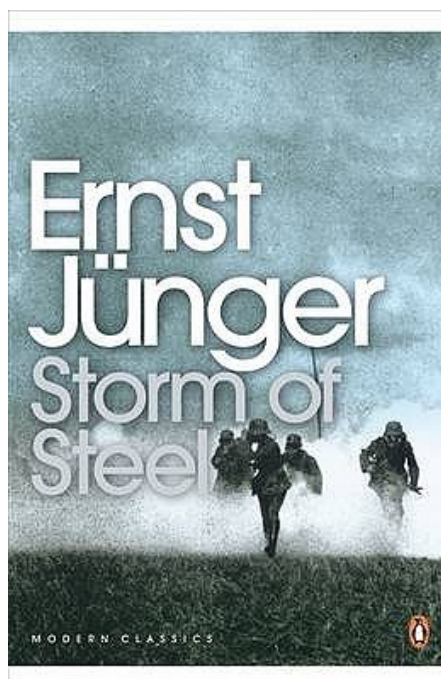




Storm of Steel

Ernst Jünger , Michael Hofmann (Translator)

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A memoir of astonishing power, savagery, and ashen lyricism, 'Storm of Steel' illuminates not only the horrors but also the fascination of total war, seen through the eyes of an ordinary German soldier.

Young, tough, patriotic, but also disturbingly self-aware, Jünger exulted in the Great War, which he saw not just as a great national conflict but more importantly as a unique personal struggle.

Leading raiding parties, defending trenches against murderous British incursions, simply enduring as shells tore his comrades apart, Jünger kept testing himself, braced for the death that will mark his failure.

Published shortly after the war's end, 'Storm of Steel' was a worldwide bestseller and can now be rediscovered through Michael Hofmann's brilliant new translation.

Storm of Steel Details

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Author : Ernst Jünger , Michael Hofmann (Translator)

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From Reader Review Storm of Steel for online ebook

George (BuriedInBooks) says

A journey of ups, downs and gore.

The war years of Ernst Jünger are filled with gore, drama and bloodshed. Storm of steel really does not hold back when it comes to describing the gore and stark reality of The Great War.

Ernst's story consists of rapid rises through the ranks of the Imperial German Army. And the many difficult decisions that follow that cost the life's and save life's of his fellow soldiers.

Ernst's journey takes him through the most awful battles of the Great War, The Somme, Passchendaele and of course Cambrai which was the first time the British tank was used in large concentrations which resulted in huge success, the tanks used were 476 various types which consisted of Mark IV and others.

As you can probably tell I really like tanks.

I give this book five stars because of the way Ernst doesn't hold back and really pulls you into his story and really makes you care about him and his comrades. I would definitely recommend this to anyone that's interested in the German perspective which isn't told as well.

Thanks for checking out my review

Remember to check out my twitter too! Thanks

Laura says

Ernst Jünger is an insurance actuary's worst nightmare — he smoked, drank, experimented with drugs, served in two world wars, sustained multiple injuries, and yet died only one month shy of 103. And his exploits on the front! You couldn't make this stuff up. I confess to not knowing many Germans, but the national stereotypes (organized, efficient, not a lot of laughs) were more than born out in his memoir.

One of the things that struck me the most about the book was how different it was from British memoirs of the Great War. To begin with, *Storm of Steel* was published in 1920, a good ten years before most people had recovered enough to write their memoirs. But Ernst Jünger was a born soldier, and therein rests the core of the book's particular power. Absent are the self-deprecating humor, the overwhelming sense of loss and the bitter ironies of English memoirs. Jünger was a man of duty, focus, and extraordinary resilience. He didn't write to condemn the war and shock future generations into pacifism, nor did he write to glorify war — he merely recorded his experience with a descriptive power unhampered by lengthy reflections and commentary. When he discovers that his younger brother had been deployed nearby he does show some real fear, but for the most part he's remarkably objective about the four years of brutal, relentless slaughter.

That's not to say the slaughter doesn't play a starring role. The mud, the rats, the screeching shells, the gas, the horrific injuries, and the driving rain of bullets and shrapnel are clinically, even ruthlessly described. You get a clear picture of the battlefield's inexorable and indiscriminate danger. But he describes horrors, such as layers of corpses from previous offensives being turned up by new shelling and entire towns being obliterated, with the sort of detachment that, combined with his apparent indestructibility, makes for the ultimate soldier. For Jünger, war didn't destroy young men — it strengthened them, albeit at a steep price. He seemed to relish the chance to prove himself by volunteering for every daring reconnaissance mission, savoring the danger, the heightened senses, the high stakes of success or failure — even though many of his

comrades were blown to smithereens during these missions.

Yet in spite of the years of bloodshed that could easily have destroyed or dehumanized him, he never lost the simple joys of smoking his pipe or discovering tins of jam in a British dugout. I couldn't help thinking that if you had enough Jüngers in your country, the idea of a super race would seem pretty reasonable. At the end of the war he calculates, "Leaving out trifles such as ricochets and grazes, I was hit at least fourteen times, these being five bullets, two shell splinters, one shrapnel ball, four hand-grenade splinters and two bullet splinters, which, with entry and exit wounds, left me an even twenty scars." Who calls being grazed by a bullet a "trifle"? I guess someone who's been through the Great War. After one double wound (shot in the head and leg), he walked **two miles** to a casualty clearing station. Compare that to my recent brush with Crest white strips, which made my teeth hurt so much after only a few minutes that I had to take three Aleve and go to bed. I doubt Ernst would have had much patience with me.

This isn't an easy read — by the end you sort of feel as though you've been through the war yourself — but it's unbelievably compelling.

