-war novels suggested that the spirit of the trenches was not dead but only waiting to be reawakened by either men like him or a powerful *Führer*. The limits on this model, however, were clear -- these were men of spirit, not of the real world.

The literary characters that came out of this ideological passion were predictably not very subtle, but bore all the hallmarks of the idealized right-wing warrior hero. In other words, they most often were monodimensional cardboard characters who simply functioned as the authors’ mouthpieces. While emotionally satisfying, the novels' plots did not move to political analyses, for example. In most of them, the whole war

experience is presented as a transparent case study of “good” battling “bad.” Nevertheless, as one look at the popularity statistics of Weimar battlefield fiction proves beyond any doubt (see the statistics included as the Appendix to this study), these were the novels that resonated with by far the most readers during the late 1920s and early 1930s. From the point of view of most male readers at the time, it seems that figures like Paul Bäumer (*Im Westen nichts Neues*), Renn (*Krieg*), Funk (*Pflasterkästen*), or Reisiger (*Heeresbericht*) had registered as confused, “un-German,” and “un-manly” aberrations, while larger-than-life heroes like Erich Siewers (*Gruppe Bosemüller*), Junne (*Sieben vor Verdun*), or Albrecht Urach (*Aufbruch der Nation*) gave them the symbolic power they so desired.

Although the right-wing militarists and nationalists took great pride in defending the memory of “their” war experience against the “historical inaccuracies” and “lies” with which Remarque and others supposedly sullied “their” war legacy, the right-wingers themselves took extraordinary amounts of freedom with embellishing historical facts to make their novels more universal in impact. Wehner’s *Sieben vor Verdun* is only one example of such bold distortion. This novel makes it seem as if the German army, held back by General Falkenhayn’s indecision, was only inches away from a great victory in the battle of Verdun.⁹ In contrast to the left-wing bourgeois camp, the pro-war militarists presented a united front and a unified picture of the war experience, which contributed to

⁹ See, for example, the following passage: “Er dachte nun heftig an die Gegenwart. Er beschwor noch einmal die Stürme der letzten Tage. Er sah die Franzosen fliehen, bis nach Verdun hinunter, sah Generäle aus der Zitadelle treten und flüchtige Offiziere niederschließen. Er fühlte, wie das blaue Meer brach und wankte. Jetzt nur nachstoßen, nur jetzt nachstoßen! Aber da senkte sich aus dem Himmel die schwarze Schranke eines Befehls. Und der war nicht zu wenden” (Wehner, *Sieben vor Verdun*, 150).

their victory in the late 1920s literary culture war. Theirs was a gigantic and ruthless advertising campaign that laid claim to the war legacy as a chapter in history and as a testing ground of their version of manhood.

However, the stock repertoire of their manhood-model coincided with that of the left, with the exception of the actual mental, emotional, or political response to the war.

(C) The Common Ground: the German Bourgeois *Homo Teutonicus*

Since the late 1920s culture war had such important implications for the future course of German history, it is understandable that most of the academic research on Weimar war novels so far was focused on their reception and political aspects. I would argue, however, that this perspective is too limited and indeed avoids a central theme of the cultural struggle that the war novels catalyzed. I venture to claim that an exclusive focus on all the venom that was spewed back and forth between the left and the right detracts from the importance of the cultural middle ground that existed universally in terms of masculinity construction, regardless of the diametric political opposition between the warring factions. That middle ground was the most successful of the images of German masculinity encountered in the novels discussed below.

Despite their salient ideological differences, the left-wing and the right-wing novelists nevertheless ultimately described, in hindsight, the same type of man as their ideal for a future German type -- *homo teutonicus* --, one who would grow out of the

same class of men: an army of working- and middle-class German soldiers who will rise up and reclaim the dignity lost to them in the First World War.

Any close readings of the battlefield novels reveals that they run on astoundingly parallel tracks up to a certain point. For example, Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* and Beumelburg's *Die Gruppe Bosemüller* feature two otherwise identical nineteen-year-old protagonists, namely Paul Bäumer, whose response to the war is famously negative, and Erich Siewers, an anti-Bäumer, whose response to the war is passionately positive. Bäumer's qualities as a combat soldier are toned down accordingly, while Siewers' are exaggerated, but underlyingly, they share many social and physical characteristics.

It is, in fact, straightforward to show evidence that the leftist and the right-wing writers were really in agreement on the basic ingredients of German masculinity. The hallmarks of that ideal German masculine type are agreed upon by almost all the novels.

i) *The Significance of Physical Appearance*

As already noted, Remarque managed to create the only effective left-wing myth about who he believed bore responsibility for the injustice of the war by writing an anti-war novel focused principally among individuals as the victims of that injustice. In the name of the "lost generation," his was a powerful new *Dolchstoß* aimed at certain elements of the parent generation of authoritarian "Wilhelminians."¹⁰ Yet that too-simple representation of the war can be complicated when the importance of bodies and their

¹⁰ Compare Remarque, *Im Westen nichts Neues*, 18; 24.

physical description in the language of this myth is assessed. Bodies and class positions yield reader identification with these novels' protagonists.

In *Im Westen nichts Neues*, for example, the culprits who inflict harm on German masculinity are Kantorek, the schoolmaster, and the sadistic Sergeant Himmelstoß. Since these men are clearly not intended to be read as positive individuals, but as allegorical types to be met in the ruling class or parent generation who "sold out" Germany, chances were high that most readers knew "people like them" and could thus relate to the constellation of the novel as a compelling explanation for German society in general. At the same time, Remarque was able to take the sting out of his accusation in the sense that the main positive figure of identification, Stanislaus Katczinsky, a forty-year-old, is obviously exempted from the charges. Katczinsky is the conciliatory token that the parent generation was not universally guilty of driving the young men into the trenches. Remarque thus adopted a positive father figure as an integral part of the magical *Frontgemeinschaft*.

The way their physical masculinity is constructed underlines the simple scheme of good versus bad. Kantorek and Himmelstoß, both bad, are virtually identical with regard to their physique. Remarque himself draws the direct conclusion that men of their frail build are generally vicious and dangerous:

Kantorek war unser Klassenlehrer, ein strenger, kleiner Mann in grauem Schoßrock, mit einem Spitzmausgesicht. Er hatte ungefähr dieselbe Statur wie der Unteroffizier Himmelstoß, der "Schrecken des Klosterberges." Es ist übrigens komisch, daß das Unglück der Welt so oft von kleinen Leuten herrührt, sie sind viel energischer und unverträglicher als großgewachsene. Ich habe mich stets gehütet, in Abteilungen mit kleinen Kompagnieführern zu geraten; sie sind meistens verfluchte Schinder. (Remarque 16)

Himmelstoß, “der schärfste Schinder des Kasernenhofes,” is described as “ein kleiner untersetzter Kerl, [...] mit fuchsigem, aufgewirbeltem Schnurrbart, im Zivilberuf Briefträger” (28). The detail about the red, twisted moustache creates a direct link between him and *Kaiser Wilhelm*. In a nutshell, Himmelstoß is a small and vain man who is obsequious to his superiors (135) but sadistic to the men subordinated to him. When he appears at the front line, he turns out to be a coward. Bäumer finds him hiding in a hole during one attack: “[...] finde ihn, wie er in der Ecke liegt mit einem kleinen Streifschuß und den Verwundeten simuliert. Sein Gesicht ist wie verprügelt. Er hat einen Angstkoller [...]” (134). The reader cannot help but loathe this character.

Katzinsky, by contrast, is a big, brave, likeable fellow with a calm voice (154) who is admired by his younger comrades not because he wields authority, but because he exudes it nonverbally. He is fair, considerate, generous, knowledgeable and unflinching in his judgment, which he derives from his extraordinary common sense. Bäumer and the other nineteen-year-olds love this man:

Stanislaus Katzinsky, das Haupt unserer Gruppe, zäh, schlau, gerissen, vierzig Jahre alt, mit einem Gesicht aus Erde, mit blauen Augen, hängenden Schultern und einer wunderbaren Witterung für dicke Luft, gutes Essen und schöne Druckposten. (Remarque 9)

Katzinsky is anti-intellectual and rejects the war, which, according to Remarque, is a positive trait of most common people.¹¹ He never questions his duty as a soldier and is

¹¹ “Am vernünftigsten waren eigentlich die armen und einfachen Leute; sie hielten den Krieg gleich für ein Unglück, während die bessergestellten vor Freude nicht aus noch ein wußten, obschon gerade sie sich über die Folgen viel eher hätten klar werden können. Katzinsky behauptet, das käme von der Bildung, sie mache dämlich. Und was Kat sagt, das hat er sich gut überlegt” (Remarque, *Im Westen*, 17).

not interested in political discussions. Due to his earthy wisdom, Kat stands for a personal autonomy that remains untouchable by the military command structure. He does his duty well when it is called upon, but his next thought is always on the next meal or the next game of *Skat* with his beloved *Kameraden*. This then is the man Paul Bäumer adores, and presumably, the masculine ideal Remarque seeks to convey.

The only detail about his physique that seems to contradict the masculine ideal is the fact that he has “sloping shoulders.” The simple explanation for this is that such shoulders “befit” the confident working man, reflecting the burdens on him -- no matter that such shoulders can be taken as signs of degeneration. Nonetheless, like the giant Lennie in Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* (1937), Kat feels secure about his strength -- he may even be unaware of it -- and thus sees no need to worry about his *Haltung*, which, Remarque insinuates, is just a vain aspect of military comportment anyway: “Schultern raus” and “Strammstehen” is for toy soldiers.

This simplistic juxtaposition between good soldiers and bad soldiers is a ubiquitous motif in any of the war novels, be they for or against the war. As a general rule, moral turpitude often correlates to physical shortcomings, meaning men who are bald, short, narrow-shouldered, narrow-chested, bespectacled, red-haired, or high-voiced.¹² This includes “the nervous type” of men who speak too much or too quickly;

¹² Exceptions to this rule are more likely to be found in left-wing war fiction than in pro-war books, since the latter category has a strong distaste for ambiguity. It is therefore rare to find a positive, yet physically inept character like Lamm in Renn’s *Krieg*: “Und Zache behandelte ihn auch sehr schlecht. Lamm war nämlich ungeschickt in allen körperlichen Dingen, dazu schwächlich. In seinen, übrigens sehr ausdrucksvollen Augen war fast immer eine Ängstlichkeit, die Zache zu ärgern schien, mir aber gefiel” (Renn, *Krieg*, 21). Also, in another passage, he reverses his first impression of a soldier named Eilitz: “Der war gewaltig groß und breit und hatte eine breite, gebogene Nase. Zum Reden schien er nicht eingerichtet.

such *Quasselköppe* also betray their unmanliness. Heroic men tend to be blue-eyed like Kat. The criterion of body weight is ambiguous. Skinniness is usually negative: “Unser dünner Hauptmann, der allgemein verhaßt war, saß im Grase, und der große, dicke Leutnant Fabian hatte eine Haarschneidemaschine in der Hand [...]”¹³ Big men are associated with *Gemütlichkeit* (exuding a sense of well-being) and fatherly qualities, hence not particularly aggressive: “war bald wieder gesund und dick wie früher. Er trank gern Wein und Schnaps, aber sonst lebte er mit uns sehr einfach” (Renn, *Krieg*, 152).¹⁴

In terms of body types and appearance, then, one must say that positive soldier figures also tend to be physically ideal types in these novels.¹⁵ Remarque’s polarization of Kaczinsky versus Kantorek/Himmelstoß sufficiently illustrates the issue of physical appearance; even the pro-war writers, who tend to attribute greater importance to it, do not deviate from this pattern. It would be an exaggeration to claim that physical appearance plays a fundamental role in battlefield fiction. Nevertheless, the descriptions of the soldiers’ physique and facial characteristics function positivistically as male code.

Übrigens hatte er eine ganz hohe, dünne Stimme. Zuerst hielt ich ihn für einen Dummkopf wie die Perle. Aber dann merkte ich, daß er sogar sehr gescheit war und seinen Verstand nur unter einer fabelhaften Gutherzigkeit verbarg” (*Krieg* 187).

¹³ See Ludwig Renn, *Krieg*, 18.

¹⁴ The right-wing militarists disprefer heavy-set men as positive protagonists. In pro-war novels, the lean, sinewy fighter-type is more likely. In some cases, he is even short, like Vizefeldwebel Krüger in Schauwecker’s *Aufbruch der Nation*: “und er übertrieb nicht, bei weitem der beste Soldat der Kompanie, klein, lebhaft, wie auf Sprungfedern gesetzt” (64). Like Leutnant Fabian, Krüger likes to drink a lot but never loses control: “Er trank gern. Alkohol war ihm Bedürfnis. ‘Das lernt man in Treptow.’ Aber er blieb auch im stärksten Rausch bei Verstand und benahm sich nie so, daß er nicht gewußt hätte, was er tat. Der Alkohol schien nur anfeuernd auf diesen bis zur Nervosität lebhaften Mann zu wirken” (ibid.).

¹⁵ There is abundant textual evidence for this phenomenon. See, for example, the description of Albrecht Urach’s *Kamerad Brenn*, a positive figure: “Brenn war Akrobat. Er war unermüdlich und von einer Albrecht völlig unverständlichen gleichmütigen Heiterkeit, die sein hübsches, knabenhaftes Gesicht im grauesten Elend belebte. Die Uniform, die bei anderen locker hing, saß bei ihm unerhört straff, und er ging mit dem Tornister beinah elegant und nichtachtend durch den zähesten Kot” (*Aufbruch der Nation* 44). This physical description is typical not only because Brenn is strong and good-looking, but also because he has an air of boyish purity about him, like Richthofen, the “Red Baron.”

This male code, i.e. the tacit understanding which physical characteristics correlate to which type of personality, seems to be universal among German men of the early twentieth century, both from the right and left. The third section of this chapter argues that it is part of a much older cultural script largely based on physical stereotypes of masculinity.

ii) *Endurance of Pain and Physical Exhaustion*

The novels cannot rest on such too-simple dichotomies between "good guys" and "bad guys" drawn on birth inheritance alone. How well the men in the novels cope with pain and physical exhaustion thus often becomes more relevant than how they look. Looks, the war novelists seem to agree, can be deceptive about an individual's masculinity and Germanness. A man's toughness and physical stamina, on the other hand, cannot be faked. What a man is really made of shows itself in how well he handles pain. And again, it turns out that there are more similarities than differences between the opposing camps of novelists.

There is a consensus that it is acceptable for German soldiers to groan from the strain of, for example, long marches in the heat with weapons and heavy backpacks.¹⁶ It is also acceptable to be miserable after cold and rainy nights spent in the trench or in the

¹⁶ Compare, for instance, these nearly identical scenes from Renn's *Krieg* and Schauwecker's *Aufbruch der Nation*: "Am nächsten Tag begannen die Märsche. Die Tage waren heiß, und wir waren nicht ans Gebirge gewöhnt. In den ersten Tagen blieben viele an der Straße liegen, im Schatten einer Eberesche, mit aufgerissenem Rock und dem Taschentuch auf dem Kopf" (Renn 16). "Sie waren schon fünf Stunden unterwegs und hatten den zwanzigsten Kilometer zurückgelegt. Es war der erste Frontmarsch, und er war länger und schwerer als ein Garnisonübungsmarsch. Mindestens hundert Mann von den tausend lagen marschkrank rückwärts an den Wegrändern. Zwei Unteroffiziere waren fluchend hinten geblieben, um die Schlappmacher zu sammeln" (Schauwecker 42).

open field. The men are often tired, thirsty, or hungry. It is understandable, the authors suggest, that the men feel afraid, even terrified during artillery bombardment or before an attack; after all, they are only human. It is natural that they scream in pain when they are injured. Renn even breaks down and cries in one scene because he feels guilty for causing harm to his group and ashamed of what he believes was a cowardly decision: “Aber als ich seine Augen sah, und daß sie freundlich waren, da drehte sich der Boden unter mir. Ich legte mich auf den Tisch und weinte. Die Perle streichelte mir die Schulter. Wenn sie sich doch nur nicht um mich kümmern wollten!” (Renn 48). War novels thus do allow for signs of physical and emotional pain -- warriors are not feelingless robots.

However, and this is the golden rule of the successful battlefield novelist, the heroic soldier figure must never let these feelings get the better of him. Regardless of the situation, he must quickly summon the self-control to withstand or overcome the crisis. He must not yield to fear, pain, despair, exhaustion, or deprivation.¹⁷ Like a tacit contract between the literary soldier figure and the presumably male reader, the soldier must cope with almost any degree of physical hardship so that the reader can vicariously enjoy the exhilarating experience of his toughness and heroism.¹⁸ At a visceral level, this is what motivates the often pornographic brutality of war films, war fiction, and other adventure

¹⁷ This mechanism is not limited to Weimar battlefield fiction. It also surfaces, for example, in Joseph Vilsmaier's 1993 film version of Plivier's *Stalingrad* (1945). In one scene, soldier Rohleder receives a letter from his wife telling him that she is having an affair with a Frenchman. Rohleder suffers visibly, rebukes his comrades for their attempts to console him, and then quickly overcomes the pain in order to resume his soldierly duties. If he did not come to terms with the emotional agony, he would lose his man-hero status. A similar scene occurs in Wolfgang Petersen's *Das Boot* (1981). Johann, the machinist, suffers a nervous breakdown and is almost shot by the Captain for refusing his orders. Johann, like Rohleder, overcomes the crisis and turns into an even better soldier for it.

¹⁸ In this sense, Weimar Republic battlefield fiction is no different from modern-day action movies. Images from *Rocky*, *Rambo*, or *The Terminator* come to mind. In both cases, the protagonist endures absurd amounts of pain, thereby vicariously empowering the adoring men and boys in the audience.

books.¹⁹ Their characters are meant to be larger than life so that the voyeuristic reader, attempting to identify with the protagonist, can feel the adrenaline rush and fantasize about himself withstanding the pain under such horrific circumstances.²⁰ It is a process that yields cathartic relief.

The protagonist's courage, pain control, and continued ability to fight are thus meant to be the decisive factors in the reader's/viewer's assessment of his masculinity: he must impress the audience with extraordinary pain endurance. This rule applied to gladiators in Ancient Rome as well as to the participants in male initiation ceremonies throughout world history. It applies to *matadores* in bull fights. It also applies to battlefield fiction written in Germany in the late 1920s. To be sure, the right-wing novelists exploited this mechanism of heroic suffering to a much greater extent than did the left-wing writers.²¹ Nevertheless, even *Im Westen nichts Neues* might not have sold one million copies if Paul Bäumer were not a proud and fear-mastering soldier who keeps on fighting *anyway*: "Wir sind schwach und stumpf, und nur das hält uns, daß noch

¹⁹ It would be interesting to see what the opposite would look like. To my knowledge, there is no well-known war book or film that depicts man in his actual biological frailty. Such an account would not be very uplifting because it would show that lice, fatigue, and an ingrown toenail are already enough to make a soldier's life miserable. In the dirt of the battlefield, any scratch can develop into a life-threatening infection. Instead, we have become so accustomed to grotesque exaggerations of manly resilience that we expect our hero to continue fighting even if he has just lost an arm. *Im Westen nichts Neues* also features such pornographic gore: "Wir sehen Menschen leben, denen der Schädel fehlt; wir sehen Soldaten laufen, denen beide Füße weggefetzt sind; sie stolpern auf den splitternden Stümpfen bis zum nächsten Loch; ein Gefreiter kriecht zwei Kilometer weit auf den Händen und schleppt die zerschmetterten Knie hinter sich her; ein anderer geht zur Verbandstelle, und über seine festhaltenden Hände quellen die Därme; wir sehen Leute ohne Mund, ohne Unterkiefer, ohne Gesicht; wir finden jemand, der mit den Zähnen zwei Stunden die Schlagader seines Armes klemmt, um nicht zu verbluten [...]" (Remarque 137-138).

²⁰ When little boys play war, they already feel stronger just by holding a wooden rifle or by tying a bandanna around the foreheads, like *Rambo*. The props facilitate identification and thus heighten the adrenaline rush of mock combat.

²¹ Wehner's *Sieben vor Verdun* is a typical example of grotesquely exaggerated human endurance.

Schwächere, noch Stumpfere, noch Hilflosere da sind, die mit aufgerissenen Augen uns ansehen als Götter, die manchmal dem Tode entrinnen können” (Remarque 136).

Extreme pain endurance coupled with courage is thus a common denominator of war fiction, regardless of the author’s political conviction. This ability distinguishes the heroic protagonist from his not-so-tough comrades and enemies -- this is a personal trait based on personality, not on genetic inheritance, so that it can apply to all in the war *Männerbund*. While the right-wing novelists often draw attention to this heroic distinction, the left-wing writers tend to understate their protagonists’ ability to withstand pain. Nevertheless, they, too, are well above average in this archetypal masculine category.

iii) *Angriffslust, the “Lust of Attack”*

Significantly, there is one additional trait for the new German soldier-warrior. One would assume that this trait, *Angriffslust*, might be an exclusive hallmark of the pro-war novels, but that is not the case. As the following passages from anti-war novels illustrate, the irrational and powerful “lust for attack” gripped even those soldiers who wound up rejecting the war later. It becomes the novels’ symbol for the common experience binding soldiers of all stations who are proper men.

In *Im Westen nichts Neues*, for instance, the ecstasy of attack appears in a somewhat modified guise; it is not so much the thirst for blood that drives Bäumer and his friends, but rather the animalistic desire to fight for their lives and retaliate against the enemy:

Aus uns sind gefährliche Tiere geworden. Wir kämpfen nicht, wir verteidigen uns vor der Vernichtung. [...] Wir haben eine wahnsinnige Wut, wir liegen nicht mehr ohnmächtig wartend auf dem Schafott, wir können zerstören und töten, um uns zu retten, um uns zu retten und zu rächen. [...]

Das Krachen der Handgranaten schießt kraftvoll in unsere Arme, in unsere Beine, geduckt wie Katzen laufen wir, überschwemmt von dieser Welle, die uns trägt, die uns grausam macht, zu Wegelagerern, zu Mördern, zu Teufeln meinetwegen, dieser Welle, die unsere Kraft vervielfältigt in Angst und Wut und Lebensgier, die uns Rettung sucht und erkämpft. Käme dein Vater mit denen drüben, du würdest nicht zaudern, ihm die Granate gegen die Brust zu werfen! (Remarque 116-117)

The strength and physical courage of these men, therefore, lead them to a kind of selflessness -- or the loss of self in blood lust.

Most often, such bloodlust is actually shown as positive. Renn, the main protagonist in *Krieg*, is wounded during one attack and talks to the field physician about it afterward. What he describes as “wonderful” is how the attack freed everyone from fear:

“Erzählen Sie noch etwas vom Sturm! War das nicht schrecklich?”

“Nein, es war herrlich, wie die vorstürmten alle, - die vorher im Tunnel klagten! Einer hat gesagt, - ich hörte es im Vorübergehen, - es wäre ihm gleich, ob er gefangen würde. Und der ist vorgerannt und hingestürzt. Wahrscheinlich ist er tot.”

“Aber das ist doch nicht herrlich!”

“Doch, Herr Oberarzt, wie sie auf einmal alle Angst verloren hatten! Daß es sie gepackt hatte und sie angriffen, das war unvergleichlich schön!”

Die Angst kam wieder, aber durchleuchtet von dem Gedanken an den herrlichen Angriff. Noch konnte sie nicht Herr werden. (Renn 223)

As these passages illustrate, the various authors share the point of view that there is something primal and cathartic about the act of storming out of the trenches and attacking the enemy.

With few exceptions (e.g. Köppen's *Heeresbericht*), all the bourgeois war novels that describe the war activity of infantry soldiers capture the emotional intensity of these moments. In the pro-war novels, predictably, the German troops appear all the more fearless and fierce:

Sie rannten in einem einzigen Schwunge hindurch und weiter vor. Mit Hurra kamen sie gegen den neuen russischen Graben an, in den deutsche Granaten hineinbarsten. Sie schrien toll und rasend, als sie von oben hineinsprangen. Es gab keinen langen Kampf. Es war nur ein kurzes Durcheinander, dann war der Graben in ihrer Hand. (Schauwecker 118)

It is certainly true that the pro-war novels contain a greater number of such attack scenes, and they also carry a higher emotional charge: storming head-on into the range of enemy fire is the quintessential act of soldierly bravery. However, the exhilaration that accompanies the storming of the enemy trenches is a motif that surfaces consistently in any of the bourgeois infantry novels.

iv) Alienation from the Heimatfront and Abandonment of the Bourgeois Bildungsideal

Another virtually universal motif that grows out of this physical description of the ideal German man is psychological: the alienation from familiar surroundings that the front soldiers feel after a longer period away from home. The men of the physical type described above line up psychologically in very precise ways. The issue of a psychological type and its alienation from the homefront German of the day tends to come up either when the soldiers receive mail in the trenches, which occasionally makes

them aware that the sender of the letter has not the vaguest idea of the *Frontalltag*,²² or when the soldiers are granted home leave (*Heimaturlaub*), which often fills them with apprehension because they anticipate communication problems.

The extreme brutality of the soldier's job is at the heart of this problem, yet they have become so used to the business of war that they find it emotionally easier than dealing with their parents. As was mentioned above, the front line routine is so merciless that the soldiers are rapidly "re-educated" in the sense that many of the bourgeois niceties are stripped away; they are brutalized. Therefore, the soldiers usually feel as though they have lost their connection with the pre-war world, like they no longer belong to the bourgeois families most of them come from.

Moreover, their sense of alienation results from the fact that their comrades in the trenches, with whom they might have spent every day and every night for months, have become more "real" and more meaningful to them than their parents, siblings, girlfriends, or wives back home. In many cases, the *de facto* new family of the front soldier has taken on virtually every function and begun to fulfill all of the soldier's needs. This hard-to-communicate fact makes them reluctant to even face the family of their past. Many of them also do not want to be confronted with the evidence of how drastically the war has changed them -- "how old they have become" -- a realization that is almost inevitable when faced with reality at the *Heimatfront*, a constant reference point. Also, they usually want to "protect" their family from finding out the real nature of trench warfare, lest their

²² Compare, for example, Schauwecker's *Aufbruch der Nation*, 162-164.

mothers be afraid to let them go back to their units, so when they tell stories, they leave out the terrible parts.

When Albrecht Urach is wounded, for example, he is sent to his home town for recovery. The conversation with his parents goes relatively well:

Er erzählte von den Tagen der Front. Die Eltern hörten wortlos zu. Der Vater verschlang jedes Wort mit einem starren, fast düstern Ernst; die Mutter strich ihm manchmal über die Hand, die auf dem Tisch lag. Er selbst war ganz hingenommen von dem Erlebnis und sprach mit einer fortreißenden Lebendigkeit von dem Ungeheuren, das man nur in Tatsachen berichten, dessen Sinn und Endergebnis aber man heute noch nicht in Worte fassen konnte. Die Dinge des Grauens verschwieg er. Der Krieg war noch nicht zu Ende, und er mochte seine Eltern für die Zukunft nicht zu sehr beunruhigen.

“Wie braun du bist,” sagten die Eltern. “Wie gesund du aussiehst!”

(Schauwecker 134).

In a later meeting with the important men of his town, Urach is so disgusted by their idiotic questions and pompous demeanor that he does not know what to tell them. That is the exact same feeling that Paul Bäumer has about his father during his *Heimatururlaub*:

Doch schon mit meinem Vater ist es anders. Er möchte, daß ich etwas erzähle von draußen, er hat Wünsche, die ich rührend und dumm finde, zu ihm schon habe ich kein rechtes Verhältnis mehr. Am liebsten möchte er immerfort etwas hören. Ich begreife, daß er nicht weiß, daß so etwas nicht erzählt werden kann, und ich möchte ihm auch gern den Gefallen tun; aber es ist eine Gefahr für mich, wenn ich diese Dinge in Worte bringe, ich habe Scheu, daß sie dann riesenhaft werden und sich nicht mehr bewältigen lassen. Wo blieben wir, wenn uns alles ganz klar würde, was da draußen vorgeht.

So beschränke ich mich darauf, ihm einige lustige Sachen zu erzählen.

(Remarque 167-168)

Renn's brief visit home is so insignificant that it fills exactly two pages. He observes that his mother makes him a bed in the “honor room” normally reserved for guests: “Jetzt wohnte ich im Ehrenzimmer. Ich galt etwas in der Familie” (Renn 175). He also registers

his own discomfort when his mother prompts him to tell stories: “Nu erzähl mal!’ sagte meine Mutter. Was erzählen? Ich hatte ein Grauen davor. Aber dann kam ich doch ins Reden, und so, daß ich gar nicht wieder aufhörte” (Renn 176).

Therefore, the soldiers’ alienation from their pre-war social network, including the emotional reluctance to rejoin that network, should be added to the list of universal features of pro-war and anti-war novels. As mentioned above, this can be attributed to the powerful function of the trench community, which absorbed the soldiers’ pre-war ties with family, friends, and girlfriends. Moreover, due to their rapid “re-education” through the war, the soldiers also feel compelled to reassess their pre-war education negatively. The universal consensus is that all the schoolbook-type facts, including history, literature, and philosophy, amount to superfluous triviality compared to the type of knowledge the war requires:

Von dem ganzen Kram wissen wir nicht mehr allzu viel. Er hat uns auch nichts genutzt. Aber niemand hat uns in der Schule beigebracht, wie man bei Regen und Sturm eine Zigarette anzündet, wie man ein Feuer aus nassem Holz machen kann – oder daß man ein Bajonett am besten in den Bauch stößt, weil es da nicht festklemmt wie bei den Rippen. (Remarque 89)

The alienation from home and the abandonment of the humanist *Bildungsideale* provide the soldiers with a rigorously pragmatic frame of mind.

Yet this new spiritual state is also directly connected to the physicality of the war experience, a hardening and tempering of the German in the "crucible of experience" that has transformed himself into something else.

v) *Fraternization Across Social Class Boundaries; Experience of Frontgemeinschaft*

That "something else" is, critically, not dependent on education, the homefront, or its social traditions. That the soldier has been tempered in battle does not mean that they have become without feeling, but rather that they are seeking new kinds of psycho-social bonds.

Many of the bourgeois war novels, for example, contain testimony to the emotional comfort that front soldiers derived from the camaraderie in the trenches. Köppen's *Heeresbericht*, Frey's *Pflasterkästen*, Johannsen's *Vier von der Infanterie*, and Renn's *Krieg* are exceptions in the sense that they all maintain a decidedly individualistic perspective: Renn does not like playing *Skat* and Reisiger hates drinking, for example. Nevertheless, even those soldier figures relate to some of their *Kameraden* with considerable affection, although they never wallow in the general community of soldiers. In other words, their *Frontgemeinschaft* may consist of only one or two friends or fellow soldiers they feel close to.

More typically, however, the men perceive of themselves as a member of a clearly defined group that often transgresses social class boundaries and fulfills most of their emotional needs, like a family of a different sort than they would encounter at home. Paul Bäumer, for example, goes through the war as one of eight friends, half bourgeois and half working-class, who tragically die one after the other. Kaczinsky is the father of their group, and due to his "uncanny ability to find food," they sometimes have a very good time:

Hauptsächlich sollen wir auf das Proviantamt achten, das noch nicht leer ist. Verpflegung müssen wir uns aus den Beständen selbst besorgen. Dafür sind wir die richtigen Leute, - Kat, Albert, Müller, Tjaden, Leer, Detering, unsere ganze Gruppe ist da. Allerdings, Haie ist tot. [...] Kat und ich machen einen kleinen Patrouillengang durch die Häuser. Nach kurzer Zeit haben wir ein Dutzend Eier und zwei Pfund ziemlich frische Butter gefaßt. [...] Gleich darauf stehen wir wie verzaubert: In einem kleinen Stall tummeln sich zwei lebendige Ferkel. Wir reiben uns die Augen und sehen vorsichtig wieder hin: sie sind tatsächlich immernoch da. [...] Das gibt ein herrliches Essen. (Remarque 230-231)

Part of Remarque's recipe is the extreme juxtaposition between the horror of the battlefield and the blissful moments of camaraderie behind the front lines, which are usually filled with playing cards, collective laziness, latrine talk, and gluttony. Remarque says it loud and clear: "Das Wichtigste aber war, daß in uns ein festes, praktisches Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl erwachte, das sich im Felde dann zum Besten steigerte, was der Krieg hervorbrachte: zur Kameradschaft!" (Remarque 32).

The deep emotional comfort of the *Männerbund* in the trenches has loud echoes in war fiction across the political spectrum. It is often heightened by idyllic descriptions of surrounding nature. Compare, for instance, the following nearly identical passages taken from Schauwecker's (pro-war) *Aufbruch der Nation* and Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues*.

Allmählich kamen sie wieder zu sich, reckten sich und standen auf. Sie aßen und tranken. Sie betrachteten die grünen Bäume und die wenigen Blumen und glaubten es nicht. Sie befühlten die Blätter, und da begannen sie es zu glauben. Es wuchs Gras. Wenn der Wind kam, warf er Licht und Schatten durcheinander. Die Post war da. Sie aßen Konfekt und tranken Cognac. (Schauwecker 194)

Und rund um uns liegt die blühende Wiese. Die zarten Rispen der Gräser wiegen sich, Kohlweißlinge taumeln heran, sie schweben im weichen, warmen Wind des Spätsommers, wir lesen Briefe und Zeitungen und rauchen, wir setzen die Mützen

ab und legen sie neben uns, der Wind spielt mit unsern Haaren, er spielt mit unsern Worten und Gedanken. (Remarque 15)

Such idyllic moments often prompt the soldiers to ponder the healing power of such unlikely beauty amidst the war, as well as the reasons for their emotional well-being among friends. Urach tells his sidekick, Herse:

“Mensch, Herse – eins weiß ich: so wie es gewesen ist, kann es nie wieder werden. Und wenn sie es tausendmal und mit allen Mitteln so lassen möchten in der Welt – nie wieder kann es so bleiben! Niemals!” [...]

“Ich meine,” antwortete Albrecht, “daß ich mit dir und mit Radke und mit Schramm und Gericke lieber zusammen bin als mit allen meinen Freunden vorm Kriege, und daß ich das bis dahin nie so gemerkt habe wie jetzt.”

“Ja?” sagte Herse. “Es wär’ gut, wenn das so bleibt. Bis jetzt – ich meine bis zum Kriege, haben sich immer nur ganz bestimmte Sorten von Leuten gekannt. Und von den andern hatte man keine Ahnung. Jetzt ist das anders. Ich hab’ früher auch nich gewußt, daß Leute aus deinem Stande so sind, wie du bist. Ich meine so einfach und gut.”

“Es ist viel, daß man das heute merkt,” sagte Albrecht.

“Man muß sehen, ob es so bleibt.” (Schauwecker 194-195)

Herse is clearly from a lower social class than Urach, who is a university student from a bourgeois family, yet both freely admit that they have never known such intense friendships in their previous lives and that they would never have gotten to know one another under normal circumstances.

In *Im Westen nichts Neues*, the tight-knit connection between the four bourgeois schoolboys and the working-class soldiers is already established early on. In one longer conversation with each other, they daydream about what life could be like if the war were suddenly over. The original question was what everyone would do. Answers ranged from

going back to school and learning a profession to getting drunk and spending a week in the bedroom with a woman. Only Bäumer's answer remains vague and impractical:

“Wenn ich darüber nachdenke, Albert,” sagte ich nach einer Weile und wälze mich auf den Rücken, “so möchte ich, wenn ich das Wort Friede höre, und es wäre wirklich so, irgendetwas Unausdenkbares tun, so steigt es mir zu Kopf. Etwas, weißt du, was wert ist, daß man hier im Schlamassel gelegen hat. Ich kann mir bloß nichts vorstellen. Was ich an Möglichem sehe, diesen ganzen Betrieb mit Beruf und Studium und Gehalt und so weiter – das kotzt mich an, denn das war ja immer schon da und ist widerlich. Ich finde nichts – ich finde nichts, Albert.”
Mit einemmal scheint mir alles aussichtslos und verzweifelt. (Remarque 90)

These passages show that *both* Schauwecker and Remarque considered the pre-war bourgeois social order as bankrupt. The only essential difference between them is that the right-wing author suggests that the *Frontgemeinschaft* can be maintained beyond the war, so his perspective is inherently hopeful, while Remarque is under no illusion that the front community will disperse with the end of the war. Bäumer surrenders to despair; his outlook is utterly hopeless. Since he supposedly speaks for an entire generation, his hopelessness must have been a devastating blow to male readers looking for constructive impulses during the 1929 social, economic, political, and often personal crisis.

As this catalogue of shared traits illustrates, both leftist and right-wing authors drew on the same stock repertoire of positive masculine attributes, although they obviously modified them to suit their political objectives. Taken together, these attributes of the new German type are very clearly drawn and recur universally in the era's war novels. Before coming to the conclusion of my argument, it is instructive to see which political perspectives might have been competing with these overwhelming images of masculinity. It is also important to examine what all of these bourgeois war novels

intentionally did not mention, the things they suppressed or omitted. As we have just outlined, both the leftist and the right-wing writers worked toward a *positive* model of masculinity.

In doing so, however, a number of uncomfortable historical facts about trench warfare were considered taboo, since they would have marred the image of the heroic German soldier. To complete the picture, the following section examines a number of such omissions.

1.2 SUPPRESSED ISSUES IN BOURGEOIS BATTLEFIELD FICTION

While the bourgeois battlefield novels created the illusion of transparency and clear distinctions between “good soldiers” and “bad soldiers,” or between acts of bravery and acts of cowardice, the reality of the war was obviously much more complicated and contradictory. The following overview provides a brief sketch of war experiences that did not enter the fictionalized world of the bourgeois novels.

A) Fraternization with the Enemy: The “Christmas Truce 1914”

On the Western Front, on a thirty-mile stretch between the infamous Belgian battle site of Ypres and the La Bassée canal, German and British soldiers laid down their arms on Christmas Day, 1914. This truce was not entirely surprising because the enemies had begun to coordinate sporadic ceasefires since the fall of 1914, when the initially dynamic attack of the Germans ground to a halt and the men took shelter in trenches and increasingly fortified positions. In the beginning, these ceasefires were intended to give each other a chance to eat, use the latrines, and recover the wounded and dead from the

no-man's land between the lines. Such spontaneous ceasefires could last hours or days. Sometimes both sides also made their rhythmic pattern of artillery bombardment predictable so that the resulting enemy casualties would be minimal.

In the fall of 1914, the Westphalian soldier Franz Töns wrote in a letter home:

Die Dreizehner aus Münster sind an einigen Stellen fünfzehn Meter vom Feinde entfernt, bei Tage sind die französischen Offiziere nicht da, dann wird nicht geschossen, die Feldweibel setzen sich auf beiden Seiten auf den Schützengraben und unterhalten sich miteinander. Die Mannschaften wechseln gegenseitig Kognak und Zigaretten aus.²³

These initial acts of fraternization with the enemy led to the so-called "Christmas Truce" of 1914, in which mostly British and German forces participated. When the German soldiers sang Christmas carols their singing was greeted by applause from the enemy trench. Then the British started singing and the Germans cheered. Eventually, the men were brave enough to light candles, put up little Christmas trees on the trench parapet, and actually leave the trenches to share with the enemy whatever Christmas gifts they had received: "Tagelang kehrten die Soldaten [...] dem Krieg den Rücken, trafen sich mit ihren Gegnern im Niemandsland, beschenkten sich mit Plumpudding und Zigarren, tauschten Uniformknöpfe gegen Koppelschlösser und spielten Fußball."²⁴

It is unclear exactly how many soldiers were involved in this illegal truce; historians estimate the number to be between a few hundred and several thousand.²⁵ The

²³ Quoted in Stefan Storz, "Der Krieg gegen den Krieg," *Spiegel Spezial: Die Urkatastrophe des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Nr. 1, 2004, 44-45.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 44. Most recently, this event was fictionalized in the French film *Joyeux Noël* (dir. Christian Carion, 2005).

²⁵ Compare Michael Jürgs, *Der kleine Frieden im Großen Krieg* (München: C.Bertelsmann Verlag, 2003) and Simon Rees, "The Christmas Truce," viewed on April 22, 2006, at 10:30 am, <http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/christmastruce.htm>.

truce was officially over when the British waved a banner in the air that said “Merry Christmas” and a German Captain climbed out of the trench to fire two shots into the air. The war started anew after that. When Erich von Falkenhayn, the Chief of the German Army High Command, heard of these activities, he issued an order that every man who left his position to communicate with the enemy be shot on the spot for high treason. Nevertheless, soldiers on both sides continued to disobey orders through clandestine communication or lulls in artillery activity well into 1915.²⁶

These events were wildly reported in Britain but received much less media coverage in Germany. It is very likely, however, that the news was passed on quickly among the soldiers. Today opinions are divided as to how this truce should be assessed. Pragmatists argue that it was “nothing more than a ‘blip’ – a temporary lull induced by the season of goodwill, but willingly exploited by both sides to better their defenses and eye out one another’s positions.”²⁷ More romantic interpretations view these events as testimony to human sanity and the common sense of the common soldier, who had already grown tired of the senseless slaughter at this early point.

Regardless of the interpretation, the Christmas Truce is a piece of historical evidence that the Generals occasionally lost control of their armies’ activities and that acts of fraternization with the enemy did occur. With the exception of one scene in Köppen’s *Heeresbericht*, none of the battlefield novels discussed in this project mention communication with the enemy. Even Köppen does not state that fraternization did

²⁶ For more details, see Jürigs 12-48.

²⁷ Compare Rees, <<http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/christmastruce.htm>>.

happen, only that Reisinger has the spontaneous idea to climb out of the dugout and shake hands: “Mir wurde beschämend klar, daß ich kein guter Soldat bin. Ich spielte sogar mit dem Gedanken: Wie einfach wäre es, jetzt aufzustehen und ‘Monsieur’ zu rufen. Und dann ginge jeder von uns einundeinenhalben Meter, und wir schüttelten uns die Hand” (Köppen 190). The audience may well have remembered the facts which would only strengthen convictions that the army leaders did not know as much as their soldiers did.

Fraternalization with the enemy was a corrosive activity that could obviously not be tolerated by the Army Command. However, it was a relatively harmless phenomenon compared to other desperate means that soldiers reverted to in order to get out of combat duty.

B) Desertion, Self-Mutilation, and Suicide

In the fictionalized world of the bourgeois battlefield novels, the protagonists are universally heroic in the sense that they never attempt to escape from combat duty. To be sure, the more sensitive characters in the leftist novels do suffer from fear and hopelessness, even depression, but even they always follow orders and attack with gusto when they must.²⁸ Ernst Johannsen’s novel, *Four Infantrymen*, for example, aggressively exposes this paradoxical mindset (*Gehorsam und Pflichtgefühl*) in Nietzschean terms as a “slave” or “herd mentality” (see chapter two). Schauwecker, a pro-war author, also sees the moral problem of unquestioning obedience. On the one hand, he regards it as a virtue

²⁸ Remarque’s Paul Bäumer, Johannsen’s *Four Infantrymen*, Köppen’s Reisinger, as well as Renn in *Krieg* all register their own war fatigue to an extreme extent. However, their heroic disposition (*Haltung*) is constructed in such a way that they cannot allow themselves to disobey. They are trapped in their good faith in authority; warriors despite themselves.

and a military necessity, but he also warns against the potentially catastrophic consequences that could arise if the soldiers' trust in authority should turn out to be misplaced:

Was würden die Frontsoldaten tun, wenn sie plötzlich vor eine Lage gestellt würden, in der sie ohne Leitung von oben als eine geschlossene Masse handeln müßten? Er wußte es nicht, weder vermochte er es in einem bejahenden, noch in einem verneinenden Sinn zu beantworten, und das erschien ihm schlimm genug. Denn auch sie da draußen, sie waren im Grunde nur ein herrliches "Material," wie es kein zweites in der Welt gab. Sie waren alle von einem herrlichen Pflichtgefühl getrieben, aber sie entbehrten wohl einer gewissen Selbständigkeit, die andererseits für den Soldaten wohl nicht gut war, nämlich der Verantwortung aus dem Gewissen heraus. Mit ihrer Pflicht erfüllten sie jeden Befehl, ohne über ihn nachzudenken, und das war wohl das richtige, wenn da auch ein Fehler war, jawohl, ein Fehler in dieser Berechnung. Was war das? Solange mußte es gut gehen mit der bedenkenlosen Pflicht, als der Befehl gut und richtig war. Aber wie nun, wenn der Befehl versagte, wenn er falsch war? Und hier in der Heimat schienen die Befehle falsch zu sein. Ja – was dann? (Schauwecker 263)

Most of the novels resolve this conundrum in the same fashion, namely by deflecting responsibility from the individual soldier. Someone else is always to blame.²⁹

However, identifications of culprits vary. In Remarque's case, responsibility for the senseless carnage of the war is shifted onto certain parent-generation Wilhelminians. The right-wingers account for losing the war through a number of variations of the *Dolchstoß*-legend. Schauwecker and others focus on the incompetence of the military command, the cowardice of the shirkers behind the lines (*Etappenschweine*), and on the treason that Germans on the homefront supposedly committed by not supporting the war

²⁹ The crux of this matter is the problematic tendency to justify and equate actions with military duty. The invocation, "er hat nur seine Pflicht getan," reverberates throughout twentieth-century German history: Remarque successfully used it to stylize men like Paul Bäumer as innocent victims, and Adolf Eichmann tried to use it in his 1961 Jerusalem trial as if he, too, were a victim. There seems to be a cultural tendency in Germany that individual moral judgement can be suspended and virtually any action be excused as long as a superior gave the order for it.

effort to the best of their abilities. Much of their venom is also aimed at able men who faked their way out of military duty (*Drückeberger*), and especially at the profiteers who grew rich through the war (*Kriegsgewinnler*).

With the possible exception of Johannsen's *Four Infantrymen*, none of the bourgeois battlefield novels take issue with the front soldiers themselves. Contrary to historical fact, the reader is led to believe that the fictionalized German soldiers always did the best they could. According to Wehner's *Sieben vor Verdun*, they were even *held back* by the High Command. This is *the* central message of the novels' positive masculinity constructions: "you played well, even if you lost the ballgame." Only Johannsen draws attention to the fact that a soldier who fulfills his duty against his own moral judgment is merely obedient but not really a hero. But if Johannsen's judgment is the harshest one among the novelists, historical reality is an even less forgiving arbiter of the German soldier. That soldier was considerably less a fighting machine than memory would admit.

Stefan Storz describes that the disintegration of the German army and its morale had reached epic proportions by the fall of 1917: "Auch im deutschen Heer kippte die Stimmung. Einige Einheiten mussten von ihren Offizieren mit vorgehaltener Waffe ins Gefecht getrieben werden" (Storz 45). According to Omer Bartov and others, the military justice system at the time was much more forgiving toward deserters than during the Second World War.³⁰ Storz asserts: "Es gab lediglich 49 Todesurteile, nur 18 wurden

³⁰ See, for instance, Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1991) 28-32.

vollstreckt. Schätzungsweise 20,000 deutschen Soldaten gelang es, sich ins neutral Ausland abzusetzen” (ibid.).³¹ By the time of the 1918 Spring Offensive, however, hundreds of thousands of German soldiers refused to fight.³² Large sectors of the army were paralyzed: “Hunderttausende Leichtverwundete marschierten Richtung Heimat oder stürmten Krankenzüge, um nach Hause zu kommen” (ibid.).

The men used any means at their disposal to sabotage their transfer to the Western Front, including vandalizing trains and train stations. Twenty percent of the replacement troops simply ran away during the transport. The crisis in German *Kampfmoral* became so pronounced that thousands let themselves be captured by the *Entente* troops without putting up a fight: “Teile der Infanterie hielten die Hände hoch, wenn der Feind noch einen Kilometer entfernt war” (ibid.). Storz concludes:

Allein im ersten Halbjahr 1918 desertierten beim deutschen Heer etwa 40,000 Soldaten, bis Kriegsende stieg ihre Zahl auf schätzungsweise 200,000 Fahnenflüchtige. Insgesamt entzogen sich in den letzten Kriegsmonaten vermutlich eine Million Soldaten dem Schlachten. Die deutsche Armee war am Ende nicht viel mehr als ein Offizierskorps ohne Truppe. (Storz 45)

Apart from such mass-scale refusal to fight, soldiers reverted to the most drastic means of escaping combat duty: they mutilated themselves or, as the historian Bruno Schrep estimates in about 3,000 cases, they committed suicide.³³ Some men used the same

³¹ On the French side, rebellion against the Army Command under Robert Nivelle grew so massive between April and September, 1917, that 23,385 soldiers were court-martialled and the General had to step down. The disintegration of the German army grew rampant in the fall of 1917, when many divisions were transferred from the eastern theatre to the western front. Approximately ten percent of the soldiers deserted the army during that time, and 20,000 fled to neutral foreign countries. See again Storz, 45.

³² Also compare Romain Leick, “Das große Sterben,” *Spiegel Spezial: Die Urkatastrophe des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Nr. 1, 2004, 34-43.

³³ Bruno Schrep, “Gebrochen an Leib und Seele,” *Spiegel Spezial: Die Urkatastrophe des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Nr. 1, 2004, 58-60.

strategy as Kantorek in *Im Westen nichts Neues*: during an attack, they pretended to have been hit and lay flat on the ground. The fear of even worse injuries or death through gunfire and exploding shrapnel also drove the men to all sorts of self-mutilations:

Um dem Inferno zu entkommen, fügten sich kriegsmüde Soldaten schwerste Verletzungen zu, häufig mit dem eigenen Gewehr: Sie jagten sich Kugeln in einen Fuß oder eine Hand, einzelne schossen sich die Finger ab. Im kalten Russland entledigten sich manche ihrer Stiefel, um mit erfrorenen Füßen nach Hause geschickt zu werden.

Feldärzte meldeten Rekruten, die Säure geschluckt hatten, die sich Petroleum unter die Haut gespritzt oder sich mit ätzenden Tinkturen eingerieben hatten – alles, um nicht weiterkämpfen zu müssen. (Schrep 60)

Since none of these events appear in the battlefield novels of the era, it appears that the authors could be said to have actively suppressed the uncomfortable historical truths of desertion, auto-mutilation, and suicide, in order to uphold and protect a heroic, if unrealistic, image of the common soldier.³⁴

C) Revolutionary Activity and *Klassenkampf*: Theodor Plivier's *Des Kaisers Kulis* (1930) and Adam Scharrer's *Vaterlandslose Gesellen* (1930)

The novelists also did not allow alternative political discourses to enter their fictional world, which, at least among the leftist bourgeois writers, existed within a bizarre political vacuum. While Paul Bäumer and Renn maintain a façade of total political cluelessness, the working-class men in Plivier's and Scharrer's novels register

³⁴ While the late 1920s war novels avoided images of unheroic behavior, there are several films about the Great War that did include them. See, for example, Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1957) and Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *A Very Long Engagement* (2004); as does Christian Carion's recent *Joyeux Noël* (2005) .

the signs of the times and act on them. In so doing, they adduce further moments of history almost totally absent from more famous war novels of the era.

Theodor Plivier (1892-1955) came from a Berlin working-class family. His colleague, Adam Scharrer (1889-1948), was the oldest son of a shepherd from a small Bavarian village. He had sixteen siblings. Scharrer attempted to evade conscription when the war broke out, which is one of the many autobiographical traits he shares with Hans Betzold, the protagonist in *Vaterlandslose Gesellen*. While Scharrer left school at the age of thirteen to work as a shepherd and then as a locksmith, Plivier had an adventurous youth. He even traveled to South America aboard a ship to work in a Chilean saltpeter mine until he returned to Germany and was forced by the police to join the navy after a 1914 Hamburg bar brawl. Scharrer spent the war years in the infantry on the Western Front and in the east. After he was wounded, he returned to Germany and worked in an ammunition factory. As a die-hard communist, he was a member of the *Spartakus-Bund* and participated in the strikes of the munitions workers in 1917 and 1918. Plivier was sympathetic to the communist cause and spent eleven years (1934-1945) in exile in the Soviet Union, but he never joined the party. He is sometimes described as an "Individualanarchist."³⁵

Their respective political affiliations had a great impact on the success of their literary work and distinguished their story-telling from that of their contemporaries. The

³⁵ Compare Maggie Sargeant, "Roman der deutschen Kriegsflotte oder Roman der geschundenen deutschen Arbeiter? Theodor Plivier: *Des Kaisers Kulis* (1930)," in Thomas F. Schneider and Hans Wagener, eds., *Von Richthofen bis Remarque: Deutschsprachige Prosa zum I. Weltkrieg* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003) 359-373.

danger inherent in that difference emerges in the publication history of the two books. Initially, Plivier's publisher had been Gustav Kiepenheuer, but after Kiepenheuer had read *Des Kaisers Kulis*, he decided that the novel would not fit into his *Verlag's* program after all. Plivier himself rejected the offer from *Internationaler Arbeiter-Verlag* because it was affiliated with the Communist Party (KPD). He wound up publishing his novel through the leftist *Malik Verlag*, Berlin, although Malik insisted on a serial pre-publication in the communist periodical *Die Rote Fahne*. The book became a great success, and by 1932, it had been translated into eighteen languages.³⁶ By contrast, Scharrer's *Vaterlandslose Gesellen* was published by the KPD in Berlin and Vienna in late 1929 and early 1930, and even reprinted by two newspapers, but it still never took off. In fact, it would have vanished into oblivion if the GDR *Aufbau-Verlag* had not retrieved it through two reprintings in 1951 and 1952.³⁷

The historical incidents in these two novels make them very susceptible to being denounced as defeatist, socialist, or communist. *Des Kaisers Kulis* describes the events that led up to the sailors' rebellion of 1917.³⁸ Authenticated through Plivier's personal history in the navy, the novel intersperses documentation with fiction, resulting in a convincing portrayal of social injustice. The men who suffer the effects of this social injustice, a loose band of sailors named Jan Geulen, Dierck Butendrift, Karl Kleesattel, Kuddl Bülow, Alwin Köbis, Alrich Buskohl, and Vierkant, are initially not interested in

³⁶ For more details, see Sargeant 361.

³⁷ For more details, see Ulrich Dittmann, "Das erste Kriegsbuch eines Arbeiters. Adam Scharrer: *Vaterlandslose Gesellen* (1930)" Thomas F. Schneider and Hans Wagener, eds., *Von Richthofen bis Remarque: Deutschsprachige Prosa zum I. Weltkrieg* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003) 375-386..

