

LAUGHTER IN THE TRENCHES: HUMOUR AND FRONT EXPERIENCE
IN GERMAN FIRST WORLD WAR NARRATIVES

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the appearances and functions of humour and laughter in selected works of German literature that thematise the First World War. The investigation focuses on selected diaries, novels, and short stories based on autobiographical experiences written by authors during the Great War and in the Weimar era (1919-1933): *In Stahlgewittern* by Ernst Jünger (1920), *Vormarsch* by Walter Bloem (1916), *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* by Arnold Zweig (1927), and *Im Westen nichts Neues* by Erich Maria Remarque (1929). In addition, the parodic imitations of *Im Westen nichts Neues*, the text *Vor Troja nichts Neues* by Emil Marius Requark (1930) and the movie *So Quiet on the Canine Front* by Zion Myers and Jules White (1931), are discussed as significant polemical contributions that use humoristic strategies to undermine or stress the elements of the original. The main focal point of the study is the relationship between representations of humour, military violence, and power. The purpose of the study is to investigate whether the justifications of violence and power structures constructed by the narratives are confirmed or questioned by the use of humour and laughter. Furthermore, the study examines the role of humour and laughter in the construction of gender roles, with a concentration on soldier masculinity. The analysis establishes narrative conventions in the representation of humour and laughter that are exhibited by all selected literary works about the First World War that played an important role in the in the socio-political life of the Weimar Republic, regardless of their ideological assignment.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Humour and war: two mutually exclusive phenomena?

The first question that many of the readers of this study will probably ask looking at its title is: is there anything at all funny about the First World War? The connection between humour and the topic of the war may appear unlikely, for we are used to regard the conflict of 1914-1918 as grim and serious, one of the lowest points in 20th-century history. Still, is there no place for humour in it? And if there is, of what nature is that humour? Though the first question may seem more baffling initially, if we agree—and I hope most readers will in the course of this study—that some scenes in the narrations about the Great War are able to evoke humorous responses, it is the second question that makes things complicated. How do we come to an understanding about which literary images have the same appeal to all of us: which make us laugh, smile, or express our amusement in any other form? And will the same scenes still be funny when we talk in detail about why they are funny? Doesn't dissecting them kill the joy?

These are just some basic difficulties I encountered while investigating the functions of humour and laughter in German narratives about the First World War. The main reason for the problems is the ephemeral and highly subjective character of humour: the essence of any humorous situation is very difficult to define, and, when defined, loses a lot of its attractiveness. As the American author and prose stylist Elwyn Brooks White summed up the investigative effort in his essay "Some Remarks on Humour": "Humour can be dissected as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind" (243). Yet despite this discouraging premise, humour and laughter as subjects of study have attracted scholars and writers for

centuries and provoked countless attempts to create theories about why people find something funny and what the nature of humour and laughter is. Especially since the late 1960s, we can observe a growing interest in humour and laughter in scholarly literature, with significant contributions in the fields of psychology, medicine, linguistics, philosophy, and literary criticism. The emerging interest in humour can be interpreted as a sign of appreciation of the important role that this phenomenon plays in human life—in all aspects of human life, including war.

In this study, I would like to concentrate on the incongruity between the topics of humour, laughter, and war in First World War German literature. My selection of the events of the Great War as the content of the literary depictions is not coincidental. The First World War, with its disregard for individual life on the battlefield and its employment of technology to a degree never experienced in military history before, pushed the limits of the imaginable with the uncovering of the massive character of death and destruction. As Modris Eksteins has put it in the title of his study about the Great War, the shock of this war constitutes the "birth of the modern age."¹ The authors of the literary representations of the military conflict who participated in the war as front soldiers subsequently struggled to find the most suitable language for the depiction of the scale and impact of the killing on the battlefield. The dominance of death and suffering in their—now popular—images of the war is the main reason why the occurrences of humour in the context of the First World War may seem incongruous, perhaps even shocking. Readers usually solve the experience of incongruity by disregarding or downplaying the occurrences of "funniness" (with which humour and laughter are

1 See Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1994).

associated) in the "serious" depictions of the First World War. Yet this is precisely what interests me: the controversial area where the juxtapositions of apparently conflicting elements, such as episodes characterized as funny in a setting dominated by extreme violence and death, provoke questions about their purpose and their functional placement in the narration.

In order of procedure, I will first—excuse my joke provoked by the military context—choose my weapon from the wide arsenal of existing humour research. In section 1.2 of this chapter, I will provide a survey of the terminology used in humour scholarship and describe the attempts to define the phenomena under investigation here. I will discuss the relationship between and outline the main theories of humour and laughter along with most established existing taxonomies of the theories, concentrating on theories of humour and laughter based on incongruity and superiority. Incongruity and superiority, as the main components of those humorous situations commonly associated with inter-social relationships, are located in opposition to more individualistic factors playing a role in humour. They interest me especially because I intend to focus on the social significance of humour and laughter and the impact both phenomena have on interpersonal interactions. The theoretical concerns emerging from the social applications of humour and laughter will also be discussed here.

My study focuses on selected diaries, novels, and short stories based on autobiographical experiences written by German authors during the Great War and in the Weimar era (1919-1933). The especially rich artistic resonance of the war in German literature derives doubtlessly from the fact that Germany was one of the main participants in a conflict that affected, directly or indirectly, the majority of its population. The same can be said, however, about British or French first-hand accounts of the war. What I find

especially significant in the context of the literary processing of the war experience in Germany is the early reception of the war works and their instrumentalization in contemporaneous power struggles (that, in return, influenced the works' positioning within the literary discourse). The problem of the interpretation of the Great War—reflected mainly in the German literary representations of the conflict—grew into a dividing issue between the antidemocratic conservative militarist groups and the pacifist left-wing intellectuals and politicians of the time. This will be illustrated in section 1.3 of this chapter, in which I will: 1) provide an overview of the situation on the literary market in Germany in the last years of the war and in the Weimar Republic; 2) describe the debate about the evaluation of the war literature and about the experience of the lost war in the last years before Hitler's seizure of power.

In chapters 2 to 5, which constitute the main analytical part of my study, I will take a closer look at material selected from the wide range of war literature published between 1914 and 1933. The deciding factor in the selection of the material was the crucial role played by soldier diaries, autobiographical novels and short stories in the socio-political life of Weimar Germany between 1919 and 1933. They are texts for which the "authenticity of the experience" of their author has been assumed by the readers: *In Stahlgewittern* [*Storm of Steel*] (1920) by Ernst Jünger (described in chapter 2), *Vormarsch* [*The Advance from Mons 1914*] (1916) by Walter Bloem (chapter 3), *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* [*The Case of Sergeant Grischa*] (1927) by Arnold Zweig (chapter 4), and *Im Westen nichts Neues* [*All Quiet on the Western Front*] (1929) by Erich Maria Remarque (chapter 5). My rationales for selecting the four works and for placing them in this particular order are the following: first, the common subject of the works is the First World War. Given the overwhelming number of works on the First

World War that were published on the German market between 1914 and 1933, the starting point for the selection of the material is determined by the participation of the narrators and/or protagonists as German front soldiers in the war. Second, the literary material I selected for the purpose of my study allows me to reflect both main directions in the narrative interpretation of the war experience: the glorification of the usefulness of the military actions for the development of German society (right-wing literary and political formations) and the negation of the meaning of war (left-wing groups). The two most acclaimed and well-known representatives of the two directions frame the study: Ernst Jünger and his *In Stahlgewittern* opens the analytical part of the study, and Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues*, the most popular German First World War narration, which has yielded a respectable number of parodies and travesties, concludes it. Between the two poles of the political and literary landscape of the Weimar Republic I place Walter Bloem and his war memoir *Vormarsch* as an intriguing and almost completely forgotten voice of the older generation of conservative nationalists who participated in the war, and *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa*, Arnold Zweig's successful novel debut that initiated the literary and political debate about the lost war and prepared the ground for the controversial reception of Remarque's novel. The selected works also represent a variety of literary forms and extra-literary circumstances that influenced their publication and success with the readers. They include a first-hand account written as a diary and prepared for publication during the war (*Vormarsch*); a first-hand account that underwent a series of changes and editions and was published in book form directly after the war (*In Stahlgewittern*); fictional material of dramatic origin that was transformed into a novel a decade after first being written (*Der Streit um den*

Sergeanten Grischa); and a fictional text that appeared as an autobiographical novel preceded by a skilfully crafted marketing campaign (*Im Westen nichts Neues*).

All the selected works in my study became—although to different degrees of intensity—objects of the debates and struggles of antagonistic social and political movements in Weimar Germany and were used to support different ideological positions within the Republic. Therefore, the goal of my study is to investigate whether the humour and laughter present in the narratives also contributed to the development of the images of war that dominated the war discourse and post-war cultural and socio-political debates in Germany. I would like to focus on the relationship between representations of military violence, power, and humour, in order to determine whether the power structures constructed by the narratives are confirmed or questioned by the use of humour and laughter. The most important questions are: first, how are humour and laughter presented in the discussed works? Here, I will use close textual analysis and focus on the representation of humour; my goal is to show in what narrative situations humour and laughter are mentioned and to search for a pattern in the introduction of humorous episodes and laughter scenes in the narrations. This will allow me to establish the narrative conventions in the representation of humour and laughter, conventions exhibited by all selected works about the First World War, regardless of their ideological assignment. Second, I will concentrate on the question of whether humour and laughter confirm or contradict other rhetorical means of the narratives, means that have been emphasized and instrumentalized in the post-war discussion about the war and that have helped place the specific works (along with its authors) in the "pro-war" or "anti-war" category. I believe that the results of my investigation will provide a basis for reconsidering such classifications based on conventional reception history: what the

soldiers in the narrations are laughing about provides important yet mostly overlooked clues that help define the narrators' positions towards individual and structural violence, towards the question of the meaning of war, and towards the institutions of military or political power. Analysed from this perspective, the texts reveal that the trenches dug between the pacifist and militarist camps in the Weimar Republic are shallower than they appear.

In order to achieve the goals described above, I will focus on the social relationships in the narrations in order to show how they are determined, expressed, and influenced by humour and laughter. Of special interest are the social interactions between soldiers in the military unit, between soldiers of the same rank, and between soldiers and their commanders. The hierarchical structure of the military allows me to analyse the relations among high-status soldiers who direct laughter towards other high-rank soldiers, low-status soldiers laughing at other soldiers (their commanders and comrades), high-status soldiers laughing at soldiers who receive orders from them, and among low-status soldiers who are laughed at by others. I will show whether the power structures within the closed and hierarchical group of the front military unit constituted by direct and structured violence (manifested, for example, in the form of orders, military drills, penalties, and rules) are confirmed or questioned by the use of humour and laughter. The question of whether the humour and laughter used by members of the social group have a corrective, subversive, or inversive character and the influencing factors for this character will also be discussed.

In addition, I will describe the soldiers' contacts with their family and friends who do not face the front life and are not able to imagine the extensive use of military technology and massive destruction during the "material battles" of the First World War.

I intend to demonstrate the use and functions of humour and laughter when members of two different social configurations (civilian world and martial world) are confronted and attempt to interact with each other during home stays, holidays, vacations, and hospital visits. I will consider the relationships between different generations (fathers and sons) and pose the question of how they use humour to start, re-build, or modify their relationship or to avoid a closer connection. I will further look at another type of intragroup relationship: the social interactions of the German soldiers with the enemy (members of the French, Russian, and English armies), in which laughter and humour are also applied to accomplish certain goals. Here, I will investigate in detail the function of humour and laughter in the reinforcement of national and racial stereotypes.

Recognizing the military as a social structure, I will pay special attention both to esteeming (inoffensive) and disparaging (aggressive) humour—explained in the theoretical part of this chapter—and investigate the possible functions they play in establishing and maintaining the relationships within the social group of the military. The question of how to judge the character of humour and how to decide if humour is present in given narrative situations will be answered by analysing the narrator's and/or other figures' assessment of the depicted event. If German lexemes associated with the use of humour (such as "komisch," "lustig," "Komik," "witzig," "Witz," "spaßig," "possenhaft," "Spaß," "ulkig," "lachhaft," "ridikül," "lächerlich," etc.) appear in the narration, the event will be considered humorous, no matter what the reader's reception of the event might be. Lexemes describing the physical activity of laughter (such as "lachen," "grinsen," "lächeln," "schmunzeln," "kichern," "wiehern," "brüllen," etc.) will also be analysed carefully and in consideration of the narrative environment, given the generally accepted position in humour research that laughter is not necessarily connected to a humorous

event. I will analyse the communication patterns between the participants in the established humorous relationship in order to determine the character of humour and its functions in the given relationship and setting.

Although there are a number of First World War literary representations authored by German women writers,² my selection is limited to works by male authors. The reasons for the selection of war works in regard to gender are twofold. First, during the First World War, the German army was a world dominated by males; women were almost completely excluded from military service in the first line. For that reason, the overwhelming majority of autobiographical texts authored by front soldiers that appeared on the market during and after the war were written by men. Second, assuming that the use of humour and laughter is gendered,³ the "male" humour and laughter should demonstrate certain patterns in the homosocial group of the German army.⁴ The situations described in the narratives are a testing ground for many assumptions about gender that

2 See, for example, the studies about the German literary works authored by women: Catherine O'Brien, *Women's Fictional Responses to the First World War: A Comparative Study of Selected Texts by French and German Writers* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997); Joan Montgomery Byles, *War, Women, and Poetry, 1914-1945: British and German Writers and Activists* (Newark: U of Delaware Press, 1995). The most analyses are limited, however, to poems and fictional works. For the personal narratives by non-German women authors, see also Margaret R. Higonnet, *Lines of Fire: Women Writers of World War I* (New York: Plume, 1999).

3 See Helga Kotthoff, ed., *Das Gelächter der Geschlechter: Humor und Macht in Gesprächen von Frauen und Männern* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1988).

4 I use the term "homosocial" according to the definition offered by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her study *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985): "'Homosocial' is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with 'homosexual,' and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual.' In fact, it is applied to such activities as 'male bonding,' which may, as in our society, be intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality" (1).

were present in the German social discourse of the time, especially assumptions connecting masculinity with combat and war.⁵ Therefore, I am interested in demonstrating what constitutes the "masculinity" of soldiers, and how this masculinity is affirmed or questioned by the laughter of men. My work is an attempt to connect social theories of humour and laughter with the myths of soldier masculinity and of the "band of brothers"—manifestations of male solidarity, affirmation of heroism, physical strength, sexual potential, and dominant and hostile behaviour towards women, who, in this discourse, are represented by the absent beloved the soldiers fantasize about and "occasional" women the soldiers meet (for example, during visits in occupied towns and villages, home visits, hospital stays). In this context, my study offers interpretations of sexually aggressive jokes and puns, jokes about the "feminized" ("womanish") and "weak" enemy, along with comments about relationships between men and women which are received (presented by the narrator) as funny and humorous. I will take a closer look at how the absence of actual women in the military unit is compensated for and to what extent the typical gender roles are modified or subverted by humorous uses of communication patterns. The role played by soldiers, defined as "masculine," has a performative character and consists of conventions that are constantly repeated, imitated

5 To the most conclusive research projects theorizing masculinities belong the studies linking combat, the military, and violence with masculinity and investigating the development of militant masculinity models in national societies. Nationalism, according to Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner, is a set of cultural constructions. According to that concept, George Mosse in *Das Bild des Mannes: Zur Konstruktion der modernen Männlichkeit* (1997) describes militant masculinity as a centerpiece of all varieties of nationalist movements. The "geobody of the nation" (the image of the homeland as a female body) is a gendered entity, and national narratives often define the duties of men and women in a dichotomous, gendered way. The specialized studies that investigate the relation between masculinity, combat, and their cultural representations include Klaus Theweleit's *Männerphantasien* (1977-78), or David Morgan's *Theater of War: Combat, the Military, and Masculinities* (1994).

or mimed. I will examine these conventions, and the way they are impersonated, according to the concept of performativity of gender.⁶ From this point of view, the performance of gender roles and family roles within the one-gender social system of the military unit is remarkable: male soldiers sometimes take up the role of the mother (confirmed, for example, by witty remarks from other soldiers), while others fit into the roles of the father and children.

What I am not going to do in this study—dodging the bullet shot in the opening questions of this chapter, if I may use the military metaphor again—is conduct an investigation of the present or timeless humoristic appeal of the discussed narrations. This means that I do not intend to look for humour and laughter in places where their use has not been described in the narrative or implied by the genre of the work. I believe that the attempts to answer the question of whether the present reader would judge the depicted scenes as humorous or funny does not yield any productive results that can be used in further theoretical investigation of humour. The reason is simple: the factors that contribute to humour production depend on a plethora of individual differences which defy all survey attempts. Depending, for example, on the individual's life experience, age, gender, race, education, and literary preferences, the social configuration the individual is entering, the repetitive exposure to the scene, and other factors, the reader can find a scene funny that no other reader of the same text would perceive in a similar way. What's more: the same reader may not find the scene funny in a different setting, for example while reading it for a second time, in a different mood or disposition, or in the presence of another person. In short, the question of whether there is something that never ceases

6 I am following the concept of performativity of gender proposed by Judith Butler. See her studies *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."*

to be funny and can be always seen as such—like the universal and extremely dangerous "funniest joke in the world" from Monty Python's *Flying Circus*—has to be answered negatively.⁷

1.2. Outline of humour research and terminology

1.2.1. Humour and laughter

No attempt to provide a comprehensive theory of humour—that would account for every occurrence of and condition for a humorous situation—has been able to satisfy all scholars involved in humour research. Existing theories of humour are limited to particular disciplines: for instance, their authors aspire to define humour within the areas of medicine, psychology, literature, visual arts, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology, while a more interdisciplinary approach is needed. The scholars' problems with analysing humour emerge already with the attempt to create a definition of humour that would encompass the complexity of the phenomenon, explain the enormously broad spectrum of humour appearances, and satisfy all investigators of humour who try to capture the multiple conditions under which humour can be observed. The theorists are therefore divided over the causes, mechanisms, and functions of humour and often offer explanations that are very effective in accounting for certain aspects of humour while completely disregarding others.

The position in humour research of another phenomenon related to humour, laughter, is also disputed. Laughter, which is constituted by a series of physiological reflexes, such as clonic spasms of the diaphragm and face muscle contractions, is often

7 See "The Funniest Joke in the World," *Monty Python's Flying Circus: Episode 1*, dir. Graham Chapman, perf. Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones. 1969, DVD, A&E Home Video, 1999.

described as the overt expression of humour. A close relationship between humour and laughter is commonly asserted both in general assumptions about the nature of humour and in the specialized literature on the subject. Laughter is interpreted as a behavioral pattern typical for but not limited to human beings that can be observed in the early stages of physical, physiological, and behavioral development (Washburn 1929, Ambrose 1963). Many scholars assume that laughter as a typical reaction to humorous situations is universal across cultures.⁸

Many of the earlier attempts to define humour—especially those dealing with the phenomenon in the 19th century—equate humour with laughter and do not consider the occurrences of non-humorous laughter or of humorous situations that do not culminate in the laughter of any of the parties involved. In the most of the literature about humour in the 20th century, however, humour and laughter are perceived as two different phenomena not necessarily complementary to each other: observations of human behavior during the First and Second World Wars have made clear that non-humorous situations can also induce laughter, especially under conditions of extreme stress and conflicting impulses. Other factors are also in play. According to David H. Munro's study *Argument of Laughter* (1951), the most frequent non-humorous triggers of laughter include: tickling, laughing gas (NO₂), nervousness, relief after a strain, release from restraint, the defense against abuse or peer pressure, the experience of stress or horror (when the recipient "laughs it off"), the expression of physical and emotional well-being, play, make-believe, and the winning of a contest or competition (20-34).

⁸ See the overview of anthropological research on humour by Mahadev Apte, *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach* (Ithaca: Cornell U Press, 1985) 22-23.

On the other hand, there are situations recognized by the recipient as funny that do not necessarily lead to a laughing response, usually in the case when the recipient is alone. In general, laughter is seen as the overt but not as the sole expression of humour and is not limited to humorous situations. Laughter is a response to humour on the level of psychological reflexes and is described as a chain of physiological processes.

Some recent studies still neglect the fact that humour and laughter may be different phenomena, for instance Neil Schaeffer's *The Art of Laughter* (1981), where the difference between humour and laughter is not marked, though the distinction between humour and laughter is currently the most dominant tendency in humour research and is supported by experimental studies. Patricia Keith-Spiegel, in her theoretical overview of humour research "Early Conceptions of Humor: Varieties and Issues" (1972), makes a clear distinction between humour and laughter and remarks rightly: "[I]f laughter were indeed an exact yardstick with which to measure humour experiences, we might have solved many of the riddles of humour long ago" (17). In the most recent studies on humour, the division between humorous and non-humorous laughter is respected and problematized, for instance by Paul Lewis in *Comic Effects* (1989), which criticizes sharply Schaeffer's theoretical approach and rejects the assumption that laughter is the only expression of humour (5-7). Robert R. Provine, in his sociological study *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation* (2000), offers an overview of the research on laughter and argues that—contrary to the older notion of laughter—laughs and smiles are most often found in non-humorous social interactions and define the relations between the participants in the interactions.⁹

⁹ Robert R. Provine, *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation* (New York: Viking, 2000). See also Robert R. Provine, "Laughter." *American Scientist* 84.1 (1996): 38-47.

The discrepancy between laughter and humour, discovered by the fields of sociology and literary studies relatively late, was noticed in the field of medicine starting in the late 19th century. Particularly the pathological, non-humorous variants of laughter have enjoyed the interest of neurologists, but very recently the appearances of laughter that is not associated with brain dysfunctions have also been investigated.¹⁰ In addition, the relationship between humour and smiling constitutes a point of interest for humour scholars, as do the different levels of laughter intensity expressed in a variety of physiological reactions. In my study, I acknowledge the distinction between humour and laughter described above and investigate the occurrences of joking interaction between the figures, the narrator's descriptions of subjectively experienced feeling that he calls "humour," and the depictions of laughter or smiling in the narrations, without assuming that all the occurrences result necessarily from amusement about an event, figure, or other element in the narrative.

1.2.2. Terminology

The definition of laughter as a chain of physiological processes and its separation from humour is an important step in providing more clarity to the field of humour research. But what is actually the phenomenon called "humour"? Do we all use the word to describe the same occurrences? Outside of the discipline of clinical medicine, where

10 For information about current research in the field of medicine, see the article "Neural Correlates of Laughter and Humour" by Barbara Wild, Frank A. Rodden, Wolfgang Grodd, and Willibald Ruchoffers, which provides a detailed description of terminology and recent medical assumptions about laughter and humour: Barbara Wild, et al., "Neural Correlates of Laughter and Humour," *Brain* 126.10 (2003): 2121-38.

the nomenclature is precisely set,¹¹ there is no consensus about the terminology. This is especially true in literary scholarship on humour and laughter. Although "humour" is the broadest and most commonly used term in the anglophone world to describe the phenomenon that may lead to laughter or other expressions of physical comfort and relaxation, there exist many synonymous terms that describe similar occurrences. In addition to the theoretical difficulties with the categorization of the appearances of humour, the dominant attitude towards humour is based on the assumption that there is a general consensus about what is "funny" and that we do not have to negotiate its definition. This intuitive assessment of humour connected with the arbitrary use of terminology contributes even further to the confusion about the subject. Many partial synonyms for humorous occurrences are accounted for by Patricia Keith-Spiegel and in the analysis *Humor and Society: Explorations in the Sociology of Humor* by Marvin Koller (1988). Keith-Spiegel and Koller remark that besides the term "humour," most popular in the English language context are the words "funny," "wit," "comic," "comedy," "joke" and "jokingly," "satiric," "mirthful," "ridicule" and "ridiculous," "ludicrous," "laughable," "amusement" and "amusing." In total, the authors name over fifty words that are used to describe the objects and forms that lead to the production of humour, the characteristics of these objects and forms, and/or the effects of humour production. Often two or more terms are used interchangeably and arbitrarily to describe the complex phenomenon. In the German literature on humour, the terms "Komödie," "das Komische," "Komik," and "Witz," to give just a few examples, are used to describe

11 See the contributions by K. Poeck, "Pathological Laughter and Crying," *Handbook of Clinical Neurology*, vol. 45, ed. Frederics, J. A. M. (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 1985) 219-25. Also Barbara Wild, et al., "Neural Correlates of Laughter and Humour," *Brain* 126.10 (2003): 2121-38.

similar subjects, but the semantic connotations are often different from their English equivalents. The discrepancies result from the different development of the scholarly discourses on humour and the divergences in the literary tradition of humorous genres.¹² These differences are discussed in the analytical part of my study. Although I provide the English translation of passages from the original German texts, I recognize that the semantic compatibility of German and English words will vary, depending on the translator's interpretation of the particular German word describing a humorous occurrence (including my own translation of works not yet published in English). In cases where this is particularly problematic, I refer to the German original text and the contextual use of a particular word or phrase as clues about the humorous character of the described interaction.

1.2.3. Theories of humour and laughter: a short survey

Attempts to give a clear answer to the question of whether humour is a stimulus, a response, or a disposition, bring scholars into theoretical difficulties. Authors often offer explanations that are very effective in clarifying certain aspects of humour but overlook others. While many taxonomies of laughter have been produced, there is no specific theory of humour that would be generally accepted among humour scholars—humour can take many forms and can fulfill many different functions. People exhibit vast individual differences with respect to their responsiveness to humour: while laughter is

12 See, for example, the use of the words "das Komische" and "die Komödie" in the prominent German scholarly works on humour: Hans Robert Jauß, "Über den Grund des Vergnügens am komischen Helden," *Das Komische*, ed. Wolfgang Preisendanz and Rainer Warning (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1976); Bernhard Greiner, *Die Komödie: Eine theatralische Sendung; Grundlagen und Interpretationen* (Tübingen: Francke, 1992).

acknowledged as the universal response to humour across cultures, the spectrum of events that evoke laughter or smiling is practically unlimited. Different characteristics of humour are considered and accented in various theories: they embrace the cognitive, physiological, psychodynamic, social, and behaviouristic elements of humour. Thus, the number of theoretical approaches to humour is difficult to survey, and the theories of humour are classified differently depending on the various criteria used by the authors. Any scholar who wants to thematise humour in his or her research therefore faces the necessity of selecting the theoretical approach that would be most productive in reaching the goal of the particular study. My study does not attempt to specify what humour is and to explain its conditions, causes, and mechanisms, but rather to show how humour and laughter construct or contribute to the relationships between figures in First World War works. For this reason, I will concentrate on those aspects of humour and laughter that serve the interests of group relationships and will interpret humour and laughter as social mechanisms with definite social functions. My aim is to present an analysis of the part played by humour and laughter in the social life of the military during the First World War, as depicted in narratives written during and after the War. As the theoretical basis for the analysis of humour in works about the First World War, I will use elements of the sociological approach to humour, with a concentration on the functionalist perspective.

The assumptions about the nature of humour that have been developed in literature usually concentrate on a few basic concepts that explain how a humorous situation occurs. The large number of theoretical attempts reflects the level of complexity of the problem. I will briefly describe the most popular and recent classifications of humour theories in order to provide the ground for the methodological basis of my study,

which emphasises only the social aspects of humor as the most productive for the purpose of my analysis.

In her above mentioned article, Patricia Keith-Spiegel recalls scholarly overviews of theories of humour created prior to the 1970s. She divides the humour theories into eight major groups (she collects over one hundred humour theories). The first group, biological, instinct, and evolution theories—popular until the first half of the 20th century—interprets humour as a necessary biological function of living organisms. According to this view, the humour function is "built into" the nervous system of living organisms and serves the purpose of homeostasis and adaptation to the ever-changing environment. Scholars working within the biological paradigm equate humour and laughter with pre-lingual communication in primitive societies, where they are associated with good news for the community and signals of safety.¹³ Another hypothesis traces laughter to aggressive behaviour (exposing teeth and noises that could be interpreted as assaulting) and sees laughter as a substitute for physical assault.¹⁴ Some scholars point out the pleasurable aspect of laughter as an effect of the development of societies.¹⁵ As we can see, biological, instinct, and evolution theories, emphasize the social aspects of humour

13 See H. C. McComas, "The Origin of Laughter," *Psychological Review* 30 (1923): 45-55; D. Hayworth, "The Social Origin and Function of Laughter," *Psychological Review* 35 (1928): 367-85.

14 See H. M. Kallen, "The Aesthetic Principle in Comedy," *American Journal of Psychology* 22 (1911): 137-57; George Washington Crile, *Man: An Adaptive Mechanism* (New York: Macmillan, 1916); Anthony Mario Ludovici, *The Secret of Laughter* (London: Constable Press, 1932); A. Rapp, "Toward an Eclectic and Multilateral Theory of Laughter and Humor," *Journal of General Psychology* 36 (1947): 207-19.

15 See J. C. Gregory, *The Nature of Laughter* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1924); A. Rapp, "A Phylogenetic Theory of Wit and Humor," *Journal of Social Psychology* 30 (1949): 81-96.

and laughter and the connection between laughter and aggression against strangers in the group—aspects of particular interest for the present study.

Superiority theories stress humour as the laughing person or group's manifestation of triumph over other people. Central to the humour experience of an individual or group is the conviction of being better than other people who, in the opinion of the laughing person or group, are uglier, less fortunate, or weaker in comparison and whose actions are regarded as foolish.¹⁶ The view implies the existence of constant competition between the members of a group or between groups and presupposes the creation of hierarchical constellations in which the laughing person or group always takes the dominant position. However, not all theorists who associate humour with superiority believe that laughter necessarily has a contemptuous and hostile character—it may be also be combined with empathy or sympathy.¹⁷ Another quite recent modification of the superiority theory is an inferiority theory that looks for the source of humour in self-depreciation, in the demonstrated inferiority of the laughing person.¹⁸

Incongruity theories rely on the understanding that humorous situations take place when two inconsistent, unsuitable, contrasted events or ideas are confronted with each other. Incongruity theories stress the perception of the contrast of concepts or situations

16 See Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (København and Los Angeles: Green Integer, 1999) 7-63; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2002) 45-46.

17 See, for example, Leigh Hunt, *Wit and Humor, Selected From the English Poets* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1846); Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will* (London: Longmans, Green, 1875); R. Carpenter, "Laughter, A Glory in Sanity," *American Journal of Psychology* 33 (1922): 419-22.

18 See Robert Solomon, "Are the Three Stooges Funny? Soitainly! (or When is it OK to Laugh?)," *Ethics and Values in the Information Age*, eds. Joel Rudinow and Anthony Graybosch (South Melbourne: Wadsworth Publishing, 2002).

as the condition for humour. When a situation does not fulfill the expectations of the observer, deviates from the "normal" pattern to which he or she is accustomed, humour can occur (although it has to be noted that not every incongruous situation is funny). To give an example from my own experience: one of the incongruous situations I perceived on several occasions while explaining the topic of this study was when my conversation partner exhibited astonishment about the possibility of humour in German literature. The confrontation of the assumption that Germans do not have a sense of humour with my search for humour in German texts creates an incongruity that appeared funny to many an interlocutor. Early incongruity theories stress the importance of contrast, such as that between laughter and fear described by James Beattie, who remarks that "laughter arises from the view of two or more inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage, or as acquiring a sort of mutual relation from the peculiar manner in which the mind takes notice of them" (348). According to incongruity theories, the observer of a humorous situation comprehends it either by interpolating the multiple inconsistent frames within the structure of the situation or by extrapolating from or referring back to background knowledge. The solution of the conflict—the comprehension that the connection between the contrasting elements is possible—results in laughter. Another well-known theory of incongruity was suggested in the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* [*Critique of Judgment*] (1790) by Immanuel Kant, who gave one of the best-known definitions of laughter as a result of incongruity: "an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing" (54).

The incongruity theory of laughter proposed by Kant also includes—as we can easily deduce—the element of surprise. The group of surprise theories emphasizes

unexpectedness and shock as necessary (though not necessarily sufficient) for a humorous situation to take place. Like the incongruity theories, the surprise theories imply a breaking up of the routine course that the observer is following. However, the surprise theories also take into account the observer's adaptation to the repetition of the stimulus that unfolded the humorous reaction for the first time and explain the resistance to situations that have been funny before but are no longer when observed for two or more times.¹⁹

Configurational theories are related to incongruity theories as they see the source of humour in elements previously perceived as unrelated which are now combined with each other to produce a humorous situation. The main difference between the two groups is the treatment of the perception of incongruous ideas or situations. Configurational theories emphasise the effect of the subjective "coming together" of elements that were previously disjointed, rather than the perception of the apparent disconnection between them. In a sense, configurational theories focus on conflict-solving and derive humour from the feeling of success in dealing with the problem.²⁰

Ambivalence theories proclaim that humour is built on the incompatible emotions and feelings of the observer who is experiencing humour. This group of theories is also connected closely with incongruity theories, but puts more stress on the emotions and feelings emerging from the humorous situation than on the perception of ideas or situations. Munro, in his *Argument of Laughter*, aptly describes the mixture of emotions: "We laugh whenever, on contemplating an object or a situation, we find opposite

19 See H. I. Hollingworth, "Experimental Studies in Judgment: Judgment of the Comic," *Psychological Review* 18 (1911): 132-56.

20 See P. Schiller, "A Configurational Theory of Puzzles and Jokes," *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 18 (1938): 217-34.

emotions struggling within us for mastery" (210). The conflicting elements could include love mixed with hate (and so, the German "Hassliebe" ["love-hate relationship"] would be an occasion to laugh), playful chaos mixed with seriousness, mania connected with depression.²¹

Release and relief theories prescribe to humour the function of relief from strain or constraint as well as release of excess tension or accumulated energy. The relaxation is embedded in the physical act of laughing. Herbert Spencer was the first theoretician to state the decisive function of laughter—understood as muscular movements—in releasing the overload of nervous energy.²²

And finally, the popular psychoanalytic theory, developed by Sigmund Freud, explains humour as a regulatory mechanism of psychic channels. Freud concentrated on the occurrences of "Witz" ["joke/joking"] and distinguishes between "innocent" and "tendentious" jokes.²³ The tendentious jokes have a sexual or aggressive content and are capable of eliciting loud laughter, while innocent jokes have less emotional impact, provoking just a smile. Freud derived the discrepancy from his assumption that sexuality and aggression are strong and fundamental forces that are restrained in the process of socialization. Freud described the tendentious joke as an expression of inhibited tendencies that temporarily abolishes the social restrictions, builds a vent for aggression, and allows for the unloading of sexual tension. When the energy build-up in the psychic

21 See G. Y. T. Greig, *The Psychology of Laughter and Comedy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1923).

22 See Herbert Spencer, "The Physiology of Laughter," *Macmillan's Magazine* 1 (1860): 395-402.

23 See Sigmund Freud, "Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten," ed. Anna Freud (London: Imago Publishing, 1940).

channels cannot be utilized (because of the censoring actions of the superego) it is released in laughter—as an action that requires less expenditure of energy.

The purpose of classifications like the one by Keith-Spiegel—and also the purpose of my short summary above—is to bring more clarity to the tangled field of interconnected concepts about humour and laughter. However, Keith-Spiegel's extensive and quite influential classification may in certain instances evoke the impression that the described theories are mutually exclusive and competitive. This is not the case by any means. Other popular classifications created since Keith-Spiegel's critical overview include Viktor Raskin's *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor* (1985), John Morreal's *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humour* (1987), and Salvatore Attardo's *Linguistic Theories of Humour* (1994). These overviews, as well as the survey proposed recently by Herbert M. Lefcourt in his study *Humor: The Psychology of Living Buoyantly* (2000), divide the considerations about humour into two or three main groups, with superiority and incongruity as the elements most commonly emphasised in humour perception. The emphasis on superiority seems to be the dominant tendency in contemporary humour research. In the analytical part of the study, I elaborate further on particular aspects of humour theories and the issues arising from them and concentrate on their application in specific narrative situations.

1.2.4. Social aspects of humour: theoretical concerns

Humour and its functions in various social relations only recently became the subject of sociological studies. The reason for the relative lack of scholarly reflection was, according to Chris Powell and George E. C. Paton, the wide-spread view of humour as "an individualistic and spontaneous expression of sheer creativity," whose "social

structural and processual parameters" were deemed "much less tangible and hence not readily amenable to sociological conceptualisation and theorizing" (xi). The recognition that humour does not belong exclusively to the realm of free will, but is, as many other phenomena, conditioned by social configurations and in turn influences social interactions, yielded many important sociological contributions to the field of humour research. The sociology of humour concentrates on the use of humour by social actors as a means of control or resistance to and making sense of social relationships and societies of any kind. Yet within the subject of humour there are many paradigms that aim to provide an explanation of how a humorous situation takes place (for example, structural functionalism, conflict theories, Marxist analyses, social action theory, symbolic interactionism). Similarly, the appearances of humour can be studied on multiple levels, starting with the macro-societal level, where the significance of humour is investigated in relation to a particular society or type of society, and ending with the micro-societal level, where the scholars observe how humour regulates the relationships between group members in small-group situations.

In my study, I will mainly concentrate on how humour works on the micro-societal level and—according to the premise outlined before—attempt to provide conclusions about the negotiated models of soldier behaviour in various social configurations. In the following section, I present the elements of the most popular theories of humour that have impacted the investigation of social relations and the role humour plays in them. This theoretical basis will be used in the analytical part of my study.

Already ancient writers assumed that humour constitutes human interactions, sets the character of those interactions, and, by doing this, is a part of every social system and

can therefore be analysed as a social process affecting the system. In *Philebus*, Plato describes how a person is made laughable by his/her self-ignorance. Plato considers that "ignorance is a misfortune," as the ignorant person thinks about him-/herself as having "wisdom or beauty, delusions which are comical in the weak and abhorrent in the strong" (116-19). Laughter fulfills the function of social corrective and is therefore allowed, but excessive laughter can also have a damaging effect on the laughing person, because he/she can lose rational control over him/herself and become less human. Laughter is, from an ethical point of view, to be avoided and constitutes a guilty pleasure. For Plato, the stimulus to laugh is aggression and/or a feeling of superiority towards the objects of laughter—individuals who do not comply with the social norm.²⁴

Subsequent theories of humour develop Plato and Aristotle's idea of a socially understood superiority. Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* (1651) defines the humorous event as a moment of triumph which the laughing people achieve by observing the defects of others and comparing the imperfections of others with "apprehension of some deformed thing in another by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves" (45-46). Hobbes's humour has a hostile character, setting up power relations in the social group, but he also allows for a type of humour without offence, which has a group-consolidating function: people can sometimes laugh at outsiders "by observing the imperfections of other men" (46). Humour, as observed by Hobbes, appears to have two sides: on the one hand, it has the power to create hierarchies based on the real or imaginary advantages of the laughing person, on the other hand, it unites people by creating collective superiority.

24 In the *Poetics*, Aristotle also describes comedy as "an imitation of men worse than the average." See Aristotle, *Poetics* (New York: Norton, 1982) 1449a1-30.

Francis Hutcheson, in *Thoughts on Laughter* (1758), finds Hobbes's account of laughter as an aggressive self-assertion antisocial (ignoring the more consolidating function of humour) and attempts to interpret laughter as a socializing activity that evokes sympathy and fellow feeling. He is one of the first theoreticians to connect the feeling of superiority of a laughing person with the idea of incongruity: laughter results from "the bringing together of images which have contrary additional ideas as well as some resemblance in the principal idea" (24), while the "contrary ideas" result very often from differences in social status.

The 19th century brought the development of the concepts of superiority and incongruity. Alexander Bain, in his work *The Emotions and the Will* (1859), concludes that all humour involves the degradation of something and expands Hobbes's ideas of superiority by adding political institutions, ideas, and inanimate objects (anything that makes a claim to respect or is respected) as targets for laughter. Bain postulates that one doesn't need to be directly conscious of one's superiority: one can laugh sympathetically with another person who triumphs over his/her adversary. Herbert Spencer, in his *Physiology of Laughter* (1860), follows a similar path: he thinks that all humor can be explained as descending incongruity. Spencer's implied inequality of elements that create humour corresponds with Bain's idea that incongruity always involves a contrast between something exalted or dignified and something trivial or disreputable. In contrast to Bain, Spencer emphasises the incongruity aspect of the situation and not the descent or degradation.

One of the most influential humour theorists, Henri Bergson, in his essay *Le Rire* [*Laughter*] (1911) offers the clearest and most frequently quoted instance of an application of the superiority theory and opens the field for the modern social theories of

humour and laughter. Bergson's proposed ideal of human social behavior is elasticity, adaptability, the "élan vital" ["thrust of life"], while the laughable is for him "something mechanical encrusted upon the living" (39). The typical comic character, he says, is a man with an obsession. Such an obsessed figure is not flexible enough to adapt himself to the complex and changing demands of reality. Bergson criticizes the blind, automatic persistence of a professional habit of mind, which disregards altered circumstances, and observes that this behavior of individuals is marked as incorrect by the laughter of the group. He defines humour as a non-emotional social corrective, used by the majority of society to adjust the deviant behavior of individuals. Bergson evaluates humour as an inclusive social mechanism, serving the goal of (re)admittance into the group, which puts this kind of humour in opposition to the exclusive humour which prevents the individual from accessing the laughing group. Such differentiation between the inclusive and exclusive function of humour plays a very important role in contemporary sociological humour research.

A comprehensive analysis of the functions of humour in social situations is offered by William H. Martineau, in his article "A Model of the Social Functions of Humor" (1972). Martineau describes the patterns of humour exchange that create and maintain the relations between the members of the group in intragroup (within the same social group) and intergroup (between members of different social groups) situations.

In intragroup situations, esteeming humour (inoffensive humour) directed towards group members helps to solidify the group and to initiate and facilitate the communication and development of social relationships (social distance between group members is reduced, consensus is achieved). Humour serves as a symbol of social approval. Esteeming humour directed towards members of other groups can prevent or

introduce a hostile disposition against members of other groups. Disparaging humour (offensive, aggressive humour) directed towards group members has three main functions: first, it helps to control behavior in the group. It is used to express grievances, or it can be directed at someone in the group who either has not learned or has violated the norms of the group. It constitutes a symbol of disapproval and an opportunity to correct the behavior of the deviant and help him/her rejoin the group. This kind of humour can be described as controlled hostility against deviance. Another function of offensive humour within the group is to solidify the social structure: self-disparaging humour works to unify the group. This goal is achieved by the admission of weaknesses or undesirable characteristics by the member(s) who initiated the humorous situation. The third function of offensive humour is to prevent the demoralization and disintegration of the group. Disparaging humour directed towards members of other groups increases morale and solidifies the group, but also establishes a hostile disposition towards others.

In intergroup situations, humour can be judged as esteeming (inoffensive) or disparaging (aggressive) by one or both of the interacting groups. If humour is evaluated as inoffensive, consensus and social integration are achieved: the similarities between groups are maximized and the differences minimized. Humour also helps maintain a friendly relationship between the two groups. If humour is seen as aggressive by one of the groups, it can threaten the relationship and possibly introduce conflict, but in some cases it may help redefine the relationship between the groups.

Robert A. Stebbins moves away from the idea of superiority or inferiority of the social group and offers new insights into the social mobilization role of humour. In his article, "Comic Relief in Everyday Life: Dramaturgic Observations on a Function of Humor" (1979), Stebbins describes what he calls the "comic relief" function of humour.

He defines comic relief as "a momentary humorous respite from the seriousness of lengthy concentration on a collective task, a respite that facilitates the completion of that task by refreshing the participants" (97). If the members of the group have no socially acceptable means of escape from the setting of concentration, such as quitting before the task is finished, going into reverie, or even taking a short break, humour allows them to relax and re-focus on the task. In other words, social comic relief reduces fatigue which, if allowed to increase, threatens role performance and motivation. Such re-charging through humour, as we will see in the analytical part of this study, is quite commonly used in the texts to show how the military unit ensures the most effective completion of the given task.