Roy Lotz says

War means the destruction of the enemy without scruple and by any means. War is the harshest of all trades, and the masters of it can only entertain humane feelings so long as they do no harm.

Ernst Jünger was a born soldier: neither risk-averse nor foolhardy, able to command the loyalty of others and to follow orders without question, able to fight without malice and kill without scruple. These are his captivating memoirs of his service in the First World War.

The consensus of posterity regarding this war is that it was bloody, tragic, and ultimately inconclusive—the exemplar of a brutal, pointless war. Erich Maria Remarque, who fought on the same side and on the same front as Jünger—albeit far more briefly—writes of his experience with trauma and disgust. Yet Jünger's memoirs, equally as bloody as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, are strangely warm and cheery. A born soldier, he felt right at home.

As regards the basic experiences of the war, Jünger's memoirs cover all the bases: bloody hand-to-hand combat, endless artillery shelling, taking cover in shell-holes and scrambling to put on one's gas-mask, swarms of flying shrapnel and bullets, and death forever prowling. But out of this basic fabric of experiences Jünger weaves a heroic and even jaunty tale, a battle narrative of gallantry and daring. Each soldier, in Jünger's archaizing eyes, is a knight locked in a gentlemanly joust with an enemy, motivated by duty and honor. I often wondered whether this quaint way of viewing the war was some kind of subtle psychological defense mechanism, shutting out its horrors with a chivalrous fantasy; but Jünger seems to have carried this perspective with him before the fight even began.

In many ways Jünger reminds me of Patrick Leigh Fermor. Both war heroes, both adrenaline junkies, both of a seemingly inexhaustible vitality—Leigh Fermor lived to 96, Jünger to 104—and both obscenely well-educated, these two authors tend to see life as a legend. Jünger's prose has none of Remarque's cinematographic immediacy. By comparison his writing is highly stylized, like a Byzantine mosaic or Homeric verse. Admittedly, this is more true of the first half than the second, which becomes quite thrilling. In any case it takes a special kind of person to compare an artillery bombardment to "a witch's cauldron," or

to motivate oneself in battle by quoting a verse from Ariosto.

The ending of the book contains, in brief, some of Jünger's thoughts on the significance of the war. Clausewitz's famous aphorism, that war is "politics by other means," seems to have been lost on Jünger. For him the war's value was not in accomplishing any concrete objective—which was, in any case, foiled for Germany—but in hardening the fighting men. You might say that, for Jünger, the war was valuable for its own sake. The extreme circumstances of war roused in the soldiers an equally extreme dedication to an ideal beyond themselves, the ability to yield themselves completely to their Fatherland; and he thought that future generations would look on the soldiers much as saints:

And so, strange as it may sound, I learned from these very four years of schooling in force and in all the fantastic extravagance of material warfare, that life has no depth of meaning except when it is pledged for an ideal, and that there are ideals in comparison with which the life of an individual and even of a people has no weight.

Personally I find this view disturbing, as I'm sure many do. The nationalistic dreams of Kaisers are nothing in comparison with even one life. In any case I think history has amply proven Jünger mistaken; in just a few years, the very hardening anvil of war he praised led to another, even more deadly war—under a regime which Jünger himself despised. And whatever we may think of the heroism displayed by individual soldiers, it is outweighed by the sheer horror of it all. I also must say that I am incredulous that someone who lost so many friends and comrades—and who himself narrowly escaped death, getting wounded 14 times—could talk in such fanciful, romantic, and vague terms about the lessons of the war—and again I wonder, was this some kind of defense mechanism?

In sum, this must be one of the oddest war memoirs ever published, equal parts exciting, off-putting, and exacerbating. For those interested in the First World War, certainly it is required reading.

Bryan Alexander says

This is an excellent and unusual World War I novel.* It's unusual in that most WWI fiction and memoirs are anti-war, dark and furious at the appalling human waste.** Ernst Jünger, in contrast, had a grand time.

Well, that's a bit flip. *Storm of Steel* is full of savagery, physical suffering, squalor, and an ultimate sense of frustration. But the narrator also exults in war. He delights in daredevil acts, charging the enemy, organizing his troops, and appreciating details of life in the rear. Jünger is repeatedly wounded (16 times for 20 punctures, he claims (314-5)), but keeps coming back for more. He learns a great deal, grows as a person, and ultimately looks ahead to a non-hideous future. What a light, Nietzschean spirit.

The plot is that of a war diary, following Jünger from the struggle's outbreak in 1914 through the failure of the Central Powers in late 1918. We don't get details of grand strategy or the big picture; instead, the text focuses on the immediate experience of life and death on the Western Front.

The novel excels at this detail. We watch troops deal with boredom, fighting off rats, coming up with nicknames for bad food. We see minute aspects of billets, gear, and personal details. There are few persistent characters, and none realized in any serious depth, but they create an impression of the armed forces around the narrator.

The sensual details and psychological aspects are quite clear.

