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Ernst Jünger, *A German Officer in Occupied Paris: The War Journals, 1941-1945*. Foreword by Elliot Neaman. Translated by Thomas S. Hansen and Abby J. Hansen. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019. xxxi + 462 pp. Notes, glossary of personal names, bibliography, and index. $40.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 9780231127400

Review by Julia Torrie, St. Thomas University.

This volume brings the journals of Ernst Jünger, German author, intellectual and man-about-town, to Anglophone readers for the first time. Fascinating, yet also challenging to read, the journals, which are already known to specialist readers, offer glimpses into the life of a German officer in occupied Paris and beyond.

Intriguing as they are, Jünger's journals are problematic for several reasons. One problem is Jünger's style, his distanced stance and his inability, or refusal, to view himself as implicated in the violence of military occupation. A second involves the reception of these journals, which were controversial when they were first published in 1949 and have remained so ever since. Additional difficulties emerge from the fact that, as a literary production that first appeared four years after the Second World War ended, the journals are closer to memoirs than to diaries, a circumstance that colours any use of them as historical sources. Finally, there are questions about Jünger's representativeness as a witness, notably to the occupation of France. Some of these problems are addressed briefly in this English edition. Considering all four in more detail would have increased the depth and scholarly reach of the volume.

Thomas S. Hansen and Abby J. Hansen's able translation echoes the composition of Jünger's 1949 publication, *Strahlungen* (emanations or rays).[1] Thus, it includes the author's first and second Paris journals, covering the periods from 18 February 1941 through 23 October 1942 and 19 February 1943 through 13 August 1944, respectively. Between these two longer stints in Paris, Jünger served a short tour of duty on the Eastern Front, a period reflected in his "Notes from the Caucasus." The volume is rounded out by Jünger's entries from when he returned home to Kirchhorst, near Hanover, after leaving Paris in mid-August 1944, through 11 April 1945, when American tanks reached his hometown. A foreword by historian Elliot Neaman provides a short biographical sketch of Jünger, contextualizes some of the events in the journals, and gives an overview of the main themes.[2] In a preface, the translators offer brief remarks about the historical and human interest of the work, as well as its style.

It would be a mistake to take these journals purely as evidence, or as a true "record" of occupation life. Jünger's style is dream-like and impressionistic, with an eye for arresting details that the

author then uses as a window onto whole landscapes. Readers may be impressed by Jünger's ability to evoke atmosphere, and fascinated by the aspects of wartime daily life that he observes almost by accident. Equally, like other journals, the text is a literary production shaped by the author's own personality and agendas. Jünger was an intellectual, an aesthete and something of a snob, by turns congenial and self-absorbed. He has been criticized, not without reason, for adopting a distanced stance to the direct violence he witnessed, and for appearing to swan around Paris largely oblivious to the oppression caused by the German occupation. Jünger's account of his experience fighting in the Caucasus is more pared down and factual in style, and he comes across as less self-absorbed, though the entries for this period also record dreams and aestheticized observations. It is as if his constructed persona shifts to accommodate the harsher conditions of the Eastern Front in the late fall of 1942, as the Stalingrad pocket closes, and there is little place for an intellectual gad-fly.

The distinctive tone and some of the difficulties of reading Jünger's journals are suggested by a passage that Neaman cites near the opening of his preface. In August 1942, Jünger wrote that while in uniform, he was buying a notebook in a stationary shop when he "was struck by the expression on the face of a young girl behind the counter: it was clear that she was staring at me with deep hatred" (p. x). On the face of it, it seems that Jünger has recognized how much some Parisians disliked the Germans. At the same time, the passage poses several problems. A minor one is the challenge of translating a phrase like "mit erstaunlichem Haß," which Neaman's preface renders as "with deep hatred" (p. x), while at the entry for 18 August 1942, the translation is given as "with incredible hatred" (p. 89). The phrase might also have been translated as "with astonishing hatred" or "with remarkable hatred." More significantly, Neaman suggests that Jünger left the shop in "deep thought" and returned to his work reading and censoring German occupiers' letters. Based on Neaman's account, readers may assume that Jünger was thinking deeply about his situation as an occupier, and perhaps pondering how he might have felt had he been placed in the position of the French shop assistant. Yet the journal passage that directly follows the one highlighted by Neaman actually details Jünger's thoughts, and reveals that this experience served neither as an opportunity to reflect on his own position as an occupier, nor as a nudge to consider, attempt to understand, and perhaps even to sympathize with the plight of the French population. Instead, Jünger moved outward from the look of hatred into generalized musings about his belief that "this intensity of human emotion had not existed for a long time. The shafts of such glaring looks can bring us nothing but ruin and death....it wants to spread like an epidemic or a spark that can be extinguished only deep inside, with difficulty and self-control" (p. 89). The shop girl's look is universalized, made to represent the human capacity to hate more generally, and thereby its specific target, Jünger, is erased. This passage might stand in for the journals as a whole, for Jünger's own agency and the possibility of his complicity in oppression have almost completely disappeared.

