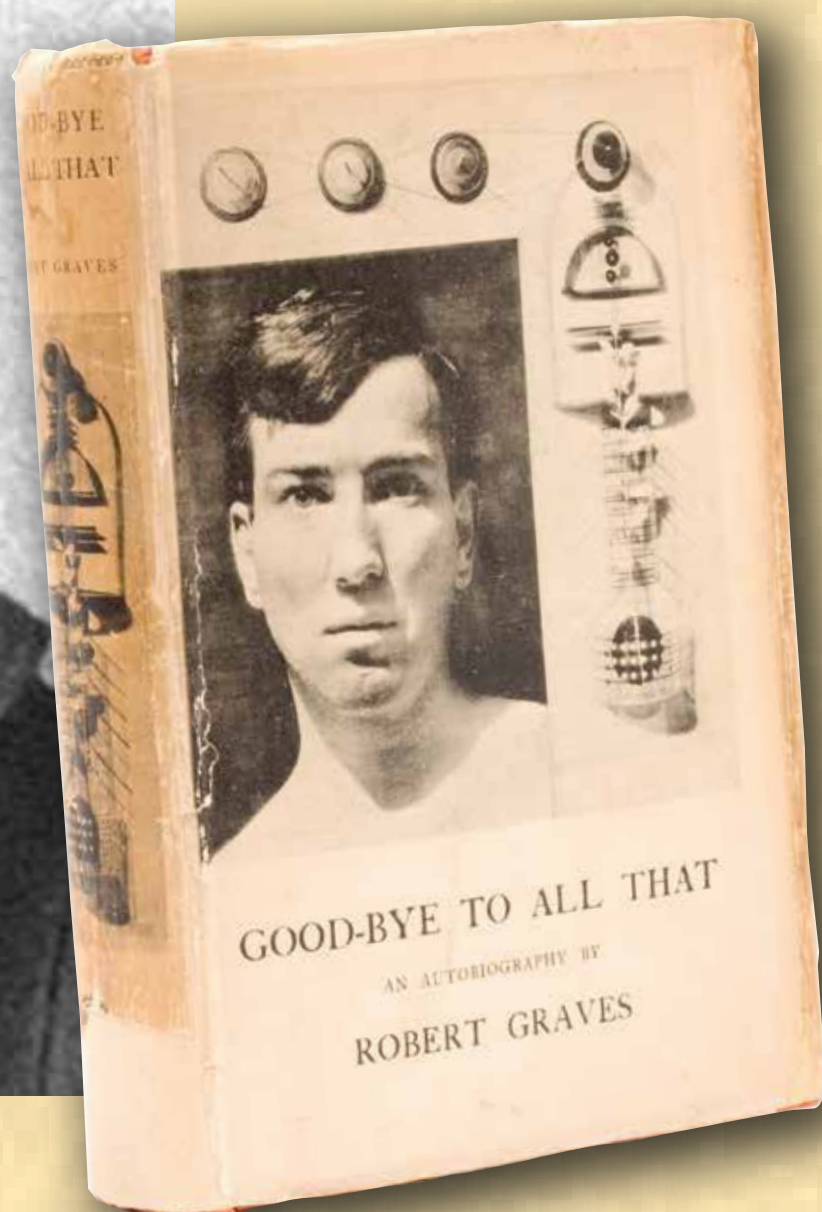


## NOT ONLY POETS ...

## CURSE



**ROBERT GRAVES**  
(1895-1985)



Robert Graves was born to an Irish father and German mother in Wimbledon, London. His father Alfred Perceval Graves was a Gaelic Scholar and poet, his mother Amalie von Ranke Graves was a relation of Rupert von Ranke, one of the founding fathers of modern historical studies.

In August 1914 while studying at Oxford, he enrolled in the British Army and fought in the Battle of Loos. He was injured during the Battle of the Somme in 1916. He was a close friend and fellow-officer of the poet Siegfried Sassoon. He began writing poetry while at school and continued while serving as a British officer on the Western Front. He produced three books of poetry during 1916/1917 – *Over the brazier* (1915), *Goliath and David* (1917) and *Fairies and fusiliers* (1917). However, during the late nineteen twenties he set his poetry aside and it was not published again during his lifetime.

In addition to his poetry he was also a critic, historical novelist and biographer.

World War I, more than any other event changed Grave's life. His memoir *Goodbye to all that* (1929) included a damning account of his World War One experiences. The horror of trench warfare was a crucial experience in his life and he remained deeply affected by the war for at least ten years after its end. Poetry became his substitute for the orthodox religion of his parents and he believed that he had been spared during the War to fulfil his destiny as a poet.