Weak natures are prone to the atavistic impulse to destroy; and it takes hold of the trench fighter in his desolate existence when any one appears above ground. I have felt it myself only too often. (219)

I was in full array: two sandbags in front of my chest, each with four stick bombs, the left-hand one having instantaneous, the right-hand with time fuses; in the right-hand pocket of my tunic I had an 08 revolver on a long cord, in my right trouser pocket a small Mauser pistol; in my left tunic pocket five egg bombs; in the left trouser pocket a phosphorescent compass and a policeman's whistle; in my belt spring hooks for pulling out the bomb pins, a dagger, and wire-cutters. There was a pocket-book in my breast pocket and my home address, and in the pocket of the back of my tunic a flat flask of cherry-brandy. (196-7)

I believe I have found a comparison that exactly conveys what I, in common with all the rest who went through the war, experienced in situations like this. It is as if one were tied tight to a post and threatened by a fellow swinging a sledge-hammer. Now the hammer is swung back for the blow, now it whirls forward, till, just missing your skull, it sends the splinters flying from the post once more. (81)

We can see certain famous historical details of the war through the narrator's eyes. Gas is frequently used and very frightening. Machine guns sweep fields. Air power is unremarkable, and not idolized, as we hear in some accounts. Artillery is the very worst, the god of war, utterly terrifying, and worse when experienced in the form of too-frequent friendly fire. Tanks rarely appear, and the one confrontation with some we see is pathetic:

There was a cluster of shell-shot tanks quite close to the embankment, and I often went to look at them. They bore names that were sometimes humorous, sometimes defiant, and sometimes affectionate, and they were camouflaged with paint; but they were all in a pitiable plight. The little cabin of armored plate, now shot to pieces, with its maze of pipes, rods, and wires, must have been an extremely uncomfortable crib during an attack, when the monsters, hoping to baffle the aim of our guns, took a tortuous course over the battlefield like gigantic helpless cockchafers. I thought more than once of the men in these fiery furnaces. (286-7)

This reads like science fiction, when humans encounter artifacts of powerful aliens from another world or time.

When not describing the combat zone Jünger reminds us of his excellent taste. He reads *Tristram Shandy* during leave, criticizes or celebrates taste in furniture, analyzes paintings, and reflects on the human condition. The war never degrades his sensibility.

Again and again Jünger celebrates the fighting prowess of his men. We don't get a sense of decay and social breakdown as we find in some French, Russian, and British accounts. No, *Storm*'s German soldiers are infused with patriotism, well drilled, and fierce in battle right through the end.

What is more sublime than to face death at the head of a hundred men? Such a one will never find obedience fail him, for courage runs through the ranks like wine. (27)

Prussian military traditions are singled out for praise. Again, this is so different from other WWI accounts,

which emphasize military futility and decay.

Horror and gore are present throughout, as befits the subject.

[O]ur gunner, the volunteer Motullo, was killed by a shot through the head. Though his brain fell over his face to his chin, his mind was still clear when we took him to the nearest dugout. (231)

Ultimately *Storm of Steel* lauds the generation of German fighters as having successfully passed through the ultimate test. The final chapter describes not the fall of the German empire in revolution, humiliation, and economic ruin, but points to new careers for veterans, who seem likely to triumph in whatever they do. This is an uplifting ending - again, how strange for a WWI novel!

I recommend this for anyone interested in the history, or in memoirs/autobiographical fiction about experiences of enormous stress. Its non-tragic perspective is rare.

Again the carnival of carnage beckoned. (308)

*I'm reading the 1929 English language translation. I don't know how different subsequent versions are.

**with the exception of American Willa Cather's strange *One of Ours* (1923), where our hero finds purpose and satisfaction in the trenches. The only bad part about the war is that the Treaty of Versailles isn't as good as it could have been. Yes, an odd book.

Jaguar Kitap says

Tevfik Turan çevirisiyle sonbaharda yayımlıyoruz. Müthi? bir kitap!

Miriam says

This is probably the cheeriest war memoir ever. While Jünger occasionally remembers to throw in the requisite "oh the horrors of war" comment, most of the time it is clear he is having a blast. Based on his other hobbies (travel, hunting, joining the French Foreign Legion, dangerous political conversation, taking all available drugs) he seems to have quite the adrenaline junkie. Kind of amazing that he lived to over a hundred.

Appearances can be deceiving: this man is totally stealing your hash and LSD if you don't keep an eye on him. And then possibly your car, which he may crash while trying to hunt mountain lions without a license.

Elizabeth (Alaska) says

This is an account of one German soldier's experience in World War I. He was wounded at least 11 times, patched up and sent back to the front. Not very interesting, eh? Junger was an extraordinary observer who kept a diary from the first day of the war to its conclusion. His was the first such soldier's account to be published after the war. From that diary he gave us enormous insight. The prose is so much better than one might expect - even his occasional quoting of that diary.

The stream poured over the weir of a destroyed mill ringed by brooding trees. For months, its water had been laving the black parchment faces of the dead of a French colonial regiment. An eerie place, especially at night, when the moon cast moving shadows through breaks in the clouds, and the sounds of the rushes and the murmuring water were joined by others less easily accounted for.

His entire enlistment was in France. And yet, *May God permit this splendid country, which has so often in its history been the battlefield for warring armies, to rise again from this war with its old quality intact.*

While reading, I kept thinking positive adjectives to describe the account such as "wonderful" or "marvelous," only to immediately remind myself that such terms are not appropriate for war experiences. I have had a fascination with this war in which the grandfather I never knew was killed. For now, my curiosity has been satisfied. I know, however, that I will return again and again to this subject. I only hope that the next encounter will be as well presented as this one.

Warwick says

An oddly jaunty memoir of the Western Front, characterised by what Jünger describes somewhere as his 'strange mood of melancholy exultation'. I am surprised so many people have found his prose 'clean', 'sparse', 'unemotional' – I thought the opposite, that it was rather over-literary in many places; not overwritten exactly, but with touches of a grand Romantic sensibility that I haven't found in English or French writers of the First World War:

The white ball of a shrapnel shell melted far off, suffusing the grey December sky. The breath of battle blew across to us, and we shuddered. Did we sense that almost all of us – some sooner, some later – were to be consumed by it, on days when the dark grumbling yonder would crash over our heads like an incessant thunder?

