INTRODUCTION

The Anarchic Imagination in *Eumeswil*

Russell A. Berman

“We fail not because of our dreams but because we do not dream forcefully enough.”

Ernst Jünger’s *Eumeswil* is a post-apocalyptic novel that combines elements of science fiction and dystopia with a sustained philosophical reflection on the predicament of the individual in the face of the intrusive powers of the state and technology. It points toward opportunities to pursue an elusive freedom, but it provides no guarantees, no reassuring metaphysics of progress or redemption. The complex vision of this novel, first published in 1977, speaks directly to conflicting aspects of our twenty-first-century condition: the prospects of ecological catastrophe and nuclear conflict, the threat of global warfare, and the exhaustion of cultural traditions. Yet the novel is equally contemporary because of its persuasive articulation of a libertarian sensibility in Jünger’s language of imaginative brilliance and crystalline intelligence.

Eumeswil is the name of a fictional city, somewhere on the North African coast. (While working on the novel, Jünger traveled several times to Agadir in Morocco.) It is named after Eumenes, a Greek general who played a central role in the Diadochian Wars that carved up the Macedonian Empire after the death of Alexander the Great. Ancient history and futuristic vision overlap in *Eumeswil*: just as Eumenes, the general, navigated through the collapse of an ancient empire, the novel takes place, temporally, in the wake of a future catastrophe. The precise character of that antecedent destruction is never fully spelled out, not unlike the sparse treatment of post-apocalypse in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*: a major destruction has taken place, but its history is
less important than its consequences. Nonetheless, there are plenty of hints spread throughout the novel that can allow us to piece together the backstory. After a “final period of wars between nations, a time that heralded great coalitions,” a “first world-state cast its shadow.” Yet that universal regime faced the same fate as Alexander’s empire: a “world civil war” broke out with “great devastations,” nuclear war and environmental catastrophes. In the aftermath, a shattered world remains. Eumeswil is a small city-state, ruled by a dictator, the Condor, and defined by its post-historical situation. Heroism belongs to the past, including any heroism of ideals: “...the surfeit of a late era is involved here. The catalogue of possibilities seems exhausted. The great ideas have been eroded by repetition; you won’t catch any fish with that bait... People no longer demonstrate publicly for ideas; bread or wine would have to cost a lot more...” The mood in Eumeswil is as post-historical and postmodern as in our own. Jünger surely modeled his epigonic city-state on provincial West Germany, in the shadow of World War II; it can speak to us today, however, in the wake of 9/11, as a sense of limitation and the mentality of aftermath replace grand strategies and ambitions.

In *Eumeswil*, Jünger scrutinizes a world in which ideas and ideals, commitment and aspiration, have dissipated, replaced by a culture of generalized mediocrity, populated by “the last man” whom Nietzsche had predicted. At the same time, however, this is a world of visionary technological achievement, especially with the luminar, a hybrid combining aspects of a computer that can draw on an enormous archive, a holograph, and a time machine, capable of calling up scenes from other eras: the protagonist travels easily to moments in the distant past to understand the background to his present. We also read of the phonophore, a sort of smartphone, the capacities of which Jünger described with uncanny prescience: “Anyone in possession of a phonophore—in other words, nearly everyone—is always solvent. His account is kept up to date automatically... through the phonophore, I pay more quickly and more easily than with a check.” However the distribution of the device carefully reflects differences in social status. On that point, Jünger anticipated not only the technological developments with which we are familiar today but the digital divide as well; access to technology is highly stratified. The deployment of these new tools enhances human potential, but they also maintain the dictatorial order. Nonetheless,
“people were skeptical about everything but science. This was the only thing that developed unswervingly and worldwide,... Science managed to do something that had been reserved for the Great Titans, who had existed before the Gods, indeed created them.”[Jünger invokes a mythological framing of our metahistorical condition, a battle between Titans and Gods, leading ultimately to the tipping point of the Second World War, designated as the “final triumph of the technician over the warrior.” Myth and faith have succumbed to machines: Eumeswil is a study on how to live in this condition]