In addition to the sociological approaches to humour and laughter outlined above, while analysing the functions of humour in the military, I will also use the conceptual elements of functionalism. Functionalism, developed in the 1950s, asserts the homeostatic nature of all social units and suggests that there is a resemblance of living organisms and social systems. The system contains interrelated smaller parts that have been assigned special functions and that work together in order to guarantee the survival of the whole. Understood that way, social systems work to maintain an equilibrium and to return to it after any disturbance of the social order. The mechanisms of socialization, applied to the members of the group, create conformity to culturally appropriate roles and socially supported norms and values. The mechanisms can be formal (institutions) or informal (for example, sneering, gossip, laughter, or other forms of peer pressure). Functionalism investigates the relationships between the parts of the system using the terms of function (divided into manifest and latent functions), dysfunction, and functional alternative. A function is defined as the contribution made by any part to a larger system.

Humour, as one of the mechanisms of socialization, can be analysed as having certain manifest or latent functions, can serve as a functional alternative, or can be dysfunctional to the group (for example, it can break up the group).

The functionalists analysed laughter in so-called "joking relationships" in primitive societies, where the conflicts between the members of the social group are staged in mocking form in order to avoid violent conflicts. Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown, in his fundamental work *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (1952), understands by joking relationship "a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offense" (90). Humour in the joking relationship serves the function of an alternative to physical violence. In the analytical part of my study, I will show that the concept of unloading aggression in "joking relationships" also applies to the troops. In the military unit, violence against one's own comrades was prohibited by army regulations. Simultaneously, the tension resulting from the enforced co-habitation during the long waiting times in the trenches and the wide availability of weapons provoked the soldiers to use violence.

It has to be noted that the idea that societies are smoothly-functioning and self-regulating entities has been challenged by feminist criticism, charging functionalist theories with an implicit normative, conservative content. The conviction of the homeostatic state of social groups legitimates gender privilege and power while ignoring the social processes on the micro-level, as well as the work and attitudes of individuals which are difficult to render. Post-structural approaches like Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" (1975), by contrast, interpret society as something less whole, less smoothly articulated, and characterized rather by

intersecting varieties of power that do not necessarily cooperate in any functional way.²⁵ Such a society is characterized more by many micro-level negotiations, interactions, and tensions and less by formal mechanisms, such as institutions. Humour, characterized by ambivalence and both subversive and affirmative abilities, can be very well incorporated into such approaches. I am going to demonstrate this ambiguity with the example of humour and laughter in German narrations about the First World War.

1.3. War literature in Germany 1914-1933

On the night of December 12th, 1916, Hans Carossa, serving as a military doctor in a German front unit, noted the following about the meaning of his autobiographical writing in the diary he kept during the campaign in the East, *Rumänisches Tagebuch* [*Romanian Diary*] (1924):

Früher wußte ich ja nicht, wozu man Aufzeichnungen schreibt; jetzt aber sind sie mir wie die Brotkrümmchen, welche Hänsel und Gretel im Walde ausstreuen, um gewiß wieder nach Hause zu finden. Freilich, als die Kinder dann wirklich den Heimweg antreten wollten, da hatten die Vögel alles aufgepickt,—aber da beginnt ja auch erst das eigentliche Märchen. (132-33)

I did not know before why one makes notes; now, they are for me like the bread crumbs that Hansel and Gretel sprinkle in the forest in order to find their way back home. Of course, when the children try to return home, the birds have pecked up all the pieces already—but that's also the moment when the real fairy tale begins. (my transl.)

In this metaphorical image, in which the author puts himself in the position of the consumer of his own text, both the desperate will to verbalize and therefore interpret the events and resist the feeling of being lost in the impulse overload and the impossibility of

25 See Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," 1975, *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Malden: Blackwell, 1998) 533-60.

doing so are indicated. Autobiographical writing is, in Carossa's interpretation, a form of finding meaning in the overwhelming wave of impressions, a form of self-therapy. The futility of all such attempts may be obvious from the perspective of time, when the interpretative framework necessarily changes and coerces one to face the unknown, but the very effort to deal with the unfamiliar surroundings is a question of self-preservation.

There is strong evidence in German war literature for the claim that autobiographical writing serves the purpose of making sense of the individual's front experience. All four authors whose works I have selected for this study admitted that their writing was a method of interpreting, of fitting the war into their world view. Walter Bloem, editing and publishing his memoirs during the war, in 1916, was driven by the wish "Geschichte [zu] machen" ["to make history"] (*Vormarsch* 37), where his writing about the war of 1870-71 was confronted with reality, and the reality of 1914 became his writing. Bloem found himself involved in an event of historical dimension that he constantly compared with the past war—and made sense of through that comparison. Ernst Jünger, Arnold Zweig, and Erich Maria Remarque, whose works appeared on the market in 1920, 1927, and 1929 respectively, admitted to periods of depression after the end of the war and described their literary activity as a method to face the "Erlebnis" ["experience"] of the war. Would writing about war then be the authors' personal attempt to sprinkle crumbs of memories in order to compose a pattern of war images that would allow them to find their place in the story? Yes, but not only that, for the real tale begins with the post-war reception of the texts that contain the autobiographical motifs.

Between 1914 and 1918, the German literary market was flooded with a large number of war poems published in newspapers and journals. These poems were especially popular in the first months of the war, carried by the high enthusiasm wave of

the "Geist des Augusts" ["spirit of August"], for which the lyrical expression seemed to be the most appropriate.²⁶ In addition, the readers, whose curiosity about the great event of the war could not be satisfied by the official information sources, expected first-hand reports of the military operations undertaken by the German army. The popularity of collections and anthologies of soldiers' letters, as well as memoirs of first-time authors who became front fighters (Hans-Harald Müller labels them "Dilettantenliteratur" ["dilettante literature"]²⁷) can be explained by the high demand for freshness and "authenticity" of war experience, intrinsically connected with the need to support the war effort. The popular memoirs of officers were pro-war in tone—the publication of criticism towards the army command was not allowed and any such criticism was blocked by government censors.²⁸ Simultaneously, "Unterhaltungsromane" ["entertainment novels"], which took advantage of the subject of the new war in order to replicate conventional love or adventure stories, also gained in popularity.²⁹ None of these productions lasted with either the public or literary critics, however, and were soon forgotten. A notable exception in the overflow of literary production at that time, that in

26 The origins of the "spirit of August" myth about the general support for the war in 1914 are described in detail in the study by Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge U Press, 2000) 134-55.

27 See the extensive description of the German literary production between 1914 and 1918 by Hans-Harald Müller, *Der Krieg und die Schriftsteller: Der Kriegsroman der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986) 11-20.

28 That was the case of, among others, the expressionist novella *Opfergang* [*Way of Sacrifice*] by Fritz von Unruh, which questioned the meaning of war, written in 1916 but published only in 1919 because of the censors's intervention (*Kriegsroman* 20).

29 As representatives of the stream of "entertainment novels," Hans Harald Müller names the very productive (and popular) writers Hedwig Courts-Mahler and Kurt Arams (*Kriegsroman* 16-17).

the majority fulfilled the momentary demand for authentic reports and easily digestible feel-good stories about the front, was Walter Flex's *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten* [*The Wanderer between Both Worlds*], published in 1916. Flex's autobiographical novella, dedicated to the memory of his fallen friend, escapes easy classification. By avoiding factual information, mixing epic and lyric elements, and romanticising male friendship, obedience to the charismatic leader, and sacrifice for the nation, the text survived the changing taste of the readers, and was revived in the Third Reich, becoming one of the best-selling German works about the First World War.

After 1916, when the chances of winning the war in the near future were minimized and the news dispatches about the military operations lost their attractiveness and became every-day reality on the home front, the interest of German readers in war stories gradually decreased. The audience was tired of depictions of war and did not show any further attraction to the genre of war literature until after the armistice of 1918. It was at this time that several direct responses to the war—among them also works that had been held by censorship—were published, and the anti-war texts *Der Mensch ist gut* [*Man is Good*] by Leonhard Frank (1918), *Menschen im Krieg* [*Men in War*] by Andreas Latzko (1918), *Opfergang* [*Way of Sacrifice*] by Fritz von Unruh (1919), and *Der Weg ohne Heimkehr: Ein Martyrium in Briefen* [*The Way of No Return: A Martyrdom in Letters*] by Armin T. Wegner (1919) enjoyed a brief period of popularity. Ernst Jünger, with his *In Stahlgewittern* (1920), took a separate position in the evaluation of the war; however, he had to wait for wider attention from readers until the end of the decade. In the years of political and social stabilization of the Weimar Republic (1922-28), autobiographical texts written by high-ranking officers as response to the lost war also appeared on the market. The memoirs of the military elite had a strong tendency to justify

the strategical decisions of the army command by re-interpreting the front events to fit the argument about the good judgment of the leaders. Another goal of the memoirs was to dismiss the accusations against the officer corps being responsible for the military and political collapse of the Wilhelminian Reich.³⁰ Among the main apologetic strategies of the authors, who did not want to acknowledge their participation in taking the erroneous decisions that led to the defeat of Germany, was the "Dolchstoßlegende" ["legend of the stab in the back"] and the propagation of the myth of the invincible Kaiser's army that was forced into capitulation.³¹ Both assumptions resonated quite successfully in the militaristic and conservative circles of the young state, which called for the restoration of the Empire, as opposed to the liberal, communist and leftist groups, against which both assumptions were directed. The latter formulated a strong case against the elite to whom it assigned responsibility for the massive killing and suffering in the war.

The polarization of the political scene in the Weimar Republic grew deeper with the severe economic and political crisis of the second half of the 1920s. With the re-examination of the current situation in the state came a renewed interest in the past. In search for the reason for the economic depression and the weaknesses of the Republic, the attention drifted to what constituted the decisive points in the recent history of

30 To the best-known memoirs belong the works of the prominent duo of the high command of the German army, *Meine Kriegserinnerungen* [*My War Memories*] by Erich Ludendorff (1919) and *Aus meinem Leben* [*From my Life*] by Paul von Hindenburg (1920).

31 The term "Dolchstoßlegende" is usually attributed to Ludendorff and Hindenburg. In October of 1918, the generals prepared a political ploy that placed the responsibility for the armistice negotiations in the hands of the civilian government and used the opportunity to blame the defeatists for lack of fighting spirit. See Lindley Fraser, *Germany Between Two Wars: A Study of Propaganda and War Guilt* (Oxford: Oxford U Press, 1944) 16; Hans Ernest Fried, *The Guilt of the German Army* (New York: Macmillan, 1942) 32-36.

Germany, in reverse chronological order: the Treaty of Versailles, the defeat in 1918, and ultimately, the war itself. The presupposition that only the "proper" understanding of the past would allow one to interpret correctly the present situation and future developments in Germany became articulated in public debates.³² The existing apologetic memoirs, diaries, and novels written by the military elite were dismissed and judged as unreliable in their depiction of what was thought to be the reality of war. The reason for this was their apparent agenda in the interpretation of strategic military actions. Instead, there was a popular demand for narratives of war that would offer new perspectives on the events of 1914-1918. The interest of the readers caused the war genre in Germany to flourish once again towards the end of the 1920s. In this context, Arnold Bennett may be right about the impact of the war on the German literary production: "Germany has had a practical monopoly of memorable war-novels, perhaps because the war left a deeper impression in Germany than in any other country. It may be that the finest war-novels are the product of defeat, not of triumph" (321-22).

The newspapers were the first to pave the way to the revival of war literature, both testing the demand for works representing the genre which had been dormant for several years and evoking interest in new authors through the publication of their works

32 The "proper" understanding was derived from the assumption that there is a believable source for what really happened in the war: the eyewitnesses, who expressed their first-hand experience in their literary works. The press reviews of *Im Westen nichts Neues* by Erich Maria Remarque from 1929-30 mark the culmination of the public discussions about the author's legitimacy to depict and evaluate the war. Already their titles refer to the "truthfulness" that was supposed to characterize the literary accounts of the war. Remarque's "mystification" was emphatically exposed by other front soldiers or professionals, for example, Evald Weiseman, "Der falsche Frontsoldat: Eine Bemerkung zu Remarques Roman *Im Westen nichts Neues*," *Nationale Erziehung* 10.5 (1929): 115-17; G. v. Donop, "Ein Frontsoldat zu Remarques Buch *Im Westen nichts Neues*," *Königsberger Allgemeine Zeitung* 208 (1929); Karl Kroner, "Ärztliche Bemerkungen zu: Erich Maria Remarque *Im Westen nichts Neues*," *Münchner Medizinische Wochenschrift* 24 (1929): 999-1000.

in serialized form. In 1926, the translation of *Osudy dobrého vojáka Švejka za světové války* [*The Good Soldier Švejk*] (1921-22) by the Czech author Jaroslav Hašek appeared on the German market as *Die Abenteuer des braven Soldaten Schwejk während des Weltkrieges*, published simultaneously in twenty newspapers, and quickly became a bestseller. The satirical novel, set in the Austro-Hungarian army during the First World War, tells the story of the common soldier Josef Švejk, whose survival strategy is avoiding confrontation with his officers and carrying out their orders to an end where their absurdity, and the absurdity of the military institutions in general, become exposed. The publication of Hašek's work was soon followed by Zweig's *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* (1927) in *Die Frankfurter Zeitung*, also critical about the institution of the army. The two novels—one belonging to a humoristic genre, one not—initiated a nationwide debate about the evaluation of the lost war, in which literature took a prominent position. Other accounts soon followed: after four years of searching for an editor, Ludwig Renn was offered the opportunity to publish his novel *Krieg* [*War*] (1928) in serialized form also in the newspaper *Die Frankfurter Zeitung*; the book version appeared promptly afterwards. The same year, *Im Westen nichts Neues* by Erich Maria Remarque appeared in *Die Vossische Zeitung*, which soon became the most controversial text about the war and most successful German literary export of the time. Another popular work, Theodor Plivier's *Des Kaisers Kulis* [*The Kaiser's Coolies*], was printed in *Die Rote Fahne*, followed by a book publication soon thereafter (1930). In total, over two hundred novels about the First World War appeared on the German market between 1928 and 1933.³³

33 According to the information about the war works provided by Hans-Harald Müller (*Kriegsroman 2*). Müller notes that the number of the new war novels appearing on the market had doubled, compared to the period between 1918 and 1928.

The discussions about the war works took place in the daily press and in literary journals,³⁴ where the critics analysed the aesthetic merits of the texts, but the attention often shifted to the central question of "authenticity." The authors who served in the army as common soldiers—like Jünger and Remarque—were praised as credible witnesses of the war, and, therefore, as giving a direct account of the past that was ready to be analysed. This assumption was based on the writers' low rank in the German army, which permitted them to perceive the war "as it really was."³⁵ The term "Frontgeneration" ["front generation"], coined by the critics to describe the emerging group of authors, was derived from the demographics of the young writers and former soldiers (born mostly in the late 1890s), for whom the war was very often one of the first and most significant experiences of their adult life.

Because of the need to get to the bottom of the phenomenon of war, to understand its consequences, and to make sense of it, the perceived autobiographical character of the literary productions of the time was a big selling factor. In the search for the desired "true face" of the war, questions of literary creation and possible (re)interpretation of the war experience were pushed into the background. In an autobiographical work, the narration seems to be certified by the facts from the author's life. The presence of the first-person narrator, very often carrying the author's name, allowed the readers to assume that the

34 Among the main periodicals participating in the debates were *Berliner Tageblatt*, *Die literarische Welt*, *Die neue Rundschau*, *Die Weltbühne*, *Die Linkskurve*, *Rote Fahne*, *Die Aktion*, *Die Deutsche Rundschau*, *Das Kunstwort*, *Die Tat*, *Deutsches Volkstum*, and others.

35 The expression "the war as it really was" is a paraphrased version of the quote from the war novel by Georg Bucher, *Westfront 1914-1918: Das Buch vom Frontkameraden* (Wien and Leipzig: Konegen, 1930): "[Es] war doch alles so geschrieben, wie die unverzerrte, traurige Wirklichkeit im Westen einst war" (Preface) ["it has been written as an undistorted and sad picture of the reality in the West" (my transl.)].

homodiegetic narrator and the actual author were the same person and that the narrative offered to the readers was a first-hand account of the war. The authenticity of the plot appeared to be confirmed by the existence of the historical speaker and to be guaranteed by references to real events taking place in real locations. In the eyes of the readers, the writer became one of the figures in his own narrative and his credibility as the source of information was beyond question. This almost obsessive attachment to the conformity between the life of the author and the events depicted in his war texts dominated the discourse and created an easy target for criticism of the discussed work: revelations of any discrepancies (real or fabricated) were frequently used by right-wing critics to dismiss the text entirely. An example will be discussed in the description of the responses to Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* in chapter 5 of this study.

But let us return one more time to the two novels that started the boom of war literature in the second half of the 1920s: *Die Abenteuer des braven Soldaten Schwejk während des Weltkrieges* by Hašek and *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* by Zweig. While the protagonist of Hašek's novel, "the good soldier" Schwejk, could be easily dismissed as "not serious," as a caricature of a real soldier who fought on the fronts of the First World War, and his story as not applicable to the conditions of the German army, Zweig's novel, not belonging to the humoristic genre, entered the social and political discourse about the effects of war on Germany. In the reception, the "serious" subject matter of the war in Zweig's novel concealed the scenes of humour and laughter and marginalized them as not significant for the evaluation and categorization of attitudes towards the conflict. Instead, other issues came to the foreground. The central questions in the debates around the war works were summarized in the brochure prepared by the publishing house Ullstein by the end of 1929 in an attempt to document the controversy

about *Im Westen nichts Neues*: "Truth or not? Pacifist? Indecent? A danger to youth? What was true heroism? A threat to religion and ethics?"³⁶ The questions posed above give an insightful look into the character of the divisions between the left- and right-oriented criticism in the last years of the Weimar Republic and allow us to follow the lines along which the war works—among them those investigated in my study—were categorized as anti- or pro-war and supposed to propagate specific images of conflict that would suit their respective ideological positions. Yet a closer look at the occurrences of humour and laughter in the selected texts—selected also because of their different ideological positioning in the literary reception—demonstrates similarities that go across these established classifications. The key point that allows us to reconsider these classifications and further re-evaluate German First World War literature is the main thesis I formulate in this study: that the recognition and interpretation of the depicted situations as humorous defines the attitude of the narrator in the text towards individual and structural violence, towards the ideal behaviour of the soldier (including gender-performing actions, such as sexually aggressive behaviour), towards the institutions of political power, and towards the question of the meaning of war. Furthermore, it opens the possibility of re-evaluating the impact that the representations of humour had on the popular images of war that have been shaped during and after the First World War.

36 Quoted after Ann P. Linder, *Princes of the Trenches: Narrating the German Experience of the First World War* (Columbia: Camden House, 1996) 165. See Linder's study for more information on the publishing campaign of Remarque's novel.

CHAPTER 2
IN STAHLGEWITTERN [STORM OF STEEL] BY ERNST JÜNGER (1920) AND HIS EARLY WORKS ABOUT THE FIRST WORLD WAR

2.1. The publication of *In Stahlgewittern*. Ernst Jünger's work on the different text versions, revisions and extensions of his First World War diaries.

Readers not familiar with Ernst Jünger's life work usually associate his literary activity with three relatively short phases in his long career. The first phase comprises Jünger's intense work on his First World War diaries. This work took place directly after the conflict and at the beginning of the 1920s, when the author served in the post-war voluntary German forces, the *Freikorps*, with the hope of continuing his military career. The second well-known phase is the time of his retreat into privacy, and the creation of his "magical realist" short story *Auf den Marmorclippen* [*On the Marble Cliffs*], in the late 1930s. The third period, through which Jünger achieved a certain degree of notoriety among the readers of German literature, includes his political publications of the mid-1920s (especially the years 1926 and 1927, when the majority of Jünger's political articles appeared) in newspapers and journals supported by and affiliated with the veteran's organization *Stahlhelm*. Through these publications, the writer proclaimed himself as the main theoretician and the leading personality of a new generation of right-wing writers who had experienced front-line combat.³⁷ Jünger's engagement as a publicist in the Weimar Republic brought him the reputation of being closely connected with the Nazi movement, even preparing the way for the emergence of National Socialism. As

37 The authors of the so-called "Frontsoldatengeneration" ["the generation of front soldiers"] included, according to the selection of writers made by the *Stahlhelm* publishing house, Helmut Franke, F. W. Heinz, Wilhelm Kleinau, and Franz Schauwecker. Martin Meyer also names Friedrich Hielscher, Ernst von Salomon, and Otto Strasser as representatives of the young soldiers and nationalists, with whom Jünger stayed in contact in Berlin. See Martin Meyer, *Ernst Jünger* (München and Wien: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1990) 102-12.

popular as it is disputed (some critics—for example, Heimo Schwilk and Rolf Hochhuth—claim that the accusation is undeserved), the assumption makes the critical evaluation of Jünger's early works quite difficult, as it involves the projection of the opinions expressed in his later articles of a strictly political character, onto his earlier interpretations of the First World War.³⁸ Jünger's early texts, although they provide many noteworthy contributions to the possible interpretations of the development of his nationalistic views, can also be investigated without looking ahead to the political outcome of the Weimar Republic and Jünger's attitude toward National Socialism and Hitler's regime. As John King remarks in his thesis on Jünger's works about the First World War, "Jünger's earliest work does not map with the simplifications that many critics have imposed in order to suit their own agendas—it is simply too full of contradictions, breaks and lacunae to conform to the binary Left-Right debate" (15). I agree with King's suggestion to move away from such simple politicized debates that place the author to the right of the political scene. Instead, I would like to follow my proposal as outlined in the introduction to this thesis, to look for similarities in the literary construction of an ideal soldier image, rather than looking for the differences in the demonstrated ideological views or real-life political associations of the authors. Nevertheless, the discussion of whether Jünger should be condemned on the grounds of his complex relationship with National Socialism undermined the post-war scholarly

38 Jünger's journalistic engagement dates as early as 1923, but his political engagement intensified in 1925 and 1926 with the publication of a number of articles in *Die Standarte*, the weekly addition to *Stahlhelm*. Further articles appeared in the periodicals *Arminius*, *Widerstand*, *Der Vormarsch*, *Der Tag*, *Das Reich*, and *Die Kommenden*. Since 1927, Jünger's involvement in the *Standarte* and *Arminius* circles declined. For more information, see the collection of Jünger's political articles published between 1919 and 1933: Ernst Jünger, *Ernst Jünger: Politische Publizistik 1919 bis 1933*, ed. Sven Olaf Berggötz (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2001).

reception of Jünger. The controversy over Jünger among critics started in the late 1940 and intensified in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s.³⁹ In the 1970s, Jünger's work met with very critical opinions among German scholars who reassessed his authorial position within the ideology of "soldier nationalism," and drew a connection between the subjectively experienced "great time" of the First World War and the political developments in the Third Reich.⁴⁰ To such examinations belong the important studies of Gerda Liebchen, Karl Prümm, and Klaus Theweleit, which are dominated by Marxist and psychoanalytical theoretical perspectives. By the end of the 1980s, Jünger scholarship also produced the volume *Der Krieg und die Schriftsteller*, a comprehensive study of the First World War works by Hans-Harald Müller (including a chapter on Jünger's early work), and the attention of scholars gradually shifted towards the vision of technology that *In Stahlgewittern* offers. Harro Segeberg, Olaf Schöter, and Reinhard Brenneke, among others, see the image of the military conflict depicted in Jünger's work as tempered by the rapid emergence of technology and its frightening and simultaneously fascinating demonstration of power, interpreting the work and the author's later theoretical writings and essays as attempts to deal with the processes of technological modernization and its influence on and consequences for societal changes.

In my opinion, Jünger's early literary works can be seen as personal attempts to incorporate his military service (for which he volunteered in August 1914 but was called

39 The post-war period witnessed the publication of the first major scholarly works about Jünger that acknowledged his disputable position among German writers, and attempted to interpret the experience of both world wars in his oeuvre. See Gerhard Loose, *Ernst Jünger: Gestalt und Werk* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1957).

40 The terms "soldatischer Nationalismus" and "große Zeit" are taken from the two-volume analysis by Karl Prümm. See Karl Prümm, *Die Literatur des Soldatischen Nationalismus der 20er Jahre (1918-1933): Gruppenideologie und Epochenproblematik* (Kronberg Taunus: Scriptor Verlag, 1974).

up for a few months later in December) into a process of socialization focused on the rites of passage in becoming a man, a respected member of a social group. The post-war process of writing down and constantly revising his notes from the war was an effort to make sense of the brutal conflict that involved massive, mechanized, and apparently senseless killing on a scale hitherto unknown. Through this work, Jünger is trying to make sense of the experience of the war both on a personal level—where he is concerned with reaffirming and justifying his status in society, trying to use the competence gained during the war in his post-war life—and on the level of social change—where he is concerned with evaluating the war as a necessary stage in the growth of modern society.

Jünger's recollections of the First World War constitute a constant motif in his literary work. The conflict builds a point of reference in the evaluation of all post-1914 political and societal processes that the author witnessed and commented on during his long life (1895-1998). Jünger kept a diary from the beginning of his military service, and the sparse scribbles in the notebooks constitute, according to Thomas Kielinger, the "pre-figuration of his complete works."⁴¹ With this term Kielinger describes the open form of the notes that, on the one hand, serve as an aid to memory and a source of factual information (dates, names, places, and courses of action), and, on the other hand, form a structure that the author constantly re-interprets, always finding in the collection of notes the elements that he wants to foreground in the specific thematic context of his newest work.

In the years 1920-1925, Jünger published four works about the First World War that are literary elaborations of his war diary. These works provide important insights

41 The German term "Präfiguration des Gesamtwerkes" was used by Thomas Kielinger in his study *Die Thematisierung des Essays: Zur Genese von Ernst Jüngers Frühwerk*, M.A. Thesis, U Bochum, 1970.

into the self-understanding of the autobiographical narrator as a member of the military. The narrative of his personal development illustrates his changing attitude toward the other soldiers and the civilian population. The development that the narrator Jünger undergoes is understood as the process of gaining combat experience, from the volunteer who had no previous contact with the military (if we don't count the short escapade in the French Foreign Legion in Africa in 1913, where he did not have the chance to serve⁴²), to the storm-troop leader decorated with the *Pour le Mérite*.

Jünger wrote his diary from late December 1914 until September 1918. By the end of the war, it encompassed fourteen volumes of various texts—comprehensive reports about battles and life in the trenches composed during the breaks between fighting and during hospital stays, specialist notes regarding strategy and military operations (also including the critical passages against the command of the army), and hastily written fragments undecipherable to anyone but their author.⁴³ Jünger's father, concerned about his son's identity crisis after the war, encouraged the latter to deal with his experiences through the writing process, and published the literary elaboration of his son's diary at his own expense in 1920. *In Stahlgewittern: Aus dem Tagebuch eines Stoßtruppführers* [*In Storms of Steel: from the Diary of a Shock Troop Commander*]⁴⁴ is written in the form of

42 The story of his running away, his disappointment with Africa and the anticipated adventure, and finally the less-than-triumphal return home with his father has been described by Jünger in the 1936 autobiographical work *Afrikanische Spiele* [*African Games*].

43 Ulrich Böhme, in his analysis of the different versions of Jünger's works, gives examples of such notes that would not be understandable to any reader of the manuscript without further explanations from its author. Böhme quotes a sequence of very short and incomplete or broken sentences that have been rewritten and expanded into almost four pages of text in the first edition of *In Stahlgewittern*. See Ulrich Böhme, *Fassungen bei Ernst Jünger* (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1972) 9-10.

44 The translation of the original title provided by Michael Hofmann, the author of the

an autobiography (with the autobiographical character additionally accentuated by the subtitle⁴⁵) and begins with the narrator Jünger as an August volunteer. A student of nineteen, excited by the prospect of the heroic fight and extraordinary war adventure, Jünger joins the 73rd Hanoverian Regiment in the Champagne. The chapters of *In Stahlgewittern* chronologically describe the battles in which Jünger's regiment participated. After the relatively peaceful stay at Bazancourt and Hattonchâtel, Jünger's first taste of combat comes at Les Esparges in April 1915, where he is wounded for the first time (he ends the war with fourteen wounds, including five bullet wounds). Then, he takes an officer's course and rejoins his regiment at the Arras sector (Douchy and Monchy). From 1916 until 1918, he participates in the battle of the Somme and other major battles on the Western front (Fresnoy, Langemark, Ypres, Regniéville, and Cambrai). In March 1918, during the final German offensive on the front, he leads one of the newly formed mobile storm troops, which employed new tactics deviating from the strategy of trench warfare. The text ends on a high note: in recognition of his achievements as a soldier, Jünger becomes the youngest recipient ever of the *Pour le Mérite*, popularly known as "The Blue Max," the most prominent German military order of the time.

The publication of *In Stahlgewittern* stirred such interest that it convinced E. S. Mittler & Sohn, the renowned publishing house specializing in military-related

newest English language version of *In Stahlgewittern*.

45 The subtitle describes in one sentence Jünger's career span during his military service: *Von Ernst Jünger, Kriegsfreiwilliger, dann Leutnant und Kompanieführer im Füs. Rgt. Prinz Albrecht von Preußen (Hannov. Nr. 73) [By Ernst Jünger, War Volunteer, and subsequently Lieutenant and Company Leader in the Rifle Regiment of Prince Albrecht of Prussia (73rd Hanoverian Regiment) (my transl.)]*. Jünger attempted to break with the idea of the strictly autobiographical character of his work: the long subtitle was shortened gradually with each major revision until it disappeared altogether in the last version of the text.

publications, to propose a new edition of the text in 1922. The second version of the text, prepared by the author for that purpose, initiated a long series of revisions (eight in total, the last in 1978) that stressed or suppressed particular elements of the original text by adding or removing text passages or introducing stylistic changes.⁴⁶ Also in 1922, Jünger published the collection of thirteen essays *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* [*Combat as an Inner Experience*], an account of the psychological disposition of the soldier whose perspective is limited to the war and to whom combat constitutes the main reference point in his judgement of reality. In 1923, Jünger published a serialized story, "Sturm," in the newspaper *Hannoverscher Kurier*. The story reworks the front-line experiences written in his diary, and is considered his first attempt at the novel form. Lieutenant Sturm, the protagonist of the narration (in addition to the name, the title also refers—appropriately to the theme of the story—to a "storm" or an "assault") carries many of Jünger's own characteristics. Lack of interest from readers forced the newspaper to discontinue the publication after only two weeks, and Jünger himself forgot about this ephemeral text until 1960, when the story was re-discovered.⁴⁷ In 1924, the author expanded the chapter of *In Stahlgewittern* entitled "Englische Vorstösse" ["British Gains"] into the short story "Das Wäldchen 125" ["Copse 125"]. The story contains detailed descriptions of battle, and offers visions of a future machine-dominated war

46 Elliot Y. Neaman calls Jünger "Jünger revididus" because of his urge to work over texts already published (Neaman 55). Jünger himself admitted to his "mania of revisions and versions" (Böhme 9). For the descriptions of the different versions of *In Stahlgewittern*, see Wojciech Kunicki, *Projektionen des Geschichtlichen: Ernst Jüngers Arbeit an den Fassungen von "In Stahlgewittern"* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1993); also Ulrich Böhme, *Fassungen bei Ernst Jünger* (Meisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1972). Throughout this chapter, I am using the latest text version of *In Stahlgewittern*, and the English translation by Michael Hofmann based on the 1978 edition of the German text (Hofmann, xii).

47 Hans-Peter des Coudres, "Bemerkung über *Sturm*," *Eckart Jahrbuch* (1967): 137-52.

fought by national societies and characterized by "total mobilization," a product of Jünger's political insights in the mid-1920s.⁴⁸ In 1925, the writer produced the last of the "enlargements" of the *In Stahlgewittern* episodes: the material in the chapter "Die grosse Schlacht" ["The Great Battle"] served as the starting point for the story "Feuer und Blut" ["Fire and Blood"].⁴⁹

Although Jünger gained considerable popularity as early as 1922 with the publication of the second edition of *In Stahlgewittern*, his recognition as an author was limited to the conservative circles of Great War specialists and army aficionados who considered him to be more of a military theoretician and disputant in the debate about the German army command than a prose writer. This reception was mostly influenced by the fact that his early works were edited by the publishing house Mittler, which had close connections with the army and had for many years specialized in military reports and analyses, and whose readership was limited to conservative groups.⁵⁰ In addition, there were important factors that placed him in the niche of the first-person officer accounts that flooded the market in the first half of the 1920s.⁵¹ One of them was Jünger's highly

48 Jünger further developed the idea of "total mobilization" in his later writings, see *Die totale Mobilmachung* [*The Total Mobilization*] from 1931. See Ernst Jünger, "Total Mobilization," *The Heidegger Controversy*, ed. Richard Wolin (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993) 119-39.

49 The term "enlargement of a fragment" ["Ausschnittvergrößerung"] is used by many critics to describe Jünger's method of expanding and overwriting the passages from *In Stahlgewittern*. See Johannes Volmert, *Ernst Jünger: "In Stahlgewittern"* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1985).

50 See the analysis of the reception of Jünger's work in Gerda Liebchen, "Ernst Jünger: Seine literarischen Arbeiten in den zwanziger Jahren; Eine Untersuchung zur gesellschaftlichen Funktion von Literatur," diss., U Bonn, 1977.

51 For a description of the literary market of the time and of Jünger's reception, see Hans-Harald Müller, *Der Krieg und die Schriftsteller: Der Kriegsroman der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986) 211-95.

regarded reputation as a talented front soldier and former storm-troop leader that accompanied the publication of his war writings (skillfully managed by Jünger himself). The other is the emphasis on the authenticity of the depiction of the war and the narrative structure of *In Stahlgewittern*, which relies on the chronological diarist mode and the limited perspective of the autobiographical narrator. Not until the late 1920s did Jünger find a wider audience for his texts. The reasons for the growth of his popularity can be found in the newly-awakened interest in the genre of war literature in general (see the description of the situation in the Weimar Republic in the introduction to this study), as well as in his activity as political publicist. The international editions of *In Stahlgewittern* confirm his growing fame: English and French translations were published in 1929 and 1930. The perception of Jünger as a writer affiliated with National Socialist ideology,⁵² or at least with the views of the ultra-conservative groups, was influenced not only by the polarizing debates in the late Weimar Republic, however. Jünger's texts were highly respected by Hitler and Goebbels, and the outline of the ideal soldier as proposed in

52 For a description of Jünger's association with the Nazi movement, see Thomas Nevin, *Ernst Jünger and Germany: Into the Abyss, 1914-1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996). In his study, Nevin discusses Jünger's connections with Hitler's political organization in its early development stages, and rejects the accusations of the Nazi sympathies of the author, present in Jünger's popular reception. It is a fact that in the September 1923 issue of the official NSDAP newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*, Jünger published an article about nationalism and National-Socialist ideology that called for a dictatorship that would "substitute . . . blood for ink . . . and sword for pen" (81), and delivered another article to the same newspaper in 1927. However, he rejected the racial doctrines of National Socialism and considered the movement plebeian, refusing any acknowledgment of his apparent supporting role that came from Germany's new government. On June 14th, 1934, Jünger distanced himself from any association with *Völkischer Beobachter*, that had re-printed a fragment of his 1929 work *Das abenteuerliche Herz* [*The Adventurous Heart*] without his permission, and stated: "[Es] mußte den Eindruck entstehen, daß ich Ihrem Blatt als Mitarbeiter angehöre. Das ist keineswegs der Fall." ["It must have evoked the impression that I am a co-worker of your newspaper. This is, by any means, not true" (my transl.)]. See Franz Baumer, *Ernst Jünger* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1967) 53-54.

Jünger's early war writings was easily accommodated in the social Darwinist world view represented by the ideologists of the National Socialist movement. Nevertheless, the National Socialists' flirtation with Jünger was turned down by the author on many occasions. Some critics cite Jünger's elitist disposition and disgust with the populist rhetoric of the Nazi party as the main reason for this rejection.⁵³ It should be noted that Jünger distanced himself artistically from his more radical earlier period of 1932-33 when he revised the fourth version of *In Stahlgewittern*: he removed text passages of explicitly nationalist character, shortened the deliberations about specific strategic points, and reworded those fragments overloaded with military jargon. The number of copies of *In Stahlgewittern* sold also speaks to Jünger's popularity and wide reception. Although far from the record level set by Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues*, to which it is frequently compared because of its subject matter and, surprisingly, the biographical similarities of both authors (both belong to the "front generation" born in the late 1890s), the sales of Jünger's debut exceeded 100,000 copies in the last years of the Weimar Republic.⁵⁴ As in the case of Remarque's work, the authenticity of Jünger's experience and the truthfulness of his literary account were taken for granted by his readers. In the need for the "real" story of the First World War that boosted the sales, the numerous later revisions, expansions, and corrections of the proto-text which would undermine the reliability of the account, were conveniently ignored or overlooked in its popular reception. Despite the questionable authenticity of the report—or precisely because of its obviously make-believe character—the analysis of narrative strategies of

53 See Norbert Dietka, *Ernst Jünger - Vom Weltkrieg zum Weltfrieden: Biographie und Werkübersicht 1895-1945* (Bad Honnef: E. Keimer, 1994) 65.

54 For the exact numbers see Donald Ray Richards, *The German Bestseller in the 20th Century: A Complete Bibliography and Analysis, 1915-1940* (Berne: Herbert Lang, 1968) 159.

the texts stemming from Jünger's war diary provides us with valuable insights into the self-designed process of becoming an ideal soldier, in which humour and laughter play an important role.

2.2. The functions of humour and laughter in Jünger's works about the First World War

A survey of the situations depicted as funny or laughable, and of the persons described as smiling or laughing in Ernst Jünger's novel *In Stahlgewittern*, reveals that Jünger uses humour to counterpoint violent events on the battlefield much more frequently than does Remarque (see Chapter 5). It would suggest that the war has much of the playful character of a child's game that is initiated by adults and, unlike in Remarque's story, thoroughly enjoyed by them. This assumption finds support in Jünger scholarship. In his analysis of Jünger's background as a reader, Christoph Lotz points out the relevance of Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen's *Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus Teutsch* [*Simplicissimus*] for Jünger's work as one of the models of a narrative structure that interlaces scenes of horror with humoristic situations in order to disarm the violence and stress the adventurous aspects of military service in the time of war. The biographical information on Jünger's youth, along with the autobiographical account of his pre-war readings, would support the claim that picaresque and adventure literature—and among them, *Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus Teutsch*—indeed influenced Jünger's understanding of war and his perception of combat. Unfortunately,

unlike studies of violence and its aesthetics,⁵⁵ a comprehensive study that deals with other aspects of humour in Jünger's work does not exist.

In the following section, I would like to re-examine the appearances and functions of humour in works by Ernst Jünger that thematize the First World War, and whose original versions date from the time of the war or of the Weimar Republic. I would like to focus on the explicitly violent narrations stemming from Jünger's war diary, and interpret the use of comic strategies not only as comic relief (which Lotz suggests in his study), but as a device employed to intensify the atmosphere of surrounding violence, to affirm the existing relationships based on individual or structural violence, and to reinforce the model of soldier masculinity promoted by Jünger's First World War narrations.

A survey of the humorous situations of *In Stahlgewittern* provides a valuable contribution to the analysis of the narrator's position in the troop and his perspective on the war. Jünger's diary is also, among others things, the story of a young man's stunning career in the military, and with the changes in his position in the group come changes in the depiction and interpretation of other soldiers' behaviour. The use and the object of laughter, as well as the readiness to participate in the humorous situations, strongly depend on the subject's position in the group. Jünger's rise from zero to hero, from complete novice to storm-troop leader and officer as depicted in the narration, serves here as a prime example, and the changes in the selection of what is "laughable" or "funny" to the narrator are among the symptoms of that development. I will describe the narrative situations involving laughter and humour in the order in which they appear in the

55 See, for example, Karl Heinz Bohrer's study, *Die Ästhetik des Schreckens: Die pessimistische Romantik und Ernst Jüngers Frühwerk*, in which he associates Jünger's aesthetic concept of terror with the author's aversion to bourgeois rationality.

narration, mirroring Jünger's self-depicted career in the army, and offer an interpretation of the incongruities that provide a basis for the humorous events. I will demonstrate how the narrator's growing combat experience correlates with the process of solving amusing incongruities only to find other ones, which must be solved in turn. Through observing how the incongruities, which amused the narrator at a specific time, cease to be seen and treated as amusing or funny, lose their novel character and, as a result, are never mentioned again in the narration, we can grasp the cognitive evolution of Jünger as a soldier. My claim is based in two assumptions. First, that people constantly encounter incongruous elements (including amusing ones) that have to be 'disarmed,' put together, and incorporated into their life experience. Second, that the incongruities never again occur in the same circumstances again, confront the same expectations, or evoke the same reaction in the subject. In other words, humour has a dynamic character that reflects the momentary knowledge of the laughing or smiling person. In the case of narrations that closely follow the structural principle of a diary, such as *In Stahlgewittern* by Ernst Jünger, or the war memoirs by Walter Bloem (described in the next chapter), the investigation of the chronological chain of incongruities that evoke laughter or prompt a smile from the first-person narrator gives evidence of his changing view of what it means to be a front-line soldier.

A question relating to the assumed autobiographical character of the narration can be raised at this point—a question regarding the objectionable incongruous character of the situations that are not described instantly, but are remembered and re-interpreted from the perspective of the war veteran Jünger. Jünger recollected his battle memories while he put together and rewrote his cryptic notes in 1920 (the work on the notes included also a number of the later revisions of the text). The discrepancy between the time the

narration took place and the time it was rewritten has to be addressed. If solving incongruities is a constant process that shapes the horizon of the subject, Jünger's knowledge must have also changed in the period between the time of the described events and the moment of their literary representation. Hence, some amusing incongruities from 1914-18 aren't funny any more, and some incongruous but not amusing events may gain their humorous character in 1920. However, measuring the "funniness" of the depicted narrative events—how their comic potential survived (or not) over the years after their occurrence—and the probing of the author's sense of humour are not the goal of this analysis. Much more important, in my opinion, is the mere occurrence of the narrator's laughter or smile in the narration. What matters is that Jünger-author gives an account of the once amused reactions of Jünger-narrator. Even if some incongruities lost their humorous potential, the humorous impact of others was amplified, or a number of amusing incongruities were simply omitted from the final text, for the presence of laughter or a smile is proof of the impact that the described situation had on the narrator: it may speak about the narrator's view of the event more directly than other rhetorical means.