In the heat of battle, where Barbusse and Genevoix feel a nauseated horror, Jünger instead feels 'an almost visionary excitement' – even 'a twinge of arousal'. Where Sassoon and Manning lament the loss or corruption of their entire generation, Jünger merely comments with apparent approbation that 'over four years, the fire smelted an ever-purer, ever-bolder warriorhood'.

It's all very slightly off-putting; and the tone is quite hard to judge, despite the newness of this translation from Michael Hofmann. He (Hofmann) spends a lot of time in his introduction denigrating his predecessor Basil Creighton's version of 1929; this is not a classy move, particularly when I wouldn't call his own translation especially fluent (though I'm sure there are fewer direct errors). There are many odd word choices – like 'grunt' for soldier, which to my ears is very American and anyway wasn't used before the 1960s; and

repeatedly using ‘splinter’ to describe a huge piece of shrapnel that can pierce a man's chest gives, I think, the wrong impression. Most of all, there is a lot of that awkward juxtaposition between high and low register that is the hallmark of ‘translationese’:

A lark ascends; its trilling gets on my wick.

Hofmann knows his subject, though, and his introductory essay has some interesting comments that contextualise *Storm of Steel* (what an appropriately George-RR-Martinesque title that is!). He makes the intriguing and, I think, convincing suggestion that Jünger's book has a ‘natural epic form’, as opposed to comparable accounts in English which are ‘lyrical or dramatic’. There are indeed many moments here that you might fairly call Homeric, not least in their tone of gung-ho excitement – and considering this helped me clarify what it was I disliked about the book.

Because isn't it the case that the epic form, with its tendency to revel in the ‘glory’ of war, is in some sense fundamentally dishonest – and, more to the point, isn't that precisely one of the lessons that the First World War taught us?

Ray says

Unsettling memoir from a German officer who fought throughout the first world war. He took thirteen wounds and survived, having fought in many of the key battles on the western front. The book gives a sense of what the war was like, full of monotony, terror, comradeship and blood and guts.

A touch vain glorious for my taste, and the author shows little sense of regret. Very matter of fact about death and destruction. I suspect that one becomes inured to death if one faces it every day.

William1.2 says

I have often lamented the lack of German World War I perspectives. Erich Maria Remarque aside, I usually read works by British and French scholars, memoirists, diarists, and novelists. Fortunately here is a fine memoir translated from the German by the esteemed Michael Hofmann. I like its very flat spare prose. Everything is simply allowed to stand for itself: bravery, death, corpses, blood, shrapnel, friendship, dreams. Plainly declarative, there is no unnecessary coloration, no prolixity, no subtext, little in the way of moral judgement.

After reading Robert Graves's *Goodbye to All That* about the efficiency of the German trenches, I found it fascinating to get a sense of how those fortifications were built and how they functioned. Niall Ferguson in *The Pity of War* goes on at some length about the greater efficiency of German soldiers than their opponents. Jünger has here provided at least one example: the Germans simply didn't have the resources--munitions, for example--that the Entente Powers had. They had to do more with less, and did so:

Hundreds of British soldiers were running forward through a flat communications trench, little troubled by the weak gunfire we were able to direct at them. The scene was indicative of the inequality of resources with which we had to fight. Had we essayed the same thing, our units

would have been shot to pieces in a matter of minutes.

Author Ernst Jünger was nineteen, the proverbial ephebe, when he went to the front. He was at first an enlisted man in the infantry who after a brief convalescence was commissioned an ensign and given responsibility for a platoon. He was frequently on the frontlines during the early years, responsible for his short stretch of the line, his poor comrades dropping all around him like flies. I suppose the oddest moments are when the tone becomes madcap, devil may care, despite the storm of steel..

Jünger was wounded with varying degrees of severity fourteen times by his count, except for the last time he was afterward always sent back to the front. Such travails you would think might sour a man, yet the attitude he evinced toward the British, which his soldiers shared, was anything but ungentlemanly:

The [British] sargeant practically had both legs sheered off by hand-grenade splinters; even so, with stoical calm, he kept his pipe clenched between his teeth to the end. This incident, like all our other encounters with the Britishers, left us pleasantly impressed by their bravery and manliness.

In the Introduction to the book translator Michael Hofmann quotes Gide who wrote in his diary: "Ernst Jünger's book on the 1914 War, *Storm of Steel*, is without question the finest book on war that I know: utterly honest, truthful, in good faith." I would agree. It is the finest book on World War I from the German perspective that I know. It also represents an utterly obsolete means of statecraft. War's elimination will only happen by way of the collective will of all of us. I ask you therefore to please sign the Charter for Compassion. Thank you.

Vderevlean says

Cea mai bun? m?rturie despre Primul R?zboi Mondial citit? pân? acum. Excelent, recomand!

Sebastien says

Beautifully written. Junger has extraordinary gifts as a writer. The one thing that makes it harder to connect with his accounts was his cool detachment in his presentation of events and experiences. Beneath the surface is a bit of soft nationalism which is obnoxious but not completely blind or extreme, at least not as blind or extreme as one would expect from a French or German citizen/soldier who was constantly indoctrinated with this nationalistic state propaganda of the times. It really is pretty much unavoidable in this time period except for a small sliver of exceptional individuals who somehow managed to defy this conformity to nationalism (of which there are examples in all of the WWI countries). I don't mean to be unfair by judging Junger via the prism of our contemporary standards, I mean, we are all products of our own time and that should be taken into consideration. But it does seem like Junger embraced a deeper more radical nationalism at certain points in his life, but in this book it isn't too bad, at least from what I can tell. Nationalism is just the worst though, I really have a hard time standing it at any level...