³⁸ Plivier decided to write this book after he had read the *Vossische Zeitung* pre-publication of Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues*. Compare Sargeant 361.

strike, mutiny, or any kind of insubordination. The narrative makes it clear that their dissatisfaction gradually grows, and finally erupts, as the gulf between their own plight and the officers' privileges widens. All of them are hard-working and experienced sailors who can actually assess nautical questions much better than their commanding officers.

The arrogance and injustice with which the officers treat the *Kulis* (sailors) are emblems of what Plivier finds wrong with the Prussian system:

Immer wieder zeigt Plivier die Kluft zwischen Unterkunfts- und Arbeitsbedingungen der Mannschaften und der Offiziere, insbesondere in Bezug auf Nahrungs- und Seifenration, Heimat- und Landurlaub. Die pragmatischen Angelegenheiten bewegen die Matrosen dazu, kleine Widerstandsakte gegen die Marinehierarchie zu leisten. Der Feind ist nicht die britische Grand Fleet, sondern die Offiziersschicht, deren Kriegsdienst bis hin zum Flottenchef durch Untätigkeit und Inkompetenz charakterisiert ist. (Sargeant 362-363)

Aside from the sailors' anger and frustration about their scanty food rations and shore-leaves, they feel genuine professional outrage at the farcical (mis-)management of the Imperial Navy. They understand that the officers only "do time" aboard a ship to improve their reputation and to get promoted: they do not need to know anything.

The sailors themselves, by contrast, are used to hard work from their history on merchant ships and cannot accept the idleness to which they are condemned.³⁹ They perceive the war as a gigantic waste of time, knowing full well that the British fleet cannot be defeated simply because their ships are faster and have a better firing range.⁴⁰

This knowledge sets them apart from their clueless colleagues in the western trenches:

Die Matrosen [...] verstehen den gesellschaftlichen und politischen Rahmen, in dem die Marine operiert, und, im Gegensatz zu den Soldaten in Remarques *Im Westen nichts Neues*, können sie Schlußfolgerungen über die Strategien, die an

³⁹ Compare Sargeant 363.

⁴⁰ See Theodor Plivier, *The Kaiser's Coolies* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931) 205-206.

der Spitze der Organisation eingesetzt werden, ziehen. In einer Diskussion über die Diskrepanz zwischen deutschen und britischen Fähigkeiten auf See besitzen die Matrosen genug Informationen, um Lösungen für das Problem anzubieten. (Sargeant 363)

In short, Plivier's novel effectively extrapolates from the microcosm of the navy to Wilhelminian society in general. The reader understands that the subordination of the competent sailors to the pompous and inept officers is as unjustifiable as the exploitation of the poor urban working class by factory owners. Unlike the infantry novels, then, Plivier's story thus presents a much larger, socio-political perspective that explains the war as a product of a faulty and outdated system. It also pays tribute to the enormous war effort that women made, while the bourgeois novels universally sidelined women in the roles of (sick) mothers, sad girlfriends, or little French concubines (see paragraph iv).

That is the reason why, when Jan Geulen visits his mother and sister during one home leave to Mülheim an der Ruhr, the picture that emerges from the novel is radically different from the one that Paul Bäumer or Albrecht Urach painted. They spoke of alienation when they conveyed representations of German workers, where Geulen speaks with compassion, understanding the role these classes have played in German history: "The street ran right through Thyssen's Rolling and Steel Mills. Workshops and blast-furnaces, railway tracks, and clouds of steam, and beside it all a dusty row of houses" (Plivier 188). His mother is at work in the factory and his little sister, Katie, has been waiting in line for potatoes all day. Jan sees all the women patiently waiting in line:

Women! They stood in fours, a long queue, nearly a hundred" [...] Jan sauntered along past the queue. Those women – their skirts hung in stiff folds, and they wore heavy boots or wooden clogs. No figures, no faces – not feminine faces. They looked at Jan and remained quite hard. (189)

Many of the women are emaciated. Some of them are so desperate that they stuff cushions under their clothes to make it seem as if they are pregnant, hoping for preferential treatment. His thirteen-year old sister puts him in the picture about the harsh reality of the homefront:

Women stuffed cushions under their skirts! Those were Russians! In the barracks there the “yellow girls” lived, the “canary birds.” “What, don’t you know that? The women from the powder-mill. They live there because nobody’ll have ‘em. They cough and spit so. But they earn a mint o’ money. They always wear gloves and put on veils when they go marketing.”

A week’s home leave. Jan asked no more questions. (Plivier 191)

When Jan’s sister and two little brothers undress at night, he is appalled by their malnutrition: “what skinny arms and big, protruding stomachs! Jan had seen children with stomachs like that in the famine quarters of Chinese seaports” (191).

The effect of these harrowing impressions is two-fold. Firstly, Plivier establishes a balanced connection between the women’s hard work in the steel mills or ammunitions factories and the men’s work on the ships, resulting in a *de facto* gender equality. And secondly, the reader comes to appreciate the sailors’ erupting mutiny not only as a form of political protest, but also as a humane rebellion against the obscenity of social exploitation. Therefore, sailor Köbis’ call for peace and a national *Klassenkampf* seems quite justified in the end:

“We’ve got eighty admirals fussing round, and they’re nearly all ashore, occupying positions that draw princely pay. And then there’s the generals and the governors of the conquered provinces, and not one of them will give up his post if he can help it. And the shareholders and dividend-eaters earning millions on guns and substitute materials.”

“The war’s one vast business deal.”

“And there’ll be an end of the swindle when we recognize it and refuse to go on. Comrades! It’s each for all, and all for each! Better an end with horror than a horror without end! Down with the war!” (Plivier 272)

While Plivier meticulously constructs this passionate appeal for peace and social justice through gradually rising pressure on the sailors’ already unfortunate position, Scharrer’s *Vaterlandslose Gesellen: Das erste Kriegsbuch eines Arbeiters* takes this political momentum as its starting point.

From the beginning, it is evident that Scharrer sees *Heimat* and *Front*, hence capitalist production and the war, as closely connected (a graphic realization of the alignment of the military-industrial complex), while all of the bourgeois authors that we will encounter present the two worlds as clearly divided. As was mentioned above, Scharrer’s protagonist, Hans Betzoldt, shares the social background and political perspective of the author. To avoid conscription, he had been hiding with forged papers among worker friends, which in turn subjected him to the permanent fear of being discovered. He also suffered from living in anonymity and isolation, so he finally presents himself to the officials.⁴¹

Class position is the key to experiences of the war. Betzoldt is a twenty-five year old lathe operator from a poor, rural Bavarian family. Due to the hunger and misery he experienced in his childhood, he feels a natural allegiance to the cause of the proletariat: he is a “klassenbewußter Arbeiter” with a political and social worldview that is already fully formed as the war breaks out.⁴² Since the war is portrayed as simply a “continuation

⁴¹ See Dittmann 382.

⁴² Compare Gollbach 129.

of capitalist politics by other means” (Scharrer 226), *Vaterlandslose Gesellen* is not a *Bildungsroman*; there is no re-education, Betzoldt already knows what war is.⁴³ Various figures in the novel, including Betzoldt, a French working-class woman, and a Polish worker, speak in unison about the war as “Gier nach Profit” (53), fought in the interest of big capitalists and bank conglomerates, as well as in the name of capitalist nations and their politics of imperialist expansion, a “Konkurrenzkampf um den Absatz auf dem Weltmarkt” and a “Platz an der Sonne” (187). But Scharrer’s/Betzoldt’s view on the war goes beyond the political perspective.

Given this opposite political ethic, it is no surprise that this novel reverses each of the elements that the bourgeois novelists employed for their positive masculinity models: whatever they painted “white” and “good” is now “black” and “bad.” Betzoldt hates the army from day one. Already on his way to the barracks, he likens himself to a man who was sentenced to death: “die freiwillige Kapitulation eines flüchtigen Todeskandidaten, der, lückenlos umzingelt, keinen Ausweg mehr sieht” (Scharrer 38-39). He is as resentful during his military training as he is later on at the front. He perceives all aspects of being a soldier as a humiliating subordination to the military hierarchy, which makes him angry, depressed, stubborn, and obstinate. However, he never lets himself be intimidated by his superiors, even if they threaten to punish him, culminating in one scene where he refuses to obey a direct order, which, had he followed it, would have cost him his life.⁴⁴

⁴³ See Adam Scharrer, *Vaterlandslose Gesellen. Das erste Kriegsbuch eines Arbeiters* (Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1974) 187.

⁴⁴ See Gollbach 131.

Scharrer uses Betzoldt's front line experiences to expose the standard bourgeois model of *Kameradschaft* and *Heldentum* as false. The only friends he makes are like-minded fellow proletarians. He loathes the obedient young soldiers from the bourgeoisie ("Herrensöhnchen" [139]), who he regards as "pliable material in the hands of the ruling class," yet physically unable to endure the harsh requirements of the war, "verlaufene Küken" (139).⁴⁵ To Betzoldt, the bourgeois-military education that these men underwent deprived them of critical thinking and prepared them for "das Morden": "Man macht die Menschen zu solchen Idioten, damit ihnen später das Verbrecherische ihres Tuns nicht zum Bewußtsein kommt" (Scharrer 49). While the bourgeois authors maintained that the front community of soldiers often transcended social class boundaries, Scharrer/Betzoldt does not tolerate blurred class divisions: only the enlightened worker passes the test.⁴⁶

This insight, in turn, prompts him to dismiss front line camaraderie as a fake and "cheap" (67) by-product of the war that is automatically generated by the shared fear of death.⁴⁷ He debunks the myth of *Frontkameradschaft* by calling it a lie: "Die Kameradschaft im Krieg ist die größte Lüge, die je erfunden wurde. Sie war niemals eine freiwillige, sondern immer eine Gemeinschaft von Todeskandidaten" (Scharrer 67). There is also no heroism, but pervasive fear, which makes men cower instead of attack: "keiner will vorgehen, keiner will der erste sein" (69), "jeder sinnt, wie er sich vor der großen Ehre, diesem Heldentod, drücken kann" (73). Although Scharrer's sabotage of the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 132; 134.

⁴⁶ Scharrer claims that the bourgeois "Herrensöhnchen" (139) are "too afraid to declare solidarity to the common *Muschkoten*" (139). The only exception to this pattern is one Lieutenant, who is a "Vertreter der feinen Welt," yet helps Betzoldt find employment in the industry. Later on, this Lieutenant is also forced to admit defeat against the bureaucrats and chauvinists in power. Compare Dittmann 383.

⁴⁷ Gollbach 133.

heroic ideal of the German soldier is obviously politically motivated, it bears a closer resemblance to historical reality than the fiction of the bourgeois narratives.

Like Plivier, Scharrer locates the *Klassenkampf* (historically attestable in Weimar society) in the opposition between the common (proletarian) soldiers and the ruling elite of the military hierarchy. Officers appear as a uniform group that distinguishes itself through arrogance and cynicism (an ahistorical depiction because of real differences between families with generations of military traditions, versus newly minted officers): “Die Kerls können doch nicht ewig leben!” (Scharrer 102).⁴⁸ They enjoy good food and accommodation throughout the war and usually find a way to stay out of danger: “Von den Offizieren kam keiner mit” (213-214). The common soldiers register this social injustice and react with growing discontent and obstinacy, hence engage in the beginning stages of rebellion against the military oppression. Like Plivier, Scharrer transfers this exact constellation to the homefront, where the industrial workers are faced with, and finally go on strike against, the same type of oppression, exploitation, and injustice. This tale thus uses a fictionalization to motivate a historically attested event and render it plausible to a reader who likely had been told that such protest was clear defeatist.

⁴⁸ Scharrer/Betzoldt gives the mid-ranked Sergeants the benefit of the doubt and exempts them from his scathing judgment. Although they do represent the military hierarchy, hence the interests of the ruling class, they can still be good people and good soldiers: “Er ist zweifellos – auf seine Art – ein guter Mensch und ein noch besserer Soldat. Er ist der deutsche Militarismus ohne ‘Auswüchse’. Er ist gut, dumm, kindisch, willenlos, ein exakt arbeitendes Rädchen in der großen Maschinerie, die die Menschen und alles, was Menschen schufen und entwickelten, zu Blut und Schutt und Dreck stampft und brennt” (Scharrer 117). See Gollbach 135.

Therefore, Plivier and Scharrer share with their fellow novelists from the radical right wing the ability to transform the war experience into something productive, into a political vision. Both political visions essentially advocate the abolition of the German bourgeoisie, albeit from diametrically opposed ends of the political spectrum: Plivier and Scharrer advocate a communist revolution while the right-wing, if one can call their vision a political concept, strive for a German nation unified by a strong leader and a militaristic ideology, hence, a dictatorship. However, the right-wingers tend in general to downplay and mythologize the suffering and sheer human cost of the war in favor of a heroic masculine ideal, hence abandoning humanist compassion. Plivier and Scharrer, in contrast, reveal the hollowness of military manliness by emphasizing its inappropriateness vis-à-vis the enormity of human agony:

Scharrer schildert eindringlich Grauen und Elend an der Front, den Krieg “in seinen vielfältigen barbarischen Erscheinungsformen.” Er beschreibt Verletzungen und Tod, Hunger und Strapazen, Krankheiten und Wahnsinn als die sinnlose Zerstörung des Humanen und der Zivilisation. Im Vordergrund stehen die Erniedrigung und Vernichtung, die Schändung, das Leid und die Verelendung des einfachen Soldaten. Der Autor betont den ursächlichen Zusammenhang mit dem Leid der unterdrückten Menschen in der Heimat und in den von Deutschland besetzten Gebieten und hofft auf die Revolution der Unterdrückten [...]. (Gollbach 136)

The brutality with which the war destroys everything that is good and beautiful is reflected in Scharrer’s descriptions of people.

In the following typical scene, Betzoldt is talking to his wife (Sophie), trying to make her understand that he has no choice but to return to his unit, just before Christmas

of 1915. Hence, he is on his way from his home to the front. At the same time, a monstrous emblem of the front (Alfred) comes home to them:

Das "Fest der Liebe" naht zum zweiten Male. An den Bahnhöfen stehen sie in langen Fronten. Sie schreiben keine patriotischen Sprüche mehr an die Wagen, ihr Gesang ist verstummt. Die Fähnchen auf den Kriegskarten machen nicht mehr viel Arbeit, es ist oft "Nichts Neues" zu melden. Die Preise klettern, klettern; der Hunger geht um im Lande. Von den Kanzeln herab eifern die Diener Gottes, um im Namen ihres Gottes zum heiligen Mord aufzurufen. Scharen von Kriegsfreiwilligen - von Kindern - sind schon geschlachtet. Man muß auf immer jüngere Jahrgänge zurückgreifen.

Wir sind nicht überrascht, als uns drei Wochen später der "Rote Schein" von neuem zufliegt.

Als ich ihr sage: "Ich gehe, Sophie", drückt sie kaum merklich meine Hand. Mein Entschluß war längst fertig, schon an jenem Abend, als sie zusammenbrach, und sie mir, der ich um sie fürchtete, bestätigte:

"Hans, ich bin schwanger!"

Daß sie so bitterlich weinte, hatte jedoch noch einen andern Grund.

Alfred ist hier. Ich hätte ihn fast nicht wiedergekannt. Sein Mund hängt durch den abgeschossenen Unterkiefer so schräg ins Gesicht, als wäre ihm das Fundament weggerissen. Als hinge diese Seite nur an dem Auge, das viel größer scheint als das andere und immer läuft. Ein ungleichmäßiger Bart versucht das Heldentum zu verdecken, das ihn zeichnet.

So kehrte er heim, will seinen Jungen auf den Schoß nehmen. Aber sein Kind fürchtet sich. "Geh fort, was willst du hier? Du bist nicht mein Papa. Ich mag dich nicht!" (Scharrer 145)

Like Remarque, Scharrer simplistically projects negative physical attributes onto what he regards as (ideologically) negative figures. Alfred, in the quote above, is an extreme example, but the black-and-white scheme appears consistently throughout the novel, as I have noted is common practice. The enemy in the *Klassenkampf* looks like this: "Seine langen Haare [...] fallen ihm wie eine verwaschene Perücke über seinen ausdruckslosen Schädel. Seine glattrasierte Fratze unter dem schmutzig-gelben Haargarten verrät nur zu deutlich, daß ihn an Hinterlist und Verschlagenheit so leicht keiner übertrumpfen kann"

(Scharrer 54-55).⁴⁹ Ideological friends, by contrast, are also beautiful: “Ich schaue mir Klaus von der Seite an. Sein kräftiges Kinn sitzt auf dem muskulösen Hals wie aus Marmor gemeißelt. [...] Seine massive Stirn ist in der Mitte durch eine große Falte geteilt. [...] Ein Bild urwüchsiger Kraft und Selbstlosigkeit” (19).

As these examples illustrate, left-wing authors like Scharrer strove to deconstruct the heroic image of military masculinity by offering additional entry points into history for their readers, in order to replace general stereotypes about little-heard groups in World War I with images that evoke human compassion, implicitly synonymous with communist ideology. Still, the aesthetics of the masculine ideal have not changed in the process, only in that its physical form is filled with a non-militaristic ideology. This new man of the radical left is also a brave fighter, but only in the *Klassenkampf*. His enemies are not the Russians or the French, but the greedy capitalists and pompous officers that represent the German ruling class.

Hence, for writers across the political spectrum, the ideal German man is strong and beautiful. There is no such thing as an ugly hero. What their heroes think, say, or do, however, is simply a matter of each author’s political opinion. One fundamental difference that does exist between bourgeois and communist writers, however, is how “their men” view women. In the above discussion of Plivier, we have seen that he depicted women as hard workers and fellow sufferers of social exploitation, while the bourgeois authors tend to stereotype women in the relatively sheltered roles of mothers or

⁴⁹ There is abundant evidence of Scharrer expressing his disdain for the bourgeoisie or for military men through descriptions of their physique: “Sein häßlicher Mund unter dem lächerlich dünnen Spitz- und Schnurrbart bleibt aber in einem blöden Grinsen stecken” (Scharrer 259). For more details, see Gollbach 137.

girlfriends. Here again, leftist history is being fairly represented to call the master narratives of the German army and the German home front into question by pointing to real historical evidence otherwise repressed in the front novels encountered to this point.

D) Women and Their Perspective: Adrienne Thomas, *Die Katrin wird Soldat* (1930)

One other set of representation conventions emerge across the board in these novels: they are written for a particular male point of view. In Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues*, as well as in most of the other bourgeois battlefield novels, women play extremely insignificant roles. They appear sporadically as absent wives or in the sexual role of French girlfriends, tending to the soldiers' erotic needs, often in return for food. They also appear as (sick) mothers, as in *Im Westen nichts Neues*, or as crying, caring but naïve mothers, as in Schaufwecker's *Aufbruch der Nation* or Köppen's *Heeresbericht*:

Die Mutter: "Ach mein Junge, wer hätte das gedacht. Aber ihr wolltet ja ins Feld. Wir Frauen verstehen wohl nichts davon." Reisiger, für sich: Nun weint sie auch noch. Wenn ich doch wieder an der Front wäre. Hättet ihr Frauen euern Männern und Söhnen verboten, mit Inbrunst und Zorn verboten, ein einziges Gewehr anzufassen – Aber was wissen Frauen vom Krieg! (Köppen 212)

Occasionally, women also enter the picture in the guise of nurses. In some novels, for instance Renn's *Krieg*, they do not appear at all.

The general consensus in bourgeois battlefield fiction is that women exist in a parallel universe, from which the soldiers are severed and estranged, and that women ought to remain outside the "manly" world of war. As was mentioned above, the men in combat undergo a process of re-education that is marked by an extreme reduction of emotional and physical needs. The bourgeois fictionalizations of the war experience

suggest that the all-male *Frontgemeinschaft* functioned as a comforting receptor of the soldiers' reduced emotional needs, thereby absorbing one of the primary functions of women. This is the more benign mechanism of women displacement.

In more extreme cases, women were entirely replaced with “material” that was available in the soldiers' universe. Due to the complete physical absence of women, the men in uniform developed a symbolic concept of femininity distilled into an abstract category that they could freely project on the objects with which they had formed an emotional relationship, for example their weapons. “Femininity” or even “virginity” also served as labels that could be attached to persons, objects, or behaviors that broke the meticulously defined male code. Any man who did not abide by the male code of discourse, appearance, or behavior, was not a man, therefore a woman. Anything outside the male code could become “feminine” by default. In most cases, soldiers who deviated from the male code were judged negatively: they became “sissies” or “pansies.” In rare cases, deviation from the male code was perceived as un-manly yet awesome in the sense of “sexually pure.”

One such example is Manfred von Richthofen, the “Red Baron” of flying history. The projection of purity went so far as to make Richthofen a virgin, in the public mind. In one episode, which Richthofen classifies as a “sehr niedliche Geschichte,” a captured British pilot mentions a rumour that is being told on the other side: “daß in der roten Maschine Richthofens ein Mädchen säße, so etwas Ähnliches wie Jeanne d'Arc.”⁵⁰

⁵⁰ See Jörg Bernig, “Anachronistisches Kriegsbild, Selbstinszenierung und posthume Heroisierung. Manfred von Richthofen: *Der rote Kampfflieger* (1917),” Thomas F. Schneider, Hans Wagener, eds., *Von*

Richthofen's comment: "Er hatte damit keinen Witz machen wollen, sondern war selbst davon überzeugt, daß tatsächlich in der pervers angestrichenen Kiste nur eine Jungfrau sitzen konnte" (Bernig 108). Jörg Bernig identifies this episode as the only mentioning of sexuality or eroticism in Richthofen's otherwise non-sexual memoirs: "Aus dem knabenhaften Richthofen, strahlender jugendlicher Held, als der er auch durch die posthumen Heroisierungen im nationalen Gedächtnis aufbewahrt werden sollte, wird durch Ausstattung mit 'perversen' Attributen ein Mädchen, eine Jungfrau" (108).

"Perversion" in the context of the military male code, therefore simply signifies an extreme deviation from it, like Richthofen's red airplane. He is aristocratic, odd, and hence oddly gendered. On the language level, the transfer of sexual attributes to objects or machinery seems to have been common practice when an author or orator tried to turn a potentially positive public figure into something less acceptable. For instance, Bernig quotes from a 1915 volume of the *Zeitschrift für den deutschen Unterricht*, in which a certain Rudolf Mothes provides the following insight into pilot language (*Feldfliegersprache*):

Wer zum ersten Male im Flugzeug aufsteigt, wir entjungfert [...]. Einzelne Teile des Flugzeuges entlehnen ihre Bezeichnung dem Menschen- oder Tierkörper. [...] Umgekehrt werden auch einzelne Teile des menschlichen Körpers mit Flugzeugteilen verglichen. So bezeichnet man Beine als Fahrgestell. [...] Das höchste Lob für eine Kiste ist, daß sie schnell ist. [...] Deshalb bedeutet schnell die guten Eigenschaften überhaupt. [...] Ein schnelles Mädchen ist ein schönes Mädchen. Ein sehr schnelles Mädchen ist ein sehr schönes Mädchen. [...] Als lobendes Beiwort wird in gewissen Verbindungen neben oder statt 'schnell' auch 'sauber' gebraucht. [...] Wie Löhnung, Kommißbrot und Quartier empfängt der Flieger eine saubere, gnädige Frau. (Bernig 108)

Richthofen bis Remarque: Deutschsprachige Prosa zum I. Weltkrieg (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2003) 97-111.

On the one hand, this transfer of attributes can be interpreted as reflections of affection for the weapons that soldiers rely on for their personal protection. On the other hand, this male language code reveals blatant misogyny (and anti-aristocracy) because calling an airplane or a rifle “woman” (or worse) also implies that the soldiers regard their indiscriminate treatment of the two as justified, an abuse of privilege. “She” is at his service, he is in control, and she had better not refuse his command.

With a number of harmless exceptions, such displacement mechanisms remain invisible in the bourgeois battlefield novels. The soldiers’ sexuality is reduced to a minimum or non-existent. Sexual aggression is an absolute taboo. Where it does exist, it is trivialized or veiled in jovial terms:

“Meine Fresse nochmal,” sagt Haie, und sein Gesicht taut auf, “dann würde ich mir so einen strammen Feger schnappen, so einen richtigen Küchendragoner, weißt du, mit ordentlich was dran zum Festhalten, und sofort nichts wie rin in die Betten! Stell dir mal vor, richtige Federbetten mit Sprungmatratzen. Kinners, acht Tage lang würde ich keine Hose wieder anziehen.” (Remarque 82)

What is most important in this discussion is the fact that all women in the bourgeois war books are reduced to either their sexual “function” or their nurturing function. They never appear in any other capacity. Only the communist war books developed a fuller appreciation of women.

One of the era's few novels written by women, Adrienne Thomas’ novel *Die Katrin wird Soldat*, must be seen in this light. If women had no place as literary characters in battlefield fiction, they were, of course, even more rigorously excluded from

authorship.⁵¹ The consensus was that women knew nothing about the war, so they could not possibly produce compelling accounts of it. Adrienne Thomas chose the most elegant approach to make her voice heard against such massive opposition. She wrote a war book from the point of view of a nurse working at a dressing station in Metz, Alsace-Lorraine, thus presenting a perspective that cut right into the juncture between the civilian world and the battlefield, and the geographical border between Germany and France.

Through this novel, Adrienne Thomas "rectified" a deficiency in the all-male world of war fiction because she proved compellingly that the war not only destroyed the men who fought it, but also the women had lived through it behind the lines -- a historical fact which is almost universally excluded from the Front literature I will be describing in the next chapters. The novel follows a diary format (often considered a "women's genre") and consists of three sections, the third of which is entitled "Die Katrin wird Soldat" and covers the time frame from August 4, 1914, to December 9, 1916, shortly before Katrin dies of pneumonia. While the first two sections describe a normal existence for a young girl from a bourgeois family, the third part sucks her into a maelstrom of horrific experiences. Katrin is in a unique position to distinguish between the official victorious

⁵¹ This is the reason why *Die Katrin wird Soldat* was initially not even recognized as *Kriegsliteratur*. Helga Schreckenberger explains: "Anfänglich wurde *Die Katrin wird Soldat* vom Verlag jedoch nicht als Anti-Kriegsbuch sondern vielmehr als eine für Frauen geschriebene Liebesgeschichte vermarktet. Darauf verweisen nicht nur die acht Herzen formende Umrahmung der Ankündigung des Buches im *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel*, sondern auch der Inhalt der Ankündigung selbst: Es führt den Titel 'Die Katrin wird Soldat' und ist ein Liebesroman in Tagebuchform, Niederschlag aus fünf Lebensjahren eines jungen Mädchens voll Charme und Klugheit'. Auch daß Propyläen mit der Frage 'Hat Ihre Gattin schon die *Katrin* gelesen?' für das Buch Werbung betrieb und die Buchhändler aufforderte: 'Geben Sie es Ihrer Gattin! Auf diese Weise prüfen Sie auch gleich, wie das Buch auf Frauen wirkt!', zeigt, daß sich der Verlag vor allem bei weiblichen Lesern Erfolg für das Buch versprach." Compare Helga Schreckenberger, "Über Erwarten grauenhaft": Der 1. Weltkrieg aus weiblicher Sicht, " Adrienne Thomas: *Die Katrin wird Soldat* (1930)," Thomas F. Schneider, Hans Wagener, eds., *Von Richthofen bis Remarque: Deutschsprachige Prosa zum 1. Weltkrieg* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2003) 387-398.

propaganda and the terrible human reality that is transported back to her field hospital at the Metz train station day after day.

She soon recognizes that not the Russians, not the French, but the war itself, embodied by old men in uniforms, is the terrible enemy of mankind. These are her thoughts when she briefly encounters Count Haeseler, a war hero of 1870:

Seine stahlgrauen Augen sahen durch uns hindurch, als seien wir Luft. Er liebt die Menschen nicht, lebt wie ein Einsiedler – das weiß man. [...] Menschen, für ihn ein Haufen Staub. [...] Ganz nah war uns das zerfurchte Gesicht – diese Stahlaugen müssen dem Krieg selbst gehören – so mitleidlos hart gegen sich und alle und so voller Verachtung für sein eigenes Metier. Nein, die Menschen haben keine Schuld, die Russen nicht und die Franzosen nicht. Ich hab dem Krieg in die Augen gesehen heute – er ist ewig und kann nicht sterben.⁵²

Katrin unmasks element after element of German war propaganda as untrue, especially the image of the supposedly terrible French enemy: “Und da seh ich nun das Ungeheuer [...]. Ein kleiner, vielleicht achtzehnjähriger Mensch, flankiert von zwei deutschen Soldaten” (Thomas 151). Like Köppen in *Heeresbericht*, Thomas thus attacks the war for the gigantic lie that it is, as well as for the terrible price of human life that it demands: “Immer dasselbe doppelseitige Bild: Oben auf dem Bahnsteig ausziehende, singende, nichtsahnende junge Menschen – unten in in der Baracke die Zurückgekehrten mit blutleeren Gesichtern, zerschmetterten Gliedern” (Thomas 202).

Thomas’ account is especially compelling through its authenticity and first-person narrative perspective of an eye-witness. We realize, she is not a “little nurse” but an intelligent and compassionate observer. Although Katrin does not fight in the trenches,

⁵² Adrienne Thomas, *Die Katrin wird Soldat. Ein Roman aus Elsaß-Lothringen* (Berlin: Propyläen, 1930) 162.

she deals with the human waste of the trenches, which is equally horrifying. At a time when most readers had just managed to gain distance from the war experience, the immediacy of this diary-novel brought the painful memory back to the surface. Unlike her male colleagues, she had no reason to embellish the male role in the war in any way. To her, the dead and the wounded are just unnecessary casualties of a barbaric war.

What ends up here as critical for my argument is that she, too, uses much the same set of images as the other novels from left or right, even as she offers a very much more detailed critique of what the war means for the ordinary soldier. She shares, in other words, the horizon of expectation for the ex-front-soldier turned reader of war novels, the horizon whose elements I have outlined in this chapter. As the conclusion to the present discussions about the shared images of manliness espoused by war novels of all political stripes, I now turn back to the shared historical background against which all these novels function, no matter if from the left or right, or as part of the war discourses I have just outlined, the almost suppressed interpretations of the Great War.

1.3 THE HISTORICAL IMAGE OF MASCULINITY IN THE ERA OF WILHELM II

It is not untoward to treat these tropes, stereotypes, and exclusions as part of Weimar's horizon of expectation and to assume their familiarity to many readers of the age. In fact, the images of masculinity that I have been tracing in this chapter even recur in the most infamous of autobiographical fictions of the era, *Mein Kampf* (1927). In his autobiography, Hitler exclaims: “Why couldn’t I have been born a hundred years earlier? Say at the time of the Wars of Liberation when a man, even without a ‘business’ was

really worth something?!" (Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 157). I will pursue Hitler's memoir in more detail below, but it is worth mentioning here how fiction and non-fiction parallel each other in "explaining" Germany and masculinity in the era.

Judging by how ubiquitous representations of similar scenes are in the fiction, Hitler's feeling was typical for a male member of the petit-bourgeoisie during the 1910s - or was at least the preferred image used by these males to think about themselves. If the home front's documented enthusiastic response to the outbreak of the war is any indicator, German middle-class men "felt" (were almost universally represented as feeling) that the imminent war gave them the opportunity to prove the value of their own existence to themselves.⁵³ German society had not seen war since 1870/71 and the subsequent forty years had been peaceful, so the younger generation, remembering the tradition of the German soldier of the early Empire, was eager to get "their war." Waging war against the Russians, the French, and the English -- "Auf in den Kampf, mir juckt die Säbelspitze" -- seemed the ultimate escape from the fetters of the bourgeois world; a chance to feel like "real men" again, the way their ancestors had (supposedly) felt in the heroic wars against Napoleon.

⁵³ George Mosse confirms the universal appeal of warfare as a test of manhood: "However, the urge to serve in a cause higher than the individual, to put manliness in the service of an ideal, had also been part of the definition of masculinity from the very beginning. The nation fulfilled this requirement; it was a constant presence during the history of modern masculinity from the Napoleonic Wars onward to the Great War." (George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* [New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996] 109).

This seems to hold true only for the bourgeoisie. There is no evidence that the working class necessarily shared the *Kriegsbegeisterung*. The German aristocracy, of which I regard Kaiser Wilhelm II as a perfect representative, was generally pompous and arrogant, and therefore eager to prove their masculinity, even if this amounted to mere showing-off.

What Hitler perceived, like so many others, was the need to prove his masculinity through acts of courage and demonstrations of physical endurance, and he himself realized that this need originated in a time period that had been mythologized in German society for a century. Wanting to fight and come out on top was especially tempting for men who were actually not physically strong, able, or robust, but weak like Hitler (who was ultimately rejected for military service by the Austrian authorities).⁵⁴ For men of his build, the war offered a unique opportunity to prove their manliness by simply enlisting in the army. In the civilian world, it was unlikely that frail men like him would gain reassurance of their manliness through male-male competitions, like wrestling, boxing, or fencing (they would lose). A historical opportunity would allow any recruit opportunities to represent himself as a real German male.

The defeat in World War I was such a catastrophe for German men on the level of personal identity because that representation and sense of masculinity, based on traditional reference points established in the nineteenth century, was shattered completely. Not only did they come home humiliated, wounded, maimed, or otherwise disabled, but also had they lost their original function as men doing service for the German Imperial Army. German men were supposed to make the best soldiers in the world, or so they had been told, and they had been steeped in the *völkisch* and Prussian-militarist doctrines of masculinity since at least the Wars of Liberation (1813-1814), yet

⁵⁴ Hitler had left Austria while still subject to military service. Ian Kershaw observes that “already in August 1912 the Linz police had started inquiries about Hitler’s whereabouts because of his failure to register for military service. Evasion of military service was punishable by a hefty fine. And leaving Austria to avoid it was treated as desertion and carried a jail sentence.” Hitler did eventually present himself in Salzburg where he was in fact “found to be too weak to undertake military service. (Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889-1936. Hubris*. [New York and London: W.W.Norton and Company, 1998] 85-86.)

the war had taught them that they were by no means invincible or in any way superior to their enemies.⁵⁵ This is extremely important in the discussion of World War I literature because it adds a new dimension to the debate.

To this point, I have summarized the reference points for the war novels that appeared *en masse* in the late 1920s mainly in terms of representations against which any political orientation might define itself. My central argument has been that the political tendencies (right or left, pro- or anti-war) of World War I fiction are actually less important for judging their impact on the public mind than the therapeutic effect it had on the individual male reader at the time. I believe that men did not read these war novels to clarify their personal political attitudes toward the lost war -- which were already clear -- but in order to find some sympathy and encouragement in their acutely felt identity crisis, as historical norms for "what men do" lacked any outlet in an increasingly narrow sphere of activity that was the German nation in the Great War. One might go as far as to say that what was once a nineteenth-century German masculinity-cult had become a masculinity self-help group.⁵⁶

From this perspective, war stories were a perfect disguise for authors (in the role of therapists) to send encouraging messages to their readers (who were their patients).

⁵⁵ Nicolaus Sombart even traces the development of German masculinity back to the "Soldier-King," Frederick William I of Prussia (1688-1740), who reigned from 1713-1740. (Nicolaus Sombart, *Jugend in Berlin 1933-1943: Ein Bericht* [München und Wien: C. Hanser, 1984] 181-183).

⁵⁶ The catastrophic collapse of German masculinity was only temporarily alleviated by the National Socialists. When World War II was lost, the situation was actually exacerbated, and although similar therapeutic novels were written about World War II, e.g. Theodor Plivier's *Stalingrad* (1945), I believe that German masculinity is still struggling to find a viable model. Evidence from my own research on student organizations suggests that certain groups of young German men still attempt to fashion themselves after nineteenth-century ideals of masculinity (especially the so-called "Schlagende Verbindungen").

The most important message read: “We know you lost the war, but you fought very bravely, and because of your German virtues, you are still a respectable man.” In this sense, the war novels mitigated an acutely felt sense of loss and pain by resuscitating nineteenth-century characteristics of masculinity, especially courage, patriotism, and loyalty to one’s brothers-in-arms (*Kameradschaft*).⁵⁷ What supports my argument is the fact that these virtues are emphasized in any of the war novels, regardless of the political orientation of the author. They are, in this sense, part of the shared discourse space of Germany in the era, the elements that *any* “credible” history of the Great War had to include for its readers. And they recur in memoir and diaries, non-fiction and fiction, from the era.

These soon-to-be standard story elements had, moreover, distinct psychological correlates. In August 1914, when the Great War broke out, the average bourgeois young German male could thus only be overwhelmed by joy about the opportunity to finally fight “his war.” Even Renn, who later winds up hating the war, can represent himself as sitting on a train car that is taking him to the Western Front and thinking: “Bin ich nicht

⁵⁷ Simultaneously, as Roger Kingerlee points out, left-wing liberal authors like Alfred Döblin, in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), Robert Musil, in *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (I/ 1930 II/ 1932) and Hans Henny Jahnn, in *Perrudja* (1929), embarked on a search for a new model of masculinity to counter the existing one. He argues that although modernity accelerated the pace of almost all human endeavors, “it also prompted the European male to *decelerate*, albeit momentarily, and take a long hard look at himself – as early as the 1920s and such an apparently unlikely location as Germany and other German-speaking countries. The psychological and social chaos and confusion that existed after 1918 meant that liberal intellectuals, sometimes unconsciously, became involved in a search for an answer as to how one should properly exist as a male human being at a time when the foundations of religious belief had been, as Thomas Leahey (1997) says, ‘steadily eroded by science’, when the shattering recognition had been made that many of our feelings and thoughts [...] ‘appear to occur in automatic fashion, without conscious volitional effort, and are often beyond [a] person’s control’, and when accepted and traditional modes of male conduct had led to unprecedented carnage. The German novel, at least for some prominent writers, became a tool for this courageous and sometimes desperate search” (Roger Kingerlee, *Psychological Models of Masculinity in Döblin, Musil, and Jahnn. Männliches, Allzumännliches* [Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001] xiii).

glücklich daran, einen Krieg zu erleben! Es ist doch irgendeine Loslösung. Wie schlimm für die, deren Jugend ohne das vergeht!” (Renn 14). Talking in a parallel context about the Wars of Liberation a hundred years before, George Mosse explains, “the volunteers wanted to find freedom and they found it in war. Freedom in the past had often meant individual freedom, and sometimes collective freedom, but violence and freedom had never been so closely linked.”⁵⁸ So why was violence and freedom such a magic mixture, both in 1813 and 1914 (and probably in all the intervening wars, as well)?

Here, a standard interpretation recommends itself for the persistence of these tropes of masculinity, even when they run against the historical facts of wars and lives lost. As most historians agree, in the early nineteenth century, the political climate in Germany continued to be affected by the French Revolution, coupled with French enlightenment ideals of universal rights and political emancipation. The German bourgeoisie was only just beginning to emerge and soon made significant contributions to discussions in the public sphere. Besides Herder, few had thought of Germany as a united nation until French troops began to occupy the German territories. The occupation brought about strong anti-French sentiments and helped shape a concept of German-ness that was diametrically opposed to what was perceived as the French national character.⁵⁹ The development of the so-called “German national character” and the social construction of masculinity that dominated German culture in 1914 thus can be seen as a

⁵⁸ See George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990) 27.

⁵⁹ Compare, for example, Fichte’s lecture series at the University of Berlin, entitled “Reden an die deutsche Nation,” 1807.

direct extension of these earlier developments: "German identity" coalesced as an identity under siege from within and outside.

The leaders in the debate in the early nineteenth century were Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778-1852), Ernst Moritz Arndt (1769-1860), Friedrich Daniel Schleiermacher (1768-1834), and Jakob Fries (1773-1843). Once German national pride had begun to stir, however, it had become unpopular to credit the French with paving the way toward German national unity.⁶⁰ Faced with such constraints, these theorists and their followers began to "invent" a number of supposedly German characteristics that they claimed had always lain dormant in the recesses of the German soul and that could emerge only now, under the heavy yoke of the French occupation. Benedict Anderson quotes the anthropologist Ernest Gellner in this context. Gellner said: "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist" (Anderson 6). Eric Hobsbawm concurs:

Plenty of political institutions, ideological movements and groups – not least in nationalism – were so unprecedented that even historic continuity had to be invented, for example by creating an ancient past beyond effective historical continuity, either by semi-fiction (Arminius the Cheruscan) or by forgery (Ossian). (quoted in Anderson 7)

The struggle against the French occupation (1805-1815) can thus be said to be the driving political force behind the invention of such German national characteristics, while the worldview of romanticism served as a philosophical backdrop.

⁶⁰ Benedict Anderson quotes Ernest Renan, who said pithily: "L'essence d'une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié beaucoup de choses." = The essence of a nation is that all the individuals have many things in common, and also that everyone has forgotten many things. (Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* [London: Verso, 1991] 6.

In this reading, moreover, romanticism constituted a turning-away from the rational ideals of the Enlightenment, and thus enabled Jahn, Moritz, and Fries to dilute rational discussions of German nationality with myths and legends, as well as with biological metaphors for the German people as a “strong body” and “organic whole” that had supposedly derived its strength from German soil since the mists of time. This romantic mystification of German national character in the nineteenth century is customarily referred to as *Deuschtümelei*. The basic idea is that German culture and traditions are unique by virtue of a sacred essence or “spirit of the people” (*Volkgeist*) that non-Germans cannot understand and do not have access to.

Jahn, who had already founded the secret society of *Deutscher Bund* in 1810, proceeded by pouring his nationalist fervor into the burgeoning gymnasts’ movement that traditionally convened on the *Hasenheide* fields outside of Berlin, while fellow nationalists (e.g. Karl Friedrich Friesen) focused on the shaping of university students. Athletic activity, especially gymnastics, rowing, and fencing, became fundamentally important in the shaping of young German men. George Mosse explains:

[Jahn] believed that the ancient Germans had already competed in sport in order to show their manly nature and virility. His gymnastic festivals took place [...] on days designated to recall the events of the wars of national liberation. The singing of patriotic or church songs, the patriotic sermon, torchlight parades, and the sacred flame all at times accompanied the gymnastic exercises. The cult of manliness through physical competition became an integral part of such rites, and some national monuments specifically designed their sacred spaces in order to accommodate them. For Jahn, such manly exercise got rid of the ‘sins of youth’; it turned young people away from the frivolities which Rousseau had castigated.⁶¹

⁶¹ George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1975) 83.

Jahn and the other nationalists aimed for a combination of discipline, militant physical fitness (*Wehrhaftigkeit*), and Protestant-nationalist chauvinism. Jahn was a patriarch and an anti-Semite who decreed that women and Jews be excluded from any such activity. At the same time, he was opposed to traditional privileges of the aristocracy. His movement introduced the progressive policy of addressing one another with the informal ‘Du’ regardless of one’s social background. The gymnasts accepted members from the bourgeoisie, held democratic elections for all offices, and pledged solidarity to help one another whenever fellow members faced difficulties.

To summarize, Jahn’s ideal of a German man was a physically fit, disciplined, militant Protestant male -- most likely from a bourgeois background -- who admired German history, especially Martin Luther, nature, traditions, and myths, was ready to fight for freedom and honor, supported his fellow Germans, believed that women should not play an active role in public life, resented Jews and hated the French. “Manliness was understood as the embodiment of those ideals, and through fighting the good fight men attempted to translate them into action.”⁶² Throughout the nineteenth century, this vision maintained its strength and made a lasting impact on the upbringing of German boys from the middle class. It was spread through the countless athletic clubs and associations that existed all over Germany, and manifested itself most saliently in academic student organizations.⁶³ This was *the* dominant male discourse of the German bourgeoisie.⁶⁴

⁶² See George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990) 26.

⁶³ To this day, some German sports clubs bear the name of “Turnvater Jahn,” e.g. “TV Jahn Rheine.”

⁶⁴ For more details, compare Björn Freitag, *Imagined Democrats: German Fraternities and the Reinvention of Historical Identity*, M.A. Thesis, University of Texas, 1999.

The next important historical date for the development of such commonplace and shared images of German masculinity was the founding of the Empire in 1871. Again, a series of successful and quickly won wars gave an enormous boost to German men, specifically to those who were associated with student associations, athletic clubs, or the Prussian military. This was the generation a “Wilhelminians” that would wreak so much havoc on the German nation, and indeed, on all of Europe. Above all, this shared view was a question of mentality. Age-wise, these were the men who had been born between 1855 and 1865, like Wilhelm II. (1859) or Erich Ludendorff (1865), and who therefore experienced the Wars of Unification as boys. In hindsight, one can say that many of these men displayed common characteristics, including “Autoritätsfixiertheit, Harmoniestreben in den Formen von Anpassung einerseits und Ausgrenzung andererseits und vor allem eine spezifische, nämlich von ‘Panzerung und Angriff’ bestimmte Aggressivität.”⁶⁵

Unfortunately for them, Bismarck had successfully pulled the German Empire together and cushioned it so well through his various non-aggression pacts that no war was fought for the next forty-three years. Max Weber and others referred to this fact as the “Fluch des Epigontums,” meaning the curse of those born too late.⁶⁶ Reulecke explains:

Diese Wilhelminer mit ihrem – wie man zugespitzt sagen könnte – Minderwertigkeitskomplex und gleichzeitig aggressivem Selbstbehauptungswillen besetzten um 1900/1910 die Führungspositionen in Politik, Militär und öffentlichem Leben, bestimmten mit ihren Vorstellungen maßgeblich die

⁶⁵ Compare Jüren Reulecke, “Neuer Mensch und neue Männlichkeit. Die ‘Junge Generation’ im ersten Drittel des Zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts” Uta Gerhardt, ed., *Zeitperspektiven: Studien zu Kultur und Gesellschaft. Beiträge aus der Geschichte, Soziologie, Philosophie und Literaturwissenschaft* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003) 171-201.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.

Werthierarchien, Stilformen und Verhaltensnormen des Wilhelminischen Deutschland und definierten dabei nicht zuletzt auch das, was – wie es damals hieß – “Mannhaftigkeit” ausmachte bzw. zu sein hatte. (Reulecke 177)

Reulecke quotes from the 1910 *Ratgeber für den Guten Ton in jeder Lebenslage*, in which proper “Mannhaftigkeit” is colorfully defined. Above all, it says, “the true man stands firmly in his place like an oak tree”:

Er bricht lieber über die Welt den Hals, als er von ihr den auf richtige Überzeugung gewurzelten Kopf sich brechen ließe. Der Mann muß Schierling trinken und in Lava baden können, wenn es gilt, um für andere und fürs Gute zu handeln und zu leiden. [...] Hoher, stolzer Sinn ist des Mannes edelster Schmuck, Edelsinn, der das Niedere, Gemeine, Schmutzige verwirft, zwar nicht schwärmt, zwar die Welt nimmt, wie sie ist, aber sie beherrscht und sich nicht nach ihr modelt. (quoted in Reulecke 177)

Such guidelines for manly behavior are quite significant as a background to the novels that have been the topic of my discussions because they reflect a cultural consensus which probably also influenced teachers in their pedagogy and parents in the way they brought up their children, in this case, sons. Apart from the brutality with which boys were “made into men” during the German Empire, it was also a time of unparalleled sexual prudishness. Especially female sexuality was suppressed into complete invisibility. This mixture clearly is echoed in the novels I have presented here and in earlier chapters of the present discussion.

Just as interesting is the fact that this ideology of masculinity became a quasi-official state discourse, as historical circumstance intervened. Wilhelm II himself, born with a crippled arm, became the unfortunate victim of child abuse, even torture, as several physicians attempted to stretch and strengthen his left arm or “remedy” his

disturbed sense of balance with electric shocks. Nevertheless (and not surprisingly), he himself became a champion of the masculinity cause. An extremely vain and neurotic man, he proclaimed in a 1906 address to the *Norddeutscher Regattenverein* in Cuxhaven the necessity

Daß wir Männer, daß wir Charaktere haben, daß unsere Männer sich bewußt sind der Wichtigkeit der deutschen Männlichkeit. Der deutsche Manneswert kann sich bewähren auf verschiedenen Gebieten, im Heere, im Zivildienst, auf der Flotte, im Dienst der Einzelstaaten, in den Gemeinden, aber am besten wird er ausgebildet, am besten und klarsten wird unseren Deutschen das Auge gemacht, wenn sie auf das Salzwasser kommen. (quoted in Reulecke 178)

Needless to say, not all the German boys and adolescents were as enchanted by Prussia and the navy as the *Kaiser* and his minions. The turn of the century thus marks a profound generational crisis during which the young began to rebel against the stifling atmosphere of bourgeois prudishness and boring conservatism that their fathers had created for them -- the atmosphere that characterizes the world view of the later generation's front-line heroes, the atmosphere in which characters like Remarque's Paul Bäumer grew up.

Here I must emphasize that this "imagined community" of masculinity was not aimed simply at the war experience, but had wider adoption within German nationalism. Two of the prominent voices in this struggle against the dominant German bourgeoisie were Friedrich Nietzsche and Arthur Moeller van den Bruck (born 1876). Van den Bruck, for instance, accused the Wilhelminians of political incompetence and cultural dilettantism in very telling terms: "Ein Blutwechsel tut der Nation not, eine Empörung

der Söhne gegen die Väter, die Ersetzung des Alters durch die Jugend.”⁶⁷ Yet this dominant view -- dominant also in the novels traced here -- was not the only historically attested voice of Germany. German youth culture after 1880 was not as homogenous as it had been at the founding of the Empire. The urban proletariat began to develop an identity of its own, and many young men organized in social clubs that were not as conservative as the youth organizations of the past. Moreover, Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis and certain reform movements in pedagogy began to reflect how these inherited images of masculinity were already being questioned before the actual war.

One of the most important reformers was Ludwig Gurlitt (born 1855). In 1906, he published a provocative treatise, entitled “Erziehung zur Mannhaftigkeit,” in which he argued that traditional family life, dominated by an authoritarian father, as well as the school system designed to produce “unterwürfige Untertanen” would never produce free and self-confident men, but only “unmännliche Duckmäuser, angepaßte Schwächlinge und gebrochene Persönlichkeiten.”⁶⁸ Gurlitt advocated a general liberalization of education, as well as officially sanctioned opportunities for young men to vent their anger:

Um den zunehmenden Verfall der Sittlichkeit und die sinkende Wehrtauglichkeit der jungen Männer, deren Demoralisierung, nicht zuletzt infolge der Trinksitten der Studenten, deren Verweichlichung, “geistige Erschöpfung und Überreizung,” “Pietätslosigkeit” usw. zu bekämpfen, forderte er nach dem Vorbild der Amerikaner, denen er eine “geistige Elastizität und körperliche Tüchtigkeit” sowie – im positiven Sinn – “Respektlosigkeit” bescheinigte, auch in Deutschland demokratische Verhältnisse und den “Zorn der freien Rede,” um bei der “besseren Jugend” das Selbstbewußtsein des freien Mannes zu erzeugen und ihr die

⁶⁷ Quoted in Reulecke, 178.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 180.

vorherrschende grenzenlose Hochachtung “vor Beamten, Betitelten, Ordengeschmückten und tönenden Namen” auszutreiben. (Reulecke 181)

Even if such ideas cost Gurlitt his teaching job at a Berlin *Gymnasium*, a new concept of youth was born out of logics like this which transformed the images of the *Turnvater's* generation into a more modern discourse of masculinity, the one which our novels' heroes took with them to the front. Men like Gurlitt saw the harm in the excessive drill and authority of the old system; instead they supported physical exercise, singing, and hiking through nature so that young men could develop a sense of freedom.

The two decades before the outbreak of the First World War, in consequence, can be said to be explicitly marked by these two basic cultural tendencies. The supporters of freedom and independent youth culture included Ludwig Gurlitt, Gustav Wyneken (both reform pedagogues), Arthur Moeller van den Bruck (cultural critic), Alfred Weber (Max Weber's brother), and Paul Natorp (philosopher). Their antagonists were the old-school Prussian authorities, including Kaiser Wilhelm, the entire elite of the military, as well as the upper echelons of civil servants and educators. What they had in mind was

Eine umfassende Disziplinierung der männlichen Jugend durch eine Staatserziehung, die letztlich auf die Einrichtung einer verpflichtenden paramilitärischen Staatsjugendorganisation aller Jungen ab etwa zwölf Jahren hinauslief. Ein entsprechender Gesetzesentwurf lag übrigens schon vor Beginn des Ersten Weltkriegs in der ministeriellen Schublade. Durch Kriegsspiele und Geländeübungen sollten Willen und Ausdauer, durch Unterrichtsstunden am Abend in den Herzen der Heranwachsenden patriotische Gesinnung und “Zorn gegen den Feind” erzeugt werden. (Reulecke 183)

And these social values were almost immediately aligned with military causes, even as they spread through general society. For example, a certain Generalfeldmarschall

Colmar von der Goltz (born 1843) had founded the *Jungdeutschlandbund* with the intent of incorporating different patriotic youth organizations, sports clubs and boy-scout associations. In the beginning of 1914, the Jungdeutschlandbund had 750,000 members.⁶⁹

To be sure, the liberals, often affiliated with the *Wandervogelbewegung*, advocated the emancipation from these heavy-handed militaristic models. Alfred Weber admonished the German youth to “stand on its own feet.” Paul Natorp appealed to young Germans in 1913 “not to let themselves be dragged into the war among the *Kulturvölker*, in which human beings were only numbers or parts of a machine”: “Sein Leben zu wagen [...] mache allein noch keinen Helden, zumal im modernen Krieg von freiwilliger Beteiligung sowieso keine Rede sein könne.”⁷⁰ And Gustav Wyneken implored the audience at the *Freideutsches Jugendfest auf dem Hohen Meißner* (October 1913): “Möge nie der Tag erscheinen, wo des Krieges Horden die Täler des Vaterlands durchtoben. Und möge nie der Tag erscheinen, wo wir gezwungen sind, den Krieg in die Täler eines fremden Volkes zu tragen.”⁷¹ But as has been argued here, even as these men rejected militarism, they were loathe to surrender the images of masculinity on which that militarism and their own images of a new Germany rested.

The rest of the bridge between these nineteenth-century models and the early twentieth-century novels under consideration here is straightforwardly made. With regard to sexuality, it has already been mentioned that Wilhelminian Germany was hostile to it. What was perceived as a crisis in masculinity during the last two decades of the

⁶⁹ Ibid., 183.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 184.