The first front-line experience of the autobiographical narrator of *In Stahlgewittern* already appears to him as a funny event. He is one of the inexperienced soldiers who had come straight from "Hörsäle, Schulbänke und Werktsche" (11) ["lecture halls, school desks and factory workbenches" (5)], and he cannot hide his excitement at the prospective of participating in a great adventure. As he arrives in a château in Champagne and awaits further orders, the war appears to him as a "männliche Tat, ein fröhliches Schützengefecht auf blumigen, blutbetauten Wiesen" (11) ["manly action, a merry duelling party on flowered, blood-bedewed meadows" (5)]. With the first

artillery attack comes the first discrepancy between the image of the war he had had before and the present reality. He wonders why the soldiers duck so ridiculously while running under shelling:

Plötzlich dröhnte eine Reihe dumpfer Erschütterungen in der Nähe, während aus allen Häusern Soldaten dem Dorfeingang zustürzten. Wir folgten ihrem Beispiel, ohne recht zu wissen, warum. Wieder ertönte ein eigenartiges, nie gehörtes Flattern und Rauschen über uns und ertrank in polterndem Krachen. Ich wunderte mich, daß die Leute um mich her sich mitten im Lauf wie unter einer furchtbaren Drohung zusammenduckten. Das Ganze erschien mir etwas lächerlich; etwa so, als ob man Menschen Dinge treiben sähe, die man nicht recht versteht. (12)

Suddenly there was a series of dull concussions, and all the soldiers rushed out of the houses towards the entrance of the village. We followed suit, not really knowing why. Again, there was a curious fluttering and whooshing sound over our heads, followed by a sudden, violent explosion. I was amazed at the way the men around me seemed to cower while running at full pelt, as though under some frightful threat. The whole thing struck me as faintly ridiculous, in the way of seeing people doing things one doesn't properly understand. (6)⁵⁶

Soldiers trying to hide from shrapnel appear ridiculous to the novices in the military trade because of his complete ignorance, which becomes apparent when he expresses his astonishment at the incomprehensible character of the scene—Jünger does not recognize the danger of the artillery attack because he has a fixed idea of face-to-face fighting between two equal opponents. At this stage of his service he cannot yet imagine the possibility of impersonal and deadly assault. What conditions the ridiculous situation and

56 For the translation of *In Stahlgewittern*, I use the newest English-language version of the novel by Michael Hofmann from 2003. This translation is based on the 1978 edition of the novel. The first English translation, brought by Doubleday, Doran and Co. in Garden City, NY, in 1929, contains too many inaccuracies to include as the reliable quotation source in this study. In addition, some text passages from the original are omitted from the translation by Basil Creighton, either for censorship reasons or because of changes that Jünger introduced in the years following the edition of the novel in 1924 that served as the source of the first translation. When necessary, I provide my own translation of the original text and indicate the changed lines by double brackets. If the English translation is not provided in the paraphrase of the quote, all page numbers refer to the German original.

allows it to take place is the incongruity between the image of "kein schöner Tod" (11) ["a fine death" (5)] in combat,⁵⁷ which the narrator had held before, and the flight of the soldiers from the village in chaotic dissolution, with the enemy remaining invisible and its presence indicated only by sound. Another source of incongruity is the mental image of "proper" running, suitable for peaceful times—without cowering, in upright position, and in a straight line—that is contrasted here with the erratic behaviour of the soldiers running to save their lives. Unlike the narrator, who is still accustomed to the civilian way, the other soldiers developed the ability to recognize danger by the subtle differences in battle sounds. The target of the narrator's ridicule are the older soldiers; the loud laughter is suppressed, however, because of the assumption that the running soldiers have the necessary combat experience and that discipline (the respect for authority) should prevail. Jünger and the other new soldiers follow the example of the older men. The laughter that would restore the narrator's belief in the idealized image of the war is not openly presented: the military order to which he prescribes cannot be questioned yet. In addition, due to the ignorance of the narrator, the awareness of physical danger is pushed to the background. The moment of proper understanding of how severe the consequences of the attack can be will come later, when Jünger sees a wounded soldier and the kerb stone spattered with blood. Only then does a "tiefe Veränderung" (13) ["profound change" (7)] go through him: the war "hat seine Krallen gezeigt" (13) ["has shown its claws"(7)]—it has revealed its violent side. The conclusion of the scene demonstrates that the amusing incongruities are replaced by another—terrifying—incongruity that occurs after the narrator gains more information about the effects of the initially strange

57 The more appropriate English translation of "kein schöner Tod" would be "no finer death," stressing the most noble character of death on the battlefield.

visual and aural impressions. According to the "model for laughter" proposed by Mary K. Rothbart in her article "Incongruity, Problem-Solving and Laughter," the individual confronted with an incongruity makes a series of instant judgments about the incongruous situation that determine whether they will react to it with fear, attempt to solve the problem, or learn from it, or laugh/smile.⁵⁸ The deciding factors are the subjective perception of the possibility of putting the conflicting elements together and solving their incompatibility, and the suddenness and the intensity of the incongruity. Jünger's appreciation of the humour of the situation, which he judged as non-threatening before, is disturbed by the new knowledge. The realization of the consequences of the shell attack leads to a new incongruity. The sudden incongruity that terrifies him now is not the shell attack: it is the awareness of his own inappropriate reaction to the extremely dangerous occurrence. In other words, Jünger understands that he reacted in a "wrong" way, not suitable for a soldier. In effect, his previous amusement marks one pole of the new incongruity, with the other pole being the death of the attack victims, and the complete incompatibility of the two creates the conflict that cannot be solved in any way other than fear.

Further situations that appear funny to the narrator are recalled in the context of a surprise shell attack:

Eine [Beschießung] überraschte uns gerade während einer Offiziersbesprechung . . . Trotz der Gefahr war es sehr lächerlich, zu sehen, wie die Gesellschaft auseinanderspritzte, auf die Nase fiel, sich mit unglaublicher Geschwindigkeit durch die Hecken zwängte und blitzschnell in allen möglichen Deckungen verschwunden war. (94)

58 See, Mary K Rothbart, "Incongruity, Problem-Solving and Laughter," *Humour and Laughter: Theory, Research and Applications*, ed. Antony J. Chapman and Hugh C. Foot (London and New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1976) 38-39.

One of them came just as we were having an officer's meeting . . .
 It was dangerous, but it was still ridiculous to watch the company
 suddenly burst apart, fall on their faces, force their way through hedges in
 an absolute trice, and disappear under various cover before you could
 count to ten. (86)⁵⁹

In this situation, the danger is already recognized and appreciated in its potentially deadly consequences. The narrator has gained the experience necessary to know what he is supposed to do in the case of an attack. The incongruity between the proper civilian and military behaviour that emerged at the beginning of the war does not exist anymore. This time, a new incongruity—the source of humour—results from two conflicting sets of images: one image of the group of officers, with which certain dignity and self-control suitable for higher rank are associated; the other, the image of animal-like disorder that erupts after the attack begins. The similarity between the picture of the soldiers trying to take cover to the panic behaviour of scared animals is not accidental: Jünger uses a similar comparison in relation to himself when he describes his own behaviour during his first battle when the troop is under heavy fire. He and another soldier dodge the bullets "wie ein Eichhörnchen, das man mit Steinen wirft" (36) ["like a couple of squirrels having stones thrown at them" (30)]. On the one hand, comparing soldiers to animals obviously implies the very instinctual behaviour of people involved in battle situations: soldiers rely on pure reflex to survive. On the other hand, the image of squirrels avoiding stones implies the existence of a conscious power, an instance that throws stones in a systematic and intentional manner and aims at the destruction of the physically inferior

59 Interesting here is also another dimension of the depicted scene added by the translator of *In Stahlgewittern* and absent from the original text: the soldiers disappear from view "before you could count to ten." This phrase introduces an element of child's play to the picture, hinting at the countdown during a game of hide-and-seek, and stresses the adventurous yet infantile (harmless) impression the scene made on the observer.

and less intelligent opponent by playing a cruel game with him. The humorous episode, recollected by Jünger on the margin of the mainstream of his narration, surprisingly undermines the dominant vision of war as a blind destructive element, "ein Naturschauspiel" (85) ["a natural spectacle" (78)], and provides the war with an anthropomorphic character.

The narrator demonstrates during the same first major battle that he is already aware of the connection between extreme danger and humour. In the heat of the battle, Jünger spots Lieutenant Sandvoß, who runs around with distracted staring eyes and a long bandage hanging around his neck. The image reminds the observer of a duck:

Ein langer weißer Verband um den Hals teilte ihm eine seltsam unbeholfene Haltung mit, und so kam es wohl, daß er mich in diesem Augenblick an eine Ente erinnerte. Ich sah das wie in einem jener Träume, in denen das Beängstigende in der Maske des Lächerlichen erscheint. (35)

A long white bandage trailing round his neck gave him a strangely ungainly appearance, which probably explains why just at the moment he reminded me of a duck. There was something dreamlike about the vision—terror in the guise of the absurd. (29-30)

The ridiculous impression ("das Lächerliche"—not the "absurd" of the English translation) is interpreted here as belonging to the sphere of the unreal. The sensory overload on the battlefield—scenes of death, blood, loud explosions and the devastation of the landscape—in addition to the image of a helpless and awkward animal, that, as far as the narrator is concerned, is out of place in this environment, causes the incongruity that induces laughter. The reality of the war, exemplified in Jünger's first experience of an enemy attack, defies rational explanation, does not fit any known structure. Hence, the narrator moves his impression to the realm of dreams, where the rules of logic do not apply, in order to keep his sanity. Laughing at Lieutenant Sandvoß is a demonstration that the reality of war deviates from the narrator's sense of "normality," and the line

dividing them is marked by the perception of the incongruity. The norm is restored, however, shortly after the outbreak. Jünger encounters Colonel von Oppen, who issues orders to his adjutant, and remarks with satisfaction: "Aha, die Sache hat doch wohl Sinn und Verstand" (35) ["Aha, so there is some organization and purpose behind all this" (30)].

When there is no immediate counterpoint to the "unreal" experience, when the new impulses cannot be put into an existing frame of reference, the overload of impulses can cause laughter that is very close in character to hysteria: a psycho-physiological reaction for which the incongruity cannot be easily perceived and solved. In August 1916, the soldiers are moved to the village of Guillemont, a strategic point of the battle of the Somme. The nocturnal landscape of the battlefield is sinister, and reminds the narrator of a cemetery at midnight. The scenery evokes an association with Dante's hell—"Laßt jede Hoffnung hinter euch!" (99) ["Abandon all hope!" (92)], exclaims the narrator Jünger—and the impression of the reign of the dead is reinforced by the heavy smell of the decomposing corpses that could not, due to the intense combat conditions, be collected and buried. To the narrator, the mix of the smell and clouds of gunpowder is "nicht lediglich widerwärtig" (100) ["not merely disgusting" (93)], but brings about "eine fast hellseherische Erregung" (100) ["an almost visionary excitement" (93)] that he associates with the immediate proximity of death.

As the experience of Jünger's narrator expands, he becomes a troop leader and his perspective on what is funny changes. The contrast between the civilian (peaceful, not dangerous) and the military (violent, deadly) spheres described before is no longer a source of humour. What now appears to him as worth laughing at are the imperfections in the behaviour of the soldiers within the military group. The following passage recounts

two such situations. In the first, a front-line soldier who has a bad stutter is not able to provide his patrolling comrades the password, and so is almost killed by friendly fire. In the second, a confused, drunken soldier opens fire on his own lines:

In diesen Tagen herrschte überhaupt vorm Draht eine lebhaftige Tätigkeit, die zuweilen eines gewissen blutigen Humors nicht entbehrte. So wurde einer unserer Patrouillengänger von eigenen Leuten angeschossen, weil er stotterte und den Paroleruf nicht schnell genug herausbringen konnte. Ein anderes Mal stieg einer, der in Monchy bei der Küche bis Mitternacht gefeiert hatte, über das Hindernis und eröffnete ein selbständiges Schützenfeuer gegen unsere eigene Linie. Er wurde, nachdem er sich verschossen hatte, hereingezogen und gehörig verbleut. (73)

There was a lot of activity in the field altogether in those days, some of it not without its funny—or bloody funny—side. For instance, a soldier on one of our patrols was shot at because he had a stammer and couldn't get the password out in time. Another time, a man who had been celebrating in the kitchens in Monchy till past midnight, clambered over the wire, and started blazing away at his own lines. After he's shot off his ammunition, he was taken in and given a sound beating. (66)

Both episodes are explicitly violent with a potentially deadly outcome: the soldier is fired at, or he fires at the other soldiers (he is either the object of direct violence or the perpetrator of violence). The narrator inhabits the safe place of the observer in both episodes, and evaluates them as "bloody funny." There is no word about him laughing with the soldiers or their comrades, which would show that he is sharing the unfortunate experiences with them; however, through his evaluation, he laughs at the affected soldiers, clearly separating himself from their misfortunes. In both events, the source of humour lies in the violation of the norm. The norm is established by the book of military regulations: one of them regulates the use of passwords to differentiate between the soldiers who are on "our" side (belonging to the same troop or company), and the soldiers who are the enemy. The password provided by the commanding officer has, in this context, a group-building ability, creating a social entity that includes all members who know the correct word and excludes those who do not have that knowledge. The criteria

are clear and the norm does not allow any deviation; whoever does not provide the password will be shot. The narrator does not laugh about the fact that the soldier on patrol does not know the code word—he laughs about the stutter that prevents the soldier from saying the password quickly enough. The recognition of the stammering soldier as a member of the group is a fact: the soldier fulfills the necessary condition (knowledge of the password) to be included in the group. Yet his small speech impairment almost costs him his life, that is, his definite exclusion from the group. The narrator's laughter here shapes the ideal, or desired, model of soldier behaviour by marking out what is not wanted.

The distortion of the "proper" way a body is supposed to function is also the basis for the second humorous situation described in the passage. The drunken soldier becomes the aggressor because he loses his orientation in space. The passage has two sources of humour: first, the drunken soldier's attack against his own lines resulting from his confusion (but only under the condition that no soldiers were harmed during his drunken assault), and second, the consequences of the soldier's behaviour after he has shot off his ammunition and is disarmed. What causes laughter is the rapid switch from his role as violent offender to that of a victim of violence that is delivered by the whole group. In both situations, the group punishes the violation of the generally acknowledged norm by applying violence, or at least presenting the possibility of its application to the group members. The norm is simply defined: firing and killing can be conducted only when the target is the enemy. In both situations, there is a danger of members of the same troop killing each other: either the stammering soldier might be shot instantly by his comrades, or the drunken soldier might kill someone in his own trench. The fortunate outcome of the dangerous situation is due to lucky circumstances, and the flexible behaviour of the

group that demonstrates tolerance (giving the soldier more time to conduct his problematic action); another explanation is that the group is too surprised or too slow to react strictly, and without hesitation simply kill the aggressor. In any case, death is not the ultimate result of the episodes. The aggressors survive and the group has to make the next move that would demonstrate that the norm has been violated and that the soldiers who performed a hostile action against the group can be included into the group again. The violence against the drunken soldier (the beating) is the punishment for the norm violation; the laughter at both soldiers allows them to re-join the troop and, simultaneously, draws a model of exemplary soldier behaviour. The model specifies that the soldier should be constantly aware of his environment (sober), fit (even a stutter is here potentially deadly disability), and react quickly to changing situations. Therefore, the laughter of the group at bodily dysfunctions is also a method of pointing out the proper functions of the soldier body. Laughter here serves as a reminder and re-enforcement of ideal soldier behaviour that cannot be produced in the periods between fighting, in the time of idle sitting in the trenches.

In yet another situation from the daily life in the trenches, Jünger's narrator recalls an interaction in which humour has the function of a reminder:

An manchen Teilen der Stellung, so an den Sappenköpfen, stehen die Posten kaum dreißig Schritt voneinander entfernt. Hier spinnt sich zuweilen eine persönliche Bekanntschaft an; man erkennt Fritz, Wilhelm oder Tommy an der Art, in der er hustet, pfeift oder singt. Kurze Zurufe, die eines rauhen Humors nicht entbehren, gehen hin und her. "He, Tommy, bist du noch da?" "Ja!" "Dann steck mal den Kopf weg, ich will jetzt schießen!" (51-52)

On some sectors of the line, say at the sap heads, the sentries are barely thirty yards apart. Here you sometimes get personally acquainted with your opposite numbers; you get to know Tommy or Fritz or Wilhelm by his cough or his whistle or his singing voice. Shouts are exchanged, often with an edge of rough humour. "Hey, Tommy, are you still there?" "Yup!" "Then get your head down, I'm about to start shooting at you!" (45)

The narrator recognizes his comrades by their voices in the darkness and hears that one of them is threatened with being shot if he doesn't hide in time. While Michael Hofmann, in his translation, interprets the episode in a way that implies that the exchange of calls happens between the German and the British line,⁶⁰ I believe that the "personal acquaintances" mentioned in the text are between German soldiers only. The cause of the confusion is probably the name "Tommy," which is considered a generalizing nickname for British soldiers and is occasionally used as such by the narrator of *In Stahlgewittern*.⁶¹ Yet "Tommy" can also be the diminutive of the German name "Thomas," and appears here in a series of German names ("Fritz, Wilhelm oder Tommy;" where the "oder" ["or"] further indicates that the names are interchangeable with each other). What is more, there is no indication in the passage that the exchange between the sentries is translated—which would certainly be required given the complex formulations. The warning, "steck mal den Kopf weg, ich will jetzt schießen," is thus given to a fellow German soldier and is interpreted by the narrator as humorous, although it can also be read as a very serious

60 There is also serious doubt that the British and German lines would be separated by the distance of only "thirty yards." That speaks to the error in Hofmann's translation of that passage.

61 Jünger describes, for instance, the excitement of the German soldiers about the artillery attack at the British lines, and uses the nickname "Tommy" for the enemy:

Mit dem Genuß von Kennern betrachten sie die Einschläge der Artillerie im feindlichen Graben. "Junge, der saß!" "Donnerwetter, sieh mal, wie das spritzt! Armer Tommy! Da bleibt kein Auge trocken!" (54)

With connoisseurial expressions, they follow the bursts of our artillery in the enemy trench. "Bull's eye!" "Wow, did you see the dirt go up after that one! Poor old Tommy! There's mud in your eye!" (48)

Similar nomenclature of British soldiers is found in the descriptions of the Christmas Eve at the front (65), of the assault during the Cambrai battle (223), and of the defence at the Vraucourt position (257).

threat: "if you stay in my way, I will hurt you." In the process of interpretation, the narrator transforms the call into an indication of affiliation with the group—"I am only joking, I would never hurt you because we are both in the same troop." The call is a message to the other soldier that he should stay awake for the benefit of the whole group, especially in this stressful situation, where the exhausted and fatigued soldiers can be overwhelmed by boredom. Here again appears the main function of group laughter in Jünger's war narration: it serves to uphold the norm, and those who violate the norm will be punished violently. Laughter thereby becomes a warning issued from the group to individual soldiers, that they must respect the rules of military service. Otherwise, the structural violence (represented by the military organization, with its book of instructions and hierarchy, and by the conditions of trench warfare, all of which limit the freedom of the individual soldiers) will be replaced by direct violence against the individual as a disciplinary action.

According to Henri Bergson, one of the most important conditions for a humorous situation to take place is a momentary "absence of feeling which usually accompanies laughter" (9), the emotional dissociation of the observers from the observed situation, their lack of empathy. The scenes, as described by Jünger, do not relate whether the soldiers who are laughed at are also laughing about the threat, sharing the amusement of the group. Jünger excludes their reaction as superfluous to the account of the scene. The interpretation of the incidents as "funny" depends entirely on the narrator. The narrator masks the violent character of the scenes by depicting them as humorous; therefore the observer associates himself with the perpetrators and tends to ignore the violent consequences of the actions for the victims (in Bergson's terms, laughter would cause the momentary lack of empathy). Nevertheless, laughter in Jünger's narration emerges as yet

another form of violence directed against individuals who do not comply with the norm established by the book of regulations and/or the ideal of soldierly behaviour on the battlefield.

The military rules are not the only indicator of the norm: in some cases, laughter is directed against the official rank, a behaviour that can be described as insubordination from the point of view of the military hierarchy. In *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*, Jünger provides the reader with more insights into his understanding of the kind of behaviour that should, according to him, become the "norm." After gaining significant front-line experience, Jünger's narrator and his troop look down on higher officers who do not have comparable knowledge of the battlefield, although they belong to the same formation:

Mittags hockten wir oft in einem Sonnenfleck des Grabens beisammen, rauchend und schweigend, denn wir kannten uns schon so lange, daß wir uns nichts mehr zu sagen hatten. Durch unerbittliche Verhältnisse zusammengeschiedet wie Galeerensklaven, waren wir meist mürrisch und mochten uns kaum mehr sehen. Manchmal schritt einer von denen dahinten an uns vorüber, sehr eilig, geschäftig, in der Hand eine Karte, von roten und blauen Linien und Zeichen bedeckt. Sehr einfach, die blauen Striche waren wir und die roten der Feind. Wir sahen, daß er rasiert war, daß seine Stiefel glänzten, daß er für das, was uns ankotzte, Interesse hatte, und machten eine Reihe bitterer Witze darüber. (47-48)

At noon, we often squatted together in a sunny spot in the trench, smoking in silence, because we already knew each other for so long that we did not have anything more to tell each other. We were forged together like galley slaves by the relentless conditions, we were grumpy, and we didn't want to see each other anymore. Sometimes, one of those guys from behind the lines walked past us, very hasty, very busy, with a map in his hand covered with blue and red lines and symbols. Very simply put, the blue lines were us and the red lines the enemy. We saw that he was shaved and that his boots were shining and that he was interested in what made us sick, and we made a number of bitter jokes about it. (my transl.)

The laughing group is smaller than the troop, and consists only of the seasoned soldiers who have fought on the front line. In the opinion of these experienced fighters, the

features of the officers about whom they make jokes are characteristics in need of discussion and reconsideration. Laughter marks the division between the "old hands" and the staff officers, a line that cannot be erased only by the fact that they all fight against the same enemy. Laughter assembles the German soldiers into subgroups that cut across the army hierarchy (among the laughing soldiers are both privates and officers). But even if the soldiers make jokes about the pen pushers from the headquarters, their attitude shows jealousy.

A summary of the instances, initiators, and targets of humour and laughter described above makes clear what Jünger suggests is the image of an "ideal" soldier: experienced and knowledgeable of new military technology, energetic, flexible, and not overly attached to formal military hierarchy. The narrator differentiates between the "princes of the trenches" (as he calls himself and his comrades⁶²) and the rest of the army, especially headquarters officers. At the same time, Jünger longs for a synthesis of the experienced front-line soldier and the officer whose perspective is not limited to the

62 In one of the most cited and controversial passages of *In Stahlgewittern*, Jünger offers the idealized image of the unappreciated heroes of the first line:

Unter allen erregenden Momenten des Krieges ist keiner so stark wie die Begegnung zweier Stoßtruppführer zwischen den engen Lehmwänden der Kampfstellung. Da gibt es kein Zurück und kein Erbarmen. Das weiß jeder, der sie in ihrem Reich gesehen hat, die Fürsten des Grabens mit den harten, entschlossenen Gesichtern, tollkühn, geschmeidig vor und zurück springend, mit scharfen, blutdürstigen Augen, Männer, die ihrer Stunde gewachsen waren und die kein Bericht nennt. (226)

Of all the stimulating moments in a war, there is none to compare with the encounter of two storm troop commanders in the narrow clay walls of a line. There is no going back, and no pity. And so everyone knows who has seen one or other of them in their kingdom, the aristocrat of the trench, with hard, determined visage, brave to the point of folly, leaping agilely forward and back, with keen, bloodthirsty eyes, men who answered the demands of the hour, and whose names go down in no chronicle. (216)

actions of his own troop, who has a broad view of the situation that allows him to make independent decisions during battle. It confirms the model of "storm-troop leader" that Jünger develops in his works about the First World War.⁶³ What has escaped scholars so far is the fact that the projection of an ideal soldier, defined by the statements of his various narrators, is also clearly expressed through the employment of humour and laughter.

It is noteworthy that the model of "storm-troop leader" offered by Jünger places him in a position of conflict when he becomes the troop commander and has to negotiate between the need to be an authority figure and simultaneously keep his informal position in the group as a comrade. Jünger seeks to solve the problem by employing humour:

Ja, er ist jetzt in seinem Element, mein alter Stoßtrupp. Die Tat, der Griff der Faust hat alle Nebel zerrissen. Schon schallt ein halblautes Witzwort über die Schulterwehr. Es ist zwar nicht geschmackvoll zu fragen: "Na, Dicker, hast auch dein Schlachtgewicht voll?", indes—sie lachen doch und der Dicke am meisten. Nur nicht gerührt werden. Gleich beginnt das Fest, und wir sind seine Fürsten. (*Kampf* 77)

Yes, my old storm troop is in its element now. The action, the grip of the fist has torn up all mists. A half-whispered joke already circles over the trench wall. It's true that it's not very tasteful to ask: "Hey, fatty, did you reach your slaughter weight?"; they laugh, however, and the fat one laughs the most. Just don't get emotional. The feast is about to start, and we are its princes. (my transl.)

All soldiers laugh, including the chubby soldier at whom the leader directs the joke. The laughter of all members of the troop creates the laughing community, in which all soldiers are equal and the differences in rank disappear. At first sight, it appears to be the community of the "princes of the trenches" proclaimed by Jünger. All appear to be equal—but some are more equal than others. The soldier who tells the joke initiates the

63 The model of Jünger's "Stoßtruppführer" ["storm-troop leader"] is described in detail by Heinz Ludwig Arnold, Klaus Gauger, and Martin Konitzer.

humorous situation and obliges the other soldiers to laugh. Through the action he reconstructs the military hierarchy that Jünger attempts to modify through the concept of the "storm trooper": his position as the leader who throws the joke over his shoulder indicates his dominant status in the group. The object of the joke is the fattest soldier in the troop. The selection of the target—the body shape that may prevent the soldier from fast movement on the battlefield—is far from incidental. Jünger makes a joke that appears quite harmless, but there is a threatening promise in the content of the joke: the fat soldiers may be the first ones to die. In addition, the linguistic joke of "Schlachtgewicht" evokes the association with killing an animal, employing the double meaning of "Schlacht"/"schlachten": to fight the battle, to slaughter animals. In the logic of the joke, the plump comrade equals a farm animal raised until it reaches the proper weight to be killed; the fat soldier belongs to the sphere of inferior creatures. Therefore, the soldiers may laugh because of the feeling of superiority that they experience thinking about the upcoming selection of the "real" human beings, an elevation over the carnal aspect of the fight. Those who live long enough to see the end of the battle, who have not been "slaughtered," prove that their humanity is advanced to a special status through the simple fact of survival.

Laughter at the cost of the less experienced soldiers is also a method of stressing the importance of self-control and the proper recognition of danger:

Zur Seite des Waldpfades dröhnten in einem Tannendickicht dumpfe
Stöße . . . Ein Ängstlicher warf sich unter erzwungenem Gelächter der
Kameraden zu Boden. (28)

To the side of the forest path, dull thumps came down in a clump of firs
. . . One nervous soldier threw himself to the ground, while his comrades
laughed uneasily. (23)

Depictions of laughing and smiling are common strategies in Jünger's war writings, employed for the purpose of non-verbal communication between the members of the same troop. In the situation quoted below from *In Stahlgewittern*, the shelling that prepares the field before the enemy attack intensifies, and the men waiting in the defence line call to each other to remain vigilant:

Zuweilen blickten sie nach rechts und links, um zu beobachten, ob der Anschluß noch vorhanden wäre, und lächelten, wenn ihr Blick einen Bekannten traf. (*Stahlgewittern* 33)

From time to time they checked to left and right to see whether we were still in contact, and they smiled when their eyes encountered those of comrades. (*Storm* 28)

The smile serves as a sign of recognition and encouragement before the expected attack. In the tightly-knit group, humour, too, opens a possibility of mutual understanding without the necessity of talking about the war. The joke becomes a semantic structure that allows the soldiers to talk about the traumatic experience without being forced to verbalize something that cannot be named precisely without expenditure of a significant amount of energy:

Man war so ineinander versponnen, so auf dasselbe Rad des Schicksals geflochten, daß man sich verstand, fast ohne zu sprechen. Jeder wanderte durch dieselbe nächtliche Landschaft des Gefühls, ein Seufzer, ein Fluch, ein Witzwort waren die Flammen, die für Augenblicke das Dunkel über dem Abgrund zerrissen. (*Kampf* 34)

We were so spun together and broken. Tied to the same wheel together so that we understood each other almost without any words at all. All of us roamed through the same night landscape of emotions; a sigh, a swear word, a joke were the flames that, for a short time, tore up the darkness over the abyss. (my transl.)

An interesting parallel can be drawn here between the function of the joke as depicted in the passage above, and the situation from Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues*, when the narrator, Paul Bäumer, tries to use the same strategy of telling jokes to avoid talking

about the war with his father and, at the same time, re-connect with him after Paul's long absence from home (see the scene description on page 175).

Laughing at other soldiers in the troop who are doing something funny helps them to forget the danger that is recognized and identified. The narrator, making his duty rounds in the trenches, encounters Sergeant Hock, who stands outside of his dugout and wants to kill a rat that kept him awake all night.

Als wir so nebeneinander standen, hörten wir einen dumpfen Abschluß, der indes nichts Besonderes zu bedeuten hatte. Hock, der am Tage vorher beinahe von einer großen Kugelmine erschlagen worden wäre und daher sehr ängstlich war, fuhr wie ein Blitz zum nächsten Stolleneingang, rutschte in seiner Hast die ersten fünfzehn Stufen sitzend hinunter und benutzte die letzten fünfzehn dazu, sich dreimal zu überschlagen. Ich stand oben am Eingang und vergaß vor Lachen Mine und Stollen, als ich diese schmerzhafteste Unterbrechung einer Rattenjagd von dem armen Opfer unter empfindsamem Reiben verschiedener Körperstellen und Einrenkungsversuchen an einem verstauchten Daumen beklagen hörte. (*Stahlgewittern* 80)

While we were standing together, we heard a distant sound of firing, which boded nothing in particular to us. But Hock, who the day before had almost been brained by a large mortar-bomb, and was therefore very apprehensive, dived into the nearest shelter, sliding down the first steps in his haste, and finding space in the next fifteen for three virtuoso somersaults. I stood up by the entrance, laughing so hard I forgot all about mortars and shelters, when I heard the poor chap bewailing this painfully curtailed rat-hunt, all the while rubbing various sore joints and attempting to put back a dislocated thumb. (*Storm* 73-74)

The incident shows that an excess of sensitivity in reacting to the shelling is an obstacle to fulfilling one's duties as a soldier. Hock's plumpness and hastiness in finding shelter cause laughter. The narrator laughs also because of the result of Hock's escape: the very action that is supposed to protect him from harm ends by causing him physical injuries. The situation appears funny only under the condition that the injuries are not really serious compared to the consequences of the explosion of the mortar-bomb.

Laughter as consciously employed relaxation strategy emerges also in "Feuer und Blut" ["Fire and Blood"], when the first grenade bursts as the soldiers approach the battlefield and see the clearing in the forest covered with the bodies of dead soldiers:

. . . da rief in die beklommene Stille, die nun einsetzte, ein alter Krieger hinein: "Jetzt ist euch das Hammelfell geplatzt!" Aber das Lachen war nicht mehr dasselbe wie kurz zuvor. (*Feuer* 445)

. . . and then, I threw the old soldier joke in the uneasy silence: "This one tanned you all right!" But the laughter wasn't the same as just moments before. (my transl.)

The gradation of the intensity of laughter mentioned by the narrator shows that the sight of the outcome of the attack—the dead bodies in front of the attacking soldiers—makes laughter much more difficult than before, when the possibility of death was just an abstract idea. The visualisation, the instantiation of the fragility of their own bodies when exposed to violence (the recognition process opposed to the "absence of feeling," mentioned by Bergson) makes the soldiers much less prone to laughter.

Laughter can be also a gesture of reconciliation with the anticipated fate of the soldier in the battle of materiel. A fighter described in "Feuer und Blut," while looking at the mortar fire on the battlefield and feeling the inequality of man's struggle against the destructive technology of war, empties the bottle that he is supposed to save for the upcoming heat of the day. The narrator describes him:

Ich sah, wie er sie zum Munde hob, in einem langen Zug leerte und lachend nach vorn über die Brüstung warf. . . . Er sah voraus, daß er sie morgen nicht mehr würde leeren können. In dieser einfachen Handlung lag eine so selbstverständliche Überlegenheit, daß ich plötzlich das Gefühl einer großen Befreiung empfand, daß ich ihn hätte umarmen mögen und mit einem Schlage ganz lustig geworden war. (*Feuer* 451)

I saw him lifting it to his mouth, emptying it at one go, and throwing it over the trench wall while laughing. . . . He foresaw that he may not have the chance to empty it tomorrow. In that simple act was such natural superiority that, suddenly, I experienced a feeling of huge relief; I felt I could give him a hug, and I became very jolly all at once. (my transl.)

The soldier's laughter is a demonstration of the superiority of man over machine. Calculating one's chance of survival, thinking about the future and strategically planning one's next move, takes away hope because the process of recognition of one's own chances is influenced by the knowledge of the soldiers who did not make it. Rationality belongs to the sphere of the mechanical and makes men inferior to the overwhelming killing machinery. The soldier, and with him Jünger's narrator, refuses to estimate his own chances for survival and rejects the necessity of thinking about the asymmetry of fighting power. In the desperado gesture of using up the reserves, the soldier denies acknowledgement of his hopeless situation. All that the attackers have is their bravery, and their laughter is a signal of their imagined dominance. The attacking soldier become "lustig" ["merry," "jolly"], while at the same time they demonstrate "Lust" ["pleasure"] to engage in the uneven fight.

The balance between the demonstrated bravery and the ignorance in calculating their chances in the fight against war technology is, however, quite subtle. An episode from the Langemarck battle, described in *In Stahlgewittern*, when the troop is under fire from circling aircraft demonstrates that very clearly:

Inmitten dieser irren Knallerei mußte ich über einen Mann lachen, der sich bei mir meldete und bescheinigt haben wollte, daß er mit seinem Gewehr ein Flugzeug in Brand geschossen hätte. (*Stahlgewittern* 179-80)

In the middle of that crazy banging away, I had to laugh at one soldier who came up to me and wanted me to confirm that it was he with his rifle who had brought down one plane in flames. (*Storm* 170)

The soldier who claims that he single-handedly shot down the plane makes a laughing stock of himself. The judgment of his claim, made by the narrator, who is already an experienced soldier, excludes him from the community of the brave and locates him in the group of the ignorant.

Some humour results from the incongruence between the military domain and the civilian sphere: writing inscriptions in the wet trench dugouts reminds the observers of the custom of marking popular tourist attractions, and thus of the holiday leisure that they enjoyed before the war. The names of the trenches, coming from a paradigm of bourgeois life, stress the primitive conditions at the front line, with the contrast between the activities of the tourists and the nearly animal existence of the front-line soldiers being a condition for the humorous situation:

[E]in gewisser Galgenhumor hatte sie deshalb mit entsprechenden Schildern wie "Tropfsteinhöhle," "Zum Männerbad" und ähnlichen gekennzeichnet. (17)

With a certain gallows humor they were called "dripping wells," "men's baths," and so on. (6)

Joking can be a strategy of making and maintaining contact between the soldiers and the civilian population. In Bazancourt, in the province of Champagne, Jünger befriends the other soldiers with whom he shares quarters. They stay and eat together and have to find their own sources of supplies. The common military practice was to requisition food from the French civilian population of the occupied territories. Jünger describes how he acquires the groceries from his French landlady:

Da ich den Einkauf für den Abendtisch besorgte, legte mir unsere Wirtin einmal eine Anzahl von Bons vor, die sie von requirierenden Soldaten erhalten hatte; eine Blütenlese des Volkshumors, meist des Inhalts, daß der Füsilier N.N. der Tochter des Hauses Liebenswürdigkeiten erwiesen und zur Stärkung zwölf Eier requiriert habe. (24)

As I was the one in charge of making purchases, our landlady once showed me a number of vouchers or promissory notes she had received from soldiers requisitioning food; a wonderful selection of earthy humour, generally to the effect that rifleman A. N. Other, having paid his homage to the charms of the daughter of the house, had needed a dozen eggs to help him recoup his strength. (18)

The landlady shows Jünger the documents confirming the war requisitions that he evaluates as funny for a number of reasons. First, it is a strategy used by her to stress her position of imagined, potential, vulnerability. Even if the business transaction satisfies both parties, the woman opens the possibility of being a victim of the requisition. In the paradigm of the relations between the troops and civilians during the war, the woman symbolically puts Jünger in the position of the aggressor, while the hidden accusation of injustice is mitigated by the humorous vouchers.

Second, the "Blütenlese des Volkshumors" (24) ["the wonderful selection of earthy humour" (18)] can be an element of a culturally specific flirtation between the landlady and the narrator, in which the latent sexual tension between the interacting parties emerges to the surface through the conventional means of sharing a funny story. The joking allows the transposition of the sexual subtext onto a fictional situation in order to safely play out the possibility of sexual encounter, and reduce the tension between the interacting partners.

Third, through the act of sharing the amusing story, specific gender and social roles are also confirmed and become stereotypes: the soldier in the anecdote who makes the requisition is the active part of the sexually charged situation, the daughter of the house is put into a receiving position (in grammatical terms, the woman is the object, along with the purchased grocery products). The requisition of eggs concludes the double win of the soldier. The man takes advantage of the woman twice, once as a sexual aggressor, and second—instead of being punished for his indecent act—by stepping into the power position afforded to him by the military and requesting her material contribution. The joke lies in the reversal of the expectations: the soldier not only goes unpunished, but he also reinforces his indecency by requesting a reward (that would also

strengthen his ability to conduct further indecent acts). What creates the funny incongruity is the soldier's refusal to acknowledge the immorality of his actions, his clever, rapid role switch in order to avoid symbolic punishment and keep his dominant position in every situation. Judging by the number of vouchers and notes mentioned in the quoted text passage, food requisition along with the execution of the dominant position was common practice among the German soldiers. Through the strategy of multiplication and anonymization of the authors of the notes ("Füsilier N.N." ["rifleman A. N. Other"]), Jünger creates a norm of soldierly behaviour towards civilians and women in which the (sexual) exploitation of the non-military population, the submission of the civilians towards the soldiers, and the necessity of male potency are central.

In conclusion, in war narrations of Jünger, humour plays an important role in the establishment of power structures. Sociological studies of humour stress its function as a social adhesive which creates an inclusive "laughing community," for example groups of trusted soldiers—"old folks"—that can be observed in all of Jünger's war narrations. Humour creates a socially sanctioned means of expressing resentment, distrust, or resistance against members of the same group, a means to reject the validity of the military hierarchy that has not been proven in the smoke and fire of battle. But humour can also be a force in the exercise of power. This is especially true in the case of disparaging humour that is used to symbolically elevate the joking person over the "butt of the joke": the person whose unwelcome shortcomings and defects are the target of the joke. The laughing group establishes an ideal model of behaviour and set of values and desired characteristics, depending on who is laughing and what or who is laughed at.

The use of disparaging humour, even in an apparently harmless situation, can be seen as a method of setting up, confirming, and maintaining the power structures within a

social group at the cost of the violation or limitation of individual freedom. The characters in the narrations struggle for a position in the social hierarchy, while the use of aggressive, disparaging humour serves as an indication of social status. As sociologists have noted, this almost always moves down the hierarchical ladder—the jokes are made at the expense of people who occupy a subordinate position in the given group. In the case of Jünger's narrations, this invalidates his projection of the storm-troop leader who is also a comrade. Disparaging, tendentious, hostile, and aggressive humour allows the group to vent anger and correct the unwanted behaviour of others without using direct violence.

CHAPTER 3
VORMARSCH [THE ADVANCE FROM MONS 1914] BY WALTER BLOEM
(1916)

3.1. The reception of Walter Bloem's work. *Vormarsch*: The forgotten First World War memoirs

Ich berichte in diesem Buche nur Selbsterlebtes, nur Dinge, die ich bis zum letzten Buchstaben als wortwörtliche Wahrheit verbürgen kann.
 (*Vormarsch* 268)

I report in this book only things I have experienced myself and for which I can guarantee literal truthfulness from the first to the last letter. (my transl.)

The credo of the autobiographical narrator of Walter Bloem's First World War memoirs *Vormarsch* [*The Advance from Mons 1914: The Experiences of a German Infantry Officer*], clearly puts an emphasis on the value, for reportage, of one's personal experience in war.⁶⁴ The contemporary reader who has navigated the waste sea of post-1914 first-person accounts of the war will not be surprised by his statement. Bloem was hardly alone in his "nothing but the truth" approach to the events of the war.⁶⁵ In this regard, Walter Bloem's *Vormarsch*⁶⁶ can be associated with Jünger's best-known First

64 The memoirs comprise three parts: *Vormarsch* (1916), *Sturmsignal* [*Attack Signal*] (1919), and *Das Ganze—halt!* [*The Whole—Stop!*] (1934).

65 For a description of war literature during and after the First World War, see Hans-Harald Müller, *Der Krieg und die Schriftsteller: Der Kriegerroman der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1986) 11-35.