The historical circumstances of the novel are described most precisely in the words of one of the novel’s most important characters, Vigo—Jünger’s hardly concealed stand-in for Giambattista Vico (1668–1774), the political philosopher and historian: “The world-state is shattered into its parts, just as Boutefeu [Jünger’s Nietzsche—RB] predicted. We are left with Diadocic realms and epigonic city-states. The keynote proclaimed by the nineteenth Christian century was a permanent, indeed qualitative growth; this seemed to be realized by Homo faber in the twentieth century. Next, new distinctions split off from progress—and they can be roughly described as the differences between economists and ecologists. The former thought in terms of the history of the world, the latter the history of the earth; the former thought in terms of distribution, the latter in terms of administration. Conflicts erupted between the human milieu and the natural environment, and they were exacerbated by the apocalyptic atmosphere that recurs at the end of every millennium.” Through Vigo we encounter Jünger as cultural diagnostician. The historical optimism of the nineteenth century adulterated growth, which transformed into the ambitious development schemes of the twentieth century: industry was expected to accomplish anything. Yet a fundamental tension erupted between the economic expectation of ever greater consumption and an ecological awareness of limited resources. Today the awareness of this tension is greater than ever, but writing in the 1970s Jünger was one of the first far-sighted thinkers to extrapolate from the oil crisis and the ominous predictions of the Club of Rome.

The novel is the first-person narration of an inhabitant of Eumeswil, Martin Venator, a historian and an offspring of a prominent family of historians. It consists of short passages, fragments, and aphorisms, often
in the nature of diary entries. Martin's historian father and his brother, Cadmo, still feel allegiance to the liberal regime of the "tribunes" who preceded the dictator, but Martin in contrast has found his way into the inner circle around the Condor. His family treats this collaboration with contempt, while Martin views their nostalgia for an earlier era as obsolete. One can recognize this conflict within the Venator family as an echo of Jünger's own biography, reminiscent of his conservative revolutionary phase of the 1920s, when he emphatically broke with the old-fashioned world of the pre-war era. (One important document of that period in his life is the essay On Pain, which Telos Press has published.) Yet that phase in Jünger's career is best understood as just the German version of the ambiguities inherent in the larger field of twentieth-century modernism, with its characteristic insistence on abandoning the categories, political as well as aesthetic, of the liberal or bourgeois nineteenth century. The Victorian (or in the German context, the proper term is Wilhelmine) world, with its dedication to progress, individualism, and reason, faced profound challenges from thinkers as diverse as Marx, Ibsen, and Nietzsche, as well as from the bitter experiences of industrialization, urbanization, and especially the devastation of the First World War. Modernism, in its multiple varieties, tended to reject the bad and seemingly antiquated world of the parents' generation while reaching for new values and new political agendas, both on the left and the right. Embedded in Martin's conflict with his family is a retrospective evaluation of that generational divide at the moment of modernism, which then therefore gives Eumeswil a distinctly postmodern perspective. It is this stance too that imbues the novel with such a contemporary feeling today.

The element of family conflict in Eumeswil—the effort on the part of the son to escape the stranglehold of the father's old-fashioned worldview—points to a subtle indication of the specific genre. Underneath the hallmarks of the post-apocalyptic dystopia, one can recognize vestiges of that premier German novelistic form, the bildungsroman, or novel of education, which excelled in tracing the growth of a hero from childhood to maturity. That genre, perhaps more than any other literary form, expressed the self-understanding of the era of liberal individualism, and it found its paradigmatic expression in Johann Wolfgang Goethe's Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship of 1795. More than a century
later, Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*, published in 1924, embodied the novel of development in the era of modernism, where the erstwhile ideas of individualism and progress faced profound challenges from psychoanalysis, new understandings of time, and the traumatic experience of the world war.

