



# NEGOTIATING INTIMACY IN THE SHADOW OF WAR (FRANCE, 1914–1920s)

## New Perspectives in the Cultural History of World War I

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Paris, 11 November 1920, at dawn: a substantial crowd converged on the Place Denfert-Rochereau, still engulfed by fog. Several hours later, the crowd would accompany the casket of the Unknown Soldier to the Panthéon. An initial ceremony took place here, in which the heart of Léon Gambetta, one of the founding fathers of the Third Republic, was interred in an urn. The ceremony thus established a symbolic link between Gambetta and the soldiers of the Great War. The procession then re-formed at the beginning of the rue Soufflot and crossed the width of Paris, reaching the avenue des Champs-Élysées and the Arc de Triomphe, where the Unknown Soldier was finally laid to rest.

The emotion that many people felt that November day stemmed from the weight of collective mourning that had haunted French society since the war, but also from the weight of the individual family dramas resulting from the war. During the ceremony at the Panthéon, a symbolic family accompanied the casket of the Unknown Soldier. This family consisted of a father and mother, as well as a widow and an orphan. They were strangers to each other, unrelated by blood, but all four were mourning a loved one whose body had never been recovered from the battlefield. “This dead man who will pass by—he is the child of an entire country in tears, the child of all those who wait no longer for the impossible return of a departed son,” a journalist for *L’Illustration* explained.<sup>1</sup>

The “Great War,” as it began to be called in 1915, was not only a major conflict on a worldwide scale. It was a traumatic event in the life of everyone who lived through it, a war that like no other before left its scars on the intimacy of every family circle. For several decades, in light of Philippe Ariès’s





pioneering work, historians have studied changes in public and private space. They then explored the shaping of various forms of intimacy, thanks to the unearthing of personal archives and to a new interest in the writing of the self. Intimacy is what lies at the core of a person: the inner space where self-image is formed, through the body and gestures; the inner space where relationships to others are shaped, through ties of blood and affection and through the memories with which we endow places and objects. Only recently has the social and cultural history of World War I made use of these methodological gains. Although a vast corpus of testimonial literature exists for the Great War, it took until the 1990s for the study of public opinion to lead to an analysis of collective mentalities, and then, individual sensibilities during the conflict.<sup>2</sup> Historians subsequently developed new areas of research—the history of the suffering body,<sup>3</sup> the experience of death and of inflicting death, the sexuality of soldiers and civilians, hatred of the enemy, religious feeling—all revealing the breadth of the upheavals created by World War I.

This history of intimacy is fragile. This is due to the very nature of the documentation used (war diaries, letters, soldiers' memoirs, novels, and short stories), to the evanescent quality of the traces of war, to the risk of misinterpreting what is left unsaid in source materials, or to the anachronistic attribution of psychological traits and social practices from our own time to events of the past.<sup>4</sup> In France, the development of the cultural history of the Great War has gone hand in hand with debates over whether testimonial literature about the war can be considered a viable source material, and how it should be used by scholars.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, if we admit that methodological debates such as these are the necessary condition for opening up new perspectives, the history of intimacy revitalizes our understanding of the Great War all the more profoundly.

The First World War was not only the first global conflict, but a true anthropological turning point,<sup>6</sup> for it exposed combatants on the battlefield to never-before seen levels of violence, resulted in an enormous number of survivors to mourn without a body to grieve over, and raised new and strange questions for an entire generation of veterans about their ability to reconnect with private life following the war. While military history has restricted the study of the Great War to 1914–1918, a consideration of the conflict's impact on intimacy must extend past these strict chronological limits into an endless mourning period that carried on from generation to generation in family memories.