66 The translation of *Vormarsch* I will be using in this chapter is taken from the 1930 English edition prepared by Peter Davies Limited, which was reprinted by Helion & Company Limited in 2004. The author of the translation is C. G. Wynne. All translations of original quotes marked with page numbers are taken from the reprint. I also provide my own translation of selected fragments and mark them appropriately in the text. The reprint is an abridged translation of the original text. A number of fragments I include in this chapter are missing from the English text, which in some instances omits entire pages. The omissions may be a result of an attempt in 2004 to shorten the more than three-hundred-page text, though I could not verify this

World War work, *In Stahlgewittern* (described in the previous chapter). Unlike Jünger's work about the First World War, Bloem's war memoirs escaped scholarly analysis so far, or—and this seems to me a plausible explanation of scholarly reluctance—his writing, overshadowed by the author's later involvement in the Third Reich's political structures, was not considered worthy of close professional attention. Except for short entries in literature dictionaries and lexicons, there are only two larger attempts to interpret Bloem's work and present him as an author. Rudibert Ettelt, in his biographical and reception

assumption due to the unavailability of the first English edition. It is more likely, however, that the earlier editor wished to exclude any personal content from the account of military operations, and the overly nationalistic fragments in which Bloem exalts his devotion to the Kaiser and to the German nation. Supporting this theory is the foreword by Brig-General Sir James E. Edmonds, in which the "compiler of the official history of the war" (as the Brig-General is presented on the title page) engages in a polemic against Bloem, and challenges the author's credibility as war documentarian. Edmonds blames Bloem and the German propaganda machine for "ignoring the second defeat of Kluck by Smith-Dorrien" in 1916 (vi), and seems to overlook Bloem's limited knowledge about the front situation at the time when the author wrote down his notes. The fact that Edmonds offers extended corrections to Bloem's account of the battles proves that the German text was received as a strictly historical document of the German advances on the western front. This reception of the text would explain the cuts to the "unnecessary" personal digressions. Also, the extended title—the German *Vormarsch* grew to *The Advance from Mons 1914*, additionally indicating the date and place of the narration—suggests that the English translation was treated as a historical source in the debate about the war. The subtitle to the English title of the work ("The Experiences of a German Infantry Officer"), not present in the original, along with the statement of Bloem's rank and the company in which he served ("Captain, 12th Brandenburg Grenadiers"), emphasise the authenticity and specific historical placement of the narration. Except for the passage that I used as the opening quote of the chapter, Bloem also expresses his devotion to truthfulness and specifies his narrative perspective in the chapter devoted to the Marne battle: "Ich kenne heute den Zusammenhang: aber getreu meinem Grundsatz will ich nur Erlebtes schildern. Unser Gefühl, unsere Gespräche und Ansichten von damals will ich wiedergeben. Sie trafen ja im ganzen das Richtige" (284) ["I already know the context today; but, following my principle, I want to depict only the events I experienced. I want to give account of our feelings, our conversations and opinions of the time. After all, they got to the heart of the matter" (my transl.)]. He does not perceive how problematic his approach is: that his own account has a priority over other depictions and versions of the Marne battle. He dismisses them as "Schwindel" (285, 299) ["fraud" (my transl.)].

study *Der Große Krieg, Teil 2: Walter Bloem, Ein Erfolgsautor der Wilhelminischen Zeit*, concentrates on Bloem's achievements as an author of historical novels (although the title of the volume is somewhat misleading, considering the fact that the peak of Bloem's popularity dates from the very last years of the Kaiserreich). Rodley F. Morris, in his analysis *From Weimar Philosemite to Nazi Apologist: The Case of Walter Bloem*, focuses, significantly, on Bloem's artistic and moral failures during the Hitler era. Morris concentrates his attention on the work *Die Brüderlichkeit [Brotherhood]* (1922), that surprised Bloem's traditional nationalist readership with its positive attitude towards the Jewish minority in Germany. The critic follows Bloem's literary and political activity from the moment of the publication of his controversial novel to his engagement in the Nazi propaganda offices. He summarizes the scholarly attitude towards the author in one short sentence: "Walter Bloem has not yet received detailed scholarly scrutiny, though his dubious role in the writers' associations has been documented" (3). Of Bloem's historical novels, the foundations of his fame, only two have been briefly examined by literary scholars after 1945: *Das Jüngste Gericht [The Last Judgment]* (1907) was mentioned by Werner Niemann, and *Gottesferne [The Distance from God]* (1920) was analyzed by Frank Westenfelder.⁶⁷ Despite the author's political entanglements, it is

67 See Hans-Werner Niemann, *Das Bild des industriellen Unternehmens in deutschen Romanen der Jahre 1890-1945* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1982) 65-69. Also: Frank Westenfelder, *Genese, Problematik und Wirkung nationalsozialistischer Literatur am Beispiel des historischen Romans zwischen 1890 und 1945* (Frankfurt am Main, New York: P. Lang, 1989) 98-100. Of Bloem's other works, only the early student novel, *Der krasse Fuchs [The Freshman]* (1906), was considered in the discourse about the culture of Wilhelminian Germany. See Holger Zinn, "Der krasse Fuchs: Literarischer Beitrag des alten Corpsstudenten Walter Bloem zur Marburger Universitätsgeschichte und seine Hintergründe," *Einst und Jetzt: Jahrbuch des Vereins für corpsstudentische Geschichtsforschung* 48 (2003): 327-37. Walter Bloem was sharply criticized by literary scholars in the Weimar Republic for flattering the popular tastes of the readers: "Der Erfolg macht ihn feder- und grammatikleicht" (232) ["Success makes him write more—and less grammatically" (my transl.)] notes

somewhat surprising that his memoirs of 1914-18 are now as good as forgotten. The huge popularity of Bloem's narratives during and after the war demonstrates that it hit the nerve of the time, yet it does not stand in comparison with the popular and scholarly reception of either Remarque's or Jünger's work. Still, the popularity of Bloem's work at the time provokes questions about the distribution of specific images of war, attitudes against the conflict, and the understanding of the relationships and hierarchies of the army, as projected by the civilian majority. Bloem represents the group of middle-class and middle-aged Germans who pushed for military confrontation, as Margrit Stickelberger-Eder notes, to escape their "political immaturity" in the Wilhelminian era.⁶⁸ Their expectations for, and perception of, the military conflict were to a great degree shaped by the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71, in which they did not have a chance to

Guido Brand, about Bloem's trilogy, which he regards as the bestselling books in the history of German literature until the 1930s. See Guido Karl Brand, *Werden und Wandlung: Eine Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von 1880 bis heute* (Berlin: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1933) 232. Carl von Ossietzky wrote quite maliciously about Bloem: "Herr Bloem gehört als Romanautor zu jenen Glücklichen, denen ihre Mittelmäßigkeit nicht schadet, sondern nützt. Ein fleißiger, zäher Arbeiter, um dessen schweißtriefende Stirn die Muse einen Bogen macht. Ein braver Kerl, wird man sagen, wenn man sieht, wie er sich um sein Handwerk müht" (465) ["Mr. Bloem belongs to the lucky category of novelists who are not hurt by but take advantage of their own mediocrity. He is a hard-working, tough person, and the muse gives his sweating forehead a wide berth. A brave lad, one would say if one saw how hard he plies his trade." (my transl.)]. See Carl von Ossietzky, "Herr Walter Bloem," *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. Gerhard Kraiker, et al. (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1994) 484-90.

68 In original: "politische Unmündigkeit." Stickelberger-Eder interprets the enthusiasm of the German middle class for the outbreak of the First World War as an expression of a feeling of liberation from people, like Walter Bloem, who, despite their growing economic power in the Wilhelminian Reich, did not have any real influence on the political decision-making processes in the state. They saw the war as an opportunity to participate in politics. Stickelberger-Eder evaluates the apparently euphoric reactions to the news about the war (spontaneous mass demonstrations on the streets, huge waves of patriotic songs in the first months of the war) as "organized chaos" and "ordered anarchy." See Margrit Stickelberger-Eder, *Aufbruch 1914: Kriegsromane der späten Weimarer Republik* (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1983) 34-56.

participate. Despite having no war experience at all, Bloem developed colourful combat scenes in his historical novels and contributed to the popularization of specific images of war that were not by any means a product of a first-hand account.

While analysing the images of combat in Bloem's memoirs, and their relation to humour, I will concentrate exclusively on the first part of the trilogy. It describes the front-line service of Captain Bloem in the first six weeks of the war, until he was wounded and came back to Germany on September 13th, 1914. After his recovery, he was sent to the Office of the General Governor in Brussels and made responsible for the propaganda newsreels relating to German military operations in occupied Belgium. The work in the propaganda office is described in the second part of his work, *Sturmsignal*, and does not contain front-line episodes or scenes of humorous interaction between Bloem and other soldiers. The third part, *Das Ganze—halt!*, was published after Hitler's seizure of power in 1933, and therefore exceeds the time frame set for this analysis of works written during the First World War and in the Weimar Republic.⁶⁹

The association of Bloem's memoirs with Ernst Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern* that I made earlier is justified if we compare the structure of both works and the similar circumstances in which the first drafts of the texts were created. Both Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern* and Bloem's *Vormarsch* are based on personal notes and descriptions of events that the authors witnessed on the front and then wrote down retrospectively during hospital stays, vacations behind the front line, and after or between front operations. The

69 The second and third parts of Bloem's memoirs are, nevertheless, great sources for an analysis of the propaganda techniques employed by the higher German officers responsible for handling the "German atrocities" in Belgium. The justification of the use of nationalist propaganda during the war offered by Bloem in *Sturmsignal* and *Das Ganze—halt!*, along with his proposals about how to improve the persuasion methods employed (with a number of specific instructions for the next conflict!), read like a manual for the Nazi regime.

organizing principle of the original diary on which the final text is based is visible in both works. The narration is used primarily to support the author's memory and to document the witnessed events. The first-person narration in which the narrator is identified by name with the author of the text, the strictly chronological order of the described actions, the overload of names of commanding officers and detailed depictions of strategic manoeuvres, and a narrative perspective limited to the immediate actions of the company also speak to the origins of the texts as diaries. Further, both autobiographical novels are characterized by an open form: Jünger's account ends with his reception of a high military order and not—as the logic of the work would require—with the last day of the war. Bloem's text concludes with the train trip that takes the wounded protagonist from the front in Belgium back to Germany. Both authors also admit in the text (or, in case of Jünger, in one of the later texts that functions as a prelude to the war opus) that they treat their written accounts as faithful documents of war. The transformed diary texts claim to provide the reader with an authentic experience and not to serve as a work of literary fiction. Jünger recalls in his short story "Kriegsausbruch 1914" ["The Outbreak of the War 1914"], written in 1934, that he took a notebook on his way to the train station when he departed for the front in December 1914, intending to use it for his daily entries about that most unusual and exciting life event, the war.⁷⁰ This notebook (in time expanding to fourteen volumes) would constitute the most immediate—and therefore true-to-the-facts

70 "In meiner Rocktasche hatte ich ein schmales Büchlein verwahrt; es war für meine tägliche Aufzeichnungen bestimmt. Ich wußte, daß die Dinge, die uns erwarteten, unwiederbringlich waren, und ich ging mit höchster Neugier auf sie zu." (*Kriegsausbruch* 544) ["In my uniform pocket I kept secure a thin notebook; it was destined to carry my daily notes. I knew that the things which were awaiting us were irreversible, and I approached them with the highest level of curiosity." (my transl.)].

—response of the author to the war. The same assumption, that the literary activity will "bear witness" to the conflict, is evident in Bloem's motto.

The differences between the texts become clear when we consider the social position of the narrator. While both Jünger and Bloem are beginning new periods in their lives that will ultimately change their position in the hierarchy of the military organization, the starting point of Bloem's narration is different: unlike Jünger, Bloem has already achieved a respected position in the military during peacetime (he is a captain), and he has undergone numerous military exercises (the last completed two weeks before August 1st). He hopes to maintain his relatively high status during his war service, but he acknowledges his lack of real combat experience. Not accidentally, in the opening chapter, Bloem mentions his age: in 1914, he is celebrating his forty-sixth birthday, and he remarks that he is already one year over the age limit for mandatory military service. He does not explain directly why he is volunteering for the field service; to him, serving the country is a natural consequence of his nationalist convictions. The fact that he does not fail to mention his relatively advanced age serves two convenient purposes: first, it is proof of his dedication to the beloved country, and second, it puts him in the comfortable position of a soldier who cannot be blamed for his shortcomings based on a lack of physical fitness.

On the other hand, Jünger (*nomen est omen*)—only nineteen years old when he joins the military directly after his final school exams—has nothing to lose and everything to gain in terms of social position. *In Stahlgewittern* does not have a pre-story that would give the reader an understanding of the author/narrator's social status before August 1914. Jünger throws himself into the war as into a new, risky, and exciting adventure, leaving nothing behind with which he would regret to part, while *Vormarsch*

builds a relation of conflict between Bloem's pre-war life and his unknown fate in the war. Bloem's narrator clearly expresses his regrets about the outbreak of the war. Walter Bloem's narration is singular among German first-person war writing because of the juxtaposition of the good life he enjoyed so far with the unknown development of the war that could destroy everything he values. Bloem does not belong to the "front generation" of writers: he does not find his place in the group of young soldiers like Remarque, who represents the "lost generation" of "men who, even though they may have escaped its shells, were destroyed by the war" (*Im Westen* preface). Neither does Bloem speak for warriors like Jünger, for whom the war, as an adventure and inner experience, created an opportunity to escape the bourgeois world, and marked the beginning of a new, fascinating era of "total mobilization." Bloem, born in 1868, is older than they by a generation, and the new war experience would not leave as significant a mark on his world-view as has been claimed in the case of younger authors. For that reason, in the first part of this chapter, I would like to take a closer look at the transition between the pre-war and war period as depicted by Bloem. I find the importance that Bloem prescribes to the transition in his life especially fruitful for the interpretation of humorous situations in the narration. In my opinion, the humorous interactions between the characters in *Vormarsch* are strongly influenced by the narrator's constant awareness of his own social position before the war. This awareness and the narrator's projections of the behaviour that would be appropriate for him, in many instances also create the conditions for a humorous situation. Humour presented in this transition phase is rooted mainly in the incongruity between the expectations of the narrator and reality, while Bloem frequently puts himself in the position of the person who is ridiculed.

In the second part, I would like to depict Bloem's changing perspective on the war and make a connection between this ongoing change, and the changes in conditions for humorous situations. After the initial period of adjustment to military service Bloem slowly forgets about the expectations, imaginary or real, that other soldiers may have of him, and his own projections of proper soldierly behaviour. The humour presented in this part of *Vormarsch* evolves into humour based mainly on the narrator's superiority, where Bloem does not consider himself the object of laughter anymore and begins to seek the persons worth laughing at in his surroundings.

Finally, I would like to concentrate on Bloem's growing fascination with the technical aspects of the military campaign in Belgium. I intend to show how the destructive potential of modern military technology that Bloem perceives on the battlefield evokes in him a feeling of superiority: first, the feeling of superiority towards his former self, an author of war novels who did not have any idea about the real combat conditions, and second, the feeling of superiority towards the imagined (and idolized) soldiers of 1870-71, who were not exposed to such intensity of fire.

3.2. Humour, laughter and the military world in *Vormarsch*

Before I investigate the relationship between humour and social status as presented in the narration, a short description of Bloem's pre-war social position is necessary. Bloem had already earned a reputation as a published author before the war. By the outbreak of the war he enjoyed a rapidly developing writing career, and that growing popularity provided him with financial security and literary recognition. His breakthrough on the literary scene was marked by the appearance in 1906 of a novel about student life in Germany, *Der krasse Fuchs* [*The Freshman*]. His monumental novel

trilogy, commemorating Prussia's victory over France in 1870-71, was written between 1911 and 1913, and became one of the greatest hits on the German book market in the 20th century.⁷¹ Between 1911 and 1922, Bloem was Germany's bestselling author: loved by readers and respected by officials (among them Kaiser Wilhelm II), he, in his own words, unwillingly heeded the call of duty (*Vormarsch* 14).

As the opening chapter points out, the war does not fill out Bloem's life completely: the world outside of the army, his family, and his professional life constantly emerge in Bloem's memoirs as reference marks for the events on the front. When the news about the assassination in Sarajevo, the mobilization in Russia, and the preparations for the war in Germany reached him, he was not eager to put his career on hold. His life had just started to develop in the desired direction, that is, towards the long-awaited financial stability. Bloem and his family were also looking forward to a long vacation after a period of very intense work and the sacrifice of time that ought to be spent

71 *Das eiserne Jahr* [*The Iron Year*] (1910) appeared for the first time in the newspaper *Die Kölnische Zeitung* after a few other newspapers refused to publish the text. Surprisingly to the editors, the novel became a quick success. Its continuations, *Volk wider Volk* [*Nation Against Nation*] (1912), and *Die Schmiede der Zukunft* [*The Smithy of the Future*] (1913), promptly followed the first part and became hits due to the rising nationalist sentiment in Germany. Each part of the trilogy came out in a remarkable fifty thousand copies, exceeded one-hundred thousand copies by 1914, and remained very popular in the Weimar Republic. See Donald Ray Richards, *The German Bestseller in the 20th Century: A Complete Bibliography and Analysis, 1915-1940* (Berne: Herbert Lang and Co. Ltd., 1968) 106-07. Bloem's high popularity in the early Weimar Republic is attributed by the documentarian of the Fischer Verlag, Peter de Mendelssohn, to the large provincial middle class readership consisting, among others, of pastors, doctors, judges, post and tax officers, teachers, and land owners. To this readership's "gerade in dieser Zeit triumphierenden Reaktion" ["reactionary tendencies, which were triumphing at exactly this time" (my transl.)], Bloem's historical novels, "die sich sämtlich aus dem Ressentiment über den verlorenen Krieg nährten und an dieses Ressentiment appellierten" ["feeding exclusively from and appealing to the resentment about the lost war" (my transl.)] were the voice of the once great German empire. See Peter de Mendelssohn, *S. Fischer und sein Verlag* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1970) 886.

together. The narration begins with the description of Bloem's previous literary achievements (the reader can find here a brief description of Bloem's three war novels about 1870-71). The narrator points out his recent activity as a writer, as well as his employment as theatre director at the Hoftheater in Stuttgart. In the summer of 1914, following a research trip to Alsace-Lorraine, he had started a new novel about the region entitled *Das verlorene Vaterland* [*The Lost Fatherland*], and now, at the time of narration, he feverishly attempts to complete the first draft of the text. The account of his frenetic work on the new novel sets the stage for the sudden and unwanted change in Bloem's life, and increases the dramatic tension. The moment when he finishes the text is to him a moment of liberation, the beginning of an idealized period of happiness: "Dann aber—dann sollte das Leben schön werden—schön wie ein Traum, entlastet aller Erdschwere—frei!" (9) ["Then life would at last be wonderful, wonderful as a dream, free of all worldly cares, absolutely and entirely free" (10)]. Although Bloem tries his best to leave his family the completed work as a last gift and support for the dark future times, he does not achieve his goal, having to interrupt his work with only one chapter to go.

The dramatically constructed juxtaposition of the stable present and the unstable future constitutes the main conflict of the opening chapters of his memoirs. The chapters depict a transition phase: the narrator counterpoints the events of his life until 1914 with the rapid developments following the outbreak of the war, while his sentiments are placed clearly on the side of the life he used to have. The first three chapters are therefore outlined as a prelude that contrasts peaceful civilian life with the new military ways the narrator has yet to experience. Bloem plays here with the conventional metaphor of closing a chapter in one's life. The metaphor is to be taken quite literally in regard to his

professional life: his activity—which is, indeed, work on the last chapters of his novel *Das verlorene Vaterland*—must be finished in order to enter a new stage of his life. The desire cannot be fulfilled, however. "[E]s ging nicht mehr. Es war aus mit dem Dichten. Die Stunde der Tat hatte geschlagen" (15) ["The feeling that the hour for action has struck and that the time for story telling was past completely overcame me" (12)].⁷² Taking into account Bloem's activity during the war as the writer of his autobiographical novel, the "time for story telling" was by no means over, but he seems to regard his memoirs as belonging to a different category. Bloem introduces here a division between literary fiction and life testimony: the autobiographical writing is characterized by truthfulness to the experience—it is, in other words, life verbatim.

In describing the outbreak of the war Bloem makes use of conventional metaphors popular among the German writers of the time. The political situation is compared to a "Weltgewitter" (10) ["world-storm" (11)] that gathers over his head, the disturbances in political relations are "die dumpfen Stöße" (10) ["muffled shocks" (11)] that reach the Bloem family in its oasis of tranquility. The assassination of Duke Ferdinand "wetterleuchtete ein paar Tage ganz beängstigend am politischen Himmel" (9) ["flashed alarmingly, like summer-lightning, across the political heavens" (10)], but the developments give Bloem hope for improvement: "das Wetter schien sich zu verziehen" (9) ["then the storm appeared to pass away" (10)]. The image of war as a natural phenomenon obscures the responsibility of individuals for the conflict and contributes to the interpretation that the war was unavoidable and completely natural in its

72 Although I used the published English translation of the text, it does catch the German idiomatic expression literally. I suggest the alternative: "It was no longer possible. The time of storytelling was over. The moment of action has come" (my transl.).

development. I do not think it is a conscious manipulation on Bloem's side; the author simply resorts to stock phrases commonly used especially in the language of the nationalist intellectuals of that time. There is no indication in the text that he reflects on the course of the German military operations on a macro scale, let alone criticizes the reasons for the outbreak of the war and its strategic goals. If Bloem is critical at all of military authorities in the command of the army, he concentrates on the handling of specific operations, allowing himself several comments about the bad image of the German army that ought to be corrected, especially after the German propagandistic catastrophe represented by the invasion of neutral Belgium. The strategy of displacement of responsibility for the conflict is hardly something rare in the war literature of the time. The use of nature-related vocabulary to describe the war can also be found in Jünger's work (the title of his *In Stahlgewittern* exploits the notion of the "natural" character of the war), as well as in Walter Flex's *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten* [*The Wanderer Between Both Worlds*], also written during the war, where the German offensive operation on the eastern front, attacks against the enemy line, and lives of the soldiers in the trenches are embedded into the seasons of nature (7-9, 118-19).

In the third chapter, scenes from the last family meetings are used to build a dramatic juxtaposition between peace and wartime. Again, Bloem takes advantage of the metaphorical potential of book-related images. The peaceful times are associated with the library, a room in which the writer's family members gather twice in the last days before Bloem leaves home. The source of light, the lamp, and the well-known desk at which Bloem used to work are counterpointed by the "Unnennbare" (20) ["unnameable" (my transl.)], "Ungewisse, . . . Ungeheure, . . . Bodenlose" (21) ["uncertain, terrible, fathomless" (my transl.)] that awaits the writer in the near future. Here, the safe area of

fictional war experiences that brought the family together and supported it financially is confronted by the impending necessity of writing about Bloem's own war experience. The imminent change from fiction (peace) to autobiography (war) tears the family apart and endangers the writer, shaking the financial basis of the family. The moment of separation from the family is marked by a series of repetitions ("Auf Wiedersehen—auf —Wiedersehen —" (24) ["Good-bye—good—bye —" (my transl.)]), where the sequence of hyphens adds to the tension of the scene, at the same time visually emphasizing the end of the "peaceful" text. The emergence into the new "war" chapter is like "ein Erwachen aus tiefer lastender Lähmung" (24) ["waking up from a deep lasting paralysis" (my transl.)]. It is a moment of death and rebirth to a new existence. The new, military life of Bloem begins.

In the fifth chapter, Bloem's narration provides a description of the mobilization of the civilian population. The chapter, entitled "Mobilisation" in the English translation, is dominated by images of transformation: men are put in uniforms. After arriving at the train station in Frankfurt an der Oder, Bloem remarks about his changing environment: "Die Welt ist nun verwandelt. Sie scheint nur mehr Männer zu tragen—und Rosse" (33) ["The world suddenly seemed to become a different place. It appeared to contain nothing but men—and horses" (17)]. Bloem's text depicts men arriving at the barracks like a stream of human material, processed by the military machine that swallows up the recruits and volunteers. The iron gates of the barracks, mentioned by the narrator, designate the switch from peaceful to martial mode.

After crossing the threshold of the military area, the human material is processed and prepared for the tasks of a soldier's life. When the men arrive their civilian clothing is differentiated, marking their social status (workers, clerks, foresters, and peasants). But

soon after they enter the station, the differences in their external appearance gradually vanish: they strip off the non-combatant clothes and put on the field grey military outfits. They become a uniform mass of privates. In the gesture of changing clothes, Bloem sees the culmination of the national unification that is indicated already in the men's marching and singing on the way to the barracks. The projection of the universal consensus in the war effort evokes in Bloem the vision of "ein einzig Volk von Brüdern" (31) ["one immense united brotherhood" (16)].⁷³

Already the choice of words, the strong emphasis on a fraternity of fighters, points to the fact that the new, changed world is devoid of women. The moment of entering the barracks is preceded by another stage of transgression, the train trip. The women in Bloem's life (his wife and daughter) disappear from the scene with the last wave of good-bye at the train station. "Man nimmt die letzten Küsse. Man klettert hinein. Man stürmt ans Fenster" (24) ["The last kisses. Trains are boarded. A rush to the windows" (my transl.)]. The transition from civilian to military existence is marked by chaotic movements of people, undermined by unexpressed fear and uncertainty about the future.

What dominates in the images of mobilization is the rapid emergence of the mechanical (the train, the iron gate of the barracks, the march in rank and file to the entrance of the barracks) that takes control over the existence of men, channels the human materiel into prepared tracks, and pre-forms the incoming stream of individuals into a unified mass that erases all social differences. The dominance of the mechanical is counterpointed by the emergence of a new organic component: horses. The horses appear in Bloem's vision as a military replacement of the women who have supported their men

73 Or: "One united nation of brothers" (my transl.).

in civilian undertakings. The description of horses of many breeds and shapes that arrive at the recruitment station constitutes a parallel segment to the description of the men.⁷⁴ In the scenes of the metamorphosis of men into soldiers, the first comic elements come into sight, delineating the soldier's ideal external characteristics. What evokes the laughter of the observer is the confrontation between the human body shape and the cut of the uniforms that are made available to the future soldiers:

Komische, zwerchfellkitzelnde Bilder des Übergangs. Reservistenbäuche, zu denen kein Koppel passen will. Quadratschädel, auf denen die viel zu enge Feldmütze hockt wie ein Studentenzerevis. (33)

Not without many a laugh at the reservist bellies around which no belt would meet, and at great square skulls on which the martial headgear sat perched like a student's cap. (17)

Bloem (in the English translation his own reaction is amplified by the group's laughter in response to the situation) is amused by the parts of the human body that don't fit into the uniforms. His reaction points out that there is an apparent excess in man's shape that has to be reduced in order to become a soldier. The disturbing elements are not simply "Bäuche" ["bellies"], they are "Reservistenbäuche" ["reservist bellies"], a compound noun stressing the civilian character of the bodies that are to be trained and trimmed

74 Bloem sings the praises of horses in war time, addressing to them a direct eulogy in which he anthropomorphises the animals: "Rosse—was ihr uns geworden seid im Kriege—wer könnte das zu Ende singen und sagen? In euch, wie in uns ist eine Kriegerseele. Ihr versteht, fühlt, leidet und triumphiert mit uns. Es gibt brave Durchschnittskämpfer unter euch und erlesene Helden. Freunde aber, Kameraden seid ihr uns alle" (35) ["Steeds—what you became to us in the war—who could sing and tell it all? In you, like in us, resides a warrior soul. You understand, feel, suffer, and triumph with us. There are brave average fighters and chosen heroes among you. But all of you are our friends and comrades" (my transl.)]. The special role of horses in right-wing war narrations (as a replacement for women) is mentioned by Klaus Theweleit in the first volume of his *Männerphantasien* in the chapter "Was die Soldaten lieben." See Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien* (Frankfurt am Main: Rowohlt, 1993) 60-61.

down. The process of trimming down, of adjusting, is limited to the human body: It is not the uniform that does not fit here (it could easily be replaced by larger pieces of clothing), it is the body that has to take the desired shape, if not now, then in the following military training. On the other hand, the typical "Feldmütze" ["field cap"] is not appropriate for the "oversized" skulls and changes the appearance of the recruits, making them look like grown-up men masquerading as students and not like "real" soldiers. The assumption is that the cap makes the men look much younger than they really are and that they—as students—cannot be taken seriously, thus requiring some adjustments in the wardrobe and in the physical shape of the men. The narrator's amusement about the new soldiers is ambivalent, however. It is not entirely clear if Bloem, presenting the image of ideal soldier to which he compares the recruits, is criticizing the oversized bodies of men, or rather enjoying the plethora of human raw material that is about to be trimmed down to perfect proportions.

The scenes at the recruitment station introduce the reader to the world of the military as depicted by Bloem. In the following section, I will look further for scenes in the narration of *Vormarsch* that include instances of humour and laughter in order to establish at or with whom soldiers laugh, and what they find funny. If humour and laughter are able to create communities so naturally and transparently that the agents of humorous interactions no longer perceive their instrumentalization, Bloem's autobiographical text—if we take his word for "truthfulness" of his account—allows for a fairly precise delineation of unique patterns of soldier humour. The humour patterns are a phenomenon specific to the military world, despite the ideological and aesthetic position of the author-narrator. They constitute subtle and powerful means of inter- and intra-group control, and are a common denominator of war narrations, re-emerging in other,

often differently interpreted works about the First World War, for instance in the works of Remarque and Jünger, mentioned in the introduction to this chapter.

Bloem's narration is overloaded with officers' names, detailed accounts of marches and halts, and statements about the fighting spirit and glorious past of his beloved 12th Infantry Regiment, to which, *nota bene*, he dedicated *Vormarsch*. Humour and laughter are underplayed in the text. When present, they take the form of non-aggressive grins and laughs directed towards fellow soldiers in order to gain their approval or include them into the group sharing the amusing element. Laughter is foremost a group-creating moment. According to William H. Martineau, esteeming humour (inoffensive humour) directed towards group members in intra-group situations usually helps to solidify the group and to initiate and facilitate communication and the development of social relationships. That way, the social distance between group members is reduced and consensus is achieved (*Model* 116-19). Humour serves as a symbol of social approval, and Bloem—aspiring to become a member of the group—seeks the approval of other soldiers, and expresses his own approval through laughter or smiles. Several examples of humorous situations in Bloem's text support this interpretation.

In the fifth chapter, Bloem describes how he, as one of the officers, assists in the process of registering the recruits. The recruitment station is, in his vision, a place where the sombre patriotic mood mixes with amusement over the overwhelming enthusiasm for the war. In the *Auguststimmung*, the mood of excitement at the beginning of August that apparently took over the whole German population disregarding the social status, profession, and age of its members, the usual restrictions and limitations of military recruitment and service are violated for a good cause: to "defend" the country from the

enemy using all men possible. The narrator quotes a man who is, according to the army regulations, too old for the service, yet desperately wants to participate in the coming war. Captain Bloem needs only to look into the man's eyes to know that his enthusiasm is honest: "Ich brauch' Ihnen nur ins Auge zu sehen" (36) ["I just need a look in your eyes" (my transl.)]. The will to fight demonstrated by all people is taken at face value and quite literally. The conversation with the fifty-six-year-old man sets up the scene for a case at the other extreme of age, thus sketching the full spectrum of the nation's enthusiasm. A teenage boy hands Bloem written permission from his father that allows him to volunteer for the army and take part in the upcoming campaign. Under peaceful conditions, the boy would be too young to be enlisted. Army regulations prevent the recruitment of teenagers, but Bloem feels that he, in his role as decision maker, has to succumb to the enchantment of the war. The conflict between the written rules and the carnival atmosphere of exemption that dominates the scene at the recruitment station is resolved in laughter. "Es ist zum Lachen und zum Weinen" (36) ["I don't know whether to laugh or to cry" (my transl.)], remarks Bloem about the boy's permission from his father. We can assume that what provokes his laughter is the boy's attempt to overrule the strict regulations by providing another semi-official piece of paper, the document about his maturity produced by his father. The boy's "Ich habe es schriftlich" (36) ["I have it in writing" (my transl.)] is his first battle engagement: the opponent is the bureaucracy of the military organization, against which the boy mobilizes his father's authority. Bloem does not know whether to react to the teenager's demand with laughter (praising his determination in a friendly way), or to be frightened about the young age of the volunteer, an age at which he is not supposed to be exposed to the risks of field service. After all, the boy is not much older than his own son, Walter Julius, mentioned in the first

chapters of the narration. By describing his impulse to laugh, Bloem expresses his ambivalence about the modes of peace and war that have come into conflict here.

In the march to the train station and on the way to the front, the passers-by, people of various social backgrounds (among them many young women, separated from the troops) smile and laugh at the soldiers. For Bloem, this is proof for the establishment of a national unity in which, as proclaimed in the Kaiser's famous speech, there are no parties (31). The creation of the fighting community, supported by the enthusiasm of the masses, that fills the narrator with national pride, is, at the same time, undermined by the incongruence of the concepts of military service suitable for grown-ups only and the volunteer's young age. Remarkably, the narrator's laughter about the boy indicates the existence of a specific norm regarding the projected ideal image of the soldier: the war is supposed to be a man's business, and the teenagers, despite their enthusiasm for the national cause, do not fit into that image, hence the ambivalent reaction. The scene with the teenage boy encapsulates the main functions of humour and laughter in Bloem's text. Observing humour and laughter in his memoir allows us to grasp momentarily the dynamic norms of behaviour and attitudes in the military group internalized by the narrator. The norms, practices, and attitudes are not expressed explicitly or suppressed through the rhetorical means used to promote a specific idea, in this case the idea of national unity and the war enthusiasm of August 1914. The narrator's laugh or the laughter of the group function as signs of the disapproval of the narrator or the group, or simply render odd and extraordinary actions not expected by the group majority.

The above outline of the functions of humour and laughter assumes that the group always accepts the narrator Bloem, and that there is no conflict between the group and the individual, that the values and norms of the group (the companies belonging to the

12th Brandenburg Grenadiers) are declared and internalized by the individual who is a part of the group (Captain Bloem). Yet Bloem's case is not so simple. The relationship between the narrator and the group is by no means a static one; it is negotiated and re-negotiated in different situations and at different times. The process of the narrator's acceptance in the group happens in stages. This can be illustrated by following the dynamics of the humorous situations in Bloem's narration.

The laughter of other soldiers often signals to the narrator that his behaviour does not comply with the ways of professional soldiers. He is older than most of his subordinates and same-rank officers, and the fact of his seniority—which at the outbreak of war provided him with a feeling of self-sacrifice for the good of the German nation—becomes a problem when it comes to fulfilling the daily tasks of a soldier's life. Throughout his story Bloem demonstrates the (badly covered) inferiority complex of a reserve officer who does not have combat experience comparable to that of the soldiers he is supposed to lead. The regiment, formed in 1813, had already fought in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71, and some senior officers still remembered the war that Bloem only knew from his own fictional depictions. The 12th Regiment had earned the nickname *Kolonialregiment* due to its service in China in 1900 and to the participation in the suppression of the Herero and Nae. His ambition to seamlessly blend in is fueled by his vain belief that as a well-known author of war novels, he has demonstrated his military expertise. His self-consciousness makes him very aware of all his little mistakes and oddities. The fear of his own errors, that he might not notice and that could cause him to lose face puts him in state of constant alertness and prevents him from taking any risks or attempting to solve problems. He realizes that the first days of active military service are

decisive for his acceptance in the group, because he is not one of the "old" soldiers who set the rules.

Selecting new horses is one of the main tasks for Captain Bloem on the first day of his service. Bloem makes a significant connection between literary fiction and life when he names one of the horses assigned to him Alfred, "nach dem jungen Freiwilligen in der Trilogie" (37) ["after the young volunteer in the trilogy" (my transl.)]. The other horse, a little defiant and smaller, is named Werner, after the protagonist of *Der krasse Fuchs*. When Alfred does not obey the requests of his master during the very first drill exercises with Bloem as company commander, Bloem remembers the incident well. He parades in the front of the company "mit siedendem Stolz in der Seele" (41) ["with boiling pride in my soul" (my transl.)] and gives the first command. Suddenly, the horse surprises the rider with an unexpected reaction:

Alfred, der nie zuvor Soldat war, hat einen fürchterlichen Satz gemacht und rast mit mir von dannen. Der ganze Kasernenhof kommt in Aufruhr—alles grinst. Ich fühle, wie mir die Glut in die Stirn quillt. (41)

Alfred, who had never been a soldier before, makes a terrible jump and makes off with me. The whole barrack square is in turmoil—everyone is grinning. I feel the heat rising in my forehead. (my transl.)

Bloem regrets that he cannot see the perfect execution of his first command and tries to control the horse. He is filled with shame over his inability to conduct the exercise as projected in his imagination, and fears the scorn of the older soldiers. He has to restore his connection with the experienced fighters, and must find a way to feel better about himself. The symbolic reconciliation between him and the company he commands is carried out using the communicative strategy of smiles. An older soldier with rather terrifying looks comes to his rescue, and Bloem senses in him "unsägliche Gutmütigkeit" (43) ["an indescribably good nature" (my transl.)]. Bloem asks him to take care of Alfred:

"Verstehen Sie was von Pferden?" Er grinst vertrauensweckend. "Jawohl, Herr Hauptmann." Er nimmt die dargereichten Zügel, . . . lacht mich an. . . . Ich lache auch. Eine Kameradschaft ist geschlossen. Sie hat gehalten. (43)

"Do you know anything about horses?" He grins in a way that inspires confidence. "Yes, sir . . ." He takes the proffered reins, . . . he smiles at me. . . . I smile, too. A comradeship has been forged. It has held. (my transl.)

The two scenes demonstrate how grins can work quite differently. First, the grins of the group (the soldiers on the parade ground) serve the purpose of making fun of the individual who aspires to a position of authority in the group but does not have the required skills to take that position. The grinning of the whole company is evidence of exclusion from the group; the superiority of the seasoned soldiers cannot be demonstrated by disobeying the command which Bloem gives shortly before. The incident is painful to Bloem because the respect, not the formal obedience, of his subordinates is at stake here; their obedience is taken for granted. Bloem quickly regains the hope of respect among the company soldiers when his helper (Müssigbrodt, one of Bloem's closest comrades during the campaign in Belgium) grins at Bloem and explains that the horse is not accustomed to this kind of exercise: "Det Ferd is jut, Herr Hautpmann. Det is man det Unjewohnte" (43) ["The horse is good, Captain. It is still not used to it" (my transl.)]. Although the soldier's explanation can be read as a masked accusation of Bloem's inability to control the animal, Bloem chooses to interpret Müssigbrodt's grin as a sign of friendliness and not a demonstration of superiority. He confirms the soldier's words with his own smile. The exchange of smiles gives Bloem a chance to escape the embarrassing situation and keep face, but he also assumes—and this shows how badly he wants to tighten his relationships with his soldiers—that the moment of smiling is the moment of the foundation of their comradeship.

Later that day, his memory of the shameful moment prevents Bloem from riding his horse in front of his troop as he, as commanding officer, is supposed to do:

Ich hatte mich nicht getraut, mich auf einem meiner Rösser an die Spitze meiner Kohorte zu setzen. Ich wollte mich nicht abermals auslachen lassen. (44)

I did not dare to ride at the front of my cohort on one of my steeds. I did not want to be laughed at once again. (my transl.)

Bloem justifies his position by citing his fear of being ridiculed for a second time on the same day. We can presume that the motivation behind his decision is that the disobedience of his horse would put an end to his hopes of being incorporated into the troop and accepted as its leader. What could initially have been taken as an honest mistake or the result of external influences (the way out of embarrassment offered by Müssigbrodt) would, if repeated, reinforce the troop's suspicion of their leader's ignorance. Bloem does not want to take any chances, considering the fact that he is still unsure about the future reactions of his horse: "Erst sollten die Pferde fertig sein" (44) ["First, the horses ought to be ready" (my transl.)], he says. Instead of participating in the field training like all other soldiers, Bloem concentrates on teaching his two horses obedience. Yet his reluctance to lead his own troop during the training day violates another norm of soldier conduct: Bloem's superior criticizes him sharply for not taking the leader's role, and setting the proper example. The superior officer, Spiegel, reprimands Bloem while other officers are watching: the gaze of the public adds to the already shameful moment. In any case, Bloem makes the decision to skip the training at the cost of disobedience towards the official military hierarchy. It is not because he is not aware of the official consequences or repercussions of his avoidance, for while spending time with his horses, he recalls: "Aber innerlich beschimpfte ich mich doch heftig wegen dieser Drückebergerei" (44) ["But inside I was castigating myself because of this

shirking" (my transl.)). His subordinate soldiers' laughter appears to him, however, to have much more serious implications for his position in the group than does the reprimand of his direct superior. His objective is "comradeship" with simple soldiers, and in pursuit of that objective he is willing to risk criticism from another officer who, in Bloem's opinion, could give him preferential treatment because of his pre-war status. Taking the criticism does not come easy to the writer, considering his ambitions and constant awareness of his age. He notes that he immediately starts marching towards his company, "um mich in der Achtung des um zehn Jahre jüngeren Mannes einigermaßen wieder herzustellen" (45) ["to at least partially restore myself in the eyes of the man who is ten years younger than me" (my transl.)]. The writer admits that the time was for him "schwarze Stunde" (45)—a "dark hour" in his military service. He is additionally humiliated by the fact that he has missed his soldiers on the training field and marched for hours looking for them. Both his intentions have failed: to show that he has fulfilled the wish of his superior, and to indicate to his soldiers his active participation in the training. If successful, his lonely march would have reforged his failure as the commanding officer into proof of his dedication. Bloem's "horse crisis" is an example of a situation where laughter creates informal hierarchies within the military organization and constitutes a very powerful factor in establishing contacts between the group and the individual who aspires to a position of respect within that group. In the situation where the individual finds himself between the devil and the deep blue sea, the most immediate and formal punishment for making a bad decision does not necessarily constitute the element that deters the offender the most.

On the other hand, it is interesting to see how Bloem's relationships with other experienced officers—not with the privates—are established. In his first contacts with

other officers who are also his subordinates (but nevertheless members of the officer corps), Bloem uses gentle teasing to introduce himself and to induce interaction with the new acquaintances. The officers von der Osten and Grabert have just returned from their respective units to the gathering place of the troops. Bloem welcomes them into the quarters:

"Na, Sie haben's gut gehabt, haben in der Welt herumfahren dürfen, während ich mit dem Feldwebel die ganze Mobilmachung allein schaffen mußte..."—"Wir haben auch nichts zu lachen gehabt, Herr Hauptmann." Und sie berichten von mancherlei komischen und ärgerlichen Erlebnissen. (48-49)

"Well, you've had it good; you could travel the world, while I and the sergeant had to deal alone with the entire mobilization..."—"Our trip was no laughing matter either, Captain." And they reported about all kinds of comical and annoying experiences. (my transl.)

In this short exchange, Bloem achieves multiple goals. First, he directs the conversation towards a topic with which he feels comfortable. By mentioning his active participation in the mobilization procedure (significantly, with the sergeant, the representative of the lower ranks, as a token of the common soldiers' trust in him), Bloem emphasises his contribution to the war effort. By means of hyperbole, he seeks confirmation of his usefulness, practically fishing for compliments. Recruitment is the activity he really did take part in, and is his only war experience so far. Because he realizes his own shortcomings as a soldier, he gives his utterance a humorous character that would serve as an emergency exit if the seasoned officers were to decide to engage in "serious" debate about military service. The other officers' practical education exceeds by far the one Bloem can demonstrate, but they cannot make use of that knowledge. They are put in a defensive position and are practically disarmed: they cannot impose their protest directly because the accusation is made in a joking manner. Instead, they indirectly confirm Bloem's activity and use the phrase "wir haben auch nichts zu lachen gehabt" ["our trip

was no laughing matter either"] to counterpoint, in a similarly joking form, the joking remark of their superior. By doing that, they hyperbolically acknowledge the "serious" character of Bloem's act as facilitator of the small-scale mobilization, and defend themselves. In order to soften the possible effects of their indirect protest both officers tell Bloem about humorous situations they have encountered and engage him with jokes about some absent others. Humour here functions as a "conversation lubricant" that allows all parties to engage in communication, to demonstrate their professional competence without resorting to qualitative comparison of their achievements. Humour reduces the tension between partners in the conversation, and provides room and possibility for mutual respect. At the same time, however, the initiator of the humorous situation can still control the situation. The superior, Bloem, takes the initiative in the exchange: the humour directed against someone who is present at the scene—typical for all situations involving partners representing different status levels in the given hierarchy—moves down the ranks.⁷⁵

In the first part, I described the functions that humour and laughter play in the scenes of Bloem's transition and adjustment to the military life—to create and consolidate the group. In the second part, I am going to point out the change in the narrator's perspective and, following the change, also the re-orientation of interpersonal

75 Laughter as facilitator of friendly relationships between officers and lower ranks can also emerge in situations that take Bloem back to his idealized student years. The author of *Der krasse Fuchs*, who praises the fraternity movement at the German universities, knows how to appreciate the debonair gesture of one of his soldiers. Private Knopfe offers Bloem and Lieutenant Graeser a glass of champagne in the heat of the battle, when the company is under artillery attack. "Die hat sich... so angefunden" (126) ["It found itself in my haversack" (42)], the soldier says of the origin of the bottle. Laughter about the theft of the champagne bottle brings Bloem, Graeser, and Knopfe together and creates the community of "old students" that are experiencing yet another adventure together.

relations in humorous interactions. After the troop accepts Bloem as its leader, he feels much more secure in his position and does not interpret the laughter of the other soldiers as a direct comment on his actions. He addresses his subordinates as "Kinder" and "Jungen" (59) ["children," "lads" (my transl.)], projecting the relationships within the troop as the equivalent of traditional family relations.⁷⁶ Bloem would play the role of the father, the authority, while Sergeant Ahlert takes that of the mother, calming the possible conflicts between the common soldiers and the captain. The group of soldiers, the troop, connected by a common task, with functions clearly defined, becomes stronger; at least that's the vision Bloem, as the troop leader, offers the readers. As a result, an interesting change takes place: the comical scenes are limited to depictions of the treatment of other groups or their representatives. Laughter becomes an indicator of exclusion from the group and shows the superiority of the laughing soldiers over other individuals or groups. The soldiers' laughter goes across and against military hierarchies and official rules of engagement and, in most cases, has dominating power over individual soldiers, inducing a conflict between their consciousness and the comforting approval of the group.