_Eumeswil_ inherits that tradition and reshapes the genre again, exploring the possibility of the bildungsroman in the era of a postmodernism fundamentally antithetical to developmental narratives (and by implication hostile as well to economic agendas of development, hence the widespread postmodern affinity for environmentalism as well as its aversion to capitalist modernization). Instead of the classical liberal individualism of the traditional genre, _Eumeswil_ describes Martin’s origin, his birth scene so to speak, twice over. At the outset, we learn that his father gave him his “Christian name,” Martin: “he calls the newborn baby by his name while picking him up and letting him prove his existence by bawling his lungs out.” Yet we also learn how Martin entered the employ of the Condor, working in his domicile, “the Casbah, the citadel,” as night steward, and there the dictator renamed him “Manuel,” in part out of his “extreme musical sensibility, which is offended by [the harsh consonant in the middle of the name—RB] ‘Martin,’”—the Condor displays an aesthetic refinement that the grim father lacks—but in part as a sign of his power, as his prerogative to rename his servant. At first Martin was christened, but then he was born again when he was renamed by his benevolent godfather, the dictator.

This shift between the two naming scenes and the two identities takes place so effectively because the son feels little more than contempt for his biological father, a contempt which takes the political form of the critique of the father’s liberalism but which in fact has a prior, more powerful source. As a budding historian, fascinated by documents and sources, Martin had discovered the correspondence between his father and mother during their courtship, and it is there that he learned of the father’s unsuccessful efforts to persuade his fiancée to abort the foetus. “My father hounded me when my life was frailest. This may be our most exquisite time. My mother concealed me from him in her womb, like Rhea hiding Zeus in the grotto of Ida to shield him from the clutches of a voracious Cronus. Those are monstrous images; they make me shudder—conversations between matter and time. They lie as erratic
boulders, uninterpreted, beneath surveyed land.” No wonder Martin often avoids referring to his father with that designation or any other term of endearment, choosing instead to label him with cold functionality as his “genitor,” his Erzeuger, merely the sperm donor who would have preferred to eliminate the son before the birth. Some dissonance between father and son often features in novels of development, but in Eumeswil it is particularly acute.

A further feature of the bildungsroman genre is the prominence of education: the novel describes encounters with his teachers, mentors, and colleagues, especially the aforementioned Vigo, the historian, Bruno, the philosopher (Jünger’s figure of Giordano Bruno), and Thofern, the grammarian who provides crucial commentary on the decay of language. As in The Magic Mountain, this bildungsroman too turns into a novel of ideas, and the reader benefits from Jünger’s erudition and intelligence, his historical depth as well as his zoological and botanical knowledge. At the same time, however, the academic milieu of the novel provides an opportunity to characterize the venality and corruption of professors in this post-apocalyptic context, where, as we have seen, ideas have surrendered their former importance. Thus for example the biting description of one of Vigo’s professional adversaries, Kessmüller, whose “ideas are as nonexistent as his hair; he is a bon vivant and a gourmet, and has a sense of humor…. His talent has gotten him through various, even antithetical, regimes as a king-of-the-herrings, which shines on the surface. He has an instinct for conformity and for irresistible platitudes, which he stylizes in a highbrow manner. He can also reinterpret them, depending on which way the wind is blowing.” Martin’s antipathy to Kessmüller results from the latter’s persecution of Vigo, but it is also Kessmüller who is more representative of academic life than are the exceptional Vigo and Bruno. In an era devoid of compelling ideas, the life of the mind degenerates into crowd pleasing, which then leads to a particular opportunism on the part of the professoriate, combining verbal radicalism and comfortable job security.

Jünger is no doubt thinking here of his contemporary German university of the 1970s, in the waning days of the student movement, but he also participates in a skepticism toward academia that dates from Nietzsche, at the latest, and still resonates today. Consider his parody of
the professor as political activist: “Incidentally, I notice that our profes-
sors, trying to show off to their students, rant and rail against the state
and against law and order, while expecting that same state to punctually
pay their salaries, pensions, and family allowances, so that they value at
least this kind of law and order. Make a fist with the left hand and open
the right hand receptively—that is how one gets through life.” Although
this corruption of academic authority belongs, in Martin’s account,
more definitively to the past era of the Tribunes, a world of liberal greed,
it continues in the novel’s present as well and contributes to the general
mood of cultural decline, one of the primary targets of Eumeswil. Nor
can one deny some resemblance to parts of the contemporary academic
world. Placed in a distant future, the novel offers trenchant commentary
to us today.

