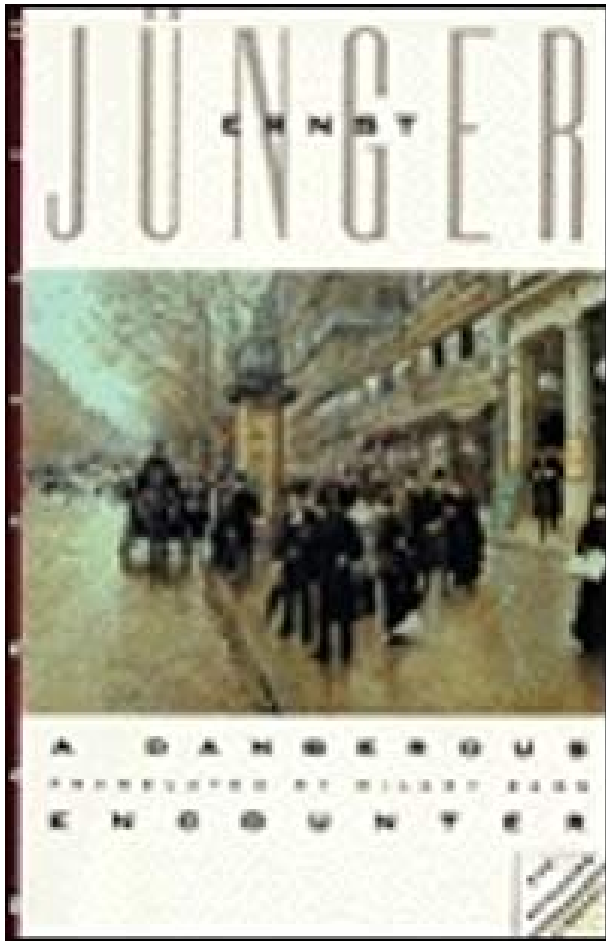


A Dangerous Encounter



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Toward the end of the nineteenth century, on a crisp autumn Sunday in Paris, a dreamy young man named Gerhard takes a solitary stroll. Handsome and well-bred, with a comfortable embassy job, he seems perfectly poised to continue his predictable ascent in society. Yet a fateful naivete and a mysterious timidity lie twined at the root of his soul, choking off his engagement with life and making him as vulnerable to its dangers as a sleepwalker. A chance encounter with Leon Duchase, a jaded and dyspeptic aesthete, draws Gerhard into a new orbit - the gamy underside of Paris, a vortex of eroticism, twisted passions, and crime. Duchase quickly maneuvers him into a liaison with an unstable married woman. As the would-be lovers sit hand in hand in a seedy hotel, Gerhard witnesses the stabbing murder of a young ballerina. Junger's trap is sprung: after luring us (like Gerhard himself) into the languorous world of decadent pleasure, he plunges the reader into a crackling detective novel, complete with an engagingly metaphysical investigator. The surprising twists of the plot are haunted at every turn by the presence of Jack the Ripper, whose crimes on the other side of the Channel have spread fear throughout the city.

Nothing Junger writes is without allegorical overtones, and in *A Dangerous Encounter* he gives us, along with a novel of great narrative zest and acute psychological penetration, a portrait of a culture's loss of innocence as

it stands at the brink of the twentieth century. That Junger can succeed so simply, yet so forcefully, and on so many levels at once, is a testament to a major modern artist working at the peak of his powers.