Examples of these conflicts are found in the text: with the forthcoming offensive in Belgium, Bloem observes the growing disorder caused by the war. He is disturbed by the sight of destroyed urban and village infrastructure and regrets the effects of the military operations on the surroundings: "welch ein ungeheures Chaos geworden sei in wenig Tagen aus unserer wundervoll geordneten, wundervoll ihren Uhrwerksgang laufenden Welt" (68) ["the terrible chaos into which our wonderfully ordered country, running like a clockwork, had been plunged in so few days" (20)]. The juxtaposition

⁷⁶ Bloem also describes himself as "Kompagniepapa" (90) ["company daddy" (my transl.)]. The use of "Kinder" to describe his soldier appears in several places in text (113, 114, 233, 269).

between the order of the peaceful times and the disorder/chaos of war creates, in some instances, the necessary conditions for humorous situations to take place. The practice of war requisitions and of involving civilians in military operations is not widespread at the beginning of World War One; the time of "total war" is still to come. When the hungry soldiers find two pigs at a farm and want to confiscate them, Bloem—like a good father to his men—allows it, but commands, according to the regulations and his deeply embedded feeling for "Ordnung:"

"Gut—Stellen Sie einen Requisitionsschein aus, ich unterschreibe." Ahlert lacht. "Die Leute sind geflohen." "Gut – dann legen Sie den Schein in ein Zimmer auf den Tisch." "Das Haus brennt, Herr Hauptmann." "Na, denn nicht. Krieg ist Krieg." (83)

"All right, give me a requisition form and I'll sign it." Ahlert smiled. "The people have all left." "Well then, leave the form on a table in one of the rooms." "But the house is on fire, sir." "Well, don't then. War is war." (26)

Bloem wants to follow the rules of peacetime, and attempts to act in accordance with the military regulations which do not include guidelines for conduct in the case of total destruction of private property. Ahlert recognizes much faster than his commander the incongruity between the instruction and the reality, and laughs about the order to implement the rule. Bloem reacts to the laughter of his sergeant by suggesting a few alternative solutions to save the illusion of what, in his understanding, constitutes justice in times of war. He gives up: the final words "Krieg ist Krieg" ["war is war"] mark his acknowledgment of new rules that are not to be found in the regulation book, but are confirmed by the laughter of his soldiers.

Humour that reduces the tension between the parties of an interaction is visible in Bloem's narration on many occasions. Humour directed towards members of groups other than the military can prevent hostility against strangers, for example in the unavoidable encounters between the soldiers and civilians. Laughter helps to avoid aggression, but an

aggressive element is already embedded into situations that are interpreted as humorous by the German soldiers. The aggressive component in such interactions is the feeling of superiority that expresses itself in laughter at the civilians. The civilians evoke laughter because they cannot match the soldiers in martial skills and knowledge. After the Germans enter Belgium, part of the civilian population makes a series of mistakes that could be met with very serious repercussions. In the following scene where the arriving troops are greeted, the humour of the situation works on two levels:

Um uns sammelt sich neugierig Volk. Eine elegant gekleidete Dame tritt auf meinen Bataillionskommandeur zu, nestelt von ihrem Waberbusen eine Rosette in den—belgischen und—— englischen Farben, reicht sie süßlächelnd dem Major entgegen. Major von Kleist rafft den Großen Ploetz zusammen: "Madame, che che crois, que vous—croyez—que che suis—ung Anglais—mais—che ne suis pas—ung Anglais—che suis—ung Allemang..." Entsetzen. Flucht. (108)

Inquisitive people gathered round us . . . A well-dressed lady approached our battalion commander, and taking from her bosom a rosette in the Belgian and English colours, handed it to him with a sweet smile. Major von Kleist quickly gathering together all he knew of the French language replied: "Madame, che che crois, que vous—croyez—que che suis—ung Anglais—mais—che ne suis pas—ung Anglais—che suis—ung Allemang." Horror on the part of the lady and a hasty withdrawal. (35)

First, there is the confusion of the Belgian woman who is not able to differentiate between the German and English uniforms. She trustfully approaches the soldiers of the aggressor's army and hands them a token of her goodwill, supporting her welcoming gesture with a friendly smile. Her ignorance creates conditions for a humorous situation, but only if it is interpreted as lack of knowledge about the differences in army battle dress. If her gesture is taken for an insult, it could also provide a reason for a more aggressive reaction from the soldiers who are taken for their enemy. Major von Kleist decides to interpret the gift of the rosette to the woman's advantage. That implies that he sees the woman as his inferior (as a woman and as a civilian, she is deemed doubly

ignorant of war matters), and he replaces a more negative response to her demonstration of nationalist sympathy with the attempt to correct her apparent mistake. And here, another humorous situation comes to existence. Von Kleist has a limited French vocabulary with which to explain to her the nature of the misunderstanding. The narrator Bloem enjoys the difficulty of the communication between the soldier and the woman, judging the limited French vocabulary of his officer, his grammatical mistakes, and stuttering from the point of view of an intellectual. To describe von Kleist's struggle to mobilize his French language skills, Bloem calls it "der Große Ploetz," which, at the time, was a reference book prepared by a former French language teacher Karl Ploetz that provided general information about France, its history, and its language. The book was by no means a specialized source of knowledge on the neighbouring country, but rather a popular edition for the masses; Bloem, the university graduate and self-proclaimed specialist in German-French relations, looks down on von Kleist, and his superiority is expressed in the phrase he uses. As the observer of the whole interaction, Bloem recognizes the intention of von Kleist before the officer is able to communicate his message to the woman, and he anticipates the culmination of the situation: the moment of the woman's necessary recognition that she had honoured a German, not an Englishman. Her frightened reaction confirms Bloem's dominant position of power. He is the enemy who did not reprimand/hurt the woman, although he could have. The story of quid pro quo also has a playful dimension: the observer Bloem can enjoy being taken for someone else by a woman, which is a flattering situation with a sexual connotation for a soldier who notices young women while passing the villages on the way to the front line (65). Another possibility created by the woman's mistake is that national differences and

animosities are momentarily lifted, making room for the exploration of alternative scenarios of the encounter between the army and the civilian population.

The demonstration of superiority in the contacts with the ignorant civilians reappears in Bloem's text in other situations.⁷⁷ On September 4th, 1914, the Germans spend their first night in the trenches near the French village of St. Barthélémy. After heavy bombardment that targeted their positions, the moment of relaxation brings an amusing moment:

Müssigbrodt kam lachend: . . . Ich möge doch mal hinkommen, es gebe was zu sehen. Händeringend kam mir der Bauer entgegen: o das große Malheur, mein Herr, o ich armer, verlorener Mann! – Nun, was gibt's denn?

Eine Granate hatte ein riesiges Loch in die Vorderwand seines Hauses gerissen, war quer durch die gute Stube geschwirrt, hatte in den Porzellanschrank hineingehauen, stak als Blindgänger, fett und unverschämt, zwischen dem Scherbenwust, den Splittern der Rückwand, saß fest in der Mauer.

"Nehmen Sie das weg, mein Herr, o bitte nehmen Sie das weg!"

Werde mich hüten, mein Alter. Lassen Sie das ruhig stecken und zeigen Sie's noch Ihren Kindeskindern als Andenken an den großen Krieg.

"O, mein Herr, unmöglich, ich stürbe vor Angst – erbarmen Sie sich, mein Herr."

Nicht zu machen. Guten Abend, Papachen. (225-26)

77 A very similar humoristic situation that involved ignorant civilians and German soldiers with minimal language skills is described in another place in Bloem's text, in which the German soldiers are also the ultimate winners of the confrontation, and Bloem tastes his superiority over both civilians and his subordinates. The German scouts sent on a reconnaissance mission to the small city of Nanteuil return to Bloem and report: "Wie wir sind am Bricke gekommen, sind Leute gekommen, chaben sich gefragt: Angläh, Angläh? Chat sich Herr Hauptmann gesagt, sollen immer sagen wui, wui, wui—chabben wir immer gesagt, wui, wui, wui. Chabben Leite gebracht lauter gutte Sachen zu essen, zu trinken, chabben uns Blumen angesteckt. Da sind Ulanen gekommen, habben sich Leite gemerkt wir sind nix Engländer, sind Deutsche, habben geschrien, sind gelaufen fort, tutt nix, wir sind satt!" (219-20) ["When we got to the bridge, people came up to us and asked: 'Anglais, Anglais?' and as our lieutenant had told us always to say 'oui, oui, oui,' we said 'oui, oui, oui.' Then the people brought us a mass of stuff to eat and drink and put flowers in our buttonholes. But when our cavalry came up the people realized we were not English but Germans. They screamed and ran away in all directions, but it didn't matter: we'd got all we wanted!" (77)].

Müssigbrodt came up to me with a broad grin; . . . [he] asked me to go back with him a moment as there was something worth seeing. As I entered the farm, an old peasant came up ringing his hands: "Oh, sir! it's terrible, terrible! I'm a poor man and I'm done. It's all over! Oh, help me, sir!"

"Well now, what's happened?" He pointed to the house, and I saw that a shell had torn a great hole through the front wall, crossed the sitting room, gone clean through a cabinet of china against the back wall, and there it had stuck unexploded, enormous, and unashamed, firmly fixed in the wall, with the pile of debris it had caused beneath it.

"Take it away, sir! Oh, please sir, take it away!"

"Not likely, old man. Let it stay quietly where it is, and show it to your children's children as a memory of the Great War."

"Oh, sir, impossible! I shall die of fright—have pity on me, sir!"

"Nothing doing. Good-night, papa!" (80)

Müssigbrodt, who points out to Captain Bloem the comical situation he has observed, laughs for two reasons. First, there is the incredible luck of the resident of the house. The walls of the house have been penetrated but the damage is otherwise limited, significantly, to broken porcelain. Second, and more important, the laughter of the soldiers clearly demonstrates their superiority over the peasant who is not accustomed to the war machinery and to the destructive effects of bombing. The laughter expresses the advantage of the soldiers' knowledge of military technology over civilian ignorance and fear when confronted with an unknown but implicitly dangerous device. Also, the laughing soldiers disclose their superiority in calling the civilian "Papachen" and "mein Alter." Additionally, the soldiers are convinced that they are "making history," and that participation in the war justifies the destruction of property and the fear that it causes in the civilians. Being a soldier puts people in a privileged position and takes the responsibility away from them for the damage the military operations cause. The war experience and military hierarchy come before age—an indicator of social status that would otherwise be respected.

The division line between "us"—German soldiers—and "them"—the enemy and foreign civilians—in Bloem's memoirs is clearly drawn, as his story progresses, by the laughter of superiority. The comical scenes often take the form of disparaging humour, demonstrated in offensive, aggressive remarks that evoke smiles and laughter. Disparaging humour increases morale and solidifies the group to a greater degree, but also establishes their hostile disposition towards others. "Wir sollen den Feind mit den Beinen schlagen – da er sich uns nicht stellt. Wo ist er überhaupt?" (112) ["It had apparently become a matter of beating the enemy with our legs, for he would not stand up to us. Where was he, anyhow?" (37)] asks Bloem, his conviction about the superiority of the German military taking the shape of jokes at the cost of the enemy. He remarks: "Englische [Kavallerie]? Zum Todlachen" (112) ["English cavalry? I would die of laughter." (my transl.)]. Bloem and his soldiers know the looks of the enemy from "Witzblättern" (115) ["comic papers" (38)] that exaggerate and ridicule the particular elements of the foot soldier's uniform. Bloem, influenced by the vision of the enemy offered by the press caricaturists, repeats the diminutive characteristics of the enemy: the English soldiers wear "Jäckchen" and "Käppchen" [diminutive "jackets" and "caps"]. According to the uniform standards of the German army, the English soldier does not look serious at all but rather give the impression of infants. Bismarck's frequently quoted phrase about sending the military police to arrest the fashion criminals in England is intended to additionally ridicule the opponent: "Bismarcks Wort von Verhaftenlassen durch Gendarmen wurde zitiert" (115).⁷⁸

78 "[S]hort scarlet tunics with small caps set an angle on their heads, or bearskins with the chin-strap under the lip instead of under the chin. There was much joking about this, and also about Bismarck's remark of sending the police to arrest the English army" (38). Bloem also compares the English caps to the German "Studentenzerevisten" ["student caps"]. The comparison reminds the reader of his

Even when the "verlachten Engländer" (147) ["ridiculed Englishmen" (my transl.)] succeed from time to time, the German soldiers' laughter at the enemy recreates the norm of bravery and skills on the battlefield. But not only that: the comic potential and therefore the implied aggression against the enemy lie in the genuine misunderstandings of the enemy on the side of German soldiers. One of the most elaborated comic scenes in *Vormarsch* relates to a Scottish officer who has been taken prisoner:

Niestrawski trat zu mich heran . . . "Haben verfluchtige Schweinehunde doch wahrhaftig ihren verwundeten Herrn Oberst – die Boxen ausgezogen!"

Ich lachte Tränen.

"Aber nein . . . [D]er Oberst ist von einem Hochländerregiment, ist ein Schotte – dies karierte Balettröckchen, die Söckchen und dazwischen die nackten Beine, das ist bei diesen schottischen Regimentern die vorschriftsmäßige Uniform!" (186)

Niestrawski came up alongside me . . . "Or did those dirty swine actually take away their own wounded colonel's trousers?"

I almost wept with laughter.

"No . . . The colonel belongs to a Highland regiment, he's a Scott—you will see plenty of them in time. His checked ballet skirt, his stockings, and his naked legs are all part of the regulation uniform of Scottish regiments." (66)

Niestrawski is sure that his Captain cannot be serious and explains to his comrades:

"Hauptmann hat jroßartigen Witz jemacht, jroßartigen Witz: hat jesagt, bei schottische Engländer is nackigte Beine Uniform!" Und die ganze Kompagnie schüttelte sich vor Lachen über den großartigen Witz ihres Häuptlings. (187)

"The captain's made a grand joke: says the uniform of a Scottish Englishman is naked legs. Ha-ha-ha, great joke!" And the whole company shook with laughter at the wonderful wit of their captain. (66)

description of the recruits whose big skulls look ridiculous under small soldier caps on the first day of mobilization (32). This is definitely a comic strategy that serves the purpose of making the English soldier the object of derision.

The ambivalent scene could be a critical depiction of the ignorance of the common German soldiers, but the diminutives in Bloem's description of the prisoner indicate that the real target is the enemy. The German soldiers laugh at the traditional Scottish uniform, excluding it from the category of "proper" military clothing. The female characteristics of the Scottish uniform suggest a clear division between the real men (the Germans) and the feminized opponent (the English army). Significantly, in Bloem's description of the Scottish officer, the nakedness is limited to legs—any mention of the presence of the male genitalia (which would create a disturbing element in the image and complicate the intended perception of the feminized enemy) is omitted. The hostility against the enemy here clearly has chauvinist overtones.

Tracking the aggressive laughter in Bloem's memoirs reveals that the respect of the enemy, which the narrator declares throughout his text, is not unbroken as the narrator would have us believe. In early September 1914, the soldiers of Bloem's company witness the transport of war prisoners after the Marne battle. The close encounter with the enemy en masse is a new experience for most of the German soldiers. Until then, the fast-moving and hidden enemy remained in their imagination as an abstract entity, idealized and, in many ways, similar to their own countrymen. Under the gaze of German infantry soldiers, the enemy appears different than expected:

In einer Vorortstraße harrend ein langer Zug seltsamer Gestalten:
 Gefangene. Bunt gemischt: vorn an etwa hundert Franzosen in ihren roten Käppis, ihren schieferblauen langen Waffenröcken. Dann etwa ebensoviel Engländer in ihren glatten Mützen, ihren gelbbraunen "Sportanzügen."
 Und endlich: Farbige. Farbige aller Schattierungen, vom fahlen Gelb bis zum schwärzesten Elfenbeinschwarz. Die vornehm verschlossenen Züge der Inder, die Gorilla-Fratzen der Neger. Ein Gewirr und Gewimmel von Trachten, Uniformen, Kopfdeckungen – meine ethnologischen Kenntnisse versagten.
 Stockung. Staunen, Empörung, Gelächter meiner Kerls.
 "Wat is denn det, Herr Hauptmann?" fragte Saueremann. "Is det 'ne Schau for Hagenbecken?"

"Nein, Kinder, das sind eure Herren Feinde! Das sind die Leute, die ausgezogen sind, Europa und die Menschheit vor'm Ansturm der Hunnen, der Barbaren zu retten! Und die Hunnen, die Barbaren, Jungens, das sind wir!"

"Kalt machen sollte man det Stinkpack—abwirkjen eenen nach 'n andern!" knirschten meine Märker. (305-06)

On the outskirts of the town a long, strange procession was standing waiting. About a hundred Frenchmen in red képis in front, then as many English in their cloth caps and yellow-brown golfing suits, and, at the tail, coloured men, all shades of colour from pale yellow to deepest black. The distinguished features of the Indians mixed with the gorilla faces of the negroes, a hotch-potch of nationalities, uniforms, and head-dresses which baffled my knowledge of ethnology. My company was astounded at the sight, greeting them with indignation and laughter.

"What's all that then, sir?" asked Sauermann. "Are they for Hagenbeck's Circus?"

"No, my lad, they're our enemies. Those are the people who have been brought together to save Europe and civilisation from the invasion of the Huns, the barbarians! And the Huns, the barbarians, are you and me, lad!"

"All the dirty lot ought to be killed, knocked over one after another!" growled my young man of Brandenburg. (106-07)⁷⁹

The German soldiers' reaction to the sight of the enemy metamorphoses from surprise to outrage, until it finds a release in freeing laughter. What triggers the laughter is the unexpected and exotic appearance of the enemy combatants, who are compared to freaks fit for a show. The German soldiers takes offence because they imagined the enemy to look like them, to be similarly built male bodies in uniforms of different fashion and colour. The German soldiers base their feelings of military superiority on the idea of the fair fight, a concept to which Bloem also subscribes in his narration. The glory for the winner, according to the traditional heroic ideal, lies in his dominance over a strong and dangerous opponent. The fair fight, therefore, requires obedience to the rules of engagement and a status of equality between the rivals. Under such conditions, the fight

79 There is an error in the English translation: "meine Märker" means "men from Brandenburg."

is evaluated as humane and the victory as worthy. The German soldiers, passing by the column of prisoners, feel deprived of this equality and thus cannot fully enjoy their triumph. The differences they observe between them and the enemy have a clear racist background: the faces of black soldiers are associated with animal appearances; they disturb and offend the ethnically homogeneous Caucasian crowd. The code of war does not allow for an immediate reaction of aggression against the prisoners; the exotic-looking soldiers are, after all, protected by the international law. What is left is aggressive laughter.

Finally, I would like to mention instances of laughter that result from the feeling of the narrator's superiority towards the older generation that participated in the war of 1870-71. Bloem, especially in the first chapters of his memoirs dedicated to the campaign preparation, points out that he participates in the process of creating memorable historical moments, instead of just describing the glorious past. He is nearly ecstatic when, in the mobilization days, Lieutenant Egon "spricht ein hübsches Wort. '[N]un haben wir so viele Jahre lang Regimentsgeschichte instruiert: jetzt woll'n wir mal selber welche machen!'" (37) ["says a nice phrase. 'We have taught the regiment history for so many years, now it's time to make our own!'" (my transl.)]. In this context of "making history," laughter also appears. As a writer of historical novels, Bloem collected material and acquired a significant amount of knowledge about the technology used in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71. He admits that the theoretical knowledge he gathered during his studies has shaped his idea of war and battlefield strategy. Confronted with the military technology of 1914, Bloem expresses his scornful amusement about the past conflict:

"Hahahaha! Ich möchte wohl sehen, wie den Vätern von Anno dazumal zumute wäre, sähen sie so einen Zwölf-Komma-Fünfer von Vierzehn einhauen und als Vulkanausbruch von zwanzig Meter Höhe in die Lüfte gehen!" (250)

"Hahahaha! I would like to see how our fathers would have felt if they would have seen the exploding 12.5 grenade of 1914 hit and burst into the air like a volcano eruption 20 meters high!" (my transl.).

While reflecting on the deadly fire to which the soldiers are now exposed, Bloem compares the "old" and the "new" war, and cannot suppress an exclamation of superiority. The juxtaposition of "then" and "now" refers in the first place to the narrator's rapidly increasing knowledge of the state-of-the-art war machinery that cannot be obtained anywhere but on the battlefield of 1914. Bloem's expertise becomes archaic as the conditions and the dimensions of the battlefield change. The new conflict overshadows the old days of glory, as well as the eulogist of the past. The distance Bloem establishes from his own position as the writer of monumental historical novels about the conflict of 1870-71—who used to be, after all, an expert in military equipment and technology—is a gesture of self-pity towards his former self: a theoretician of war, a peace-time scribbler confronted for the first time with the gruesome machinery on the battlefield. Bloem says good-bye to his former self and transforms into a warrior. But his laughter also sounds of the superiority of the sons who have supposedly outgrown their fathers in soldiering. It can therefore be interpreted as aggressive towards the imaginary group of soldiers from 1870 that Bloem himself had set as an example of bravery through his writings. His laughter implies that the soldiers from "back then" wouldn't know how to manage the situation their sons are confronted with. Bloem's superior laughter establishes a construct of uniqueness of the war: a new standard for man's bravery is in place, and the new war is an event that no man has known before.

Humour and laughter in Bloem's *Vormarsch* serves as more than relaxation from the terrors of the front, although the survivors' laughter of relief resounds in Bloem's

memoirs many times.⁸⁰ Primarily, though, it serves to strengthen the officially established hierarchies, or to create new ones within the military group, and, alternatively, to create the possibility of disobedience and rebellion against restrictions that cannot be overcome in other ways. Remarkably analogous images of hierarchies established by humour and laughter emerge from other first-hand accounts of the First World War. From this point of view, *Vormarsch*, a significant yet forgotten voice of the "generation of fathers," can be included into a broader discourse about the Great War and the power relations emerging from it, and about its forms of violence, which are not limited to direct violence on the battlefield.

80 For example, in the scene at the end of battle when Bloem is happy to survive and celebrates the moment, wanting to share it with his absent family (150).

CHAPTER 4
DIE QUITTUNG [THE RECEIPT] (1914) AND DER STREIT UM DEN
SERGEANTEN GRISCHA [THE CASE OF SERGEANT GRISCHA] (1927) BY
ARNOLD ZWEIG

4.1. The short stories about the First World War from 1914. The publication and early reception of *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa*

The years of the First World War brought real breakthroughs both in Zweig's artistic and personal life.⁸¹ Like many Germans of his age and social background (Zweig was born into a lower-middle-class Jewish family in 1887), he enthusiastically welcomed the outbreak of the war and believed that the conflict might create the long-awaited unity between all social classes and ethnic and religious groups in Germany. At the end of August and in September 1914, carried by the enthusiasm for the conflict in Europe that would decide the future, Zweig wrote a number of short stories that reflected the official German war propaganda. He published most of them in the popular satirical weekly *Simplicissimus*, and then in the collection entitled *Die Bestie [The Beast]* (1914).⁸² The stories, propagating the chauvinist and affirmative view of the war, were condemned by the author, as early as in 1926, as exemplifications of his political naivety and lack of the war experience.⁸³

81 For detailed biographical information on Arnold Zweig see Wilhelm von Sternburg, *Arnold Zweig* (Frankfurt am Main: Hain, 1990). In this section of the chapter, I also used my article on Arnold Zweig and his works written for the *Compendium of International 20th Century Novelists and Novels*, prepared by Michael D. Sollars, to be published by Facts on File in New York in late 2006.

82 The title story about the Belgian war atrocities, *Die Bestie [The Beast]*, was originally published in the magazine *Schaubühne*, and the story *Der Blick auf Deutschland [The Look at Germany]* appeared for the first time in the collection. The collection also included the short stories *Der Feind [The Enemy]*, *Turkos im Park von Schwetzingen [The Turcos in the Park of Schwetzingen]*, *Der Kaffee [The Coffee]*, *Der Schießplatz [The Firing Range]*, and *Die Quittung [The Receipt]*.

83 See Robert Cohen, "Lernprozeß mit offenem Ausgang: Arnold Zweigs

Zweig, overwhelmed by the *Auguststimmung* characteristic of the German middle class, volunteered for service in August 1914. He was initially rejected for health reasons, but he was eventually drafted into the army in the spring of 1915. The writer participated in the battle of Verdun, one of the bloodiest battles of the war. He served on the western front, and in Hungary and Serbia until June of 1917, where he worked in the public information office of the eastern front. After coming back home in 1918, Zweig made efforts to incorporate his war experience into his writing in order to achieve relief from the depressions and creative inhibitions that were caused by the traumatic experiences of the war. As a result, the First World War, seen both from the trenches and from behind the front line, created a point of reference for Zweig's later works, and the author constantly worked over the experience in his literary production. His novel cycle about Germany entitled *Der große Krieg der weißen Männer* [*The Great War of the White Man*], grew to encompass six finished works, which were published between 1928 and 1957. They are set both before and during the First World War, and are accounts of the history of the country and the shift in the ideology of Wilhelminian Germany caused by the First World War, as reflected in the fates of people from various social and ethnic groups.

Zweig's most famous work and his first published war novel is *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* [*The Case of Sergeant Grischa*]. Initially, the work came out as a serialized novel under the title *Alle gegen einen* [*All Against One*] in the newspaper *Die*

Kriegsromanen von 1914 und ihre Fassungen," *Arnold Zweig: Berlin - Haifa - Berlin; Perspektiven des Gesamtwerks; Akten des III. Internationalen Arnold-Zweig-Symposiums, Berlin 1993*, ed. Arthur Tilo Alt, et al. (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995) 137-76.

Frankfurter Zeitung, over three months starting in July of 1927.⁸⁴ When the novel appeared in Germany in book form in October of 1927, its readers acclaimed it as the most moving account of the First World War to date. The critics credited the author with re-awakening the interest of the readers for war literature, which prepared the ground for the success of other war novels such as the later bestseller *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1929) by Erich Maria Remarque, to which Zweig's novel was often favourably compared.⁸⁵

Zweig had worked on the subject of the novel since 1917, intending to express his changing attitude about the war and to incorporate the period when he had worked in the headquarters of the German army on the eastern front. He had already used the authentic episode around which the novel is built, and which took place on the eastern front in 1917, in his 1921 play *Das Spiel vom Sergeanten Grischa* [*The Play of Sergeant Grischa*] (also called *Der Bjuschet* [*The Bjuschet*]). However, due to the lack of interest from theatre directors, it was not performed until 1930, by which time the same core material was already transformed into a successful novel, selling 120,000 copies by 1933.⁸⁶

84 Heinz Kamnitzer, *Ein Mann sucht seinen Weg: Über Arnold Zweig* (Schkeuditz: GNN Verlag, 2001).

85 A number of favourable reviews appeared in the newspapers shortly after the publication of the novel: by Lion Feuchtwanger in *Berliner Tageblatt*, by Paul Friedländer in *Die Rote Fahne*, by Kurt Tucholsky in *Die Weltbühne*, and by Arthur Seehof in *Die Welt am Abend*. In the nationalistic and fascistic circles, however, the novel was denounced as *Kitsch* and became a target of political attacks. In 1933, the novel shared the fate of Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* and was condemned during the infamous book-burning ceremony on the Berlin Opernplatz. See Annie Voigtländer, ed., *Welt und Wirkung eines Romans: Zu Arnold Zweigs "Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa"* (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1967) 19-23.

86 Zweig later described the unwillingness of the theatre directors to stage his play with the term "Verdrängung des Krieges" ["repression of the war"] that has been borrowed doubtlessly from Freud's vocabulary. In his opinion, the social repression of the "Unrecht" ["injustice"] brought by the war took place in Germany in the early 1920s. Disappointed by the theatre's refusal to break the taboo topic of the war, Zweig turned to an epic form, the novel. His *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa*

The plot of *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* starts with the escape of a Russian soldier, Grischa Paprotkin, from a German prison camp in the spring of 1917. On the way to freedom and his family back in Russia, he encounters a peasant girl and berry picker named Babka, who falls in love with him and advises him to assume the identity of a dead Russian soldier, Bjuschew, in order to avoid prosecution as a jail breaker. Grischa does not know that the Germans believe Bjuschew to be a spy. When the German troops capture Grischa, he is sentenced to death on the assumption that he is Bjuschew. Grischa reveals his real identity, and his innocence convinces the military Judge Advocate Posnanski, in cooperation with the young officer Paul Winfried and his friend Werner Bertin, to defend Grischa's case. The struggle for Grischa's life between two groups of German soldiers representing two different attitudes against the codes of military honour and justice builds the centre of the novel. Although witnesses from the prison camp are able to confirm Grischa's version, the quartermaster of the German Army in the east, General Schieffenzahn, insists that Grischa must be put to death in order to prevent the apparent spread of Bolshevik ideas through the army. When the intervention of the old General von Lychow fails, the last chance for the legal rescue of the innocent victim is lost. Grischa's execution is carried out by firing squad in the fall of 1917.

was the first major novel to be widely discussed in Germany, and awoke the interest in First World War works. See Georg Wenzel, ed., *Arnold Zweig 1887-1968: Werk und Leben in Dokumenten und Bildern* (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1978) 122-23. For more information about the number of copies sold see Sigrid Bock, "Literaturdiskussion und öffentliches Denken: Zur Debatte um den Roman *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa*," *Arnold Zweig - Poetik, Judentum und Politik; Akten des Internationalen Arnold Zweig-Symposiums aus Anlaß des 100. Geburtstags*, Cambridge 1987, ed. David Midgley, Hans-Harald Müller, and Geoffrey Davis (Bern, Frankfurt am Main, New York, and Paris: Peter Lang, 1989) 40.

In the novel *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa*, Zweig exposed the faulty interdependencies of justice and politics that originated in the socio-political conditions of Wilhelminian Germany, grew during the war, and came to dominate public life in the Weimar Republic. The case of Grischa demonstrates how the administration of justice is abused to become a political weapon used to suppress political opponents. The legal murder of the innocent Russian soldier was for Zweig a symptom of the disease that tormented the post-war German state, in which the trials of those who were antagonists of the industrial and conservative establishment all too often had only the illusion of justice.

Through the figure of Grischa, a common soldier who loses control over his own fate and is condemned to watch the fight for his life without means of intervention, Zweig also showed the effects of war on the individual. The military, political, and economic machinery of the state and the army entraps and destroys the helpless human being, treating him as insignificant in the outcome of total war. The non-political, deeply human motives for Grischa's escape—to reunite with his wife and a daughter he has never seen—do not matter in the trial that has the character of a political power struggle. The agenda of General Schieffenzahn (a disguised version of the actual historical figure of Erich Ludendorff, the Chief of Staff of the German Army since 1916) contrasts sharply with the moral standards of the group concentrated around General von Lychow. Schieffenzahn's victory in Grischa's case was, for the author, an exemplification—as if under a magnifying glass—of the gradual shift of power in the state and in the army. The defeat of soldiers educated in German idealism in the confrontation with the aggressive imperialist and annexationist ambitions of Schieffenzahn and his supporters is symbolic: Zweig strived to show the triumph of the bourgeois mentality over the old aristocratic values that proclaimed that wars are to be fought for noble causes rather than for

materialist interests. For Zweig, the First World War announced an end of the world in which the categories of right and wrong were superior to the legal appearances of human and institutional actions.

The popularity of the novel after its publication revealed that Grischa's story was very timely. The author very precisely caught the reasons for the political developments in the Weimar Republic in the 1920s, without sacrificing the wide scope of the novel and the complexity of the figures. Characterized by a lengthy, naturalistic style, a large number of plot points and historical and psychological details, the narrative follows the causal connections between events and passes on from one situation to another without losing the consistency and tension built by the main plot. The omniscient and often ironic narrator provides a good balance between affection and distance, allowing for intellectual play with the reader. The writer's language discipline and carefulness in the depiction of multidimensional figures was one of the factors that made *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* such a successful novel.

After writing the Grischa story, Zweig felt that he needed to write its pre-story as well as continue the war adventures of selected characters from the novel in order to better explain their motivations, the psychological changes they underwent, and the historical background of the events. Zweig's initial intention to limit the First World War works to a trilogy, and later to a tetralogy, proved insufficient. From the point of view of narrated time, the cycle *Der große Krieg der weißen Männer* opens in 1913, in the last published novel *Die Zeit ist reif* [*The Time is Ripe*] (1957). The next two parts, *Junge Frau von 1914* [*Young Woman of 1914*] (1931) and *Erziehung vor Verdun* [*Education before Verdun*] (1935), precede the events told in *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa*.

Die Feuerpause [Ceasefire] (1954) tells the occurrences on the eastern front after the time of Grischa's death, in the winter months of 1917-18.

It has to be noted that Zweig's novel *Die junge Frau von 1914*, published in 1931, also dates from the time of the Weimar Republic, and—according to the criteria I outlined in the introduction chapter of this study while describing the selection and the scope of the material—its analysis could be included in this survey. However, for the purposes of the investigation of soldier humour in war works, I would like to concentrate only on the earliest part of the cycle, *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa*, as the inquiry about the relationships between soldiers reflected in and shaped by humour and laughter yields more interesting results in the case of the novel about Grischa. For the same reason, in this chapter I would like to begin my investigations of humour and laughter with Zweig's early short story *Die Quittung* [The Receipt], which takes a humorous situation occurring in a German military troop in the first months of the First World War as its starting point.

4.2. The short story *Die Quittung*: A joke with a surprising outcome

The collection *Die Bestie* includes three stories, each of whose narrative is based on one selected event from the front and is described by the the author as anecdotes: *Der Kaffee* [The Coffee], *Die Quittung* [The Receipt] and *Der Schießplatz* [The Firing Range]. *Die Quittung* is the only story in the collection that mentions laughter about events on the front and elevates humour in the army during front-line duty to the main focus of the narrative. The story demonstrates how a humorous situation can be interpreted differently in the context of the military troop, depending on the hierarchical position of the members of the troop. The text depicts an episode from the heavy fighting on the

German-Russian front. The major on the German side observes that one of his subordinate companies, defending the first trench line in a location that has no connection with the commanding officer, lacks ammunition. The company's soldiers barely resist the Russian attack. The defence of the line is crucial to winning the battle. A new ammunition delivery would solve the problem, but access to the company is not easy; the supplier has to cross the field that is under heavy artillery bombardment. Ordering soldiers who have to carry the ammunition across the battlefield would mean to send them to certain death. The major asks for volunteers and his subordinates hesitate; but before the major finally decides to give an order to one or two selected soldiers, private Faustin Kruppa stands up and volunteers for the task. His readiness surprises everyone because Kruppa belongs "zu den schlechtesten Soldaten des Bataillons" (317) ["to the worst soldiers of the battalion" (my transl.)], whom the training officers and sergeants weren't able to teach how to be a "real" soldier:

Er turnt kümmerlich, er leistet in der Instruktion jene Antworten, von denen die Witzblätter leben; seine Abneigung gegen kaltes Wasser erregt den Unwillen aller Stubenkameraden, und die Langsamkeit seines Denkens vermag jedermann außer Fassung zu bringen. (317-18)

He exercises miserably, during the training he produces the kind of answers that revives the humorous magazines; his aversion to cold water incurs the displeasure of all his roommates, and the slowness of his thinking process is able to upset anyone. (my transl.)

Kruppa is acceptable as a soldier only because of two characteristics: he shoots tolerably if he is allowed to aim long enough, and he knows how to effectively take cover on the battlefield. The major, although surprised by his worst soldier, enjoys Kruppa's unexpected willingness to provide the fighting company with the ammunition. The officer helps to load Kruppa's backpack with ammunition. Encouraged by the easy solution to his strategic problem, the major cannot resist a joke:

Und jetzt erst . . . überkommt ihn Erleichterung; das Aufatmen, daß es glücken wird, mündet in einen soldatischen Spaß. Er droht ihm mit erhobenem Finger: "Daß du mir ja die Quittung bringst!" (318)

And now, finally, . . . a feeling of relief came over him; the deep breath, bringing him relief about the lucky outcome, leads to a soldier joke. He raised a warning finger: "But bring me back the receipt!" (my transl.)

Kruppa manages to deliver the ammunition to the first line. The major, who follows his moves, does not expect him to come back. Yet Kruppa repeats the animal-like dodging of the grenades and bullets on the battlefield and returns to his troop. The major initially thinks that Kruppa wants to deliver an important message from the defending company, but the private shows him the receipt for the ammunition the company received. The major, who has already forgotten his earlier joke, does not know what to say and rewards the soldier with the Iron Cross, the military decoration for courage on the battlefield.

The major, by joking about the receipt for the ammunition that has to be brought back from the company, creates a humorous situation that, in his opinion, is readable to all the gathered soldiers. The object of the joke is, in this case, the standard military procedure suitable for the time of the soldier's training behind the front line where the supplies, especially the ammunition, are counted and rationed in order to avoid misuse and potential violent assaults against the officers. The echo of this procedure sounds in the jokingly presented order of the major, who recognizes the superfluity of the paperwork in the heat of battle, and stresses the necessity of ignoring the regulations while faced with a life-threatening situation. The humorous incongruity results from the confrontation of the two realities: that of military training in the barracks and that of combat, in which the same rule cannot be applied to the same extent without unnecessary risk to the soldier's life. The shaping of the order as the joke, in addition to the relief function indicated in the text, allows the major to achieve two main goals in his position

of authority: first, to show the soldiers that in extreme combat situations, in which fast reaction time and the proper recognition of danger play a crucial role, some regulations are superfluous and almost absurd. Second, the joking form of the order demonstrates the major's still prevailing awareness of the particular procedure that is a part of the rule book regulating relationships in the army. By pointing out the rule, the major reminds his subordinates of the existence of the regulations in general, because the regulations secure his authoritative position in the troop, but—using the same authority given to him by the rank—he temporarily lifts the requirement to follow that particular procedure. The major remains under the impression that all witnesses to his remark have understood the joke according to his intentions: as a demand of the flexibility in the combat conditions and, at the same time, as a subtle reminder of the major's dominant position resulting from the rules, about which all soldiers agree. The joke can be made—and understood as it was meant regarding its object—only by the superior in the troop and the soldiers who share his view of the situation.

The consequences of the major's humorous order provide an example of a situation in which one of the participants does not "get the joke," when one of the parties does not recognize the incongruity standing behind the structure of the joke. Kruppa takes the major's order literally: as a request for the receipt. By interpreting the order that way, he demonstrates that his capacity to judge the situation on the battlefield is very limited. Facing the enemy does not differ from any other conditions of military life known to him, that is, from the reality of training. For Kruppa, the risky task and its fulfillment is just another order that has to be followed regardless of the environment: "alles in Ordnung, Befehl ausgeführt, die Quittung" (319) ["everything is ok, order executed, here is the receipt" (my transl.)]. Kruppa cannot understand why the major is

baffled by his return, and wonders about the change of the tone in which the officer addresses him. To him, the discipline is natural and the order does not deviate from any other orders he may receive during his military service.

By unconditional submission to the wishes of the superior, Kruppa creates yet another humorous situation, in which the major's assumptions about his soldiers are questioned and, ultimately, corrected. First, the major's certainty that no one in his troop will take him seriously and attempt to execute the order is revealed as wrong. The reactions to the major's joke demonstrate that the audience of the joke is differentiated, and the reception of the joke depends on the position in the hierarchy. Private Kruppa takes the order and the threatening gesture of the major quite literally; on the other hand, the lieutenant who assists the major interprets his order as humorous and does not expect the soldier to return. Like the major, he too expects that Kruppa wants to deliver a message from the captain of the company, and, looking at Kruppa jumping on the battlefield, he expresses his curiosity: "Da bin ich doch neugierig" (319) ["Now, I'm really intrigued" (my transl.)]. Kruppa's willingness to execute the order that was meant to be a joke, at the risk of his life, shows that the superior is responsible to carefully select the audience of his jokes, and to make sure that the joking relationship he enters is interpreted as such by all parties involved. The division of competence between the officers and the common soldiers is therefore stressed: the narrative strategy of showing the outcome of the misunderstood joke can be a warning about officers making "inappropriate" jokes that involve the privates. Making the common soldiers equal partners in the humorous situation, assuming that they have the same perspective of the events as the commanding officers, can have unforeseen effects and should be avoided.

The second contrast created by Kruppa's execution of the order is the contrast between his image as the company's loser that developed during the training period and the image of the skilful soldier that Kruppa presents in real battlefield conditions. The possibility that the major agrees to give Kruppa the hopeless task only because the clumsy soldier appears to be less valuable to him than a trained fighter cannot be excluded here. The other soldiers are not prone to risk their lives while making the deadly run through the battlefield, and the major understands their resistance as the confirmation of his own feelings: "Sie schweigen und der Major begreift sie gut" (317) ["They keep silent and the major understands them well" (my transl.)]. By volunteering, Kruppa saves the officer from making the difficult choice of sending one of his soldiers with the ammunition, a choice that would be a fulfillment of the major's duty but would also be, according to his view of the situation, the sacrifice of one of the soldiers. Therefore, the joy that the major experiences while Kruppa prepares for the task can be interpreted not as joy of being helpful to the soldiers in the first trench, but rather as joy resulting from the officer's conviction that he did everything he could to save the defensive line. The major's joke is a natural consequence of this conviction; the officer does not initially take to the difficult position of the decision maker and then, after the solution offers itself (Kruppa's volunteering), he compensates for his brief moment of losing control by restoring order: he makes the joke that points out the existence of the rules. The outcome of the joke (Kruppa's surprisingly successful return) shows that the officer can be proved wrong in the assessment of his inferiors. The major's spontaneous promise of the Iron Cross is less an award for the soldier's bravery and more the symbolic punishment of the officer for his own underestimation of the capabilities of his soldiers.

In addition, the major's position as the joker in the humorous situation, connected with Kruppa's miscomprehension of his own role as the projected audience of the joke, results in the interesting observation on the value of a soldier's life. The major's excitement about Kruppa's performance has two culminations: the first, when Kruppa reaches the trench with the ammunition, and the other, more intense, when Kruppa—against all expectations—makes a successful run for the second time. Only after the second run is the major willing to decorate the soldier. By surprising his superior, the soldier's action advances to the rank of an extraordinary task for which the soldier receives not only the order, but also gets adopted into the military family in which the superior officer plays the role of the authority figure: the major, touched by Kruppa's bravery, addresses the soldier as "mein Sohn" (320) ["my son" (my transl.)]. It is only the commanding officer who has the privilege of making the distinction between "normal" soldierly behaviour and the extraordinary activity that deserves to be awarded. That way, the higher-ranked members of the military hierarchy have the deciding influence on the discourse of soldier value: the definitions of bravery, heroism, sacrifice, and last but not least the definition of the moment when the recruit becomes the "real" soldier. Kruppa, on the other hand, does not understand the major's excitement and sees the run as his "normal" duty, a task expected from him even in the situation for which he volunteers: he interprets the major's finger gesture and the request for the receipt as a direct threat. He deduces from his superior's warning that certain forms of behaviour are still required and their negligence leads to punishment. Therefore, volunteering becomes a routine part of the soldier's service, not an option but an instance of illusory freedom established by the ranks in order to create a possibility for bravery.

Zweig's early short story demonstrates that the joke made by the major, and misunderstood by Kruppa, serves to support the military hierarchy and prove the chain of command. Here, in my opinion, the most important aspect is the opportunity that the joke offers to define the characteristics of a "good soldier." Who makes the joke in the military hierarchy, has also the power to decide the value of a soldier. However, the joke can also serve as a warning issued to the commanding officer to control his reactions in front of his troop, to take the consequences of his difficult decisions, and allow for flexibility in the estimation of the soldier's worth. *Die Quittung* indicates a strong conservative view of the military, the definition of the soldier virtues, and the relationships between the officers and the common soldiers. After all, the bottom-line message of the joke is: the discipline introduced and enforced during military training and unconditional respect towards superiors pays in the future, even if gain is not expected.