Eumeswil describes a process of cultural atrophy, particularly
affecting language quality and historical knowledge, which uncannily
anticipates what we today think of as the crisis in the humanities.
Points of cultural orientation have disappeared, and the inhabitants of
Eumeswil face a ubiquitous alienation and malaise: “In a period of de-
cline, when it was considered glorious to have helped destroy one’s own
nation, the roots of language were, not surprisingly, likewise pruned,
above all in Eumeswil. Loss of history and decay of language are mu-
tual determinants; the Eumenists championed both. They felt called
upon to defoliate language on the one hand and to gain prestige for
slang on the other hand. Thus, down below they robbed the populace
of language and, with it, poetry, on the pretext that they were facilitat-
ing speech; while on the heights they presented their ‘mugs.’” In the
name of emancipation, the poor are denied access to cultural traditions
through educational reforms that keep the elite in power. Jünger’s own
prose is an antidote to these conditions, with its linguistic precision and
his historical knowledge. Still, building on a critique of linguistic de-
cline that derives from Karl Kraus, Jünger presents a tableau in which
this process leads to a society of vast conformism. The preconditions
for this conformism include both the degradation of language and a
systematic elimination of encounters with the past.

The city-state of Eumeswil is the dystopia of the managed society.
Not only do the dictator and his apparatus maintain a system of exten-
sive surveillance, but the inhabitants themselves participate eagerly in
their own oppression. Thus “one often has the impression in Eumeswil that it is not the person but the swarm that answers.” Individualism has disappeared, and if there are answers given they are provided by “swarms,” i.e., the many who act as if they made up part of a mass cohort of animals. At the same time, that mass can be divided and conquered through the powers of technology, through the phonophore, with its explicit class distinctions, and even more through television. The Domo (short for Majordomo), a regular companion of the Condor, recognizes its value: “He also thinks that the best police force, like a good housewife, is the kind that is least spoken of. He is relieved of some of his worries by television; here, too, games and melodramas are more popular than politics. Besides, the masses are thus divided among their households.” A core function of that mass media form was, at least in Jünger’s view, to break up the masses and keep them at home, in front of their screens.

This dispersion and the corresponding conformism in opinion contribute to a depoliticized culture that nonetheless generates broad loyalty to the regime. Opposition is minimal. On the contrary, there is widespread support for the Condor and his regime, despite the lack of freedom and governmental transparency. “Gullibility is the norm; it is the credit on which states live: without it, even their most modest survival would be impossible.” The mendacity of the powers that be, in other words, poses no threat as long as the population remains credulous; if however that popular appreciation were to be lost, if the population were to grow critical, no technology of domination could maintain the regime and its security. [The core issue in the politics of Eumeswil therefore is not the behavior of the sovereign but the acquiescence of the population to the Condor’s rule.] Understanding this apparatus of subordination and navigating among strategies of resistance make up the core of the novel.

Privately, Martin may be the black sheep of the Venator family for having taking up with the dictator. Professionally, he is a historian as well as the night steward at the Casbah. However his primary identity, the self-understanding that he underscores repeatedly, is as the “anarch,” the emphatic individual who refuses any ultimate allegiance, maintaining his inner freedom and always reserving the option to decamp. In the figure of the anarch in Eumeswil, Jünger fashions one more of the major
archetypes in his own oeuvre—after the soldier, the worker, and the forest fleer: this is the “forest rebel” in Jünger’s *The Forest Passage* of 1951, also published by Telos Press. With the anarchist, Jünger has added to the list of existentialist heroes of modern literature, akin to the narrator of Dostoevsky’s *Notes from the Underground*, Kafka’s Joseph K., Camus’ Sisyphus, and the protagonist in Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. “As an anarch, I am determined to go along with nothing, ultimately take nothing seriously—at least not nihilistically, but rather as a border guard in no man’s land, who sharpens his eyes and ears between tides.” Existence is replete with danger; hence the need for perpetual agility: “Such is the role of the anarchist, who remains free of all commitments yet can turn in any direction.” His experience as a historian contributes to this perspective, since looking back across time, like Epimetheus, he understands that all regimes decline. “The special trait making me an anarch is that I live in a world which I ‘ultimately’ do not take seriously. This increases my freedom; I serve as a temporary volunteer.” Every arrangement is only provisional, and with every choice, the anarchist seizes freedom. Martin insists furthermore on distinguishing emphatically between the anarchist and the anarchist. “It is especially difficult to tell the essential from that which is similar to and indeed seems identical with it. This also applies to the anarchist's relation to the anarchist. The latter resembles the man who has heard the alarm but charges off in the wrong direction.” Through their commitment to establishing a new order, anarchists slide into ideology and a repetition of domination; in contrast, the anarchist strategizes to maintain independence in the face of the challenges of existing order. “[The anarchist] is not for or against the law. While not acknowledging the law, he does try to recognize it like the laws of nature, and he adjusts accordingly. When it is hot, you doff your hat; in rain, you open your umbrella; during an earthquake, you leave your house.”