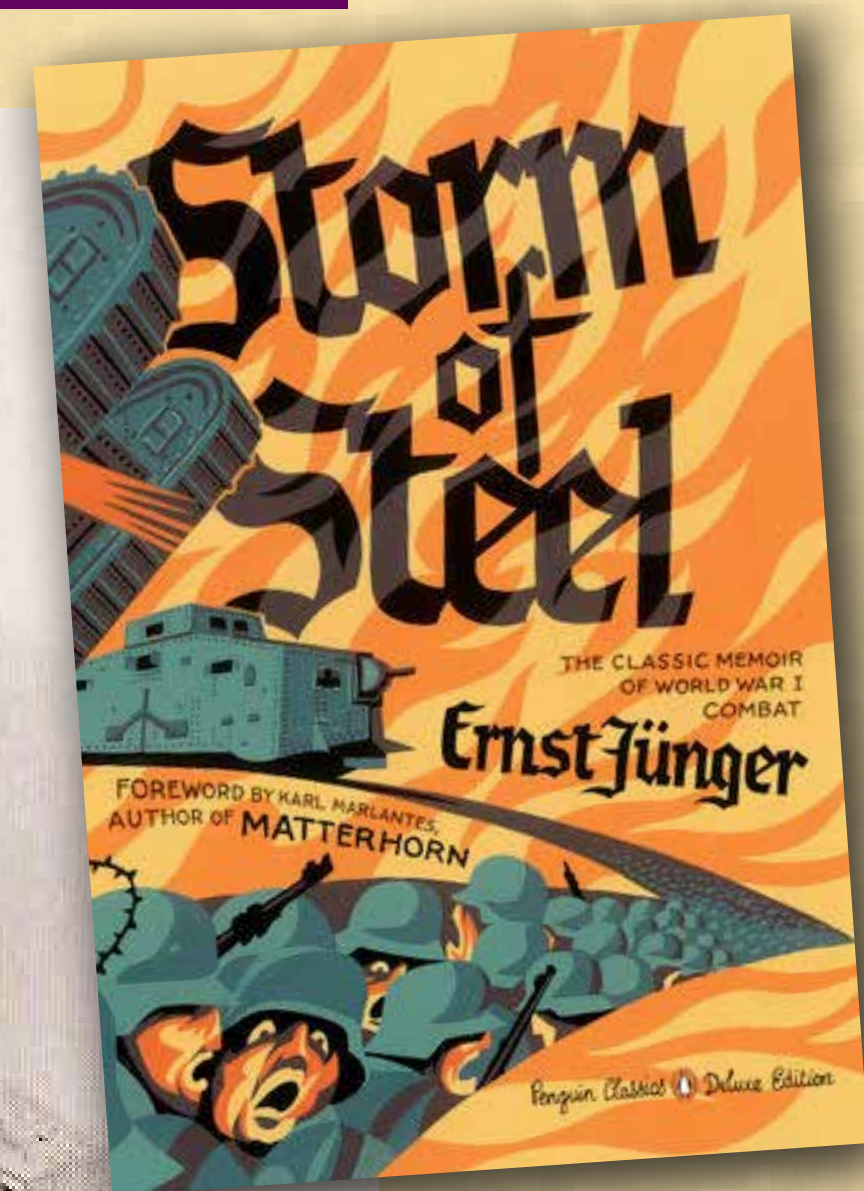
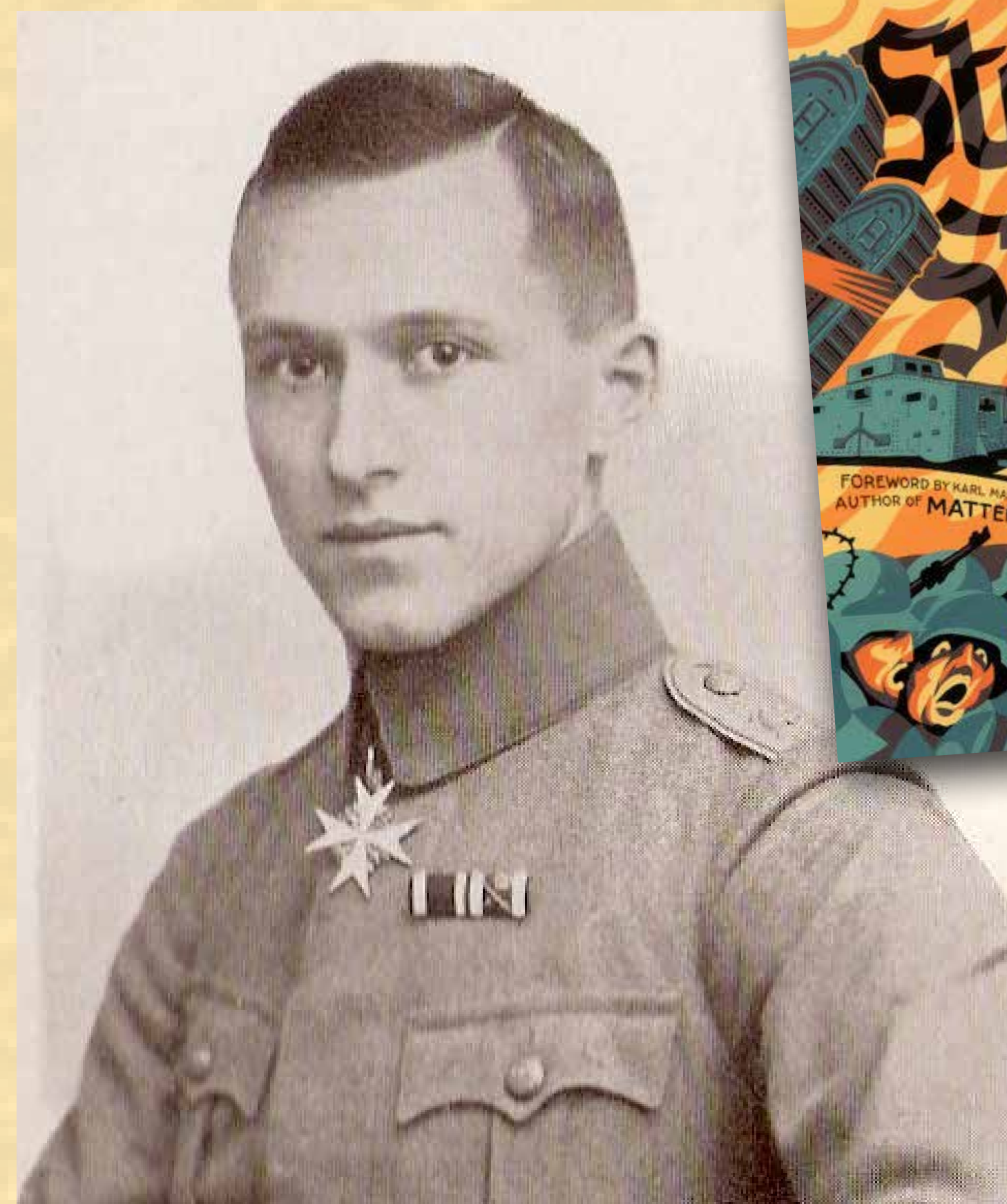
**A Dead Boche** – here a British soldier (Graves himself) is trying to get across the notion that the product of war is not glory or victory instead it is death and destruction. The second stanza begins with a horrific description of a dead German soldier. He describes him as sitting against a shattered tree:-