4.3. Humour and laughter in the novel *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa*

In the novel *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa*, Zweig thematizes the political and social relationships within the German army, depicting the tensions, co-operation, and power struggles between different groups of interests: the conservative Prussian officer corps, the group of officers associated with big industry, the workers drafted to the army in the mass mobilization, the Jewish soldiers, the front-line fighters and the base administration, and the youngest volunteers whose world view is shaped entirely by the war. Laughter and humour play the key part in many of their social interactions, allowing the participants to express acceptance and friendliness, distance and contact limitations, or mask their aversion or aggression against each other. Laughter in the narration

functions as a social adhesive that makes the institutionally enforced co-existence of the individuals belonging to these groups possible without expressing disobedience or using direct violence. In the following section, I propose the overview of the different functions humour and laughter play in the novel, without strictly following the development of the plot.

The ability to create humorous situations helps the protagonist of the novel to assimilate into the group and, consequently, become the unquestionable leader of the group. Grischa Paprotkin uses humour in a non-offensive way to ensure the collaboration of the prisoners who saw the trees and load the freight-cars with timber. The prisoners at the work camp in Navarischky respect Sergeant Grischa for his great military service; the fact that he had won the St. George's cross, one of the highest military orders in the Russian army, at the siege of Przemyśl is stressed by both his fellow prisoners and by German soldiers. No less important in the relationship between Grischa and the other prisoners is his friendly attitude towards others. He is likeable because of his ability to make non-offensive, friendly jokes: "Er hat einen Spaß für jeden" (14) ["He had a jest for every man" (6)]. Grischa uses his talent for making people laugh to overcome divisions between the prisoners, solve conflicts, and, ultimately, create a strong community of soldiers that obey him. The third-person narrator admits the influence Grischa has on the other prisoners; in the whole company of two-hundred-and-fifty prisoners of war there are no individuals who challenge his authoritative position in the group. Grischa's goal is to escape from the camp and see his family. The support of other prisoners, among others Aljoscha, helps him succeed.

After the escape, Grischa encounters a group of deserters and marauders who hide in the forest, and he joins them in order to survive the cold spring. The relations between

the forest people and Grischa is a model example for the process of establishing friendly contact between a small, well-adjusted band and a stranger—the process that can often have various outcomes. The group consist of three Russian prisoners of war, three German deserters, and Babka. The setting of the group can be interpreted as Zweig's post-war statement about a possible international community of war objectors: people who—for various reasons—do not want to serve in the army or stay in opposition to its actions, and who learn how to effectively communicate and co-operate with each other. All people belonging to the group try to speak both Russian and German languages, and the binding element is their aversion to the prolonged war that turned them into outlaws. The company is organized by democratic principles; every member of the group has a vote to influence the important decisions that affect the whole band. Only coincidence decides that, on the day of Grischa's arrival in the group, such a vote about whether he can stay with the gang does not take place. In retrospective, Grischa thinks that the vote would have had an unfavourable outcome for him: the exclusion from the group would be conducted quite radically, by shooting the stranger.

The group receives the newcomer in a friendly manner; the peaceful character of the greeting is demonstrated by laughter: "Grischa lachte und schüttelte seine Hand, und Koljä lachte und drückte sie" (54) ["Grischa laughed as he shook the outstretched hand; Koljä laughed as he pressed it" (37)]. Grischa is accepted as a comrade, but there is a distance that can be reduced only when Grischa does his full share of work felling, lopping, and dragging the timber to the collection place (the gang earns money by selling timber for purposes of war). It is not only participation in the common tasks of the group that is important: one of the most important social adhesives is Grischa's readiness to joke with his new acquaintances, and his demonstration that he is not offended by their

humorous reactions. Grischa, who "zu jedem Spaß . . . seinen Teil . . . voll einzahlte" (70) ["bore his part in every jest" (50)], is prepared to interact with his new social surroundings. "Freude" (79) [the "joy" (57)] that Grischa expresses in the everyday contacts with other members of the group not only accelerates the social acceptance of the newcomer, but also saves his life and greatly contributes to the fact that Babka, the only woman in the group, engages in a sexual relationship with him that evolves over time into a deeper emotional commitment. Grischa's joyful nature convinces her to say: "Ist doch wieder ein Ziel für mich auf der Erde" (79) ["I've got an object in life again" (57)].

It is noteworthy that Babka possesses ambiguous gender characteristics that allow her to function, in the group of males, with equal rights and duties, and not as a woman, the object of sexual advances. Grischa's "joy," his playfulness shown in the contacts with other members of the gang, allows her to forget about the experiences of the murder of her family that turned her into an ambiguous gender figure: in the aftermath of the murder her hair turned grey, and she took the male role of the avenger of her father (in the absence of the sons, who have been killed, too). The relationship with Grischa, initiated through the ease with which he uses humour to navigate in the group and make her laugh—she recalls that he naively called the first lynx that he encountered in the forest a "tree-cat" (47)—puts her again into the female role of lover, and, subsequently, because she becomes pregnant, into the role of mother; for Grischa she had "sich für einige Zeit in eine junge derbe Magd zurückverwandelt hatte" (57) ["resumed the guise of the young and sturdy girl" (40)].

It seems, in the contacts with the forest group, Grischa "possesses" the joke; he decides what is a suitable object for the joke and creates a laughing community, standing

at the top of it. Therefore, the newcomer, using humorous strategies to take the initiative in the group and to reduce the tensions between the men in the execution of common tasks, moves to the position of the dominant male. The dominance of one member breaks the equality principle that governed the group and, as becomes visible in the relationship between Grischa and Babka, recreates the gender difference. When compared to the functions of laughter that can be observed in the short story *Die Quittung*, an essential difference emerges here. It is the ability to make jokes that puts Grischa in the leadership position in the group hierarchy; humour is an instrument to gain control over the group. The major from the short story makes jokes because he is already in the unquestionable position of group leader, and he simply reinforces his high status by using humour. He employs humour not to gain control, but to maintain it.

The function of laughter as social adhesive is not limited to Grischa and his usual mode of connecting with other people. The examples of such interactions in the narration include the encounter between Sascha, a Jewish student who does not want to give away Grischa's hiding place, and the policeman looking for the fugitive (79-80), in the conversation between Bertin and the phone operator (128-129), the meeting between the big industry mogul Wilhelmi and the general Schieffenzahn (182), the conversation between Schieffenzahn and the delegate of the Red Cross van Ryjtje (275-277), the dispute between Grischa and the German soldier Sacht over the nutritional value of fresh snow(320), Babka's visit to Veressejeff's store when the initial hostility of the owner changes into laughter in order to mitigate the situation (186), and the headquarters staff's celebrations that include an episode in which a drunk and aggressive front-line officer has to be "disarmed" with laughter about his transgression (192-217).

In such contacts, the mitigating functions of smiling and laughter is stressed; they can also express, however, the scepticism about the partner's ideas that is suppressed and not directly verbalized, for the sake of maintaining the good relationships in the group. The smile expresses disbelief but, at the same time, it prevents the smiling person from discouraging the partner in the conversation. For example, Aljoscha, Grischa's best friend from the prison camp, does not want to escape the camp with Grischa. He does not believe it is possible to successfully break out from prison in March, when it is still cold:

Aljoscha lächelt. Näherten sie sich jetzt nicht gerade dem Feuer, so fiele dies Lächeln noch etwas trüber aus. (17)

Aljoscha smiled. If they had not been sitting quite so near the fire, the smile would have looked more rueful still. (9)

Aljoscha supports Grischa in his preparations to escape, and his support is expressed through smiling that functions to build the relationship, though he does not undertake the same activity as the person with whom the relationship is built. Grischa demonstrates that he is stronger than Aljoscha, and his friend approves of Grischa's actions but stresses his independent perspective on the possibility of the escape with a smile, without repeating the gestures of the stronger partner:

Grischa legt ein Stückchen glühenden Holzes mit den bloßen Händen auf den Tabak in seiner Pfeife und pafft. Aljoscha steht da und lächelt schüchtern. (18)

Grischa put a small ember with his bare hands on the tobacco in his pipe and puffed. Aljoscha stood beside him and smiled nervously. (10)

In the above section, I described the functions of humour and laughter in a group in which the differences of rank do not play an important role (group of prisoners, group of officers, group of privates), and it is humour that creates the possibility of creating a new hierarchy. Now, I would like to turn to the situations from the narration in which laughter and humour can change the official relationships between superiors and

subordinates within the military hierarchy. They serve, in my opinion, as manifestations of disobedience to the superiors, or create alternative informal hierarchies that oppose the obligatory chain of command.

Lieutenant Winfried and the army lawyer Posnanski talk about Schieffenzahn's attempts to order Grischa's execution. The first step to avoid that is to prevent Schieffenzahn's officers from taking Bjuscheff's (Grischa's) dossier and the execution warrant. Winfried asks his friend to guard the documents and stresses his request with a military order; he emphasises, very seriously, that he will hold Posnanski responsible for any loss of the files, and that this order has to be scrupulously obeyed:

Der Kriegsgerichtsrat griff ruckhaft an die Stelle, wo sonst die Mütze zu sitzen pflegte, und sagte: "Befehl, Herr Oberleutnant."
Dann lachten beide über die Komödie und sagten einstimmig: "so." (318)

The lawyer jerked his hand up to the place where the peak of his cap should have been, and said: "Very good, sir." They both laughed and said with one voice: "That's that." (251)

The friends switch between formal rank and intimate relationship within the military hierarchy, of which they are both part. The change of the paradigm emphasises the importance of the operation to save Grischa's life. Immediately after the formal commitment to prevent Grischa's execution, Posnanski ridicules the gesture of the proper salute, referring to the non-existent cap with make-believe seriousness. His movement constitutes the visible mark of his subordinate position in the hierarchy. Winfried is much younger and less experienced than Posnanski, and respects him as a highly educated man, but he is Posnanski's formal superior and can execute the latent threat of disciplinary action that is included in his order. Posnanski subverts the hierarchy through the incomplete gesture of obedience; he escapes the uncomfortable position in which his

friend puts both of them. He plays with the idea of subordination, relaxing their relationship.

A similarly friendly relationship exists between Bertin, the young Jewish writer (Zweig's *porte parole*),⁸⁷ and the Judge Posnanski. Bertin is Posnanski's secretary and subordinate, but he allows himself to laugh in the presence of Posnanski when the latter makes a joke about the correlation between the military rank, the soldier's pay, and the rightfulness of the judgment:

"[U]nd wollten Sie vielleicht an der überlegenen Weisheit meiner Orakelsprüche in Ihrem zersetzenden Hirn Zweifel erheben, so erwägen Sie gefälligst, daß ich ungefähr zwölfmal so viel Gehalt beziehe wie Sie und infolgedessen zwölfmal mehr Recht habe." Bertin lachte schallend los, anstößig laut in der Gegenwart eines so hochgestellten Vorgesetzten . . . (173)

". . . I draw approximately twelve times as much pay as you and consequently I am twelve times as right." Bertin bursts into a peal of laughter, unduly loud in the presence of so highly-placed a superior . . . (134)

87 The hypothesis is well supported by a number of autobiographical elements that Zweig uses to construct the figure of Bertin, who connects the part of the war cycle. And so, *Die Junge Frau von 1914* tells a story of love, abortion, and marriage in the time of the war that demonstrates similarities with Zweig's biography. In *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa*, Bertin thinks about using the story of Grischa for his future literary work. It is the clearly autobiographical motif that is confirmed by the characteristics of Bertin:

Eines Tages, das weiß er grell, wird er an diesem Geschick des gewöhnlichen Russen Paprotkin den Schicksalsfall, die Entscheidung der Zeit zu gestalten versuchen, in einem Drama *Alarm Überhört*, das gefaßt von Anfang bis zu Ende, keimhaft, eine Entelechie, die sich entfalten wird, in ihn eingepreßt ist wie der Same in die Krume. (518)

One day, he clearly realizes, he would try to embody in the story of this humble Russian Paprotkin, his conception of the cleavage between this age and the last, and write a play called *Alarm Überhört*, in which he would lay bare the whole process from its earliest origin to its final realization like seed unfolding in an ear of corn. (419)

Bertin's laughter in this situation can be read as a symptom of disrespect towards the superior, and, in fact, it would be interpreted that way if the observer was not aware of his friendship with Posnanski. His loud laughter about the joke, and the appearance of his laughter itself, indicate that he takes Posnanski's statement as a joke based in the incongruity between common sense and military rank/soldier's pay. Laughter demonstrates that Bertin essentially maintains the strong disbelief in the chain of command which, under formal circumstances, would equal his disobedience. His laughter has a deeply subversive character: it challenges the system that aspires to be absolutely correct in all matters that concern the military. In the conversation that follows, Bertin uses the phrase "Darf ich Herr Kriegsgerichtsrat gehorsamst fragen . . ." (173) ["may I respectfully ask the Herr Kriegsgerichtsrat . . ." (134)], and Posnanski immediately catches the internal incongruity between the rhetorical form and the assumed inferiority of the subordinates:

Wissen Sie, daß in diesem Worte sich Ihre ganze himmelschreiende Verrätereie offenbart? Gehorsamst darf nur ein Offizier fragen. Bei einem Gemeinen versteht sich Gehorsam doch wohl von selbst! . . . [A]n der Verwendung so grenzenlos ungedienter Mannschaften wie Sie wird noch der ganze schöne Krieg scheitern. (173)

Don't you know that that word has betrayed all that duplicity of yours that cries aloud to heaven? Only an officer may use the word. In a private, respect is taken for granted . . . [I]f there were a few more insubordinate gentlemen like you about, this glorious War would not last long. (134)

Posnanski is joking (he stresses his tirade with laughing exclamations), and Bertin reacts appropriately. On the other hand, the judge jokingly points out the risky nature of all friendships that exist between people that occupy different positions in the military hierarchy. Posnanski also seems to say that if there is no place for redundancy in the official mode of communication between the superior and the subordinate, and such duplication—the appearance of the word "gehorsamst" ["respectfully"] in the relationship

that is by definition based on respect towards the superior—may be interpreted as a ridiculing practice. If treated logically, the demonstration of the surplus respect shows the subversive attitude of the soldier towards the institution. Posnanski's joking remark serves both as a criticism of such modes of communication between friends, and as the warning to Bertin about something in the formulations of his language that his friend may not be aware of.

The salute, ridiculed in the conversation between Winfried and Posnanski, is one visual sign of hierarchy; the other is the uniform. The role of the uniform in relationships between the ranks is confusing when it is not supported by other signs of respect. Bertin and Posnanski are friends, and adopt a man-to-man attitude with each other. Bertin—the subordinate—sometimes takes the entire initiative and decides for both of them, and his commanding tone surprises the accidental observer, Sergeant Pont, who does not know about their close relationship:

. . . einen Ton . . . , der zwischen dem Schriftsteller Bertin und dem Rechtsanwalt Posnanski nichts Auffälliges hätte, zumal die beiden befreundet sind, der aber, in Uniform angewandt, sein Komisches hat; und das schmeckt Feldwebel Pont heraus. (514)

. . . which would have been in no way remarkable between Bertin, the writer, and Posnanski, the lawyer, especially as the two were friends, but when they were in uniform looked rather odd; and Sergeant-Major Pont was not a little amused. (416)

The incongruity, perceived by Pont, is enjoyable: the clash of two orders, the military and the civilian, produces the humour in the situation. The humorous potential of the scene is additionally amplified by the fact that both Posnanski and Bertin do not recognize the incongruity. If Sergeant Pont had burst into loud laughter, it would have sent the clear signal that their attitude must be corrected. But he keeps his enjoyment to himself, which

makes his reaction slightly subversive to the military order, allowing him to play with the idea of discipline without risking his own position.

Now, I would like to move to another function of laughter in the military structures as shown in the novel: smiling and laughing can replace aggression against the higher rank, aggression which is prohibited within the same troop. In this case, laughter takes an offensive character. For instance, in the scene when the privates and sergeants are singing in the canteen, their song becomes a demonstration of the fury and despair of the common people who are disappointed with the current course of the war. The song is interrupted by the Divisional Chaplain, an officer without significant front-line experience, who comes to the canteen and starts praising the singers in a very friendly manner as if he was one of their comrades. He wants to hear more. The sergeant Halbscheid, taking it as the condescending gesture of an officer, responds to the chaplain's request:

Freundlich grinsend antwortet der Unteroffizier: das Lied sei leider grade aus gewesen. (311)

Der Käufer errötet leicht: er bekomme dort eben nicht diese Marke; er sei ja gleichsam auch Mannschaft, murmelt er schüchtern.

Die Soldaten, soweit sie überhaupt hinhorchen—die richtigen Mannschaften—lächeln taktvollerweise nur. Sie grinsen nicht, sie brüllen nicht, und Gott der Herr versteht sie doch . . . (312)

With a friendly grin the sergeant explained that he was sorry but the song was over. . . . (246)

The customer blushed slightly; he said he could not get that brand there; and he added nervously, "But I am practically one of the troops myself." The soldiers who heard him—the real troops—only smiled tactfully. They grinned not, neither did they roar, but their Heavenly Father understood them. (246)

Even a tactful smile (let alone a grin or loud laughter) can demonstrate a negative attitude towards the superior. In this case, the chaplain understands perfectly that he is trespassing and withdraws, looking at the faces of the soldiers. From the formal point of view he is

right; he can receive the cigars as a member of the troop, but the informal hierarchy established through long service on the front line prevails. The smile or friendly grin draws a line between him and the front-line soldiers, and excludes him from their community.

Humorous strategies are also helpful in taking symbolic revenge against a more powerful opponent who cannot be easily defeated in a conventional power struggle, or whose superiority is warranted by his position in the military hierarchy. Humour becomes an ersatz revenge and a method of ridiculing the rival party that utilizes the feeling of the superiority of the joker over the object of the joke. In one of the situations when the superiority serves as the source of the joke, General von Lychow does not feel well and is bothered by Schieffenzahn's attempts to take control over von Lychow's troops at the eastern front. Schieffenzahn is his rival and superior in the General Command of the army. In the situation where the conflict of interest is unavoidable and the foreboding of his defeat in the struggle overwhelms von Lychow, the general makes the opponent laughable in front of his nephew Winfried, comparing Schieffenzahn to a satirical drawing quite popular at the time:

"Weißt du, wie er aussieht?" fragte er plötzlich erheitert, "wie die alte Queen Victoria auf Karikaturen in dem frechen *Simplizissimus*. Genau so." Und ganz getrost lachte er herzlich. (330)

"Do you know what he looks like?" he asked jovially. "He looks like Old Queen Victoria in a *Simplicissimus* caricature. Exactly like." And he laughed heartily, thoroughly pleased with himself. (261)

The insult against Schieffenzahn operates on two levels. First, the insulting core of the joke is the comparison of the opponent to an old woman; the symbolic emasculation of Schieffenzahn gives von Lychow the pleasure of feeling better, feeling more powerful and dominant, and restores his self-image as a man. However, although the figurative

emasculatation of Schieffenzahn turns out to be successful (von Lychow laughs, having Winfried as his understanding audience), the distressing notion of authority that cannot be overpowered is still in the picture. Here, the second level of the insult comes into play. The ridiculed female is not any old woman, it is Queen Victoria, and she is still a mighty figure. The comparison indeed may have latent meaning that reveals the fear of von Lychow. The fear manifests itself in the elevation of Schieffenzahn to the status of a crowned head and personification of Germany's enemy, England. Schieffenzahn obtains the status of an authority that cannot be challenged and overpowered because it has been turned into a symbol: Queen Victoria died in 1901, but German satirical magazines still exploited her image decades later.

Schieffenzahn, on the other hand, makes jokes about von Lychow:

Generalmajor Schieffenzahn, der Allmächtige, hat im Kasino, natürlich in seiner Abwesenheit, zwei- oder dreimal sein gefürchtetes Lachen über ihn ergossen. (212)

Once or twice in the mess, of course in Lychow's absence, Major-General Schieffenzahn, the all powerful, had made him the subject of his bitter wit. (166)

The internal reasons for making jokes about von Lychow, who is Schieffenzahn's formal subordinate, are similar to those of von Lychow. The Prussian general, the object of the joke, stands high in the Emperor's favour and cannot be easily subdued in formal ways. Schieffenzahn chooses the method of symbolic revenge for von Lychow's high informal status to stress his own superiority in the presence of the understanding audience (headquarters officers); he speaks of von Lychow in derogative terms: "Er ist ein komischer Alter" (212) ["He was a comical old fellow" (166)]. The bitter jokes can be interpreted in reference to Schieffenzahn's long-lasting aversion to the old Prussian aristocratic officer corps, the group to which he aspires and in which he could never be

admitted because of his lower social station. His love-hate relationship with the aristocracy dates back to his youth when he was admitted to the cadet school. Since then, he used to make up for his deficiencies with ambition and extraordinary strategic skills. Schieffenzahn's feeling of insufficiency emerges in jokes about the old general, and the jokes mask the fear and emphasize his apparent superiority.

When the two generals finally meet to discuss their positions in the case of Sergeant Grischa, the power struggle is expressed in polite smiles and laughs that stress the feeling of superiority over the opponent. Smiles and laughs have the direct goal of making the antagonist angry enough to commit an offence that can be formally punished, therefore they are provocative and offensive. Schieffenzahn tells von Lychow that Grischa will be executed and, when asked for the lawful explanation, addresses the accusations of an error in judgment "mit dem milden, öligen Lächeln des verzeihenden Jüngeren" (353) ["with the genial propitiatory smile of a younger man humouring an old man's whim" (281)]. The arguments on both sides are supported with smiles that keep up the appearance of polite conversation. Schieffenzahn, better controlling his anger during the exchange of opinions, "lächelte verbindlich, gut gelaunt über die Arglist, mit der er den Alten da in eigener Schlinge gefangen hielt" (355) ["smiled amicably, delighted at the cunning with which he had caught the old gentleman in his own trap" (283)]. After he wins the dispute, he "[m]it straffem Lächeln sah, breitbeinig stehend, der Generalmajor Schieffenzahn die Tür hinter einem Besiegten sich schließen" (361) ["watched with a sardonic smile the door close behind a beaten man" (288)]. The contrast between the formal character of the generals' conversation, emphasized by polite smiles, and its aggressive content contributes to its dramatic effect, evoking emotion in the reader, and marking it as the key scene in the novel.

After analysing the uses of humour and laughter in the group situations, I would like to describe the role laughter plays in the process of self-recognition and the creation of the identity of the main character, Grisha. I believe that the instances of Grisha's laughter can yield many interesting insights in the discussion about the individual's strategies in coping with the reality of war. Another purpose of the protagonist's laughter is to deal with the stress brought on by the feeling of helplessness in facing decisions he does not understand and does not have any influence on. Grisha's laughter emerges, significantly, in the three main turning points of the narration, which I will consider in this section.

In Zweig's novel, the laughter of Grisha Paprotkin comes as a result of the recognition of the figure's freedom from life-threatening danger, even if it lasts only momentarily, and as such it forms an expression of relief from physical and mental stresses. The relief function is recognized by John Morreal, in his survey of humour theories, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, as one of the main purposes of this psychophysical phenomenon of laughter. The relief, as defined by Morreal, refers to the psycho-physiological tension, the build-up of "nervous energy" (21) that occurs as the result of the suppression of impulses. The relief theories of humour postulate the accumulation of nervous energy in two cases: either before the humorous situation takes place, or during the humorous situation. The content of the humorous story, for example, can direct the reader towards the anticipated narrative solution, gradually building the tension. The tension results from the reader's emotional attachment to the figure(s) in the story. When the culmination of the story through the unpredicted narrative turn disappoints the expectations of the reader/listener instead of confirming his/her suppositions (for instance, when the figure reveals himself to be extremely different from the reader's

assessment of his/her character), the tension built up during the narrative may be released in laughter. Laughter results in this case from perceived incongruity.

According to Morreal, laughter can also occur when a person enters the situation with accumulated nervous energy that has to be released. This theoretical approach to laughter yielded a number of definitions of humour, and of these, Freud's analysis of the sexually charged joke is the most frequently employed in the scholarship of humour. The surplus of nervous energy is possible when the group or a group authority imposes a prohibition on a person. That can occur when the individual is prevented from fulfilling the sexual desire that has to be repressed for the purposes of group cohabitation, or from executing violence against other members of the community that cannot be touched because of their prominent position in the group. The frustration—the unpleasant arousal—that results from the impossibility of executing the desired activity causes the energy build-up, and the tension that results can be unloaded through laughter. Interpreted that way, laughter is a product of a social restriction imposed upon the individual who seeks relief in this particular bodily response.

The theory developed by Morreal, and grounded in Spencer's and Freud's depiction of the expenditure of the energy surplus, should be supplemented, however, with the current knowledge of the functioning of the nervous system.⁸⁸ Berlyne, Bushnell, and Scheff—not questioning the motivations for laughter that allow it to take place but rather re-examining its physiological mechanism—argue that laughter does not serve to relieve the built-up energy but rather to reduce the arousal of the person back to the

88 The relief theory of laughter is evaluated critically in relation to the neurological studies on the field in Herbert M. Lefcourt and Rod A. Martin, *Humor and Life Stress: Antidote to Adversity* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1986) 7-8. Also see Herbert M. Lefcourt, *Humor: The Psychology of Living Buoyantly* (New York: Kluwer Academic and Plenum Publishers, 2001).

pleasurable level, preventing the arousal from becoming overwhelming and stressful. Here, the theoreticians use the concept of an inverted U-relationship between physiological arousal, performance, and subjective pleasure. The core idea of the inverted U-relationship theory presumes that high levels of arousal lead to a reduction in the amount of information to which the individual can pay attention, to stress the arousal's negative influence on the individual's ability to deal with the present tasks. The assumption that laughter has a great impact on the agent's stress level and performance seems to be the common ground for the humour theoreticians, while the debate in behavioural psychology about the functions of the arousal in humour is still ongoing.

The basic principles of the relief theories of humour are helpful in the interpretation of Grischa's behaviour because they take into consideration the situations present in the narration that are not accounted for by the sociological approaches to humour and laughter. The sociological approaches concentrate mainly on the instant social effects of both phenomena, and the assumption that laughter is a social activity reveals its shortcomings when the agent laughs alone. The reader of *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* encounters such a case of solitary laughter in the figure of the protagonist: the Russian soldier also laughs when he does not enter any direct social interaction with other soldiers or civilians. Yet the assessment of his solitary laughter within the narrative structure is crucial for the interpretation of the character of his subsequent social interactions, and cannot be dismissed.

Grischa laughs alone for the first time when his attempted escape from the camp in Navarischky ends successfully. He hides on the train that transports the planks behind the front line, and that way he hopes to reach his destination faster. He finds shelter in a coffin-like hollow in the wood, in which he cannot be seen by the German guards:

[Er] streckt sich aus und lacht, lacht laut los, durch und durch geschüttelt . . . Er liegt hart. Viel Bewegung kann er sich nicht machen. Aber er lacht, und seine Augen mögen in der Finsternis glänzen wie die eines ausgebrochenen, lange gefangenen Panthers. (29)

[He] stretched himself out and laughed aloud, and shook with that great laughter . . . It was hard lying: he could move but little. But he could laugh: and his eyes must have shone in the darkness like those of a panther which had burst its bars at last. (18)

In the days that follow his escape, Grischa keeps his attitude up; the uncomfortable conditions of his trip do not trouble him, although he cannot move and he has a headache:

[D]ieser Mensch lacht und kichert in die Schwärze des Wagens vor sich hin. Es fehlt nicht viel, daß er sich eins singe oder pfeife. (33)

[T]his man laughed and chuckled to himself in the blackness. Indeed, he could have sung and whistled. (21)

Grischa's laughter in both described situations is, as the narrator suggests, a sign of relief that his time in the prison camp has ended and he is finally on the move. The object of his laughter is imagined (what Grischa laughs about or with whom he laughs is left to the imagination of the reader). The observers of his laughter are not present at the moment. Yet his laughter does influence his social identity: his laughter has to be concealed so that it does not attract the attention of the guards; otherwise, he could once again become a prisoner. The soldier's chuckle demonstrates his reflection on the change of his social status but, at the same time, constitutes the biggest threat to his new position as a free man, a fugitive. Interpreted that way, laughter is an indicator of a transition, of a temporary and unstable state as the agent passes into a new form of social existence, but the same laughter could also reverse his course back toward the position that he is attempting to free himself from. Laughter has an ambivalent character: it encompasses the expression of the newly acquired freedom but it is, at the same time, the biggest threat to the freedom.

The juxtaposition of the spacial restriction of Grischa's body, with his feeling of breaking out of any restrictions, is substantial for the analysis of Grischa's situation. The space Grischa has at his disposal is much smaller than what he lived in before.

Considering that change, I see his laughter as the immediate reaction to the modifications in his environment, to the extreme spacial limitation that has to be overcome. According to the relief theories of laughter that include the concept of controllable arousal, Grischa's reaction is a strategy aimed at lowering the unwanted arousal to bring himself back to the mental state in which he could concentrate on his long-run task: to hide in the freight car for a few days. Laughter also takes the role of the animator of the body: it activates the muscles, giving the laughing individual an illusion of bodily movement in the limited space. Grischa's hiding place between the planks on the train evokes the association with a wood coffin in which the dead human body is placed and buried. If the connection is made, Grischa's laughter would negate death by re-animating the body. Solitary laughter indicates the moment of rebirth from a period of apparent extinction, and the assumption of a new identity. Other episodes of laughter that I am going to describe in the following sections also speak to that hypothesis.

After getting off the train, Grischa survives in the forest without a firearm. He uses a primitively constructed bow to hunt. On his way, he encounters a hungry mother lynx that is not scared of people, and has developed a taste for human flesh. As the lynx prepares to attack the prey, Grischa, who had never before seen a lynx, takes the unknown animal for a big wild cat:

Und Grischa, betroffen von der Haltung dieses unbekanntes Biests, immer schärfer hinsehend, fand plötzlich, das Ding sei ihm, Grischa, ähnlich! Ungeheuer erheitert erkannte er sein eigenes rundes Gesicht, seinen Bartkranz rundherum, seine etwas schief stehenden, durchdringend hellen Augen, seine breite kurze Nase und sein mächtiges Gebiß; und er brach in

herzhaftes Gelächter aus, lachte wie ein Junge, die Fäuste auf die Schenkel gestützt, wie er seit Aljoschas Späßen nicht mehr gelacht hatte. (50)

And Grischa, as he gazed more and more closely at the unknown beast, was struck by its attitude, and it suddenly dawned on him that the creature was like him, Grischa! He was hugely tickled to recognize his round face, with its frill of beard, his piercing blue eyes set somewhat askew, his snub nose and his powerful set of teeth: and he broke into a hearty guffaw, laughing like a boy, slapping his thighs - as he had not laughed since Aljoscha used to crack his jokes. (33-34)

The lynx is frightened and she disappears in the bushes: "[Da] erholte sie sich von der unbeschreiblichen Verblüffung, die das erste menschliche Gelächter ihr bereitet hatte" (51) ["There she recovered from the unutterable confusion into which she had been thrown by her first experience of human laughter" (34)]. Zweig seems to share Plato's conviction that laughter is an exclusively human phenomenon: Grischa's laughter scares the animal away, only because she encountered something that she is not familiar with and has interpreted as threatening. Laughter draws the line between the animal and the human, but also between the living and the dead. The lynx is placed in the realm of the dead: it is a predator, a killer, but it also acquired the taste in human flesh in the winter, eating up the body of a soldier killed by the forest people. Grischa's laughter, from the point of view of the relief theory, can be seen as the manifestation of an impulse override that cannot be managed in any other way because Grischa does not possess a weapon with which he can defend himself more effectively. It may also be a response to the long period of loneliness that erupts in the moment when he meets an animal that reminds him of the domestic sphere, and is associated with humans (the lynx looks like a cat to him). In addition, his laughter is clearly a social gesture: Grischa experiences a moment of self-recognition when gazing at the wild animal. The lynx, evoking the impression of resemblance to Grischa, reminds Grischa of his humanity and his social conditioning. The activity of looking and recognizing other people as belonging to the same group

because of their similarity to the observer, an activity that Grischa has been deprived of in his long vagabond trip, has a social character. Also, the soldier's laughter is directed towards the lynx that resembles Grischa: it has the function of creating the community that the fugitive longs for.

Another scene in the novel demonstrates the role that laughter plays in creating or assuming social identity. In the prison, Grischa receives the death sentence of Bjuschew and goes into shock: he did not expect the identity that Babka offered to him, and the Germans believe in, would become his undoing. The moment of collapse and rage against the sentence transforms into laughter that the guards can hear from outside of the prison cell:

Ein ungeheures Gelächter bricht durchs Holz gedämpft aus der Zelle des zum Tode Verurteilten. "Der ist verrückt, den hats gepackt," sagen sich die Leute, indem sie bewegungslos das Unwahrscheinliche und Grausige . . . in ihrem Gebein spüren . . . Er ist es ja gar nicht, den sie verurteilt haben! Vor seinen Augen erscheint . . . der Luchs, . . . das Vieh, das vor seinem Lachen ausriß. Lachen verscheucht den Tod. . . . Und halb befreit, halb im Krampfe schlägt er die Hände zusammen wie damals und lacht. (146-47)

A monstrous shout of laughter, a little muffled by the wooden walls, bursts from the cell of the condemned man. "He's mad, he's off his head!" they said to one another, as they sat quivering at a thing so strange and gruesome. . . . He is not the man they sentenced to death! . . . And before his eyes came the vision of the lynx . . . the beast that had fled before his laughter. Laughter scares away death. . . . And half in relief and half in agony he beats his hands together as before and laughed. (111-12)

The motif of "wooden walls" and seclusion re-appears here, showing the affiliation of this scene with the scene on the freight-car. The scenes build a parallel, and the motif of the coffin also appears in other scenes (Grischa makes his own coffin on the prison carpenter's bench, assisted by the Jewish worker Tävje), while the lynx becomes the symbol of a deadly threat. Similar to the scene on the train, Grischa's laughter in the prison has the ambivalent characteristics of the phenomenon that connects fatal danger

with the escape to life. The death of Bjus Chew means the prolongation of life for Grischa Paprotkin. The formal acknowledgment of death of the long-deceased Russian soldier by the German military authorities is possible only after Grischa's testimony. Grischa, recognizing the arbitrary nature of the identities recognized by the military, finds the way out of the dangerous situation: he has to deny his assumed identity of Bjus Chew and come back to his identity as Paprotkin; his laughter accompanies the moment of the switch in social identities. He is, in his wooden coffin of a cell, coming back to life.

In the scene described above, Grischa's laughter of relief is by no means shared by the readers. In his novel, Zweig employs the narrative strategy of providing the reader with an overview of the situation, giving the complete image of the relationships and connections between occurrences that remain arbitrary and unclear to the novel's protagonist. The reader is familiar with the developments in Grischa's trial, the insights into the motives of the Generals Schieffenzahn and von Lychow, and the Grischa's rescue attempts undertaken by other soldiers and Babka. Not accidentally, Zweig opens the novel by offering the reader a view, from a great distance, of the planet in the state of war, and zooming in to the figure of Grischa walking in the snow, small by comparison (3). Grischa has a very limited perspective at his disposal and, unlike the reader, remains ignorant about his own future. Grischa's restricted knowledge compared with the wide knowledge of the reader evokes the tragic irony that gives evidence of the stage origins of the main story in *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa*. Significantly, the tragic irony is emphasized by Grischa's illiteracy. What gives Grischa away during his trip home, and ultimately causes his death, is his inability to read and his tendency to ignore the importance of written documents that provide their carrier with institutionally acknowledged identity. While wandering in the countryside on his way home, Grischa

cannot understand the information about enemy spies on the occupied territory that will be arrested and prosecuted by the German military. The announcement has been posted in seven languages, none of which Grischa could communicate in writing (69). In consequence, he does not know that he should avoid villages and any social interactions. Similarly, he treats the official identity stated in army documents very nonchalantly, trusting only direct interactions and people's spoken words. The growing dramatic tension between Grischa's attitude towards the written word and "the power of paper," as one of the chapters is entitled (Book Three, Chapter I), becomes clear to the reader who follows the narration and learns to understand the mechanisms of the military bureaucratic machine. Zweig seems to suggest that the lack of face-to-face interaction and trust in the written forms of communication (military personal files, orders, telegraphic messages, letters, and notes) is an opportunity to create injustice, with individuals in the role of victims. The two orders, the one of non-verbal and oral communication, and the one of formalized written contacts, stay in a conflicting yet balanced relationship with each other, providing the narration about the struggle for Grischa's life with dramatic intensity. Grischa—and here his laughter plays an important role—has the ability to win trust of people with whom he interacts: for example, he reminds von Lychow of the soldier authority figure from his childhood and, mostly because of this resemblance in Grischa's bright eyes and joyful mood (196), the general takes the conflict with Schieffenzahn very personally and makes an attempt to save this common soldier. Grischa's joking disposition and laughter, when experienced by others, appears to override the decisions made in official documents.

The new element in the prison scene is Grischa's full awareness of laughter as a strategy that, according to his new conviction, can scare away death. The remembrance of

his own successful defence against the danger in the woods becomes the moment in which he is able to re-join the living. In a way, through his laughter Grischa acknowledges in both situations his social belonging, excluding death—which he animalizes as the approaching predator—to this community. Only this time, in the prison, he very consciously employs the tactic of scaring away death. Paradoxically, the laughter that is supposed to bring him back to the living causes suspicion among the guards. They assume that he has lost his mind, which would prevent him from functioning as a predictable member of the group. It shows that laughter, if it is meant to create community, must be shared.

The animalization of death re-appears in the final moments of Grischa's life. Facing the firing squad, he sees the images from his entire life, including the moment when he faced the lynx in the forest:

. . . [U]nd da kriecht das schwarze Tier heran, der Luchs, der . . . ihn niederreißen will und vom Gelächter seines Übermuts . . . kümmerlich flieht. Und wieder lächelt er schwach und verloren über das Tier, jetzt, wo es aus den fünf Höhlen der Gewehrläufe ihn anspringt, gleich landen, ihn gleich hinschlagen wird. (532)

. . . [A]nd there was the black beast creeping towards him, the lynx . . . , longing to leap upon him and tear him down, yet fleeing in terror at his laughter . . . Once more, now weak and forlorn, he smiled at the beast as she leapt upon him from the five muzzles of the rifle-barrels—this time he knew she would tear him down. (431)

Here, Zweig's text offers yet another instance of laughter. The doctor calls Grischa's death and remarks: "Aus. Gut gestorben. Hippokratisches Lächeln" (534) ["Quite dead; perfectly satisfactory. That's what we call the Hippocrates smile" (433)]. The phrase "Hippocrates smile," which describes the result of the spasm of facial muscles in the moment of death, suggests here—when we take into account the previous scenes of deadly danger and laughter—another transition in Grischa's existence. Grischa's smile

becomes his last testimony of his life and humanity: the German original "gut gestorben" evokes quite different associations than "perfectly satisfactory," and could mean "good death" (proper, noble). I see here an additional argument supporting the position of those critics who, like Friedrich Carl Scheibe, claim that *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* is "eine optimistische Tragödie" ["optimistic tragedy"].⁸⁹ Grischa's transition into a different identity in this case is the re-telling of the story of his mistrial by people who witnessed his march to the execution place (435)—not to forget Bertin's testimony of Grischa's case. The story of the Russian soldier, the victim of the legal murder, circulates among people and, in the atmosphere of disappointment with the moral foundations of the state, creates the conditions for civilian disobedience. In this last re-incarnation of Grischa the reader may see the hope for the future, as the last incident of Zweig's novel seems to suggest: two train engineers, against the military regulations, intentionally slow down the train in order to pick up a late passenger. (448-49)

As I attempted to demonstrate, in the novel *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa*, as well as in the short story *Die Quittung* by Arnold Zweig, laughter and humorous situations have ambivalent functions. On the one hand, they support the military hierarchy and the discipline of the troops. The reinforcement of the military hierarchy is visible especially in Zweig's early work, *Die Quittung*, written in the atmosphere of support for German war operations—and without the first-hand knowledge of front-line service. On the other hand, laughter and humour can also, as in other war works by authors such as Erich Maria Remarque or Ernst Jünger, who deal with the

89 See Friedrich Carl Scheibe, "Der Kriegerroman als optimistische Tragödie: Über Arnold Zweig's *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa*." *Arnold Zweig "Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa"*, ed. Rudolf Wolff (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1986) 57-74.

social relationships within the German military in the time of the First World War, have a deeply subversive function that serves to create and maintain the informal hierarchies within the formal chain of command. The ability to laugh and make others laugh can also serve the purpose of gaining and keeping control over the group. The occurrences of laughter in intra-group interactions in *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* seem to confirm the highly ambivalent character of the social phenomenon of laughter.

In Zweig's novel, the basis of the protagonist's strategy, which is that "Lachen verscheucht den Tod" (147)—["scaring away death" (112)] is possible through laughter—advances to one of the main motifs of the work. Laughter marks the transitions between the social identities that Grischa adopts in order to avoid extinction. It indicates the dynamic and self-reflective resistance of humans to life-threatening and impersonal actions that would lead to the destruction of them and their social relations. This function of solitary, non-humoristic laughter, which still has a deep social significance, is a novelty among the German works about the First World War.

CHAPTER 5
***IM WESTEN NICHTS NEUES* [ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT] BY**
ERICH MARIA REMARQUE (1929) AND ITS PARODIC TRANSFORMATIONS

5.1. The publication and the reception of *Im Westen nichts Neues* in the Weimar Republic

Im Westen nichts Neues (translated as *All Quiet on the Western Front* by A. W. Wheen in 1929) is not, as is usually assumed, the first literary work written by Erich Maria Remarque. In fact, Remarque had published short stories and poems as early as 1916.⁹⁰ His two previous attempts at novel writing, *Die Traumbude: Ein Künstlerroman* [*The Dream House*] (1920), printed by a small publishing house in Dresden, and the serialized novel *Station am Horizont* [*Station on the Horizon*] (1927-28), printed in the newspaper *Sport im Bild*, were soon forgotten by most readers. Remarque himself played a crucial role in this: after the huge success of *Im Westen nichts Neues*, and apparently embarrassed by his first major literary effort, the author asked his current publisher, the Ullstein Verlag, to buy up all available copies of *Die Traumbude* from its publisher, Verlag der Schönheit, and destroy them. His earlier controversial name change from the original Erich Paul Remark to Erich Maria Remarque, the name under which *Im Westen nichts Neues* was published, is also interpreted by critics as a bid to separate himself from his previous literary attempts.

Im Westen nichts Neues, written by Remarque in the years 1927-28, and based on notes he had collected and revised since the war, was first printed in the newspaper *Die Vossische Zeitung* from November 10th to December 9th, 1928, for the purposes of

90 In June 1916, Remarque published the article "Aus der Heimat: Von den Freuden und Mühen der Jugendwehr" ["From the Homeland: About the Joys and Troubles of the Youth Service"] in the paper *Heimatfreund* in Osnabrück. The article, describing the pleasures and difficulties of the German Youth Defence Association, became Remarque's actual literary debut.

checking the readers' potential interest in a book edition. The Ullstein Verlag, represented by its head reader Max Krell, decided to give Remarque an opportunity to publish his war novel after the Fischer Verlag, one of the largest publishing houses in Germany, rejected the manuscript, arguing that the readers were no longer interested in stories about the war. The book, with slight text revisions, was eventually printed by Propyläen-Verlag, a part of the Ullstein publishing group, and officially appeared on the market on January 31st, 1929.

Im Westen nichts Neues depicts the disillusionment of Paul Bäumer, a young German soldier who joined the *Kaiserliche Armee* right after the outbreak of the war. Bäumer, who narrates the main part of the story, and his school colleagues, including Kropp, Müller, Kemmerich, and Tjaden, enthusiastically volunteer for service, convinced by their teacher Kantorek. They undergo military training under the sadistic corporal Himmelstoss. At the front in Eastern France, their company suffers heavy losses. Over the course of the war, Bäumer is forced to revise his vision of the enemy, which was shaped by war propaganda. His first eye-to-eye killing experience leaves him feeling guilty. The front episodes, dominated by violence and death, interweave with descriptions of leave periods behind the front line and at home that bring only illusory relaxation from the terror of the front. In the fall of 1918, all of Bäumer's remaining friends are killed, including the older soldier Kaczinsky (nicknamed Kat), who had become his mentor and best friend. Bäumer outlives the original company only temporarily, for he is also killed in the last weeks of the war.