Another quibble against Junger is he does seem to find some primeval enjoyment in war, there is a joy and

celebration of war that is a bit scary/crazy to me. It is a bit hard to swallow such sentiments... but overall he crafts an amazing memoir which captures the essence of the times. The writing is too good, and I do like how he presents things, overall he is a very good nuanced thinker and writer (in spite of the critiques I make), so well worth the read if you are interested in this history.

I'm curious to learn more about Junger, read more of his works, he seems to have been a complex figure.

I'd like to keep reading more memoirs from the war, would like to read memoirs from various participants. I don't know much about the Eastern front, would be nice to read some Russian memoirs of this experience. There is something about WWI, it is the ultimate testament to how far human folly can go, one of the grandest most pointless operatic human tragedies. Maybe reading about it helps me, helps me to contextualize modern suffering and modern problems. But it serves as a reminder as to the horrors and idiotic mistakes humanity is capable of, and why we should always remain vigilant. Even moreso nowadays, with the technological prowess we have we can destroy ourselves much more easily, which is why it is more important than ever to buttress systems of international cooperation and avoid war. Given our destructive capabilities we have less margin for error than 100 years back, with hot-headed ethnonationalists coming to power who view foreign policy as a zero-sum game, there are reasons to worry.

Nationalism in my eyes is the bane of the human species, we will accomplish so much more and improve human welfare by leaps and bounds if we can ever transcend this pernicious ideology. But it is so seductive, and exquisitely wielded by those in power to control and trick us into blindly following and serving their narrow interests no matter the ultimate costs.

Alexander says

(2-3) Ein banaler Roman. Sprachlich gewandt schildert Jünger die subjektiven Kriegserlebnisse seines Helden.

Es findet sich keine Kriegsverherrlichung- es ist aber auch kein Antikriegsbuch.

Mathijs Aasman says

Excellent book. Vivid descriptions of combat make you feel as though you are there. A counterpoint to the views of Remarque et al. who came out of the war with a far less exalted view of the crucible of war as Junger, not to say that WWI was a 'good war'.

Nat says

Jünger's account of the brutal fighting on the western front in WWI makes an enlightening contrast with Robert Graves's *Goodbye to All That*. Graves's account is comic and ironic, while Jünger's writing is almost completely dispassionate, even while describing his friends being torn to shreds by British artillery and sniper fire--an example of the so-called *Neue Sachlichkeit* applied to trench warfare. It's hard not to see the difference as an expression of a difference in national character between the English and Germans.

Jünger's absurdly good luck and fighting skill gets the same kind of cool, detached description as the variety of different kinds of soil he encounters in trenches across France and Belgium: trenches are dug out of chalk,

gravel, mud, fossilized shellfish, clay and marl, depending on the region; Jünger is wounded fourteen times, "these being five bullets, two shell splinters, one shrapnel ball, four hand-grenade splinters and two bullet splinters" (p. 288). He repeatedly volunteers to crawl over to British and French trenches to engage in all kinds of mayhem--cutting wire, tossing grenades, trying to take prisoners. He leads one assault after another through curtains of artillery shells (both from the British and from his own batteries), machinegun and sniper fire, and all variety of trench mortars, rifle-grenades, and aerial bombardment. Over the course of the book, he is awarded increasingly impressive medals for bravery: the Iron Cross, 1st class; the Knight's Cross; and on the final page of the book, the *Orden Pour Le Merite*.

Jünger doesn't refrain from describing the full variety of injuries that soldiers suffer on the modern battlefield. The neck, eyes, forehead, hands, fingers and thighs seem to receive a disproportionate amount of attention from bullets and shrapnel.

There are a few moments of intentional levity, including a complex prank involving 17 hunchbacked residents of the Belgian town of Langemarck and a dispute over some inheritance, and the author being ejected, unharmed, from a runaway, stolen "glass coach" when it runs into a tree. There are also moments that are unintentionally amusing, as when Jünger describes nearly being shot by a careless friend playing around with his own revolver as "irritating".

The book isn't overwhelmingly gruesome. Nearly half of the book consists of Jünger describing everyday life in the trenches---what he is reading, the delights of an unexpectedly good meal, enjoying his pipe, watching the sun set over enemy lines, devising new ways of killing rats, and so on.

The one quasi-philosophical moment in the book is on page p.241: "The state, which relieves us of our responsibility, cannot take away our remorse". I wonder: is remorse without responsibility possible?

Eric says

Expecting a Marinetti-like vociferation, an avant-garde hymn to mechanical war, I initially found Jünger's narrative a little flat. In *The Great War and Modern Memory* Paul Fussell makes Jünger sound entertainingly gauche, a gas-goggled steampunk berserker with a will-to-power prose style. I was bored by the 100 pages preceding "chapter" 7, "Guillemont," whose evocation of the Battle of the Somme finally hooked me:

A runner from a Württemberg regiment reported to me to guide my platoon to the famous town of Combles, where we were to be held in reserve for the time being. He was the first German soldier I saw in a steel helmet, and he straightaway struck me as a denizen of a new and far harsher world. Sitting next to him in a roadside ditch, I questioned him avidly about the state of the position, and got from him a grey tale of days hunkered in craters, with no outside contact or communications lines, of incessant attacks, fields of corpses and crazy thirst, of the wounded left to die, and more of the same. The impassive features under the rim of the steel helmet and the monotonous voice accompanied by the noise of the battle made a ghostly impression on us. A few days had put their stamp on the runner, who was to escort us into the realm of flame, setting him inexpressibly apart from us.

"If a man falls, he is left to die. No one can help. No one knows if he'll return alive. Every day we're attacked, but they won't get through. Everyone knows this is about life and death."

Nothing was left in his voice but equanimity, apathy; fire had burned everything else out of it. It's men like that you need for fighting.