Skepticism toward any regime results in a consistent and radical libertarianism as a political philosophy. “Flags have meaning for him, but not sense.” The anarchist can understand the political exigencies of the moment, and he can even act opportunistically (which is what his father and brother accuse him of doing), but he also understands the provisional status of all political meanings. After a revolution, “the May Day celebrations will survive, but with different meanings. New portraits will head up the processions.” Each new state system develops its
own discourse of propaganda, even as it recycles the symbols of the past. For the anarchist, it is at most a matter of a change of costumes: “For the anarchist, little is changed when he strips off a uniform that he wore partly as fool’s motley, partly as camouflage. It covers his spiritual freedom, which he will objectivate during such transitions.” No doubt sentences like those could be read as retrospective apologetics, Jünger’s reflection on his own personal agility across German regimes during that country’s troubled twentieth century. Yet Martin’s point is somewhat different: in contrast to the anarchist who preserves an internal freedom in situations of duress in order to “objectivate” it when the opportunity develops, the fundamentally ideological anarchist, opposed to this order only for the purposes of establishing another one, ends up making matters worse because, “objectively unfree, [he] starts raging until he is thrust into a more rigorous straitjacket.” That paradoxical inversion, when the activist’s aspiration for freedom flips over into a new oppression, reappears throughout the novel, perhaps most saliently when Martin reflects on the ironic proximity of the death of the famous anarchist Peter Kropotkin in 1921 and the Bolshevik suppression of the Kronstadt revolt, the uprising of sailors and soldiers against the repressive policies of the Leninist regime: “There is a brief intermezzo between the fall of the legitimate powers and the new legality. Two weeks after Kropotkin’s funeral cortege in which his corpse had followed the Black Banners, the sailors of Kronstadt were liquidated.”

This invocation of Kropotkin and Kronstadt takes place in the context of an extended meditation on the history of anarchism and socialism. Thanks to the luminar, Venator can visit Jacob Hippel’s wine garden in Berlin—94 Friedrichstrasse—in the 1840s, where the young Karl Marx engages in verbal battle with the left Hegelians, an Ur-scene of the long conflict between socialism and anarchism. The novel also integrates material from the American anarchist Benjamin Tucker, while it devotes special attention to Max Stirner and his 1845 volume The Ego and Its Own, a foundational text of individualist anarchism. These passages are the crux of Eumeswil as a novel of ideas and a treasure trove for engaging with the nexus of individualism, libertarianism, and anarchy: Martin insists that “my study of anarchy...is my secret focus.”

While the futuristic technology of the luminar brings the reader to the scenes of these historical debates that would turn out to be
foundational for subsequent revolutionary thinking, it also provides Martin with corroborating evidence supporting the melancholy view of the history of permanent dictatorship as the grand narrative of the past. In order to understand the condition of the Condor and his tyranny in Eumeswil, Martin the historian searches for comparable cases: "Through the luminar, I was presented with a wealth of types and also of eras in which these types were concentrated: Greek and especially Sicilian cities, satrapies in Asia Minor; late Roman and Byzantine caesars; Renaissance city-states, including, over and over—on Vigo's behalf as well—Florence and Venice; then the very brief and bloody uprisings of the okhlos, nights of hatchets and long knives; and finally the prolonged dictatorships of the proletariat, with their backgrounds and shadings." Nearly all history was a history of dictatorship, but the scandal of Jünger's listing should not be passed over too quickly: the equation of the Nazi "night of the long knives" with the Communist dictatorship of the proletariat. The thesis of the proximity between the two modes of terror, familiar since Hannah Arendt's Origins of Totalitarianism (1951), remains a provocation for those who may still want to rescue Communism as a good idea just poorly implemented, rather than a fundamentally flawed vision. Martin offers us a more sobering view by equating red and brown terror, framed moreover with the suggestion that both extremisms represent the will of the mob, the okhlos, the oppressive majority as the motor of modern power. Yet we have already heard that in Eumeswil it is the swarm and not the individual who speaks. It is the Condor who rules, no doubt, but is there not also a subjective side, as the Hegelians would have said, a "rule of the swarm"? The compulsory membership in the collective of the class or the race, or the obligatory participation in received opinion forms the structures of unfreedom from which the anarch endeavors to escape—these are the constituents of shared experience in societies that eliminate the space of personal freedom.