⁷¹ Ibid., 185.

nineteenth century was also attributed to a general process of cultural decadence. Physicians, for example the neurologist Hermann Oppenheim (born 1858), believed to have found a mysterious nervous weakness in men, which they called “Neurasthenie,” and which supposedly led to permanent nervous disturbances, depression, listlessness, and “zum Gefühl des Versagens und morbiden Schwelgen in der Décadence [...] und letztlich eine Verweichlichung und Verweiblichung der Männer im Gefolge hatte” (Reulecke 182).

Male hysteria, “Neurasthenie,” and rampant nervous disorders were also connected to the moral problem of libidinous behaviors, especially masturbation, and associated quite directly with both a crisis in German masculinity and with the war itself. The primary socio-cultural response of the bourgeoisie was the recommendation of abstinence.⁷² Reulecke also mentions a “flood of sexual education books for young men” that came out at the turn of the century, one of which contained

Horrorbeschreibungen von den Folgen sexueller Zügellosigkeit und gab Ratschläge, wie der Heranwachsende mit der “fast feindlich erscheinenden Macht,” die das Wertvollste, was der junge Mann besitze, seine Ehre, bedrohe, dem Geschlechtstrieb, durch Willenstraining, Abhärtung des Körpers z.B. mittels häufiger kalter Bäder, durch intensive sportliche Betätigung, Meidung von Alkohol usw. umgehen sollte. (Reulecke 182)

Note how the “cure” for these male illnesses is described almost identically with the male values shared between the right and left in their descriptions of the (largely bourgeois) heroes engaged in their *Bildung* on the front and in the trenches of the First World War.

⁷² Also compare Walter Flex, *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten: Ein Kriegserlebnis* (1916). This war novel contains the motto: “Rein bleiben und reif werden – das ist schönste und schwerste Lebenskunst.”

Taken together, these descriptions paint a sad picture of young German men during the decades leading up to the First World War. It is impossible to describe all the nuances of bourgeois culture that might have influenced the mindset of German adolescents prior to 1914, but the influences outlined above are certainly among the most significant, and they need to be brought into juxtaposition with the images of maleness that recur throughout the literature of the First World War. It is safe to say that most young men were frustrated by the joyless, sexless, and boring atmosphere of German bourgeois culture and therefore welcomed the outbreak of the war as a release from these constraints and as an opportunity for manly adventures.

Yet more critical is the very comparison between left-wing and right-wing construction of masculinity in Weimar war novels, and the gaps left in the dominant discourses that characterize options for identity-construction available to men in a state born out of a defeat and near to ruin. The century-long tradition that I have sketched briefly here is what grounds the following thought experiment, which would probably be successful, and which thus offers interesting confirmation of how ubiquitous these tropes were: If one were to switch out characters between novels from opposing political camps, say, put Paul Bäumer in a pro-war novel and Albrecht Urach in an anti-war story, this switch-over would remain fairly unnoticeable as long as the men did not open their mouths with any overt political pronouncements.

One reason for this similarity is that there is no essential difference in the war-behaviors that heroes from any political camps find desirable: raised on a century's tradition of German manliness, both are valiant soldiers who obey orders and care for

their comrades. Both have the same manly traits. They differ mostly in what they say and how they react to the war emotionally. Nonetheless, they are almost identical physical and psychological types, as I have outlined, and they are defined against the omitted, largely un-German elements suppressed in the war novels that were not successes.

This chapter has brought the reader full circle, back to the culture of German masculinity that enabled the success of novels like *Im Westen nichts Neues*. There was quite literally "nothing new in the West," in a Germany that had not yet managed to rethink its *Bildungsideal* and the appropriate roles in the twentieth century for its heroes like Paul Bäumer who would die in the trenches or survive to be utterly lost in Weimar. The crisis of masculinity that I have traced here, however, has not been traced in the secondary literature as I have done here, using the war novels themselves.

Let me now turn to the novels and memoirs themselves in more detail, to recover not just the *sameness* of the representational material shared by the many war novels in the era of *Im Westen nichts Neues*, but the specific uses of these materials in the *Bildungsromane* of the German war novel around Remarque, as well as in the era's non-fiction. I will first turn to the political right before turning to the more critical leftist novels.

Chapter Two: The Right-Wingers

This chapter examines the socio-political significance of the *Dolchstoß*-myth and provides thumbnail sketches of some of the men who became the ideological trailblazers for the conservative, right-wing forces in the Weimar Republic, founders of a New Nationalism and inventors of the new German masculinity, precursors to the vision of Remarque's generation, men such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Oswald Spengler, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Carl Schmitt, Manfred von Richthofen, and Ernst Jünger. Moreover, I will undertake an analysis of exemplary right-wing literary reactions to Remarque's bestseller, reactions that took the form of a specifically conservative approach to the inheritance of the war experience. That investigation will begin with the tacit reference points to all this generation's war novels, the politics of Hindenburg and Ludendorff.

Hitler's own *Mein Kampf* will set up how these historical narratives of national justification can be turned into myth-building strategies, as will be confirmed by an almost contemporary fiction, Franz Schauwecker's *Aufbruch der Nation* (1929), which was the only right-wing novel coeval with *Im Westen nichts Neues*.¹ Schauwecker was

¹ Compare Müller, *Krieg und die Schriftsteller*, 297.

the first to appropriate for his fiction what George Mosse refers to as the “Myth of the War Experience” and hereby clearly set the stage for likeminded novelists to follow.² As a representative sample of further war novels from the more conservative camps, I will further examine Werner Beumelburg’s *Die Gruppe Bosemüller* (1930), Joseph Magnus Wehner’s *Sieben vor Verdun* (1930), and Hans Zöberlein’s *Der Glaube an Deutschland* (1931).

Compared to the leftist-liberal war novelists to be assessed in a later chapter of the present study, the right-wing militarist writers created a much larger, yet more homogenous body of literature.³ What characterizes and unifies the latter group are the shared tenets of an aggressive ideology that seeks to elevate and defend the central *Fronterlebnis* against anyone they suspected of denigrating it, both during and after the war. All the right-wing writers tended to employ similar literary stratagems with which they upheld or resuscitated the memory of the valiant, and ideologically incorruptible, German warrior. The central message of right-wing war novels is that these German front heroes were, in fact, not defeated by the French, British, or Americans, but betrayed by

² Compare George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990) 70-106; 159-181.

³ Thomas F. Schneider of the Erich-Maria Remarque Friedenszentrum and Hans Wagener, Professor of Germanic Languages at UCLA, are among the leading experts on German war literature written during the Weimar Republic. In the introduction to *Von Richthofen bis Remarque: Deutschsprachige Prosa zum I. Weltkrieg* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2003), they point out that only a small fraction of the entire literary production about World War I has been analyzed by literary scholars so far. Only 20-30 works currently form the canon, while its total historical size is estimated to be in the thousands (16). Michael Gollbach points out that “the number of novels that were critical of the war or condemned it was very low compared to the number of nationalist and *völkisch* novels” (*Die Wiederkehr des Weltkrieges in der Literatur*, 247). Schneider and Wagener support that claim: “Das Leserinteresse war im Untersuchungszeitraum eindeutig auf Repräsentation des Krieges als Abenteuer Geschichte ausgerichtet oder zielte auf jene Titel politisch rechter Provenienz, die einer Re-Interpretation und Dienstbarmachung des Krieges für eine aktuelle politische Gestaltung der Gegenwart das Wort redeten (um es vorsichtig auszudrücken)” (*Von Richthofen bis Remarque*, 14).

“un-German” forces and their influence, including Bolsheviks, revolutionaries, Jews, war-shirking profiteers on the *Heimatfront*, and, first and foremost, the Social Democrats who came to power after Erich Ludendorff, head of the Supreme Army Command, stepped down on 29 September 1918. Readers are supposed to accept the idea that the German army could have or would have won the war if these traitors (later to be called *Novemberverbrecher*) had not been given free rein in their corrosive activities.

Historical evidence, of course, does not support the claim that Germany lost due to a lack of support from the *Heimatfront*. Operations “Michael,” “Georgette”, and “Blücher-Yorck,” the vast final spring offensives in the west (*Kaiserschlacht*), had failed, and Germany thus lost the war militarily.⁴ The German forces under Hindenburg and Ludendorff could eventually not withstand the combined military power and superior *matériel* of the western allies and “the OHL made this declaration of bankruptcy at the GHQ conference at Spa in Belgium on 28-29 September” (Kolb, *Weimar Republic* 4). But to the right-wing writers and their fellow nationalists/ militarists, this was a truth too painful to face, and a fact they were not willing to accept. By and large, the nationalist/ militarist circles were like-minded in this regard, which made it easy to create myths with which to blur the truth. The *Dolchstoß*-myth, among others, was fabricated and constantly propagated until Hitler came to power, aiming to persuade the public that

⁴ Eberhard Kolb explains that the majority parties of the Reichstag “had pursued their policy of extending the power of Parliament with caution rather than impetuosity” until the summer of 1918. “But from July-August onwards, as the military situation of the Central Powers grew rapidly worse, drastic changes soon ensued in home affairs. After the Austro-Hungarian peace note of 14 September and the collapse of Bulgaria (armistice, 30 September), the Army High Command (Oberste Heeresleitung, OHL) was obliged to recognize that Germany had lost the war and that only an immediate armistice could prevent a military disaster” (Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic* [London: Unwin Hyman, 1988] 4).

German forces had remained “unconquered in the field” (*im Felde unbesiegt*), and that Germany’s surrender would not have been inevitable. In the opinion of Walter Laqueur,

[t]his allegation, made by among others Hindenburg, the future President of the Republic, was not just factually untrue. It was the grossest slander, for the ‘home front’ had for more than four years accepted without grumbling countless sacrifices simply because it had been told to do so by military leaders of indifferent quality. Nevertheless the ‘stab in the back’ legend was to play a central role in anti-republican propaganda during the years to come.⁵

Due to the censorship during the war, the public was largely misinformed to begin with, and so it was not surprising that they were susceptible to a story about the war that was largely false.

Steeped in the belief that Germany was militarily far superior to its enemies, and thinking that the German man-warrior was stronger than *der Franzose* or *der Engländer*, the idea that the army had been defeated seemed outrageous to many of this public, and “many were only too willing to believe in the existence of a ‘hidden hand’, of all-powerful forces which had brought about Germany’s ruin” (Laqueur 5). This was the national catastrophe whose consequences would eventually overpower and absorb any pacifist activity that existed beforehand. Let us now outline the *Dolchstoßlegende* in its history.

2.1 SLY STRATEGISTS TO THE END: HINDENBURG AND LUDENDORFF

Paul von Hindenburg (1847-1934) and Erich Ludendorff (1865-1937), as well as many other generals who published memoirs, recognized the importance of manipulating

⁵ Walter Laqueur, *Weimar: A Cultural History 1918-1933* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1974) 5.

public opinion in their favor at the end of the war.⁶ They set to work almost immediately after the armistice, with obvious motivation: both former military leaders had personal stakes in exculpating themselves and legitimizing the old military command, as well as political objectives for shifting the blame for Germany's defeat to the unsuspecting and naïve left. Hindenburg audaciously rejected responsibility for the failure of the German army in a hearing before an investigative committee on 18 November 1919:

An English General said with justification: 'The German army was stabbed in the back.' No guilt applies to the good core of the army. Its achievements are just as admirable as those of the officers corps. Where the guilt lies has clearly been demonstrated. If it needed more proof, then it would be found in the quoted statement of the English general and in the boundless astonishment of our enemies at their victory.

That is the general trajectory of the tragic development of the war for Germany, after a series of brilliant, unsurpassed successes on many fronts, following an accomplishment by the army and the people for which no praise is high enough. This trajectory had to be established so that the military measures for which we are responsible could be correctly evaluated.⁷

In his memoirs, entitled *Aus meinem Leben* (1920), Hindenburg's pathos is even more pronounced: "Wir waren am Ende! Wie Siegfried unter dem hinterlistigen Speerwurf des grimmen Hagen, so stürzte unsere ermattete Front; vergeblich hatte sie versucht, aus dem

⁶ This was a historical moment for which the French reaction to the defeat in 1870/71 had actually set a precedent. Faced with the humiliating peace treaty they were forced to sign by Prussia, the French representatives of the emerging Third Republic recognized the importance of inciting public scorn against a scapegoat, which they found in Napoleon III. Eberhard Kolb explains, "Aber die französischen Republikaner wurden nicht müde, die ausschliessliche Verantwortung für Kriegsniederlage und Friedensvertrag Napoleon III. und seinem Regime anzulasten, und sie vermochten die Nation davon zu überzeugen, dass Napoleon III. der alleinige Sündenbock sei. Auf diese Weise gelang es ihnen, trotz Friedensvertrag und zeitweiliger Okkupation einzelner Landesteile, die neue Ordnung schrittweise zu stabilisieren und ihr eine nationale Legitimation zu verschaffen" (Eberhard Kolb, "Vom Kaiserreich zur Republik. Politische Neuordnung im Zeichen von militärischer Niederlage und Staatsumsturz," Gerhard Schulz ed., *Ploetz Weimarer Republik: Eine Nation im Umbruch* [Würzburg: Verlag Ploetz Freiburg, 1987, 18-31] 20).

⁷ Quoted in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg, eds., *The Weimar Sourcebook* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: U of California P, 1994) 16.

versiegenden Quell der heimatlichen Kraft neues Leben zu trinken.”⁸ In both cases, the army was "admirable" but defeated by external agents -- the high command.

Not surprisingly, to make their cases, Hindenburg and Ludendorff also lied about the crucial question under which circumstances the armistice came about, and who really requested it. Their distortions went unnoticed by the public because both displayed extraordinary slyness during the last days of the war, especially in their negotiations with the newly formed government. According to the historian Eberhard Kolb, events actually unfolded as follows:

[After the armistice of Bulgaria, September 30, 1918], the Army High Command (OHL) was obliged to recognize that Germany had lost the war and the only an immediate armistice could prevent a military disaster. The OHL made this declaration of bankruptcy at the GHQ conference at Spa in Belgium [...]. It was decided to address an appeal immediately to President Wilson for an armistice and peace, and to support this on the home front by establishing a parliamentary government, a decree to this effect being issued on 30 September. On this basis, with the OHL still pressing for the immediate dispatch of the request for an armistice, negotiations were conducted for the formation of a new government. [...] If, in September 1918, matters did not come to a showdown between the OHL and the Reichstag majority, it was because Ludendorff, seeing that the military situation was hopeless, judged it wiser to let the parties take over, and thus place on them the responsibility for terminating the war effort.⁹

Yet Ludendorff paints a completely different picture in his war memoirs, which he wrote from the safety of his Swedish exile at Hesselholmsgard between November 1918 and February 1919. He conveys the impression that Hindenburg and himself stayed in control and were determined to fight to the last man in a heroic effort to avert the crippling conditions of the allied armistice.

⁸ Paul von Hindenburg, *Aus meinem Leben* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1920) 403.

⁹ Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988) 4-5.

Upon Wilson's reply to the second German note of appeal for an armistice, in which he demanded that Germany stop the submarine war immediately, a War Cabinet meeting took place in Berlin on October 17. Ludendorff was asked to assess the military situation, and whether or not continued fighting might still yield success. According to the testimony in his memoirs, he replied:

War is not a sum in arithmetic. There are in war many probabilities and improbabilities. What will actually happen no man knows. When we went to East Prussia in August 1914, and the orders were given for the battle of Tannenberg, even then none knew how things would go, or whether Rennenkampf would move or not move. He did not move, and we won the battle. Part of war is luck, and luck may come Germany's way again.¹⁰

At the same meeting, the military leaders present discussed the question of transferring some 26 divisions from the east, especially those scattered in the Ukraine, over to the west, where 185 divisions were deployed. Ludendorff deplors that these men were ill-suited for reinforcing the western front because "the temptations to which the men were exposed from the corruption of Jewish traders in the East and from Bolshevik propaganda, and, indeed, also by propaganda from home, had broken their fighting spirit" (Ludendorff 409). Two sentences later, he admits that the military situation in the west was hopeless, whether or not these men would be transported there: "Nothing they could do could produce any such alteration in the military situation as would bring the enemy to negotiate with us" (409). Even from his own memoirs one gets the impression that Ludendorff was engaged in double play. It seems clear that he knew full well the war was

¹⁰ Erich von Ludendorff, *Ludendorff's Own Story: August 1914 – November 1918, The Great War from the Siege of Liege to the Signing of the Armistice as viewed from the Grand Headquarters of the German Army* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1919) vol 2, 408.

lost after the armistice in Bulgaria, but, depending on whom he spoke to, he continued to be evasive about the true state of affairs.¹¹

Another instance where Ludendorff creates the impression that he was given misleading information, and therefore deceived by the politicians, is in the context of mobilizing more troops from Germany, instead of transferring existing divisions from the east. Ludendorff reports:

We now turned to discuss the vital question of how much the people could and would still give to the army. Everything else depended on this. I had hoped that the Government would have been clear on this point. The new Minister of War gave me a more optimistic account of the prospects for reinforcements that I had hitherto received. He estimated a figure of 600,000 men. I could not check his figures. I was very greatly impressed by the statement that 60,000 to 70,000 men were immediately available to be sent into the army. Why had they not been sent sooner? I said, 'If I have these reinforcements now, I can face the future with confidence, but I must have them immediately.' The Minister promised not to lose a day. (Ludendorff 411-12)

Again, the implication is that Ludendorff and his army would have managed to turn the hopeless situation around if the men in charge at home would have kept their promises. In the context of the same discussion, the Social Democrat Scheidemann describes the general sentiment on the homefront with the German saying: "Better a terrible end than terrors without end" (412). This hopeless attitude was to be attributed, above all, to the dire food situation, Germans were starving. Ludendorff promised his support: "I agreed instantly to adopt, so far as lay in my power, every measure that could relieve the shortage. In general, his statement constituted a serious indictment of our Government, which had allowed the splendid spirit of 1914 to be so terribly changed" (412).

¹¹ Ludendorff himself mentions in passing that others confronted him about his evasiveness: "Secretary Solf accused me of a change in front" (415). "This, taken together with Secretary Solf's idea that I had changed my views, led me to discuss once again [...]" (Ludendorff 416).

The impression of Ludendorff's evasiveness and probable mendacity run like threads through the chapters of his memoirs in which he discusses the final stage of the war. Statements like the following are typical because they downplay his own maneuvering and highlight the degree to which everyone else was supposedly involved with what went wrong:

The majority of the German people were ready and willing to sacrifice the last of their strength to the army, and it was the duty of the Government to carry out this sacrifice. I spoke to this effect, [...], and also suggested that Ebert, the leader of the Social Democrats, should be given some leading post, in order by his help to strengthen the resistance of the people and bring new strength into the fight. (Ludendorff 414-15)

Wilhelm II, Ludendorff, and Hindenburg were of course not the only military commanders who acted in bad faith although they could see the larger picture. There were many other generals and military experts who would have been capable of giving an accurate report on the circumstances of Germany's military defeat, yet none of them spoke out to inform the German public of the truth.¹²

In the erupting *Politik- und Kulturkampf* between supporters and enemies of the new republic, the new men in power failed to recognize the fundamental importance of clearly assigning the responsibility for the military defeat to Kaiser Wilhelm's old power apparatus; one could have seized the opportunity to officially blame the true culprits once and for all. But the new leaders did not anticipate how much resentment, humiliation, and

¹² In fact, large portions of the German public continued to live with the historically false belief that World War I had been fought in defense of the fatherland, not as a war of aggression. Fritz Fischer's publications of 1961 (*Der Griff nach der Weltmacht*) and 1969 (*Krieg der Illusionen*) were the first major works by a German historian to question that assumption. See Paul Bookbinder, *Weimar Germany: The Republic of the Reasonable* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996) 8.

hatred the harsh terms of the Versailles treaty would release in Germany, despite the fact that Wilson's Fourteen Points and the Lansing-Note of 5 November 1918 foreshadowed the terms of the treaty as severe.¹³

In fact, Ebert and his fellow Social Democrats, as well as the representatives of the revolutionary government, did nothing to prepare the German populace for May 1919, when the conditions of the treaty were officially announced and indeed left the nation stunned. On the contrary: they even made the tactical mistake of contributing to the unfounded hope that President Wilson might be able to grant more lenient peace agreements to the conquered Germany.¹⁴ In a welcoming speech to returning front soldiers, Ebert himself was unwise to express his respect to the German army for being "undefeated in the field," thus lending legitimacy to the right-wing militarist myth. It must also be called a tactical blunder that Matthias Erzberger of the Centre Party was sent to the armistice negotiations in France, instead of insisting on sending an emissary from the ex-military High Command (a military High Command that no longer existed legally, but whose presence was long felt in Germany and so needed to be accommodated in the public mind). This gesture must have given the impression to the world that the new government did indeed share the responsibility for the lost war and the peace terms.

The new German government underestimated the ultimate danger embodied by the reactionary right wing and the risk of releasing them from responsibility for what the Army High Command had actually done (miscalculate and misjudge the war). In fact,

¹³ For a more detailed discussion, compare Kolb, "Vom Kaiserreich zur Republik" 20.

¹⁴ For more details, see Kolb, *The Weimar Republic* 6.

they even granted the old army, now under General Groener, a new position of power in return for assisting the new government in their struggle against a take-over from the radical left. This misjudgment had long-lasting and severe consequences for the new republic because it prevented its broader acceptance by German citizens who failed to understand the old army's culpability. In this sense, the Culture War between the ancients (embodied by the right-wing militarists and nationalists) and the moderns (left wing democrats and other supporters of the Republic) was already decided early on in the game. Ludendorff and Hindenburg managed to shroud the reality of Germany's military defeat in a myth. Since the left failed to see the significance of this tactic, and could not offer a more convincing version to counter the *Dolchstoß*, they alone wound up shouldering the responsibility for the national disaster.

There was little the left could do to make the new parliamentary system, the Republic, more appealing to Germans. The new system was perceived as bureaucratic, tedious, and weak rather than as a corrective to the errors of the old army. There was nothing to love. "It was in way quite characteristic that the very idea of 'loving' democracy or the Republic should have been an issue at all, as if a political system was evil unless it evoked emotions of this kind," Laqueur observes (5). "The thought itself would have struck Frenchmen and Englishmen as absurd, an exalted Romantic notion. But many Germans were romantic in their attitude towards the state, and since the Republic was so unromantic, it was *mal-aimée* (5).

The war memoirs and novels from the right reflected this state of affairs.

2.2 ADOLF HITLER, *MEIN KAMPF* (1925)

One of the first populists to take full advantage of these anti-republican feelings was Hitler himself. With the assistance of Rudolf Heß, he wrote the autobiographical manifesto *Mein Kampf* during his nine months of incarceration at the Landsberg fortress (April 1 – December 20, 1924). Not a novel (no matter how much fiction might be in it), it is nonetheless instructive to examine how Hitler personally assessed the lost war because his narrative reveals the continuity between Ludendorff's subtle, but deliberate, twisting of the truth and Hitler's own full-blown racial hatred and demagoguery. Hitler and Ludendorff had similar political objectives after the war -- the removal of the Weimar Republic government -- and had already cooperated in the attempted *coup d'état* that took place in Munich on November 8-9, 1923 (*Beer-Hall Putsch*).¹⁵

In terms of the right-wing nationalist perception of the lost war, then, one might say that Ludendorff sowed the seeds that Hitler brought to germination. Hitler, among others, also gave the *Dolchstoßlegende* its decidedly anti-semitic slant:

This most of all shows the assertion that the lost War was the cause of the German collapse to be a lie. No, this military collapse was itself only the consequence of a large number of symptoms of disease and their causes, which even in peacetime were with the German nation. This was the first consequence, catastrophic and visible to all, of an ethical and moral poisoning, of a diminution in the instinct of

¹⁵ At the time, Hitler vied with Gustav Ritter von Kahr for the leading position in Munich's extreme right wing (*Kampfbund*). In an attempt to replicate Mussolini's March on Rome, Hitler and his fellow agitators brought the *Bürgerbräukeller*, a beer hall where von Kahr was giving a speech, under their control, took von Kahr, Seißer and Lossow as hostages, but ultimately failed to rally sufficient support for a "March on Berlin" to topple the government and "drive out the Jewish-Marxist brood." Ludendorff joined in on the evening on November 8, released the hostages, and led the march to the *Feldherrenhalle* on the next day ("Wir marschieren!"). Unlike Hitler and the other insurgents, Ludendorff was acquitted due to his famousness and connections in high places. For more details, see Heinrich August Winkler, *Weimar 1918-1933: Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1993) 234-235.

self-preservation and its preconditions, which for many years had begun to undermine the foundations of the people and the Reich.

It required the whole bottomless falsehood of the Jews and their Marxist fighting organization to lay the blame for the collapse on the very man who alone, with superhuman energy and will power, tried to prevent the catastrophe he foresaw and save the nation from its time of deepest humiliation and disgrace. By branding Ludendorff as guilty for the loss of the World War, they took the weapon of moral right from the one dangerous accuser who would have risen against the traitors to the fatherland.¹⁶

In this excerpt, Hitler brings up several key ideas that resurface in many pro-war novels five years later. Reminiscent of the cultural pessimism expressed by such thinkers as Nietzsche, Spengler, and Moeller van den Bruck (to be discussed in the next section), Hitler speaks of “disease” and “moral poisoning” that affected the well-being of the German nation even before the war. He also mentions “the instinct of self-preservation,” a term he might have adopted from Ernst Jünger (1895-1998) or Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), a German biologist whose “biogenic theory” offered a version of Darwin’s theory of evolution that the National Socialists could coopt.¹⁷ In a sweeping generalization that is typical of Hitler’s style, he equates Jews with their “Marxist fighting organization” without providing any evidence or support for the link between the two. And finally, he

¹⁶ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, Sentry Edition) 231.

¹⁷ Ernst Haeckel (February 16, 1834 – August 8, 1919). Haeckel advanced the “recapitulation theory,” which proposed a link between ontogeny (development of form) and phylogeny (revolutionary descent), summed up in the phrase “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny.” He supported the theory with embryo drawings that have since been shown to be inaccurate, and the theory is no longer generally accepted. Haeckel was also known for his “biogenic theory,” in which he suggested that the development of races paralleled the development of individuals. He advocated the idea that “primitive” races were in their infancies and needed the “protection” and “supervision” of more “mature” societies. He extrapolated a new religion or philosophy called Monism from evolutionary science. In Monism, all economics, politics, and ethics are reduced to “applied biology.” His writings and lectures on Monism provided scientific (or quasi-scientific) justifications for racism, nationalism, and social Darwinism. It has even been argued that Monism thus became the *de facto* religion of Nazi Germany. Other scholars disagree, arguing that Nazi ideology was not comfortable with evolutionary theory, which describes a common descent of all human races. January 19, 2006, at 9:35 pm, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernst_Haeckel>.

bestows upon Ludendorff the attributes of a Nietzschean *Übermensch*, namely “superhuman energy and willpower,” the qualities of a true *Führer*.

Hitler and the war novelists discussed in this chapter share a particular style. Neither seem to see a need to justify any of their cultural or historical assumptions. Reading *Mein Kampf* or any of the pro-war novels written in the late 1920s, one feels as though one is expected to know the dim backgrounds of a glorious German history or the qualities of the ancient German soul to which they steadily allude. Hitler and these writers are extremely eclectic in their choice of historical evidence for acts of heroism, instances of national unity, or undiluted fighting spirit. Reminiscent of Nietzsche’s aphoristic style, they often evoke a Golden Age that is never clearly defined, but that is apparently characterized by certain virtues still being intact, including manly courage, strength, instinct, honesty, camaraderie, and often the subordination of the individual to a strong *Führer*-figure. Likewise, they tend to insinuate the desirable recurrence of such a Golden Age without any indication of how this could be established.

Due to this evocation of a nebulous, distant past and an equally hazy future, Hitler’s writing and the pro-war novels share a peculiar way of dealing with the present time. With an air of aloofness, it is taken for granted that German culture and society are in demise, and that the reader detests the present historical situation as much as they do. Therefore, *Mein Kampf* and the pro-war novels are essentially motivational writings for readers who are frustrated with the current state of society. Their primary aim is not necessarily to offer practical solutions, but to signal to the reader that something must be

done and that there is a community of like-minded men who share his loathing, frustration, and anxiety.

There thus clearly exists a common denominator between the adherents of the nationalist-militarist (and often anti-Semitic) creed. Apart from blind acceptance of the war as a test of the nation's mettle, one tangible aspect of this common denominator is the shared sense of euphoria that washed over Germany when troops were mobilized in late July, 1914 (*Kriegsbegeisterung*). This is how Hitler describes his emotions when he heard the news in Munich:

To me those hours seemed like a release from the painful feelings of my youth. Even today I am not ashamed to say that, overpowered by stormy enthusiasm, I fell down on my knees and thanked Heaven from an overflowing heart for granting me the good fortune of being permitted to live at this time.

A fight for freedom had begun, mightier than the earth had ever seen; for once Destiny had begun its course, the conviction dawned on even the broad masses that this time not the fate of Serbia or Austria was involved, but whether the German nation was to be or not to be. (*Mein Kampf*, 161)

Hitler's reaction, even by pro-war writers' standards, is quite exalted. However, many seemed to have felt the same sense of national pride, unity, self-confidence, and release from the stifling world of the bourgeoisie, even those who eventually rejected the war.¹⁸ Looking back from today's perspective, and taking into account the unimaginable horror that would ensue, it is inconceivable what could have motivated millions of young German men to welcome the outbreak of another German war, at a time when memories of the Great War were still so alive.

¹⁸ Compare, for example, Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues*, Renn's *Krieg*, and Glaeser's *Jahrgang 1902*.

One hypothesis attributes this new *Kriegsbegeisterung* to the general *Zeitgeist*: “Im imperialistischen Zeitalter sei eben alles Denken unterschwellig von der Vorstellung einer naturwüchsigen Auslese der Stärksten durchdrungen gewesen.”¹⁹ Another hypothesis seeks the reason in the elementary, irrational allure of mass psychology. And the literature scholar Helmut Fries explained the German case in his two-volume study *Die große Katharsis* as follows: “Deutschlands Dichter und Denker hätten den Krieg als Chance missverstanden, ihre angestammte Rolle von geistigen Führern der Nation zurückzuerobern – die sei ihnen nämlich im 1871 einsetzenden Triumphzug der kapitalistischen Mechanisierung entrissen worden.”²⁰ Apart from these different attempts at explaining the chauvinism and mass hysteria, it also seems fair to assume a high level of naïveté: no one knew what to expect, and many people thought the war would be as short as the wars of German unification. If the civilian people had known what trench warfare, artillery bombardment, flame-throwers, tanks, and gas attacks would do to the soldiers, they would not have steered into the madness. I have already discussed the nineteenth-century buildup to the 1914-*Kriegsbegeisterung* in more detail in chapter one.

For now, the “spirit of July 1914” became a historical moment in the narratives through which the right-wing mythologized war, during and after the actual Second World War, an embodiment of undiluted national unity and strength. Interestingly, *Kriegsbegeisterung* engulfed not only those who already equated their sense of patriotism with militaristic aggression, but also politically more moderate segments of society, first

¹⁹ Rainer Traub, “Der Krieg der Geister,” *Spiegel Spezial: Die Urkatastrophe des 20. Jahrhunderts*, (Vol. 1, 2004, 26-30) 30.

²⁰ Compare *ibid.*. The exact literary reference is: Helmut Fries, *Die grosse Katharsis: der Erste Weltkrieg in der Sicht deutscher Dichter und Gelehrter* (Konstanz: Verlag am Hockgraben, 1994-95).

and foremost the intelligentsia. The euphoria seized people as different from one another as Adolf Hitler, Thomas Mann, Rainer Maria Rilke, Rudolf Eucken, Gerhard Hauptmann, Ernst Jünger, the scientists Max Planck and Wilhelm Röntgen, the theologian Ernst Troeltsch, and the Jewish writers Stefan Zweig and Ludwig Fulda, all of whom left written testimony as to how much the outbreak of the war excited them.²¹

²¹ *Kriegsbegeisterung* was not only a German phenomenon but affected all the countries that would be waging war soon. In his essay “Krieg der Geister” (*Spiegel Spezial: Die Urkatastrophe des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Vol. 1, 2004, 26-30), Rainer Traub mentions some of the details: In his autobiography, *Die Welt von Gestern*, Stefan Zweig described the situation in Vienna after Austria had declared war on Serbia: “Buchstäblich über Nacht sei dann – Anfang August – ‘der erste Schrecken über einen Krieg, den niemand gewollt’, einem allgemeinen Enthusiasmus gewichen. Ganz Wien im Schwindel der Kriegsbegeisterung, überall Fahnen, Spruchbänder, Musik. Der Rausch der Millionen habe ‘etwas Grossartiges, Hinreissendes, sogar Verführerisches’ gehabt, versichert Zweig und bekennt, er wolle diese Erinnerung ‘trotz allem Hass und Abscheu gegen den Krieg’ in seinem Leben ‘nicht missen’: ‘Jeder Einzelne erlebte eine Steigerung seines Ichs, er war nicht mehr der isolierte Mensch von früher, er war eingetan in eine Masse, er war Volk, und seine Person, seine sonst unbeachtete Person hatte einen Sinn bekommen [...]. So gewaltig, so plötzlich brach diese Sturzwelle über die Menschheit herein, dass sie, die Oberfläche überschäumend, die dunklen, die unbewussten Urtriebe und Instinkte des Menschens nach oben riss” (26). Rudolf Eucken, Nobel Prize laureate, expounded his views on the war at the University of Jena in August, 1914: “Zwar erweise sich der Krieg als schweres Übel [...], wenn er aus niedrigen Beweggründen geführt werde – aus Hass, Neid, Ruhmsucht oder Erfolgsgier etwa. Als ‘Quelle sittlicher Stärkung’ dagegen bewähre sich ‘der Kampf eines ganzen Volkes für seine Selbsterhaltung und für die Wahrung seiner heiligsten Güter’. Dass Deutschlands Krieg von ebendieser Art sei, also einer gerechten Sache diene, das zeige ‘die durchgreifende Läuterung und Erhebung’, die er an ‘unserer Seele’ bewirke” (26).

It seemed like no one knew or dared to mention the real reasons behind the war. Germany’s leading intellectuals proclaimed in unison that their country was culturally superior and that this eminent position had to be defended against the onslaught of the enemy. In England and France, of course, the opposite image of Germany was propagated, namely that this was a nation enslaved by Prussian militarism and its blood-and-soil ideology. Like the huns, these barbaric hordes were again attacking the circle of civilized nations. Ninety-three prominent members of the German intelligentsia published a manifesto on October 4, 1914, entitled “An die Kulturwelt!” – with which they protested against what they perceived as international slander. A protest “gegen die Lügen und Verleumdungen, mit denen unsere Feinde Deutschlands reine Sache in dem ihm aufgezwungenen Daseinskampfe zu beschmutzen trachten” (28). The manifesto rejected the charges that Germany bore responsibility for the war, had invaded Belgium against international law, or brutalized and killed Belgian civilians.

It also denied that militarism had usurped German culture. Paradoxically, the pamphlet was signed by people like Ludwig Fulda (1862-1939), a liberal, multi-lingual, cosmopolitan writer and German patriot who had been opposed to Wilhelm II’s reactionary politics before the war. “Die Deutschen sind mehr als ein gebildetes Volk,” he proclaimed in “Deutsche Kultur und Ausländerei” (1916), “sie sind das gebildete Volk der Welt.” Even Shakespeare was understood and performed much better by the Germans, and if England were to be defeated, one should put a clause in the peace treaty that Shakespeare had formally to be surrendered to the Germans (29). Ludwig Fulda, after 1933, was libeled, isolated, and driven to suicide by Nazi harassment in 1939.

The extent to which this excitement was really supported by the broad population remains an issue of current debate.²² In the context of the literature-based culture war of the late 1920s, however, the important fact is that, in their novels, the right-wing militarists were able to draw on the “spirit of 1914” as a moment of German national strength and glory represented in the right-wing war narratives of the later Weimar Republic, whether or not a majority of Germans had actually shared that feeling. These right wingers, notably, pursued the same strategy that the original nineteenth-century German nationalists, including Jahn, Arndt, and Körner, had successfully employed by invoking ancient battles, e.g. Arminius against the Romans, or the defeat of the French. As Benedict Anderson has described in *Imagined Communities* (1991), these myth-building moments of national glory can be real or imagined, and even have a more powerful impact if they are, in fact, imagined.²³ How such “imagined” moments of national history became grafted onto the *Dolchstoßlegende* is particularly interesting.

²² Jochen Bölsche, in his essay “Ein Hammerschlag... Historiker widerlegen die Legende von der Kriegsbegeisterung der Volksmassen im Herbst 1914” *Spiegel Spezial: Die Urkatastrophe des 20. Jahrhunderts*, (Vol. 1, 2004, 32-33), mentions the historians Wolfgang Kruse (Germany), Jean-Jacques Becker (France), and Jeffrey Verhey (U.S.), all of whom have studied *Kriegsbegeisterung* as a mass phenomenon. He quotes Kruse as saying: “Nur wenige Vorstellungen sind so tief in unserem historischen Bewusstsein verankert, wie die Kriegsbegeisterung von 1914. [...] Es scheint, als habe die europäische Bevölkerung des Krieg herbeigesehnt” (32). According to these historians, this was not the case, or only one side of the picture. They have argued that “Der Geist von 1914” mainly affected bourgeois-urban middle classes, but not workers, women, or the provinces. Bölsche says: “Tatsächlich belegen Unmengen von Quellen die Ansicht, dass die These von der Dominanz der Kriegsbegeisterung in Wahrheit ein ‘Konstrukt’ gewesen sei, das die gelenkte Presse und die gezielte Kriegspropaganda sowie später die NS-Ideologen zum ‘Mythos’ aufgeblasen haben” (32).

²³ For more details, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

2.3 EXCURSUS: FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, OSWALD SPENGLER, ARTHUR MOELLER VAN DEN BRUCK

Familiarly, right-wing nationalist literature was characteristically heavy-handed in its ideological fervor, low-brow in style, and limited in scope. It catered to male readers whose horizon of expectation demanded both the emotive romanticizing of the German “people’s soul” (*Volksseele*), as well as clear evidence of the physical superiority and moral incorruptability of the German war hero. The creative reservoirs that the novelists had at their disposal comprised, of course, their own war experiences, but what also distinguishes these post-war novels is how they specifically targeted the diffuse legacy of the nineteenth-century *völkisch* creed (e.g. Wehner), including its notions of masculinity (see chapter one), the *Dolchstoss-Legende*, as well as certain other myths created to avert the blame from the the military, the mythological allure of the “spirit of 1914,” a possible knowledge of Hitler’s worldview (e.g. Zöberlein), and the teachings of lesser anti-Semites or racists.

Besides this romanticism, the pro-war novelists liked to draw inspiration selectively from certain predecessors with a penchant for irrationalism, including Heinrich von Treitschke (historian), Friedrich Nietzsche (philosopher), Oswald Spengler (cultural critic), Arthur Moeller van den Bruck (cultural historian), Hermann Löns (*völkisch* writer), Manfred von Richthofen (pilot), and Ernst Jünger (writer). These men were revered as intellectual pioneers and their texts represented a resource of images and

ideas that regularly recurred in the pro-war novels.²⁴ In them, they created not just the everymen who had experienced the war, but also a new type of German, beyond class and historical limitations -- a new type of German hero who would further ennoble the front-line soldier familiar from *Im Westen nichts Neues*.

I will sketch their general significance only briefly here, which obviously does not do justice to the complexity of any of their works. Yet such brief sketches are, nevertheless, instructive because they reveal the pool of ideas feeding the generation of “direct action” new nationalists as unsystematic, irrational, and contradictory as they are grafted onto historical narratives to obscure historical facts. In this context, it is important to remember that both the *Kriegsbegeisterung* of 1914 and the post-war nationalist revisionism were not informed or fuelled by one coherent text or ethos, but by loosely used *Schlagworte* and *Parolen*: disconnected catchwords and slogans that like-minded supporters readily latched onto. All of these eclectic sources are relevant because they contributed to the shaping of the novelists’ ideas of the new German masculinity, and slowly, gradually, moving beyond the simpler analyses that the left's war novels had offered.

It is due to one of the perverse twists of history that Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 - 1900) should even have to be mentioned in this discussion. To be sure, his philosophy, often articulated in aggressive aphorisms, is not free from contradictions and thus lends

²⁴ In 1938, Herbert Schack attempted to draw a *geistesgeschichtliche* genealogy of National Socialism. The prominent figures he included were Richard Wagner, Friedrich Nietzsche, Paul de Lagarde, Rudolf Eucken, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Oswald Spengler, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and Stefan George. For more details, see Herbert Schack, *Denker und Deuter. Männer vor der deutschen Wende* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1938).

itself to eccentric interpretations. However, “virtually all he stood for – cosmopolitanism, intellectual excellence, beauty for beauty’s sake – was anathema to the leaders of [the] political movement” that would later try to adopt him as an ideological forebear.²⁵ Nietzsche was, in fact, an elitist who detested the petty-minded German bourgeoisie (*Spiessertum*) and its *völkisch* ideology. As is well known, he accused this section of society as being *Herdenmenschen* with a slave mentality. He was also not an anti-Semite, as his bitter controversy with Richard Wagner about “the Jewish element in music” made abundantly clear. As to why Nietzsche still appealed to the German chauvinists of the beginning twentieth century, the Nietzsche scholar Geoffrey Clive explains:

[...] It is a matter of historical record that numerous self-elected Nietzscheans, among them his own sister who went so far as to falsify some of his papers and letters, chose to identify Nietzsche’s philosophy with the politics of racism and virulent German nationalism. Why this should have occurred calls for a detailed study. Suffice it to remark here that Nietzsche’s profound dissatisfaction with the modern world and his ‘philosophizing with a hammer’ appealed to many who lacked his rigorous habits of mind and who remained insensitive to his *Hintergedanken*. [...].²⁶

It has been argued that Nietzsche’s philosophy resonated with the very philistines he despised because, not unlike today, it offered attractive catchwords like “God is dead,” “the will to power,” or *Übermensch* that even the not-so-voracious reader could start using to give himself an intellectual air. Unfortunately, it is “human, all too human” to reduce Nietzsche’s complex ideas to mere tidbits and items of vocabulary. His sister,

²⁵ Geoffrey Clive ed., *The Philosophy of Nietzsche* (New York: Mentor Books, 1965) xix.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Elisabeth, who was attracted by National Socialism, contributed to the further distortion of his thought.

Let me rehearse the obvious: Nietzsche was attractive because of his glorification of war, his rebellion against traditional norms, his anarchy, and “his abhorrence of academic drabness and [...] paradoxically Romantic repudiation of Romantic decadence” (Clive xviii). During the late Wilhelmine empire, German adolescents felt a connection between Nietzsche’s wrath and their own cultural fatigue:

With Nietzsche no longer able to speak for himself, German secondary-school teachers and their overwrought students seized upon those aspects of his thought which reinforced their frustrations and grievances. Toward the end of the nineteenth century there emerged a widespread feeling, particularly among the young, that life was passing them by, that the two-facedness of bourgeois (Victorian) morality with its ludicrous show of constraints was intolerable to bear, and that for the sake of general revitalization new horizons needed to be explored in every area of endeavor. (Clive xviii)

In the present context, it is critical to remember that this pre-war source of a cultural imaginary was almost completely absent from the most popular novels of the left that we addressed briefly in the last chapter, just as it was in *Im Westen nichts Neues*. At the same time, it was a rhetoric of dissatisfaction already in place by the Great War, and familiar to the *Bildungsbürgertum* in particular -- to those who studied Nietzsche in *Gymnasium* and college. The stereotype is that Nietzsche was carried in backpacks to the trenches; the novels we will turn to below suggest that he was carried back in the minds of the bourgeoisie, and that this reconstituted version of this thought was immediately deployed to address a general dissatisfaction with the older generation. Yet it *amplified* the sense that bourgeois morality was useless -- and hence the tools of the bourgeois, including

parliamentary politics and diplomatic negotiations. When the older generation picked up this rhetoric to emphasize how heroic the trench veterans were, the power of Nietzsche's rhetoric helped obscure the real history that the *Dolchstoßlegende* was trying to hide. All Germans, even those upper-class zealots whom the left had blamed the war on, could become victims of small minds and traitors to personhood when they appealed to Nietzsche.

What gradually became Germany's ultimate tragic narrative of history was used strategically by many *Bildungsbürger* to assert that Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), another introvert with frequent migranes, became Nietzsche's spiritual heir. Thomas Mann scornfully dubbed him “Nietzsche's smart monkey.”²⁷ He was unknown until the publication of *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918), a pseudoscientific and portentous work that completes the parallels needed to paper over any historical facts. He expansively draws comparisons between the demise of ancient empires, real and imagined, and what he saw as the current decline of Western civilization.²⁸ “In Germany, it soon became the center of the most excited and bitter literary controversy of the post-war years.”²⁹ H. Stuart Hughes describes the work as a “sombre, murky vision of the doom of our civilization” (Hughes 7). In one sweeping generalization, Spengler dismisses the conventional view of history as a “ridiculous distortion” (Hughes 10) which his novel

²⁷ Compare Barbara Beßlich, *Faszination des Verfalls: Thomas Mann und Oswald Spengler* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002) 12.

²⁸ Spengler spoke with some authority about ancient Greek and Roman culture, ventured into cursory discussions of Egypt and Babylon, and provided a “garbled account of a successor culture, unrecognized until he himself ‘discovered’ it, which he called Arabian or ‘Magian’” (H. Stuart Hughes, *Oswald Spengler, A Critical Estimate* [New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952] 9-10).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

approach would rectify. Significant for his particular appeal to the bourgeoisie is the name he chose for his historical approach, “morphological” (ibid.), a concept he borrowed from Goethe’s principles of natural research. His arguments pulled the emphasis off specific politics, and onto a general perception of the decline of the/his world.

Spengler spoke of “basic attitudes” within every culture that, taken together, formed a “master pattern” from which the stage of development could be discerned for any culture (Hughes 10). He viewed history as a gigantic representation of “universal symbolism” (Hughes 11), a concept that replaced the conventional view of western history as having progressed from the Greeks to modern times. Spengler distinguished between eight cultures, e.g. *die abendländische*, all of which went through an organic cycle of four stages: rise, associated with adolescence/spring, culmination, associated with maturity/summer, decline, associated with old age/autumn, and a final stage, associated with death/winter. For western culture, Spengler posited that it had not begun with the Greeks but with the Christian Middle Ages, and that it was currently in its stage of decline. By extension, Germany was in its winter, and thus no one was particularly guilty of it from within. All Germany was in need of a new rise.

These ideas fascinated many, they were easy to relate to, and Spengler became a popular “prophet of doom.” According to Barbara Beßlich,

Diese letzte Phase einer Kultur etikettierte Spengler als ‘Zivilisation’, die sich auszeichne durch Rationalisierung, Bürokratie, Bedeutungszuwachs der Technik, Urbanisierung und Vermassung, durch eine Hausse der Wissenschaft und eine Baisse der Religion, durch depravierten Liberalismus, Kapitalismus und durch

labile demokratische Herrschaftsformen, die dazu tendierten, sich cäsaristischen und imperialistischen Modellen zu öffnen. (Beßlich 7)

The fact that Spengler borrowed eclectically from various sources also accounts for his popularity. In his cultural pessimism and the “design of superhuman rulers” (Beßlich 7), he was clearly indebted to Nietzsche. His morphological concept of history came from Goethe, and his view of culture as entelechy stemmed from Marx, or ultimately, from Aristotle. Altogether, then, he was speaking for a German bourgeoisie who had felt under pressure since the late 1890s, when (like the *Buddenbrooks*) families were confronted with new worlds that they did not understand and that their classical educations had not prepared them for.

More critically, Spengler was disenfranchising the *others* to his own class. He can thus insult his urban contemporaries as “nomads and parasites” – “der Großstadtbewohner, der reine, traditionslose, in formlos fluktuierender Masse auftretende Tatsachenmensch, irreligiös, intelligent, unfruchtbar, mit tiefer Abneigung gegen das Bauerntum” (quoted in Beßlich 8). That is, city-dwellers as a class were in no way “traditionally German,” lacking relation to the land, the state religion, or any other of the traditions that had held Germany together. On the other hand, he seemed to view this rotting civilization as a political opportunity for Germany’s new rise as an empire, which he advocated. Such ideas made him the laughing stock of leftist cultural critics like Kurt Tucholsky and endeared him to the right wing, who supported Spengler’s disdain for modernity. They played into the ideals of chivalry and honor present in the trenches, rather than into the economic and political realities of interwar Germany.

A third figure who was influential to the development of right-wing ideology and the call for a new German nation-*Reich* during the 1920s was Arthur Moeller van den Bruck (1876-1925). The man who coined the term *Das Dritte Reich* with a 1923 book title, was a cultural critic and historian who had published an eight-volume history of Germany in 1905, entitled *Die Deutschen, unsere Menschengeschichte*. He enlisted for the war in 1914 and was soon detached to the foreign affairs section of the *Oberste Heeresleitung*. In 1916, he published the essay “Der preußische Stil,” which glorified Prussia’s “Wille zum Staat” -- a concept akin to Nietzsche’s “Wille zur Macht” -- and thus marked his own vehement embrace of a nationalism that saw in Germany something other than the state offered in Weimar Germany.

Moeller van den Bruck founded the *Juni-Klub* and soon gathered around him a significant number of like-minded young conservatives (*Jungkonservative*), who were united in their hatred of the Versailles Treaty. Although the National Socialists, later on, usurped many of the ideas he had put forth, Moeller van den Bruck is unlikely to have joined their ranks had he lived to see their rise to power. He was not an Anti-Semite, actually appreciated Russians, and disagreed with the stereotypical arguments Hitler liked to use. He was instead infatuated with the images of heroic Germaness from history and from the heroes of the trenches. Thus when he met Hitler in 1922, he rejected him for his “proletarian primitiveness.”³⁰ Hitler was impressed with Moeller van den Bruck, however. He told him: “Sie haben alles das, was mir fehlt. Sie erarbeiten das geistige

³⁰ See Hans-Joachim Schwierskott, *Arthur Moeller van den Bruck und der revolutionäre Nationalismus in der Weimarer Republik* (Göttingen: Mustersmidt Verlag, 1962) 145.

Rüstzeug zu einer Erneuerung Deutschlands. Ich bin nichts als ein Trommler und Sammler. Lassen Sie uns zusammenarbeiten!” (Schwierskott 144).

Like Spengler, Moeller was clearly influenced by Nietzsche’s ideas on culture. Unlike Nietzsche, however, Moeller was at least nominally interested in the reconciliation of the bourgeoisie and the working class in the name of a unified German nationhood, and in establishing middle ground between the political left and right, between the workers and the soldiers.³¹ Yet after the terms of the Versailles Treaty became public knowledge in May, 1919, his conservatism took a sharp right swing. In political terms, this would lead to an consolidation of goals and a reduction of the distance between the new nationalists, like Ernst Jünger, and the young conservatives, like Moeller himself. What Nietzsche had described psychologically, and the *Dolchstoß* had politically, Moeller did in cultural terms, as he shared Spengler’s dissatisfaction with modernity, which he called “Germany’s cultural poverty.” What he regarded as destructive of “true culture” were the political manifestations of enlightened rationalism, including liberalism and socialism, that were attempting to make a new Germany rather than restore the greatness lost by the old because of the trenches and the traitors. Moeller van den Bruck thus advocated the creation of a new German faith to stem European culture’s flagrant signs of cultural disintegration and vulgarity. His dissatisfaction with the German status quo after Versailles, as well as his support of a new German faith,

³¹ See, for example, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Das Recht der jungen Völker* (München: R. Piper & Co., 1919).

were the main reasons why Moeller van den Bruck became a popular figure for the radical right.

Taken together, what these three authors accomplish is to offer a layer of metaphors that the right used to "unite" all Germans behind a notion of elite Germanness that nonetheless pointed to the kind of heroics and victimhood that also occurred in the leftist war novels. What they opened the door for, however, is a *metaphor* of German heroicism that could present itself as truth. It is no accident, therefore, that it is called the *legend* that Germany was stabbed in the back. It joins the heroic vision of the Great War's trench soldiers familiar since before Remarque to another layer of story-telling, facilitating the transition of a more nuanced, multiple perspective on German society in times of war into the image of a beleaguered German *Volk* with a historical destiny.

2.4 THE INDIVIDUALISTS: MANFRED VON RICHTHOFEN AND ERNST JÜNGER

Yet it would be wrong to consider this elitist picture of Germany as a civilized nation of a particular type the creation of proto-Nazi sentiment. There were other prominent images of German heroes of more mythic proportions than those in the trenches, with military provenances leading back to quite different sources.

Manfred Freiherr von Richthofen (1892-1918) was the most famous German pilot who ever lived. Stylized as "The Red Baron" even by his enemies, he was also the most

colorful figure that the First World War created – he actually became a pop star.³² With over 700,000 copies sold by 1933, his war memoirs, entitled *Der rote Kampfflieger* (1917), was the second most popular book besides Remarque's.³³ Like Ernst Jünger, Richthofen was an extraordinarily fearless soldier who was decorated with the highest military honor, the *Pour le Mérite*, for shooting down over eighty enemy planes. It is emblematic of his playful arrogance that he painted his fighter plane bright red, taunting the enemy, as if the whole war were a sport, a game, or a fox hunt. When he himself was finally shot down in April 1918, British soldiers buried him with military honors to express their respect for the brave and dignified enemy: "Es ist dies ein Ritual, das die Superioren inter pares zelebrieren und das um den Begriff des Sportsgeistes kreist" (Bernig 101).³⁴

Yet his narrative stresses the heroism of the individual of whom much is asked, even as it notes that this hero is somehow a member of his own order. *Der rote Kampfflieger* ist a chronologically sequenced collection of episodes of the kind that would be told in the officers' casino (compare Bernig 106). Richthofen, the individual warrior, takes center stage, while the war itself takes place hardly noticeable in the background. The heroic deeds of the individual, reminiscent of jousting or dueling, form

³² For more details, compare Jörg Bernig, "Anachronistisches Kriegsbild, Selbstinszenierung und posthume Heroisierung. Manfred von Richthofen: Der rote Kampfflieger (1917), Thomas F. Schneider and Hans Wagener eds. *Von Richthofen bis Remarque: Deutschsprachige Prosa zum I. Weltkrieg* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2003) 97-111, 98.