That Jünger sees the runner as one of the men “you need for fighting” instead of a pitiable hollow man is pretty characteristic. *Storm of Steel* may not be a Futurist manifesto, but neither is it a rueful anti-war meditation, with the Western Front as a stereotyped literary inferno where Europe is dying and no one is right. Jünger is far from elated by the infernal engines plowing the landscape and vaporizing whole platoons—

—but he doesn’t think they cancel his chivalric-gymnastic idea of soldiering. His war remains an arena of individual dash, a tournament of gallants:

Even in these frightful moments, something droll could happen. A man next to me pulled his rifle to his cheek and pretended to shoot at a rabbit that suddenly came bounding through our lines. It all happened so abruptly, I had to laugh. Nothing is ever so terrible that some bold and amusing fellow can’t trump it.

Storm of Steel was published in 1920 and retained, through numerous revisions (this translation uses the final, 1961 edition), much of Lt. Jünger’s apolitical, athletic euphoria in battle, his consummately personal drive to *win*. His enemy isn’t the British Empire or the French Republic; he seeks out and kills the men in the opposite trench, the opposing team (a year before war broke out, Jünger was in the *French* army—he ran away from school, from the straitened routine of well-to-do bourgeois, and joined the Foreign Legion).

Bruce Chatwin called Jünger’s persona “an aesthete in the center of a tornado, quoting Stendahl” (another soldier-writer-adventurer). To that I would add: a teenage Quixote pursuing a private errand through the battle royale of empires, an incarnation of bardic archaisms amid industrial global war. *Storm of Steel* is shaped as a saga. Jünger consistently favors legendary parallels. Lobbing grenades while storming British trenches is just updated swordplay, really:

Then you hurled your own bomb, and leaped forward. One barely glanced at the crumpled body of one’s opponent; he was finished, and a new duel was commencing. The exchange of hand-grenades reminded me of fencing with foils; you need to jump and stretch, almost as in ballet. It’s the deadliest of duels, as it variably ends with one or other of the participants being blown to smithereens. Or both.

He says his personal attendant, Vinke, “followed me into battle like the squires of yore” (he also scraped Jünger clean after he stumbled into a puddle of someone else’s panic diarrhea). Strolling about in the “radiant and narcotic” lush-blooming May of 1917 Jünger reflects mystically:

It’s easier to go into battle against such a setting than in cold wintry weather. The simple soul is convinced here that his life is deeply embedded in nature, and that his death is no end.

With sacks of grenades strapped across his chest, he led one of the teams of storm troops that stove in the British lines in March 1918, as part of Ludendorff's last-ditch gamble to defeat the Allies before fast-arriving fresh American troops could tip the balance. Jünger gestures only vaguely at the strategic momentousness of the Michael Offensive and gives it a more fabulous title: "The Great Battle." *Storm of Steel* stops in September 1918—not with Germany's impending defeat, but with Jünger's own apotheosis as a warrior. The last line of the book is the text of a telegram he received in hospital: "His Majesty the Kaiser has bestowed on you the order *pour le Mérite*. In the name of the whole division, I congratulate you." The Kaiser, who is two months from abdication and exile; the *Croix pour le Mérite*, established by Frederick the Great, and the highest award available to servants of the dying *Kaiserreich* (Jünger was one of the last to win it, and when he died in 1998, the latest-surviving recipient).

The first 100 pages of *Storm of Steel* bored me, hence the 3 stars, but the remainder is thrilling. I wasn't surprised to read that the bookish half-blind young Borges, with his cult of gaucho knife fights and macabre tangos, adored Jünger's stylish, violent, essentially cold-blooded testament.

In the afternoons, the village was under bombardment from all sorts of weapons and calibers. In spite of the danger, I was always loath to leave the attic window of the house, because it was an exciting sight, watching units and individual messengers hurrying across the field of fire, often hurling themselves to the ground, while the earth whirled and spat to the left and right of them. Peeping over destiny's shoulder like that to see her hand, it's easy to become negligent and risk one's own life.

Of course, Jünger gives off a strong whiff of Fascism. Walter Benjamin dismissed his nationalist writings of the 1920s as "sinister runic humbug." Jünger's archaic airs bear a family resemblance to the programmatic primitivism of the nuttier avant-garde and the Nazis, and Hitler craved his prestigious endorsement—but the same solipsism that allowed Jünger to fight the Great War as a personal quest kept him out of mass politics, however much he condemned the Weimar Republic and dreamt of a rearmed Germany; also, he was not an anti-Semite. With the profits of the bestselling *Storm of Steel* he bought a rural retreat and pursued entomological researches (he was fond of armored beetles). His situation in the 1930s was that of an "internal émigré." We're more comfortable with the Soviet version. Oblique and private opposition to Hitler we read as cowardice, especially in someone with Jünger's untouchable prestige...and access to Hitler, and skill with weapons. From 1938 he was vaguely associated with plots against Hitler, though Clive James says he was "never an active conspirator, he thought he was doing his duty to civilized values merely by despising Hitler. The thought of killing him did not occur." In 1939 he published an allegorical attack on Nazism, *On the Marble Cliffs*, which was suppressed. In 1940 he rejoined the army, and was dismissed 1944 for his closeness to the ringleaders of the Stauffenberg plot. He spent most of the war years in Occupied Paris, indulging his biblio- and oenophilia, dining with André Gide and composing the diaries that in Chatwin's judgment combine "acute observation and an anesthetized sensibility" in "the strangest literary production of the Second World War, stranger by far"—get this—"than anything by Céline or Malaparte." If that weren't enough to pique my interest—AC and Chris Sastre have given me some idea of the strangeness of Céline and Malaparte—Jünger's prewar notebooks of secret dissent and war diaries recur throughout James's *Cultural Amnesia*, as *loci classici* of the crisis of humanism:

When intellectuals conspire to undermine vulgar democracy in favour of a refined dream, it

might seem unfair to condemn them for failing to foresee the subsequent nightmare. And Moeller, though outstandingly qualified, was only one among many. But there were too many: that was the point. Too many well-read men combined to prepare the way for a pitiless hoodlum who despised them, and they even came to value him for being a hoodlum: for lacking scruples, for being a drum of nature. Among the revolutionary conservative intellectuals, Jünger is the real tragic figure. He saw the light, but too late. In his notebooks he gradually de-emphasized his call for conservative revolution led by men who had been "transformed in their being" by the experience of World War I. In 1943, in Paris, he was told the news about the extermination camps, and finally reached the conclusion that he had been staving off since the collapse of the Weimar Republic he had helped to undermine: one of the men whose being had been transformed by their experience of the Great War was Adolf Hitler. The quality Jünger valued most had turned out to be the only one he shared with the man he most despised.

Jim says

This has to be the best bit of WW1 writing I've experienced so far. I've often maintained that the Great War was the last major conflict in which the combatants regarded the foe with a certain amount of respect and chivalrous conduct. They were equals at arms, with neither side having an ungodly edge in technology, as we see today. Junger was typical of young officers of the time, whether they wore the grey or khaki: he was keen to fight, and did so energetically. His aggressive nature can be deduced from the way he kitted himself out for battle (P.168):

I had got together some kit appropriate to the sort of work I meant to be doing: across my chest, two sandbags, each containing four stick-bombs, impact fuses on the left, delay on the right, in my right tunic pocket an 08 pistol on a long cord, in my right trouser pocket a little Mauser pistol, in my left tunic pocket five egg hand grenades, in the left trouser pocket luminous compass and whistle, in my belt spring hooks for pulling out the pins, plus bowie knife and wire-cutters. in my inside tunic pocket I carried a full wallet with my home address, in my right back pocket, a flat flask of cherry brandy."

Junger is not all business, however, and is quick to note humorous or ironical situations. Many passages are tinged with a bit of sardonic humour. I'm sure his colleagues and underlings were somewhat chagrined to find Junger did not mind calling them by name, as in the case of this unfortunate fellow:

"In the platoon left of us, Sergeant Hock, the unfortunate rat-catcher of Monchy, aimed to discharge a white flare, picked up the wrong flare, and instead sent up a red barrage light, which was taken up in all quarters. Straight away our own artillery opened up, and it was a joy to behold. One shell after another came yowling down out of the sky and showered the field ahead of us in a fountain of shards and sparks on impact. A mixture of dust, stale gases and the reek of flung carcasses brewed up from the craters. After this orgy of destruction, the shelling quickly flooded back to its previous levels. One man's slip of the hand had got the whole titanic machinery of war rolling."

During his days in the trenches, Junger and his troops would face French, Indian, and Scots regiments at various times. Prisoners were usually treated humanely, and often troops did not fire on stretcher bearers from the other side. With all that amiable co-operation going around, one wonders why they didn't just drop the guns and go for a beer. Junger ponders that himself, in regarding a Brit soldier he had killed (p.219):

Outside it lay my British soldier, little more than a boy, who had been hit in the temple. He lay there, looking quite relaxed. I forced myself to look closely at him. It wasn't a case of "you or me" any more. I often thought back on him; and more with the passing of the years. The state, which relieves us of our responsibility, cannot take away our remorse; and we must exercise it. Sorrow, regret, pursued me deep into my dreams."

I am happy to enthusiastically recommend this book to anyone, not only war buffs. Junger is an excellent writer and this book is one I will read over and over again, it's just that good.

Benjamin says

"Disturbingly self-aware." Killing did not trouble Junger too much - his ability to move through absolute carnage on an industrial scale cannot but fascinate. The first World War was the charnel house of charnel houses, a maw consuming men and nations whose aftershocks reverberate today not only in Berlin but even in Baghdad. Junger stands in vivid contrast to the ranks of writers who rejected the war and everything it stood for; he found it a positive experience and did not agonize over his experiences. Pointedly, unlike many writers that did agonize over World War I, he lived through World War II and the Cold War to see the reunification of Germany, passing on to the Wagner fest in the sky at a very well seasoned 103. He found the struggle bracing and clarifying, as the struggle for survival put so much of his former life in proper perspective - he regarded it as frightfully trivial. Of course, his viewpoint, enjoying the war on its own terms and having the bad grace not to be destroyed or otherwise mangled, psychologically or physically, despite his many, many wounds, makes him viewed less than favorably by many literary critics and readers. It is not a glorification of war, though, as the details cannot but shock and horrify, but it does depict a man who gloried in his excellence at war, which I think is a distinction. He did not start the war, but once there, he did not find it the worst of all possible fates.

Terence says

Ernst Junger's memoir of his time on the Western Front (1914-1918) is a powerful glimpse at what it's like to be a soldier, made all the more powerful because it's unadorned with philosophical introspection or politics. The reader joins Junger as he joins his unit in Champagne and leaves him during his final convalescence in a Hanover hospital. In between, we vicariously experience the daily life of a German officer and his men - and "vicarious" is about as close as any rational person would want to get to war.