As Martin describes this claustrophobic situation, he is suddenly gripped by concern with the threatening possibility of an imminent revolt or some other unspecific political disorder from which he would have to escape. Political danger lurks everywhere, even if it is never specific, and a free-floating anxiety results as well as the desire for some safe haven. The most lyrical passages in Eumeswil invoke scenes of potential
refuge where one might flee to hide and evade the unnamed threat: here Jünger’s prose, for all of its cool intelligence and adventure, gestures toward a utopia of genuine happiness and protection. For example, in a reverie sequence, Martin imagines himself a mouse in the wilds preparing a hideaway for hibernation. “Now let the snow fall; the wolf season was beginning. I could lay myself to rest with drawn knees and a sunken head. My breath would not stir a feather, my heartbeat would be barely perceptible. I was the child in its mother’s womb. Why could this not last forever?” The image of intrauterine safety recalls the paternal threat of the abortion: natural history (the mouse), family history (the parents), and political history (tyranny) converge in the description of escape.

Yet the mouse passage was only Martin’s dream; in fact, he begins to construct a clandestine bunker outside the city, not unlike the mouse’s nest, where he would hope to flee to safety in the case of an uprising or a palace revolt. That his refuge would be located in the forest is consistent with Jünger’s imagery since The Forest Passage: nature as a location of archaic freedom. It follows then that Eumeswil also alludes to a paradigmatic literary flight into nature from the medieval Icelandic saga of Grettir—“the longest forest flight in Iceland was carried out by Grettir, the strongest man on the island: he feared no human being, but he did fear ghosts”—and this Nordic imagery recurs in the vision of a strange island in the ocean with a mysterious “Gray Castle of Transiceland.” Although Eumeswil is placed in a science fiction future, we have already seen how it invokes the distant past of Mediterranean antiquity through the reference to Eumenes; here it is a different archaic stratum, the medieval North that Jünger integrates into his diagnosis of the present.

Martin appears convinced that he will sooner or later be compelled to flee to his bunker. The regime is structurally unstable, not because it is the Condor’s dictatorship—he is hardly the worst tyrant—but because power is always destined to collapse, as the luminal teaches. “The best one can expect is a modest legality—legitimacy is out of the question. The coats of arms have been robbed of their insignia or replaced by flags.” It would be a mistake to treat this remark as a vestigial monarchism nostalgic for a Kaiser, with the legitimacy of a coat of arms, since Martin continues, “Incidentally, it is not that I am awaiting a return to the past, like Chateaubriand, or a recurrence, like Boutefeu; I leave those matters politically to the conservatives and cosmically to the stargazers.”
Eumeswil therefore enters no plea for counterrevolution, but, rather, it appeals to an existential dimension that surpasses the political as it has ever been previously known. “No, I hope for something equal, nay, stronger, and not just in the human domain. Naglfar, the ship of the apocalypse shifts into a calculable position.” Naglfar—from Norse mythology, the ship of the dead who will battle the gods—signifies here a breakthrough into dimensions of freedom beyond political ideologies and regimes.