*He scowled and stunk  
With clothes and face a sodden green,  
Big-bellied, spectacled, crop-harried,  
Dribbling black blood from nose and beard."*

**It's a Queer Time** – this poem describes the atmosphere in the trenches, he is writing of the sounds and images of battle:-

*It's hard to know if you're alive or dead  
When steel and fire go roaring through your head.  
Traversing, mowing heaps down half in fun  
The next, you choke and clutch at your right breast—*

He made the island of Majorca his home and lived there until his death in 1985.



**Ernst Jünger**  
(1895-1998)

Ernst Jünger was a German novelist and essayist, an ardent militarist who was one of the most complex and contradictory figures in German literature. The son of a successful businessman and chemist, Jünger rebelled against his affluent upbringing and in 1913 joined the French Foreign Legion. His father had him brought back to Germany where he joined the German army in 1914 at the outbreak of war. He served as an officer on the Western Front throughout the war.

As a soldier Junger was conspicuous for his bravery and wounded at least seven times. An ill-fated German offensive in 1918 ended his career with the last and most serious of his many woundings. He was awarded the Pour Le Merité medal – Germany's highest military honour in 1918, its youngest ever recipient.

After the war his memoir, based on his handwritten diaries, *Storm of steel* (1920) was published. It is a notably unconstructed book which sets no context for the author or his experiences. There is nothing in it about the politics of the war, nothing even on the outcome. However, it contains vivid recollections of his life in the trenches and his experiences in combat as a company commander.

An entry on August 28, 1916, written during the Somme battle, reads:

"This area was meadows and forests and cornfields just a short time ago. There's nothing left of it, nothing at all...

And everything full of corpses who have been turned over a hundred times. Whole lines of soldiers are lying in front of the positions, our passages are filled with corpses lying over each other in layers."

In a dispassionate, matter-of-fact voice, Jünger describes the heroism and suffering displayed by himself and his fellow soldiers in the brutal fighting on the Western Front.

"And still, the heroic, grand impression given by this endless passage of death uplifts and strengthens us survivors. As strange as it may sound, here you become reacquainted with ideals, the total devotion to an ideal right up to the gruesome death in battle," he wrote on July 3, 1916.

In it he attempts to make sense of his war experiences but he also glorifies war as a purifying test of individual and national strength.

*The Storm of Steel* was a success with critics and public alike in Germany and other countries.

He was discharged from the army in 1923 and went on to study zoology and botany at the Universities of Leipzig and Naples. He continued to publish further memoirs of his war experiences, *The Grove* (1925) *Fire and blood* (1925). This writing, with its attack on bourgeois culture and "civility," played into the prejudices of the Nazis. However, he rebuffed repeated wooing by Hitler's party, refusing the offer of a seat in the Reichstag in 1927 and, after Hitler seized power in 1933, membership in the Nazified German Academy and he lived until 1998.