It is well known that Jünger was sympathetic to some of the ideas behind Nazism, yet no friend of the party apparatus, its mass organizations and racial ideology, its desire to control and unify German life. His position was highly ambiguous, for he did not go into exile like some other writers, yet Neaman informs us that when Hitler sought to meet Jünger, the author refused. Jünger's book, *The Worker*, published in 1932, was criticized in the Nazi party organ, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, and Jünger would not allow his work to be published in that newspaper. The fact that he never passed the military rank of Captain (despite having been highly decorated during the First World War) is a sign that the hierarchy did not consider him fully trustworthy, and that he himself did not seek further advancement. Jünger transmitted information about

planned roundups in Paris, thus saving Jewish lives, and was linked to several of the figures behind the 20 July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life. At the same time, he never suggested that he might have been a resister, nor came out publicly as such.

Unsurprisingly, given the ambiguities of Jünger's position, his journals were controversial from the outset. It is regrettable that this edition includes no information about their reception, a subject about which Neaman has written elsewhere. Several reviewers, and most notably the emigré writer Peter de Mendelssohn, criticized Jünger for aestheticizing violence, and for producing journals that were "a triumph of irrelevancy," little more than intellectual self-satisfaction, less about the war than about himself.[3] Other reviewers, especially those on the political right, were more receptive, and Jünger enjoyed a postwar career as an author and public intellectual, a firm partisan of what Neaman describes as "conservative modernism."[4]

Beyond the journals' reception, this volume also fails to address the fact that these texts, written during the war, were first published in 1949. An early segment called *Gärten und Strassen* (Gardens and Streets), which covered the period from early April 1939 through late July 1940, appeared in 1942. However, Jünger kept his other wartime journals, the ones translated here, out of the public eye until the end of the war. This complicates any historical reading tremendously, raising issues that could have been considered in greater detail.

As de Mendelssohn recognized, these texts are in no way "authentic" records of wartime--they are a construction, a version of Jünger's experiences as he chose to make them available to a wider audience after the war had ended. Critics typically refer to them as "journals" to underline the point that Jünger's form is literary, but the texts' date of publication makes them closer to memoirs than anything else. Jünger clearly revisited his work after the war, something that is addressed briefly in this volume's preface. The translators explain that Jünger often revised his work, including his World War One narrative, *Storms of Steel*, which he "drastically edited...by toning down or removing indications of his youthful, subjective voice" (p. xxix). They then suggest that "something similar happen[ed] to the compositional process of these wartime journals" (p. xxix-xxx). This explanation does not go nearly far enough, for it fails to take into account the fact that Jünger was preparing these texts for publication in the immediate postwar years, at a time when he and many other Germans had a strong interest in downplaying their own role and complicity in the crimes of the Third Reich.

Several passages of Jünger's text echo the narratives and self-justifications of the postwar period, rather than the wartime years. Comparisons of the journals' published version with key passages in Jünger's notes and his diary manuscripts support this point, as explained below. But even without examining Jünger's manuscripts alongside the published text, the following segment stands out, suggesting the degree to which these published works were shaped by postwar preoccupations, rather than wartime ones. On 8 February 1942, Jünger reported that he had just read Lieutenant General Hans Speidel's notes about a recent visit to Hitler's headquarters, and that, "These altered my opinion that strategies of elimination--those efforts to murder by shooting, starving, and exterminating--are produced by a general nihilistic tendency in our age. Of course that is also true, but behind the swarms of herrings, there are sharks driving them on" (p. 49). It seems highly unlikely that Jünger wrote these words in this form during the Third Reich. They are dangerously specific for a man who knew he was being watched and they dovetail too well with a narrative that emerged in the early postwar years that pointed fingers at Hitler

and other high-level leaders (the "sharks") while downplaying the responsibility of the majority of the population for the Third Reich's crimes (the "herring").