Yet before he takes refuge in his bunker, Martin receives an invitation to accompany the Condor and his advisors on a “Great Hunt” that will penetrate the ominous forest that lies beyond Eumeswil, specifically as the “Xenophon,” the historian of the expedition—once again, the ancient past erupts in the midst of futuristic vision. Previously the forest simply stood as the extreme alternative to Eumeswil, the unknown beyond. All that we have learned of it comes from accounts provided by Attila, another member of the Condor’s inner circle, who has gone on “ventures beyond the boundaries: into the polar sea, the great deserts, the forest.” The account of Attila’s journey provides more insight into the post-apocalyptic condition of the planet after one of the previous nuclear catastrophes, euphemized as “great devastations.” “The caravan trails were lined with human and animal skeletons. The bones gleamed like opals in the sun; they were calcined. It was not decay that had bleached them. The flesh must have been devoured instantly.” Attila sees “plants and animals, including some that were new to me. A few of them evoked pictures in old fable books, as if a demiurge had patched them together,” suggesting post-nuclear mutations. Then suddenly at the edge of the desert: “The forest stood like a rampart; no axe could ever have touched it. The cataclysm must have intensified the growth of the forest, as if the breath of the fire and the subsequent deluge had liberated its primal energy.” Entering the forest, Attila encounters a world of the imagination realized, bizarre forms of life absolutely beyond the realm of normalcy. “The snakes that traveled the trees overhead were also huge. They seemed neither to glide nor to fly; the edges of their skin were shimmying. They were obviously demonstrating the transition to dragons.” Within the framework of Eumeswil, these bizarre phenomena suggest, on one level, the consequences of nuclear radiation, but the prose also invokes the imagery of hallucinations—Jünger experimented with psychedelic drugs—as well as religious visions: “In a clearing, a
sunbeam fell upon a ramlike shape. Its left front leg was propped on a lamb with a human face. Both dissolved in light as if the vision were too powerful.”

Before departing, Martin pays a final visit to his mentor, Vigo, who encourages him to participate in the expedition. Vigo understands that his protégé has always preferred the forest. Because of his anarchic aspiration to independence, Martin has maintained a subterranean opposition to the normalcy of any regime. While Attila treats the forest as an adventure, and the Domo denigrates it as fiction, Martin understands it as a “passage,” a forest passage to a realm of freedom. Vigo endorses the undertaking with the blessing: “A dream comes true in each of our great transformations. You know this as a historian. We fail not because of our dreams but because we do not dream forcefully enough.” Is the alternative to tyranny the anarchist as dreamer? The “Great Hunt” is the enigma that marks the limits of the novel, the venue of some profoundly different life, a promise of an adventurous alternative.

But Eumeswil has one more surprise for us. In the short epilogue, we learn that years later, Martin has been declared dead, the Condor is long gone, and a new regime has come to power. Cadmo, Martin’s hostile brother, has taken control of the literary legacy, editing some of the writings and adding the final words to the text before us. Since it includes damning comments on himself and their father, Cadmo finds himself in a difficult position. “Reading these pages has thrown me into an inner conflict—between the private man and the historian. My brother did not love his family. Such was his peculiar character. But we loved him. His presentation is larded with judgments and, in my opinion, misjudgments that would justify my burning it as a private person; I have thought about it.” Instead of destroying the pages, however, he acts as the meticulous historian that he is and preserves the documents. Was this an act of restitution to his brother? Did he try to reach out across their political and existential divide? Hardly. Cadmo’s closing gesture is more akin to an assertion of property rights and unmitigated triumph over the deceased. For regarding “these notebooks,” the text of the novel that we hold in our hands, Cadmo does not edit them: he withholds them. “There is an archivist’s conscience to which a man must sacrifice himself. I am submitting to it by sealing these pages and storing them at the institute.”
Martin/Manuel Venator has not returned from the Great Hunt, from the expedition into the imagination, from the pursuit of freedom in a forest passage. In Eumeswil, the city-state, the self-satisfied culture of the tribunes has been reestablished, where the erstwhile advocate of freedom of the press, the brother, consigns Martin's words to the impervious silence of the archive. He has sealed the writings away, ensconced them in an archival tomb, where, he presumes, they can do no harm, raise no doubts, and encourage no pursuit, neither of anarchy nor of art. Yet the text has, inexplicably, escaped that incarceration. We have it before us, Jünger's magnificent novel, *Eumeswil*, a study of tyrannical conformism as well as of the potential for every one of us to pursue very different lives.