³³ *Ibid.*, 97.

³⁴ For more details, compare George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP) 1990, 120-122.

the antithesis to the true character of the anonymous mass warfare in the trenches. Jörg Bernig explains:

Die erzählten Episoden sind immer an einen Konflikt gebunden, der sich stets gleicht. Er ist -- hier äußert sich der als ritterlich suggerierte Kampf -- der duellhaften Zusammenstoß mit dem Gegner. Reflexionen oder Brechungen des Erzählten finden sich nicht. Der Einleitung einer gefährvollen Situation [...] folgt eine dramatische Steigerung mit Höhepunkt, der sich eine Kadenz anschließt, die den Erzähler als Sieger oder Entkommenen (was so viel bedeutet wie Sieger, da er nicht getötet/ gefangen genommen wurde) zeigt. Die Handlung treibt rasch auf den Höhepunkt des Zusammenstoßes zu; der Gegner fällt und macht damit Platz für die nächste Episode. (Bernig 104)

Whenever ground soldiers do appear in the text, which is rare, they have the “status of fascinated observers” who have not yet learned to distinguish between the different types of airplanes, which Richthofen often refers to as “Apparate” (104-105). The proud pilot is thus doubly removed from the foot soldiers: he controls a fighting machine that appears to observers below as mysterious and futuristic, yet he likens his fighting effort to an ancient aristocratic pastime, namely the hunt; he is thus a nobleman of the future and the past, but he is not engaged in the present.³⁵ This tendency toward archaic imagery is something that Richthofen shares with Jünger: both withdraw from the immediateness of the war through aloof references to bygone eras, even as they celebrate heroism. Yet here we see an image of the *art* of war, as well as its horrors. In its own way, though, the narrative brings that art of war into context of ordinary German experience.

Bernig identifies the equation airborne warfare = hunting as the central principle of Richthofen’s self-image:

³⁵ Ibid., 122.

Bereits die Bezeichnung Jagdflieger steht dafür. Die Front selbst wird zum Jagdrevier, und Richthofen überträgt mittels des Jagd-Topos im Text Bilder aus seiner Passion, der Jagd auf Wild, auf den Krieg. Das Wild wird substituiert durch den Gegner, durch den gegnerischen Flugapparat, hinter dem kaum je ein Mensch erkennbar wird. Die Hoheitszeichen und Nummern der abgeschossenen Flugzeuge werden entfernt und als Trophäen präsentiert wie auch die eventuell überlebenden gegnerischen Flieger. (105)

From our perspective today, his callousness (“Menschen jagen”) stands in stark contrast to the puerile style of his writing. He tells stories about horses or how much he loves his dog -- “Das schönste Wesen, das je die Welt geschaffen hat, ist die echte Ulmer Dogge, mein ‘kleines Schoßhündchen’, der ‘Moritz’” (109) -- and welcomes the outbreak of the war the way a young boy would welcome playing “Cowboys and Indians” in the woods (Bernig 107): “Jeder aktive Soldat war selig, nun endlich seine Persönlichkeit und sein Können zeigen zu dürfen” (100). “Dies sowie über den gesamten Text verstreute Manierismen und Infantilismen verweisen auf die Jugend Richthofens und auf die Diskrepanz von körperlicher und intellektueller Reife” (107). Richthofen’s youth was a central aspect of his being elevated to a cult figure.³⁶ Just like all the “real guys” who were sent to the front and represented in the leftist war novels, his youthfulness became equated with purity (see chapter four). Richthofen’s wartime memoirs thus represent a perplexing mixture of asexual infantility, adolescent recklessness, aristocratic arrogance, and martial cold-bloodedness. The author conveys the impression that he perceived the war as a challenge to which he responded with the competitiveness of a good sportsman - - that is, as an *upper-class* version of the “ordinary German” of the left-wing war novels

³⁶ Bernig quotes Friedrich Georg Jünger as saying about Richthofen’s death: “Rein und hart war dieses Leben, und rein und hart war es vollendet worden. [...] Wen erschüttert nicht diese schöne und reiche Jugend, die wie ein Stern in der Nacht versinkt” (Bernig 108).

we have already seen. Like Remarque, then, this hero becomes one because he shows us how heroes react -- he is not a member of a war effort, but a warrior, a different caste altogether.

What this more upper-class warrior-soldier image can lead to emerges more clearly in one of the best-remembered authors of the war novels, if not one of the most popular at the time. Innocence or infantility are qualities that Ernst Jünger (1895-1998) certainly did not have. What he and Richthofen had in common, however, was an exaggerated sense of individuality and the general perception of war as the ultimate male sport and the warrior as the archetype of the soldier's heart. Jünger remained relatively unknown in the early 1920s. He gained prominence only gradually through his political activism in support of revolutionary New Nationalism, as well as through the publications of books and essays about his war experience. This success had few analogues. Jünger was an intelligent and unique figure and, it seems, an absolutely fearless soldier. He was wounded seven times during the war, yet kept returning to the front. Like Richthofen, he was decorated with the highest military honor, the order *Pour le Mérite*, which earned him the admiration of the other veterans. Jünger even served as a Lieutenant in the greatly reduced *Reichswehr* after the war, which made him a personal link to another Germany.

His first major literary work -- the war novel most remembered by literary scholars today as being of "quality" where Remarque's was not -- was *In Stahlgewittern* (1920), which was based on the diaries Jünger kept during the war. He states in the

prologue that he was dismayed with the political turn of events after the armistice and the cultural non-appreciation of the military's accomplishments:

Möge dieses Buch dazu beitragen, eine Ahnung zu geben von dem, was ihr geleistet. Wir haben viel, vielleicht alles, auch die Ehre verloren. Eins bleibt uns: die ehrenvolle Erinnerung an euch, die herrlichste Armee, die je die Waffen trug und an den gewaltigsten Kampf, der je gefochten wurde. Sie hochzuhalten inmitten dieser Zeit weichlichen Gewinsels, der moralischen Verkümmern und des Renegatentums ist stolzeste Pflicht eines jeden, der nicht nur mit Gewehr und Handgranate, sondern auch mit lebendigem Herzen für Deutschlands Größe kämpfte. (quoted in Müller, 220)

Jünger paints an almost erotic picture of combat, while taking off from a rhetorical point of view we have seen before. To him, combat is the epitome of existential exhilaration, the ultimate proof of one's personal courage, honor, and manly strength, as well as the release of the most primitive instincts.

In his second influential publication, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* (1922), he illustrates such a "baptism of fire" in characteristically bright colors and quite openly sexual terms:

Die Feuertaufe! Da war die Luft so von überströmender Männlichkeit geladen, daß man hätte weinen mögen, ohne zu wissen, warum. O Männerherzen, die das empfinden können! – O Leben du! Noch einmal, noch einmal noch, vielleicht das letzte! Raubbau treiben, prassen, vergeuden, das ganze Feuerwerk in tausend Sonnen und kreisenden Flammenrädern verspritzen, die gespeicherte Kraft verbrennen vorm Gang in die eisige Wüste. Hinein in die Brandung des Fleisches, tausend Gurgeln haben, dem Phallus schimmernde Tempel errichten... - Ein letztes noch: die Ekstase. Dieser Zustand des Heiligen, des großen Dichters und der großen Liebe ist auch dem großen Mute vergönnt. Da reißt Begeisterung die Männlichkeit so über sich hinaus, daß das Blut kochend gegen die Adern springt und glühend das Herz durchschäumt. Das ist ein Rausch über allen Rauschen, Entfesselung, die alle Bande sprengt.³⁷

³⁷ Ernst Jünger, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler, 1922) 12.

Such passages prove that Jünger by no means catered to popular taste, like many of the later pro-war novelists did. He was in a different category altogether because he exuded a Nietzschean kind of aristocratic arrogance and elitism, even as he shows the same trenches that his more leftist contemporaries had experienced. He was an eccentric individualist, not a *Kamerad*. Nevertheless, he earned the admiration of his followers through his proven courage in the war and his blend of sexual aesthetics and combat imagery.

If Richthofen was the archetype of the elitist warrior, then Jünger was his martyr-animal, the fulfillment of Nietzsche's description of the good German who is not a member of the herd. What is critical to note here is that both stories actually are constructed much like the left-wing novels I have discussed above: they center on individual experience, downplay politics in favor of the individual, show individuals transfigured into something more than human by the extreme experiences of the front, and draw divides between the home front, with its "ordinary people," and the true soldier/warrior caste that the Great War had generated for a Germany which then discarded them.

More such symmetries emerge in the most popular rightist novels of the era.

2.5 THE NOVELISTS, (A): FRANZ SCHAUWECKER, *AUFBRUCH DER NATION* (1929)

According to Ulrich Fröschle, *Aufbruch der Nation* "had remarkable effects on the contexts of the late Weimar Republic and the beginning of the Third Reich. It could be transformed into a conceptual term affectively integrating conservative, national

revolutionary, and National Socialist ideas concerned with a national ‘renaissance’.”³⁸ Michael Gollbach too affirms that this title, along with Zöberlein’s *Der Glaube an Deutschland* and Hans Grimm’s *Volk ohne Raum*, was elevated to a “frequently used communication and combat formula of the New Nationalism and National Socialism.”³⁹ Franz Schauwecker (1890-1964) was thus directly involved with building bridges between pro-war nationalist fiction and pro-war politics for a German public that had a firm grasp of the value of the soldier-warrior and supreme suspicion about politics. Joseph Goebbels, for instance, noted in his diary on November 10, 1929, that the book was “fabulous.” With some stylistic editing, Goebbels thought that this could become “the German war novel.” He liked Schauwecker’s dictum of losing the war to win the nation: “Wir mussten den Krieg verlieren, um die Nation zu gewinnen.”⁴⁰ This was the simple formula that could tie the hero into the national project that Spengler had described, and to turn the winter of Weimar into a new spring.

Schauwecker was from Hamburg and had studied history, art history, library science, and German in Munich, Berlin, and Göttingen. As a typical representative of the conservative *Bildungsbürgertum*, he was unable to reconcile his personal reality after the war -- especially the Weimar Republican system -- with the worldview of his formative years. He thus devoted his entire productive energy during the Weimar years to a refashioning of what he thought the war experience had really meant: the idea that the

³⁸ Compare Ulrich Fröschle, “‘Radikal im Denken, aber schlapp im Handeln’? Franz Schauwecker: *Aufbruch der Nation* (1929) Thomas F. Schneider and Hans Wagener, eds., *Von Richthofen bis Remarque: Deutschsprachige Prosa zum I. Weltkrieg* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003) 261-298.

³⁹ Compare Michael Gollbach, *Die Wiederkehr des Weltkriegs in der Literatur: Zu den Frontromanen der späten Zwanziger Jahre* (Kronberg/Ts.: Scriptor, 1978) 139.

⁴⁰ Compare Fröschle, 261-262.

war had, in fact, been a senseless and insane orchestration of mass death did not and could not enter his thinking because it was anathema to anything he had ever believed.⁴¹ Although it turned out that neither Schauwecker nor his friend, Ernst Jünger, could easily be integrated in the National Socialist movement once it had established itself, both writers helped pave the way toward successful Nazi agitation in that attempt to find meaning where the left had found principally carnage.⁴² Both writers insisted that the war, despite its horrors, had also created something positive: they portrayed it as the

⁴¹ Fröschle describes at great length the various efforts Schauwecker made between 1919 and 1929 to establish himself as a writer and as a journalist in the service of New Nationalism. In 1919, he still published a collection of apolitical novellas, entitled *Der Dolch des Condottiere*. Living at his parents' manor in West Prussia, he then wrote two war books, entitled *Im Todesrachen. Die deutsche Seele im Weltkrieg* (1919) and *Weltgericht* (1920). Both works contain a "critical war history from the bottom up." Schauwecker tried to depict what "really happened at the front" and authenticated his texts with the authoritative claim of "having been there" (267). In *Weltgericht*, he even expressed a certain sense of sympathy for those who wished to desert from the army in late 1918. In the fall of 1921, he contacted Ernst Jünger, whose novel *Stahlgewitter* (1920) he had just read. Through his correspondence with Jünger, Schauwecker began to focus on political objectives aimed at the upheaval of the Weimar system (*nationalrevolutionäre Ziele*). Schauwecker worked for the *Stahlhelm* veterans' periodical called *Wochenschrift des Bunds der Frontsoldaten* (as of 1925), then for *Die Standarte*, and eventually for the *Wochenschrift des neuen Nationalismus* (as of 1926). The concept of *Neuer Nationalismus* was firmly established when this periodical began to appear. Fröschle affirms that Schauwecker here first articulated the ideology of New Nationalism that invoked as its myth of origin the irrational "Erlebnis" of the war (270). Schauwecker stated in an essay published on May 8, 1927: *Der Materialismus der Vorkriegszeit war eine seelische Erstarrung. [...] Da gab uns der Krieg einen Mythos, einen uralten Mythos in einer neuen Form; er gab uns die Nation, das Volk als etwas im Blut lebendig erfundenes. [...] Das deutsche Volk von heute ist nur eine heimliche Nation. Der Neue Nationalismus will es zu einer offenkundigen Nation gestalten. Der Neue Nationalismus stammt nicht aus einer Berechnung oder aus einer Erwägung oder Wissenschaft, wengleich dies alles als Methode zu seiner Verwirklichung notwendig ist, sondern er stammt als der Mythos unserer Zeit und der Zukunft aus einem Urgrund, aus einer metaphysischen untrüglichen Gewißheit seiner inneren Wahrheit*" (quoted in Fröschle 270). The first time that Schauwecker transformed the war experience into what he saw as the mythical beginning of a new Germany was in his 1925 novel *Der feurige Weg* (see also Gollbach 139).

⁴² Goebbels noted in his diary on October 17, 1930, after he had met Jünger and Schauwecker at one of Arnolt Bronnen's social gatherings: "Die Literaten sind versammelt. Am besten gefällt mir Bronnen selbst. Er ist klar und nicht so eitel wie die anderen. Am schlimmsten ist das bei Jünger und Schauwecker. Fast unerträglich. Sie können sich nicht einfügen. Trotzdem muß man ihre spitzen Federn gebrauchen. Ich will mit ihnen für die Tageszeitung ein radikales Feuilleton machen. Das wird auch gelingen. Sonst viel Literaten. Radikal im Denken, aber schlapp im Handeln." (quoted in Fröschle, 262-263).

crucible in which the new German man and the new German nation was forged -- a compensatory invention.

The central concept of new nationalism was thus the transfiguration of the war experience into a mythical event that supposedly separated the worthy from the unworthy and produced the steely mentality of the new German man, even if he should have perished in the process. The trench soldier, if not sold out by international politics, could become the new nation. Strikingly many of the men who propagated these notions were physically far away from the ideal warrior-type they fantasized about. Both Hitler and Spengler, for instance, had been refused military service at least once; Goebbels, of course, was entirely unfit for it with his birth defect (a club foot); and Schauwecker, apparently, was a “small, bespectacled, nervous man of the masochistic type whose *Landsknechtstum* and heroic war-enthusiasm were mere overcompensations of a frightened *Spießler*.”⁴³ Ernst Jünger certainly does not fit this mold, but for many others it seemed to be the case that they were obsessively concerned with finding a way of recasting their (frail) masculinity through the lens of the war, to assert that *they themselves* were not weak, only the nation and its politicians were. The aftermath of the Great War marked a historic culmination of the “little-man-with-the-fierce-dog-syndrome, especially in the nations that had lost the war.”⁴⁴

⁴³ Thus reads Arnolt Bronnen’s description of Schauwecker in Bronnen’s 1954 autobiography (quoted in Fröschle 263).

⁴⁴ Kaiser Wilhelm II, of course, was another man who clearly overcompensated for his physical handicaps, in this case, a left arm crippled from birth, with military ostentation. Among the many researchers who have investigated this phenomenon, Erich Fromm, Klaus Theweleit, George Mosse, and Peter Sloterdijk are the most prominent. For a detailed discussion of their findings, see chapter four. Also compare Fröschle 263-264.

Schauwecker's personal fantasy, as published in *Aufbruch der Nation*, was personified in a typical hero for a World War I novel: a young man from a good bourgeois family by the name of Albrecht Urach. The novel encompasses the time from a few months before the war to directly after the November 1918 armistice. Urach is a history student working on his dissertation in the beginning; he is the *Bildungsbürger* who would lose the most from the war.⁴⁵ Later on, as the narrator, he represents the voice of the front line soldiers in general; he is also clearly Schauwecker's ideological mouthpiece, which makes him flat and boring as a character, and pompous as an omniscient narrator.

The novel's emphasis on front line soldiers is important because *Aufbruch der Nation* works with simple dichotomies to drive home the message that Urach and Herse, who is his sidekick, represent what is right and meaningful in Germany, while their adversaries, including homefront profiteers (*Kriegsgewinnler*), the wrong kind of officers, or "the pigs from the communications zone" (*Etappenschweine*), represent what is senseless or frivolous.⁴⁶ Urach is right, the rest are wrong, or at least a little off, like Weigert (who is a Jew). In one scene, Urach speaks to him about the imminent war and it turns out that Weigert is a Jewish humanist who believes in world peace and "Verständigung der Völker im Namen der Menschheit."⁴⁷ After the conversation, Urach

⁴⁵ Franz Schauwecker, *Aufbruch der Nation* (Berlin: Frundsberg Verlag, 1929) 16.

⁴⁶ The simple black-and-white scheme is continued among Urach's superiors. Reminiscent of Oliver Stone's Sergeants Elias and Barnes in *Platoon* (1986), Schauwecker created a good Sergeant named Krüger, "the best soldier of the company (64), and a bad Sergeant named Mollwan, "tall and skinny with a malicious grin around his narrow mouth" (64). Another good soldier is Lieutenant Bergenthin: "Das ist ein überlegener Mensch [...]. Zu dem kann man Vertrauen haben" (70).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

reflects on the “invisible glass wall” that separates people like Weigert (whose very name means “refuses”) from himself:

Er dachte noch des öfteren an dies Gespräch mit einem sonderbaren Gefühl Weigert gegenüber, wie er es vormals nie verspürt hatte. Eine kaum merkbare Verschiedenheit stand zwischen jenem und ihm, vergleichbar einer dünnen, unsichtbaren Glaswand, und das erschreckende Halbbewußtsein, daß an bestimmten Punkten des Gesprächs – man mußte nur tief oder weit genug gehen – eine Verständigung unmöglich sei. Er bedauerte das, und es machte ihm zu schaffen. (Schauwecker 26)⁴⁸

The hypocrisy of this scene is very interesting because Schauwecker, who otherwise tends to be heavy-handed in his ideological sermons, can afford to be subtle here -- there are, somehow, two German nations in these trenches. The subtext is, of course, that most of his readers would nod their anti-Semitic heads and get the hint, “Jews are just different from us,” no need to expound on that, “we all know what you mean, Franz.” What is nauseating about Urach as a character, however, are lines like the last one in the above quote: “He regretted this, and it caused him some misgivings.”⁴⁹ In such characterizations, Urach emerges to us today as the unfortunate product of an anti-Semitic author attempting to draw a saint. He projects the same attitude toward the other “wrong” characters he encounters throughout the book: he does not hate them, he only registers what is wrong with them in order to do better himself. *Aufbruch der Nation* is

⁴⁸ Anti-Semitism does not only play a role in the pro-war novels. Ernst Glaeser’s otherwise leftist-liberal novel *Jahrgang 1902*, for instance, contains substantial amounts of anti-Semitic stereotypes directed at the Silberstein family.

⁴⁹ Later on he even apologizes to his comrades for accepting the offer to become an officer. We are led to believe that Urach has a moral problem with abandoning his equals to become their superior: “‘Tja – ich weiß nich’, überlegte Albrecht. ‘Ich fühl mich sehr wohl in der Kompanie. Nachher komme ich womöglich woanders hin, und das käm mir wie Verrat an der Gruppe vor’.” His friend Herse reassures him that his doubts are noble but unfounded. He tells him: “‘Ich mein, ich möcht lieber, daß du so bei uns bleibst wie jetzt. Von mir aus und auch noch von vielen andern aus. Aber du bist mehr als unsereiner, und da ist es richtig, wenn du Offizier wirst. Wer soll denn sonst Offizier werden, wenn nich Leute wie du! Solche Leute wie du sind gute Offiziere’” (Schauwecker 224).

clearly educational in intent; Schauwecker wants to convert his readers into followers of Albrecht Urach. In the process, they will learn to become better Germans, Germans of a future instead of a past.

The black-and-white pattern of the novel unfolds along these lines: before the war, day-in and day-out, Urach is surrounded by the meaningless routines of the bourgeoisie -- a sentiment we have seen in many war novels. His fellow students, his parents and their friends, do not seem to notice the shallowness of their life, but Urach does because he is destined for the higher and the more profound. This occurs to him, for instance, as he meets a General in the street:

Ein General begegnete ihm auf der Straße. [...] Dieser Mann mit grauem Haar war unantastbar. Hinter ihm standen Staat und Tradition, Armee und Geschichte. Er repräsentierte konzentriert die Macht. Der Straßenlärm rührte nicht an seine Knie. Ein Gefühl seiner eigenen Bedeutungslosigkeit ergriff den jungen Mann, ein für Sekunden geradezu zermalmendes Gefühl des Nichts. Und so erging es ihm öfter, wenn er Männern begegnet, die offensichtlich eine Stellung innehatten [...]. (Schauwecker 18)

Then he joins the war, which promptly makes him a man and a first-rate officer. *Aufbruch der Nation* is thus an activist *Bildungsroman* that equates the German nation with the main protagonist. The things he learns are the things Schauwecker wants the whole nation to learn, they are not only the means through which an individual discovers himself. His attributes and principles are the attributes and principles the author would like to see upheld by all members of the German nation.

His learning process involves both the acquisition of new knowledge and convictions, as well as the undoing of previously held beliefs that are unmasked as

meaningless one after the other. Since the acquisition of new knowledge and convictions only takes place within the context of trench combat, Urach essentially shrinks into the small identity of a trench-hardened front soldier that so many Weimar readers knew. The war experience strips away previously dominant aspects of his social class, education, and worldview, and replaces those with a political vision that emphasizes the same principles that were relevant in the trenches. This narrative pattern has been used by authors from all sides of the political spectrum. But then the text moves further to make the affective truth of individual development into a metaphor for the nation.

One example of how this process plays out is Urach's changing image of the Emperor. Before the war, Wilhelm appears only as an image because Urach keeps his picture in a thick gilded frame: "Kaiser Wilhelm II. in großer Uniform des 1. Garderegiments zu Fuß sah aus mächtigem Goldstuckrahmen gebieterisch über ihn hinweg" (Schauwecker 15). When he actually sees the *Kaiser* toward the very end of the war, it becomes apparent that Wilhelm is one of the icons Urach should have never put faith in: "Er stand da im Pelz und bezogenem Lederhelm, ein wenig zusammengesunken in seinem großen Mantel, und sah auf die Masse unter sich herab. Dann sagte er mit einer brüchigen Stimme: 'Guten Morgen, Kameraden'" (359). On the one hand, the experience of the front functions as a great leveller -- previous differences disappear among the fighting soldiers; on the other hand, the front experience makes these soldiers unlike any other men, especially distinct from those behind the lines and the cowards who shirk war service, as well as from the bourgeoisie and the politicians who do not understand what

forces they have unleashed. True men, according to Schauwecker, are only the valiant soldiers fighting in the trenches.

Abundant evidence in the book drives home the point that only personality matters in the end -- a not unfamiliar message for war novels. Social class is as unimportant as education.⁵⁰ War means that one leaves behind the narrow constraints of personal background and outgrows parents and former superiors.⁵¹ Whatever happens at the *Heimatfront* is not as important as the events at the front, even if people are starving.⁵² The bizarre experience of becoming alienated from (former) friends and family at home is unpleasant but essential because it helps the front soldier realize that the old way was the wrong way. German society cannot go on the way it had. Urach knows, it is perishing along with so many of its sons. In the end, however, a total catastrophe for Germany may be narrowly avoided. Only very few of the best are left, and only few of those will have the required leader-personality (*Führer-Persönlichkeit*) to lead the disoriented into a brighter future for Germany instead of into organized defeatism:

Es war im September 1918. In der vordersten Linie herrschte nur noch die Persönlichkeit. Die Achselstücke für sich an irgendeinem Paar Schultern galten nichts mehr. Es kam darauf an, wer sie trug. Wer Vertrauen besaß, war Führer, und wer jetzt Vertrauen besaß, der hatte es sich mit Recht erkämpft. Sie fühlten

⁵⁰ The following scenes illustrate both points: (Two soldiers talking about the new Regiment Commander, Lieutenant Colonel von Monchart) “‘Aber er is aus dem ältesten pommerschen Adel’, fügte Lange gedankenvoll hinzu. ‘Du bist’n Dussel!’ sagte Herse scharf. ‘Hauptsache, er is’n guter Kommandeur’.” (88) Shortly thereafter, Urach mentally prepares for the battle near Pracznycz: “Das war auch eine Prüfung, dachte Albrecht, und er entsann sich der Gymnasial- und Universitätsjahre und ihrer Examina. Welcher Wert war ihnen beigelegt worden! Wie entschieden die über Leben, Stellung, Einkommen, ja über den Menschen selbst! Diese Prüfung der Schlacht vor Pracznycz erschien ihm entscheidender” (89).

⁵¹ This notion of liberation from the bourgeoisie is an interesting parallel between Schauwecker’s and Remarque’s books.

⁵² Compare Schauwecker, 98.

sich als das einzig Vorhandene. Sie überstanden sogar den Rückzug, der nie zur Flucht wurde. (Schauwecker 336)

Instead of feeling lost, they feel purified into a new leadership role; their individuality promises to bring them into a new brotherhood.

On their way home, Urach and Herse have one final conversation on the question of what the war has taught them. Urach even feels liberated in the sense that he has gained certainty about those elements in his worldview he can now freely discard. In this scene, the men who started the revolution play the part of “wrong” to juxtapose Urach and his friend being “right.” Urach even appreciates the revolution for showing him clearly everything that is wrong:

[Die Revolution] sie hat einen dicken Wust abgebaut. [...] Sie hat uns den Dreck aus den Augen gewischt. Jetzt endlich sind wir seit Jahrhunderten so weit, daß wir ganz von vorn mit uns selber beginnen können, ohne die alten Häute mit uns herumzuschleppen, die alten Vorschriften, die alten Gewohnheiten. Jetzt können wir endlich mal [...] das Leben neu prüfen, wie wir uns selber geprüft haben da draußen, wenn wir gegen den Tod mit unserem Leben anrannten. [...] Wir brauchen ja nur ein Wort zu sagen, dann verstehen wir uns im Blut: Front. Nicht wahr, da haben wir einen maßlosen Stolz vor den anderen, vom Bürger bis zum Munitionsarbeiter, der im wichtigen Moment gestreikt hat. (Schauwecker 381)

Hence, despite the catastrophic defeat of the German army, Urach and his friend emerge from the war unscathed and even fortified in their resolve. They are now alienated from the past, but at the same time united by the “sanguine understanding” of the front experience and filled with “boundless pride” versus the “ammunitions worker who called a strike at the critical moment.”

Yet again, the subtext goes beyond the political implications into sexual imagery. As the German forces retreat and throw their remaining ammunition into ponds and rivers, Urach perceives this humiliating scenario as a “national self-castration”:

Das war der endgültige Schluß! Dies war nicht wieder gutzumachen! Jetzt erst waren sie wirklich wehrlos! Hier schnitt sich die Nation auf Befehl zielsicher die Geschlechtsteile ab – wozu brauchen wir die noch in den kommenden Zeiten der internationalen Verbrüderung, des Weltfriedens, der Menschenliebe, des allgemeinen Glücks? Wozu? (369)

In typical soldierly fashion, Urach associates male genitals with aggression against the enemy and cynically advocates national castration as appropriate for the coming age of “international fraternization, world peace, love of mankind, and general joy.” This passage illustrates that his self-image as a potent man is inextricably linked to his ability to combat the enemy.

In another scene, his friend Herse wonders why none of the front soldiers interfered with the cowards who staged the revolution, and Urach replies that there is “no man” on the other side, not even a proper revolution, just an “running away out of weakness”: “Aber sieh dir bitte die andere Seite an. Wo hast du denn da einen Mann?! Wo denn?! Das ist doch keine Revolution. Das ist ja bloß ein Nachgeben aus Hunger, ein Auseinanderlaufen und Sichzusammenrotten aus Schwäche, Verbitterung, Haß, kurz aus lauter minderwertigen Gründen” (376).

To summarize, Schauwecker’s *Aufbruch der Nation* is a classic work of the transformative passion that drove new nationalism as a political movement. I would argue, along with Mosse, Sloterdijk, and Theweleit, that this campaign to reinvigorate the nation was politically motivated only on the surface, while its other objective was the

rewriting of the German masculine code. These pro-war novels tend to equate the status quo of the German nation with the given state of the German front line soldier, who they regard as the only true indicator of German masculinity -- an image clearly more forward looking than that in *Im Westen nichts Neues*, even though it is built of many of the same elements. Other purportedly German men, including Jews, draft-dodgers, malingerers, cowards, revolutionaries, etc., are not accepted as real men but only serve as projection screens for unmanly characteristics. Schauwecker thus reconfigures the stab-in-the-back-myth into an image of national castration.

The modified myth that this novel offers results in a soldier type who refuses to let himself be castrated, a soldier who keeps on fighting even if it is not against the French or the British -- a soldier who will continue his German battle on a home front ruined by the war. In Schauwecker's vision, men like Albrecht Urach were forced by you-know-who to quit the official battle against Germany's enemies only to continue their mission by fighting against a new enemy, which was the new political establishment in their own country: "Wir haben allerhand gelernt voneinander, das wir brauchen können. Denn dieser Friede ist die Fortsetzung des Krieges mit anderen Mitteln. Jeder geht an seine eigene Front. Die Front ist jetzt heimlich. Lebt wohl, Kameraden" (376).

As Schauwecker himself explained in a letter to Ernst Jünger, his literary treatment of the war experience was not intended to create heroic individuals who stride or fly across the battlefield like Jünger or Richthofen. His ideal man-warrior is heroic on in the day-to-day business of quietly fulfilling his duty and sticking up for his comrades. Not without a tinge of resentment toward the reckless warrior-sportsman, he told Jünger:

“Es ist etwas anderes, fliegend, hoch in den Lüften dem Tode entgegenzurasen, als dem Tode verdreckt, verspeckt, hungrig, durstig, müde auf allen Vieren durch Kot, Draht, Trichter, Leichen entgegenzukriechen” (quoted in Fröschle 280). His warrior on the home front, however, would set the pattern for the right-wing novels that would win the day as publicity for the Nazis' eventual political program.

(B) WERNER BEUMELBURG, *DIE GRUPPE BOSEMÜLLER* (1930)

Quite naturally, this narrative strategy was found in many novels, as the soldier's dignity in the trenches as seen in the 1920s gives way to this call for the soldier-warrior to continue his engagement on the home front, proving himself a real man.

The ideal of comradeship in the trenches, which played an important role in most of the novels I have discussed up to this point, was, for example, taken to a new level by Werner Beumelburg (1899-1963) in *Die Gruppe Bosemüller*. This writer too was from the bourgeoisie. He was a minister's son and studied at the University of Cologne. He had volunteered for military service and fought before Verdun, as well as “in other major battles on the western front” (Gollbach 167). He returned as a Lieutenant decorated with the Iron Cross, First and Second Class. Like Schauwecker, he worked as a journalist after the war and became a freelance writer in 1926 (*ibid.*).⁵³ His most popular work was

⁵³ Beumelburg was a prolific (pro-)war writer. Commissioned and assisted by sources from the *Reichsarchiv*, he published a series of “historically accentuated writings” on major battles of the Great War, including “Douaumont” (1923), “Ypern 1914” (1925), “Loretto” (1927), and “Flandern” (1928). In the comprehensive *Sperrfeuer um Deutschland* (1929), he intended to “blend the processes of the war with the processes of the soul.” By 1939, the seventeen works he had published reached a sales volume of over 1,000,000. *Die Gruppe Bosemüller* was even read in schools, which proves that Beumelburg was readily adopted by the National Socialists, who also honored him with the “Grosser Literaturpreis der

Sperrfeuer um Deutschland (1928), which reached a sales volume of 328,000 by 1940 (ibid.).

In *Die Gruppe Bosemüller*, he focuses on the theme of camaraderie in the Battle of Verdun during a time period of seven months (May – December, 1916). In German national consciousness, this battle was heavily mythologized as the quintessential battle of World War I, very much like Stalingrad later became the epitome of World War II. Due to the “omniscient and omnipresent third-person (plural) narrative perspective,” Beumelburg “creates the impression of objective description” (Gollbach 168). His main protagonists are the “young war volunteer, Erich Siewers, the Private Wammsch, and, integrating both, the Bosemüller Group” (ibid.).

The group itself is composed for the most part of members of the lower bourgeoisie and of farmers; only Siewers himself stands out because his father is a high civil servant and young Siewers has attended the *Gymnasium*. The strategy of placing the protagonists at the lower end of the social spectrum is quite clearly borrowed from Remarque, who had created an even split between older working class and younger bourgeois group members. Beumelburg, moreover, emphasizes that the group members stem from geographically diverse regions of Germany, which makes their fusion into one group identity even more remarkable. Like Remarque, the narrative perspective is restricted to the war as the group perceives it (*Schützengrabenperspektive*), so there is no overreaching discussion of the origins or effects of the war in any larger context.

Reichshauptstadt Berlin” in 1936 and the “Kunstpreis der Westmark” in 1937. (For more details, see Gollbach 167-168).

Another aspect that is similar to Remarque's strategy is that Beumelburg chooses not to develop his characters psychologically or individually. They remain mere types that are loosely defined with humoristic labels or little anecdotes. The Lieutenant, for example, "hat das Herz am rechten Fleck."⁵⁴ Someone else is "ein Prachtkerl, alle haben Spaß an ihm" (Beumelburg 9). This literary strategy is the equivalent of the author nudging the reader in the side, especially because the personal anecdotes about each group member are intentionally light-hearted or humorous, as if no further explanation were necessary. With regard to male readers' horizons of expectation, this tactic amounts to a direct appeal to fill in the blank where there is no information: "He is that type of guy, you know?" Like Remarque, as we shall see, Beumelburg engineers reader identification through superficial and deficient character development. The slight differences that do exist do not interfere with the group dynamics (compare Gollbach 170). These similarities between *Gruppe Bosemüller* and *Im Westen nichts Neues* suggest that Beumelburg crafted his novel as a direct right-wing response to Remarque.

Affirmative evidence for this claim stems from Beumelburg himself. In a 1933 statement, entitled "Das jugendliche Reich," he explained that he could not accept the memory of the war experience being sullied by pacifism or let it be "dragged into the dust":

Vor einem Dutzend und mehr Jahren, als wir achtzehn- und neunzehnjährigen jungen Menschen von den Schlachtfeldern des Westens zurückkehrten, als wir, einem negativen und erschöpften Zeitgeist zum Trotz, es wagten, so etwas wie ein nationales Schrifttum zu beginnen – damals wurden wir von denen, die sich als Pächter des deutschen Schrifttums und der deutschen Dichtung in einem

⁵⁴ Werner Beumelburg, *Die Gruppe Bosemüller* (Oldenburg i. O.: G. Stalling, 1930) 25; 204.

besonderen Sinne betrachteten, mit einem Lächeln des Mitleids über die Schulter angesehen. [...] Die Riesenwelle dieser besonderen neudeutschen Literatur, ganz auf das destruktive Element gerichtet und auf die intellektuelle Zergliederung und Verächtlichmachung aller uns heiligen Begriffe, erreichte ihren Höhepunkt in jenem wahnsinnigen Versuch, unser Innerstes in den Staub zu ziehen, das tiefe Erleben der Nation, das uns im Kriege unter Blut und Tod geworden war, zu verwandeln in Abscheu vor uns selbst, in Pazifismus und in eine Gesinnung, die uns die Schamröte vor unseren gefallenen Kameraden in die Stirn trieb. Aber da erwachten wir. Damals empfanden wir die Pflicht vor unserer Nation, vor unseren Toten und vor unserem eigenen Gewissen mit ganzer Entschlossenheit. Wir warfen uns in die Bresche.⁵⁵

Beumelburg's novel, then, represents a direct contra to the new left-wing war literature and its "destructive element."

I would argue that, ten years after the war ended, the importance of its memory superseded the importance of the actual experience, at least to the veterans on the radical right wing, leading to a second wave of war novels in the 1930s, this time told from the right. After all, they could not allow the "unmanly" lefties addressed next -- famous names today like Zweig, Renn, or Remarque -- to write the script of this memory for them, so they fought back with novels of their own to set the record straight.⁵⁶ In addition, as I will turn to in the next and final chapter of this study, the perceived threat to German masculinity always lurked just below the surface. In the foreword to *Sperrfeuer um Deutschland* (1928), for instance, Beumelburg stated that the book was meant to

⁵⁵ Werner Beumelburg, "Dichtung und Nation," in *Das jugendliche Reich. Reden und Aufsätze zur Zeitenwende* (Oldenburg: [no publisher] 1933). This quote appears in Heidrun Ehrke-Rotermund, "Durch die Erkenntnis des Schrecklichen zu seiner Überwindung"? Werner Beumelburg: *Gruppe Bosemüller* (1930)" Thomas F. Schneider, Hans Wagener, eds., *Von Richthofen bis Remarque: Deutschsprachige Prosa zum I. Weltkrieg* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2003) 299-318.

⁵⁶ The right-wing writer Friedrich Lehmann used the expression "unmanly books of young old men" in his attack on the Remarque-camp in the foreword to his novel *Wir von der Infanterie* (1930). For more details, see Müller, *Krieg und die Schriftsteller*, 298.

enhance “Männlichkeit, Kameradschaft und Liebe zum Vaterland” as the “legacy of the fallen soldiers” (Ehrke-Rotermund 301).

In order to blot out the possibility of a more left-oriented script as completely as possible, then, and to reclaim the warrior out of a landscape that had threatened to turn all soldiers into pacifists (and hence *Weicheier*, pansies), Beumelburg and others had to compose novels that would work well as antidotes to Remarque’s Paul Bäumer group. Beumelburg therefore fashioned Erich Siewers, a seventeen-year-old, as a direct anti-body to Paul Bäumer, a nineteen-year-old:

Erich Siewers ist Gymnasiast wie Paul Bäumer. Beide hegen romantische Vorstellungen vom Krieg und werden von der Schulbank weg in die Gräben der Westfront versetzt. Sie finden sich in einer ‘Gruppe’ mit einfachen Handwerkern aus allen Regionen Deutschlands wieder, mit denen sie freundschaftliche Beziehungen entwickeln. (Ehrke-Rotermund 302)

The paradigmatic fatherly/motherly function of Remarque's Stanislaus Katczinsky is taken over by Private Wammersch in *Gruppe Bosemüller*, as well as by the Lieutenant, who thinks first and foremost in terms of what is best for his men. Up to this point, Remarque’s and Beumelburg’s novels are practically identical in conception and execution: both worship camaraderie as the best thing the war produced and both concur that comrades in the trenches took over the pre-war social role of the family. A successful coming-of-age is only possible for Bäumer / Siewers because of the protection and guidance the “trench family” provides. Without it, they would be likely to make fatal mistakes during the first days at the front. Moreover, that family represented a larger range of German types than later novels would valorize.

Once the accelerated maturation-process is complete, however, the right-wing writers hasten to take opposite sides from Remarque in the continued character development of their main protagonists. Siewers, for instance, never knows such feelings as loss of perspective, depression, hopelessness, resignation, or fear of failure in his post-war life.⁵⁷ He makes exactly one mistake, out of fear, namely failing to rescue his severely wounded friend from a shrapnel hole they both hid in, but in the end the group comforts him and he emerges with the same steely resolve that also graced Albrecht Urach in *Aufbruch der Nation*. The pattern may seem simplistic, but this is how the right-wing novels would eventually create all its heroes: the young man endures the horror, lives through it, and then ascends to a level where he can see the meaning and the objective of the German nation's mission.⁵⁸ Typically, their bravery is recognized by a superior and the men become officers, hence leader-figures. Siewers is moreover decorated with the Iron Cross for his wound.

His commanding officer praises his good performance by telling him: "Machen Sie Ihre Sache weiterhin so gut wie bisher, Sie sind mit Ihren siebzehn Jahren früh zum Manne geworden" (Beumelburg 332). This evidence suggests that, in the right-wing imagination, the war made men out of children, and to qualify for manliness one had to

⁵⁷ Compare Ehrke-Rotermund, 303.

⁵⁸ In Siewer's case, his change of heart is reminiscent of either an orgasm or a religious apotheosis: "Da überfällt ihn etwas, das zehnmal stärker ist als er selbst. Da krampft sich etwas in ihm zusammen und breitet sich im gleichen Augenblick unendlich aus. Da wird es auf einmal ganz hell, ganz klar, ganz einfach. Da ist auf einmal eine wilde, berauschte Feierlichkeit. [...] Er hört nichts, er sieht nichts, er denkt nichts, er ist nicht lebendig, und er ist nicht tot" (Beumelburg, *Gruppe Bosemüller*, 228).

not only endure the war but embrace it, which one could do from any social position.⁵⁹ Unlike Siewers, however, Paul Bäumer and his friends turned away from the war once they had found out its true nature. That is what made them un-manly in the minds of the right-wing militarists. In *Gruppe Bosemüller*, the Lieutenant, for example, has given up hope in the war effort and thus serves as a counterpoint to Siewers' determination, but the Lieutenant still seeks death on the battlefield rather than succumbing to his despair. This detail suggests that the right-wing imagination can accept that a soldier may feel hopelessness (Lieutenant) or fear (Siewers), but it cannot tolerate that soldiers give in to those feelings. It is from this angle one should interpret one of the heroic images in *Gruppe Bosemüller*, when the eponymous Sergeant, like Atlas, supports a wooden beam in a trench that caved in under artillery fire with superhuman strength until, much later and out of nowhere, Private Wammsch appears to rescue the group out of the hopeless situation. What thus emerges as the hallmark of the pro-war novels is the protagonists' resolve not to lose sight of their personal function in the war effort.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ In a dream, Siewers has a conversation with his dead mother about his fear to carry on. In stark contrast to Paul Bäumer's mother, who advocates life, Siewer's mother advises him to "overcome this one last mountain of fear": "Ich kann nicht, Mutter, ich habe fürchterliche Angst vor dem Berg'. 'Du mußt, mein Junge, du mußt!' Damit konnte Siewers sich erfolgreich von der dem Krieg antagonistisch gegenübergestellten weiblichen Lebenswelt lösen und der bewunderten 'Männlichkeit in ihrer rauhesten Form' annähern" (Ehrke-Rotermund 307).

⁶⁰ While Siewers redeems himself through a flashy act of bravery, the stuttering Pioneer Casdorp is not as fortunate. Heidrun Ehrke-Rotermund explains that Casdorp's unmanliness is not redeemed, which leads to his brutal exclusion from the Bosemüller Group: "Der Stotterer wird schon bei der ersten Vorstellung aus der Gruppe ausgegrenzt; denn vor dem Angriff auf Douaumont ist er 'der einzige, der Aufregung verrät' [Beumelburg 28]. Dementsprechend bildet er sich auch ein, am Kopf getroffen zu sein, als das Gehirn eines anderen Soldaten ihm ins Gesicht spritzt. Peter Schwarzkopf [...] weist ihn stellvertretend für die Gruppe zurecht: 'Halt's Maul, Mensch ... wenn das dein Gehirn wäre, dann wärest du längst verreckt. Meinst du, man kann sein Gehirn spazieren tragen wie einen Topf Reisbrei?' [36]. Als Casdorp in der Folge das für ihn traumatische Erlebnis nicht – wie erwartet – überwindet, vielmehr von panischer Angst überwältigt wird und am Sturm auf Souville nicht teilnehmen möchte, versucht die Gruppe wieder, ihn mit ihrem 'Humor' lächerlich zu machen und dadurch zum Einsatz zu zwingen [148-152]. Der als 'Schlappschisser'

Another essential difference between *Gruppe Bosemüller* and the more general tactic that *Im Westen nichts Neues* represents is that Beumelburg painstakingly created verisimilitude through verifiable place and time markers -- he was willing to take a position on a real war and on the leaders and politicians who had failed their troops-warriors. The events of the book take place between May and Christmas 1916 at a precisely described section of the front near the fortress Douaumont. Siewers participates in the defense of the fortress against a French counter-attack at the end of May, then in an unsuccessful German advance toward the village of Fleury and Fort Souville, as well as in the retreat from Douaumont in October of the same year.⁶¹ Beumelburg thus attempted to invalidate Remarque's account of the war as fabricated, while his own work would, by comparison, appear closer to "what really happened." His omniscient third-person narration -- versus Remarque's first-person narrator -- enhances the impression that Beumelburg speaks with authority. He even dedicated the novel to "Private Wammsch" as if he had been a real comrade in the war. *Gruppe Bosemüller* is also not structured in loosely connected episodes, but follows a carefully crafted trajectory of heightening tension that culminates in a climax of heroic failure.⁶²

To summarize, Beumelburg created a fictional war -- a *Kriegslegende* rather than a memoir or *Bildungsroman* -- in which a tightly-knit group, characterized by extreme courage and altruism, replaces the individual soldier's social network in civilian life. In

Stigmatisierte antwortet mit Selbstmord [153]. Wie alle, die die Gruppennormen nicht erfüllen und den absoluten Einsatz im Kampf vermissen lassen, fällt er völlig aus der hochgelobten Kameradschaft heraus" (Ehrke-Rotermund 308-309).

⁶¹ Compare *ibid.*, 304.

⁶² *Ibid.*

contrast to Jünger and Richthofen, he downplayed individual heroism in favor of the group's collective achievement. Through their fighting experience in the first line, the members of the group appear more knowledgeable of tactical decisions than the commanding officers behind the lines. Beumelburg's main criticism is thus directed at anyone who did or could not belong to such front-line groups, and especially at the soldiers behind the lines (*Stabsoffiziere* and *Etappenschweine*). The political implication of this novel is nonetheless utopian since Beumelburg seems to suggest that the altruism of the trenches could serve as a model for a new German nation:

Der Autor hält diese Gruppenform für die Keimzelle einer qualitativ neuen staatlichen (völkischen) Gemeinschaft für die Zukunft (Nachkriegszeit). Er erliegt einem illusionären Wunschenken, da er glaubt und fordert, diese an der Front und unter ihren Bedingungen entstandene Gruppenform als Ideal gesellschaftlichen Zusammenlebens auf eine friedliche Zukunft projizieren zu können. Bar jeder gesellschaftspolitischen und historischen Fundierung bleibt Beumelburgs Wunsch und Forderung mystische Vision ohne konkret politische Kontur. (Gollbach 182)

This summary does not do justice to what Beumelburg has really achieved: the ability to create a new German nation around the figure of the mystic warrior. Gollbach particularly underestimates the political dimension of Beumelburg's narrative, its clear call to continuing a politics of individual nobility and German warrior caste nationhood rather than a modern political state of collective weaklings.

(C) JOSEPH MAGNUS WEHNER, *SIEBEN VOR VERDUN* (1930)

Others took up this synthesis as viable, creating more stories about one-time trench heroes who would form the core of a new German and educated nation.

Joseph Magnus Wehner's novel represents another didactic militaristic response to Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues*, even if it does not open a recognizable point-for-point dialogue with it, like *Gruppe Bosemüller* did. Like many of his fellow war novelists, Joseph Magnus Wehner (1891-1973), who had studied Philology, Philosophy, and Art History in Jena and Munich, volunteered for the war in 1914, served as a common soldier in Italy, Serbia, and France, and was seriously wounded in the battle of Verdun in 1916. After the war, Wehner worked as a journalist for the *Münchner Zeitung* until 1930, and the following three years as a theater and literature critic for the *Münchner Neuesten Nachrichten*. He decided to become a freelance author in 1933.⁶³

Like Beumelburg, Wehner could not bear the thought that Remarque's best-seller should have a prominent place in the public memory of the war and decided to rectify what he perceived as distortions: "Jetzt, als ich mein Volk in Gefahr sah, dem kleinlichsten Ressentiment gegen alles Heldische zu verfallen, erhob ich mich und schrieb meine *Sieben vor Verdun*" (quoted in Gollbach 187). To him as a right-wing *völkisch* writer, the battle of Verdun was a "symbol of German heroism and unparalleled sacrifice" (ibid.). In his own version of a forward-looking synthesis of the warrior and the utopian nationalist, Wehner aims to derive meaning from the mass death of the Great War by linking the troops' sacrifice to the mystical idea of a God-sent nascent German Reich that shall dominate the world: "Das heilige deutsche Reich ist nicht gebunden an Grenzen und Länder, es ist unendlich wie die Welt selber, eingesetzt von Gott, und den

⁶³ For more details, see Gollbach 185.

Deutschen als Auftrag der Ewigkeit gegeben, in der sichtbaren Welt Ordnung und Gesetz zu schaffen” (ibid.).

In terms of ideological zeal and literary purpose, Wehner’s book thus closely resembles Beumelburg’s. He, like Wehner and Schauwecker, was spurred on in his literary activity and political activism by a pronounced hatred of the Weimar Republic. What resonates in his criticism of it, however, is not so much political hostility as a deep-seated fear of modernity in general. According to Michael Gollbach, Wehner thus reveals himself as a typical adherent of the nineteenth-century *völkisch* creed:

Der Regierung in den letzten Kriegsjahren wirft er vor, versäumt zu haben, ‘Meuterer, Gewinnler und Schmarotzer [...] kurzerhand in den Tod zu schicken’. Aus Wehners nationalistischer Perspektive haben die ‘damals regierenden Parteien [...] Schuld an dem kulturellen Zerfall des deutschen Volkes und an der Not und Verzweiflung seiner schöpferischen Geister’. Massenkultur, Intellektualismus, Zivilisation, Demokratie und politische Parteien als Entartung des ‘Deutschen’ verwerfend, sieht Wehner in den Menschen der Weimarer Zeit ‘nur noch böse, brutale, geldgierige und in schmutzigem Materialismus verkommene Tiergesichter’. (Gollbach 186)

This description of Wehner’s contempt for the Weimar system suggests that he believed in a Golden Age that was not yet marred by “mass culture, intellectualism, civilisation, and democracy.” Indeed, *Sieben vor Verdun* contains the message that there once was a powerful German Reich, alluded to without specific historical details, and that the war experience should be understood as a force to help veterans re-erect such an age of national glory. Therefore, Wehner’s perspective on the German nation is split: it reaches back into a nebulous period past (*das alte Reich*) and, in utopian fashion, it also reaches forward to a future age of national maturity, which he likens to a nation becoming a man: “Er [the eternal soldier, now calm and serene] weiß um das alte Reich und weiß vom

neuen Reich, daß es noch kein halbes Jahrhundert alt war, als es sich selbst zerschlug. Was will man von einem Kinde erwarten? Es wird einst wach werden und ein Mann.”⁶⁴

What attracts attention here is the expression “the new *Reich*, which was not even half a century old when it struck *itself* asunder.” Thus Wehner denies that Germany’s defeat was in any way related to the power of the enemy forces or to the perfidy of foreign politics. In fact, *Sieben vor Verdun* is virtually a study in racial contempt for the French: they appear as feeble, incompetent cowards. But what does he mean by “struck itself asunder?” Unlike many other right-wing novelists, Wehner names an actual culprit, namely the Chief of the Supreme Army Command, General von Falkenhayn:

[Der Dämon des Krieges] sah den ehrgeizigen alten Mann, [...], einen Glücksspieler, der die letzte Karte nicht wagte, um nicht eine Stufe von seiner Stellung herabzusteigen. Dieser Mann, der Chef der Obersten Heeresleitung, General von Falkenhayn, ein verschlossener Charakter von gemachter Liebenswürdigkeit [...], hatte den Kern des Angriffsgedankens [...] gespalten. Während die Soldaten [...] nichts sehnlicher wünschten, als den Feind [...] ungestüm zu überrennen, [...] wie es dem riesigen Willen des Deutschen gerecht wird, engte der Chef nicht nur die Grundlinie des Angriffs ein und strich von den Sturmkorps soviel ab, daß ihm selbst noch genug verblieb, um überall stark zu sein: er hieb dem Geiste des Sturmes selbst den Kopf ab. (Wehner, *Sieben vor Verdun* 7)

The military command is thus juxtaposed with the will of the German soldier from the outset -- a decadent old nobility compared to a new noble German spirit. According to Wehner’s prologue, what drove the soldiers was “the gigantic will of the German” and the “underworldly yearning for a great *Reich* of all German tribes” (8), while Falkenhayn,

⁶⁴ Joseph Magnus Wehner, *Sieben vor Verdun. Ein Kriegsroman*. (München: Albert Langen/ Georg Müller, 1934) 8.

apparently, only thought of Verdun as “a tactical measure for the conclusion of a temporary war, the sense of which no German had uttered yet” (8).

The novel ends on the same note. With grandiose pathos, Wehner elevates the “immortal” survivors of Verdun into the realm of the eternal, where they remain satisfied in the knowledge that one day their sacrifice will bear fruit:

Ihre Füße sind kalt von fernster Eiszeit, und ihre Häupter flammen von den Sternen fernster Zukunft. Sie wissen, was sie der Welt geschenkt haben, das Beispiel eines unerhörten Opfers die Jahrtausende hinauf. Sie wollen keinen Dank, sie sind unsterblich. So summen und sagen sie unhörbar vom unsichtbaren deutschen Reiche, das seine Wurzeln hat in ihren Wunden. Und sie wissen, daß dieses Reich unsterblich ist mitten unter sterbenden Völkern. (Wehner 244)

The prologue and the final apotheosis form the fixed frame of the story, and they are identical. What happens in between is actually the devastating defeat of the German forces in the battle of Verdun, yet in Wehner’s book, the Germans keep winning. The fact that they were, after all, defeated, is immaterial to Wehner’s portrayal of German heroism or his utopian vision of German national glory. It is as if Verdun did not happen, or as if it had no consequences, because *politics* was not real, only *German spirit* was.