### **A History of Intimacy: New Objects of Study, New Approaches**

Analyzing intimacy in wartime means first taking stock of the social and cultural upheaval that World War I left in its wake, and going beyond the numerical approach that has long dominated scholarly work on the war's demographic history.<sup>7</sup> The most important aspect of large-scale death does not





lie in military casualties or in a subsequent imbalance in the population pyramid, but in the wide scale of mourning that people were plunged into, and this has been the focus of the new cultural history of the Great War for the past twenty years.<sup>8</sup> Whether their work addresses war memorials, mourning rituals, or visits to battlefields after the war, specialists of the cultural history of World War I emphasize the breadth of the shock wave that affected all the belligerent nations, particularly France, over the course of several generations.<sup>9</sup>

No family was spared. The abundance of mourning clothes worn in public during and after the war attests to this. Whether war widows, orphans, or parents of soldiers killed in action, an entire society spent its days dressed in dark colors, with a subtle gradation evolving from deep black to light gray with the passing of time. The aged mourned the young, often many times over. Parents mourned the loss of several sons; women mourned the loss of a fiancé, of more than one friend. In a magnificent, posthumously published work about her mother Jeanne, the eminent French scholar of Antiquity Jacqueline de Romilly describes this succession of losses during the Great War: "You have to imagine that for Jeanne, everything was falling apart. Her husband would never return, nor would her younger brother Pierre, who was killed on 18 September 1914, two weeks before my father. Only, I don't know how long it took for her to find out. Doubtless less time than with my father, such that further disaster seemed like a heightened possibility, with the pain of mourning two losses occurring so closely together. The Colonel's two sons, my father's two friends, also died very early on. Whereas the other Pierre, my father's brother, survived until the end, only to be killed as the Armistice was being signed."<sup>10</sup>

Another indicator of this widespread grief was omnipresence of memories of the dead in family conversations. In a short autobiography published in 1987, the historian Raoul Girardet, born in 1917, poignantly testifies to this: "As for the dead themselves, they remained strangely present. They were the ones we heard mentioned almost daily in adults' conversations: a husband, a son, a brother, a cousin, 'killed in Champagne,' 'killed in the Épargés,' 'killed in the Argonne.' It was also their faces—such young faces—that we saw as soon as we entered a friend's house: on a table, on a chest of drawers, frozen in what was then the dignity of the ritual of having a photograph taken. Smiling or thoughtful, with a short, well-trimmed mustache, sometimes hunched up in the stiffness of a uniform that was still brand new."<sup>11</sup>

Contrary to the nineteenth-century customs observed when someone died surrounded by family, the war put an end to all the procedures in preparation for mourning. It abolished the rites of separation that went along with the first moments of loss: the clock that was stopped, the curtains that were drawn, the keeping watch over the body.<sup>12</sup> But what especially cut at the heart of mourners' pain was the absence of bodies to grieve over, since they remained on the battlefield. In France, families had to wait until passage of the law of 31 July 1920, and until the governmental decree of 28 September 1920,





in order for the repatriation of bodies to begin—and even then, only a third of some 700,000 bodies could be identified. More than 600,000 others were simply lost in the chaos of battle, ripped apart by shells, swallowed up in the mud, or abandoned for too long in No Man's Land. In these circumstances, the burial ceremony for the Unknown Soldier on 11 November 1920, took on considerable importance. That day, all the dead returned home, including those of whom nothing remained. It is for good reason that the cultural history of the Great War reminds us of the role played by the body in the experience of a new degree of violence in war: mutilated bodies<sup>13</sup> or bodies poisoned by mustard gas<sup>14</sup> represented traces of World War I's brutality; the raped bodies of French or Belgian women were symbols of the homeland invaded and soiled in 1914;<sup>15</sup> the destroyed bodies of the dead were metaphors of absence and endless mourning.<sup>16</sup>

The violence of war rendered the distinction between public and private space a fragile one, which could no longer serve as a screen to block out the brutality of the outside world. Beginning in the 1830s, a new way of organizing private living space took shape in Western Europe.<sup>17</sup> This expansion of intimacy had various forms: the specialization of spaces within private homes, the valorization of the couple and the nuclear family, growing intolerance of lack of privacy and bad smells,<sup>18</sup> the search for times and places “for oneself.”<sup>19</sup> A distinction must of course be made here between urban and rural Europe, which did not evolve at the same pace. Nonetheless, by bringing together so many bodies in close proximity, the trenches—as a long-term way of life and not the simple defensive system of the American Civil War or the Boer War<sup>20</sup>—forced many soldiers to accept living conditions that had become intolerable for them. The preservation of intimacy, of a private space, was profoundly threatened in the trenches.