Junger is **not** a pacifist. He did not enter the war an eager, young idealist only to have reality turn him into a burnt-out cynic or ardent pacifist as often seems to happen in other, perhaps better-known memoirs. He entered the war an ardent nationalist and patriot, and came out no less so. He is not, however, blind to the horrors and rampant stupidity and the capricious fortune that makes one man a hero and another a coward (or dead). A couple of examples: In the final months of the war, Junger's company (about 80 men) is ordered to advance against the British lines. They enter the maze of trenches, quickly losing their way and stumble upon an equally confused group of British (New Zealand) soldiers (about 200). The surprise is so complete, the "fog of war" so dense, that, without a melee, Junger's men capture them all. In another engagement, Junger is ordered to take 14 men across the no-man's zone in a reconnaissance mission and to capture some soldiers for interrogation. Almost from the beginning, the patrol goes awry and 10 of the 14 never return. Needless to say, the mission objectives remained unfulfilled. But that appears to be par for the course - little exercises designed to keep the men occupied but with little or no tactical value.

Reading *Storm of Steel*, I'm reminded of Christopher Hedge's *War Is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*

Paperback, where that author argues the allure of war - the feeling of ultimate power and aliveness - is what draws (mostly) men into an army. Junger was the living example of Hedge's theoretical recruit (he died in 1998).

A few of the more affecting passages and observations follow:

The chapter titled "Guillemont" is a nice snapshot of the war. Endless days in the trenches, the filth and physical misery, interrupted by pointless forays against enemy positions. Here and all through the book, Junger's emotional distance strikes the reader (or at least this reader). Colleagues and soldiers drift in and out of the narrative, often with little or no introduction and (perhaps) the briefest of leave takings.

In that same chapter, Junger defines what makes the "good soldier": "Nothing was left in this voice but equanimity, apathy; fire had burned everything else out of it. It's men like that that you need for fighting" (p. 92).

There are flashes of sardonic wit, as when the author describes the travails he encounters trying to protect his bicycles from shellfire: "To this unpleasant bit of target-practice I lost four bicycles.... They were comprehensively remodelled and cast to the four winds" (p. 139).

In that same chapter ("In the Village of Fresnoy") we get another glimpse into Junger's idolization of war and the soldier: "There was in these men a quality that both emphasized the savagery of war and transfigured it at the same time: an objective relish for danger, the chevalieresque urge to prevail in battle. Over four years, the fire smelted an ever-purer, ever-bolder warriorhood" (p. 140).

The hypocrisy and lying in war (regarding the write-up of an action): "Then we discussed the most important aspect of the affair: the report. We wrote it in such a way that we were both satisfied" (p. 155).

Evidence that even a "warrior" need to psych himself up to kill: "...I chewed my pipe and tried to talk myself into feeling brave.... Several times I murmured a phrase of Ariosto's: 'A great heart feels no dread of approaching death, whenever it may come, so long as it be honourable'" (p. 171).

And finally, a troubling sentiment that's excused all sorts of atrocities: "The state, which relieves us of our responsibility, cannot take away our remorse..." (p. 241).

Lee says

I couldn't help associating this WWI memoir with what I've read recently, particularly *Speedboat* and *Sleepless Nights*, that wouldn't seem related at all on the surface but definitely shared a sense of fragmented cohesion, or cohesive fragmentation. This one and those two novels by late-'70s NYC intellectual women offer minimal to zero plot and characterization but excel thanks to unique voice, setting, and perception/vibe. *Storms of Steel* is just as fractured as "Speedboat," with just as many fleeting human encounters but this is differentiated of course by the ever-present possibility of a bullet in the eye, shrapnel severing an essential artery, excessive inhalation of chlorine gas, on and on. Also, as far as I know, Renata Adler never shot an enemy soldier about to capture her as she lay on her back, bleeding, after a bullet punctured her lung. Junger was mentioned a few times in the fifth part of 2666 and last year I read and loved *All Quiet on the Western Front* and also earlier this year read some Imre Kertész Holocaust-related books -- those were the forces at play before reading. After reading, the single lingering impression (beyond "war is hell") is luck. In a concentration camp or in the trenches, death is always there, horrors unimaginable in peacetime are everywhere out in the open, and there's really no way to ensure survival. He's developed elevated

anticipation for incoming bombs and makes many of the right moves at the right time but so often the same move a minute later would've meant death. Junger is wounded six times and comes away with twenty serious scars (entry and exit wounds) and each one, if his body contorted another way or if the trajectory of the shell or bullet had been just a little different this book never would've been written, let alone read 100 years later. A century later, it's still read because it's gripping, so clearly describes the storms and stresses of battle and the times of quiet in-between, and it does so without much theorizing or hand-wringing or editorializing about humanity. For the most part, it's a feat of dramatization. He *shows* courage, mercy, passion, suffering, cowardliness, rage, companionship, sympathy, on and on. His respect for the enemy is remarkable and his impressions of near-death moments, when he thought that death was finally upon him and felt something like lightness and happiness and harmony with the world, noticed how all the pebbles on the ground around him were perfectly and intricately patterned, are reassuring somehow. And when he does generalize about humanity it's always welcomed and well-phrased. Michael Hofmann is a top translator of course (loved his *The Radetzky March*). Sometimes the language seemed to carry excessive British slang, a few times to the point of not making sense or seeming like a word was missing, but as with Berlin Alexanderplatz, I'm sure Hofmann was accurately rendering or at least relaying a sense of old-timey German slang in the original. As with Holocaust novel/memoirs, books like this are good for your perspective -- the general takeaway, despite the daily "fresh hell" of the news, is that things could be worse these days. Imagine everything devastated, every church steeple razed so not to help enemy artillery set its sights, every old tree shattered, little girls in pools of their own blood laid out on the front steps of well-to-do houses, rats everywhere, and the air more or less at all times alive with deadly projectiles. I'm sure if the current president were to read this (or have it read to him), he'd come away with bloodlust more than hunger for ever-lasting peace.