Given this optic, the seven protagonists are psychologically indistinguishable from one another because they all support the war and do not question its causes or consequences. Their greatest joy is to attack: “Er schilderte den Sturmangriff als die höchste Lust des Mannes und war ganz in Feuer geraten [...]” (Wehner 26). Men are reduced to their instinctual capacity for combat when they attack; their thinking stops -- a phenomenon first described by Jünger in *In Stahlgewittern* (1920). Storming the enemy

trenches provides these soldiers with cathartic relief from fear or physical exhaustion.

Wehner depicts Germans on the attack like a bloodthirsty pack of wolves on the hunt:

Die Leute waren außer sich. Sie schrien und sangen, einige warfen die Röcke ab und gingen nacktarmig gegen den Feind. Unmöglich, den Haufen zu halten. Er suchte Witterung [...], horchte und spürte und stürzte sich im Nu auf neue Batterien und Maschinengewehre. Der Kampf wurde zum Strudel. [...] Es waren Riesen und Jäger, die da stürmten, und sie waren entbunden. Die befohlene Linie machte ihnen keinen Gewissensbiß, sie sprangen an den Feind, wo sie ihn erblickten, und wo er floh, da rauschten sie ihm nach [...]. (Wehner 156)

Wehner's German soldiers are not only fearless and ferocious, they are superhuman -- or human-animals in the blood lust of real being.

In one scene, for example, Sergeant Junne's left leg is shattered by a shrapnel fuse: "[...] der Oberschenkel ist von dem faustgroßen Zünder durchschlagen, die Sehnen der Kniegelenkhöhle sind zerrissen, der Eisenbecher steckt tief in der Wade" (177). While normal men would either bleed to death or lose their leg to an emergency amputation, Sergeant Junne waits half a day in a shell hole and then starts operating on himself: "Er dachte nicht daran, sich verloren zu geben, sondern machte sich zunächst daran, den Zünder aus der Wunde zu entfernen" (178). In this situation, Junne's shell crater is already filled with the torn body parts of two dead Germans and one Frenchman, which does not bother him. His attempt to pull out the fuse with his hands is unsuccessful: "er nahm sein Messer, schnitt faules Fleisch heraus, und nun gelang es ihm, das Trumm ein wenig zu heben" (ibid.). Eventually, he pulls out the fuse, bandages himself, lays down to sleep, and makes up his mind to crawl back to the German position at night.

The scene verges on an existentialist orgy of self-assertion. The man in this ridiculous scene struggles for almost two days to get out of the crater, slides back down several times, is buried by soil thrown up by another explosion, digs himself out -- “wäre das Granatloch in deutscher Erde, so wäre ich längst hinaus, aber die verfluchte Gartenerde hier ist tückisch wie Sand” -- then drinks the dead Frenchman’s wine, writes a farewell letter to his family, to be delivered to his officer, wraps it in his Iron Cross ribbon, and throws it out on the battlefield. Miraculously, the right person finds it: “Der [Offizier] strich, als er es zu Ende gelesen, den Namen des Toten durch und schrieb darüber ‘Junne.’ So wurde der Tote namenlos, doch sein Schicksal steht für viele” (Wehner 183).

Apart from such absurd manly fantasies, a version of the *Dolchstoss* surfaces sporadically throughout the book. The implication always is that the German warriors could have and would have won the battle of Verdun, if not the entire war, if they had not been held back by their own military command or let down by reservists that never came:

Zwar der alte Joffre blieb fest, doch erzählten Gefangene, das deutsche Heer hätte nach den letzten Angriffen bis zur Stadt vorstoßen können, ohne auf Widerstand zu treffen.

Und das witterte der deutsche Soldat vorne an der Front. Das saß wie ein Dolch in seinem Herzen, und wenn der Befehl kam, auf der erreichten Linie zu halten und wenn er nun trotzdem nach rückwärts blickte und nirgends Reserven sah, die den sicheren Sieg vollenden konnten, dann wurde der Dolch zum siebenfachen Schwerte, und das war der schlimmste Schmerz des Soldaten. (Wehner 151)

Sieben vor Verdun also propagates the myth that Germany did not start the war but was attacked by enemy forces: “Denn man hat uns nicht gesagt, mit welchem Eifer die Feinde

vor dem Kriege ihren Ring um uns schlossen und uns im Namen ihrer Götzen friedlich erwürgt hätten, wären wir nicht aufgesprungen, früh und schrecklich wie ein Mann” (204-205). With the exception of anti-Semitic accusations, Wehner thus explores the full potential of right-wing ideology as it grew out of a specific political interpretation of the First World War.⁶⁵

The tools that Wehner uses are part and parcel of German thought. For example, his final method of exaggerating the fighting power and moral determination of the German soldiers is to juxtapose them with the French enemy: “[...] niemand könne dem Deutschen seine Unsterblichkeit nehmen; und wenn der Deutsche nur noch als Gerippe über die Erde wandele, sei er stärker als alle anderen” (192). This strategy of self-aggrandizement had been popular among nationalists since 1815. Wehner amasses many of the old stereotypes about the French: they are presented as effete, weak, fearful, and easily captured: “Kaum waren die drei abgeführt, so brachten die Posten einen neuen Gefangenen. Gelächter rollte die Stollentreppe hinab. ‘Er will ein deutscher Hauptmann sein, er will Welsch heißen,’ riefen die Häscher und stießen einen riesigen Mann vor sich her, den sie eben im Vorfelde gefangen hatten” (186). There are several scenes in which a single German captures fifty or more French soldiers.

Wehner’s scornful descriptions of the French soldiers are only surpassed by his racial hatred against the black (Somali and Senegalese) soldiers that also fought on the

⁶⁵ Wehner also propagates that the German government tried to make deals with President Wilson without the OHL’s knowledge, which is another historical falsehood: “Es war die Zeit [...] da Bethmann-Hollweg dem amerikanischen Botschafter ohne Wissen der OHL mitteilte, er verzichte auf den uneingeschränkten U-Bootkrieg” [...] (Wehner 108).

French side against the Germans.⁶⁶ They appear as “predators trained to attack their pieces, their ‘Boches’” (206), as “incensed negroes” (206), as “leaving their trenches dancing, kissing their leader’s hands and feet” (210), as “drunk blacks with thick lips” who need to be given permission to smoke “like pleading children” (210). They “show their teeth,” one can see “the white in their eyes” (213), and the “wooly heads” (224) also cut the Germans’ throats (220) or massacre them with bayonets (224).

Compared to these “stinking jungle animals” (184), who also fight ferociously, the Germans appear dignified and pure: “Wehners Darstellung der Minderwertigkeit der Schwarzen hebt sich kontrastierend von der Heldenhaftigkeit, absoluten Reinheit und kindlichen Unschuld der deutschen Soldaten ab” (Gollbach 200).⁶⁷ As we shall see in the following discussion of Zöberlein’s *Der Glaube an Deutschland*, Wehner’s often grotesque exaggerations of German soldiers in combat, as well as his (racial) hatred of the enemy, were common currency in radical right-wing war literature. Together, they began to define not only the *acts* of the German warrior-hero, but now their mindset.

(D) HANS ZÖBERLEIN, *DER GLAUBE AN DEUTSCHLAND* (1931)

This new mindset, critically, moved beyond the narrow frame of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Unlike most of his fellow novelists, Hans Zöberlein (1895-1964)

⁶⁶ See, for example, the following passage: “Wo aber die Grauen auf die Schwarzen stießen, da gab es selten Pardon. Sie stanken wie Urwaldtiere im Käfig, sie trugen bei 28 Grad ihre lockeren Mäntel, und wenn sie den Weißen witterten, zogen sie ihre Messer. Auf Sprungweite ließen sie in herankommen, daß er seine Waffen nicht mehr gebrauchen konnte: Gewehre und Handgranaten. So schlugen die Deutschen, da sich jene nie ergaben, mit Spaten und Äxten drein und entfesselten ihre letzte Wildheit. Denn nun sprangen die Bestien vom Senegal den Grauen an die Kehle” (Wehner 184).

⁶⁷ The image of purity and innocence that Wehner drapes on the German soldier is nothing new. It also came up in Manfred von Richthofen’s *Der rote Jagdflieger*, in which he proudly reported that the British assumed the pilot of the red airplane would have to be a virgin.

did not stem from the educated bourgeoisie. He was a brick-layer and mason who participated in the war as an infantry soldier. He was seriously wounded and decorated with both the Iron Cross, First Class, and the Bavarian Gold Medal for Bravery (see Gollbach 210). After the war, Zöberlein became a member of the *Freikorps Epp*, which fought for the liquidation of the *Räterepublik* in Munich. An admirer of Hitler, he joined the NSDAP and the SA already in 1921 and assisted in the attempted *Hitler-Putsch* in 1923. In 1948, Zöberlein was sentenced to death because, as head of a *Werwolf*-commando, he had been involved with the murder of nine anti-Nazi protesters in Penzberg, Bavaria, in April 1945. During his trial, he professed to still be a staunch National Socialist and anti-Semite. His death sentence was converted to life imprisonment in 1949 (Gollbach 211).

His 1931 novel *Der Glaube an Deutschland* is a 890-page volume that was instrumental in the establishment of the *Führer*-principle and Nazi ideology in German cultural discourse -- another extension of the warrior metaphors traced to this point.⁶⁸ Literary critics agree that this book belongs to the “vilest sorry efforts of National Socialist anti-Semitic literature.”⁶⁹ According to Karl Prümm, the text helped cement the war as a useable paradigm in the culture war of the late 1920s. Certain maxims the soldier had to obey in wartime, including the “belief in destiny, camaraderie, and

⁶⁸ Compare, for example, Karl Prümm, “Das Erbe der Front. Der antidemokratische Roman der Weimarer Republik und seine nationalsozialistische Fortsetzung.” Horst Denkler and Karl Prümm, eds., *Die deutsche Literatur im Dritten Reich. Themen-Traditionen-Wirkungen* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1976) 138-164.

⁶⁹ For more details, see Walter Delabar, “‘Aufhören, aufhören, he, aufhören – hört doch einmal auf!’ Hans Zöberlein: *Der Glaube an Deutschland* (1931) Thomas F. Schneider, Hans Wagener, eds., *From Richthofen to Remarque: Deutschsprachige Prosa zum I. Weltkrieg* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2003) 399-421.

combative virtue” now became transferable into civilian life.⁷⁰ Walter Delabar supports this claim and adds:

Dennoch reicht sogar dieser Text, dessen literarische Qualität nicht zur Debatte steht, weiter. Die willfährigen Belegstellen, mit denen sich der Nationalismus des Textes und der Blutrausch seines Protagonisten nachweisen läßt, sind zweifelsohne vorhanden. Der Text enthält nachweisbar nationalistische, rassistische, anti-semitische, antikommunistische und asoziale Passagen. Er hebt die Neuerhebung eines geschlagenen Deutschlands hervor, die das Werk eines Führers sein werde: “Ein Führer wenn rufen würde! Einer nur [Zöberlein 875].” (Delabar 406-407)

The novel describes, from a first-person point of view, ten battles that took place on the western front between 1916 and 1918.⁷¹ Except for its bulk, the novel largely resembles Wehner’s *Sieben vor Verdun*. The narrator, a brick-layer named Hans Zöberlein, feels no compunctions about the war; on the contrary, he thrives as a member of the front-line community, especially when his comrades and superiors commend him for his soldierly virtues: “Ich war unbändig stolz.”⁷² He perceives the war as an exhilarating event that he readily accepts and desires as a model for post-war life: “Erst der Krieg hat in uns diese Sehnsucht richtig entfacht. Größe, Wahrheit, Reinheit wollen wir. Klar soll das Leben sein – und einfach, dann ist es schön. So soll es einmal werden, wenn wir wieder heimkommen” (Zöberlein 126).

Heavily drawing on Jünger’s *Stahlgewitter*, Zöberlein projects the ecstasy of combat as the quintessential manly endeavor, its irresistible rush: “Das Gefühl der Macht dieser Vorbereitung [für die Schlacht ist] wie ein Rausch” (Zöberlein 459). The imminent

⁷⁰ See Prümm 148.

⁷¹ By 1940, it had reached a sales volume of 800,000, according to Karl Prümm. For more details, see Delabar 402.

⁷² Hans Zöberlein, *Der Glaube an Deutschland. Ein Kriegserlebnis von Verdun bis zum Umsturz*. (München: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, Franz Eher, 1934) 180.

battle will be fought by the “best of German manhood”: “Deutschlands bestes Mannestum, das uns die mörderischen Schlachten noch gelassen haben” (471):

Hier marschiert das Heer in seiner höchsten Vollendung, die es je erreicht hat. Aus den Augen blitzt jener furchtbare Geist der weitab von allem Elan und schäumender Begeisterung nur unsere Rasse beseelt. Erschauernd wie von einem Hauch uralter Zeiten fühlen wir das im Blut. Es ist das Göttliche, Große in uns Deutschen, das wir selber kaum kennen, das aber unsere Feinde tödlich lähmt. Sie nannten es einst – und fürchten es heute noch als den “Furor Teutonicus.” (Zöberlein 472)

In this particular battle, however, the *Furor Teutonicus* stalls at the British barrage fire, which temporarily leaves Infantryman Zöberlein, who stayed in the trench, without his comrades’ support. He watches from behind as the advancing Germans are mowed down. Being the hero that he is, he then seizes a machine gun, jumps out of the trench, and opens up enough space for the second line to start its attack, an action that is again heavily inspired by Jünger’s belligerent individualism. The novel thus advocates subordination of the individual to a group under a leader, but it also worships individual heroism when the group effort fails and the single man is left to his own devices: “Das ist ein Sinn dieses Krieges, uns erkennen zu lassen, wie unheimlich stark ein Mann sein kann” (156). Under fire, a new German warrior is born.

Zöberlein’s novel thus conveys two central messages. Firstly, that he who lived through this war emerges from it “steeled”: “Solch ein Erleben macht groß, stark – gewaltig, daß man in solchen Minuten ahnt, wie der Schöpfergeist unwühlend über die Welten geht und dabei unkennbar leise seinen Samen in die brechende Erde streut” (578). And secondly, that the model out of which such strength was born in wartime, namely

unconditional loyalty toward one's comrades, is indeed transferable to civil society: "Wir sind Kameraden, ganz einfach. Können wir nicht auch daheim uns als Kameraden das Leben schöner, rein von gegenseitigem Haß, gestalten? Jawohl, das geht! Geht's heraußen, dann geht's auch daheim!" (157-158). The war experience constitutes both the evidence of the front soldier's extraordinary masculine qualities and the recipe for an ideal life in which male bonding has primary importance.

This viewpoint corresponds to history in some dimensions. According to Karl Prümm and Walter Delabar, the simplicity of front line camaraderie held continued allure for returning veterans because they found Weimar society in its modernity anything but simple⁷³: "Das Frontparadigma ist Teil jenes Komplexes phantasmatischer Vorstellungen, die als Reaktion auf die Moderne klare und einfache Verhältnisse als wünschenswert erscheinen lassen" (Delabar 420). Delabar also quotes Alexander Honold, who -- in the context of Ernst Jünger -- suggested that the war paradigm thus functions not in opposition to modernity, but as an extreme manifestation of its discrepancies.⁷⁴ These discrepancies, in turn, appear as simple black-and-white schemes in the pro-war novels, and are easily resolved because the protagonist is always "white." Seen in the light of the war paradigm's post-war function, one can then understand why Remarque's best-seller, which threatened to rewrite and muddle the script of the war memory, suddenly was such a contentious issue for these authors: it undermined the right-wing

⁷³ See Delabar 420.

⁷⁴ See Delabar 421.

militarists' entire *raison d'être*. Zöberlein himself was among its most aggressive defenders when Remarque appeared on the scene.

In his 1929 review of *Im Westen nichts Neues*, entitled “Die Antworten eines Frontsoldaten auf das Buch Remarques,” published in the National Socialist paper *Völkischer Beobachter*, Zöberlein criticized Remarque’s novel with the expert authority of one who knew “the trenches of the west” himself (compare Müller 68). Remarque, he hypothesized, had either never been at the front or lied about the front experience for some other reason:

Es ist eine jauchzende Entschuldigung der Deserteure, Überläufer, Meuterer und Drückeberger und somit ein zweiter Dolchstoß an der Front, an den Gefallenen aber eine Leichenschändung. [...] Woanders hinge ein solcher Schmutzfink längst von Staats wegen an einer Laterne auf einem öffentlichen Platz der Hauptstadt zur öffentlichen Abschreckung. Oder er wäre von den Frontsoldaten in seinem Element, der Latrine, ersäuft worden.⁷⁵

The extreme hostility with which the right-wing received Remarque and the other anti-war novelists becomes more understandable if one takes into account that their own war memory was quite a fragile construct on which their worldview vis-à-vis postwar Germany, as well as their self-image as men, depended.

Yet it is clear that these right-wing novels do something that the left-wing ones had not, no matter how many elements they share. Most particularly, they belie the value of the home front and of new politics as they glorify a cadre of conservative elites. That is, they move their optic from the *now* to the *future* in a way that would facilitate the transition of many readers into an acceptance of what came to be early Nazi ideology.

⁷⁵ Hans Zöberlein, “Im Westen nichts Neues. Die Antworten eines Frontsoldaten auf das Buch Remarques.” *Völkischer Beobachter* (Reichsausgabe, August 14, 1929), quoted in Müller, *Krieg und die Schriftsteller*, 68-69.

2.6 CONCLUSION

Aside from the comparisons between war novels from right and left that I have been drawing, there are some significant differences that are worth noting. For example, all the right-wing militarists novels discussed in this chapter are characterized by an extreme reduction of complexity, where their left-wing counterparts occasionally tried to get their readers to appreciate and understand the difficulties that a war presents. In these books, the Great War, which was, of course, an enormously complex phenomenon, is broken down into categories that appeared meaningful from the point of view of the common soldier in the trenches -- which was then adopted by the novelists ten years later -- and beyond that into simple black-and-white dichotomies. These binary contrasts include the individual versus the group, the men in the front lines (*Frontsoldaten*) versus the men behind the lines (*Etappenschweine*), the common soldier versus commanding officers, the front line versus the home front, Germans versus other nationalities, Germans versus Jews. In most cases, the militarist authors share a simple formula of composition with regard to their image of the German front line hero: he is depicted as super-human or super-masculine in the sense of physical and moral superiority over all other men who differed from him in attitude or behavior. Besides that, he is also an excellent *Kamerad*.

Since pro-war writers tend to avoid emotional complexity and contradictory characters, the main protagonist, alone or in his peer group, always displays exactly those

idealized characteristics his adversaries lack or only possess to a lesser degree. The resulting impression is that World War I, despite the horror and the chaos, even despite Germany's defeat, was a *locus amoenus* of clear divisions between right and wrong, between appropriate and inappropriate, manly or unmanly *German* reactions to the experience.

Familiarly, this romanticized version of the war experience, which Mosse labeled the "Myth of the War Experience," is usually cast in the context of German national unity and strength. As readers, we are encouraged to accept that heroic trench warfare represented such a moment of national unity, but that it was flawed by forces outside the front soldiers' realm of influence, often by incompetence among the commanding officers, or by insufficient support from the homefront. To varying degrees, the micro-system of a functioning combat group, with or without a strong leader, is elevated into a model for Germany's political future (e.g. Zöberlein). But as a general rule, all the right-wingers cite the war experience as evidence of Germany's national strength, exemplified by the men in the trenches, which was then sapped by the Weimar system and its representatives. Hence they speak out in unison against the Republic, which seems to them an injustice because it does nothing to honor their war memory. And hence their hatred of Remarque, whom they perceived as besmirching their war memory.

It would be interesting to find out to what extent these writers knew they were deluding themselves. The case of Hindenburg and Ludendorff is clear: both men simply lied. Richthofen chose a clear redirect, distancing himself from his noble peers, so that he, not the war, could be the issue. But all the writers who followed in their footsteps,

even Hitler: did they really see the war this way? Why did it not occur to them to say: “the war was traumatic, it hurt me emotionally, and I would appreciate help in overcoming the trauma?” Did they really believe in irrational things, the loose construction of the various *Schlagworte*, or those myths and legends about the German *Reich* and the superior strength of its warriors? From a distance of almost ninety years, this seems hard to believe.

I would argue that another interpretation is more likely, namely that the harrowing war experience clashed too violently with the humiliating defeat and the sober Weimar practice of getting back to business-as-usual without trying to assuage the painful memory of the veterans. In this perspective, the leftist novels might be said to acknowledge a people in a kind of post-traumatic stress, while the rightist ones deny this trauma by promoting an illusion that it is worked through. Chapter three presents abundant evidence to suggest that the ten million returning veterans needed precisely such support, and that the warrior imaginary I have sketched here was particularly critical for their self-image as men.

Chapter Three:

The Second Generation of World War I Narratives:

Erich Maria Remarque

3.1 REFASHIONING THE RECENT PAST

In past analyses of Weimar culture, literary scholars have tended to underrate the impact of the war experience on cultural and political developments, especially with regard to the war novels it spawned. According to Hans-Harald Müller, it was military historians, sociologists, and politicians who generally had a clearer idea of how central an issue this was.

For example, the German historian Kurt Sontheimer emphasized as early as 1962 that the war experience, and the way it was “processed” in literary and other publications of the time, assumed a central position in the antidemocratic potential of the Weimar Republic.¹ Along the same lines, Carl Hans Hermann asserted in *Deutsche Militärgeschichte* (1968) that the literary re-writing of the war had a stronger impact on public imagination than the earlier accounts by World War I officers: “[...] die

¹ Compare Hans Harald Müller, *Der Krieg und die Schriftsteller: Der Kriegerroman der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986), 1.

literarische Verarbeitung des Weltkriegs hat auf die Vorstellung vom Kriege und dem Kriegswesen stärker gewirkt als die generalstäblerische Auswertung der Kriegserfahrungen” (Müller 1).² And in 1974, Walter Laqueur stated that the second generation of war books was the decisive factor in the shaping of Weimar *Zeitgeist*: “It is possible to understand the spirit of the twenties without George, Hesse and *The Magic Mountain*; it cannot be understood without reference to the mood of the survivors of Langemark, Verdun and the Somme” (Laqueur 136).³

This chapter explores the question why (semi-)fictionalized narratives of the war experience suddenly “touched a nerve” after 1928 while earlier publications, documentary in style, had achieved little but create widespread fatigue with the whole subject. Specifically, this chapter illuminates the literary strategies that rendered the second generation of war books so effective in terms of mass appeal, to the point where the narrative commonalities I described in the first chapter of the present study became a kind of norm for the German World-War-I novel.

I will argue particularly that Erich Maria Remarque (1898-1970), the most successful of the war novelists with his *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1928), devised a narrative scheme that made familiar characteristics of “German-ness” appear in a new light, and thereby changed the way popular imagination pictured the events of 1914-1918. In fact, Remarque created very little that was new, but, in a touch of genius, he reconfigured available building blocks from the German cultural repertoire in such a fashion that most readers accepted the product as a “true” or somehow authentic

² Müller, *Krieg und Schriftsteller* 1.

³ Walter Laqueur, *Weimar: A Cultural History 1918-1933* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1974).

representation of the war. This also helps explain why, later on, Remarque could straightforwardly be perceived as a (revolutionary) new voice on the old topic of war -- which he was indeed -- , and internationally hailed as a visionary writer and a pacifist -- which he was not.

As already noted, the shadow of World War I loomed large over the entire fifteen years of the first German republic's existence. Despite people's efforts to return their lives to normal, the war remained an unassimilated national trauma beneath the surface of everyday life. However, the amount of literary production it provoked and the public attention this received varied greatly for the different phases of the Republic. Müller reports that over 200 new war novels flooded the German book market between 1928 and 1933, while the previous ten years of the Republic had seen fewer than 100 publications altogether (2).⁴

This sudden wave of war novels that helped to tell a new story of World War I began with the phenomenal success of Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1928/1929). What ignited the ferocious debate about this novel were not its literary qualities, which are meagre, but its sociopolitical potential, which is enormous, especially compared to the early right-wing accounts of the war that I discussed in the first part of the last chapter of this discussion. Any of the activists in Weimar's political spectrum, ranging from the ultra right-wing nationalists and militarists to the liberal republicans in the (left) center to the revolutionary communists and pacifists on the far left, soon realized that Remarque's book held the key to an enormously important question, namely

⁴ Comp. Müller, 1. More recent research suggests that Müller underestimated the amount of war literature publications, which probably goes into the thousands. His figures are only realistic if one strictly counts war novels.

who would come to dominate the discourse on the national trauma of the lost war. *Im Westen nichts Neues* poured new fuel onto the smoldering embers of the hitherto unanswered question of what had really happened during that war. Public debate, which had lain dormant for the previous five years, was reinvigorated. Unlike any of the officers' war accounts, Remarque's war narrative was close enough to ordinary readers' horizons of expectation to facilitate identification. With mass identification came a mass audience, and with the mass audience came considerable political significance.

For a brief period, while the public debate on "who owned Remarque" waged back and forth, it seemed undecided who would get to refashion the recent memory of war, and thereby make a powerful imprint on public opinion, even national identity, in the present and the future. It was unclear who would determine the new truth, or what that "truth" would be: the old elites were crumbling, the center parties dwindling, and the extremists on both sides became more polarized. In this climate of disintegration, the debate over *Im Westen nichts Neues* seemed to infuse new strength into the supporters of the Republic, but it was not enough.

Only five years later, the struggle was lost, and the National Socialists seized total control over Germany's political and cultural institutions and thus secured for themselves a position to create and dictate the official script of recent history.⁵ The book burning of May 10, 1933, orchestrated by Goebbels, reduced the literary contributions of writers like Remarque to ashes. Nevertheless, the early stages of the hate-filled struggle between right-wing forces and defenders of the Republic hold important clues for our understanding of

⁵ I will argue in chapter three that the left wing really had no chance to succeed in this cultural struggle because Hindenburg and Ludendorff, the creators of the original *Dolchstoß*, had successfully manipulated public opinion in 1919/20.

the late Weimar years. Nowadays, the publication of a controversial book may easily fall beneath the radar of public awareness. But in the uniquely sensitive climate of the Weimar Republic, with its multi-faceted spectrum of political and cultural activism, public debate over one book could spread like wildfire, and even unleash a Culture War.⁶

3.2 1928: STRUGGLE OF ANCIENTS AGAINST MODERNS

There were historical antecedents to the Weimar situation which are useful to reference to see what is at stake in such moments of transitions. For instance, Joan DeJean describes, in her analysis of late seventeenth-century France, how the so-called “Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns” (1687-1715) changed the face of French society forever.⁷ In this particular societal crisis, the “Ancients” sided with the old intellectual elite, first and foremost with the *Académie Française*, while the “Moderns” were representatives of an evolving public sphere seeking access to the body of national literature. This was the first time in history that a literary debate “touched a public nerve”

(8). DeJean explains:

A far broader spectrum of readers than ever before became involved in this controversy – many of whom eventually even decided that they had a right to express their opinions on the issues being debated. Indeed, just as has happened in our Culture Wars, the public right to judge became a highly controversial issue when the Ancients protested that only professional scholars had the right to

⁶ In 1997, the publication of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* caused a similar storm of controversial reception in Germany. Like Remarque’s novel, the book itself is far from flawless, but among many Germans in the 1990s, it was perceived as “the truth” about ordinary Germans’ involvement with the holocaust machinery. Christopher Browning’s work, *Ordinary Germans* (1992), on the same subject and based on the same research, was less sensational, and remained widely unnoticed.

⁷ Joan DeJean, *Ancients Against Moderns: Culture Wars and the Making of a Fin de Siècle*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997).

pronounce on literary issues and the Moderns countered with the argument that nonprofessional readers might even possess superior judgment. (8-9)

Like France in the 1690s, Germany underwent the turmoil of such a quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns in the 1920s.

The Ancients, in this twentieth-century historical moment, were embodied by the various anti-republican forces, including *Kaisertreue* (loyalists to the emperor), *Freikorps* (militiamen), former officers, militarists, as well as large portions of bourgeois elites (students, physicians, judges, professors). Hitler's National Socialists, when their movement began to gain momentum in the mid twenties, opportunistically sided with them to gain stature and social capital. The Moderns, on the other hand, were represented by the defenders of the republican system, including liberals, leftist intellectuals, and social democrats. The late Weimar Republic Culture War was fought to determine whose (literary) version of World War I would emerge as the dominant discourse.

Drawing on their personal wartime experiences and under considerable pressure to exculpate themselves, one might say that the Weimar Ancients had produced the earliest publications right after the war (1918-1923). Diaries, reports, or memoirs were their preferred literary genres, titles like Paul von Hindenburg, *Aus meinem Leben* (1920), Erich Ludendorff, *Meine Kriegserinnerungen* (1919), Alfred von Tirpitz, *Erinnerungen* (1919), and others. Through these, as I have sketched, they sought to authenticate and corroborate their own position and to legitimize the outcome of the war or the role they had played in it, being well aware that detailed references to factual information, presented from an insider's perspective, would be hard to refute by anyone who had not shared similar experiences.

These documentary writings did not entirely reach the goal of swaying public opinion in their favor: the critics of the war and of the military establishment remained unconvinced. The later readers of Remarque did not buy the generals' stories. After 1928, the Moderns launched their own literary campaign, namely war novels, which had a seismic effect on the nation. Remarkably, partial fictionalization of the war produced a higher level of credibility than the officers' painstaking efforts at documentation (titles like Hindenburg, *Aus meinem Leben* [1920], Ludendorff, *Meine Kriegserinnerungen* [1919], and von Tirpitz, *Erinnerungen* [1919]). An author, like a politician, may claim to present the facts, but this does not guarantee the audience is going to believe him; on the contrary. As I will map out in this chapter, what is perceived, constructed, or universally accepted as "truth" may be quite removed from actual events.

To gain the upper hand in such a conflict between opposing groups within one culture, it is crucial to appropriate to one's own cause images or texts to which most people can relate, "die Dinge, die jeder kennt," or, alternatively, to re-interpret existing icons of popular imagination. Such a crisis tends to spark heightened cultural creativity, even frantic attempts from both sides of the conflict, to gain the upper hand, or to debunk the products of the adversaries. Culture wars typically arise during periods of societal change that public opinion perceives with unease, although it remains difficult to pinpoint its socio-political origins with any amount of precision. More likely than not, a particular constellation of variables creates a climate that makes a societal rift seem imminent, or inevitable. DeJean concludes:

Whether anxiety over societal change preceded or even gave birth to anxiety over intellectual change, or whether the opposite is true, is less important than the fact

that, during Culture Wars, these two anxieties become grafted onto each other – to such an extent that it is in general impossible to define the point where one type of anxiety ends and another begins. (4)

It is often stated that the ever fragile political system of the Weimar Republic enjoyed a five-year period of relative stabilization between 1924 and 1929 (*Stabilisierungsphase*). The assumption of political stability and social calm, however, would not explain the fact that Remarque's publication of *Im Westen nichts Neues* provoked such a volatile reaction in 1928. Upon closer examination, then, it was precisely the years leading up to the great economic depression of 1929 that set the course toward the Republic's demise.

According to the historian Detlev Peukert, the impression of relative stabilization in Weimar is an illusion, and can only be maintained when seen as relative to the cataclysmic events before 1923, and after 1929. In fact, the years in between had to withstand the corrosive forces of several smaller and larger crises that were indicative of deeper-seated, structural rifts:

Weder konnten die Strukturprobleme des Friedensschlusses und der Republikgründung von 1918/19 wirklich gelöst werden noch die Strukturprobleme der Inflationsjahre und der zeitweiligen Konsolidierung von 1924. Alle diese Spannungen und Belastungen wurden in die Jahre der 'Stabilisierung' hineingetragen. [...] Insofern läßt sich sagen, daß sich jenes Widerspruchspotential, an dem die Republik 1930 bis 1933 scheitern sollte, ausgerechnet in den sog. Stabilisierungsjahren akkumulierte. Die Weichenstellung für den Untergang der Republik erfolgte, bevor die aktuelle Krise 1929/30 ausgebrochen war. Alles drängte bereits auf den 'großen Knall' hin. (Peukert 204)⁸

One could even argue that President Friedrich Ebert's death (28 February 1925) was the first step in a series of events that led to the eventual fate of the Republic.

⁸ Detlev J.K. Peukert, *Die Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1987).

Ebert's successor was imperial field marshal Paul von Hindenburg, who was 78 years old at the time. "The revered victor of Tannenberg, who [...] had taken no part in postwar political life, now came forward as the candidate of the right-wing-parties united in the 'Reich bloc'" (Kolb 74).⁹ Hindenburg's election was testimony to the splitting of the workers' movement and the disintegration of political Catholicism. Eberhard Kolb views Hindenburg in power as a clear victory for the Ancients and "as a serious setback for the republic" (74). To be sure, his election did not result in an immediate "sharp swing to the right," which would have exceeded his official authority, but, nevertheless, "there began with his presidency a 'silent change in the constitution,' whereby – gradually and at first barely perceptibly – the balance shifted in favour of presidential power" (ibid.). Kolb continues:

Given the precariousness of parliamentary majorities, the President was able to bring his personal and political preferences to bear on the formation of governments to an extent greater than the founders of the constitution had dreamt of. Hindenburg's preferences were clear from 1925 onwards: if at all possible, the DNVP should be included in government, if at all possible, the SPD should be kept out of it; this was a matter of principle, independent of parliamentary constellations and concrete political requirements. (ibid.)

Hindenburg as President is emblematic of the Weimar predicament. Here was the figurehead of the Ancients, the creator of the *Dolchstoß*, a stubborn old Prussian officer, elected on old credentials, wielding power again to diminish the role of a republican parliament he did not understand or approve of. He was not much of a politician, but he could be relied on to loathe the Social Democrats. In fact, he became a buffoon whose tragic role would end with the ceremonious handing over of power to Hitler.

⁹ Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988).

Hence, Germany's increasing internal polarization about its history and future had been institutionalized politically after 1925. In the realm of intellectual life, supporters of the Republic had even more resistance to confront. As a rule of thumb, the Ancients longed for the “Golden Age” of the old empire (or before), while the Moderns, absurdly inexperienced, did not know how to strengthen their dream, the establishment of a pluralist democracy. What weakened the Moderns in this culture war was the fact that they could hardly ever agree on anything. They know their common enemies, but the knowledge failed to unite them. The Ancients, however, had a clearer vision, and presented a more united front. Henry Pachter summarized the situation as follows:

The aims of conservative intellectuals were mostly determined by the word “anti”: They were anti-illuminist, anti-liberal, anti-Semitic, antisocialist, anti-intellectual, antidemocratic, antiparlamentarian, anti-industrial – in a word, “anti” everything that had happened since 1789. (126-127)¹⁰

Thus leftists and liberals reckoned with vehement opposition from the right, but they could not count on solidarity among themselves.

In a real sense, the entire Weimar Republic is characterized by the failure to resolve a position between these poles, bringing rapid fluctuations of catastrophic crises and phases of promising potential (like Stresemann’s foreign policy efforts), ideological contradictions and political conflicts on every level. It never enjoyed a period of relative stabilization, at least not with respect to cultural developments. The cultural scene, minutely stratified according to political opinion, equally failed to work out compromises between opposing camps. Especially on the left, everyone toiled for himself. Early on,

¹⁰ Henry Pachter, *Weimar Etudes* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982).

the leftist and the liberals had also failed to provide a convincing World War I-script of their own, which they might have created if they had not focussed all their energy on demonizing the right-wing militarist publications that existed. Symptomatically, Kurt Tucholsky announced in a *Weltbühne* article on January 5, 1926:

Wer, wie wir, vom ersten Tag nach dem Waffenstillstand an für Aufklärung über das Verbrechen der deutschen Militärs und ihrer Helfer gesorgt hat, ist wohl berechtigt, vor den lawinenhaften Publikationen, Broschüren und Streitschriften über den Krieg ein Wort zu sagen, daß erklärt werden muß, wenn man uns recht verstehen soll. Dieses Wort heißt: Genug. (quoted in Müller 36)

Tucholsky is quite aware that the leftists, and especially the pacifist movement, had missed their chance to convince fellow citizens of their beliefs.

In Tucholsky's opinion, the right time to have done so would have been directly after the war:

Da waren die Wunden frisch, und die Wunden schmerzten; da brannte die Erinnerung, und da zitterte das ungeheure Erlebnis lebendig nach; da wußte jeder zu bestätigen und zu erzählen und tats gern, weil er endlich, endlich sprechen durfte – da war viel zu machen. Es ist so gut wie nichts getan worden. Als die Generale ihre Memoiren beendet hatten und die Uniformierten ihre Reichswehr: da war es zu spät. (Müller 36-37)

He misread the signs of the times. So did the publishing houses. Publishers, like Tucholsky, were convinced that there was nothing more to be said about the war, at least nothing that would spark public interest. For this reason, *Im Westen nichts Neues* was rejected by a number of publishing houses. It first appeared in the *Vossische Zeitung* in the late fall of 1928, until it was published by Ullstein, Berlin. The consensus at that time was that no one wanted to read more of the same.

But given the fact that none of the old officers' and generals' accounts had contributed to the healing of national trauma, in retrospect the time was ripe for a new approach. Remarque took advantage of the wide open space between the entrenched factions in this Culture War. He knew that the public had grown tired of a particular kind of war literature, and he also knew that the left had never landed a major success. So he decided to write something in opposition to the Ancients, to the delight of the Moderns. 1928 was the perfect historical moment for *Im Westen nichts Neues* to come out.

3.3 LITERARY DEVELOPMENTS

This success came as a surprise. By 1923, after the Republic had overcome periods of anarchy and revolution, public opinion had seemingly lost interest in war literature.¹¹ Between 1923 and 1929, survivors sought to rearrange their lives, overcome the trauma, and heal the wounds they had suffered. Many of the war supporters gravitated towards veterans' clubs (*Frontkämpferverbände*), German heritage clubs (*Traditionsvereine*), or right-wing paramilitary associations (*Freikorps*).¹² But the broad majority of the public expressed a fatigue with accounts penned by officers who had fought in the war. Müller points out that Ernst Jünger, Ludwig Renn, and Josef Magnus Wehner all complained "daß die belletristischen Verlage nach 1923 der Kriegsliteratur überdrüssig waren und bei literarischen Preisausschreiben die Darstellung von

¹¹ Compare, for example, Hans-Harald Müller, *Der Krieg und die Schriftsteller*, 35. He maintains that the overall public interest in writings about the war dwindled in the mid 1920s. Thomas Schneider and Hans Wagener, two more recent scholars on World War I literature, contradict that claim. (Compare Thomas F. Schneider and Hans Wagener, eds., *Von Richthofen bis Remarque: Deutschsprachige Prosa zum I. Weltkrieg* [Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2003] 12.)

¹² For more details on right-wing nationalist organizations, see Paul Bookbinder, *Weimar Germany: The Republic of the Reasonable* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996) 41-53; 211-225.

Kriegserlebnissen generell ausschlossen”.¹³ This period of waning literary production concerning the war lasted until 1929. Even one year earlier, the S. Fischer publishing house had rejected Remarque’s *Im Westen nichts Neues* with the argument that “nobody was interested in war novels” (Müller 35). Günter Blöcker adds:

Aber auch im Hause Ullstein hatte man sich nur zögernd und ohne große Erwartungen zur Annahme entschlossen. Man war sicher, nichts mehr vom Krieg wissen zu wollen – man hatte ihn, mitsamt seinen Ursachen und Folgen, erfolgreich verdrängt oder meinte doch, es getan zu haben. (Blöcker 35)

Thus from several sides, the prospect of yet another war novel becoming a major factor in establishing a new national consciousness was deemed unlikely.

The year 1928, however, marks the beginning of a new literary approach to the national trauma of World War I. The old war books had dominated the past of an older establishment. What was now at stake for a new generation was the question whose script of the war would come to rule the present, at a moment where new crises were looming. This cultural struggle was heavily politicized from the first.¹⁴ As a matter of credibility, producers of war accounts still had to have fought in the trenches themselves. Otherwise, their narratives would have been too easily dismissed by the old militarists as “fake” or “invented.” Erich Maria Remarque, Ludwig Renn, Arnold Zweig, Edlef Köppen, Theodor Plivier -- all of these writers had the authority to claim first-hand experiences of war, yet they all used their expertise to produce a new genre of wartime narrative. While the first generation of war diaries and officers’ memoirs had essentially hailed the war

¹³ Müller 35.

¹⁴ “Nach einer Periode, in der Seelenanalysen und Mythen aller Art Mode waren, wendet sich die Literatur wieder der Realität zu. In Deutschland kommt diese Veränderung vor allem in der sogenannten *Neuen Sachlichkeit* zum Ausdruck, im lebhaften Interesse der Schriftsteller – und ihrer Leser – an Problemen der Gegenwart und der jüngsten Vergangenheit” (Pavel Peter, “Bemerkungen zu einigen deutschen Prosawerken über den Ersten Weltkrieg” [*Germanica Wratislaviensia*, vol. 36, 1962, 19-34] 23).

and created false excuses for personal failures or Germany's defeat, this second wave of books took a much more ambiguous stance toward it. Much will have to be said about this ambiguity.

The older texts had come out while the atrocities and the devastation were still fresh on everyone's mind. The most important first-generation titles were: Walter Flex, *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten: Ein Kriegserlebnis* (1916), Gunther Plüschow, *Die Abenteuer des Fliegers von Tsingtau: Erlebnisse in drei Erdteilen* (1916), Philipp Witkop, *Kriegsbriefe gefallener Studenten* (1916), Manfred von Richthofen, *Der rote Kampfflieger* (1917), Leonard Frank, *Der Mensch ist gut* (1917), Andreas Latzko, *Menschen im Krieg* (1917), Martin Beradt, *Schipper an der Front* (written 1916, published 1919).¹⁵

The second wave of narratives, actually starting with Georg von der Vring's *Soldat Suhren* (1927), Ludwig Renn's *Krieg* (1927), Arnold Zweig's *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa*, (1927), and then Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1928/29), emerged almost ten years after the signing of the Versailles treaty. These newer books were written in hindsight and aimed at rethinking the original war experiences, which equipped the authors with a much keener idea of the socio-political landscape surrounding them. In other words, unlike writers closer to the chaos of World War I itself, this new generations could gauge more precisely what their readers' horizon of expectation would be. Any successful publication would have to be fine-tuned to the expectations of this new generation of readers.

¹⁵ Leonard Frank's and Andreas Latzko's collections of novellas were humanist-pacifist books, but they were forbidden in Germany immediately after their publication and thus failed to gain sufficient popularity to counterbalance the many pro-war publications.

One concession to “the new taste” seems minor, but I believe it should not be underrated: the new narratives were written from the point of view of a common soldier, not an arrogant officer’s.¹⁶ The old accounts had not satisfied the public because they had not provided any answers to the truly important questions, i.e. who is to blame for losing the war?, why were we in it for so long?, what was the point in fighting it in the first place? So the new generation of writers seized the opportunity to refashion the collective memory of the war, or at least to supply some missing pieces in the puzzle -- from the soldiers in the trenches' point of view, not from that of the high command that had clearly betrayed both those soldiers and Germany as a whole.

Müller refers to these literary innovation of 1928 as the creation of a new “poetic matrix”:

Die zweite Welle der Kriegsliteratur [...] bedarf nicht länger einer poetischen Matrix, die wahre Beschreibungen der Ereignisse und Erlebnisse von 1914 bis 1918 liefert, sondern einer poetischen Matrix, die für die Gegenwart wahre Aussagen über den Krieg liefert, die Krieg und Nachkriegsexistenz miteinander vermittelt und eine sinnstiftende Kontinuität zwischen diesen beiden heterogenen Erlebnisbereichen herstellt.¹⁷

What Müller chooses to call a “matrix,” I will call a “script.” A script, in this context, is a literary mechanism, the basic outline of a character and his or her typical story, crafted to elicit certain emotional responses from the reader. Using such scripts as threads in the cultural fabric connecting the author with his readers enables him to predict likely responses to his text: that author and the readers share knowledge of the types of their

¹⁶ In fact, the aristocratic Prussian Captain Arnold Friedrich Vieth von Golßenau adopted the pen name “Ludwig Renn,” which, in this context, bespeaks the urgency of avoiding association with the loathed old elite.

¹⁷ Müller, 39.

era, and what those characters will typically experience. Sharing such scripts within an era's horizon of expectation gives an author the ability to read his own text with another reader's eyes, and to calculate at least the most probable ways in which the reader will fill in the "blank spaces" (*Leerstellen*) in the text, i.e. which meanings that reader is likely to attribute to it.

Müller makes two important observations about the scripts that would be initiated by this second generation of World War I writers: their new war narratives would be judged by whether or not they could supply new meaning (*sinnstiftend*), and whether or not they could draw a picture of the war that was "true for the present" (*für die Gegenwart wahre Aussagen*). In other words, the challenge for Remarque's generation of writers was to maintain a required amount of authenticity and credibility about the details of a war whose memories were still very much alive, while, at the same time, fictionalizing the war experience sufficiently to generate a new popular image of it.

In this context, one should add that new scripts had to be created which would, first and foremost, captivate male readers and help them make the connection of their own experience and the script elements available in their horizons of expectation, as I spoke of in the last chapter. In general, as part of this script, women are assumed not to care for war novels. Too, these writers knew that they could not repeat the mistakes of the early Weimar war accounts if they wanted popular success -- the memoirs of the old war elite had proved themselves to be largely bankrupt for the current generation. Everyone, except the small segment of the nationalists and militarists of the old guard, had come to detest the old military elite, so the collective decision was made by these new-generation

writers that the new script for German men would describe events from a more modest perspective: a private's instead of a lieutenant's.

Most potential readers of 1929 and beyond also agreed that the older generation had wielded undue authority over the younger men, who, lamentably, did as they were told and then became cannon fodder. Also, accuracy or authenticity was not enough. Ernst Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern* (1920), for example, proved that war scenes without soul seemed empty; above all, the story had to "seem right," it had to be believable.¹⁸ Feeling can be more convincing than facts or verbal artistry alone. But the most difficult challenge would be to create a new type of hero. Germans, after all, had not only lost this four-year battle that Jünger portrayed as still largely heroic; they had been butchered, blinded, burned, maimed, and castrated, as the pictures of Georg Grosz and many other artists documented. In the face of overwhelming evidence of total defeat, how does one create a literary figure of an authentic, believable, yet heroic loser, or sustain the belief in heroism at any cost?

Despite these obstacles, the emerging producers of the new war scripts had substantial shaping powers. It was up to them to decide what the new version of the German World War I warrior would look like, in the minds and hearts of the new generation. From this perspective, then, it emerges that Remarque must be credited with knowing the most popular recipe and executing it well. The main objective to be met in

¹⁸ Gerda Liebchen explains that Jünger basically had to lie about what war was like, and that his readers realized this: "Die Verklärung des Weltkrieges zur Schule heldischer Männer war kein müheloses Unterfangen. Jünger mußte hier mit schlecht gezinkten Karten spielen, um gerade jene neue Erfahrung, die sich so negativ auf den Kampfmoral ausgewirkt hatte, die Erfahrung des Trommelfeuers, in die Heldenideologie einbinden zu können" (Gerda Liebchen, *Ernst Jünger. Seine literarischen Arbeiten in den zwanziger Jahren. Eine Untersuchung zur gesellschaftlichen Funktion von Literatur* [Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1977] 22).

analyzing such a text -- a popular text gauged at meeting the horizon of expectation of an audience and visibly successful in so doing -- is to shed light on the invisible, yet traceable, mechanism that establishes the connection between a writer and his audience through the medium of a semi-fictional narrative.

Therefore, it is crucial to gain awareness of the author's intentions, the literary means he used to reach the desired effect, as well as of the way the book was popularly received.¹⁹ But apart from the more or less accurate insights to be gained from intention-and-reception analysis, the primary task at hand for my turn to *Im Westen nichts Neues* is to unmask the gender-specific (in this case, masculine) cultural "buttons" this particular war author seeks to "push." Since there is indeed an invisible mechanism, or an inaudible dialogue taking place between the author and his readers, one ought to be able to identify the components of this interaction.

3.4 REMARQUE'S RECIPE

As Wolfgang Iser pointed out in his 1970 essay "Die Appelstruktur der Texte," ambiguity (*Unbestimmtheit*) is a central aspect of modern literary texts.²⁰ He argued that meaning is not an inherent feature of a literary text but a construct derived from the text with the aid of the reader. The reader's interaction with the literary text is determined by

¹⁹ Apart from interviews with the authors, there is not much evidence to identify the intentions behind writing what they wrote. With respect to popular reception of a new book, one automatically reads newspaper reviews first. But in this socio-cultural context, newspaper reviews may reveal the political position of the given newspaper, but not necessarily what the ordinary reader felt when reading the book. In what follows, however, I am following the lead of Wolfgang Iser, *Der implizite Leser: Kommunikationsformen des Romans von Bunyan bis Beckett* (München: W. Fink, 1972), which argues that each literary text carries within it an image of the readership for which it is intended.

²⁰ Wolfgang Iser, "Die Appelstruktur der Texte: Unbestimmtheit als Wirkungsbedingung literarischer Prosa," *Konstanzer Universitätsreden*, ed. Gerhard Hess (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag, 1970).

the degree to which his realm of experiences overlaps with the fictional reality presented by the text. Modern literature challenges the reader to review his personal experiences from the fictional perspective offered by the text. Iser continues:

Wird die Welt des Textes auf die eigene Erfahrung projiziert, so kann sich eine sehr differenzierte Skala der Reaktionen ergeben, auf der die Spannung ablesbar wird, die aus der Konfrontation der eigenen Erfahrung mit der potentiellen Erfahrung entsteht. Zwei extreme Möglichkeiten der Reaktion sind denkbar: Entweder erscheint die Welt des Textes als phantastisch, weil sie allen unseren Gewohnheiten widerspricht, oder aber als banal, weil sie so vollkommen mit ihnen zusammenfällt. Damit ist nicht nur angezeigt, wie stark unsere Erfahrungen bei der Realisierung des Textes im Spiele sind, sondern auch, daß in diesem Vorgang immer etwas mit unseren Erfahrungen geschieht. (Iser 12)

Since the fictional world of the text and the empirical world of the reader can never be perfectly mapped onto each other, an element of ambiguity remains. Through the act of reading, then, the reader attempts to “normalize” this ambiguity by integrating the text into the real world, or whatever his subjective idea of “the real world” may be. “Unbestimmtheit läßt sich ‘normalisieren,’ indem man den Text so weit auf die realen und somit verifizierbaren Gegebenheiten bezieht, daß er nur noch als deren Spiegel erscheint” (12). In other words, the reader interacts with the text in such a way that the fictional world appears to mirror reality, and thereby loses its literary qualities.

The tendency to reduce the fictional world of the text to the level of one’s own experiences is the most likely reader response. But whether the reader’s approach is reductive or not, the essential quality of a literary text lies in its adaptability to the highly subjective world of the reader. Iser concludes:

Daraus ergibt sich die Eigenart des literarischen Textes. Er ist durch eine eigentümliche Schwebelage charakterisiert, die zwischen der Welt realer Gegenstände und der Erfahrungswelt des Lesers gleichsam hin und her pendelt.

Jede Lektüre wird daher zu einem Akt, das oszillierende Gebilde des Textes an Bedeutungen fest zu machen, die in der Regel im Lesevorgang selbst erzeugt werden. (13)

The act of reading this new generation of war novels, then, required the reader to rethink and find meaning in a set of experiences that had been found meaningless in traditional forms.

These thoughts on the nature and effect of literary texts aid in understanding Remarque's recipe. *Im Westen nichts Neues* offers a particularly high level of *Unbestimmtheit* in the sense that the reader is disoriented with regard to space and time. Exact dates, the names of places in Belgium or France, as well as the names of military units are deliberately left out. The events depicted could have taken place anywhere on the Western front, to any group of young infantrymen at any time between 1915 and 1918. In accordance with Iser's analysis, the lack of time and space references in Remarque's novel provoked extreme reactions. Right-wing critics initially compared the novel to the First Generation of war accounts and regarded the absence of space and time markers in the narrative as a deficiency. Hence, they dismissed the text as "vague" and "unaccountable." Müller reports: "So moniert z.B. Herbert Kranz in der 'Tat' die generelle 'Unzuverlässigkeit' von Remarque's 'Bericht': 'Er [Remarque] muß, weil er die Wirklichkeit nicht meistert [...] alle Situationen, was Ort und Zeit angeht, im ungewissen lassen, was jede Nachprüfung unmöglich macht'" (Müller 67). Such right-wing literary criticism typically sought to debunk war novels by emphasizing their lack

of accuracy in comparison to the first generation *Tatsachenberichte* (factual reports).²¹ However, supporters of the war novel, the vast majority, did not criticize its lack of referential markers. Most readers were willing to accept the events described in this novel more readily and to participate in making meaning of the "facts" that they nonetheless found in the text.

The relation of this book to its context is critical for our assessment of its possible success. Spatial and temporal ambiguity in *Im Westen nichts Neues* was unacceptable to the right wing because their horizon of expectation (*Erwartungshorizont*) had already been defined by the First Generation of war books. To the right wing, only war diaries, reports, and memoirs had established themselves as acceptable genres because they contained "the truth" about the war, a truth firmly anchored in historical facts and known to the generals and admirals who had led the war effort.²² In Iser's terms, the right wing's realm of experiences was best reflected by the non-fictional accounts of the war, which was not the case for anyone else. Therefore, the right wing had to react defensively when the emerging new genre challenged the validity of the old accounts. What united the right wing, in Iser's sense, was therefore the centrality of the war experience and the belief in the non-fictional accounts of it:

[...] diese Erfahrung, die in allen möglichen Frontkämpfervereinen, Traditionsverbänden und sonstigen Organisationen der militärischen

²¹ Müller brings this point into sharper focus: "Daß das Romangeschehen von *Im Westen nichts Neues* auf Ort und Zeit nicht festzulegen war und eine Reihe von Episoden enthielt, die Vorgänge von geringer Wahrscheinlichkeit beschrieben, wurde von der politischen Rechten nicht als legitime Eigenschaft eines in fiktionaler Rede abgefaßten Romans, sondern als 'Fälschung' der historischen Realität betrachtet" (70).

²² However, this right-wing belief in factual accounts of the war was a phenomenon of the first post-war decade. Remarque taught the right wing that fictionalized accounts of the war experience could be extraordinarily effective in conveying a particular message. He opened the right wing's eyes to the fact that a good story told by a nobody was more compelling than an accurate account given by a general. This is what ultimately led to the flood of anti-Remarque novels between 1929 and 1932.