Im Westen nichts Neues was a huge success from the moment of its appearance on the market. The publication of the first version of the novel in *Die Vossische Zeitung* helped to sell the newspaper, which, for the first time, did not record any returns. After

the book edition was released on January 21st, 1929, the first hundred thousand copies were sold by February 23rd, and the half-million mark was reached by May 21st.⁹¹ By the end of 1929, the novel had been translated into 12 languages, each of the foreign editions selling no less than ten thousand copies (with the French, British, and US editions exceeding three-hundred thousand). The overall number of copies sold worldwide was estimated at over 2.5 million in the first eighteen months after the publication. Part of the success of Remarque's work was due to the innovative advertising campaign employed by the Ullstein marketing section, which made the decision to first print the novel in the newspaper in order to test and stimulate the readers' interest, and presented its author as a mysterious first-time writer who was attempting to describe the war from the point of view of a common soldier. Last but not least, sales jumped due to the image of himself that Remarque built through interviews, where he portrayed himself as an inexperienced author who spontaneously wrote down his text in just six weeks of intense and exhausting labour in order to escape the overwhelming attacks of depression caused by his war memories.⁹²

Whatever the influence of Ullstein's advertising machine, the commercial success of *Im Westen nichts Neues* indicated that readers still wanted to engage in the debate about the First World War, ten years after the armistice. Their positive response to

91 According to Bärbel Schrader's reception study of the novel, two-hundred thousand copies were sold by March 9th, 1929, three-hundred thousand by March 28th, and four-hundred thousand by April 21st. See Bärbel Schrader, *Der Fall Remarque: "Im Westen Nichts Neues": Eine Dokumentation* (Leipzig: Reclam-Verlag, 1992) 11.

92 As described in Curt Riess, *Bestseller: Bücher, die Millionen lesen* (Hamburg: C. Wegner, 1960) 60. See also: Thomas Schneider, "Der unbekannte Remarque: Der Erich-Maria-Remarque-Nachlaß in der Fales-Library, New York - Ergebnisse und Aufgabestellungen," *Erich Maria Remarque 1898-1970*, ed. Tilman Westphalen (Bramsche: Rasch Verlag, 1988) 32-34.

Remarque's novel, supported by many enthusiastic literary critics,⁹³ alarmed conservative and right-wing commentators who launched an attack on *Im Westen nichts Neues*, accusing Remarque of perverting the truth about the war and lying about his background and military service. During the heated debate that followed the publication of the novel in the years 1929-30, hundreds of reviews and personal letters were published in newspapers and journals. Within a few weeks, the focus of discussion moved from analyses of the text's literary merits to its real-life aspects and its repercussions in the political, social, and cultural life of the late Weimar Republic. Questions were raised about the ideology that the novel was apparently advocating—that it was about pacifism, the diminishment of soldiers' sacrifices in the First World War, and the subversion of the spirit of the German Army and, consequently, of the German nation. Criticism of the text quickly switched to more personal attacks on Remarque. The editor of the novel is partially to blame for this shift; the marketing decision to spin facts from Remarque's life that could be easily checked and exposed as false (such as the extent of his military service) gave the novel's opponents reason to dismiss the author's overall credibility, and motivated them to search for more biographic obscurities.⁹⁴

The strongest protests against the publication of the novel came from the National Socialists, who considered *Im Westen nichts Neues* to be a part of the international Jewish

93 See the collection of reviews in Bärbel Schrader, *Der Fall Remarque: "Im Westen Nichts Neues": Eine Dokumentation* (Leipzig: Reclam-Verlag, 1992).

94 Because the novel was regarded as aspiring to present the "truth" about the war, the literary vision of the reality of the front in Remarque's book met with serious criticism for its many inconsistencies and concealments. For example, see the protest of Peter Kropp, who had been a patient in the same military hospital as Remarque and was outraged by the false depiction of the patients and nurses in the hospital: Christine R. Barker and R. W. Last, *Erich Maria Remarque* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1979) 37.

and socialist conspiracy to subvert the concept of the hero that emerged from the battles of the First World War—a new type of German soldier cherished by the Nazi ideology as the founding myth of the new Reich. Again, the attacks focused less on aesthetic characteristics of the text than they did on the fact that the publicists and activists associated with the political opposition to the Nazis praised the novel as an anti-war and anti-militarist voice in the debates about the meaning of the lost conflict of 1914-18. The parliamentary elections of September 1930 that brought the National Socialists considerably larger representation in the Reichstag encouraged the propagandists of the party to make a public stand against the apparent anti-German message of the novel, though they did this primarily to solidify the Nazi party's presence in the media. The occasion for the propaganda stunt was the first German screening of the movie adaptation of *Im Westen nichts Neues*, directed by Lewis Milestone and produced by Universal Pictures. The production had premiered in the USA in May 1930 and was scheduled for release in Berlin on December 5th, 1930. The Nazi party *Gauleiter* of the German capital, Joseph Goebbels, organized a riot to prevent the screening and further distribution of the movie in Germany and Austria. The attempt succeeded, and the release of the adaptation was delayed, creating publicity for the Nazi cause.⁹⁵ Remarque's novel was eventually prohibited after the Nazis seized power in January 1933, and condemned during the infamous book-burning ceremony of May 1933.

95 *All Quiet on the Western Front* was banned for obscenity in Germany until the end of 1931 and its public screenings were limited in Austria until the late 1980s.

5.2. Humour and laughter in the novel *Im Westen nichts Neues*

The scholarly reception of Remarque's novel has concentrated mostly on the questions of the pacifist message of the novel, the narrator's perspective, and the connections between the biography of the author and Bäumer's war fate as depicted in the text. The only scholar who has so far dealt with the comic aspects of Remarque's novels, Harley U. Taylor, devotes only a few lines to *Im Westen nichts Neues*. He notes: "For the person who is only casually acquainted with the novels of Erich Maria Remarque or, as is often the case, is familiar only with *Im Westen nichts Neues*, Remarque's work might appear to be an unlikely source of humor" (*Humor* 38). Taylor saw Remarque as an author who was insistently autobiographical in his literary works, and who had first-hand knowledge of the grim events "in the world's most troubled periods." The history of Germany in the twentieth century, including the two wars that became Remarque's literary subject matter, justifies, in Taylor's opinion, the lack of humour in the work. Unfortunately, Taylor does not define his theoretical approach to humour, and offers only a limited interpretation of the natural human predisposition for humour: the nature of humour in Remarque's literary work correlates with "the basic nature of the man himself," who is supposed to be, in Remarque's case, "both idealistic and cynical" (38). The critic stresses the ironic, often sardonic humour, as well as the gallows humour that Remarque used to cope with the disparity between his ideals and reality. Taylor points out that Remarque's humour is the humour of a survivor, a person who uses his wit to deal with the traumatic situation in which he finds himself. In addition, Taylor rightfully observes that Remarque valued comradeship and friendship, and the appearance of humour can be frequently found in the context of a group of comrades or friends within the figure constellation of his novel. According to Taylor, *Im Westen nichts Neues*

includes some "amusing moments" thanks to the "rough humour in the soldiers," but, in general, the novel has "very little humour," and what little there is, is "rather bland" (*Humor* 38-39). The principal source of humour is the figure of Tjaden, whose physicality and verbal conflicts with Corporal Himmelstoss could evoke laughter. Taylor remarks that the coarse humour of Tjaden—emphasized by the comedian "Slim" Summerville in the American movie adaptation—along with some of the language of the novel, resulted in the book being censored in 1929. The critic, however, does not explore the connection between humour, profanity, and censorship.

Although Taylor's attempt to thematize and interpret the "amusing moments" in Remarque's work constitutes an initial and valuable effort at pointing out the appearances of laughter and humour in the novel, the work requires a more systematic approach. Following the theoretical model I outlined in the methodology chapter of this study, I would like to re-examine the appearances and function of humour and laughter that can be observed, on the intratextual level, in Remarque's novel. Further, I would like to investigate how *Im Westen nichts Neues*, commonly interpreted as a non-humorous work, became a target of parody—ambivalent intertextual practices that both ridicule and pay tribute to the immensely popular original text. Taking advantage of modern humour theories, I would like to demonstrate how the humour and laughter in Remarque's narration have been instrumentalized to cover or legitimize different manifestations of individual and structural violence within the homosocial framework of military organization. In addition, I would like to show how the selected parodies of *Im Westen nichts Neues* employ various comic strategies to uncover and verify the validity of the issues that emerge in the original. These parodic forms in different media, living from the

audience's laughter, therefore appear, as Linda Hutcheon remarks in her *Theory of Parody*, in their important role as metatextual, critical works.⁹⁶

In the following section, I would like to present selected scenes from the narration that include humour and/or laughter. I will concentrate on the following four main situations, as they most distinctly demonstrate the functions humour and laughter can play in social encounters: the scene of Kantorek's training on the parade ground, the German soldiers spotting a naked corpse on the battlefield, the reception of the officer Himmelstoss by the troop, and Bäumer's meeting with his family at home.

For Paul Bäumer, the narrator of *Im Westen nichts Neues*, one of the biggest occasions to laugh is his meeting with his old school teacher, Kantorek, who has been drafted, although only long after he had encouraged his young students to join the army. Bäumer, together with Mittelstaedt, who is the troop commander and Kantorek's superior, recognizes his teacher but pretends not to, and smiles at him as if meeting him for the first time: "Ich aber grinste ihm nur harmlos in die Visage, so als ob ich ihn gar nicht weiter kenne" (123) ["But I grin at him innocently, as though I do not recognize him any more" (176)]. Bäumer's misleading smile has an offensive character in this setting; he separates himself from his former teacher without giving the opponent any substantial reason to receive his smiles as hostile. The soldiers observe how the recruit Kantorek exercises on the parade ground:

Da erblicke ich Kantorek und muß das Lachen verbeißen. Er trägt eine Art Schoßrock aus verblichenem Blau. Auf dem Rücken und an den Ärmeln sind große dunkle Flicker eingesetzt. Der Rock muß einem Riesen gehört haben. Um so kürzer ist die abgewetzte schwarze Hose; sie reicht bis zur halben Wade. Dafür sind aber die Schuhe sehr geräumig, eisenharte, uralte Treter, mit hochgebogenen Spitzen, noch an den Seiten zu schnüren. Als

96 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois Press, 2000) 100-01.

Ausgleich ist die Mütze wieder zu klein, ein furchtbar dreckiges, elendes Krätzchen. Der Gesamteindruck ist erbarmungswürdig. (123)

Then I see Kantorek and am scarcely able to stifle my laughter. He is wearing a faded blue tunic. On the back and in the sleeves there are big dark patches. The tunic must have belonged to a giant. The black, worn breeches are just as much too short; they reach barely halfway down his calf. The boots, tough old clod-hoppers, with turned-up toes and laces at the side are much too big for him. But as a compensation the cap is too small, a terribly dirty, mean little pill-box. The whole rig-out is just pitiful. (175)⁹⁷

Bäumer admits, "Ich brülle innerlich vor Vergnügen" (123) ["that makes me bubble with glee" (175)], when Mittelstaedt criticizes Kantorek's looks using the same phrases that he heard as a student: "Landsturmmann Kantorek, ist das Knopfputz? Sie scheinen es nie zu lernen. Ungenügend, Kantorek, ungenügend" (123) ["Territorial Kantorek, do you call those buttons polished? You seem as though you can never learn. Inadequate, Kantorek, quite inadequate" (175)]. The exercise in proper military behaviour has the obvious purpose of taking revenge against the hated teacher who once "[thronte] auf dem Katheder" (123) ["sat up there enthroned at his desk" (175)]. The description of the teacher also illustrates Freud's description of tendentious jokes directed at the patriarchal authority, as explored in *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten* [*The Joke and Its Relation to Unconscious*], but I am not going to further develop the interpretation of the situation according to the psychoanalytical theory of humour. The situation in which Kantorek becomes the subordinate, results from a power struggle that took place a few days before the exercise on the parade ground. Mittelstaedt explains to Bäumer that Kantorek attempted to restore his own dominant position over his student, who is now his

97 All English quotes are from A.W. Wheen's 1929 translation of *Im Westen nichts Neues* unless otherwise indicated. Wheen's translation sometimes deviates in details from the German original, and the text elements that indicate laughter or humorous situation are suppressed or lost in translation.

formal superior. Kantorek made Mittelstaedt an offer—if needed, he would use his influential position at the school board to help his former student, Mittelstaedt, pass the emergency exam, a test that the young soldiers did not have a chance to complete because they volunteered for active duty. Mittelstaedt indicates his anger at Kantorek for attempting to position himself in a prominent place in the hierarchy: "Er wollte mich erinnern, verstehst du. Da packte mich die Wut, und ich erinnerte ihn auch" (122) ["He was trying to remind me of those things, you know. Then I got mad and I reminded him of something instead" (174)]. Bäumer's friend justifies his revenge by using the example of Joseph Behm, who, if not for Kantorek's nationalist rhetoric and his demonstrated enthusiasm for the war that encouraged the students to volunteer, would have been called for military service only three months later and therefore may have lived that much longer. Because Behm's chances of survival, had he been called up a few months later, are impossible to calculate, Mittelstaedt's reaction has less to do with Behm's death on the battlefield and more to do with the desire to channel his personal anger. Mittelstaedt's anger comes from his realization of his vulnerability to the pro-war propaganda that brought him to the front, and the cynical abuse of his naivety by the school functionaries. Behm's fate functions only as an example of what could have happened to any one of the students who were caught in the net of propaganda, and expresses Mittelstaedt's helpless frustration with structures that no one can escape.

In this regard, another important reason for Mittelstaedt's revenge is to symbolically pay back the repressive school system that Kantorek personifies. Laughing at the school oppressor is a rebellion against the old order in which the students felt caught up two years ago. Yet that is only a palace revolution: the scene shows that the young soldiers are not able to question the structures that made them students and

subsequently, the Kaiser's soldiers. It is worth observing that their laughter at Kantorek is not a liberation from, but a confirmation of the power structures within both the military organization and civilian society. Mittelstaedt uses his newly-acquired rank to mock the teacher; the mockery, however, is only possible in a situation in which both of them, the joker and the butt of the joke, are in agreement about the value system in which they believe. Kantorek would not expose himself to the humiliation if he did not acknowledge Mittelstaedt's and Bäumer's higher positions in the social structure. In a society as disciplined as the German Wilhelminian society, the military hierarchy was seen as unquestionably overriding the civilian—regardless of the age, education, and experience of its members—for the duration of the war. Kantorek, on changing his status from respected teacher to private, subordinates himself to the military chain of command and tolerates the jokes without protest as a natural part of being at the bottom of the pyramid. His unconditional submission can be also associated with his previous attempt to violate the prevailing order: his remarks about Mittelstaedt's emergency exam can be interpreted as an effort at corruption that, for the sake of preserving the order, cannot go unpunished. Kantorek is aware of his violation and, by fulfilling the wishes of his superior, redeems his crime. The former students take advantage of this situation and, as their former teacher's superiors, feel in a position of power from which they can pay him back. It is significant in this context that Mittelstaedt exactly repeats the reprimands to which he was subjected during his school time. What he has in mind is a parody of grading practices; Bäumer understands it and enjoys it. It causes the laughter of the observer (Bäumer) but it can also be interpreted as a simple transposition of the evaluation system into another area. The new structure is not less threatening, but its oppressive character

becomes transparent to the people who have gained their new dominant position as the result of a simple role switch.

The attitude of all of the figures towards the uniform is also of significance. It is not coincidental that Kantorek is being laughed at because his appearance places him somewhere between the civilian and military worlds. The soldier's laughter fulfils a corrective function: pointing out the badly fitting uniform is a reminder of how the ideal uniform—and through it also the exemplary soldier—ought to look. The moment of laughter is therefore not a moment of eclipse and relaxation from the military drill, but rather a social disciplinary action in Henri Bergson's sense, and it expresses the deep involvement of the figures in the structures that put male bodies in uniforms. Similarly, a "funny" moment happens when the troop encounters dead soldiers hanging in the branches:

In den Ästen hängen Tote. Ein nackter Soldat hockt in einer Stammgabelung, er hat seinen Helm noch auf dem Kopf, sonst ist er unbekleidet. Nur eine Hälfte sitzt von ihm dort oben, ein Oberkörper, dem die Beine fehlen.

"Was ist da los gewesen?" frage ich.

"Den haben sie aus dem Anzug gestoßen," knurrt Tjaden.

Kat sagt: "Es ist komisch, wir haben das nun schon ein paarmal gesehen. Wenn so eine Mine einwächst, wird man tatsächlich richtig aus dem Anzug gestoßen. Das macht der Luftdruck." (142)

In the branches dead men are hanging. A naked soldier is squatting in the fork of a tree, he still has his helmet on, otherwise he is entirely unclad. There is only half of him sitting up there, the top half, the legs are missing. "What can that mean?" I ask. "He's been blown out of his clothes," mutters Tjaden. "It's funny," says Kat, "we have seen that several times now. If a mortar gets you it blows you clean out of your clothes. It's the concussion that does it." (208)

The soldier's naked body makes an uncanny impression, and an old soldier interprets it as ridiculous in order to reduce its depressing effect. The explanation provided by Kat also points out the growing number of soldiers killed that way; the high frequency of the sight

increases the incongruity between the number of soldiers who died in uniforms and the soldiers unclothed in the moment of death. It can be assumed that Kat sees the "funny" of the event in the reversal of the "usual" way of killing in battle. Another source of incongruity is the nakedness of the body counterpointed by the helmet. The main function of the helmet—the protection of the head—is emphasized and ridiculed not through its failure but through its uselessness against artillery attack. The body reminds the living soldiers of the deadly effects of heavy ammunition, and contributes to the atmosphere of ever-present danger. At the same time, as a reminder of human mortality, the cadaver has to be joked about in order to separate two spheres: the civilian one, marked by nakedness, where violent death should not have any domain, and the military one, designated by uniforms, where death in violent struggle becomes a norm. The naked body disturbs the onlookers because of its innocence and its missing assignment in the order of war; in other words, for the lack of any marks that would associate the man with his profession (the presence of a uniform) and nationality (the cut of the uniform). The observation that the corpses, among them the naked one, are hanging in the trees, deprives the living of the feeling of security that is prescribed to the ground. The bomb craters mean protection from enemy fire, the elevation above the ground equals danger. In the narration, a number of scenes point out the protective function of trenches, bomb sites, tunnels and dugouts; Bäumer dedicates a whole passage to the earth that provides shelter and becomes "sein einziger Freund, sein Bruder, seine Mutter" (45) ["his only friend, his brother, his mother" (55)] during the battle. "Für niemand ist die Erde so viel wie für den Soldaten" (45) ["To no man does the earth mean so much as to the soldier" (55)], says the narrator, of the role the earth plays in the front-line soldier's life.

The disturbing character of the scene causes the social group to accept it as funny, which also means that the group marks it as odd and unusual but not threatening. The group follows here the lead interpretation of the group authority, the most experienced and oldest soldier, Kat. This strategy has to be employed to avoid questioning the rules that maintain the group as a killing squadron.

In Remarque's novel, making jokes serves the purpose of re-establishing and strengthening oppressive structures, but the structures, although they correspond in many cases with the order of ranks and the power associated with them, are not necessarily identical with the military chain of command. What counts for the characters is field experience, through which a parallel hierarchy is constituted: the nineteen-year-old soldiers, who consider themselves "alte Leute" (22) ["old folks" (18)] compared to their life before the war, use jokes to express their superiority over newcomers or soldiers serving behind the lines. In a scene that best demonstrates the clash of the two hierarchies, officer Himmelstoss arrives for the first time at the front and faces his former recruits. Below, I include the quote in its entirety because it depicts the various stages of the communication between the soldiers, from Himmelstoss's attempt to restore the old relationship to his negotiation of a new position in the group:

Ein paar Sekunden verstreichen; Himmelstoß weiß sichtlich nicht, wie er sich benehmen soll. Am liebsten möchte er uns jetzt im Galopp schleifen. Immerhin scheint er schon gelernt zu haben, daß die Front kein Kasernenhof ist. Er versucht es abermals und wendet sich nicht mehr an alle, sondern an einen, er hofft, so leichter Antwort zu erhalten. Kropp ist ihm am nächsten. Ihn beehrt er deshalb. "Na, auch hier?"
 Aber Albert ist sein Freund nicht. Er antwortet knapp: "Bißchen länger als Sie, denke ich."
 Der rötliche Schnurrbart zittert. "Ihr kennt mich wohl nicht mehr, was?"
 Tjaden schlägt jetzt die Augen auf. "Doch."
 Himmelstoß wendet sich ihm zu: "Das ist doch Tjaden, nicht?"
 Tjaden hebt den Kopf.
 "Und weißt du, was du bist?"

Himmelstoß ist verblüfft. "Seit wann duzen wir uns denn? Wir haben doch nicht zusammen im Chaussee Graben gelegen."

Er weiß absolut nichts aus der Situation zu machen. Diese offene Feindseligkeit hat er nicht erwartet. Aber er hütet sich vorläufig; sicher hat ihm jemand den Unsinn von Schüssen in den Rücken vorgeschwätzt. Tjaden wird auf die Frage nach dem Chaussee Graben vor Wut sogar witzig.

"Nee, das warst du alleine."

Jetzt kocht Himmelstoß auch. Tjaden kommt ihm jedoch eilig zuvor. Er muß seinen Spruch loswerden. "Was du bist, willst du wissen? Du bist ein Sauhund, das bist du! Das wollt' ich dir schon lange mal sagen." Die Genugtuung vieler Monate leuchtet ihm aus den blanken Schweinsaugen, als er den Sauhund hinausschmettert.

Auch Himmelstoß ist nun entfesselt: "Was willst du Mistkötter, du dreckiger Torfdeubel? Stehen Sie auf, Knochen zusammen, wenn ein Vorgesetzter mit Ihnen spricht!"

Tjaden winkt großartig. "Sie können rühren, Himmelstoß. Wegtreten." Himmelstoß ist ein tobendes Exerzierreglement. Der Kaiser könnte nicht beleidigter sein. Er heult: "Tjaden, ich befehle Ihnen dienstlich: Stehen Sie auf!"

"Sonst noch was?" fragt Tjaden.

"Wollen Sie meinem Befehl Folge leisten oder nicht?"

Tjaden erwidert gelassen und abschließend, ohne es zu wissen, mit dem bekanntesten Klassikerzitat. Gleichzeitig lüftet er seine Kehrseite.

Himmelstoß stürmt davon: "Sie kommen vors Kriegsgericht!"

Wir sehen ihn in der Richtung zur Schreibstube verschwinden.

Haie und Tjaden sind ein gewaltiges Torfstechergebrüll. Haie lacht so, daß er sich die Kinnlade ausrenkt und mit offenem Maul plötzlich hilflos dasteht. Albert muß sie ihm mit einem Faustschlag erst wieder einsetzen.

(63-64)

A couple of seconds go by. Apparently Himmelstoss doesn't quite know what to do. He would like most to set us all on the run again. But he seems to have learned already that the front-line isn't a parade ground. He tries it on though, and by addressing himself to one instead of to all of us hopes to get some response. Kropp is nearest, so he favours him.

"Well, you here too?"

But Albert's no friend of his. "A bit longer than you, I fancy," he retorts.

The red moustache twitches: "You don't recognize me any more, what?"

Tjaden now opens his eyes. "I do though."

Himmelstoss turns to him: "Tjaden, isn't it?"

Tjaden lifts his head. "And do you know what you are?"

Himmelstoss is disconcerted. "Since when have we become so familiar? I don't remember that we ever slept in the gutter together?"

He has no idea what to make of the situation. He didn't expect this open hostility. But he is on his guard: he has already had some rot dinned into him about getting a shot in the back.

The question about the gutter makes Tjaden so mad that he becomes almost witty: "No you slept there by yourself."

Himmelstoss begins to boil. But Tjaden gets in ahead of him. He must bring off his insult: "Wouldn't you like to know what you are? A dirty hound, that's what you are. I've been wanting to tell you that for a long time."

The satisfaction of months shines in his dull pig's eyes as he spits out: "Dirty hound!"

Himmelstoss lets fly too, now. "What's that, you muck-rake, you dirty peat-stealer? Stand up there, bring your heels together when your superior officer speaks to you."

Tjaden waves him off. "You take a run and jump at yourself, Himmelstoss."

Himmelstoss is a raging book of army regulations. The Kaiser couldn't be more insulted. "Tjaden, I command you, as your superior officer: Stand up!"

"Anything else you would like?" asks Tjaden.

"Will you obey my order or not?"

Tjaden replies, without knowing it, in the well-known classical phrase. At the same time he ventilates his backside.

"I'll have you court-martialled," storms Himmelstoss.

We watch him disappear in the direction of the Orderly Room. Haie and Tjaden burst into a regular peat-digger's bellow. Haie laughs so much that he dislocates his jaw, and suddenly stands there helpless with his mouth wide open. Albert has to put it back again by giving it a blow with his fist. (81-83)

The soldiers in the scene laugh at the humiliation of the officer, establishing a group hierarchy that is, in their opinion, superior to the ranks. The condition for the humorous situation is the incongruity between the two hierarchies. The transition of the soldiers' attitude towards Himmelstoss is also interesting, signalled both in verbal and non-verbal messages: from simulated indifference, through refusal to acknowledge the superiority of the officer, to open hostility, swearwords, and laughter. However, though Himmelstoss's dominant position is symbolically violated, the officer has not been beaten, unlike in another "revenge" scene, involving the same people, that took place on the last day of military training. In the other scene, the recruits attack a drunken Himmelstoss on his way home, and give him a brutal spanking. The revenge temporarily

satisfies the aggressors: "Es war ein wunderbares Bild" (41) ["It was a wonderful picture" (49)], the narrator remarks with satisfaction, but the direct violence is not sufficient to pay back their former oppressor, and the full revenge can be achieved only through group laughter. The narrator admits that the revenge in the form of a beating is a risk that the superiors are going to take, and he interprets it as a signal of successful military training: "Eigentlich konnte Himmelstoß froh sein; denn sein Wort, daß immer einer den anderen erziehen müsse, hatte an ihm selbst Früchte getragen. Wir waren gelehrige Schüler seiner Methoden geworden" (42) ["Himmelstoss ought to have been pleased; his saying that we should each educate one another had borne fruit for himself. We had become successful students of his method" (49)]. In the army, where physical violence is the norm and a tool used to educate killers, derisive laughter is revealed as a more effective and satisfying form of violence—a weapon more powerful than assaults.

Throughout the narration, whenever Himmelstoss is mentioned by other soldiers, the training officer is a handy object of derision. The moments of joking that are interpreted by Remarque scholars as exemplifications of the "peaceful times" and "breaks" between the front events (see Murdoch 14-25; Barker 32-68) are not stripped of their hostile character, however:

"Ich habe das Gefühl, daß mir beim nächsten Schanzen eine Drahtrolle auf die Beine von Himmelstoß fallen wird," vermutet Kropp. "Wir werden an ihm noch viel Spaß haben," lacht Müller. (68)

"I have a feeling that next time we go up wiring I'll be letting a bundle of wire fall on Himmelstoss's leg," hints Kropp. "We'll have quite a lot of jokes with him," laughs Müller. (88)

The jokes at the expense of other soldiers, who are usually placed higher in the formal military hierarchy but inferior in the informal hierarchy of "old hands," help to mask the danger present in the narration, to diffuse and disarm it through humour. If the

figures affected by the violent event laugh or respond to the violence with humour, the reader may not acknowledge the serious implications of the violent event.

The narrator in *Im Westen nichts Neues* also points out another function of humour and laughter. When Paul Bäumer is entitled to spend a few days at home on a short vacation, he visits his sick mother and his father with whom, as he admits, he no longer has much contact. He hesitates to tell his father about the front:

Er möchte, daß ich etwas erzähle von draußen, er hat Wünsche, die ich rührend und dumm finde, zu ihm schon habe ich kein richtiges 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 bleiben wir, wenn uns alles ganz klar würde, was da draußen vorgeht. So beschränkte ich mich darauf, ihm einige lustige Sachen zu erzählen. (117)

He wants me to tell him about the front; he is curious in a way that I find stupid and distressing; I no longer have any real contact with him. There is nothing he likes more than just hearing about it. I realize he does not know that a man cannot talk of such things; I would do it willingly, but it is too dangerous for me to put these things into words. I am afraid they might then become gigantic and I be no longer able to master them. What would become of us if everything that happens out there were quite clear to us? So I confine myself to telling him a few amusing things. (165)

At the end of his stay, Paul says goodbye to his father, and wants to make the moment of farewell more bearable:

Um ihn etwas aufzuheitern, erzähle ich ihm einige Geschichten, die mir gerade einfallen, Soldatenwitze und so etwas, von Generalen und Feldwebeln, die irgendwann mal 'reingelegt wurden. (136)

In order to cheer him up a bit I tell him a few stories, soldiers' jokes and the like, about generals and sergeant-majors. (198)

In the first scene, Bäumer realizes that he is not able to express in words his experiences from the front. The impossibility of verbalizing his feelings about the war forces him to resort to a discursive practice with which both conversational partners are

familiar. A joke, in which the objects of ridicule are well known to Bäumer's father, provides the soldier with the opportunity to engage his father in a talk about the war—without really talking about it. At the same time, Bäumer does not feel the pressure to find a more suitable form of expression that would necessarily alienate him from his family. The decision to joke about the war is an effect of a calculation between individual and social benefits and losses. The jokes provide the soldier with the social support he needs during his stay at home (by creating a laughter community) when his comrades are not present.

In Bäumer's jokes from the second scene, the characters in the joke (generals, officers) lose their individual character and the context of specific times and places. They become stereotypes, authoritative figures of the German army with whom everyone is familiar yet no one really knows. In the act of telling jokes, Bäumer betrays the truthfulness of his account, but his jokes are a necessary compromise; they allow him to introduce his front-line experiences into the war discourse without expending the energy needed to verbalize his feelings. Telling a joke becomes a method of dealing with the experience of war that is, in the joker's opinion, impossible to fully share with the unaware civilians. The situation exemplifies both Freud's view of the function of the joke, and the assumptions of contemporary theoreticians who investigate humour and laughter as relief (I outlined the theoretical basis of relief theories in the chapter about Jünger's early war works). The joke reduces the tension, and makes the main tasks of the soldier easier to fulfill. The desire to precisely describe the experience would cause the arousal that prevents the soldiers from despairing; in Freud's terminology, the popular strategies of "Verschiebung" ["displacement"] and "Verdichtung" ["condensation"] of the

content help them to overcome the stress. Bäumer points out these particular functions of telling jokes when talking about the humour of the troops that are sent on vacation:

Das Grauen der Front versinkt, wenn wir ihm den Rücken kehren, wir gehen ihm mit gemeinen und grimmigen Witzen zuleibe; wenn jemand stirbt, dann heißt es, daß er den Arsch zugekniffen hat, und so reden wir über alles, das rettet uns vor dem Verrücktwerden, solange wir es so nehmen, leisten wir Widerstand. . . . Wir tun das nicht, weil wir Humor haben, sondern wir haben Humor, weil wir sonst kaputt gehen. (100)

The terror of the front sinks deep down when we turn our back upon it; we make grim, coarse jests about it, when a man dies, then we say he has nipped off his turd, and so we speak of everything; that keeps us from going mad; as long as we take it that way we maintain our own resistance. . . . We don't act like that because we are in good humour: we are in good humour because otherwise we should go to pieces. (140)⁹⁸

I would like to reiterate that humour and laughter in the novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* are employed in most cases to define the relationships between the soldiers of the "lost generation," who are connected by their comradeship on the front, and their commanding officers and other professional military personnel, as well as their teachers, parents, foreigners, and other people who belong to the civilian world. The humour and laughter of the comrades reveals the limits of their tolerance towards others and demonstrates their hostility towards individuals who, in their opinion, made them the victims of politics and pro-war propaganda. In addition, humour and laughter disguise violence as an appropriate means of restoring order in the group and point out specific models of soldier behaviour and appearance that readers would rather expect from First World War narrations which are perceived as glorifying the conflict. Yet *Im Westen nichts Neues*, too, despite its being regarded as a pacifist novel, stresses the validity of the soldiers' models that emerge from the strictly defined hierarchical and homosocial

98 I suggest the alternative version of the last sentence: "We don't act like that because we have sense of humour: we have sense of humour because otherwise we should go to pieces." (my transl.)

order of the military, portrays unconditional discipline, depicts aggression against outsiders, and promotes specifically delimited physical fitness through the selection of objects of ridicule in its humorous situations. Such models are typical for First World War works by authors usually found at the other pole of scholarly reception, such as Walter Flex, Walter Bloem, or Ernst Jünger.

In the following section, I would like to present some examples from the reception of *Im Westen nichts Neues* in the early 1930s that make use of various comic strategies to undermine, correct, or expand elements of the original that were regarded as controversial.

5.3. Parodic forms targeting *Im Westen nichts Neues*: A case study

In 1936, the National Socialist newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* published a fragment from a prose text with the following introductory words: "After all the lies told by people like Remarque, we now bring to you the experience of a soldier who took part in the war, of which you will say at once: that is what it was really like" (Kerker). The published text turned out to be part of Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues*. The fragment was presumably sent anonymously to the newspaper editor as an original work written by a former front-line soldier. Similarly, excerpts from Remarque's work had been published earlier in *Der Angriff*, the newspaper controlled by Joseph Goebbels, and unwittingly described by the ultra-conservative reviewers as a "genuine tale from the front line," although the same critics had denied the novel by Remarque any credibility and despised the author who, in their opinion, falsified "the real image" of the First World War, because he was not an experienced and aggressive front-line soldier (Barker and Last 32).

In order to understand the impulse to send the text (twice!) to a radical right-wing publisher, we have to keep in mind the readers' response to Remarque's novel. As described before, *Im Westen nichts Neues*, from the very moment of its publication in book form in 1929, provoked both readers and critics to passionate and often contradictory reactions. The book appeared on the German market in a climate of rapid political polarization—how to evaluate the past and establish a generally acceptable memory and interpretation of the First World War were hotly debated topics in the late Weimar Republic, dividing the disputants into "pro-war" (militarist) and "anti-war" (pacifist) camps. Popular soldier's diaries and autobiographical war novels played an especially important role in these debates, serving as documents of "authenticity of experience"—supposedly reliable sources of information about the war for those who had been spared the experience of trench warfare. Remarque's novel, advertised by the publisher as the authentic "confessions of a front soldier"⁹⁹—a successful market strategy that also led readers' expectations in a very specific direction—was almost instantly used to support the position of ardent war opponents. The novel fit well into the black-and-white setting of the discussions about the lost war, and eventually the nuances and ambiguity of the plot, the unreliability of the young narrator, and other narrative devices that might have been noticed without such a pre-conditioned reception, were lost from sight as the debates heated up.¹⁰⁰

99 The first publisher of the novel, *Die Vossische Zeitung*, calls it "Bekenntnisse eines Frontsoldaten" ["confessions of a front soldier"], and points out that the story is authentic, according to the supposed testimonies of "real experts," experienced front soldiers. See "Im Westen nichts Neues: Remarques Buch erscheint," *Vossische Zeitung* 31 Jan 1929, sec. Das Unterhaltungsblatt.

100 For examples of the extreme critical response to the novel see Bärbel Schrader, ed., *Der Fall Remarque: Im Westen nichts Neues, Eine Dokumentation* (Leipzig: Reclam-Verlag, 1992).

We can assume that the two submissions of Remarque's text to right-wing editors were meant as a practical joke. There is no evidence that would tell us otherwise: there was no previously unpublished author looking for fame even at the cost of easy-to-prove plagiarism, and the submissions were anonymous. The fact that the recipients of the forged manuscript were in both cases editors of right-wing periodicals can be also interpreted as an attempt to ridicule their superficial knowledge of the literary works that they had so passionately attacked a few years earlier.¹⁰¹ The choice of target for the joke was hardly a coincidence: it was Dr. Goebbels, who, in May of 1933, initiated the public burning of Erich Maria Remarque's works, an act he said was directed "against literary betrayal of the soldiers of the First World War [and] for the education of the people in the spirit of truthfulness."¹⁰² The publication of Remarque's work in Goebbels's newspapers subverted the latter's self-proclaimed role as the only adjudicator of authenticity.

The joke at the expense of the Nazi propaganda organ would not be noticed and be not possible at all (if we understand the act of making jokes as a social action that requires a joking subject, an object of the joke, and the gaze of an understanding audience) if the excerpt had not made it into the newspaper, a public medium read by many. Moreover, it would not be as funny if the same text had not appeared again in very similar circumstances, for repetition is one of the conditions for a humorous situation to take place. One slip in the editing job is just a mistake that could happen to anyone and might therefore be tolerated; the same mistake made twice is ridiculous, and the editor responsible for such an unfortunate accident becomes a laughing stock. The laughter of

101 See Erich Limpach, "Neudeutsche Kriegsliteratur," *Völkischer Beobachter* 16 Feb 1929, sec. Reichsausgabe, Beilage: Der Deutsche Frontsoldat; and Joseph Goebbels, "In die Knie gezwungen," *Der Angriff* 12 Dec 1930.

102 James MacPherson Ritchie, *German Literature under National Socialism* (London: Croom Helm, 1983) 68-69.

the audience/readership functions here as a social corrective, analyzed for the first time by Henri Bergson in his essay *Le Rire* [*Laughter*]. It is as if the anonymous sender(s) of Remarque's text were trying to say, "be careful what you're doing, do not mechanically approve all submissions you receive, specify your critical position, and revise the reasons why you reject an author's text."

And here again emerges the question of the conditions and mechanisms of literary criticism and reception that in some cases disregard the text's internal features, and base interpretations too heavily on external factors. Although speculation about this question is not the main goal of this chapter, the story of the two submissions clearly demonstrates that the same text, stripped of the author's name and title that would pre-condition its reception, can be interpreted very differently in various ideological, political, and cultural settings. Attempts to re-publish Remarque's text in those different contexts can therefore be seen as a consciously employed comic strategy intended to ridicule those critics and readers who constructed, based heavily on extra-textual influences, a specific model of soldier behaviour and granted it the sole right to draw the "true" image of the war.

Two issues arising at this point need further discussion. First, taking Remarque's text and its parodic uses as examples, what are the characteristics of the comic strategies that made the laughter possible? And second, how do we know that the comic strategies target specific models of soldier behaviour (in addition to the literary ignorance, the self-proclaimed role as truth oracle, and the lack of professionalism of the right-wing editors)? Further, does the use of these comic strategies reject or affirm the characteristics of these models? Answering these questions is the goal of the following discussion.

Let us first concentrate on the question of the comic strategy. As mentioned earlier, the comic effect that results from the described situation has its source not only in

repetition, in the multiple appearances of the same text at different times and in different contexts, but also in the incongruity between the context of the original and the context of the copies, thus exposing the re-published text as incomplete and imperfect. Among other conscious ways in which texts are alluded to or cited in other texts (and for which the term "intertextuality" has been coined), imitative repetition is one of the forms that expresses our evaluative attitude to the text, or, what is more important here, to the set of circumstances in which the text occurs. Simon Dentith, in his attempt to create a larger framework for the major (and often conflicting) theories of parody proposed by Gérard Genette, Margaret A. Rose, Robert Phiddian, and Linda Hutcheon, notes that the evaluative attitude is typical of a whole range of interrelated and criss-crossing parodic cultural forms that, in addition to imitation, include pastiche, mock-heroism, burlesque, travesty, spoof, and—last but not least—parody itself. Dentith tries to escape the systemic limitations of the previously proposed theories of parody by suggesting that all "polemical allusive imitation[s] of a preceding text" can be called parodic practices—a definition that will definitely be useful in this short outline of works intertextually related to *Im Westen nichts Neues*. According to Dentith, one has to differentiate between two kinds of parodic text practices: "general" and "specific" parody, that reflect, accordingly, humoristic evaluations of genre and judgments about individual, specific texts belonging to a given genre (Dentith 1-9). Another division suggested by Dentith, which allows for some clarification of the tangled definitions, functions, and uses of parodic forms, results from the selection of the target for parodic attack. Parodic forms do not have to make fun only of the specific precursor text(s) or genres, but can also use the authority of precursor texts (originals, or "hypotexts" in Genette's terminology) to mockingly attack the elements of extra-textual reality.

The authority of the hypotext can be measured both by the high number of copies printed and the vivid critical reception,¹⁰³ together with other cultural and political activities that lead to the canonization of the text, but also—and this is a crucial indicator for our reflections about parodic forms—by the frequency and range of allusions to the text over time. The number of intertextual practices that take the novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* as the original text is very high. Even for someone who is not familiar with the details of Remarque's war narration, the phrase used as the title for the novel denotes, in short, the hypocrisy of the decision makers, or the pointlessness and the hopeless stagnation of a given situation, depending on the discursive context in which the phrase appears. The spectrum of uses in various media ranges from the title of an Elton John song from 1982 (*All Quiet on the Western Front*), to the title of an article on wildfires in California from 2004 in the newspaper *USA Today* ("Wildfires: All Quiet on the Western Front"), to the title of a weblog entry by Kai Kretschmann, who complains about the lack of new features in the upcoming version of Microsoft's Internet Explorer browser ("Im Westen nichts Neues"). And these are only few examples of the possible uses of the phrase. The title of Remarque's famous work, which is set here as a point of intertextual departure, is itself meant as a parodic attack on the official language of the German Supreme Command of the Army and its propaganda. The narrator of the last part of the novel claims that the phrase "Im Westen nichts Neues" often appeared in official news from the front line, such as on the relatively quiet day in October 1918 when the main narrator, Paul Bäumer, is killed. In fact, the phrase was not all that popular during the

103 *Im Westen nichts Neues* was one of the most popular books in Germany until the Second World War. It is still sold as "the greatest war novel of all times." See Donald Ray Richards, *The German Bestseller in the 20th Century: A Complete Bibliography and Analysis, 1915-1940* (Berne: Herbert Lang and Co. Ltd., 1968) 55.

First World War, as the novel and some critics suggest. As for the English version of the title, Brian Murdoch points out that A. W. Wheen's translation of the original German title, smoothly incorporated into the English vocabulary of collective war memory, has much more resemblance to the Civil War Song *All Quiet Along the Potomac* than to the First World War military dispatches (Murdoch 49). We can also notice here that the authority of Remarque's text re-designed the context of the phrase. The military dispatches containing the phrase "Im Westen nichts Neues" were in fact quite rare, but, through the reception of the novel, the phrase has been *post factum* promoted to an icon of the official lingo. Remarque's simple poetic application of the phrase increased the incongruity between the de-humanized language of the state institutions and the human tragedy of common soldiers, creating discrepancy and space for the parodist, and possibly a comic effect. However, as Margaret A. Rose notes, the reader has to be able to recognize both codes—the code of the parodied text and the code of the parodying text—in order to recognize the incongruity between the codes, and identify the latter as a parodic practice. Thus, the title phrase must have strong semantic and/or formal resemblance to the institutional language, both in German and in English, in order to be interpreted as a satirical poke at the language of war propaganda.