This example suggests how Jünger's construction of his wartime experiences may have shifted in the postwar years. Supporting this point, scholar Felix Krömer has undertaken a detailed comparison of Jünger's drafts and the published version of his work. Krömer traces notably the way that Jünger used careful editing of the handwritten notes and diaries he kept during the war to obfuscate his extramarital affair with a Parisian woman, Sophie Revoux, whom he called the "*doctoresse.*"[5] Krömer has also examined various versions of well-known passages in the journals, including an entry from 29 May 1941 that describes Jünger's experiences as part of a firing squad. Early drafts depict the author in charge of a unit tasked with carrying out the killing. In the published version, Jünger reinforced several subtle indications that he was an unwilling participant in this event, and deflected responsibility for the violence from himself by adding a superior officer who led the unit.[6] Krömer has also shown that Jünger rewrote several times entries dealing with the German Military Commander Otto von Stülpnagel's conflicts with Berlin over reprisals for French resistance activities. These passages were reworked to downplay Stülpnagel's initial support for reprisals, recorded in Jünger's rough notes, and to paint Stülpnagel as a "tragic figure" instead.[7]

In the end, perhaps the number and even the content of Jünger's revisions makes little difference as long as readers understand these journals as literary texts, constructions rather than accurate reflections of past realities. At the same time, blanking out the postwar context of their final production may lead to lop-sided and ahistorical readings of texts that are, too often, taken as eye-witness testimony to German experiences of the occupation of France.

Reading Jünger's journals as an historical source is complicated for one final reason that could have been better addressed in this volume--the fact that Jünger was by no means a typical soldier or occupier. Insofar as the journals reflect wartime experiences at all, they should not be taken to stand in for Germans' views of war more generally, or their perspective on France during the occupation, specifically. Yet at least in the English-language literature, no account that considers the Germans' perspective on the occupation omits Jünger, and he is often cited alone, or nearly so, as if his attitudes were typical. If his writing can be taken to represent anyone at all beyond himself, it is only a very small cadre of highly educated officers in Paris. Nothing could be further from the experiences of a foot soldier stationed on the Atlantic Wall, or a reservist guarding a prison camp on the Bay of Biscay, the types of men who made up the majority of the occupation forces, than Jünger's life in Paris, where he rubbed shoulders with the French collaborationist intelligentsia, the circle of men around German ambassador Otto Abetz, and artists of international renown like Pablo Picasso or Jean Cocteau.

This translation will bring Jünger's work to a wider audience, making it accessible to undergraduate readers and other non-specialists. It is unfortunate that the publisher did not take the opportunity to produce a fuller critical edition of this problematic and self-involved portrayal of a soldier's and occupier's life. Jünger's work can tell us a great deal about Jünger, and far less than it is often taken to reveal about the German occupation of France, German soldiers' experiences, or the war as a whole.

NOTES

[1] Ernst Jünger, *Strahlungen* (Tübingen: Heliopolis Verlag, 1949).

[2] Neaman has written about Jünger more extensively in *A Dubious Past: Ernst Jünger and the Politics of Literature after Nazism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

[3] Neaman, *A Dubious Past*, p. 147.

[4] Neaman, *A Dubious Past*, p. 168.

[5] Felix Krömer, "Die Handschriften von Ernst Jüngers Pariser Tagebüchern - stereoskopisch betrachtet," *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 15/2(2005): 337–51. Alan Mitchell draws on Krömer's work in *The Devil's Captain: Ernst Jünger in Nazi Paris, 1941-1944* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011).

[6] Krömer, "Handscriften," pp. 345-347.

[7] Krömer, "Handscriften," p. 347.

Julia Torrie
St. Thomas University
jtorrie@stu.ca

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