Traditionspflege als unverlierbarer Besitz gepflegt und nicht selten wie ein Fetisch kultiviert wurde, war nur einer 'wahren Beschreibung' zugänglich, wie sie in Kriegstagebüchern, Kriegsberichten und Offiziersmemoiren geliefert wurde, nicht aber der Überprüfung, Kritik oder reinterpreterender Fiktion. (Müller 71)

Based on internal evidence, however, Remarque was well aware that only the right wing showed this allegiance to the First Generation of war books.

When Remarque decided to write a war book in a different style, effectively creating a new genre, he seemed to know what readers would expect (what the horizon of expectation would be) -- a more open, less determined account of the war. His assessment was correct that only the right wing fringes would try to defend their set of expectations while the vast majority was receptive to his innovation, especially to help them make sense of their own experiences, which they had not found reflected in the tactics and politics of the generals' and admirals' worlds. Such a *Horizontwandel*, as Hans Robert Jauss pointed out in a 1967 essay, may result from "negation of familiar experiences or the raising of consciousness (*Bewußtmachung*) with regard to experiences that have never been articulated."²³ *Im Westen nichts Neues* did just that: it raised the level of consciousness about the war experience in a way that it had never been articulated. It created a new *Erwartungshorizont* for a mass audience.

Or so it seemed. What I claim in the next sections of this chapter is that Remarque actually only had two original ideas. His first idea was to connect the war experience with familiar narrative strategies of popular fiction, to bring war stories into the lives of his readers in comfortable style. Events are related from the point of view of the first-person

²³ Hans Robert Jauss, "Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft" (Konstanz: Druckerei und Verlagsanstalt Konstanz, 1967).

narrator, usually in the historical present to heighten the dramatic effect of the narration. The novel is loosely structured into episodes that do not necessarily follow chronological order, which is why it was well-suited to being published in a daily paper initially. Nothing groundbreaking there in terms of literary innovation; it is obviously scripted after nineteenth-century models.

But Remarque's second, more significant idea was ideological rather than literary: to relieve the common soldier from his responsibility of having lost the war, separating his actions from those of the high command that had lost the war. *Im Westen nichts Neues* takes the guilt, the shame, and the national trauma off the younger men and the common soldiers, and reassigns the blame to the older generation. I will thus argue that Remarque effectively rewrote Hindenburg's *Dolchstoßlegende* for a mass audience. The *Dolchstoßlegende*, like many conspiracy theories, initially left most people unconvinced - the generals had lost the war themselves, with the material situation of Germany, as the trench soldiers had known.

Yet Remarque's refashioning of that powerful political legend as part of the new definitions of masculinity in Weimar contained far more persuasive power, as it made up a new myth about loss. Hindenburg and Ludendorff targeted bolsheviks, Jews, and Social Democrats – an eclectic mix of everyone they didn't like. Remarque, on the other hand, made a more convincing case without having to rely on fabrications; he did not need a *deus ex machina* with a sense of menace from without: he simply said the younger generation was driven into the war by the older generation who held positions of authority and abused those positions, betraying the innocent youth delivered into their

hands. There are no partisan politics, there is only a family drama. The older generation is to blame for the war, the younger generation suffered the consequences -- a personal refashioning of politics that appealed to the hearts of the readers rather than their minds.

3.5 Reading *Im Westen nichts Neues*

As a novel, *Im Westen nichts Neues* appears to the reader essentially as a coming-of-age story, a *Bildungsroman*, or novel of formation, in the particular sense that the 19-year-old main characters were drafted straight from school and had the misfortune of coming of age during the Great War. While the term *Bildungsroman* has traditionally been applied to novels that trace the spiritual, moral, psychological, or social development and growth of the main character from infancy to maturity, Remarque's novel confronts us with extremely accelerated maturation resulting, paradoxically, in stunted growth, even regression, on the part of the young men. It is, in fact, a *Bildungsroman* of alienation and dehumanization, an *Anti-Bildungsroman*, as it were.

Other critics have preferred to label it a *roman-à-clef* because it is so openly autobiographical. And yet another attempt to classify the genre of *Im Westen nichts Neues* has created the term *Stationenroman*, analogous to Brecht's *Stationendrama*, because the development of the narrative is not rooted in plot or chronological progression.²⁴ In this context, plot has traditionally been understood as "developing action culminating in a climax," and followed by some sort of denouement, but the unifying principle of this novel are "broader thematic links, such as characters or ideas"

²⁴ Compare Christine R. Barker and R.W. Last, *Erich Maria Remarque* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1979) 49.

(Barker and Last, 49). This description is in many ways less than convincing: *Im Westen nichts Neues* consists of twelve chapters or sections, but these chapters or episodes are “not necessarily related to one another causally” (ibid. 48). Still, Barker and Last refer to this narrative scheme as “structural technique: a series of small episodes as building bricks” (ibid.). They underscore as well that most of the episodes read like entries into a fictitious diary, only that they are narrated in the historical present, not past tense.

The style was thus in many ways familiar, only that Remarque’s episodic writing was fictionalized, while the old diaries were referential, closer to actual events. (2) Such a structure lent itself well to publication in installments, which is precisely what the Propyläen Verlag chose to do: *Im Westen nichts Neues* first appeared in the *Vossische Zeitung* (November-December, 1928), before the first 50,000 copies were printed in book-form.²⁵ And episodes create suspense. Upon beginning every new section, one is tempted to think, with mixed feelings, “hopefully it won’t be another terrible day in the life of Paul Bäumer,” knowing full well it probably will be.²⁶

The book tells the story of Paul Bäumer, Remarque’s autobiographical mouthpiece, and three of his classmates – Kropp, Müller, and Leer – as well as of four other men these schoolboys closely befriend over time (Tjaden, Westhus, Detering, and Kaczinsky). Kaczinsky is already forty, twice their age, and he represents a father figure. Some critics consider him the true hero of the story. What is significant about this

²⁵ Comp. Barker and Last, 34.

²⁶ The often graphic descriptions of deaths or injuries form an integral part not only of this novel, but of war fiction in general. Therefore, it can be assumed that a (somewhat perverse) sense of voyeurism is part of the reader’s motivation. Not counting war veterans, who may have very personal reasons, what is it that makes people want to read about such unimaginable atrocities? With very few exceptions, none of these books are good literature.

set of characters is the mathematical balance between the four representatives of the bourgeoisie (schoolboys) on the one side, and the four working men on the other. Tjaden is a locksmith, Westhus a peat-digger, Detering a farmer, and Kaczinsky “maybe a shoemaker, but that does not matter” – he is skilled and sly, “a jack of all trades.”²⁷

Four milk-faced, preppy schoolboys meet four weathered, hard-handed, uneducated workers – an unlikely union only the war could forge. But friendship and solidarity among the schoolboys is the miracle recipe which gives them the strength to endure the ordeals of basic training, sadistically administered by a drill sergeant named *Corporal Himmelstoß*. They are subjected to, and initially appalled by, the random abuses of power with which Himmelstoß tries to break their spirit. The effect is, obviously, a general hardening, as well as disillusionment. The boys come to learn that, as Remarque sententiously puts it, “a polished button is more important than four volumes of Schopenhauer.”²⁸ But the brutality and anti-intellectual environment of boot-camp prepares them, in a sense, for what is to come; namely, trench warfare.²⁹ Indeed, Bäumer is going to observe, much later, that the final generation of draftees did not receive such basic training, and thus died like flies when they got to the front lines.³⁰

²⁷ “Kaczinsky ist der Gerissenste, den ich kenne. Von Beruf ist er, glaube ich, Schuster, aber das tut nichts zur Sache, er versteht jedes Handwerk. Es ist gut, mit ihm befreundet zu sein” (Erich Maria Remarque, *Im Westen nichts Neues*, Berlin: Ullstein, 1928), 41-42.

²⁸ “Wir lernten, daß ein geputzter Knopf wichtiger ist als vier Bände Schopenhauer” (Remarque, 27).

²⁹ “Wir wurden hart, mißtrauisch, mitleidlos, rachsüchtig, roh, - und das war gut; denn diese Eigenschaften fehlten uns gerade. Hätte man uns ohne diese Ausbildungszeit in den Schützengraben geschickt, dann wären wohl die meisten von uns verrückt geworden. So aber waren wir vorbereitet für das, was uns erwartete” (Remarque, 32).

³⁰ “Sie haben kaum eine Ausbildung, nur theoretisch haben sie etwas üben können, ehe sie ins Feld rückten. [...] Sie sind hilflos in diesem schweren Angriffsgebiet und fallen wie die Fliegen. [...] Dieser junge Ersatz weiß natürlich von alledem noch fast gar nichts. Er wird aufgerieben, weil er kaum Schrapnell von einer Granate unterscheiden kann, die Leute werden weggemäht [...]” (Remarque, 133).

After basic training, the four of them stay together and get sent to the Western front, where they unite with the other four men as soldiers of the same company. Daily routine, be it tedious, pleasant, or dangerous, forges a strong bond between the men. They come to rely on each other. The class difference that would divide them in civilian life vanishes, as do age disparities. War strips away such vain and unnatural distinctions; it makes them simply men. Men who know and trust each other perfectly. Men who fight, sleep, and eat together, or preferably gorge themselves; men who play cards together while defecating – in short: men in men’s paradise, if it weren’t for the ugly reality of losing friend after friend in meaningless combat. Remarque’s depiction of the war includes both these aspects: it is both an idyllic state of freedom, excess, and fulfillment of basic (male) needs, blossoming in the blissful experience of camaraderie, as well as a horrifying, mindless, and random annihilation of life. Camaraderie, a sense of trust and belonging, is the stuff that got the soldiers through this. Remarque (Bäumer) concludes: “Das Wichtigste aber war, daß in uns ein festes praktisches Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl erwachte, das sich im Felde dann zum Besten steigerte, was der Krieg hervorbrachte: zur Kameradschaft!” (Remarque, 32).

One crucial difference remains nonetheless. Even though the eight men in this group of comrades are all buddies who accept each other regardless of social background, Bäumer has one reason to worry more about himself and the other schoolboys. In his mind, the four working men, by virtue of having a profession, wife, and children, are going to have it easier to return a “normal” civilian life once the war is over.³¹ Müller,

³¹ “Kat und Detering und Haie werden wieder in ihren Beruf gehen, weil sie ihn schon vorher gehabt haben. Himmelstoß auch. Wir haben keinen gehabt” (Remarque, 89-90).

Kropp, Leer, and himself, on the other hand, were plucked straight out of school and do not have a “normal” life to return to. Their lives were too young, too unfinished, not to be tarnished, or extinguished, by the war experience. Now they all share a feeling of foreboding emptiness, meaninglessness, and nihilism: “[...] Beruf, Studium und Gehalt und so weiter – das kotzt mich an [...] ist widerlich. Ich finde nichts – ich finde nichts, Albert” (Remarque 90). The school friends represent the lost generation whose lives were deprived of purpose and direction, “even if they escaped the grenades” (Remarque, 1). According to Hans Harald Müller, the author counted himself among these victims of the war: intact on the outside, but broken and confused within. The schoolboys in the story discuss this issue repeatedly.³²

Thankfully, there is one person on this earth who looms larger than life. He does not worry very much, always knows what to do next, and never loses his cool. He is monosyllabic, indestructible and somehow comforting.³³ Frightened schoolboys look up to him, and fall in love him, when he fries a stolen goose in the middle of the night.³⁴ Such a benign giant is Stanislaus Kaczinsky – Paul Bäumer’s idol and father figure. His saccharine adoration for “Kat” is occasionally hard to bear for the reader, but not

³² Remarque articulates these thoughts with Schillerian pathos: “Albert spricht es aus: ‘Der Krieg hat uns für alles verdorben.’ Er hat recht. Wir sind keine Jugend mehr. Wir wollen die Welt nicht mehr stürmen. Wir sind Flüchtende. Wir flüchten vor uns. Vor unserem Leben. Wir waren achtzehn Jahre und begannen die Welt und das Dasein zu lieben; wir mußten darauf schießen. Die erste Granate, die einschlug, traf in unser Herz. Wir sind abgeschlossen vom Tätigen, vom Streben, vom Fortschritt. Wir glauben nicht mehr daran, wir glauben an den Krieg” (91). Compare also 124-126.

³³ “Kat horcht hinaus: ‘Diese Nacht gibt es Kattun’” (57). “‘Schlamassel,’ sagt Kat” (62). “Kat klopft seine Pfeife aus. ‘Es gibt Zunder’” (64).

³⁴ “Wir reden nicht viel, aber wir sind voll zarterer Rücksicht miteinander, als ich mir denke, daß Liebende es sein können. Wir sind zwei Menschen, zwei winzige Funken Leben, draußen ist die Nacht und der Kreis des Todes” (98).

“Ich sehe im Halbschlaf Kat den Löffel heben und senken, ich liebe ihn, seine Schultern, seine eckige, gebeugte Gestalt – und zu gleicher Zeit sehe ich hinter ihm Wälder und Sterne, und eine gute Stimme sagt Worte, die mir Ruhe geben, mir einem Soldaten [...]” (99).

inappropriate in the context of young soldiers looking for a leader amidst the chaos.³⁵ Kat can see things clearly, and express them unpretentiously.³⁶ If there were only people like him, the war would have never happened, or it would have been over the next day. Kat is a hero who epitomizes all the qualities Bäumer (hence Remarque -- or at least his audience, as he judges it) finds desirable in a man, including courage, compassion, modesty, calmness, loyalty, dexterity, resourcefulness, and non-academic shrewdness (*die deutschen Tugenden*). He is also a working-class philosopher with a keen sense of justice.³⁷

It is clear what Remarque intended with this novel: it was meant to appeal to simple folk, people like you and me. *The simple people* is the formula uniting the schoolboys and the working men in this company. It is their common denominator, their shared social fabric. It is also the formula that most readers of popular fiction would use to describe themselves. *Wir einfachen Leute* creates a united front against *die da oben*, the evil, often, *gebildete*, ones with authority up there, like the stupid officers and the vain, effete Emperor himself.³⁸ The whole narrative is strewn with evidence to support

³⁵ Or, for that matter, a nation looking for someone to relate to and identify with in the middle of the ongoing chaos.

³⁶ Kat can predict consequences of misdemeanors: “‘Drei Tage Arrest,’ vermutet Kat” (94). He can predict attacks to come: “‘Es wird wie an der Somme, da hatten wir nachher sieben Tage und Nächte Trommelfeuer’” (107). He can diagnose injuries from afar: “Kat meint, er hätte entweder eine Beckenzertrümmerung oder einen Wirbelsäulenschuß” (127).

³⁷ The first time he is mentioned, one already gets the idea that this man is extraordinary, larger than life: “und endlich Stanislaus Katzinsky, das Haupt unserer Gruppe, zäh, schlau, gerissen, vierzig Jahre alt, mit einem Gesicht aus Erde, mit blauen Augen, hängenden Schultern und einer wunderbaren Witterung für dicke Luft, gutes Essen und schöne Druckposten” (9). Katzinsky’s crudely existentialist philosophy is as basic as his needs: “‘Und wenn du einem Menschen ein Stückchen Macht gibst, dann geht es ihm ebenso; er schnappt danach [wie ein Hund]. Das kommt ganz von selber, denn der Mensch ist an und für sich zunächst einmal ein Biest [...]’” (48).

³⁸ At one point toward the end of the novel, *Kaiser Wilhelm* himself visits the troops to decorate certain soldiers with Iron Crosses. Bäumer is disappointed because he had imagined a more manly man: “Wir

this interpretation: If the world had more men like Kaczynsky, a shoemaker - or whatever he is, it doesn't matter – if there were more Kaczynskys in the world, this terrible war would not have happened.

Kaczynsky is the hero of the simple folk, *die einfachen Leute*, and as such, he commands admiration. He is the same age as Kantorek, the schoolmaster who carelessly urged these boys to sign up for the war. He is the same age as Himmelstoß, the mail man turned corporal, who tormented these boys with his vile lust for power, but turns out to be a pitiful coward.³⁹ Because of his age, Kaczynsky is a representative of the older generation, but not the condemnable part of the older generation.⁴⁰ Kat is a saint with a trade and a nuclear family he wants to return to.⁴¹ Kat is the powerful German warrior slain in this evil war. In the “tomb of the unknown soldier,” he is the soldier. Collective imagination, or national consciousness, imbues “the unknown soldier” with a set of characteristics that he should have, even if the war was lost. The idea of an “unknown soldier” fulfils precisely that function: it is a free-for-all projection screen in the service of national mourning and reconciliation. Remarque gave the unknown soldier a name, a

stehen stramm und der Kaiser erscheint. Wir sind neugierig, wie er aussehen mag. Er schreitet die Front entlang, und ich bin eigentlich etwas enttäuscht: nach den Bildern hatte ich ihn mir größer und mächtiger vorgestellt, vor allen Dingen mit einer donnernden Stimme” (201).

³⁹ During one attack, Himmelstoß, who has recently been sent to the front, pretends to be wounded and tries to hide in a shrapnel crater. Bäumer realizes this, and reacts with vitriolic rage: “Ich fasse ihn am Arm und will ihn hochreißen. Er quäkt auf. Da gehen meine Nerven durch. Ich habe ihn am Hals und schüttele ihn wie einen Sack, daß der Kopf hin und her fliegt, und schreie ihm ins Gesicht: ‘Du Lump, willst du raus - du Hund, du Schinder, du willst dich drücken?’ Er verglast, ich schleudere seinen Kopf gegen die Wand – ‘Du Vieh’ – ich trete ihm in die Rippen -, ‘Du Schwein’ – ich stoße ihn vorwärts, mit dem Kopf voran hinaus” (135).

⁴⁰ Remarque carefully distinguishes between “good father figures” and “father figures gone bad.”

⁴¹ “Besaufen könnte man sich ja, sonst aber auf die nächste Eisenbahn – und ab nach Mutter. Mensch, Frieden, Albert,” (80-81).

face, and a definite set of qualities. The characteristics he chose for the unknown soldier were universally acceptable (even outside of Germany); hence the success of this book.

This is Remarque's own version of the *Dolchstoßlegende für die einfachen Leute*: Kaczinsky does not literally get stabbed in the back by some rogue enemy, but his skull gets pierced by a tiny piece of shrapnel that does not even cause a visible wound:

Kat hat, ohne daß ich es bemerkt habe, unterwegs einen Splitter in den Kopf bekommen. Nur ein kleines Loch ist da, es muß ein ganz geringer, verirrter Splitter gewesen sein. Aber es hat ausgereicht. Kat ist tot. (Remarque, 284)

What Remarque accomplishes symbolically is to expose the *Dolchstoß* as an invention. The way he debunked it was ingenious, yet simple: He created two good German friends, two common soldiers, Bäumer and Kaczinsky, who nine out of ten male readers could easily relate to and gladly identify with. These two soldiers form part of a larger group, a company of *einfache Leute* (like us), who are forced to fight in this war despite their own better judgement. Thus, the new *Dolchstoß* suggests: It was us, simple folk like us, who were stabbed in the back, and it was almost unnoticeable (like Kat's wound). The officers and the Emperor, *die da oben*, the authorities with a lust for power, bear responsibility for this.

Im Westen nichts Neues facilitates identification with the common soldier. Since common soldiers are the heroes, it is almost impossible to find fault with them; on the contrary, the reader feels total compassion for their agony, or for their bereft mothers' agony over having lost a son. The book makes it explicit that these young men should not be in the war, and would prefer not to have been sent to war in the first place. They fulfill their duty with courage and discipline, but invisible figures of authority direct their

movements to the front line and back. The German reader, of course, is fully aware that all of this absurd combat will ultimately result in catastrophic defeat. One feels compassion for these likable soldiers. They are obvious victims, cannon fodder, lambs for the slaughter. Any reader who sides with them, anyone who regards himself to be in the caste of *einfache Leute*, becomes virtually a victim by proxy. Remarque redeemed the German nation with *Im Westen nichts Neues* because he exculpated the common soldier, be it schoolboy or working man. Kat never did anything wrong; he never wanted to go to war. His head was pierced by a small piece of shrapnel. But if it had been up to him, he would not have been anywhere near detonating shrapnel in the first place.

Because it gave voice to such individuals' moments, *Im Westen nichts Neues* proved to be a therapeutic book. Remarque himself explained in interviews that writing it was a way to deal with his depression, or maybe, to generalize the term a little bit, with his low self-esteem. In 1928, that kind of war-inspired low self-esteem was widespread among the German population because the political system started to show signs of disintegration, leaving the widespread impression that the war had been fought for nothing, as the common man saw it. The war experience had not been mastered or dealt with on the national level; in fact, it had not been dealt with at all since about 1923. The nation longed for a self-esteem booster. Remarque provided it with his elaborate praise of *der einfache Soldat* and *die einfachen Leute*. Katczinsky states in one of his longer monologues:

Aber es darf keine Schikane werden. Und mach du das mal einem Schlosser oder Knecht oder Arbeiter klar, erkläre das mal einem Muskoten, und das sind doch die meisten hier; der sieht nur, daß er geschunden wird und ins Feld kommt, und

er weiß ganz genau, was notwendig ist und was nicht. Ich sage euch, daß der einfache Soldat hier vorn so aushält, das ist allerhand! Allerhand ist das! (49)

Kaczinsky, in his primitive manner, provides simple explanations for the question that had been vexing the German nation since the end of the war.

3.6 THE AUTHOR'S INTENTIONS IN THE HORIZON OF EXPECTATIONS

If the common man and his war experience was the key topic that *Im Westen nichts Neues* worked through, there still remains the question about what the author intended to do, if anything beyond simply selling a book.

Hans Harald Müller argues in his comprehensive analysis of Weimar war novels, *Der Krieg und die Schriftsteller* (1986), that Erich Maria Remarque wrote *Im Westen nichts Neues* for non-political, personal reasons. He portrays Remarque as a largely unsuccessful literary amateur who suffered from frustration and depression because his aspirations toward an artist's life remained unfulfilled. In fact, Remarque's *petit-bourgeois* social background and the pitiful beginning of his literary career represent a blatant contradiction to his documented biographical goal, his fanciful vision of becoming a bohemian *homme-des-lettres*. Based on information concerning Remarque's personal life, Müller asserts that *Im Westen nichts Neues* was a therapeutic book for this author-as-failure that, evidently, also worked therapeutically for millions of readers. He validates his biographical approach to Remarque's masterpiece by the fact that Paul Bäumer, the hero of the novel, bears striking similarities to the author himself.

In the following discussion of *Im Westen nichts Neues*, I will draw on much of Müller's evidence because he researched the circumstances of the book's creation and

reception meticulously. However, I will also develop a more complex argument: that, while Müller's insights are perfectly valid, he does not account for the book's mass appeal. There is no *a priori* reason that Remarque's person should have been the model it turned into for thousands of Germans. Most particularly, Müller's analysis can be relied on as careful but positivistic, but he does not accommodate the readers' political and social horizons of expectation, as I have begun to do, and so it does not see Remarque's innovation: the new version of the stab in the back, the *Dolchstoß für die kleinen Leute*, that Remarque so ingeniously created -- and I will argue, consciously, at least to a degree.

Müller draws upon several interviews that Remarque gave, in German and in French, while everyone talked about the groundbreaking effect of the novel in 1929 and 1930. Remarkably, Remarque stated more than once that his book was purely personal, subjective, and in no way political. For instance, he said to the interviewer from the French magazine *Revue d'Allemagne*: "I have never pretended to speak for everyone. My book is subjective."⁴² In another interview with the magazine *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, Remarque did not want to be addressed as a "writer" and even denied having a "literary vocation." He made it seem as if the mass appeal of *Im Westen nichts Neues* was accidental, a by-product of his written efforts of coming to terms with a highly personal problem:

I am straining to repeat to you: I cannot begin to believe that I have a literary vocation. If I have written a book, it was pushed by the one concern of discussing with myself a problem that touches me personally. [...] I do not worry over

⁴² Quoted in Müller, *Der Krieg und die Schriftsteller*, 40. "Je n'ai jamais prétendu parler au nom de tous. Mon livre est subjectif" (my own translation).

knowing if the book I am writing is interesting or not, the only thing I ask of it is that it deliver a personal solution.⁴³

What makes these responses noteworthy is the fact that they contradict other evidence about Remarque's intentions with the writing of this novel.

As Müller and others have researched, the artist as a young man wanted nothing more than to become a writer. According to one anecdote about his many affected behaviors, he had business cards printed, shortly after the war, which read "Erich Remark – Schriftsteller," even though there had not been any literary production worth mentioning.⁴⁴ And if it is true that Remarque did not want to "speak for everyone" but only to resolve his personal issues, it is puzzling that the prologue to the novel promises the story of "a generation destroyed by the war, even if it escaped its grenades."⁴⁵ On the one hand, the author professes that the novel is apolitical and only about himself. On the other hand, the book claims to be over "a[n] [entire] generation destroyed by the war." Such ambiguities or contradictions are symptomatic of this book and its author, and they have contributed to the undervaluing of the strategic success of the book.

In dealing with his own publicity, it seems clear that Remarque had a tendency to prevaricate, or at least to "manage" his publicity actively. In a German interview with *Literarische Welt* on June 14, 1929, for instance, he was asked by the interviewer, Axel

⁴³ Quoted in Müller, 40. "Je me tue à vous le répéter: je ne peux pas arriver à croire que j'ai une vocation littéraire. Si j'ai écrit un livre, c'est poussé par le seul souci de discuter avec moi-même un problème qui me touche personnellement. [...] Je ne me inquiète pas de savoir si le livre que j'écris est intéressant ou non, je lui demande simplement de m'apporter une solution personnelle."

⁴⁴ Müller, 46.

⁴⁵ Erich Maria Remarque, *Im Westen nichts Neues* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1928). "Dieses Buch soll weder eine Anklage noch ein Bekenntnis sein. Es soll nur den Versuch machen, über eine Generation zu berichten, die vom Kriege zerstört wurde, auch wenn sie seinen Granaten entkam."

Eggebrecht, if the author of a war novel would not necessarily have to reckon with its political impact. Remarque said that was true, but only if the book claimed comprehensive coverage of the war experience. *Im Westen nichts Neues*, he explained, was by no means “complete.” It was “incomplete” because it only talked about a small group of *Schülersoldaten* who were infantry soldiers in only one location during a very brief and uneventful period of the war on the Western front. The events of the war, according to Remarque, just serve as a backdrop to the personal experience these young soldiers go through:

Der Krieg ist als Tatsache vorausgesetzt. Die wenigen Reflexionen, die in dem Buch stehen, beschäftigen sich nur mit diesem rein menschlichen Erleben des Krieges. Sie vermeiden jede politische, soziale, religiöse oder sonstige Stellungnahme. Dazu halte ich mich ebensowenig für berufen, wie dazu, eine Geschichte des Krieges zu schreiben. (quoted in Müller, 41)

No war, however, can be such a pure "fact" without an opinion (*Stellungnahme*),

Nonetheless, Remarque did not cast himself as a historian or a chronicler of the war, only as a human observer. He laid no claims on the historical accuracy of the events he described. As such, he positioned himself in opposition to the first generation of war writings, which were officers' first-hand accounts of what they had seen, usually in the form of memoirs or diaries that purported to report the true facts of the war. References to specific dates, places, people, strategies, or military units, which had helped authenticate the officers' accounts, were insignificant to Remarque. His omission of time and place markers has two major effects, as noted: (1) the story becomes universal (this could have happened to any infantry soldier on the Western front); (2) the story becomes naïve and vague (it does not seem to matter which General decided what). On the more

practical level, this also means he has invalidated any of his readers' attempts to contest his facts -- he is not portraying "his war," but rather "his experience," a gesture which makes his narrative essentially fact-proof.

Hence, Remarque claims to have been an author with no political opinion about World War I. At least publicly, he upheld that position, when he professed that he did not see himself as entitled to comment on such a vast and complex event. In a letter to the British General Sir Ian Hamilton, he said: "I have not felt myself called upon to argue about the war. That must be reserved for the leaders, who alone know all that is necessary to know."⁴⁶ One is tempted to think that Remarque only pretended to be an apolitical individual. Maybe he only acted aloof and detached from the highly political controversy surrounding the success of his book so that he would not have to take sides. But, as Müller observes, there is reason to believe that Remarque really did not have much of a political mind. Around the same time that he was finishing *Im Westen nichts Neues*, in June of 1928, he wrote reviews about five different war books. And despite the fact that these five volumes were written by authors with grossly different political opinions, such as Jünger, Schauwecker, and von der Vring, political terms did not enter Remarque's vocabulary. He really liked Jünger. "Jüngers Kriegsbücher *In Stahlgewittern* und *Das Wäldchen 125* bezeichnete Remarque in dieser Rezension als 'von einer wohltuenden Sachlichkeit, präzise, ernst, stark und gewaltig'" (Müller 41).

Even as late as September, 1930, Remarque afforded himself the luxury of living without a political opinion. When a French interviewer asked him about the political

⁴⁶ Quoted in Müller, 41.

significance of Adolf Hitler, whose NSDAP had been the strongest party in that year's election, he replied:

I have no opinion on Hitler at all. I know nothing about him. I never occupy myself with political questions. As a matter of honesty. Because I think that politics is such a vast domain, and so complicated, that one would have to be a politician to venture there. (quoted in Müller, 42)⁴⁷

In these cases, he did not identify himself as a liberal or a pacifist. He merely stated that he hated war and what it did to the soldiers having to fight it. When the Berlin newspaper *Tempo* asked him in 1929 how he would react to a future war, he said:

Der Krieg erschien mir als die vollkommenste Negation des Lebens, gegen die ich reagieren mußte. Und doch bin ich kein politischer Idealist. Wenn heute feindliche Truppen in Westfalen einbrechen, so bin ich morgen wieder Soldat. Ein friedlicher Mensch bin ich... kein Pazifist. (quoted in Müller, 42)

There is thus ample evidence that Remarque had indeed no interest in the war as politics. He showed no desire to discuss or describe war in political terms.

The question is, then, what was it that compelled him to write a novel about World War I? In the June, 1929, interview with *Literarische Welt*, he explained the necessity of writing about the war as a personal experience:

An Hunderttausenden ist natürlich das Erlebnis Krieg abgelaufen wie eine Dusche. Andere sind wenigstens ohne Bruch durchgekommen. Manche haben sich ja auch so sehr daran gewöhnt, daß sie nachher ohne den Krieg nicht mehr auskamen. Aber wichtig sind ja alle die anderen, die zahllosen Zerrissenen, Getroffenen, Erlebnisfähigen, die dem Erlebnis Ausgelieferten. Die haben jetzt erst angefangen, sich wiederzufinden. Ein Beweis dafür, daß – abgesehen von der ersten Zeit revolutionärer Erhebung nach dem Kriege – fast zehn Jahre niemand etwas davon hören wollte. Es war nicht möglich, nicht erwünscht, nicht dringend, über den Krieg zu schreiben. Nur als ein Moment politischer Diskussion wurde er

⁴⁷ “Je n’ai aucune opinion sur Hitler. Je ne sais rien de lui. Je ne m’occupe jamais des questions politiques. Par honnêteté. Parce que je pense que la politique est un domaine si vaste, si compliqué, qu’il faut être politicien pour s’y aventurer” (my translation).

verdammt, verteidigt oder verherrlicht. Mit dem persönlichen Erlebnis des Krieges aber war besonders der junge Mensch unserer Generation noch längst nicht fertig. Es wirkte in ihm dumpf fort, es blieb ein undeutlicher Alldruck, ein Zustand der Unruhe, der Skepsis, der Härte oder schwankenden Ziellosigkeit. (quoted in Müller, 43).

Nevertheless, he said in the same interview: “Ich hatte früher nie daran gedacht, einmal über den Krieg zu schreiben.” And in another French interview, he announced: “I had never had the intention of writing a book on war. Even on the day before I began, I did not dream of it.”⁴⁸ It is peculiar how the thought of using war as a literary subject had never crossed his mind, but at the same time, he gives such compelling and philanthropic reasons why a book on war *ought to be written* to help heal the wounds of the many surviving victims. It is hard to believe that the same person who had never imagined writing a war novel and who is not even that interested in politics would suddenly come up with the literary idea and the considerable amount of social consciousness behind it.

The answer to this riddle may well be Remarque’s personal situation, or, more specifically, his recurring depressions. He explains:

Ich war damals, im Frühjahr vorigen Jahres mit ganz anderen Arbeiten beschäftigt. Ich war angestellt als Bilderredakteur einer Zeitschrift. Abends mühte ich mich mit mancherlei Dingen. Zum Beispiel machte ich verschiedene Anläufe, ein Stück zu schreiben, kam aber damit nie sehr weit. Ich litt unter ziemlich heftigen Anfällen von Verzweiflung. Bei dem Versuch, sie zu überwinden, suchte ich allmählich ganz bewußt und systematisch nach der Ursache meiner Depressionen. Durch diese absichtliche Analyse kam ich auf mein Kriegserlebnis zurück. Ich konnte ganz ähnliches bei vielen Bekannten und Freunden beobachten. Wir alle waren – und sind oft noch – unruhig, ziellos, bald exaltiert, bald gleichgültig, im tiefsten Grunde aber unfroh. Der Schatten des Krieges hing auch und gerade über uns, wenn wir gar nicht daran dachten.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Müller, 42. “Je n’ai jamais eu l’intention d’écrire un livre sur la guerre. La veille même du jour où j’ai commencé, je n’y songeait pas” (my translation).

Am selben Tage, an dem ich diesen Gedanken hatte, begann ich zu schreiben, ohne lange Überlegung. Das ging sechs Wochen lang, jeden Abend, wenn ich aus dem Büro kam. Dann war das Buch fertig. (quoted in Müller, 43)

Here a useful distinction might be drawn: he was not speaking *about* the war or *for or against* its politics, but rather from the position that, practically speaking, was central to the war -- he spoke of the war from the position of thousands of other soldiers, as recovered memory, cast as if recovered from the moment in which it happened. He had managed to recreate not what the war was, but how it felt, from in the middle of it.

Remarque was at the same time careful not to individualize himself or to cast any one moment in that war experience as *the* war experience. Instead, he consciously transposed his narrative back into the framework of an imminent reaction, not a retrospective analysis. In a French interview, for example, Remarque attributed his depression not to the war experience itself, but to a particular feeling of loss and solitude that set in after the war.⁴⁹ He said that even the war had moments of beauty, love, and exaltation -- the war had not *caused* his depression, the peace had. Thus he was forced out of his present and back to that conflicted space of experience. As he knew the war, many young men were drafted directly out of school, went through basic training together, fought in the trenches, or even saw each other die. Warfare forms strong bonds

⁴⁹ “[...] on réfléchit [...] on se demande comment il peut se faire que la santé étant bonne, la matérielle assurée, comment, tout allant bien, on n’est pas heureux cependant. On a l’impression d’être privé, séparé, amputé d’un mystérieux je ne sais quoi. Pourquoi suis-je seul? Seul! Je me demande depuis combien de temps je suis dans cet état. Je remonte lentement dans mes souvenirs, et je remonte jusqu’à la guerre et je constate que pendant la guerre, je n’étais pas seul, j’avais des camarades” (quoted in Müller, 44). “[...] you think [...] you ask yourself how it can be that, being in good health, material life secure, everything going well, you are not happy anyway. You get the impression that you are deprived, separated, amputated from a mysterious I-don’t-know what. Why am I lonely? Lonely! I ask myself how long I have been in this state. I climb slowly back into my memories, and I go right back to the war and I realize that, during the war, I was not lonely, I had comrades (my translation).

between men, and many of the survivors still had fond memories of war-time camaraderie when the war was over.

Remarque cast himself as no exception, as *no different* than many others who experienced it. It is possible that the biographical truth tells the whole story: he became depressed over the loss of friends. But is it really true? Is it true that he missed the old companionship so much that he fictionalized it to help him overcome his sadness? Such a statement sounds too calculated without further conditions. In fact, Müller claims that his depression actually revolved around his lack of success as a writer. Be that as it may, one can assert that his personal experience of the war was ambivalent, and that it emerged to him as a *place* from which he could speak with an audible voice and about a topic of wide interest. It encompassed atrocities and pain as well as moments of beauty, friendship, and joy. At the same time, his chosen voice was not without its own dangers for an author. One of the many verbal assaults Remarque was exposed to after *Im Westen nichts Neues* had become a success for the left and a provocation to the right addressed the issue of camaraderie and whether or not the author had even been in the trenches.

In fact, almost every aspect of the author's life became contested during the heated debate following the publication of the novel and the controversial screening of the American film version -- the critics would not let stand his self-imposed restriction to *the experience* of the war rather than its facts. Probably because of the vehemence of the right-wing slander against Remarque, a number of misconceptions remain to this day, making it difficult to split out the marketer, the artist, and the person of Remarque. No wonder, then that, with respect to the question of whether or not Remarque was a

political figure, or what really motivated him to write a book about war, even today's scholars and biographers do not agree. Some see him as a braggart and a dandy who shirked being sent back to the front after his injuries had healed. Others see him as a devoted pacifist who spoke out loud and clear against the injustice of authoritarian rule, the terror and destruction of war, and the threat of chauvinism. Data might support either interpretation.

Thomas Schneider, a member of the Remarque archive in Osnabrück, Germany, portrays the writer's alleged lack of political consciousness as part of a promotional strategy his publisher (Ullstein, Berlin) forced him to abide by. In a recent compilation of letters and interviews of Remarque recorded between 1929 and 1962, entitled *Ein militanter Pazifist* (1993), Schneider explains that it was Ullstein, not Remarque, who aimed for maximum success by restricting the book as far as possible to its experiential content. As part of their strategy, his editors made him rewrite the original manuscript in the sense that he had to delete the passages expressing clear condemnations of the war. The idea behind that was to make the narrative not as openly pacifistic, and to veil the author's true colors behind a smoke screen of ambiguity. According to Schneider, Ullstein tried to market *Im Westen nichts Neues* as a semi-confessional report of an apolitical common soldier:

[...] als Erlebnisbericht eines unpolitischen, einfachen Muschkoten zu verkaufen, der den bislang marktbeherrschenden Offiziersmemoiren eine neue Perspektive hinzufügen und für Kriegsgegner wie –befürworter akzeptabel sein sollte. Entsprechend stimmte der Konzern in der Werbung auch die Informationen über den Autor und seine Intention auf dieses Konzept ab. [...] In den Selbstaussagen und Interviews hielt sich Remarque zunächst an diese Vorgaben. (Schneider, ed., 11-12)

Clearly, though, Schneider seeks to exculpate the author from any charges of his being an opportunist, while other critics, like Carl von Ossietzky, expressed disappointment about the fact that Remarque did not take a clearer stance. Ossietzky said “Es war verhängnisvoll, daß er vor den Kämpfen kniff, die eine ebenso unausweichliche Konsequenz seines Erfolges waren” (qtd. in Schneider, 13).

The details of the original reception do support the idea that Remarque may have been considerably more political than he (or Ullstein) allowed himself to be. Most notably, he published a short statement, entitled “Haben meine Bücher Tendenz?” (1931-32). In this commentary, he proclaims himself as a true patriot and discusses the pointlessness of modern warfare in general. He seeks to explain the differences between genuine and misunderstood heroism, as well as between healthy patriotism and overblown chauvinism. He states that, in times of upheaval, it takes more courage to be a declared pacifist than to be one of the armed fighters:

Aus solchen Überlegungen heraus erklärt sich, daß die äußersten Radikalen sich gegen mich wandten, während die gemäßigten Elemente, sogar im konservativen Lager, die Wahrheitstreue anerkennen, mit der ich die Schrecklichkeiten des Krieges schilderte. Niemand kann leugnen, daß ich, was groß und edel in meinem Lande ist, liebe und daß ich aus tiefstem Herzen wünsche, daß Deutschland sich erholt von seinem augenblicklichen Elend. (Schneider ed. 64)

That statement, however, again subsumes the war's politics to its experiential content.

Ultimately, it does not become completely clear what Remarque's intentions and political opinions were, or which role his publisher played prior to the publication of the novel in Ullstein's *Vossische Zeitung*. It is clear, however, that Remarque did not have to invent very much that was new in writing his great book. Large sections of the novel are

based on his own life, without needing much expansion through research -- he narrates from an individual's point of view, very narrow but intense. He himself admits freely that the book is based on his memories of the war: "kann ich nur wahrheitsgemäß sagen, daß meine spontanen Erinnerungen an den großen Krieg lediglich wiedergeben, was ich sah und erlitt" (Schneider ed., 62). Thus the hero of the story, Paul Bäumer, is clearly fashioned after Erich Paul Remark himself, making its deviations interesting to look at in some more detail as a more indirect indicator of his intentions.

It is worth showing the correspondences between the author's biography and his text, not to argue for its status as an autobiography, but to show how they share a common script of the war experience.

3.7 AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS IN *IM WESTEN NICHTS NEUES*

Erich Paul Remark was born on 22 June 1898. His parents, Peter Franz and Anna Maria, were poor – his father was a book-binder. Remarque adopted the French spelling of his last name in 1923 (after his great-grandfather's), and had previously substituted "Paul" for his mother's middle name, "Maria."⁵⁰ Those shifts reflect a taste for a slightly more urbane and upper-class identity and a less overtly middle-class Catholic one. He had two sisters, Elfriede and Erna, and, due to their financial plight, the family had to move eleven times before Erich was nineteen years old. Up to 1914, the family lived in several places on *Jahnstraße* in Osnabrück, and this street left the most lingering impressions on young Erich (which he used in *Im Westen nichts Neues* and *Der Weg zurück*).

⁵⁰ Compare Christine R. Barker and R.W. Last, *Erich Maria Remarque* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1979), 5.

Since his parents were Catholic, he attended two Catholic schools in Osnabrück; from 1904-1908 the *Domschule*, and from 1908-1912 the *Johannischule*. Remarque was a good student, but since his family was so poor, he did not have any career opportunities, other than becoming a teacher. So he received his teacher training at the Catholic *Präparande* between 1912 and 1915. The headmaster of the *Präparande* (Rektor Korthaus) was nicknamed “Schlächter” (butcher), and Remarque reportedly had many an argument with him.⁵¹ Another teacher named “Konschorek” would become “Kantorek” in Remarque’s novel (the similarity is restricted to the name). Young Remarque had the nickname “Schmierer” (smudge), a name he still used later on to sign the letters he wrote from his hospital bed in Duisburg, where he spent time from 1917-1918, recovering from shrapnel wounds.⁵² Until 21 November 1916, when he was drafted, Remarque attended the *Lehrerseminar*, an institution for the training of elementary school teachers.

All indicators concur that, like so many German authors from the middle classes who embraced the concept of *Bildung* as a way to class improvement, Remarque always wanted to be someone else, something better. His petit-bourgeois upbringing and his career as a *Volksschullehrer* were not enough to satisfy his ambition. He always dreamed about what it would be like to be a famous writer and to belong to a bohemian circle of friends. As a child, “he collected butterflies, stones and stamps, and was interested in painting and music. He was particularly gifted as a musician, and played both piano and organ extremely well” (Barker and Last, 6). By 1916, he played the piano well enough to

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 6.

make a little money on the side with piano lessons. The money was spent on his beginning obsession with outward appearance, especially extravagant clothes.

Around the same time, Remarque joined the *Jugendstil* art circle that Fritz Hörstemeier (1882-1918) had founded in Osnabrück. Hörstemeier had rented some rooms in *Liebigstrasse* that the members of the aesthetic circle affectionately dubbed the “Traumbude” (dream den). The circle had about six members. “They were all idealists in the *Jugendstil* (art nouveau) vein, seeking to transform drab reality into an idealized world of beauty” (Barker and Last, 7). Later on, possibly during his stay at the Duisburg hospital, Remarque would write a novel, entitled *Die Traumbude – Ein Künstlerroman* (1920), and dedicate it to “Onkel Fritz.” Later Remarque, as well as his critics, considered this book “really terrible.” One Remarque biographer, Armin Kerker, describes the Hörstemeier circle as:

Zwischen vulgarisierter Natur- und Lebensphilosophie, verinnerlichter Gottesmystik, überzeugtem Vegetariertum und flachem Nietzsche-Kult bewegte sich ihr geistiges und künstlerisches Streben nach der ‘Schönheit’ – vornehmlich nach der ‘adeligen deutschen Seele’ – in Kunst, Musik und Dichtung. (qtd. in Müller 45)

Such were the circumstances of Remarque’s life before he became a soldier, and the self-image of an author-to-be who was very concerned with public image. On 21 November, 1916, he was drafted for military service. So he did become a soldier, but he probably only saw minimal action on the front line. After basic training in the Caprivi barracks on the *Westerberg* (the *Klosterberg* of *Im Westen nichts Neues*) under Corporal Schwarze, he was sent to the Reserve Battalion IR.78 to receive further training (compare Barker

and Last 8). “But, as his mother was seriously ill, he obtained frequent compassionate leave to return to Osnabrück” (ibid.).

In June of 1917, his unit was moved to the Western Front and “assigned to the Second Company of the Field Recruiting Depot of the Guards Reserve Division, which was located in Ham-Lenglet, behind the Arras front” (ibid.). Several of his friends and acquaintances from Osnabrück were with him during this time, including

Georg Middendorf (Kropp in *Im Westen nichts Neues*), Wilhelm Katschinsky (Kat), Seppel Oelfke (Haie Westhus), Detering, and Theo Troske. Troske was badly wounded by grenade splinters in July 1917 and Remarque carried him back behind the line of fire; but Troske later died in hospital of head wounds which at first passed unnoticed, and was buried in Osnabrück on 24 August. (Barker and Last 8)

Remarque himself was described by his best friend Middendorf as “a reasonably competent soldier, always calm and self-possessed and valued by comrades, whom he frequently entertained with playing the piano or by performing hypnotic tricks” (ibid.). He was wounded during the Battle of Flanders, which began on 31 July 1917, while attempting to carry a comrade out of the line of fire during a surprise attack by the British. He suffered grenade splinter wounds in his arms and neck, but he recovered fully from these injuries at *St. Vincenz* hospital in Duisburg. Apparently, he had a pleasant stay there and even befriended the daughter of a hospital official. The war was over before he could be sent back to the front. Shortly after the war, his mother died.

Hence, all the main characters and major narrative components of *Im Westen nichts Neues* are based on people and events in Remarque’s biography, but were not necessarily drawn from the perspective of the very heart of the Great War’s battles. It is

not unusual for a beginning writer to draw on personal experience as the main source of literary output. It is also not unusual for a writer to employ “artistic freedom,” and alter actual events to fit the narrative. These alterations are indeed informative in the case of Remarque and his main character, Paul Bäumer. They clearly reveal Remarque's sense of what "the war experience" ought to contain.

First of all, while Remarque survived the war more or less unscathed, Bäumer's life mostly takes place in the trenches and is generally less pleasant. Bäumer dies, Remarque lived, and even became an impostor after the war by illegally wearing a lieutenant's uniform and decorating himself with the Iron Cross First and Second Class.⁵³ Bäumer is definitely heroic, Remarque largely undistinguished, despite the possibility that he might have dragged a friend to safety. Perhaps even more telling, Bäumer, like Remarque, collects his own juvenile writings in his desk drawer and loves his book collection, a bibliophilic passion the war experience brutally severed.

However, and this is a crucial difference, the war did not sever, stunt, or paralyze much in Remarque's life beyond the loss of some of his youthful friends and the fact of his service. After the war, he continued “business as usual.” He finished his teacher training and graduated in June 1919, “attaining average grades in every subject except art and religious knowledge, in which he fared better, and took up his first appointment in Löhne during August of that year” (Barker and Last 10). During this time, he never managed to get his literary career off the ground, was bored with teaching, until he quit

⁵³ Ibid., 9.

and became a copywriter (*Continental-Werke*, Hannover) and a journalist (*Sport Illustrierte*, Berlin) in the mid-1920s.

In the light of these developments in Remarque's own life, Müller interprets *Im Westen nichts Neues* as the author's therapeutic effort to rationalize his lack of success as a writer. According to Müller, World War I served Remarque as a welcomed projection screen onto which he could conveniently deposit the roots of his failure:

Remarque löst das aktuelle Problem des Scheiterns seiner künstlerische Ambitionen, indem er die Ursache für dieses Scheitern in die Kriegszeit zurückprojiziert. Mit dieser Projektion wird Remarque von seinen aktuellen Depressionen befreit, da deren Ursachen nun nicht mehr von seinem persönlichen Versagen in der Gegenwart oder der jüngeren Vergangenheit zu suchen sind, sondern in einer säkularen Katastrophe, die nicht nur ihn, sondern seine ganze Generation der Möglichkeit der Selbstverwirklichung beraubt hat. (Müller 48)

To think of *Im Westen nichts Neues* as a retroactive and backward-looking projection is a helpful concept. Müller convincingly shows how it helped Remarque -- personally -- to find a likely explanation of his generation's failures, even if this particular explanation does not necessarily apply to him. His generation had lost its chance; his own abilities need not be considered separately from that. By embracing that perspective, his generation could see themselves as hapless victims, and the older generation as perpetrators. Remarque adjusts his self-fictionalization with constructions of masculinity that would appeal to both right and left. This novel embodies most of the political and personal clichés the era's horizon of expectation provides him, even as he avoids the difficulties of partisan politics.

His was not the only novel of his era to take on these stereotypes, but it was the most successful. No wonder, then, that his sales figures far outreached those of his leftist

contemporaries, to which I now turn. They were attempting to solve the problems of national and personal identity to which Remarque also responded, but the comparison suggests details in the set of images that reflect the fraught political context.

Chapter 4

Bourgeois Front Literature: Contextualizing the Narrative of Experience

4.1 OVERVIEW

In order to see how Remarque's novel spoke to its most probable readership, this chapter examines eight battlefield novels that appeared around the same time as Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* and illustrate the wide spectrum of different literary approaches to the heretofore unassimilated block of World War.¹

Familiarly, Remarque was hailed as the pioneer of German battlefield fiction by the *Vossische Zeitung* in November 1928, which is when it began printing the newspaper version of his soon-to-be famous novel. While it is true that Remarque's book crushed everyone else's in terms of volumes sold, it is not true that he was the first to ever fictionalize the war experience, or that it was he who single-handedly put an end to the

¹ Despite the considerable variety of critical "takes" on the war, one should keep in mind that anti-war fiction, with the exception of *Im Westen nichts Neues*, did not sell well between 1928 and 1933. Only Ludwig Renn's *Krieg* (1927/28) reached a volume of 155,000; most of the other novels discussed in this chapter sold much less than 100,000 copies (see Appendix I). Müller claims that Ernst Glaeser's *Jahrgang 1902* (1927/28) also reached a sales volume of 125,000 by 1933, as well as translations into twenty-four languages, but there is no conclusive evidence for or against it (see Müller 97).

previously dominant genre of war memoirs. Four other leftist-bourgeois novelists had actually accomplished that before him, even if they did not hit as big an artery of publicity as he did.

Three of the precursors to Remarque's *Frontroman* had been published by the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and a fourth had been written by one of its own journalists, Ernst Glaeser, which again illustrates how restricted the range of leftist *Publizistik* was at the time.² These novels, discussed below, were Georg von der Vring, *Soldat Suhren* (*Private Suhren*, 1927), Arnold Zweig, *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* (*The Fight About Sergeant Grischa*, 1927), and Ludwig Renn, *Krieg* (*War*, 1927). Glaeser's novel was entitled *Jahrgang 1902* (*Class of 1902*, 1928).³ These novels provide a broader indication of how the Great War was being thought of, how authors of the time were beginning to address the lot of the common soldier in that war and to tell a story of his generation that fit its experience as remembered a decade after its close. Their existence supports my contention that Remarque provided a compelling script for his audiences.

The other four novels treated in this chapter appeared shortly after *Im Westen nichts Neues*, which makes them interesting as parallel works existing in the shadow of the Remarque mania that seized the German nation in 1929. Unlike their right-wing colleagues, the other Remarquians did not write responses to *Im Westen nichts Neues*. Although parallels with regard to setting and perspective exist, it would be misleading to classify the 1929 production of anti-war fiction as reactions to Remarque. In fact, some of

² In terms of war-fiction, only *Vossische Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and *Weltbühne* are the three recurring names of leftist publications that had readers from the bourgeoisie.

³ Compare Müller, *Der Krieg und die Schriftsteller*, 94.

them appear to have been written well before Remarque's novel existed but did not find a publisher until Remarque's success proved that the German public did want to read war fiction. These novels are Ernst Johannsen's *Vier von der Infanterie* (*Four From the Infantry*, 1929), Edlef Köppen's *Heeresbericht* (*Army Report*, 1929), Alexander Moritz Frey's *Die Pflasterkästen* (published under the title *The Cross Bearers*, 1929), and Karl Federn's *Hauptmann Latour* (*Captain Latour*, 1929).

Remember that *Im Westen nichts Neues* claimed to be representative of an entire generation, an assertion that set it apart from the other battlefield novels in the bourgeois anti-war camp. None of the other authors in this group made a similar claim. They were content with fictionalizing the war experience in such a way that two things shine through: (1) the author's own war experience; (2) the author's rejection of the war resulting from that individual experience. That is, they were *adding* their fictionalized experiences to the public archive of memoirs by generals and field marshals. Not surprisingly, in some of these works, the author's anti-war stance is intensely personal and vehement.

Remarque, in contrast, intended Paul Bäumer, the central figure of *Im Westen nichts Neues*, to be both his literary alter ego and a representative of the whole generation of young German men who were "destroyed by the war." That may be why Paul Bäumer is the only hero among these war novels who actually dies: he dies tragically and senselessly, on one of the last days of the war, in the line of duty, as a representative of millions of other German soldiers like him. The other authors in this group let their protagonists survive. Their heroes tend to be individuals that stand apart from the crowd,

have their own opinions, even learn to disobey orders (like Reisiger in Köppen's *Heeresbericht*), while Paul Bäumer is clearly part of his peer-group, a German *everyman*. Yet Bäumer is a *dead* everyman whose experiences never were tested against the homefront, as the other novels' heroes would have to do.