Its title aside, *Im Westen nichts Neues* can be read as a polemic against the images of war and the attitudes towards the war propagated by the Wilhelminian institutions and their apologists in the time of the Weimar Republic. In the chain of intertextual influences, however, Remarque's war narration was also often parodied in both literature and film. What Dentith wrote about the specific and general parody can be observed in the case of *Im Westen nichts Neues*: the number of parodies of the work reflects its popularity in the 1930s, as well as the popularity of war narrations in general. Although

Harold Bloom, like many other critics, refused to acknowledge the novel's artistic value—he called it "a period piece and a historical document" and allowed its popularity to be "an index to popularity, and to nothing more" (1-2)—the wide recognition of the novel, deserved or not, is an important starting point for parody. The massive popularity of *Im Westen nichts Neues* undoubtedly multiplied the frequency of its parodic quotation.

The parodic imitations of *Im Westen nichts Neues* include, among many others, the literary description of an ancient Greek war campaign, *Vor Troja nichts Neues* [*All Quiet on the Trojan Front*] by Emil Marius Reuquark (1930), the Eastern variation of Paul Bäumer's story, *Im Osten nichts Neues* [*All Quiet on the Eastern Front*] by Carl August Gottlob Otto (1929), the alternative, positive view of events, *Contra Remarque: Im Westen wohl was Neues* [*Contra Remarque: Not Quite Quiet on the Western Front*] by Arthur Klietmann (1931), the musical *Not So Quiet on the Western Front* by Monty Banks (1930), and the dog comedy *So Quiet on the Canine Front* by Zion Myers and Jules White (1931). Already the titles of the works, representing both narrative and performative genres, demonstrate that they relate directly to Remarque's novel, but their polemical ambition goes beyond the use of the catchy phrase to pre-condition the reception of the text, as in the newspaper article, weblog entry, and song lyrics mentioned earlier. For the purposes of this chapter section, let us concentrate on only two works—the first and the last—in order to answer the questions about the application of comic strategies and the elements that provoke polemic humoristic responses, with a concentration on the model of soldier behaviour suggested by war narrations including Remarque's novel.

Vor Troja nichts Neues was published by the Brunnen-Verlag in Berlin in 1930. Its author reinforced the mocking effect of the title by choosing the pseudonym Emil

Marius Requark,¹⁰⁴ an obvious allusion to Remarque, playing not only on the similarity of the author's initials but also on the contemporary disputes over whether the young writer Erich Paul Remark changed his name to the French-spelled Remarque with the intention of proudly exposing his foreign—and possibly noble—ancestry, hiding his Jewish ethnic background, and revealing the Catholic roots (demonstrated in the middle name Maria), or whether he made the change simply to separate himself from his earlier, unsuccessful literary attempts. Given this context, the mocking wordplay—the German word "Quark" means cottage cheese, but also refers to an uninteresting subject, or simply nonsense—does not surprise. In addition, some external features of Ullstein's market hit were imitated in the Brunnen-Verlag parody, such as the design of the dust jacket and the endorsement on the title page. The first edition of Remarque's work bore Walter von Molo's commendation, "Remarques Buch ist das Denkmal unseres unbekanntes Soldaten. Von allen Toten geschrieben" ["Remarque's book is a memorial to our unknown soldier. Written by all the dead"], while the motto of the parody twists Walter von Molo's words by remarking, "Requarks Buch ist das Denkmal des seit dreitausend Jahren unbekanntes Soldaten. Von einem Lebendigen geschrieben" ["Requark's book is a memorial to a soldier, who has remained unknown for 3,000 years. Written by one of the living"]. It is difficult to say if the mimicry actually helped the parody to its financial success, although a considerable 30,000 copies were sold. This possibility notwithstanding, there is an interesting contrast between Molo's metaphorical style and the down-to-earth statement

104 It is presumed that the parody has been written by Max Joseph Wolff, literary historian and author of works on Shakespeare and Moliere. See C. R. Owen, *Erich Maria Remarque: A Critical Bio-bibliography* (Amsterdamer Publikationen zur Sprache und Literatur 55. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1984).

of the parodic motto ("written by one of the living"). The incongruity between the two mottoes carries considerable comic potential.

Literary critics specializing in Remarque's reception do know Requark's (Wolff's) parody. In his article about *Vor Troja nichts Neues*, Brian Murdoch gives an extensive analysis of elements targeted by the parody. He observes that *Vor Troja nichts Neues* is a multi-layered work that humorously attacks Remarque's novel and its author as well as Homer's literary achievements:

Vor Troja nichts Neues is able as a parody of *Im Westen nichts Neues* to raise questions about that novel. Wolff's book, though, also uses the externals and the context of Remarque's work to provide a basis for a reversal of the heroic ideals in Homer. Anachronism is a useful comic device and the receptive overlap for the reader of a structure belonging to a novel about the Western Front and the characters and places of Homeric Greece and Troy makes for a double comedy. . . (*Trojan Front* 53)

The double parody in *Vor Troja nichts Neues* allows us to classify it, in Dentith's terms, both as a general parody of the classic epic poem and its protagonists, and as a specific parody of Remarque's text. In addition, it attacks the narrative solutions of *Im Westen nichts Neues*, and, maybe even more forcefully, the literary images of the First World War in general and the cultural and political situation of the Weimar Republic in the late 1920s. It is worth noting that in order to read the text as a "double comedy," as postulated by Murdoch, the reader requires knowledge of both texts' codes, Homer's and Remarque's, but *Vor Troja nichts Neues* is able to sustain its parodic potential even if the reader is not familiar with one layer of the hypotexts referenced by the parody. Thus, the comic effect of the hypertext depends upon the ever-changing dynamics of different incongruities that the reader is able to perceive and solve in a playful way. Murdoch, keeping in mind the reception of the texts over time, acknowledges the slowly fading knowledge of the details of Homer's texts (such as the names of some characters and their

actions), but admits that "the work is genuinely funny" (53). The assumption here is that the double nature of Requark's parody is the source of its comic effect, unlike other "barely readable" parodies (50)—Rüter calls them "Gegenschriften" or "opposing works"—that exclusively target the stylistic manner of *Im Westen nichts Neues* and the biographic obscurities of its author—an example of such a text being *Hat Erich Maria Remarque wirklich gelebt? [Did Erich Maria Remarque Really Live?]*, written by Salomo Friedlaender (Mynona) in 1929.¹⁰⁵

Although Murdoch does not focus on the mechanisms that create the conditions for parodic effect, he accounts for a large number of parodied elements. He first identifies, as one of the main targets of the parody, the commercial exploitation of Remarque's book that was seemingly intended by its author and publisher (Ullstein) from the early stages of the creation process. Second under parodic attack is the attitude of Remarque's narrator, who demonstrates naivety, generalized pacifism, and a pessimism that passes into frequent moments of despair. Third, the parody aims at the heroic idealism of the classical age that cannot survive in a time of changed military tactics and the "battle of materiel," yet still strongly influences the images of battlefield confrontations in the twentieth century.

Murdoch's examination of *Vor Troja nichts Neues*, although extensive, requires some additions. Thersites, the narrator of the story, evokes an association with the comic character from *The Iliad*, who is a specialist in sharp, mocking insults. The reader of *Vor Troja nichts Neues* can associate him with the cowardly and apparently

105 Manfred Kuxdorf, "Mynona Versus Remarque, Tucholsky, Mann, and Others: Not So Quiet on the Literary Front," *The First World War in German Narrative Prose*, ed. Charles N. Genno and Heinz Wetzel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980) 71-92.

ugliest man who came to Troy, a hunchbacked, bow-legged, almost bald cripple. In *The Iliad*, he dares, in front of the troops, to accuse King Agamemnon of egoistic motivations for continuing the war: "[W]hat's your problem now? . . . What are you missing? . . . [A]re you in need of still more gold . . . Or do you want a young girl to stash away, so you can screw with her all by yourself?" (Homer 261-71). Thersites also hurts Agamemnon's male pride by calling Achilles, his rival in the race for fame, "a much finer warrior than himself" (282). For these insults, Odysseus beats Thersites and makes him cry "like an idiot" (319), to the mirth of all warriors gathered around.

Thersites, in Homer's narration, is a marginal but highly interesting figure, because he himself and the actions provoked by him define the ideal model of ancient warrior by negative example. He balances on the thin line between obedience and open disrespect for military authority, using humour to play out the aggression against the leaders who prolong the war. He is an "expert in various insults, vulgar terms for inappropriate attacks on kings, whatever he thought would make the Argives laugh" (249-51). The kings hate him but leave him alone. Interestingly, the joking relationship that guarantees him inclusion into the group and immunity from the anger of the kings breaks when the solidarity and loyalty of the soldiers is put to a test. Thersites accuses Agamemnon of what constitutes the biggest insult for a warrior: greed, lust and sexual privileges, and inferiority to another soldier. At this moment, Odysseus finally uses violence against Thersites to end his mockery. The incident shows that there is a line that Thersites cannot cross; he is punished to avoid the questioning of the leader's warrior qualities, and to prevent the disturbance of order in the group. The other soldiers identify with their leaders by laughing at Thersites; they confirm the soldier model that the

leaders would like to make obligatory. In the end, Thersites is emasculated by his crying and by the demonstration of his physical defects.

The story of Thersites is relevant to *Vor Troja nichts Neues*; through the figure of Thersites, Reuark aims at two narrative models of soldier behaviour created by the military—the model of militant and violent masculinity as outlined in *The Iliad* (and mocked by Homer's Thersites), and the not-necessarily-opposite image of the soldier as presented in *Im Westen nichts Neues*. The first model was alive and well before, during, and after the First World War. The heroic model connects violence with masculinity, the fair fight of equal opponents, the strictly homosocial orientation of military organizations, loyalty to and trust in the leader, and the refusal of individual gratification for a service that is understood as an honourable duty to the country and its leaders. First World War authors such as Ernst Jünger, Walter Bloem, and Walter Flex (and many others *Stahlhelm* writers¹⁰⁶) constructed models of military masculinity upon this ancient heroic ideal. Their models have survived as First World War images.

Reuark's use of anachronism—Homer's figure of Thersites, as well as the setting of the First World War parody in the time of the Trojan War—causes an incongruity. For instance, in Reuark's text, Thersites is one of the common soldiers who has to fight in the first line:

Ein Hagel von Pfeilen ging über uns nieder, riesige Feldsteine wurden geschleudert, siedendes Pech in Kesseln über uns ausgeleert, Schwert und Lanze verrichteten ihr maschinenmäßiges Vernichtungswerk. (18-19)

A hail of arrows came down over us, enormous field stones were hurled, boiling pitch from kettles was emptied on us, sword and lance performed their machine-like destruction. (my transl.)¹⁰⁷

106 The *Stahlhelm* was one of the paramilitary organizations that arose after the First World War, and was part of the political front against the Weimar Republic.

The description of the defence, especially the phrase "maschinenmäßiges Vernichtungswerk" ["machine-like destruction"], is jokingly targeting the war as depicted in Remarque's novel—the technology of destruction might have changed dramatically since Homer's time, but the basic tactical principles could be the same. The war, a noble event, may well make real men and heroes, but, in the heat of the battle

. . . weiß man nicht, ob man vor- oder rückwärts gehen soll. Tut man das eine, so ist man ein Held, tut man das andere, ein Feigling. Im Grunde ist es genau dasselbe, die Richtung und der Zufall machen es. (19)

. . . one does not know whether to go forwards or backwards. If one does the first, one is a hero; if the other, a coward. In general, both are exactly the same; it's the direction and the chance that decide it. (my transl.)

The comic anachronisms in Requark's text are often twentieth century elements, such as slogans, phrases, or real names from the Weimar Republic, disguised as pseudo-Greek and smuggled into the ancient times. A blood-curdling event from Remarque's novel, when a wounded soldier is dying on the battlefield after the first attack, is parodied in *Vor Troja nichts Neues*:

Unter den Vordersten lag tödlich getroffen der junge Hippias aus Athen. Mit dem Nationallied *Hellas, Hellas über alles* war er losgestürmt. Mehr als den ersten Vers hatte er nicht singen können, dann pfiff der Sänger aus dem letzten Loch. (19)

Among the first warriors lay the mortally wounded young Hippias from Athens. He had attacked with the national anthem *Hellas, Hellas above all* on his lips. He did not get farther than the first verse when he whistled his last. (my transl.)

As in the case of the outdated military technology, this anachronism serves to demonstrate that the heroic ideal survived a long time: its framework does not require more than a simple substitution of constituent elements.

107 An English edition of *Vor Troja nichts Neues* does not exist. Where necessary, I provide my own translation of the quotes from the text.

Significantly, in *Vor Troja nichts Neues*, Thersites is elevated to narrator of the story, as opposed to in *The Iliad*. The conversation with Homer shows how the position of ancient story teller, propagator of militant masculinity, and constructor of its narrative model can be subverted: Homer is not only a beautifier of the reality and servant of the official war propaganda, as Thersites sees him, but he also tries to compliment the decision makers whenever possible, exaggerating their warrior qualities. Thersites describes Homer in a derogatory way:

Sie haben hier einen alten Kerl. Ich glaube, er stammt aus Smyrna. Homer heißt er. So eine Art offiziellen Berichterstatters, und außerdem unterhält er die Führer bei ihren täglichen Mahlzeiten mit Gesangsvorträgen. Man kann sich denken, was dabei herauskommt. Elende Lobhudelei. Dafür kriegt er dann auch ein Glas Wein oder ein Stück Braten ab und wenn er die verzehrt hat, trägt er noch einmal so dick auf. Hier glaubt ihm natürlich kein Mensch, doch zu Hause sind sie ganz toll auf seine Berichte. (33)

There's this old guy here. I think he comes from Smyrna. His name is Homer. He is kind of an official reporter, and he also entertains the leaders during their daily meals with his singing. You can imagine what comes of that. Extravagant praises. In return, he gets a glass of wine or a piece of roast, and when he has consumed them both, he lays it on thick once more. No man believes him here, of course, but at home they are crazy for his reports. (my transl.)

Thersites, as the narrator and subject of the story, objectifies Homer and his vision of war and, by doing so, creates the conditions for the social situation of laughter. The narrator delivers the blind poet to the mirth of the readers, but also allows them to reflect on the artificial and conditioned character of Homer's warrior ideal.

The subversion of a certain perspective on war goes further, though, and relates to Requark's critique of the soldier's (self)image as it appears in *Im Westen nichts Neues*. With the intertextual reference to *The Iliad* as a sort of pre-story of *Vor Troja nichts Neues*, the figure of Thersites is able to undermine Paul Bäumer's image as a young, innocent narrator who arrives at the front line directly from school, after only a short

period of military training. In the parody, Thersites repeats Bäumer's opinions about a soldier's life and the command of the army, but the knowledge of the pre-story stands in the way of Bäumer's reliability as a narrator, and the repetitions of affectionate statements expose Thersites as an egocentric panic-monger who cultivates his negative attitude towards the war and the leaders. The only purpose of his service appears for him to be financial success after the war when he publishes his war diary. When his friend Timarchos expresses his disbelief in the accuracy of Thersites's depiction of the war, the author *in spe* says "Ein reicher Mann will ich werden, ganz Griechenland wird mein Buch lesen" (22) ["I want to be a rich man, the whole of Greece will read my book" (my transl.)]. He cynically explains his view on the war and the possibilities of its narrative representation:

"Nein, du [wirst mein Buch] nicht [lesen]. Du warst ja im Kriege. Aber alle Leute, die nicht dabei waren, die werden es verschlingen. Man wird gar nicht genug Exemplare beschaffen können. Denn das sage ich dir, Timarchos, wenn dieser Krieg überhaupt einen Zweck hat, so besteht er darin, daß ich darüber schreiben kann."

Mein Freund lächelte ungläubig. Wir Soldaten glauben überhaupt nichts mehr, desto bereitwilliger werden mir meine Leser glauben. O, ich sehe sie schon im Geist, wie sie gebeugt über meinem Werk sitzen, wie sie mit hastigen Fingern Seite auf Seite umschlagen und sie mit noch hastigeren Blicken durchfliegen. "Vor Troja nichts Neues" wird eine Sensation werden, eine Sensation ohnegleichen.

"Es lebe der Krieg!" hätte ich in meiner Begeisterung beinahe gerufen. Aber das sei ferne von mir! Im Gegenteil, mein Buch wird dafür sorgen, daß der Krieg der letzte aller Kriege bleibt. (22-23)

"No, you won't read my book, because you were in the war. But all these people who weren't there, they will devour it. It will be almost impossible to print enough copies. You see, if this war has a meaning at all, its meaning is that I can write about it."

My friend smiled in disbelief. We soldiers don't believe in anything anymore, but my readers will believe me that much more. Oh, I see it already in my mind's eye, how they lean over my work, how they turn the pages with their hasty fingers and read it through even faster. "All Quiet on the Trojan Front" will be sensational, nothing else will beat it.

"Long live the war!" I almost shouted in my enthusiasm. But may that be far from me! Just the opposite, my book will ensure that this war will be

the war to end all wars. (my transl.)

The phrase "Es wird darin viel von mir und wenig vom Kriege die Rede sein" (24) ["There will be much about me and little about the war in [the book]" (my transl.)] specifies Thersites's authorial position. Thersites's observations during the war about his future literary work about the war also betray his intentions as an author. What he thinks about his writing, and not the diary in its finished and apparently censored form, constitutes the narration of *Vor Troja nichts Neues*. Thus, the reliability of the narrator of the actual diary is questioned from the very beginning. We read the meta-narration and follow the construction process of a war story that has to sell well. The structure of the parody is also important here—the publisher's preface and afterword, by bracketing the story taken from the original, additionally exaggerate the position of the autobiographical narrator. The preface ridicules the publishing house Ullstein for editing stories from the long-gone war: "Das archäologische Institut von Ullsteinopolis" (5) ["the archaeological institute of Ullsteinopolis" (my transl.)] found Thersites's manuscript 3,000 years later. It praises the "Persönlichkeit des Verfassers, dieses einzigartigen Mannes" (6) ["personality of the author, who is an extraordinary man" (my transl.)] and the authenticity of his war descriptions far too frequently to be taken as anything more than just commercial advertisement—which, in return, subverts the narrator's position of the meta-story, too. Clearly, the narrator and author of *Im Westen nichts Neues* do not remain intact either, for the parody necessarily changes the view of the parodied text: in this case, it provokes questions about the commercialization of the novel and the reliability of its depiction of war. Bäumer's naive perspective on the war, his and his comrades' pacifism, and the propagated view that the young soldiers belong to the "lost generation" damaged by the war, are all questioned. In the parodic version, the well-known introductory words of

Remarque's text take an anachronistic twist: the men belong "zu einer Generation [...], die vom Kriege zerstört wurde, selbst wenn sie den Speißen der Trojaner entkommen sollte" (cover page) ["to a generation who was destroyed by the war, even though they may have escaped the Trojan spears" (my transl.)]. The superficial anti-war and anti-military convictions of Thersites, whom his teacher, a Homer fan, encouraged to volunteer for the war, reveal themselves in his reflections (though reflected in a fun house mirror) that resemble particular scenes from *Im Westen nichts Neues*. What makes an experienced old front-line soldier is the avoidance of every duty and the theft of private property (with special accent on food and drink). A special place is accorded here to open manifestations of disrespect towards the narrator's superiors: "Strammstehen und Grüßen lernt man nur, um den Vorgesetzten durch ihre Unterlassung die gebührende Nichtachtung zu beweisen" (28) ["One learns to stand at attention and to salute only in order to omit them thereby proving to one's superiors the proper disrespect" (my transl.)]. To be a "Frontschwein" ["front pig"] means also to fraternize with other soldiers (not with all, though; the comradeship is limited to the soldiers from the same troop), and to swear at life in general and the war in particular. The parody makes an ironic and very apt comment on the scene of the sadistic military training targeted at Kantorek that evidently contradicts the declared pacifist attitude of Remarque's figures:

Ich huldige einer pazifistischen Abschreckungstheorie, ich will den Leuten den Krieg vereiteln. Ich habe damit die besten Erfolge. Zwei von den Rekruten haben sich umgebracht—die Glücklichen!—, zwei andere haben einen Herzkollaps, so daß sie für den Frontdienst untauglich sind, drei sind desertiert. Keiner von ihnen wird sich am Kriege beteiligen und den Rest der Mannschaft kriege ich hoffentlich auch noch so weit . . . [S]o erzieht man überzeugungstreue Pazifisten, Männer, die den Krieg verabscheuen, ohne daß sie ihn erst kennengelernt haben. (52-53)

I honour the pacifist theory of deterrence; I want to put people off the war. I am highly successful. Two of the recruits committed suicide—lucky them!—two others had heart failure and are unsuitable for front service,

the next three deserted. None of them will take part in the war anymore, and the rest of the company I will hopefully bring to do the same . . . That's how you educate conscious pacifists: men who despise the war before they get to know it. (my transl.)

The meta-narrative form of *Vor Troja nichts Neues* allows the addition, expansion, or explanation of certain ideological components of the hypotext that—in the eyes of the parodist—are in need of correction. The previous scene demonstrates that one of the components can be the simple fact of participation in the war as an all-in-one, universal theory of the "lost generation"—as explanation and justification for all failures, cases of misconduct (for example, use of violence that leads to suicide), or mistakes, present and future.

What is strikingly visible in Requark's work, in contrast to the parodied text, is the presence of femininity in the war, expressed in a constellation of episodic yet important woman characters. Women, either real or projections of the soldiers' fantasy, motivate male behaviour, but are also the voice of the truth. In the parody of the scene in which Remarque's soldiers speak about reasons for the war, Requark's "Muskoten" ["tommies"] guess that the main impulse for the Trojan War is not the defence of the fatherland but the fact that Agamemnon wanted to take a break from his malicious wife (16). The main standard by which the common soldiers judge victory and failure in the war is sexual satisfaction: "Für einen Soldaten fällt kein Weiberfleisch mehr ab. Und Ochsenfleisch auch nicht..." (43) ["For the common soldier there is no woman's flesh left. And no bull's flesh, either" (my transl.)]. The easy access to women's bodies, reserved for the officers, is also the main cause of the common soldiers' disappointment with the higher ranks (in addition to the envy of the officers' better reserves of food and alcohol). In Remarque's narration, women are deprived of their own voice. The only female figures that appear in *Im Westen nichts Neues* are Paul's mother on her deathbed, speaking

weakly and only reacting to her son's inquiries (*Im Westen* 126-129), the French women with whom communication is sparse and based mainly on the soldiers' interpretation of their intentions (103-107), and the colourful poster on the wall (101-102)—an idealized male representation of woman. In the parody, the soldiers do not hide their desire, but their declared lust is immediately exposed as a rather empty expression, a pose that is suitable for the soldier role they have adopted. Thersites begins a search for women with the exclamation, "Wir sind schuldlose Opfer, aber wir brauchen Weiber, Weiber!" (*Vor Troja* 80) ["We are innocent victims, but we need women, women!" (my transl.)], but his comrades prefer to stay with their provisions. When Thersites finds the last three priestesses of Artemis, they aren't pretty, but he is satisfied with the results of his search: "es war zurückgestellte Ware, aber immerhin, es waren Weiber" (85) ["they were reshelved products, but still, they were women" (my transl.)]. The sexual desire of both genders is depicted as corresponding with hunger. The two needs of the body correlate with each other very closely: first, the promise of sex makes the soldiers finally visit the women, and second, the food given as a gift convinces the priestesses to have sex with the visitors. The women's willingness to be involved in sinful sexual acts surprises Thersites, but the women, who were spared sexual abuse apparently because of their physical unattractiveness, find a convenient reason to overcome the moral obstacles: "Der Krieg is entsetzlich! Was sollen wir tun? Die Keuschheit hat keine Stätte mehr auf Erden" (89) ["The war is horrible! What should we do? There's no play for chastity in the world anymore" (my transl.)]. The satirical impetus of the conversation here turns against the image of women often projected in the male narrations of the First World War—as absent beings stripped of manifest sexual connotation, and of desires and human imperfections (such as vanity) of their own. At the same time, the politeness of Thersites

and his comrades during the meetings with the women, and their initial dilemmas of what to choose—food or sex—undermines the model of military masculinity based on violence, including sexual aggression and physical domination. For the masculine figures, Thersites, Timarchos, and Archidamos, a soldier's duties include being lustful, although they would rather stay where they were and eat than risk becoming sexual prey. For the female figures, the gruesomeness of war appears as a welcome pretext to escape their social roles (priestesses) and try a less morally restrictive alternative (damsels in distress, sexual objects). Noticeably, the encounter with the priestesses is not a direct parody of any scene from Remarque's novel, but rather a parodic elaboration on the meeting with the French village women.

The female, banned from both the narrations of conservative authors (as described by Klaus Theweleit in his work *Männerphantasien*, a comprehensive study of right-wing war narrations) and Remarque's story, emerges in the parody as the inevitable element of war reality without which the image of war would neither be complete nor believable. Interestingly, in *Vor Troja nichts Neues*, the female voice is the one telling the truth, and yet, the voice is ignored. Pythia says about Thersites's future book:

[I]n 3000 Jahren . . . , ich sehe zehn Druckereien, zwanzig Buchbindereien, Hunderte von Arbeitern . . . sie können es nicht schaffen, nicht genug Exemplare herstellen . . . (63)

In 3000 years, I see there will be ten printing presses, twenty book binding shops, hundreds of workers . . . they are not able to do it, to produce enough copies . . . (my transl.)

The soldier does not believe her. "Das war natürlich Quatsch" (63) ["It was nonsense, of course" (my transl.)], he observes, although in all other circumstances he is very sure of his talent and future pecuniary success.

The success of Remarque's novel, to which the parody alludes, was quickly turned to profit in a different medium, film. The 1930 American movie, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a faithful adaptation of the novel, became a big hit in the United States and Great Britain. In the Weimar Republic, the political right accused the film of anti-German sentiment and, as was the case with the novel, of a distorted portrayal of the war. Yet even in Germany, where the movie initially received quite a different reception, the Hollywood motion picture became a classic of the war movie genre. The popularity of the movie doubtlessly contributed to the further success of the novel; the adaptation, made with a large budget and care for detail, reinforced certain narrative images that, consequently, became visual marks of the war, easily recognizable icons.

A subject for a further analysis could certainly be the question whether the movie by Lewis Milestone (screenplay authored by Maxwell Anderson and George Abbott) was at all parodic, following Simon Dentith's theory of the unavoidable parodic character of all literary and movie adaptations of a text. Or—to add even more complexity to the question—it would be interesting to ask if, and in which respect, the latest film adaptation, the 1979 TV production by Delbert Mann, parodies Remarque's text and/or its film predecessor, Milestone's film. For the time being, however, let us put aside the discussion about the possible parodic dimensions of a film adaptation of the text, even if it might be very interesting to investigate the interplay between the two media from the point of view of parody theories. Instead, I would like to present the short 1931 movie, *A Dogville Comedy: So Quiet on the Canine Front*, by Zion Myers and Jules White, as an example of film parody of the movie *All Quiet on the Western Front*. In this parody, the application of comic strategy is very easy to determine and helps us to specify what

elements are drawn from both Remarque's text and Milestone's movie to provoke polemic humoristic responses.

From 1929 through 1931, the film studio Metro Goldwyn Meyers, in an attempt to overcome years of crisis, produced a successful series of nine so-called "Barkies," short movies with dog actors, dressed like people and with human voice-overs. The concept of the series—parodying well-known mainstream movies—is, in the opinion of Eve Golden, "bizarre," but she observes that "the Dogville shorts are also high . . . camp . . . [T]he Dogvilles are so bad they're wonderful" (Golden C12). The plot of one of the movies, the 15-minute long *So Quiet on the Canine Front*, is very simple and quite extraordinary compared with other war movies. It contains five parts divided by black title screens. The chapters resemble the plot of *Im Westen nichts Neues* in some elements, although they are anchored in the American context. The film starts with the scene in which the message of the outbreak of war finds the students in the middle of a boring anatomy class, and they all volunteer for the service. Then follows the scene at "Camp Poodle," where the recruits receive their military training. During "Entraining for 'Over There'" (clearly an American term, not the only one in the film, that is used to describe the conflict abroad, on the European soil), the soldiers say goodbye to their families. "So Quiet on the Canine Front" shows the first experiences of the soldiers on the front. "The Same Rookies a Week Later" closes the movie with a story of espionage and the heroic rescue, from behind the enemy lines, of an arrested comrade.

What is relevant to our discussion of parody is the preliminary observation that the movie is both a direct and a general parody. It is the parody of a specific movie and of the text which the movie adapts. The title of the parody is also alluding to the big-screen production *All Quiet on the Western Front*, feeding on the popularity of the previous

adaptation. In addition, the parody polemically addresses the elements that characterize the war movie genre, such as depictions of combat and violence in its different appearances, with an emphasis on warfare and its effects on the individual, relations between the individual and the homosocial group, and the creation of a military-specific masculinity. The comic strategy employed in the parody *So Quiet on the Canine Front* is based strongly on incongruity—animals take the roles of soldiers and civilians and imitate human moves, dress, voices, and interactions in social relations. Eve Golden notes that the incongruity has to be intensified to reach its comic effect: "[H]ad the cast walked on all fours, perhaps the effect wouldn't be quite so appalling" (Golden C13). In the 1930s, the issue of animal cruelty was raised in relation to the whole series (the dogs are held upright by wires), which re-establishes the invisible category of "natural" human or animal behaviour. The dogs in the movie march like soldiers, lie in the trenches, present arms, turn left or right, crawl on the battlefield, and sit at the table in the tent. All this appears unnatural to the viewer, but at the same time allows reflection about the influence of military training on the male body, which changes in that process. The body of the soldier in the western military institutions that base their training on the Enlightenment model undergoes a series of planned exercises that should prepare it to endure fatigue and pain, but also to function as a part of the group, in which obedience and teamwork are crucial.¹⁰⁸ The scene of military training in the parody shows that dog bodies are not prepared for the change that male bodies are subjected to; their coordination in turning right or left is miserable and may cause laughter. At the same time, the scene makes the viewer aware of the process leading from the natural to the mechanical body behaviour that is put in motion in order to smoothly adopt the recruits

108 See Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien* (Frankfurt am Main: Rowohlt, 1993).

into the military machine, to the meta-organism of the troop. An interesting detail from the movie confirms the assumption about the "unnatural" character of the process of the construction of the male body that, at the same time, makes "real men." The only time when the dogs use all four legs and walk naturally are the moments of panic on the battlefield. The formation breaks up; the soldiers run in all directions. In the moment of extreme danger the structure of the troop dissolves. Running from the enemy is cowardly, not honourable, not worthy of the soldier, in a word, unmanly. In another scene, the German general von Pretzel asks the enemy spy who does not want to betray his comrades: "Do you want to die like a dog?" (chapter 5), which is a linguistic joke considering the canine cast, but it also marks the distinction between the worthy (human) and unworthy (animal) death. It corresponds with the hegemonic model of masculinity created by the state institutions in the West from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, in which inclusions and exclusions play a decisive role in creating roles adequate for a human being.¹⁰⁹

The interplay between human and animal characteristics is visible also in the relation between the body and the clothing that serves the purpose of assigning appropriate gender or social roles. The characters are dressed like high school students (male and female) in the first scene, and then they change to army uniforms. The

109 "Der militärische Männerraum erzeugt Inklusionen und Exklusionen und beweist dadurch seinen hegemonialen Charakter. Er zwingt Männer zur Übernahme der Soldatenrolle oder zwingt sie in Rollen, die dem ganzen Leben eine besondere Wendung geben: Deserteure, Kriegsdienstverweigerer, Meuterer, Überläufer, Selbstverstümmeler, gefolgt von Ausweichstrategien innerhalb der Soldatenrolle ('Kriegsneurotiker', 'Simulanten', 'Kriegsunfreiwillige', 'Stellungsflüchtige', 'Gehorsamverweigerer', 'Feige' u. a. m.). See Wolfgang Schmale, "Hegemonie: Männlichkeit in der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft des 18., 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts," *Geschichte der Männlichkeit in Europa 1750-2000* (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2003) 149-203.

clothing, brought to the viewer's attention through the incongruity between the shape of the human and the dog body, is the only indicator of gender, social status, profession, age, and membership in a national community. Two scenes deserve closer attention. In the first scene, at the train station, the soldiers are saying good-bye to their families and are sent off by an enthusiastic crowd (chapter 3). Two of the soldiers are having their pictures taken; they pose behind a cardboard cutout with holes for their heads. The rest of their bodies are painted on the board. The purpose of these boards, popular in folk festivities, is to disguise the real appearance of a person, to trick the viewer of the picture. It is a wishful projection of the desired body shape that can never be achieved under normal circumstances, or an image that has a ridiculing effect through its incongruity with the real appearance of the body. In both cases, the function of those images is socially corrective, for they make the viewer aware of an ideal model of human body, either through its presence in or absence from the picture. In the scene, the dogs pose behind the image on the board depicting two human bodies, one skinny and one corpulent, in army uniforms. The comic effect results from many criss-crossing incongruities: it is the product of the awareness that the animal bodies look different from human bodies, of the conviction that the uniform looks "in its place" on the human male body (as one of the main indicators of masculinity), and of the confrontation of two human bodies of extremely different shape, neither of them corresponding with the ideal image of the skilful soldier.

The second scene also has the character of a polemic with the appearances and behaviour prescribed to the gender. Private Barker, disguised as a nurse, has a spy mission behind the enemy lines. He makes it to the headquarters of the German army, where General von Pretzel immediately courts Barker, whom he takes for an attractive

nurse, and exclaims, "You beautiful thing, if my wife only understood me like you do" (chapter 5). The soldier tries to hide his gender, speaking in a high-pitched voice, and is subjected to the sexually aggressive advances of the general. Two soldiers witness the scene through a hole in the building wall; the voyeurs are wagging their long tails in approval of the general's behaviour (Barker, as is mentioned in the opening scene, does not have a tail, which probably allows him to successfully disguise himself as a woman). The masquerade ends accidentally when Private Barker loses his nurse skirt and shows his soldier trousers underneath. His gender is finally revealed, and he is supposed to be executed as a spy. Both scenes play with the notion of the "typical" gender features and demonstrate their artificial, given character.

The mere separation of the narrative elements of the movie can also be interpreted as a polemical attack on elements that had become recognizable markers of narrations about the First World War. Formally, the parody is split into five chapters standing for different stages in the process of becoming a "real" soldier. The first stage is the school, where the male students are playing adolescent tricks on each other. They go through military training, depart from their families, and get their first experiences on the front, typical for the narrations about the First World War: artillery attack, shell shock in the bomb shelter, life in the trenches, fixing barbwire entanglements, gas attack. The new situation hardens them, and they learn their new role. The challenge comes with the dangerous situation that requires taking big risks for their comrades or troop. The soldiers pass the loyalty test and become brothers-in-arms. From the point of view of this narrative scheme, the movie *So Quiet on the Canine Front* may be a parody that jokingly points out the complex relation between the body and gender or social roles, but, ultimately, it also stresses the importance of growing up to the role of the "real" soldier—

a hero; it affirms the value of loyalty, courage, and male bonding in the military, and it assigns these values to masculinity. It may be noted that the dog breeds that are perceived as the most aggressive are put in prominent enemy roles (like General von Pretzel, who is a real "dog of war"), while the aggression and violence of the protagonists are considerably downplayed. Similarly, the war technology used by the American soldiers in the parody consists of harmless trick toys: the deadly shrapnel becomes "flea grenades," and the gas attack metamorphoses into the emanations of a "Limburger bomb" (chapter 4). It appears that loyalty and willingness to help, and not aggression, are intended to be associated with the dogs playing the roles of "our boys."

In conclusion, I would like to remark that my investigation of only two of many works using the novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* as the point of departure for parody certainly does not cover all the possible elements of the text that are polemically discussed in the hypotexts. The number of parodic uses is high—Remarque's novel is a good target for the text form that lives from the popularity of other texts. The text appeared on the market at a time when the debates about the meaning of the First World War, the future role of the military, and "good" and "bad" soldier models were intensifying both inside and outside of Germany. The parodic responses to the narration, *Vor Troja nichts Neues* and *So Quiet on the Canine Front*, stem from the same period, and indirectly resonate with the questions that emerged in the discussions of the 1930s: Is there a place for the heroic ideal of the warrior? How does one deal with the increasing role of technology in warfare? How does the "real man" deal with the technological, social, and narrative challenges brought by the war?

The examples from the works discussed here demonstrate that the parodic practices, the *Doppelgänger* of the original text, have very specific functions. They can

work, like *So Quiet on the Canine Front*, as conservative devices that mock the innovations and changes threatening the established model of behaviour in order to preserve its structure. They create a playground where alternative possibilities are safely explored, but, eventually, they downplay the subversive impulses and re-affirm the existing model. On the other hand, the parodies can have a subversive function, like *Vor Troja nichts Neues*, and aim at polemical modifications of long-established models. They also target the emerging model alternatives that aspire to the rank of dominant representations. These parodies work towards the destabilization of meaning, while at the same time paying tribute to the original text.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

The First World War is the main subject of all four major works selected for this study. I chose the works for my analysis not only because I wanted to give an account of the authors' search for the most suitable literary expression for the impact of the "Urkatastrophe" ["seminal catastrophe"] of the 20th century on the individual, as Wolfgang Mommsen has called the conflict in his historical study about the war,¹¹⁰ but also because I wanted to show how much humour and laughter influenced the images of war and how they unite authors of various backgrounds and ideological conviction in one laughing community. Regardless of the fact that the authors often disagree over their objects in "serious" discourse, they agree on the targets of their humour and laughter. The appearances of humour and laughter in so-called pro-war works, such as Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern* and Bloem's *Vormarsch*, draw a sharp line between the front soldiers and other groups described in the narrations, undermining the respect towards the enemy, civilians (including women), or less experienced fighters that is declared openly through other rhetorical means. In Jünger and Bloem's narrations, the division marked by laughter depends not only on the experience but also on the age of the participants in the humorous situation; the assumption that experience comes with age, creates the conditions for laughter to take place if the assumption is not confirmed, for example when older soldiers try hard to demonstrate their skills and fail. Bloem, the representative of the older generation in the group of authors selected for this study, serves here as a good example. In so-called anti-war narrations, to which Zweig's *Der Streit um den*

110 Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Die Urkatastrophe Deutschlands: Der Erste Weltkrieg 1914–1918* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2002).

Sergeanten Grischa and Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* are usually counted, humour and laughter contradict the apparent victimization of the figures by the war and serve the purpose of taking an effective revenge on the oppressive structures. In these works, humour and laughter create "Kameradschaft" ["comradeship"], but the initiators of humorous situations usually take the dominant position in the laughing group, subverting the very concept of camaraderie. Despite the classification of the works from the point of view of their ideological standing and literary reception, all of them propagate a similar image of the "ideal" soldier through humour and laughter, coming to an agreement in sexist laughter at the weak and womanized opponent and ridiculing the performances of soldier roles that deviate from the ones accepted by the homosocial group.

Laughing in the analysed narrations is a male activity, described by men sharing similar convictions about gender-specific characteristics. This is hardly surprising: historically, and in the reception of war literature, the First World War remains an area of male dominance. The reason for this is the fact that most popular literary representations of war experience are depictions of trench warfare created by men who were direct participants in the military operations at the front. Therefore, the humour and laughter instances we can find in the war narrations also belong to the male sphere; they shape the relationships between men in the homosocial organization of the army and influence their attitude towards women, who are excluded from the group of front combatants. In this respect, my study illustrates "das Gelächter eines Geschlechts" ["the laughter of one gender"] only.¹¹¹ The dominance of the male perspective in the presentation and

¹¹¹ To paraphrase the title of Helga Kotthoff's collection about differences between the female and male uses of humour and laughter in social interactions. See Helga Kotthoff, *Das Gelächter der Geschlechter: Humor und Macht in Gesprächen von Frauen und Männern* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1988).

propagation of war images in the late 1920s and early 1930s was well noted by contemporaneous readers and writers. Significantly, the first responses to the war depictions were intended to engage in a polemic with the male narrations using the humoristic strategies of parody, an instrument deemed powerful enough to counterbalance the influence of the original texts. Thus, soon after *Im Westen nichts Neues* by Erich Maria Remarque was translated into English in 1929, the British publisher Albert Marriot sought to use the huge commercial success of the original as a vehicle for his own project. He contacted popular writer Evadne Price with the commission to write a spoof of Remarque's novel: a work from a woman's point of view, that should be authored by the fictional female writer Erika Remarque and appear under the title *All Quaint on the Western Front*. Although the parody was meant as an obvious reference to Remarque's market hit, the final results were more subtle in evoking the original: the initial publisher's idea yielded a pseudo-autobiography by Helen Zenna Smith, *Not So Quiet... Stepdaughters of War*. The text, based on the war experiences of a real female ambulance driver in France, was intended to destroy the popular conviction about the gendered experience of war that banished women from the front and into the domestic area.¹¹² It is a significant addition to the parodic uses of *Im Westen nichts Neues*, on which I comment in chapter 5 of my study, but it exceeds the scope and focus of my analysis. The female authors writing on the First World War and the uses of humour in their works deserve an elaborate separate study.

Another possibility for further investigation is to look at the works by other authors whose war experience constitutes the subject of their main artistic creations.

¹¹² The story and content of *Not So Quiet... Stepdaughters of War* is described in detail in: Angela K. Smith, *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War* (Manchester and New York: Manchester U Press, 2000) 107-20.

Among the bestsellers of the Weimar Republic, *Krieg* [War] by Ludwig Renn (1928) seems to provide especially promising material to investigate the functions of humour and laughter in the social relations between soldiers. The novel *Krieg*, even more than *Im Westen nichts Neues*, is the result of a major literary mystification: the real author, Arnold Vieth von Golßenau, was a young German officer of aristocratic descent who entered the war as a troop leader, not a common soldier. Yet his text was advertised and sold as the autobiographical work of a private and peace-time worker — definitely a marketing strategy that took advantage of the general pursuit for "the authenticity of experience" and the distrust towards the military elite, two elements that dominated the discussions about the war in the last years of the Republic. The discrepancy between the figure of the author Vieth von Golßenau and his narrator Renn raises the question whether humour and laughter can betray the social position of the laughing person, depending on the target of laughter. In what way the uses of humour and laughter differ from their employment in other war narrations that were also received as truly autobiographical could also be investigated.

Other texts whose reception reached a high tide during the Nazi period only to sink from view post-1945 similarly await their own larger volume. Walter Flex's *Der Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten* [The Wanderer between Both Worlds] (1917) is an example in case. The quest for the ideal soldier, propagated by his prose, resonated deeply with the Nazis. The role played by humoristic strategies in the development of his highly influential images can be a potential goal of another project.¹¹³

113 The Flex scholarship, much to my contentment, was recently revived after a long period of inactivity by a new study devoted to Flex und Jünger: Lars Koch, *Der Erste Weltkrieg als Medium der Gegenmoderne: Zu den Werken von Walter Flex und Ernst Jünger* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006) 60-191.

I hope that my study, which forms only a step toward embracing humour as an important factor in the investigation of non-humoristic literature, will change the way the analysed works about the First World War — and, further, other autobiographical and non-humoristic works in which the war constitutes the main subject — are assessed in literary scholarship. The various aspects of violence and the influence of the war on the post-war social structures and narrative solutions have been already largely investigated in the scholarship of the German First World War literature. Although there exist analyses of military humour (for instance, soldier jokes, postcards or comedies played at the front), as well as investigations of the function of black, grotesque, and absurd humour in narrations about the First and Second World War, the interest of scholars has been limited to humoristic literary and visual genres. My study aimed to fill a gap in the research on the German literature of the First World War which is not of genuinely humoristic nature. I attempted to demonstrate that humour and laughter can be weapons no less effective than violence in subordinating and organizing people and taking the dominant position in the group, as well as making the soldiers "real men." Alternatively, they can be powerful subversive instruments used to question the meaning of war and the processes of male identity shaping through the military institutions. War may be no laughing matter, but laughter sometimes goes to war.

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