Not surprisingly, then, others around Remarque also did not fictionalize (or edit) the war as completely as Remarque did. He decided to leave out space and time markers (except seasons), even references to military units, so that the disoriented reader is drawn into an episodic impression of the war. In this sense, *Im Westen nichts Neues* operates at a level of universality that conveys the message: "this could happen to any soldier, any time, anywhere." The other authors, in contrast, were careful to maintain an element of authenticity through references to verifiable events, places, or military units. Remarque paints his picture in broad sweeping strokes; the others are more precise in their accusations. Both Remarque and the other authors in his group depict young individuals who were torn from their pre-war social settings and dehumanized by what they saw and endured in the trenches. To most of these protagonists, a return to bourgeois life would seem incredibly difficult, if not impossible -- but only Bäumer is drawn so that this question will never be asked of him.

All these authors loosely follow the literary model of the *Bildungsroman*, only that their heroes do not return home wiser, tested, and good, but broken and cynical. In this other handling, the modern *Frontroman* is thus a negative variant of the classical *Bildungsroman* because it, too, describes a young man's coming-of-age in unfamiliar surroundings and under adverse circumstances. Unlike the *Bildungsroman*, however, the

Frontroman does not lead to a dissolution of the conflict between the individual and the social order from which he has become estranged. In the classical *Bildungsroman*, the process of maturity is arduous and gradual, and becomes manifest in repeated clashes between the protagonist's needs and desires and the views and judgments enforced by an unbending social order. Yet in the end, the spirit and values of the social order become instilled in the protagonist, who is then (re-)accommodated into society. This type of novel typically ends with an assessment by the protagonist of himself and his new place in that society. The *Frontroman* never offers that possibility. Remarque, as well as the other authors, repeatedly emphasizes in *Im Westen nichts Neues* that there will be no possible route of return to the sheltered pre-war world. But Remarque closes off the question where the other novels will necessarily lead their readers to ask what will become of the heroes once they go home.

This is the extent to which Remarque and the other bourgeois anti-war writers share common ground. In all of them, there was a clear historical moral: the safe bourgeois existences of their protagonists were shattered and could never be rebuilt. As was discussed in chapter one, Remarque's personal reaction to this was one of hopelessness and lament, conditioned most likely by his own bourgeois aspirations to upward mobility. According to the characters in his novel, which are more or less his mouthpieces, he was not depressed about his own abilities, but instead felt betrayed and victimized by the society that did not value him, and so he easily found the culprits for

the destruction among the figures of authority in the parent generation, a very common political charge at the time, as well.⁴

The other authors around Remarque -- with the exception of Ernst Glaeser -- were less interested in assigning blame for the war to an older generation, but focused on the terrible thing called war itself. Their *Frontromane* move along much the same milestones as Remarque's, as the plot passes the same stations, yet they manage to take different turns. Their characters are imbued with the same virtues as Remarque's hero, but, in terms of their attitude and mentality, they really seem to harden and grow, so they do not come across as lambs headed for the slaughter. Paul Bäumer often emphasizes how much he and his friends have changed, but he keeps speaking with the same juvenile voice. He is a pretender. In contrast, to today's readers, the soldiers in the other bourgeois war novels seem real, and so their authors require that they take a real stand.

The result of this disparity reveals something about Weimar readers, since none of the alternative *Frontromane* reached the broad readership that Remarque's book would; they were probably seen as politicized rather than personal, and hence partisan in inspiration. I have used the term "literary fast food" to apply to Remarque's book because it is soft, shapeless, innocuous, and designed to appeal to everyone, yet the publishing landscape I am addressing here suggests that other writers knew that. The other novels from the leftist-bourgeois camp have more character; each provides alternates to the set

⁴ Since the generational conflict in *All Quiet on the Western Front* is so salient, it is also a *Jugendroman* (adolescent novel). This certainly added to its mass appeal, not only to war veterans, but also to readers who were teenage boys in 1929.

pieces of war experience and narrative that Remarque would use -- and each came closer to a historical truth about the war rather than simply a human one.

Let me now turn to each in turn, to present this landscape of authors around Remarque in closer to their own voices.

4.2 PRECURSORS, (A): GEORG VON DER VRING, *SOLDAT SUHREN* (1927)

Georg von der Vring (1889-1968) was a teacher, a painter, and a writer. As a writer, he remained obscure, although some of his poems are relatively well-known.⁵ Von der Vring did not volunteer for military service like so many others; he was drafted. *Private Suhren* chronicles the author's war experience, from basic training in Germany and France, in the first half of the book, to months on the eastern front with not much happening, in the second half. An actual firefight does not occur until the very end when Suhren fires his first shot at the Russians and is wounded shortly afterwards. The last section of the book, "Flucht" ("flight"), describes how Suhren marches back behind the front line and catches a transport for the wounded back to Germany.⁶

In terms of its writing, *Private Suhren* is intimate and non-sensational. With regard to genre, it is a hybrid between the first generation of war memoirs and the second generation of more fictionalized war narratives. Its thirty-nine chronological sections are not exactly diary entries, but they are reminiscent of a diary and clearly autobiographical.

⁵ Müller mentions that von der Vring completed the novel *Private Suhren* in 1923 but could not find a publisher for it. Apparently, it was turned down by well-known literary publishers eighteen times until Spaeth-Verlag Berlin finally published it in 1927. Two years later, 20,000 volumes of it had been sold, which makes the book at least moderately successful. For more details, see Müller, 95.

⁶ Compare Müller, 95.

Private Suhren, like the author, is painter and a lyricist who hates the war. He perceives the transformation from sensitive artist to mindless soldier as a loss of identity, a loss of his self (“Entselbstung”):

Suhren ist selber hin – was blieb denn von Suhren? – Er liegt im Stroh in einem Kleide, das er nicht erwählt; trägt ein Gewehr, um Menschen damit totzuschießen, die er nicht kennt; marschieret über Hügel, die nicht seine Heimat sind, und weiß nicht, wozu. (Georg von der Vring, *Private Suhren*, 8)

This statement is clearly anti-war and anti-hagiographic; there is no reason that this soldier is here, that his life of *Bildungsbürgertum* was destroyed.

Throughout the novel, von der Vring juxtaposes Private Suhren’s inner self with the harshness of the environment, providing a continuous commentary that suggests that German *Bildung* and destiny have nothing whatsoever to do with the heart of the German nation as he wants to know it. He is disgusted with the monotony of military drills, the details of strategic developments in the east, the stupidity of soldier-talk, and with the very idea of uniformity. The prevailing mood is one of melancholy. Since the hero’s prevailing experiential reference point is bourgeois, the reader is constantly shown how his aesthetic sensibilities are being offended. As a consequence, Private Suhren tries to remain detached from what constitutes his daily routine -- an indictment of his ability to report faithfully on the war at all. He continuously seeks refuge and comfort in his inner world of poetic thoughts, childhood memories, descriptions of nature, or shreds of highschool knowledge.⁷ Therefore, *Private Suhren* is essentially a *Künstlerroman* about an artist trying to counteract and undo the corrosion wrought upon him by the war; as

⁷ Compare Müller 96.

such, it valorizes his experience without accepting it as able to speak to the war in the future.

Here, the *Bildungsroman* emerges as a comment on the *Bildungsbürger*. *Private Suhren* is told from the unusual perspective of an artist in uniform, but that perspective is nevertheless revealed as firmly planted in the bourgeois camp, not part of a political critique or modern art. Yet the author does not overtly critique that perspective, even as he memorializes it as past. Unlike their colleagues on the far left or on the far right, bourgeois war novelists like von der Vring seemed content with first-person narrators who openly profess their political ignorance and their adherence to higher callings (art). In most cases, their political ignorance is used as a narrative tool to support the impression that these soldiers were essentially good people – obedient, a little naïve, but innocent.

The mechanism behind this, and its politically questionable tactic from today's point of view, is that readers are supposed to sympathize with these beautiful characters who suffered and died and tried so hard to make the best out of a terrible situation they did not cause. Private Suhren may be somewhat of a special case. He is not a particularly good soldier, like Paul Bäumer, Adolf Reisiger, or Renn, but he is portrayed as innocent by virtue of vulnerability and aloofness – he is an artist, after all. To him, confusing political questions are secondary. Like a romantic poet, he moves on moral high ground:

Eine Front aber gibt es, die ist klar, eindeutig und gerade, und ich finde sie an heimlichem Orte – in meinem Gewissen finde ich sie. Und es ist die Front der guten Gedanken und der menschenwürdigen Taten, der Händedrucke und des treuen Glaubens. (*Private Suhren*, 10)

His ideals thus reclaim a humanity from the war experience, something humane and *menschenwürdig* that might be a guide for the new generation.

Not surprisingly, readers and critics in the appropriate demographic groups among the educated responded positively to this blend of artistic self-pity, hurt aestheticism, and romantic otherworldliness. It even earned Private Suhren the title of “the unknown soldier.”⁸ Hans-Harald Müller speculates that the book was generally well-received because it was the first truly subjective account of an individual violated by the war. He believes it was a welcome change for normal people to read such a story after the barrage of dully strategic officers’ accounts that dominated literary production between 1919 and 1923.⁹

This assessment may be so, but it is still beside the point, when seen as an index for its possible reception. Above all, Private Suhren was a literary character with whom readers were invited to sympathize and identify, which 20,000 readers apparently did. That is what prompted Glaeser and others to say, “he’s one of us,” even though he clearly was not. In other words, *only* 20,000 of those who wanted to think about their war experiences (or those of their loved ones) did so in reading this novel, because it was *too* distinct a person type, a member of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, not necessarily an “ordinary German.” The tone was right, but the hero was not -- he had not left his schoolhouse and

⁸ Ernst Glaeser suggested the title of “unknown soldier” in his positive critique of the novel. According to him, von der Vring “presented the destiny of the common soldier, his loves and friendships, his fears and craftiness, his desires and pleasures, and, moreover, the collective of these human beings: their development toward becoming a *suffering community*, in which the individual is nothing – deprivation everything. That is why this novel is not ‘romantic’, that is why it is one of today. [...] Here you have the story of the unknown German soldier” (Ernst Glaeser, “Soldat Suhren: Bemerkungen zu Georg von der Vring’s Roman,” *Blätter für Alle* No. 3, vol. 2, 1928, 23 [my translation, quoted in Müller 97]).

⁹ See also Müller 96.

found his front comrades like Bäumer had. I would further speculate that the book remained well below the radar of public awareness because it is by no means an *Abenteuerroman* and it also does not provide a protagonist with heroic qualities. It therefore has very little therapeutic power for male readers seeking to reinvigorate their violated sense of masculinity, except for those bourgeois males who felt the world was somehow more beautiful before the war -- a platitude, rather than an emotional truth of any novelty.

(B) ARNOLD ZWEIG, DER STREIT UM DEN SERGEANTEN GRISCHA (1927)

Not all war novels sharing features with *Im Westen nichts Neues* represented the classic, covertly Aryan *Bildungsbürgertum*. Nonetheless, Arnold Zweig (1887-1968) is the only Jewish author in this group. This fact is significant in so far as it pre-programmed the reception of his literary work in some parts of society: right-wing critics spewed slurs of racial hatred when *Grischa* appeared in 1927.¹⁰ But apart from that, Zweig's Jewishness is interesting as part of the "German" war experience, because he seems to have rediscovered it around 1916 as a result of the Jewish census the Prussian war ministry conducted in the German armed forces; a measure which he perceived as highly defamatory.¹¹ Moreover, his military service brought him into closer contact with

¹⁰ Jost Hermand notes in one essay that *Grischa* was attacked as one of the "most pitiful efforts of contemporary literature": "Dagegen wurde der *Grischa* in allen völkischen oder präfaschistischen Blättern als eins der übelsten Machwerke der gegenwärtigen Literatur angegriffen und sein Autor als 'Thersites' oder 'asiatischer Schmutzfink' abgekanzelt" [Jost Hermand, "Arnold Zweig: Der Streit um den Sergeanten *Grischa* (1927); Eine 'systemkritische' Analyse" Thomas F. Schneider, Hans Wagener ed. *Von Richthofen bis Remarque: Deutschsprachige Prosa zum I. Weltkrieg, Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik* (New York and Amsterdam: Rodopi: 2003) 195-205.

¹¹ At the time, there were approximately 100,000 Jewish soldiers in the German armed forces.

the socialist and Zionist ideas of eastern European Jews around Willna and Kowna, while his early childhood in Upper Silesia had only seen the edge of the non-urban, more traditional Jewish world.

That recapture of a Jewish cultural perspective may express not only a cultural sentiment, but a political conversion. Toward the middle of the war, Zweig grew increasingly critical of the *völkisch* and nationalist-patriotic pretexts with which the military leadership and national propaganda sought to justify the war effort.¹² This position represents a complete reversal of opinion, because Zweig had belonged to those who welcomed the outbreak of the war and the heroic spirit of “the August Days,” 1914.¹³ In a letter to his friend, Helene Weyl, he had rejoiced about the return of “great Germany,” which he saw as an opportunity to break open the loathed crust of “capitalist greed” and “philistine mentality” of the Wilhelmine empire (compare Hermand 195). If it had been up to him, he would have volunteered right then and there, but because he was already twenty-seven years old and had very weak eyesight, he was put in the reserves until April, 1915, when he was finally drafted.

During the first five months of the war, Zweig wrote seven war stories for *Simplicissimus* and *Die Schaubühne* in which he subscribed to the prevailing propaganda

¹² Compare Hermand, *systemkritische Analyse* 197.

¹³ Literary reflections of this excitement can be found, for instance, in Zweig’s novel *Erziehung vor Verdun* (1935). One of the protagonists, Lieutenant Eberhard Kroysing, is depicted as follows: “Wenn je ein Mensch, so hatte Eberhard Kroysing den Krieg nötig gehabt, um zu Grund zu kommen, Wesen auszudrücken, Reichweite zu erproben, wie er sagte, aus dem Drang nach solcher Erfahrung heraus war wohl eine ganze deutsche Jugend der Vorkriegsenge entlaufen, hinein in den unbändigen Krieg – [...]. Alle hatten 1914 das Gefühl gehabt, jetzt erst beginne des eigentliche Leben, das gefährliche, stählende.” See Arnold Zweig, *Erziehung vor Verdun* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2001) 87. For a detailed analysis of Zweig’s own *Kriegsbegeisterung*, see Müller 125-127.

about Germany's strength and cultural mission.¹⁴ He first participated in the war vicariously, but then he donned the uniform himself. After a comparatively calm period as an armaments soldier in Flanders, southern Hungary, and Serbia, Zweig was transferred to the trenches in front of Verdun in the spring of 1916. In the eponymous title of a later war novel, he referred to the thirteen terrible months he spent there as the *Education at Verdun* (1935). Like many soldiers from the trenches on all sides of the war, Zweig came to realize that the war had nothing to do with cultural values or heroic ideals but was fought over purely materialistic objectives (compare Hermand 196). He also understood that soldiers from the lower classes often had a better understanding of what was going on than the so-called intellectuals: "Schließlich sind die Mannschaften beider Heere einander erbitterte Feinde nur während der Kämpfe."¹⁵ Zweig survived the barrage fire and then managed to get transferred back to the east, where he became a journalist and joined the press department of the military high command.

Jost Hermand explains that three factors contributed to Zweig's reversal of attitude toward the war. First, he reflects general *Kriegsmüdigkeit* (war fatigue) that began to spread in the armed forces in the summer of 1917. Just as importantly, he was converted by his thirteen months in the trenches by Verdun, during which time he began to appreciate the resilience and political common sense of the common soldier. Finally, he was influenced by the revolutionary upheaval that took place in Russia between March and October of 1917 and led to the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk that was signed

¹⁴ These stories include *Die Bestie* (*The Beast*), *Der Feind* (*The Enemy*), *Die Quittung* (*The Receipt*), *Turkos im Park Schwetzingen* (*Turkos in Schwetzingen Park*), and *Die Schießbahn* (*The Shooting Range*). For more details, see Hermand, *systemkritische Analyse*, 196.

¹⁵ Arnold Zweig, *Erziehung vor Verdun* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2001) 12.

between Russia and Austria-Hungary alongside Germany on December 2, 1917 (Hermand 196-197).

Hans-Harald Müller confirms that rampant anti-Semitism as well as Zweig's harrowing personal experiences contributed to his disillusionment with the German bourgeoisie and the war, which he came to interpret as the embodiment of Prussian imperialistic hegemony. In a letter that seems to contradict what Hermand said about Zweig's appreciation of the simple folk in the trenches, Zweig wrote to the writer Willi Handl in February, 1916: "It is distressing for a sensitive human being to be part of a platoon that is treated like a pile of broken glass, like we are. I am the only *Mensch* of my class in this company, I mean, the only academic" (quoted in Müller 128). According to Müller, Zweig's re-discovery of his own Jewishness was indeed the main reason why he quickly abandoned the national-militaristic mindset and joined the Jewish pacifists. Above all, the intense correspondence with Martin Buber, the leading voice of cultural Zionism at the time, convinced Zweig that pacifism was the only conviction appropriate for spiritual Judaism.¹⁶

Arnold Zweig is a particularly interesting case of a writer who switched from enthusiastic support to total condemnation of the war.¹⁷ It seems to be the case that his ideological and political repositioning was set in motion by Zweig's personal integrity. He saw for himself that the official picture painted by warmongers and national

¹⁶ For more details, see Müller, *Krieg und die Schriftsteller*, 119-137.

¹⁷ Two other prominent figures who scaled back and then reversed their enthusiasm once they learned the truth about the war were Thomas Mann, who had written the 1914 pro-war essay "Gedanken im Kriege," and the aristocratic officer Arnold Friedrich Vieth von Golßenau, who became a communist, adopted the name Ludwig Renn, and wrote the popular novel *Krieg* (1927), which is also discussed in this chapter.

propaganda simply did not match reality.¹⁸ Zweig's most important novel, *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* (1927/28), reflects his commitment to honesty, but also his class-bound position. The book is an unflinching exposure of an execution helped along by bureaucrats whose cowardice, obedience, and hypocrisy prevents them from intervening in the unjust death sentence. Originally written as a drama some seven years before, *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* is more properly a *Justizroman* (judicial novel), not a *Frontroman*, since its events take place behind the lines.

The gist of the story is that a Russian Sergeant named Grischa Iljitsch Paprotkin manages to escape from a German POW camp in the German-occupied zone called *Ober-Ost* ("Upper East"). On his way home to Russia, he meets a woman named Babka, who falls in love with him and advises him to assume the identity of a Russian defector named Bjuschetw in the event that he gets caught by the Germans. Grischa follows her advice, not knowing that the German high command issued an order to have all defectors shot. When the Germans apprehend him, he is sentenced to death. Grischa then makes his true identity known, expecting his sentence to get revoked. Some honorable and dutiful Prussian officers do support him, but General Albert Schieffenzahn, a caricature of Erich Ludendorff, has him executed regardless to make a warning example of Sergeant Grischa vis-à-vis the rebellious *bolsheviki* in the east.

While most of the other novels discussed here are restricted to the narrow perspective of the common soldier in the trenches, *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* examines the larger picture of the war and its politics. Zweig's analysis is

¹⁸ A total commitment to personal honesty also drove Edlef Köppen and Ludwig Renn.

especially poignant because he painstakingly investigates the injustice done to one man, yet manages to reveal the entire merciless machinery of national "justice" behind that one act of injustice. The reader watches from a distance as the judicial case unfolds: the bourgeois proponents of moral principles and humanitarian ideas, in this case, Prussian officers, are overwhelmed by the military machinery. In this, Zweig exposes several *Schreibtischtäter*, bureaucrats who would not have executed Grisha on their own, but whose unquestioning obedience contributed to the implementation of his death-sentence.¹⁹ We realize: these people are guilty, too! According to Michael Gollbach, Zweig's objective is to criticize a social system that has militarism, inhumanity, and unfairness woven into it. This broad accusation of German society stirred critics to passionate reactions. Even more so than with Remarque, the "critical" reception of Zweig is frustratingly predictable along political and ideological lines.

The radical left, like Paul Friedländer in the *Rote Fahne*, conceded that *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa*, to be sure, was the work of a bourgeois writer, but that he was "anständig gesinnt" and "geistreich." The Jewish press proudly hailed Zweig as "one of their own." Lion Feuchtwanger lauded the novel as "masterly composed" and as testimony to the author's "profound humanity."²⁰ And the leftist-bourgeois press, in its typical fashion, found many things good and some things wrong. Kurt Tucholsky, for

¹⁹ Zweig's novel is the first major work to emphasize the moral responsibility of the German bureaucracy. The phenomenon of *Schreibtischtäter* (= bureaucrats implicated in an evil machinery) is certainly not only a German problem. But Germany became notorious through the vast bureaucracy erected by the National Socialists. *Schreibtischtäter* do not feel personally responsible: "I only did my job. I did not have the authority to change anything." Even Adolf Eichmann used that as an excuse during his 1961 Jerusalem trial. *The Fight About Sergeant Grischa* is prophetic in that sense; it warns us that people will get killed when good people are not resolute enough to fight for their humanitarian ideals.

²⁰ Compare Hermand 201.

example, chooses such an angle in his *Weltbühne* review of Zweig's novel. He appreciates Zweig's work not so much as a moral revelation, but as an act of honest labor, a solidly crafted piece, and a genuine effort at telling the truth, hence a welcome contrast to the dry and dusty officers' memoirs. But he also regards it as superior to the efforts of other (unnamed) novelists -- disparagingly referred to as *Neumänner* and *Modeschluderer*²¹-- who, Tucholsky suspects, would carelessly render the war-experience in too "novel-esque" a fashion:

Warum wird der Roman von Zweig überall gekauft? Weil er ein anständiges Stück Ware ist. Weil er gut gearbeitet ist. Weil das Publikum einen fast untrüglichen Instinkt für sorgsame Mühe hat (die ein Künstler sich gibt) – weil keine Seite, kein Satz hingeschwindelt ist. [...] Wie groß der Kunstwille bei Autoren dieser Gattung ist, steht dahin – ihre handwerkliche Anständigkeit ist unbestreitbar. Aber lockert die Schleusen nicht! Ströme von Schweiß ergössen sich durch das Land, denn fleißig sind sie bei uns. Beschütze uns, heilige Staatsbibliothek, vor den Neumännern, die die Geschichte romanisieren. Also so geht das nicht. Die Modeschluderer lassen es allerdings doppelt schätzen, wenn einer arbeitet. Der Dichter Zweig hat gearbeitet.²²

In his praise for this author from the *Bildungsbürgertum*, Tucholsky thus borrows a virtue that is not normally associated with the upper bourgeoisie, but with the working class, namely "doing good work." By granting readers the "instinctual" ability to distinguish an honest and diligent effort like Zweig's from either embellished war chronicles or disingenuous novels, and by granting Zweig the status of "honest craftsman," Tucholsky stakes the parameters of what he sees as an opportunity for productive author-reader

²¹ "Neumänner" means "new men," hence authors who are not "old school" but decidedly modernist in their perspective, and "Modeschluderer" refers to authors who produce shoddy work after the current fashion, men who are prone to work disingenuously.

²² Kurt Tucholsky, "Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa," *Die Weltbühne*, 23, vol. 50, 1927 in *Kurt Tucholsky, Gesammelte Werke vol II* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1960) 975.

interaction across social classes. He makes the Jewish bourgeois author a “worker” and elevates his readers, who may really be from the working class, to the status of competent literary critics. This creates the impression that there is considerable common ground between the two, including the working class ability to fathom and comprehend Zweig’s moral charge against the *Schreibtischtäter* who witnessed such injustice but failed to prevent it.

The *völkisch* right wing, of course, detested the *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* novel, so much so that some of the critics did not waste time actually discussing the characteristics of the text but went straight for the author: the aim of their criticism was to destroy his masculinity -- a fairly typical anti-Semitic strategy -- which underscores my argument that these attacks and counter-attacks between left and right were not really about literature, but only catalyzed through it. The central issue in this political rejection of Zweig's work was who would win the privilege to say what a German man was and was not. Joseph Magnus Wehner (1891-1973), himself the author of sixty-four *völkisch*-militaristic novels, including *Sieben vor Verdun* (1930), is a typical representative of the right. He created one of the most hateful comparisons between Zweig and Thersites, a hideous figure from Greek mythology:²³

²³ As Christopher Bungard explains on a website: “Thersites was the son of Agrius. He is the only rank and file soldier that Homer gives a graphic depiction of. Thersites was bow-legged, lame, and his shoulders caved inward. His head was shaped like a sugar loaf, coming to a point. Atop his head tufts of hair sprouted up. Homer mentions that he was a vulgar man whose ‘head was full of obscenities, teeming with rant’. Thersites incurred Odysseus’ wrath when he called Agamemnon greedy and Achilles a coward. Odysseus struck Thersites upside the head with the royal scepter of Agamemnon. Later, Achilles struck Thersites upside the head for mocking his sorrow at the death of Penthesilea. No one grieved for Thersites when he spat out teeth and fell to the earth dead.” Viewed February 23, 2006, at 9:30 pm, <<http://www.pantheon.org/articles/t/thersites.html>>.

An Stelle der Toten aber, die irgendwo in fremder Erde einem neuen deutschen Tage entgegenfruchten, erheben sich jetzt überall die Thersitese des Krieges, die zahllosen Simulanten, die ihr erbärmliches Leben retteten, um den Tod der unverständenen anderen, die auch für sie starben, zu schmähen; kleine Wichtigtuer und Gernegroße, die den Stachel angeborener Feigheit und eine blinde Befangenheit in der eigenen süßen Existenz dadurch rechtfertigen möchten, daß sie wie nur ein internationaler Kriegsgewinnler, die ethischen Werte des kämpfenden deutschen Volkes, Vaterlands- und Freiheitsliebe, auf dem Markte des Pazifismus verschachern.²⁴

Wehner forgets that Zweig was neither a “malingerer” (*Simulant*), nor did he feel the “sting of inborn cowardice” (*den Stachel angeborener Feigheit*); in fact, Zweig fought longer in the Verdun trenches than Wehner did himself. Needless to say, Zweig was also neither a little braggart nor an impostor (*kleine Wichtigtuer und Gernegroße*), but a humanist who personally witnessed gross acts of injustice and decided to follow his conscience by articulating them. The tale of sergeant Grischa is based on an actual event.²⁵ What passed as “literary criticism” in these extreme right-wing circles were mere (anti-Semitic) harangues; it takes an effort to discuss them seriously, but they were well-gauged to keep one segment of the readership away from the novel by invalidating its author.

To be sure, the novel was gauged at a generally liberal bourgeois audience, judging by this humanitarian cast. Arnold Zweig himself was trying to appeal to some kind of German humanity, while criticizing the German war machine, as well as the bureaucracy in its service. His picture of the German army attributes to it opportunism

²⁴ Joseph Magnus Wehner, “Kriegsromane” (excerpt), *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, March 1928, quoted in Annie Voigtländer, ed. *Welt und Wirkung eines Romans. Zu Arnold Zweigs “Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa”* (Berlin und Weimar, Aufbau-Verlag, 1967), 87.

²⁵ Compare Müller 162.

and ethnic discrimination; it is a dehumanizing rather than a liberating force. He explained: “Aber eine von früher Jugend genährte Überzeugung hatte bisher [bis Herbst 1917] standgehalten, daß für die Rechtspflege im deutschen Heer die Begriffe Gerechtigkeit und Humanität maßgebend zu sein hatten” (quoted in Müller 162). His erroneous conviction that strict adherence to justice was a military virtue was finally shattered when he heard of the illegal execution of a Russian prisoner of war, who was made an example to scare off the advancing *bolsheviki*. Zweig concludes: “Dieser Bericht öffnete mir die Augen, wie man zu sagen pflegt. Ich erkannte zunächst, daß der Mißbrauch des Menschen durch den Menschen im Kriege unbedingt bekämpft und beendet werden müsse, wenn wir unsere Epoche vom Mittelalter abgrenzen und als Neuzeit loben” (ibid.).

Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa is thus unique in its subtlety and unsettling in its ethical implications. As in *Soldat Suhren*, an uneventful section of the eastern front serves as the setting. Zweig did not want to show exploding shrapnel and scenes of carnage, but the murderousness of the war through the senseless death of one individual. He was interested in painting a nuanced picture of different players weighed down by gradations of responsibility according to their role in wartime, as well as their individual reactions to that responsibility. In fact, he strained to complete his work on another important novel, entitled *Erziehung vor Verdun* (1935), precisely because he fundamentally resented certain elements of Remarque’s *Im Westen nichts Neues* and Renn’s *Krieg* as too adventure-like: “Er meinte darin, nur wenig abgewandelt, ‘die alte Freude am Krieg als unbürgerlicher Lebensform, als Gelegenheit zum großen Abenteuer

zu erkennen’.”²⁶ Ullstein Verlag, Remarque’s publisher, realized that this would not satisfy popular taste and withdrew from the contract on *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* when Zweig had completed work on it in 1927.²⁷

(C) LUDWIG RENN, *KRIEG* (1927)

Of the four better-known novels that appeared before Remarque’s best-seller, Renn’s *Krieg* is the one that bears some similarity to it on the surface, but which could not have come from a more distant place. On the literal level, *Krieg* encompasses World War I from August, 1914, when mobilized German troops cheered with excitement and hopped on the train cars, to the final days of the war, when the surviving troops ached to reach German soil before the pursuing soldiers of the *Entente* could capture them. Like Remarque’s and Köppen’s narratives, *Krieg* is set on the Western front. The story is told from the point of view of a first-person narrator. In fact, the experiences of the main figure, the private Ludwig Renn (later promoted to Sergeant and Master Sergeant), amount to literary modifications of the author’s personal wartime memories. Due to its resemblance to previously-known wartime diaries, readers debated if *Krieg* should even be considered a novel.²⁸ Yet there is no doubt that fiction is in play -- not in the diaries or the military action depicted, but in the person of the author himself.

What is extraordinary about this book is that its author abandoned his real identity to become the communist Ludwig Renn. Arnold Friedrich Vieth von Golßenau was born

²⁶ See Arnold Zweig, “Kriegsromane,” *Die Weltbühne* 25 (April 16, 1929) 16, 598, quoted in Arnold Zweig, *Erziehung vor Verdun* (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 2001) 555.

²⁷ Compare Müller 163.

²⁸ Compare Müller 198-99.

into the Saxon aristocracy in 1889 and joined the military in 1910. He quickly climbed the military career ladder and participated in all the major battles of the Western front. After the war, he was not accepted into the greatly reduced army but became a police officer. He then quit the police force to study law and economics. He finally decided that bourgeois society was no longer a place for him after he witnessed a brutal massacre in 1927, when the Viennese police opened fire on protesting workers. Around the same time, he also read John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World* (1922), which describes the Russian revolution.²⁹ Renn later professed that the Vienna experience and the reading of Marxist literature converted him into a devout communist within a few days.³⁰

Originally, the novel had been a diary, which Golßenau/Renn had completed by 1924. No publisher was interested in yet another officer's memoir, so he was unable to publish it even after he had fictionalized the diary to render it into a novel. When he had given up hope, one of his friends submitted the manuscript to the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, whose editors responded with enthusiasm. When they learned that the author really was an aristocrat and former Captain in the army, they urged him to choose a pen-name and withdraw from public scrutiny for six months, so that their promotional strategy of advertising *Tage und Jahre im Krieg* as "a true story by a complete stranger" would have time to pay off. The editors were worried that the public would otherwise mistake the book for another officer's memoirs and the author for a "Nazi und Antisemit" (Müller

²⁹ Compare Ulrich Broich: "Hier spricht zum ersten Male der einfache Mann," Die Fiktion vom Kriegerlebnis des einfachen Soldaten in Ludwig Renn: *Krieg* (1928)," Thomas F. Schneider and Hans Wagener, eds., *Von Richthofen bis Remarque: Deutschsprachige Prosa zum I. Weltkrieg* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2003) 207-209.

³⁰ Compare Müller 196-197.

186). Renn obliged, and both the newspaper version and the book sold well. The *Frankfurter Zeitung* thus employed the same strategy that the *Vossische Zeitung* would use to promote Remarque: both he and Renn were presented as common men speaking the plain truth. The *Frankfurter* editors originally phrased it as follows:

Wir beginnen in diesen Tagen mit den Aufzeichnungen eines völlig unbekanntes Mannes, des Ludwig Renn, die den Titel tragen 'Tage und Jahre im Krieg'. Es ist uns selbst unbegreiflich, wie diese Aufzeichnungen haben nach so langen Jahren niedergeschrieben werden können. Es ist der Krieg eines einfachen, beschränkten Mannes, eines mutigen Mannes, dem deshalb die Feigheit nicht unbekannt blieb. Es ist der Krieg aus der engen horizontlosen Perspektive des Infanteristen, der Krieg aus Grabenhöhe. [...] Hier ist aber vor jeder Tendenz geschrieben worden, und hier spricht zum ersten Mal [...] *der gemeine Mann*. [...] Wir bringen diesen Bericht der Jahre 1914 bis 1918, weil wir das Gefühl haben, ihn nicht verschweigen zu dürfen, weil wir glauben, es sei hier die *biblia pauperum* unserer Zeit uns übergeben worden. (quoted in Müller 187)

Both the *Frankfurter* and the *Vossische* editors figured that only a petit bourgeois perspective on the war would interest the readers and entice them to overcome their reluctance to pick up the war issue again. This assessment was exactly right. The German bourgeoisie demanded that if the war was to be made into literature, this should be done by one of their own. What remains to be seen is why Renn's *Krieg* sold 100,000 copies and Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues*, 1,000,000.

In the beginning, the hero of the story is in favor of the war: "Bin ich nicht glücklich daran, einen Krieg zu erleben! Es ist doch irgendeine Loslösung. Wie schlimm für die, deren Jugend ohne das vergeht!"³¹ He regards his soldiering as a profession, a trade, and he strives to fulfill this trade to the best of his abilities. Not until later, after he

³¹ Ludwig Renn, *Krieg*, (Frankfurt a. M.: Societäts Druckerei, 1929), 14.

has been promoted for his outstanding performance, does he begin to feel doubt: “Ich war nicht mehr wütend auf die Belgier, wenigstens meistens nicht, sondern mich grauste vor ihnen und vorm Kriege, diesem gräßlichen Kriege mit seinem Völkerhaß.”³² However, there is no evidence that this Ludwig Renn, the main figure, has much of a political consciousness. Like most human beings would, he hates the atrocities of war, but he does not begin to question warfare as a means to achieve political objectives. On the contrary, like Remarque, he professes to be entirely unpolitical: “Ich hatte auch noch nie über Politik nachgedacht. Ich hatte einen Ekel davor, wie vor etwas Schmutzigem.”³³ Like Paul Bäumer in *Im Westen nichts Neues* and Adolf Reisiger in *Heeresbericht*, Ludwig Renn can sense the injustice of the war, but he cannot put his finger on the source of this injustice. He does not begin to question the politics of the Wilhelmine Empire; it does not occur to him that these politics may benefit the few while harming the many.

What, then, is the intention Renn had in mind when he wrote the book? In an article discussing the preconditions for writing the book, the author describes an incident where the official log book of his regiment fell into his hands during the war: “Was da stand, war ganz richtig, aber alles Wichtige war ausgelassen [...] Damals setzte ich mir vor, einmal die Wahrheit über den Krieg zu schreiben.”³⁴ His intention was to write the full truth, depict everything the way “it really was,” as it would be recognizable to the ordinary soldier. Renn was, however, not able to make his realism psychologically compelling to the readers. Occasionally, his literary realism degenerates into

³² Renn 53.

³³ *Ibid.*, 189.

³⁴ Ludwig Renn, “Über die Voraussetzungen zu meinem Buch ‘Krieg’” (1929), *Ludwig Renn zum 70. Geburtstag* (Berlin: Malik, 1959), 112.

onomatopoeic verbalizations of shrapnel explosions, like “S! S! Sch! – Preng, pamm! Rammsss! krachte, zischte, zirpte es.”³⁵

Nevertheless, that Renn used his diary materials and set out to paint a truthful picture of the war for precisely the audience who had experienced it first-hand. To illustrate: he describes, in the first section of the book, an attack that was successfully executed by his platoon. His depiction of this attack, however, conveys the impression that the soldiers do not even know where to direct their rifles. They take cover on the ground in some shell hole somewhere, without knowing where they are. They suffer losses from the invisible enemy. Then they jump up and advance because they see the others advance. Then, suddenly, they are called back and told that they won the battle that was just finished. This rather standard picture of the chaos of war actually comes close to disenfranchising the soldiers he hoped to valorize.

Or perhaps he is drawing analogies about the senselessness of war by showing the warriors as insensate. In the next scene, for example, one of the officers keeps staring at a house burning down. Others make conversation about everyday things, without the slightest interest in details of the attack that just happened. Eventually, the soldiers crawl into their dugouts to sleep. Renn concludes laconically: “[...] und ich schlief ziemlich feucht und kühl” (37). Disorientation, ill-directedness, and confusion in combat; apathy, indifference, and mindless routine after combat, that is the daily bread of the front line infantry soldier. Renn is disgusted with particulate aspects of the soldierly life, especially

³⁵ Renn, *Krieg*, 72.

with sloppiness and cowardice among his comrades, but his rejection stays at that level. He also never supports the war, or takes pride in successful attacks. He just does what he is supposed to; in fact, that makes him an excellent soldier.³⁶ His descriptions are in one sense an accurate, factual, camera-eye view of events. But Renn, the author, came to realize that this style did still not yield a more “truthful” or “accurate” picture of the war, which is what he had attempted so painstakingly.³⁷

Renn, the soldier, grapples with the same inability to construct meaning when realizes: “[...] dieses Schema nützte für die Darstellung der wichtigsten Dinge gar nichts. Dafür fehlten mir stets die Worte. [...] Was fehlte, war immer im Grunde dasselbe, und doch wußte ich nicht, was es war. Gewiß, dachte ich, fehlt es mir nur an irgendeiner Erkenntnis” (119). Renn, the soldier, is by no means ignorant. He may not be educated, but he has a keen sense of right and wrong. When he arrives at the insight that his positivistic approach to reality is “not the whole truth,” he seeks additional corroboration in philosophy. He senses that his lower-middle class outlook on life cannot support him any more. However, the philosophy book does not provide for meaning and leaves him disappointed -- this soldier would not find comfort among the humanism claimed by the bourgeois. Communist ideology would later fill that gap in reality.

Renn’s book has a number of features in common with Remarque’s, including the setting of the Western front, the first-person point of view of an apolitical but courageous

³⁶ At one point, someone hands him a copy of *Simplicissimus* and tells him: “You are just like that guy.”

³⁷ Müller quotes Renn’s explanations to the communist periodical *Rote Fahne*: “Mein Krieg ist nicht der Krieg, wie er war”, as well as to *Die Linkskurve*: “eine Dichtung, die ihre richtigen und ihre falschen Seiten hat” (Müller 198). Renn, the author, also did not claim to be identical to Renn, the soldier in the book. The soldier in the book is not from the aristocracy but a common cabinet maker from a village.

infantry soldier whose attitude toward the war disintegrates into despair and disgust, extremely positive descriptions of male-male bonding and experiences of camaraderie, as well as the glorification of one particular individual. Remarque's real hero was also not the main protagonist himself (Paul Bäumer), but the father-figure he adores (Katzinsky). The parallel in Renn's book is between Sergeant Ludwig Renn and Lieutenant Fabian, who is the likely alter ego of the author.³⁸ While most of the other men die, Fabian remains the leader of Renn's unit for a longer period of time. Fabian, like Katzinsky, embodies leadership qualities, strategic wisdom, and paternal love for his comrades. He is the only one who elicits warm feelings in Renn. Throughout the novel, Renn understates his emotional responses to painful experiences, for instance when his friend "Perle" dies:

"Wir haben heute im Regiment über zwanzig Offiziere verloren," sagte Fabian wie von ferne. Ich nippte am Becher. Der Rotwein war herb und kalt. "Die Perle ist auch gefallen," sagte der Feldwebel. "Das war doch Ihr Freund, Renn," sagte Fabian. Die Flasche war ausgetrunken. "Gute Nacht!" sagte der Leutnant und stand auf. Wir legten uns auch schlafen. (Renn, Krieg, 77-78)

In this scene, Renn's emotional response is strikingly absent. In a different, mildly homoerotic scene, when he and some others join Fabian on a patrol and Fabian gives him a piece of boiled meat, he reacts with noticeable affection:

"Da hast du ein Stück Wellfleisch!" flüsterte er. "Aber's tropft!" Er gab mir das warme, wabblige Stück in die Hand. "Ich danke dir," sagte ich. "Aber was soll ich jetzt damit tun?" "Steck's doch in den Feldbecher!" sagte er und blieb zurück. Ich hakte den Feldbecher vom Brotbeutel ab, drückte es hinein und steckte den Becher aufrecht in die rechte Rocktasche. Es wärmte mein rechtes Bein. Ich lächelte in mir, wegen des warmen Gefühls, und auch weil er mir das nachgebracht hatte. (Renn 21-22)

³⁸ Compare Müller 205-206.

Fabian's power to soften Renn's stoic resolve is one of the more subtle motifs of the novel.

Otherwise, however, Renn does not feel close to his comrades and also distances himself from officers he regards as lazy or incompetent. Therefore, the most significant differences between Remarque and Renn are that Renn's book is minimalistic, understated, and strictly subjective. Renn, the soldier, invites identification to an extent because he is a common foot soldier from a low social class, but he is not particularly likeable and does not evoke sympathy. He is by no means an *everyman*, and there are clear references to actual places, dates, battles, and military units. Moreover, Renn's *Krieg* does not scapegoat anyone for the war going catastrophically wrong, but only criticizes certain individuals, including other soldiers, while Remarque blamed authorities from the parent generation. And finally, Renn does not die but comes home in 1918, so he does not bear the hallmarks of a tragic hero. In terms of masculine appeal, he is less boyish than Bäumer, but also less approachable, even cold, so male readers would relate to him more reluctantly.

In his book review of *Krieg*, Arnold Zweig typified Renn as the archetypal soldier, "als Urbild eines deutschen Soldaten."³⁹ The 100,000 copies sold argue to a degree for that truth. But Renn's soldiers were perhaps not exemplary enough, because they were withdrawn victims, but not warm-hearted and "human" enough to lead identify

³⁹ Compare Müller 199.

with and to a broad readership into a new vision of the camaraderie and male-bonding resulting from war.

(D) ERNST GLAESER, *JAHRGANG 1902* (1928)

The other most popular of this group of novels takes a clearer perspective on just these issues than does Renn, offering the picture of a soldier who is more clearly placed as part of Germany: *Jahrgang 1902*. Its author, Ernst Glaeser, was himself born in 1902. He studied German and Theater, wrote theater pieces of his own and eventually became a journalist for the leftist-liberal *Frankfurter Zeitung*. His novel, *Jahrgang 1902* (*Class of 1902* [1929]), was pre-published in two short segments by the *Weltbühne* and appeared in book-form in autumn, 1928. According to Sigrid Schneider and Hans-Harald Müller, this book reached a sales volume of 125,000 and had been translated into twenty-four languages by 1933, although the statistics compiled by the literary historian Helmut Müssener's do not support this.⁴⁰

Class of 1902 is a classic coming-of-age story told from the point of view of a first-person narrator who is twelve years old at the beginning of the book. Two-thirds of the story take place before the outbreak of the war, and even the remaining section only describes a vicarious experience of the war through its impact on the *Heimatfront*, a small town in Hessa. While some of the more adult novels feature the occasional sexual situation or oblique references to homoerotic feelings among the soldiers (e.g. in Remarque and Renn), Glaeser's novel is a genuine *Jugendroman* in which the

⁴⁰ Compare Müller 97 and Appendix.

problematic development of sexual identity emerges as a central theme.⁴¹ Yet this is not a novel that will uncritically support the coming of age of the bourgeois or mourn its passing.

The main protagonist's best friend is a boy named Ferd. He is the "Red Major's" son, hence a young aristocrat, who becomes ostracized by the stuck-up petty-bourgeois society in the village who flock around the anti-Semitic schoolteacher Heini Brosius. The reason why the villagers reject the Major and his son is that he hates Kaiser Wilhelm and what he regards as the Emperor's idiotic political ideas, as well as the pomp and vanity with which he builds up the fleet or talks about Germany's colonial aspirations. Ferd's father is from another part of history, an old-school Prussian officer who has traveled the world, believes in fairness even toward the enemy, and is fond of the British. The Major becomes notorious because he publishes essays in radical papers that expose Wilhelm's folly. Ferd, who was brought up in his father's image, is treated as an outcast on the surface, yet feared for his bravery and secretly admired by most of the schoolboys.

The narrator is caught in the middle but takes sides with Ferd early on. He is clearly attracted to Ferd, both spiritually and physically:

His hand was lying on my shoulder. I felt helpless and dejected; my head yielded to that winning pressure. His lips were before me; I could see nothing but those red lips, which had a duskier gleam where they joined the white of his skin. [...] And suddenly I felt a stab of curiosity amid my bewilderment; what would happen if I were to touch those lips? Must lips be touched in order to learn the mystery?⁴²

⁴¹ Compare Müller 97.

⁴² Ernst Glaeser, *Class of 1902* (New York: The Viking Press, 1929) 40-41.

This passionate attraction to Ferd is soon replaced by lust after village girls -- this is not an aristocrat who can "seduce and betray" the bourgeoisie, as so many fictional ones do. Yet throughout the novel, the *leitmotifs* of (sexual) disorientation and identity-confusion continue to surface as a kind of dual coding, balancing off identity and morality in a class-bound world. The narrator is often torn between different choices regarding his rejection of the adult world, his feelings of friendship toward Ferd or Leo, the weak Jewish boy, and ultimately in his worldview regarding Germany and the war during the "August Days" of 1914. This novel, therefore, situates the dilemma of the soldier solidly as part of a more diverse German population, not only within one class.

Yet Glaeser is not simply anti-war. Like Remarque, with whom the term "lost generation" is associated, Glaeser chalks up the identity-loss of the *Class of 1902* to the parent generation, specifically to the fathers. The first-page motto of the book says: "La guerre – ce sont nos parents." No wonder, then, that Glaeser chooses as his mouthpiece a narrator who rebels against the adult world and their mysterious affairs: "What did I care about war? What did I care about the affairs of the grown-ups? It was *their* war, and I had had enough of it. It is true, I thought for a moment of the Red Major, [...] of Ferd too, who believed what his father said."⁴³ The narrator is trying to come to terms with his own confusing and contradictory loyalties.⁴⁴

⁴³ Ibid. 196.

⁴⁴ In a later confessional scene with his friend Gaston, the narrator feels the pressure of all the unresolved conflicts he struggles to keep inside. By the end of the outburst, he seems to succeed in finding the answer to these questions. What prompted him to open up was Gaston's using the cathartic formula "*La guerre, ce sont nos parents – mon ami...*": Then something broke inside me, for I knew that in a few minutes I should lose him. Everything that I knew about the grown-ups I told him, all of it; their fighting with each other, the mystery – things which I had long forgotten, I told them: the life on the farm, Ferd's great friendship, Leo's

Glaeser's message is, however, more complex than Remarque's. Ferd's father, the aristocratic Herr von K., whom the villagers stupidly call the "Red Major," emerges as the only positive (father) figure of the parent generation. This identity is central to the understanding of the book because he is the one who openly attacks Wilhelm's and the villagers' misguided *Hurrapatriotismus*, an attitude for which he is banished from the community as a radical. Again the tug-of-war about this controversial figure unfolds on the level of masculinity. The village women contest it by making fun of his Indian shirts and his clean-shaven face: "He looks like a play-actor'. [...] "Calls himself a man, does he?" said the women, mincing proudly in the tight bodices. 'He's un-German', answered the men, twirling their moustaches fiercely. This was another habit they had caught from the Kaiser."⁴⁵ The narrator, on the other hand, perceives Herr von K. as the epitome of elegant and worldly masculinity: "He was wearing a tussore silk shirt under a coffee-coloured jacket, and no waistcoat. That shirt of his was my delight. [...] An adventurous shirt!" (Glaeser 43). Later on, he also comments on the way he speaks: "I admired his clear and manly language, which was not smothered under a rank growth of ideology" (114-15). This "manly" hero can be an aristocrat and a bit of a dandy, yet a voice of clear reason (a type that will recur as late as *Das Boot*, in the elder generation of submarine commanders who remember the good old days).

sufferings, August's bravery, the Red Major's isolation, my breaking my promise and why it had happened [...]. I concealed nothing, I admitted all my meannesses, but the undertone which ran through this outpouring of myself, which came over me like a hysterical fit, was: '*La guerre, ce sont nos parents!*'" (201).

⁴⁵ Ibid. 44.

As these examples illustrate, Glaeser sets up a simple dichotomy between the chauvinistic and anti-Semitic petty bourgeoisie, who appear as a tight-knit group, and the free-thinking ostracized individual, represented by Herr von K. and the younger generation correlative, his son Ferd. From the perspective of the narrator, Herr von K. is the “real man,” cosmopolitan, elegant, well-spoken, courageous, and strong, while all the other male figures tend to be provincial, fat, sweaty, weak, or bow-legged.⁴⁶ The narrator’s admiration of Herr von K. as a man evokes nineteenth-century ideals of masculinity rather than bourgeois *Bildung*: the old-school Prussian officer who is capable of independent thinking, withstanding social pressure, and respecting the British. Since Herr von K. dies in combat⁴⁷, the ideals he stood for, including his disdain for Wilhelminian chauvinism, die symbolically with him. It is the other type of man that prevails in this conflict, the petty, the weak-willed, the anti-Semites, the *Gebildete*, and the vain.

Glaeser thus constructed a profound amalgam of war-politics and masculinity-politics. The masculinity debate is cleverly hidden behind the perfectly normal confusion that accompanies the narrator’s puberty and search for a sexual identity. Throughout two-thirds of the book, the young protagonist feels strongly drawn toward the free and

⁴⁶ One example is Dr. Hoffmann, the Social Democrat from the *Landtag*, who is friends with Herr von K.: “His hat was pushed back off his forehead, for he sweated easily. He weighed almost two hundred pounds. His fleshy hands were pink and soft. He was always smiling” (44). The narrator’s description of the Jewish family Silberstein is a chilling mimicry of the prevailing anti-Semitic tone in the small town: “All that was ridiculous in Herr Silberstein’s appearance had vanished; I saw no longer his funny little legs, and I forgot the unmanly crook of his shoulders; even the mother, whose blurred face always offended me, had a fine air, and Leo, standing pale, thin and weary between his anxious parents, looked as if he were gazing into a tomb” (70).

⁴⁷ Compare Glaeser, *Class of 1902*, 262-263.

powerful masculinity that Glaeser suggests defined pre-Wilhelminian Prussian officers, but because identification with that type would entail enormous social pressure and isolation, he ultimately fails to live up to it. Swept away by the general enthusiasm of the “August Days,” he abandons his ideals, ultimately betraying Ferd, his best friend. Glaeser’s characters are overdrawn so much they resemble caricatures, hence the novel lends itself to allegorical interpretation. His message, then, is that there once was a species of German men like Herr von K. with sons like Ferd, but that this type became extinct during the reign of Wilhelm II.

4.3 PARALLELS: (A) ERNST JOHANNSEN, *VIER VON DER INFANTERIE* (1929)

Another very visible war novel of the era takes on Germany from a perspective other than the bourgeois, as well. Its author, Ernst Johannsen (1898-1977), was an electrician’s apprentice when the Great War began and is nearly forgotten today. Writing from the bottom end of the middle class, he published two anti-war novels in 1929, one entitled *Vier von der Infanterie: Ihre letzten Tage an der Westfront 1918* (*Four Infantrymen on the Western Front*), which sold 20,000 copies the first year and served as the model for Georg Pabst’s film adaptation (1930), as well as the curious *Fronterinnerungen eines Pferdes*, which actually does “describe the war from the perspective of a female horse on the Western Front.”⁴⁸ According to Johannsen himself, he wrote *Vier von der Infanterie* in the summer of 1928, so there cannot be any direct

⁴⁸ Compare Brian Murdoch, “Tierische Menschen und menschliche Tiere. Ernst Johannsen: *Vier von der Infanterie* und *Fronterinnerungen eines Pferdes* (1929)” Thomas F. Schneider and Hans Wagener, eds. *Von Richthofen bis Remarque: Deutschsprachige Prosa zum I. Weltkrieg* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2003) 249-260.

influence from Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues*.⁴⁹ The Hamburg *Fackelreiter-Verlag* chose to advertise it as an explicitly pacifist work "to keep the picture of war reality alive and combat the evil of war at its root."⁵⁰ Although it remained rather insignificant in terms of its sales volume, the novel is included in this discussion because it makes heroes of the protagonists in a similar fashion as *Im Westen nichts Neues*: these four men form friendships across social class boundaries⁵¹ and endure the terrors of the war even though they know, intuitively, that they are lambs being led to a senseless slaughter.

According to Brian Murdoch, Johannsen's novel differs from Remarque's and others' because it does not feature a first-person narrator but relies heavily on dialogues. As the title suggests, there are four main protagonists: Lorsen (an engineer), Job (a worker), *der Student* (called *Philosoph*), and Müller (a farmer), whose conversations are intended to compel the reader to empathize with their hopeless outlook on the war surrounding them. Remarque's narrative strategy involved a loose first-person narration that cut back and forth between *Ich* (= Paul Bäumer/ Remarque) and *Wir* (= Bäumer's peers/ the Lost Generation in general).⁵² Reading Johannsen's work, readers have a more immediate version of this tactic, as they overhear what these soldiers say to one another, as if it were a film, with the author's comments functioning like sub-titles:

⁴⁹ Ibid. 251.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 250.

⁵¹ I believe that Johannsen was aware that class differences did not just disappear even in wartime. The integration of the student (*Philosoph*) into the group thus needed to be accounted for: "This sergeant-major, nicknamed the 'Trench-Hound', threatened to shoot a man about a year ago. The chap would not go over the top in an attack, and Trench-Hound held the revolver to his head. Not long after somebody shot him from one of our own support trenches. He got a slight wound. They were never able to prove who did it, but it was shrewdly suspected to have been the student. The student was thereupon voted one of the fraternity and so came to be the fourth in the group" (Ernst Johannsen, *Four Infantrymen* [New York, Alfred H. King, 1930] 93-94).

⁵² See also 252.

The men are weary almost to death; they would like to drop the things where they are and quit. But the enemy can afford to run day and night shifts. Five German divisions will oppose the attack; five German divisions no longer exist. Even now the last remnants might hold were the opposing numbers not so great. The life is not yet all extinguished in the German trenches. Man is tougher than steel, harder to master even than gas.⁵³

As can be seen from this quote, Johannsen's soldiers too have heroic qualities ("tougher than steel, harder to master than gas") yet, at the same time, the author acknowledges that these men did not stand a chance against the overwhelming numbers of the enemy.

Both novels run roughly parallel, but with very strategic divergences. Johannsen, like Remarque, juxtaposes fine, upstanding soldiers with the brutality and senselessness of the war as such. His soldiers are older, however, so they are not as naïve as Bäumer and his friends. Their discussions of the war are thus less puerile, even profound. Job, father of three and foreman in a factory, for example, explains that he did not shout "Hurra!" in 1914. He is quite aware that it is mostly workers and other *Muschkoten* ("grunts") who do the dirty work in this war. He also says that ideas like *Vaterland* and *Heimat* do not exist for workers, "industrial guys" (*Industriekerls*).⁵⁴ In one longer monologue, the student expounds his viewpoint on the riddle about how European men, who supposedly stood so high, could have fallen so low within two years of war:

In 1914, people thought they had the measure of this delicate, tame, Christian European. Then lo! suddenly, overnight, he became an unexplored mystery. And what became of that pre-August man? The tame man, the man from whom the last feeble rudiments of savagery had been removed by schooling, education, profession, law, public opinion and the fear of ghosts. The man, so well broken in, who wore his harness unprotestingly, only thankful to be allowed to live at all. Workmen, mildly agitating for a fair wage, and scattering in haste at the mere

⁵³ Ernst Johannsen, *Four Infantrymen* (New York: Alfred H. King, 1930), 214.

⁵⁴ Murdoch, "Tierische Menschen" 253.

approach of the gendarme [...]. And that other man, the fellow in the forefront of progress, trumpeting against corporal punishment, basement-tenements, child labor [...]. The man who founded societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, blubbing over the death-penalty; and then, good citizen, submitting to two or three years' military service for Fatherland, God, and King, with as mild a grace as to the rain and the sunshine. Little ... in a word. Little, unassuming, tame, scared of the rod. (Johannsen 67-68)

The student goes on to explain that the *Hurrapatriotismus* and the *Kriegsbegeisterung* of 1914 made heroes out of everyone, or so they thought: "And then suddenly in the twinkling of an eye, these tame, domestic fowls, these men turned to veritable heroes, roaring 'Hurrah!'" (Johannsen 68).

He compares the illusion of heroism to wearing masks: "Jeering they went, sneering at the enemy; transfigured overnight, unrecognizable, masked. Yes, masked is the word" (68). The student brilliantly exposes the mechanism with which the German male bourgeoisie could be so easily manipulated by Prussian militarism.⁵⁵ Along with the over-use of the word "Held" (hero) came the over-use of the word "Feigling" (coward). Military service became the one and only criterion of male valor, a black-and-white scheme: whoever did not or could not enlist was simply not a real man, not a hero, but a coward, a weakling, or a traitor. *Kriegsbegeisterung* was a gigantic mechanism of peer-pressure from which no man could escape, not even the "tame fowl": "These poor tame creatures put on the mask of heroes born, and bravely would they play the part that was given them. War! Here was a real sensation at last, and the Fatherland blameless as usual" (68).

⁵⁵ The promise of heroism represents an irresistible temptation to early twentieth-century man: "The Hero's mask is a congenial one, and well-drilled domestic fowls are hardly to be distinguished from true heroes. Words can do most things; with a mob words can do anything, small wonder then if for the first year none doubted but that he was a hero" (Johannsen, *Four Infantrymen*, 68-69).

Two years into the war, as the novel portrays it, the mask came off and soldiers grew tired of the war, the dirt, the deprivations, the permanent terror. Yet the hero-trap continued to work because, at this point, men had already endured too much not to be considered heroes, even if the concept had become hollow on the inside: “What! You dare tell me that men who went out to face such things as this, with scarce a penny a day to put in their purses, are not heroes? Well, let me tell you, though they may not have been heroes before, now they have become them” (69).

The importance of this insight cannot be underestimated as a central component to how the memories of World War I were reworked in Weimar. What Johannsen draws attention to is precisely the issue that fueled the masculinity culture war of the 1920s: what is a hero? The right wing, as already argued in Chapter two, would argue that the German soldier hero mustered the strength, courage, and endurance to hold out under the most gruesome circumstances. The fact that men did continue to fight proves that they were heroes willing to die for the fatherland. The left wing/pacifist position, as we will see in the following excerpt from the student’s monologue, argues that such a definition of heroism is, in fact, a misconception that was encouraged by the military elite and its war propaganda:

What actually happened was this: All the glamour, the glory, the ardor – everything of 1914 slowly perished. The hero’s death has become a byword; slight wounds are welcomed as ‘home-shots’ a chance of escape; men whose jobs kept them away from the front were pitied then as being shut off from glory, but now they are the ‘lucky bastards’; the hated enemy has become the ‘Comrade’ lying in the same mire; the ‘calling-up paper’ is now used as a threat, a thing of terror, menacing; decorations are called ‘tin-ware’ to be issued along with the new mess-tins; and the ‘holy war’ has turned into this ‘God-damned mess.’ (69)

The student argues that “real heroes” would understand the mechanism, realize that they were deceived, and consequently refuse to carry on: “They would knock off, go home. And though they might get shot, what is mere death to heroes who have endured so much?” (70).

This explanation completely reverses the masculinity ideal that was used during World War I to keep men in line, and that men desperately clung to to keep themselves in line. In fact, Johannsen argues that a hero is actually the *opposite* of what the military, or the right-wing nationalists, claimed.⁵⁶ According to Johannsen, these men were not heroes but slaves, too afraid to rebel against military authority and too afraid to abandon the false concept of manhood they had believed in:

Now too cowardly, too slavish to turn homeward, we go forward once again. What else can such sorry cattle do? But in the meantime we have found out that we are no heroes. And if some naïve soul should say to one of us ‘you hero’ we would merely grin. We know better. More than that – we sneer at ‘heroes’, at the ‘hero’s death’, at what they call ‘love of the country’, at the whole rigmarole. We have penetrated behind the war, behind patriotism, behind the heroes. The shells have taught us day by day. (70)

This begs the question, of course, why there were not more deserters.

For soldiers who shared Johannsen’s point of view, desertion would have been an honorable thing to do. He suggests that there were no true heroes to lead the many, “born heroes, such as cannot be otherwise. It is for them we have been waiting” (71).

(B) EDLEF KÖPPEN, *HEERESBERICHT* (1929)

⁵⁶ The same reversal of the term “Held” serves as a leitmotif in Lothar Günter Buchheim’s novel *Das Boot*, as well as in Wolfgang Petersen’s 1981 film version.

One hero in the mode of Johannsen plays the main role in Edlef Köppen's *Heeresbericht*, another of the novels trying to capitalize on and extend *Im Westen nichts Neues* for a more discriminating audience. A pacifist, he may not lead or encourage anyone else to lay down arms, but he does arrive at that decision for himself, demonstrating a process of *Selbstbildung* to a non-militaristic cause. His name is Adolf Reisiger, and he, like Paul Bäumer, is a young student who chose to volunteer for army duty. But Reisiger, unlike Bäumer, also takes responsibility for it as he makes his *Bildungsreise* through the trenches. He is a volunteer, twenty-one years old, and after a few weeks of basic training, in the fall of 1914, he arrives at his assigned artillery unit somewhere on the border between Belgium and France, south of Arras -- familiarly, the scene of some of the fiercest battles of the war. Here, a real man and a real soldier will come to choose differently than Germany itself had.

The story is mostly told in third-person narration. In the beginning, Reisiger feels genuine war excitement: he enjoys the new surroundings, the soldierly lifestyle, the thrill of approaching the front lines, watching artillery fire in the distance. What frustrates him during his first few weeks are routine drills that are obviously senseless, such as washing and repainting the ammunition truck, or shoveling dirt off the road. Reisiger can't wait to see "the real war." He is anxious to get to the front lines, but, first and foremost, he is happy to be part of it all. In his first letter home, he writes, "Feuerstellung vor Arras. Bin

sehr glücklich. Nette Kameraden (ja, es gibt wirklich so etwas; alles wie eine grosse Familie, auch hier an der Front).”⁵⁷

The first time he is assigned to night-time trench digging, a comrade reminds him that the enemy is only a few yards away, and that even small noises travel far at night. They listen, and indeed they can hear the noises of people coughing, dogs barking, carts rattling. Reisiger reflects on the clashing concepts of “familiar sounds” and “strange enemy”: “Das also ist der Feind? Aber keinen Augenblick kommt das Bewusstsein ‘Feind’ in Reisiger auf. Das alles klingt wie friedliches Leben. Hundebellen, Lokomotivenpfeiff, Geräusch von Wagen: das alles ist fast eine Vision der Heimat” (34). Thirty pages into the story, Reisiger has not seen a single enemy soldier, he has only heard them working on their trenches in the middle of the night. But his keen perception informs him that, despite his bubbling *Kriegsbegeisterung*, the French are people like the Germans. He senses familiarity, not hostility (a trope picked up in the recent film *Joyeux Noël* [2005], about the Christmas truce and its anti-war implications). This initial realization, a not unusual pre-war sense of European internationalism, lies at the heart of his growing dislike of the war.

His first sighting of dead German infantrymen leaves him feeling uneasy and aesthetically shocked, but mostly because these men had died in surprisingly life-like positions, as if they were still aiming to fire their rifles. Reisiger receives his first real shock, however, during his “baptism of fire” when a surprise attack hits his artillery unit. A commanding officer had just raised his hand to indicate “ready to fire” when a French

⁵⁷ Edlef Köppen, *Heeresbericht* (München: Deutsche Verlags Anstalt, 2004) 32.

shrapnel explodes nearby. When Reisiger opens his eyes a second later, he hears the man groaning in pain, and he sees a fountain of blood gushing out of the stump where his left hand used to be. To Reisiger, this first jolt is an eye-opener:

Reisiger hat ein Zittern in den Knien, das ihn schüttelt. Und im Hals würgt etwas. Das also ist der Krieg! Da steht ein Mensch, laut und kräftig, mit provozierendem Mut. Die Sonne scheint, und es ist blauer Himmel. Plötzlich liegt der Mensch am Boden. Und Blut spritzt. Und der Mensch wird nach Hause gehen und niemals im Leben wieder eine linke Hand haben. Das ist ja ekelhaft! (43)

After this initiation into the reality of war, Reisiger has come to two important realizations: the enemy makes the same sounds we make -- he is entirely like us -- and war will maim and kill in a disgusting and random fashion -- it is therefore wrong. These insights continue to fester in him until he eventually refuses to participate another day. For the time being, he is proud to be in the front lines and excited to contribute to the German war effort.

It becomes increasingly clear that Reisiger has the qualities outstanding soldiers are made of: he is intelligent (tedious drills insult his intelligence), he always follows orders, he is a loyal comrade, and, above all, he is absolutely fearless. One time, under particularly heavy enemy fire, Reisiger gets injured and separated from his unit. Luckily, a field doctor finds him and sends him to a dressing station where he could easily stay until full recovery. But the thought of his battery being short of soldiers haunts him, so he leaves the hospital early to return to his unit. If he has one flaw, from a military point of view, it is the fact that he thinks too much.

Like Paul Bäumer, Reisiger derives satisfaction and a sense of belonging from the military environment. Belonging to the German artillery forces gives his existence a place and a function it never had; the things he used to worry about are now remote:

Er war so glücklich wie selten vorher in seinem Leben. Er hatte sich niemals so unbelastet gefühlt. Was kann mir geschehen? Es gibt keinerlei Sorgen. Alle Menschen müssen gut sein, denn alle Menschen sind deutsche Soldaten und Kameraden. Man kann sich hinlegen und schlafen: man weiss, man wird aufwachen wie im sichersten Zuhause, nicht bestohlen, nicht überfallen [...]. (93)

Taking seriously the notion of a *Bildungsreise* through the course of the war, Reisiger stays in the war almost from beginning to end. His unit moves from here to there. Sometimes they become trapped in heavy fire, other times they are fortunate enough to be stationed in relatively calm positions. Reisiger fulfills his duty, survives his injuries, visits his parents, even spends some time on the Russian front. He likes some comrades better than others, but he is generally on good terms with all of them. His courage never fails him, but his attitude toward the war deteriorates. In the end, he has become a Lieutenant, but too bitter and disillusioned to continue his duty. After a particularly devastating tank attack and heavy losses among his men, he cannot stand the absurdity for another day. So he decides to ignore orders, to never follow another order again, and, consequently, is sent to an insane asylum: “Da Reisiger, wie man ihn findet und zum Generalkommando führt, erklärt, dass er den Krieg für das grösste aller Verbrechen hält, verhaftet man ihn und sperrt ihn ins Irrenhaus” (388).

Significant for the reception of the novel, this story is largely autobiographical. Edlef Köppen is indeed one of the few German war time authors who experienced World

War I from start to finish (Remarque served from 1916-18). When the war ended, he was in fact behind the walls of a mental institution in Mainz, Germany. In September, 1918, he had taken to open disobedience in an attempt to resolve the conflict between fulfilling one's duty as a soldier and contributing to the amorality of war. He was discharged as Lieutenant of the Reserves and decorated with the Iron Cross. Due to the chaotic times following the war, he never had to face the legal consequences of what he had done. The injuries he had suffered during the war, especially the contusion of his lungs, led to continuous health and career problems, and to his untimely death in 1939. Not surprisingly, *Heeresbericht* was blacklisted and burned by the Nazis, and it was unavailable in Germany until the 1970s.⁵⁸

Heeresbericht is thus inspired by much the same pacifist passion that fuelled *Im Westen nichts Neues*, but it is in a different league as a literary achievement and as a fictionalized account of the war. Like Döblin in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and Dos Passos in *Three Soldiers*, Köppen uses montage to offset the narrative -- to make *his* realistic depiction of the war experience without claiming complete authority over the experience or giving the impression that "everyone" would reach the same conclusions. The material he employs for this montage stems from "the world back home," mostly newspaper clippings, advertisements, or cabaret menus. Be he also inserts official government communication, e.g. army reports, announcements, or guidelines on censorship. What makes this technique so effective is the startling juxtaposition it reveals -- how the novel

⁵⁸ Compare Roman Schafnitzel, "Die vergessene Collage des Ersten Weltkriegs: Edlef Köppen, *Heeresbericht* (1930)," Thomas F. Schneider and Hans Wagener, eds., *Von Richthofen bis Remarque: Deutschsprachige Prosa zum I. Weltkrieg* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2003) 325.

aims at educating its readers through its own consciousness-raising. If readers believe the narrative about Reisiger, which switches between first and third person narration, then it is difficult for them to give any credence to what the “official” discourse makes of the same events.

Even today, this montage approach remains challenging for the reader who must watch the mechanics of propaganda at work and gradually realize how remote and how detached these front line soldiers were from the impoverished, but normal, life at home. But where this novel tries for balance in the parties through its montage, others took more overtly partisan viewpoints.

(C) ALEXANDER MORITZ FREY, *DIE PFLASTERKÄSTEN* (1929)

Perhaps the most interesting forgotten novel of the era connects Weimar and the Nazi era most overtly. Before the war, Alexander Moritz Frey (1881-1957) had been attracted to the realm of the fantastic in his poetry and prose. In 1907, he moved to Munich and became friends with Thomas Mann. Frey published a much-lauded collection of short stories, entitled *Dunkle Gänge*, in 1913, as well as a novel, *Solneman der Unsichtbare*, in 1914. During the First World War, he actually got to know Adolf Hitler because both served in the same regiment. Hitler attempted to befriend Frey and take advantage of his literary talent, but Frey refused and kept his distance, disgusted by Hitler’s ideas and opportunistic demeanor. This explains why Frey had to flee into exile (Austria and Switzerland) after Hitler came to power. Frey died in Zurich, impoverished and nearly forgotten.

In 1929, he published the novel *Die Pflasterkästen: Ein Feldsanitätsroman*, which takes an unflinching look at the gruesome reality of the Western Front between September 1915 and the near end of the war, seen through the eyes of the first-person narrator, the paramedic Funk. The novel is quite openly autobiographical, though Hitler plays no role in it.⁵⁹ Unlike Remarque's episodic structure, *Pflasterkästen* follows a strictly chronological narrative scheme, like Köppen's *Heeresbericht* or Renn's *Krieg*, but it is not based on a diary-format. In this story, a more classic *Bildungsroman* about the front experience from a purportedly neutral point of view, Funk emerges as a total individualist and a keen observer. He rejects the constraints of any ideology, including those of pacifism, although he did decide to join the paramedics so that he would not have to participate in the madness of shooting at people.⁶⁰

Of all the protagonists described in this chapter, Sergeant Funk most closely resembles Reisiger because both are individualists as well as courageous and sober observers who manage to stay in control until one final order pushes them over the edge, and they decide to rebel. In Funk's case, he is sent to the front because he failed to greet an officer in the communications zone. Müller describes his reaction as follows:

In diesem Augenblick brennen bei Funk alle Sicherungen durch, er will "nicht mehr mitmachen." Seinem Stabsarzt schreit er entgegen: "Ich will, will, will die Wahrheit sagen – ich will sagen: Militär und Krieg sind die albernste, schamloseste, dümmste Gemeinheit von der Welt. Dieser Ausbruch des Sanitätsunteroffiziers Funk – der von dem verständnisvollen Stabsarzt mit einem "Persilschein" in die Heimat geschickt wird – enthält zugleich die These von [...]"

⁵⁹ Christian Friedrich Funk, too, is the author of fantastical tales. Compare Müller, *Krieg und die Schriftsteller*, 100.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Die Pflasterkästen, der ein pazifistischer Roman von beachtlicher literarischer Qualität ist. (Müller 100)

Funk's loss of control, however, is carefully built up throughout the narration. He has over two years front service behind him at this point, so it is understandable he has reached his breaking point -- the point where he becomes politically aware.

With regard to their approach to the unspeakable horror of the war, Frey, Köppen, and Renn are diametrically opposed to Remarque: where he wailed "poor me!" they said "just look at this." Frey, Köppen, and Renn created protagonists whose emotional expressions remain understated, yet due to their more convincing psychological development, these soldiers' responses are entirely plausible. What they say rings true and accurate because, throughout their military service, they distinguish themselves as critical observers of their environment, including the shortcomings of fellow soldiers. This does not make them likeable, but it does make them credible. Remarque's Bäumer, by contrast, is neither an individualist nor a critical observer. If readers want to relate to him, their only choice is really to pity him as victim, a passive witness to events.

In this case, Frey's Funk, like the student in Johanssen's *Four Infantrymen*, sees through the military establishment's façade of decorating men for the wounds they suffered, for instance. In this scene, he is engaged in conversation with Doctor Lipp about a soldier named Pöffel, who still has not been decorated even though he was severely wounded while cleaning weapons. Funk does not seem to understand:

"And why didn't he get it?" he asks. "Can't you understand that?" asks Lipp impatiently. "It was only an accident. He might just as easily fallen off a ladder or swallowed a shoe-nail in his food. They don't decorate you for that. They must

draw the line somewhere. Or why not include among the distinguished the boil champions, or the appendix operations.” “They all surely deserve to be decorated,” says Funk in a low voice. “You’ve got some queer notions,” says the staff surgeon. “And what remains of the idea of heroism?” “Yes – what does remain?” retorts Funk.⁶¹

His superior feels provoked by this, of course, and emphasizes that he himself applied for decoration. Funk is not interested in an argument, so he deflates the situation:

“It was talking about the idea of heroism that introduced the personal element. It wasn’t my doing, anyhow, Sir. Isn’t the hero nowadays always someone who’s had an accident, so to speak? If I go up to the line and come back whole, I’m in luck. Just in the same way as Pöffel was out of luck.”

The staff surgeon speaks condescendingly through his hooked nose: “You’re a Jesuit, Funk – a sophist, I can see. To merit a decoration there must be the will to accomplish something.”

“Quite right, Sir. But Pöffel had the will. So has every man out here. He had the will to be a soldier, the willingness to conform to a soldier’s life. To split up this mass of willingness into parts and call some men heroic and others unheroic is not logical.” (81)

At this point, most readers would realize, Funk is right! He expresses many valuable insights throughout the book, like Reisiger, but both are too engaged in fulfilling their duties (*Pflichterfüllung*) to stage open rebellion sooner than they do. That is, these heroes may actually see less than the audience does, and so, although they are heroes of the war era as opposed to supermen for a future utopia, their readers can still identify with them.

One stylistic feature sets *Die Pflasterkästen* apart from the other novels in this group, namely the sub-plot about the staff surgeon, Dr. Lipp, and his proclivity for secret gardening, which casts into relief the abysmal absurdity of the war in an almost Expressionist fashion. Lipp is often absent from duty because he is busy tending to his

⁶¹ Alexander Moritz Frey, *The Cross Bearers: A Story of the Medical Corps* (New York: The Viking Press, 1930) 80-81.

mushroom, strawberry or asparagus patches, which are the true joy of his existence.⁶²

Lipp finds his job aesthetically offensive:

“They can’t expect me to spend my days coaxing abscesses ripe like my strawberries, and then lovingly opening them and gently pressing out the core into absorbent cotton. It makes me sick [...]. Who is it that really doing something for the men’s health? Look you, Funk, it’s I! All the stomach complaints we have to combat here are due to the soldiers having to stuff tinned meat into their bellies and getting no fresh vegetables with it. And who grows vegetables, unwearingly, day and night? Who, Funk? I do.” (82-83)

The absurdity of such comparisons underscore for a reader the hopelessness and anguish of meaningless suffering.

Ironically, readers come to understand that Dr. Lipp is right, too: whether or not he carefully treats the soldiers’ boils makes no difference. His work, like any humanitarian effort, is a drop in the ocean in such a political environment. He might as well be growing strawberries. Such alternative expressions of despair also play a role in the remaining novel to be discussed in this chapter, as part of a group of novels that connects the past front with the present homefront emotionally as well as politically.

(D) KARL FEDERN, *HAUPTMANN LATOUR* (1929)

Not surprisingly, a novel that connects the home and warfronts will again take a broader picture of German history. *Hauptmann Latour* is the product of a joint effort made by the Austrian writer and translator Karl Federn (1868-1943) and the Officer Hubert E. Gilbert (born 1889), who was a cynic, had a Scottish mother, adored

⁶² Dr. Lipp is to *The Cross Bearers* what Milo Minderbinder is to Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* (1961).

Shakespeare, and fought in the war for four years.⁶³ His literary correlative, Fritz Talbot Freiherr Latour von Saint-Aubin, works for the Berlin General Staff and is sent to Britain for reconnaissance work on British war preparations. His assessment displeases his superiors and he is transferred to an artillery regiment. He does his job well, both in France and on the Eastern Front, but he lives in inner exile because he had already decided in 1914 “wie sinnlos eigentlich diese ganze Schießerei in Europa ist.”⁶⁴

Taking his characterization from a time well before the Great War, Captain Latour embodies the noble spirit of a knight. He is the figure that Ferd’s father, the “Red Major” in Glaeser’s *Jahrgang 1902* would have become if he had lived to fight in the war. His disenfranchisement from his peer-group, fellow Prussian officers, is brought about by his colleagues’ narrow-mindedness and Germano-mania. Unlike these Prussians who resemble the German general staff of World War I, he is brave, highly educated and a competent officer, but completely disillusioned with Germany’s leadership and mission in the war. Like Arnold Friedrich Vieth von Golßenau alias Ludwig Renn, he decides to abandon his military career after the war to become a student because he is “fed up with the whole thing”: “Ich hab keine Lust, mich von den Kerls, die jetzt im K.[riegs] M.[inisterium] und in den Stäben oder sonstwo rumsitzen, schurigeln zu lassen.”⁶⁵

It is clear to him that his political and moral convictions contradict what his job demands of him. He also knows that the war cannot be won for Germany, yet it never occurs to him to abandon his duties before the war is over. Discipline is ingrained in him

⁶³ Müller 101.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 103.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

and a defining aspect of his personality: “Der Krieg ist nicht zu gewinnen. Aber ich drücke mich nicht. Darüber ist gar nicht zu reden.”⁶⁶ He thus adopts a jovial and somewhat cynical perspective to cope with the irreconcilable clash between his mindset and his duties. He even ponders whether the war could be considered a sport.⁶⁷ However, he is too much of a humanist to actually begin thinking that way: “[...] aber ihm ist klar, daß der moderne Krieg sich nicht in der Metaphorik eines sportlichen Wettstreits interpretieren läßt. Den Gaskrieg empfindet er als ‘Gemeinheit’; den Sinn strategisch nutzloser, aber überaus verlustreicher Gegenangriffe, in denen Soldaten einer ‘Prestigefrage’ geopfert werden, vermag er nicht ‘einzusehen’” (Müller 103).

Like Ludwig Renn, Hauptmann Latour becomes a champion of the anti-war bourgeoisie because he turns away from the aristocracy and their military equivalent, the arrogant officers’ clique. In the eyes of the middle-class reader, this makes him more human and a more convincing candidate for possessing common sense. Yet ultimately, neither Renn nor Latour facilitate working-class reader-identification, however, because their personal careers are too unusual, and their characters intellectual and aloof. No wonder, then, that the novels’ sales did not reach the heights of either those with a broader cast of characters, or Remarque’s own, with its carefully controlled focus on the guilt of the older generation and the innocence of its sons, eliminating externalized politics in favor of the politics of the personal.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Both Manfred von Richthofen and Ernst Jünger adopted the attitude that warfare represented the ultimate sport (comp. chapter three).

4.4 CONCLUSION

My main argument is that Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* far exceeded other anti-war novels in popularity precisely because it appealed through its universality to working-class and bourgeois readers alike. Paul Bäumer is not even necessarily German: he stands for any innocent boy soldier who was drafted into an unjust war under false pretenses; what happens to him has allegorical undertones. As such, the novel is a wide-open projection screen for anyone who also felt victimized by the war in any way. *Im Westen nichts Neues* seems to address the plight of these young soldiers as much as the future plight of the survivors, but only ostensibly. Bäumer and his comrades die in the war, so there is no connection between them and the Weimar Republic or any other political vision, other than in Remarque's and his readers' minds, cleverly emphasized through the dedication: "Dieses Buch soll weder eine Anklage noch ein Bekenntnis sein. Es soll nur den Versuch machen, über eine Generation zu berichten, die vom Kriege zerstört wurde – auch wenn sie seinen Granaten entkam." Through this invitation to the reader, Remarque created a perfect victim's tale that intentionally eschews historical place and time references.

The eight other novels discussed in this chapter, with the possible exception of Glaeser's *Jahrgang 1902*, are not made for mass taste. They do not exploit the common soldiers victim status as fully or as sentimentally as *Im Westen nichts Neues* does. On the contrary, their protagonist develops an understanding into the mechanisms that drew them into the military. They thus accept a measure of personal responsibility, and, with the exception of *Soldat Suhren* and *Jahrgang 1902*, they engage in more classical

processes of *Bildung* into a community of some sort, and do not put forth blanket accusations. Whichever judgments they pass tend to be nuanced and developed from within the story. Even *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa*, which does target the weak moral resolve of the German war bureaucracy, is not a black-and-white picture.

A common denominator for all these novels is, of course, their rejection of the war as an atrocious and senseless business, as well as a sense of alienation from families and familiar surroundings. But more importantly, with the exception of the artist in uniform, *Soldat Suhren*, all these novels also lavish a generous measure of male virtues onto the protagonists. I argue that the development of the male protagonists remains a sub-text, but that this sub-text carries the messages that were really important to German readers in the late 1920s: they wanted to see proof of valor and integrity even in those who came to despise the war as such. Johannsen's *Four Infantrymen* openly suggests that desertion would have been the bravest choice in light of trench warfare's absurdity. Reisinger in *Heeresbericht* and Funk in *Pflasterkästen* reach their breaking-points and subsequently refuse to participate in the war, yet not a single one of these men ever shows signs of cowardice or egotism. Not one of them mutilates himself or deserts. They continue to do the best they can, regardless of the circumstances, and that is what ultimately accounts for their therapeutic appeal to the readers.

Conclusion

Previous research on Weimar Republic war fiction tended to approach it as intertwined with the political debate that waged back and forth at the time. The exploration of the nexus between literary production and socio-political developments is certainly worthwhile, but it tends to forget other important functions of reading literature. One of my main arguments in this project is that the typical middle-class German man of 1928 did not consume war fiction in order to determine his own political standpoint with regard to the lost war -- his views were already firmly in place, inherited from his fathers and grandfathers.

Instead, the war fiction summoned up these older stereotypes to deal with a current psychological problem rather than present a new political and social idea. Through these novels, the front veteran was given a tool, however inadequate, to fathom the decline of his status as a German man, as well as by the desire to derive some sort of meaning from the enormous sacrifices most people had made. The bottom line indicated by the success of *Im Westen nichts Neues* and its peers from left and right is thus a severe political consequence for Weimar Germany: a generation of veterans (and presumably their families) were habituated to think in terms of personal politics, not national

politics.¹ Their horizon of expectation was receptive to human messages addressed to them as men, not to political messages addressed to them as Germans.

This lack of a *political* or *collective* vision of what the war meant for the country would be critical, I believe, in explaining the utter failure of the Weimar Republic to be able to craft a viable political vision for the country, and the ease with which a low-ranking individual war veteran -- Hitler -- could present his own war experience as paradigmatic and have it taken as a viable political program by so many readers. The Germany that read Remarque and made him the best-seller of an era knew that its manhood had been left in the trenches and that the ongoing legacy of the Great War for the survivors was only a sense of personal loss and betrayal, not any larger connection with political and economic realities of the world after the Great War.

What I have presented as a culture war about World War I (1919-1932) thus took its public dynamics from a heavily politicized debate over all kinds of literary production, including letters, diaries, memoirs, plays, poems, and novels. The only genre that gained fundamental importance and large-scale resonance (judged by sales figures), however, was the novel, much more popular because it possessed qualities that the other genres lacked vis-à-vis a broader public. These qualities included the flexibility to adapt traditional narrative models (e.g. *Bildungsroman*, *Abenteuerroman*, *Episoden-Erzählung*, *Künstlerroman*) to the new and overwhelming *topos* of World War I, as well as the

¹ I firmly believe that readers continued to think what they already thought about the war and the political system of the Weimar Republic. Public opinion was already too polarized in 1928 for the novels to have much swaying power. Again, the opposing factions were firmly entrenched. There was no member of the *Stahlhelm* or the early *SA* who read *Im Westen nichts Neues*, thought about it, and then changed his political ideology.

ability to incorporate subtle sub-texts -- in this case: therapeutic messages for German men -- into a set of narratives that effectively used personal experience to occlude political rhetorics of any sort beyond the *Dolchstoß*.

I have argued here that the entire critical debate about the different authors' political viewpoints or intentions was a wildly exaggerated and misguided surface phenomenon that actually rested on a fairly limited set of variables defining Germany and the German public and almost equating that "German public" almost exclusively with "the German male." The fabled instability and vacillations of Weimar politics may actually be less a sign of creativity and reformation than one of a male public sphere that was based on a stubbornly preserved sense of Germanness, a stereotype impervious to political redefinition. In this reading, the *Dolchstoß* becomes less a political narrative than a claim that the German male "died on the front" due to political ineptitude.

Erich Maria Remarque himself is the best example of the pose that may have been typical for this generation, whether left or right, bourgeois or lower nobility (and probably less so for the proletariat which was more actively confronting the economic failures of Weimar): he professed over and over again that he knew nothing about politics and did not want to interfere with national politics. Not surprisingly, however, his critics permanently attempted to support or discredit him *as if his message had a nuanced political message* beyond "war is bad" for individuals' health. The bourgeois anti-war camp supported him, the bourgeois pro-war camp discredited him as a pacifist, and the radical left (often including the pacifists) viewed warfare as endemic in capitalist society

and thus rejected anything from the bourgeois camps that might have pointed out a link between the bourgeois *cultural* identity and war.

Critics at the time were unable to disassociate themselves from the moral imperative of echoing their political convictions in their literary criticism -- or rather, they were unable to see the distance between this psychologized literature and anything like an analysis of what politics might actually correlate with the trench experience of the First World War. Once *Im Westen nichts Neues* became the focus of a power struggle between the political left and the *völkisch*-nationalist right wing -- hence immediately after its publication -- , public reception ceased to be anything but reactive. The novel's critics could not reach out beyond their own political molds; the novel never was able to reveal itself as a simple tear-jerker with little political content, or to spur a serious investigation of *why* all those Paul Bäumers were sent to the trenches (to fill in the narrative and political blanks that I pointed to briefly near the end of the last chapter). All reviewers were concerned with the political implications of the novel and sought to appropriate it to their respective cause, but hardly any of them analyzed its literary characteristics or its subliminal (let alone overt) political and social messages. Therefore, it is not surprising that the extant scholarly analyses of that critical reception have yielded the same results.²

In an effort to complement the existing debate, I aimed to bring to the foreground one of the reasons why I believe *Im Westen nichts Neues* hit a sensitive spot with German

² Compare, for example, Hans-Harald Müller, *Der Krieg und die Schriftsteller*, and Michael Gollbach, *Die Wiederkehr des Weltkriegs in der Literatur*.

readers. By providing both a new explanation that actually did not require change (a diagnosis of German masculinity under fire that actually reinforced conservative elements originating a century earlier) and a new scapegoat, namely the parent generation and the *Dolchstoß*, it filled a large vacuum for all those who had not otherwise bought into the *Dolchstoß*-myth. Remarque's idea was brilliant because it fed two strata of readers exactly what they wanted to hear: by making forty-year-old Kaczkinsky the true working-class hero of the story, Remarque exculpated the petite bourgeoisie and the German workers from war guilt. At the same time, the younger generation of bourgeois Germans -- Paul Bäumer and his friends -- emerge as innocent victims, abused and sacrificed by their recklessly authoritarian fathers, the evil "Wilhelminians." Being the cultural chameleon that he was, Remarque thus harked back to a discourse from the late nineteenth century by adopting the humanist voice of the liberal reform pedagogues in the generational debate (see chapter four, section three). In other words, he (with a little help from his publisher) positioned his bland narrative at the intersection of the traditional, apolitical *Bildungsroman* and the reformist, even iconoclastic *Generationenroman*, a crossroads that turned out to be a neuralgic cultural area. In this sense, it also seemingly contributed to resurrecting German masculinity in purely human terms, without relying on *völkisch*-nationalist messages. It delineated the aspects of German masculinity that, handed-down from the nineteenth century as they were, could still be counted as functioning male virtues, especially courage, camaraderie, and resourcefulness.

This, at least, is what Remarque and his fellow bourgeois novelists would have us believe. In hindsight, it appears that the limited scope of this masculinity model left German men ill-equipped for the challenges of modernity, and vulnerable to the heavily aestheticized Nazi-allure. By weaving an early nineteenth-century concept of German masculinity into their early twentieth-century battlefield discourse, the novelists on the left as well as the right essentially constructed a backward-looking utopia.³ For the right-wingers, this utopia also encompassed an imagined state of national unity, a concept which surfaces in their novels as the microcosm of the *Frontgemeinschaft*. The leftist-liberal writers generally pushed the same concept, but not for its political implications. To them, the *Frontgemeinschaft* rather served as (imagined) evidence that even the gruesome reality of the war had not shattered the core concepts of pure German masculinity. The *Frontgemeinschaft* epitomizes “how good men treat each other” and is presented as something precious and beautiful amidst the horror.⁴ In other words, most of the bourgeois writers intentionally withdrew from the political discussion about the origins and consequences of the war in order to distill what they regarded as the pure, innocent essence of their imagined front soldiers. This distilled essence was, as *Im Westen nichts Neues* proved, a much desired tonic for hundreds of thousands of male readers at the time.

³ This utopian vision is relatively subtle in Remarque and his leftist-liberal colleagues. Moving further to the right on the political spectrum, the utopian dream of German masculinity becomes so heavily mythologized that it loses its connection to (historical) reality altogether. What seems to have fanned the fantasies of Schauwecker, Beumelburg, Wehner, and other right-wing militarists were not only visions of Jahn and other anti-French fighters, but also archetypal warrior images, like Arminius defeating the Roman legions.

⁴ The only author that we have seen breaking this mold was Adam Scharrer in his *Vaterlandslose Gesellen*.

The boiling-down of a complex historical phenomenon to a mere essence of masculine, and allegedly German, characteristics presented an ideal loophole through which the bourgeois stratum of society could escape acknowledging the need for political solutions other than war. Concepts and institutions of national politics were, in effect, dissolved in favor of a common denominator of personal politics, manifest in the fictionalized representations of the German male. Like the acerbic political debates of the apolitical battlefield fiction it embraced, the public mind had stopped to distinguish between what was and what was not actually political. Due to the immensity of the unassimilated trauma, everything pertaining to the war simultaneously affected the personal politics of its veterans. At this point, war fiction came to their rescue. Through their stories of “deformation” (*Rückbildungsromane*), the bourgeois novelists essentially turned back the clock by a full century, to an unverifiable state of masculine intactness that supposedly existed during the Wars of Liberation, as if that would compensate for failed political action. Like a snail retreating into its shell, they created an “inside world” -- impenetrable to criticism by non-veterans -- in which there were no women, no public, no masses, no Weimar Republic, no *Bildung*, not even a bourgeoisie, and, of course, no lost war -- hence an ahistorical utopia of man’s paradise; men in the bliss of innocence before the fall.

The implications of this withdrawal from national politics are enormous. According to my argument in Chapters three and four, one of the major differences between Remarque and the other authors like him was that *Im Westen nichts Neues* radically dissolved the individual in favor of the Paul Bäumer *everyman*. As we can see

now, this “trick” accomplished more than just generate identification, or popular appeal, on a mass-scale. It also effectively erased the individual and its role in the war discourse. In Remarque, the individual ceases to exist not only symbolically, but quite literally, by merging with a collective and seeking refuge behind a smoke-screen of ignorance.⁵ This vanishing individual remains beyond reproach because he is a “good German,” only did his duty, and was thrown into the carnage and the chaos by someone else. If Paul Bäumer is a bourgeois *everyman*, than *everyman* fled into a political vacuum at the precise historical moment when he could have and should have taken a political stance on the stage of the real world.

Since Paul Bäumer fails to take a stance, Remarque ultimately betrayed his audience. With the superficial air of an iconoclast, he presented a new *Dolchstoß* aimed at the belligerent and authoritarian Wilhelminians, but his dagger hurt no one. On the textual level, Bäumer and the other boys do get their revenge, both on Himmelstoß, the evil drill Sergeant, and on Kantorek, the schoolmaster, but it amounts to beating up the one and gaining authority over the other. Such juvenile fantasies mark the limit of Remarque’s “political” analysis of how to deal with, or retaliate against, the men who brought about the catastrophe. However, Remarque revealed his true political weakness by failing to offer ideas about political and social changes needed to deal with catastrophe. Given that it was the best-selling book on the war, many Remarque-fans apparently appreciated this shallow message of victimhood, as long as it exonerated them

⁵ The other Remarquians, who did create believable individuals, remained rather insignificant in terms of popularity and also failed to offer a political vision with which the destruction of the individual could be historicized or otherwise addressed.

from participation in democratic resolutions for conflict. Bourgeois Germans, for whatever reasons, were still in a political slumber when the next catastrophe was already visible on the horizon.⁶ They were content to be mollified into thinking that the symbolic punishment of Kantorek or Himmelstoß somehow set the record straight.

This degree of political inertia, or *politische Unmündigkeit*, exacerbated by the bourgeoisie's exclusive focus on personal (gender) politics, did not pass unpunished. Right-wing militarists were swift to exploit this middle-class state of indecision for their purposes: within a decade, they had effectively blotted out the remaining leftist-liberal and pacifist traces in mainstream bourgeois culture with a much more powerful vision of what German men were or should be. This vision followed a trajectory from aestheticized hyper-masculine militarism (Jünger, *In Stahlgewittern* [1920]), to anti-bourgeois neo-nationalism (Schauwecker, *Aufbruch der Nation* [1929]), to racist, anti-Semitic, and anti-communist fascism (Zöberlein, *Der Glaube an Deutschland* [1930]).

Klaus Theweleit's *Männerfantasien* (1977) /*Male Fantasies* (1989) is certainly one of the most compelling and original analyses of these developments. His work was ground-breaking in the sense that it opened up a new view of German Nazism, arguing that Hitler was no accident, and that National Socialism grew out of more factors than a German *Sonderweg*, the Great Depression, or the public resentment of the Versailles Treaty. Theweleit focused on the period from 1918 to 1923, during which the paramilitary *Freikorps* wielded largely unchecked military aggression, including political

⁶ As we have seen, only few leftist-liberal writers drew attention to the seriousness and scope of this misjudgment, for example Ernst Johannsen in *Vier von der Infanterie* and Edlef Köppen in *Heeresbericht*.

assassinations, in many regions of the Weimar Republic, for example in Berlin, during the Kapp-Putsch, in Upper Silesia and other areas of the future Baltic states, in the *Ruhrgebiet* during the communist uprising, and during Hitler's "Beer-Hall Putsch" in 1923.

His view of developing fascism is intensely personal. He develops his argument through a psycho-analytical reading of individual case-studies of seven prominent figures in the *Freikorps*-movement. The men he focused on were Hermann Ehrhardt and Gerhard Rossbach, both Lieutenants and infamous *Freikorps*-commanders, Martin Niemöller, who was a pastor in Münster, Rudolf Höss, the future commander of Auschwitz, Ernst von Salomon, an aggressively fascist ideologue, General von Lettow-Vorbeck, and Lieutenant Manfred von Killinger, who would become prime minister of Saxony in 1933. Through a vast collection of textual evidence, Theweleit cements his main argument that these *Freikorps*-men shared a particular socio-psychological pathology vis-à-vis their various groups of enemies, including Bolsheviks, proletarian workers, Jews, and, above all, women.

Drawing on a number of psychoanalytic concepts, including the "Male Armor," which is a psychological and cultural construct that helps protect the *Freikorps*-men against the subversive threats exerted by "Rifle-Women" (*Flintenweiber*), "Red Nurses," and various floods and swamps, Theweleit arrives at an interpretation that posits as a psychological imperative the fighting-man's desire to continue fighting even after the war's end, given that he cannot allow the dissolution of the male armor. The male armor had a double function for the *Freikorps*-fighters: while it did protect them against the

influence of undesirable forces, it also tormented and imprisoned the men in a rigid, lifeless world:

The Germans were united in the anti-eroticism of their marital relationships, the formal quality of their neighborly relations; in the chilly distinctions demanded by German's ubiquitous hierarchical systems; in their unspoken knowledge of the proximity of impenetrable prisons. They were united as wearers of granite expressions.⁷

Theweleit emphasizes repeatedly that he does not want to equate the core engineers of fascism with the masses of future followers. However, he does insist that there must have been a number of psychological parallels, or common denominators, that contributed to the merger between active forerunners and passive supporters:

If we accept that fascism cannot be treated simply as a form of seduction or misrecognition, but that, as this study has attempted to demonstrate, it is a specific form of production of reality, then analyses of its "core" must be assumed to be representative -- at least in part -- of the condition of its "followers."⁸

According to my own analysis of late Weimar Republic battlefield fiction, Theweleit correctly directed our attention away from the political sphere and its institutions to the level of psychology and personal politics. My own findings also support his claim that it was not, in fact, the war experience that created the hyper-aggressive male mindset. As described in chapter four, the masculinity model that regained the upper hand in the late 1920s was actually only a backlash to the nineteenth-century precursor. In Theweleit's words:

Yet any analysis that claims the foundations of German fascism to have been laid by the war and its aftermath, or subsequently by the world economic crisis, obscures the fact that the type of man who contributed decisively to fascism's

⁷ See Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989) vol. II, 348.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 349.

triumph existed in essence long before the beginning of the war in 1914. (Theweleit, vol. II, 351)

The men who were boys and adolescents during the Wilhelmine Empire suffered from the impossibility of realizing their personal potential or any sense of freedom because the socio-cultural restraints under which they grew up were too severe. Although the forty-three years between the founding of the Empire and the outbreak of the First World War were superficially peaceful and culturally productive, Theweleit compares this kind of capitalist authoritarian society to a covert form of war. The *Freikorps*-man, he argues, “[was made] by the superficial peace that is the normal form of the permanent state of war waged by capitalist male society against its youth, its women, and its wage laborers – and, indeed, against its men” (Theweleit, vol. II, 351).

Despite certain alternative models of child-rearing and pedagogy that began to emerge in the final decades of the nineteenth century, the military model of masculinity remained for many the only viable route to manhood, gaining power, and breaking free from the stifling environment of their families. Prussia’s army and the semi-militaristic student organizations crushed the liberals and the *Wandervögel*. Free-thinking individuality was extremely difficult to either reach or maintain given the high price of social ostracism. Theweleit concludes: “But even everyday life in the Prussian military denied them true tests of strength, true victories, explosive advances. Men of strata on two fronts between the ages of around eighteen and thirty-five demanded nothing short of war” (351). Most other endeavors seemed unattractive as long as they did not entail existential tests of manhood.

Yet while my own findings largely support Theweleit's results, his eclectic corpus of data is personal and private rather than public and fictionalized, his method is psycho-analytical and interpretative rather than literary, and his general perspective points in the opposite direction. His case-studies follow a forward trajectory toward the coming age of German fascism, whose roots he sees in the largely dysfunctional relationship between German men and women before and directly after the Great War.⁹ I have argued that late Weimar Republic battlefield fiction, at least from the leftist-liberal bourgeois camp, was almost entirely apolitical, oblivious of women, and in fact looked backward to a previous golden age of intact masculinity and self-appreciation. In Theweleit's words:

The Great War touched the masculinity of several German male generations in its most sensitive area; in the conviction that German men were born to be warriors and victors. It deprived them of the victory they considered their "birthright" and subjected them, as Germans, to a narcissistic wound of the first order. (Theweleit, vol. II, 357)

My own study therefore complements Theweleit's earlier research on masculinity and sharpens the focus on the mechanisms with which fictionalized accounts of the traumatic war experience were used to bypass politics and come to terms with the recent past.

While Theweleit primarily bridges the Weimar years to show how the *Freikorps*-male ideology manifested itself during the civil war period from 1918 to 1923, then disappeared from the scene for five to six years, only to resurface full force after 1928, I

⁹ Theweleit posits: "The process whereby the relation between women and men becomes a perverted relation of anti-production – a process that consolidates prevailing prohibitions on the flowing of the stream of desire – is of far greater significance for the rise of fascism than any changes wrought by war on the soldier's nature." See Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. II, 358.

argue for much deeper and more continuous historical roots.¹⁰ According to my analysis, the cultural script that informed German men of “what they should be” harks back to Jahn’s *Turnerbund* and the early stages of German nationalism. More importantly, these *männliche Eigenschaften* were not originally Prussian or military ideals: they were *German* ideals. Therefore, they had considerably more adhesive power; any young man’s attempts to develop his individuality outside of that dominant mold would be castigated as both “unmännlich” and “undeutsch.”

As I described in chapter one, these forces grew so powerful within the German bourgeoisie, especially because the many sports clubs, gymnasts, and student organizations increasingly aligned themselves with the Prussian military code of honor and behavior, that any outsider would be socially isolated and condemned to failure in virtually any higher career. By the end of the nineteenth century, the “deutsche Tugenden” were as sticky as fly-paper. Every man “knew”: A real German does his duty and submits his manhood to the test. Very often, such tests consisted of mock-combat, like student fencing, or duels, both of which spread uncontrollably because they provided young men with the much desired opportunity to display their courage and assert their honor. While the upper echelons of the military had been traditionally reserved for

¹⁰ According to Nicolaus Sombart, the cultural phenomenon of the *Männerbund* dominated Prussia since the French Revolution: “War, bei Lichte besehen, diese ‘Krisis der europäischen Kultur’ nicht überhaupt eine Erfindung der ‘deutschen Männer’? Es ging doch immer um das schreckliche Unheil, das die Ideen von 1789 über die Welt gebracht haben – die böse Trinität von Freiheit, Gleichheit und Brüderlichkeit, die sie als apokalyptische Bedrohung empfanden. Warum? Freiheit hieß für sie Befreiung der Frau, Freisetzung der Sexualität, Libertinage; Gleichheit Emanzipation der Juden; und Brüderlichkeit die demokratische ‘Cochonfrèrerie’, die gesellschaftliche Anarchie, die Religion der Pöbelverehrung. Davor hatten sie Angst. Dagegen mußten sie sich zur Wehr setzen. Ihre Gegenposition ist generell antidemokratisch, antiliberal, antiparlamentarisch natürlich, im speziellen aber, und das ist viel wichtiger: antifeministisch, antisemitisch und elitär. Das ist das deutsch-konservative Syndrom.” Compare Nicolaus Sombart, *Jugend in Berlin 1933-1943: Ein Bericht* (München und Wien: C. Hanser) 181-182.

aristocrats, changes in the military and academic codices opened up the door to bourgeois men to climb that high.

Theweleit describes *Freikorps*-leaders who, for the most part, already belonged to the higher levels of the Prussian military hierarchy, they were members of the upper class or upper middle-class; his case-studies are therefore not necessarily representative of the wider bourgeois phenomenon. My own analysis describes the segments of the bourgeoisie, thus providing a more nuanced picture of the (largely imagined) dissolution of class boundaries in war time, as well as the characteristic of popular *Frontliteratur* to reduce political ideas of German nationality to masculine ideas of Germanness.

Ultimately, Theweleit's psycho-analytical interpretation of the *Freikorps*-men's correspondence only illuminates one side of the picture. It does not account for the enormous importance of the various myths (of Germanness, of masculinity) with which the bourgeoisie operated throughout the nineteenth century, the Weimar Republic, and the Third Reich. As I have argued, after the failure of the 1848 Revolutions, myths largely displaced any real argument about the role of democracy in national politics.. Even within the political parties, these myths resonated on a deeper level than *Parteipolitik*, thereby affecting German men on a personal identity level regardless of the changing political landscape. While Theweleit focuses on the oedipal struggle between sons and fathers during and after the Wilhelmine Empire, I argue that the older and more flexible myths of Germaness/manhood represent a deeper key to identity politics, and that these were used to circumvent, or to undermine, any other analyses of the public sphere.

The adhesive forces of these myths came to the foreground, as I have shown, in the characteristic ways in which bourgeois novelists attempted to come to terms with the national trauma of the lost war. Remarque and the other writers from the leftist-bourgeois camp displayed a complete lack of faith in politics as a way of coping with the political catastrophe. To them, the centre of pain was located deep in the German male psyche, and to that level, such seems to be the consensus, only the healing power of myths would penetrate.

Appendix

This list of World War I literature ranked by volumes sold was compiled by Helmut Müssener in 1987.¹ The titles with asterisks are discussed in this project.

*003	Remarque:	<i>Im Westen nichts Neues</i> (1929)	900,000
006	Flex:	<i>Wanderer zwischen den Welten</i> (1917)	682,000
009	Plüschow:	<i>Flieger von Tsingtau</i> (1916)	610,000
*026	Richthofen:	<i>Der rote Kampfflieger</i> (1917)	420,000
032	Luckner:	<i>Seeteufel</i> (1921)	392,000
039	Peckelsheim:	<i>Kriegstagebuch U 202</i> (1916)	360,000
047	Mücke:	<i>Ayesha</i> (1915)	332,000
049	Beumelburg:	<i>Sperrfeuer um Deutschland</i> (1929)	328,000
085	Ettighoffer:	<i>Gespenster am Toten Mann</i> (1931)	249,000
087	Schmöckel:	<i>Ein Lebensbild</i> (1915)	249,000
094	Dwinger:	<i>Die letzten Reiter</i> (1930)	225,000
097	Dwinger:	<i>Zwischen Weiß und Rot</i> (1930)	225,000
110	Bloem:	<i>Kriegserlebnis – Trilogie</i> (1916)	205,000
114	Dwinger:	<i>Armee hinter Stacheldraht</i> (1929)	200,000
*144	Beumelburg:	<i>Gruppe Bosemüller</i> (1930)	170,000
*147	Hindenburg:	<i>Aus meinem Leben</i> (1920)	170,000
167	Peckelsheim:	<i>Oberheizer Zenne</i> (1917)	160,000

¹ Helmut Müssener (ed.) *Deutschsprachige Kriegs- und Antikriegsliteratur in Deutschland und Schweden 1914-1939* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1987) 18-19.

*168	Renn:	<i>Krieg</i> (1928)	155,000
173	Lettow-Vorbeck:	<i>Heia Safari</i> (1920)	151,000
174	Dohna-Schlodien:	<i>Der "Möwe" 2. Fahrt</i> (1917)	150,000
192	Fendrich:	<i>Wir. Ein Hindenburgbuch</i> (1917)	145,000
195	Beumelburg:	<i>Mit 17 vor Verdun</i> (1931)	142,000
213	Beumelburg:	<i>Douaumont</i> (1923)	135,000
*229	Wehner:	<i>Sieben vor Verdun</i> (1930)	130,000
287	Dwinger:	<i>Wir rufen Deutschland</i> (1932)	110,000
315	Salomon:	<i>Die Geächteten</i> (1930)	104,000
328	Dohna-Schlodien:	<i>M.S. "Möwe"</i> (1915)	100,000
337	Heimburg:	<i>U-Boot gegen U-Boot</i> (1917)	100,000
344	Nerger:	<i>M.S. "Wolf" und "Wölfchen"</i> (1919)	100,000
407	Fendrich:	<i>Mit dem Auto an die Front</i> (1915)	90,000
481	Sommer:	<i>Fliegerhauptmann Boelcke</i> (1916)	80,000
495	Beumelburg:	<i>Deutschland in Ketten</i> (1931)	77,000
502	Frank:	<i>Der Mensch ist gut</i> (1919)	75,000
*511	Remarque:	<i>Der Weg zurück</i> (1931)	75,000
529	Euringer:	<i>Fliegerschule</i> (1929)	72,000
539	Keller:	<i>Grünlein</i> (1915)	71,000
550	Frei:	<i>Unser Fliegerheld Immelmann</i> (1916)	70,000
559	Neubau:	<i>Kriegsgefangen</i> (1916)	70,000
570	Fendrich:	<i>An Bord</i> (1916)	68,000
573	Lettow-Vorbeck:	<i>Meine Erinnerungen</i> (1920)	65,000
*652	Jünger:	<i>In Stahlgewittern</i> (1920)	60,000
719	Semsrott:	<i>Der Durchbruch der "Möwe"</i> (1928)	56,000

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Vita

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