Mud infiltrated everything, swallowed up dead bodies and threatened to drown the living. “Membranes have become permeable: the skin can no longer separate the inside and the outside, the self and the world,” as the historian Santanu Das notes.<sup>21</sup> The key idea here is that of the threshold: thresholds between interior and exterior, thresholds in degrees of intimacy, thresholds between bearable and unbearable—which varied according to the individuals, social frameworks, and in all likelihood, the social groups being studied. Soldiers often seemed to sink into war step by step, by successively renouncing those things that were part of their life before the war.<sup>22</sup> The French ethnologist Robert Hertz, a student of Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, was doubtless one of the most perspicacious observers of the elimination of intimacy in the trenches.<sup>23</sup> The lack of privacy, the permanent feeling of danger, the absence of personal hygiene, life with rats, vermin, and cadavers were all new ordeals for him and his comrades in arms. In the correspondence that he maintained with his wife Alice until his death near Verdun in April of 1915, he carefully noted the changes that the war introduced into soldiers' sensibilities: the suffering caused by the lack of hygiene and by the rigors





of the climate, the way that the soldiers had to deal with a new world of sound.<sup>24</sup> “This was something that was to accompany us all through the war, that habit of jumping at any sudden and unexpected noise,” noted the German writer Ernst Junger. “Whether it was a train clattering past, a book falling to the floor or a shout in the night—on each occasion, the heart would stop with a sense of mortal dread.”<sup>25</sup> Soldiers got into the habit of keeping their ears open for the trajectory of shells, identifying each kind by the sound it made. Henri Barbusse, in a letter to his wife, wrote: “To the deafening sound of dry, dull, strident explosions stretched out on all sides by echoes, were added the whistles and bangs of bullets and the blast of passing shells: roars and wails, very precisely, and the wheezing of locomotives moving at top speed.”<sup>26</sup> The Great War required an entire re-ordering of the hierarchy of the senses: sight, touch, and smell were confined to the maze of the trenches, with its nebulous outlines, but conversely, the sense of hearing was sharpened, since it was the only way to discern danger in a world of reduced visibility.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, a kind of physical well-being went along with this outdoor life. Robert Hertz, for example, accepted the lack of private space, which seemed to him the price to pay for discovering a new world and new sensations. He expressed thus his astonishment at the physical toughness he was acquiring in war: “More recently, I had a little sore throat that in civilian life I might have perhaps called an infection.” To read the work of this French ethnographer is to realize that life in the trenches brought along with it not so much a loss of private space as a kind of re-creation of the personal world of each soldier. Hertz admired his fellow soldiers’ ability to develop the know-how that allowed them to better adapt to the war. Whether focusing on art created in the trenches, on soldiers’ spirituality, or on their letters home, the latest work of historians confirms the capacity of soldiers in the Great War to maintain a personal identity in the face of the profoundly dehumanizing experience of war.<sup>28</sup>

During the long waiting periods that defined life on the front lines, soldiers tried to stave off boredom in a multitude of ways, especially by recycling the material world of the war—casings and fragments of shells—into artisanal objects like rings, vases, and crucifixes. These personal creations were full of nostalgia for a lost world, as in the case of the erotic sculptures in the Chauffour grotto in the Oise *département*.<sup>29</sup> They also expressed the hope of soon returning to the (clearly idealized) pre-war world, as did the embroidery done by a prisoner of war, Wéllèle: it shows him welcomed home by his wife and little daughter, in a house typical of the countryside of northern France, while at the same time a series of dates in the embroidery—1914-1915-1916-1917-1918—marks the endless length of his captivity.<sup>30</sup> This rediscovery and analysis of material culture, along with the development of battlefield archaeology<sup>31</sup> and with the creation of museums such as the Museum of the Great War in Péronne, in the Somme,<sup>32</sup> offers a fascinating perspective on the conditions in which soldiers had to renegotiate intimacy and privacy, whether in spatial or emotional terms.





The same is true of war photography. We know that the use of cameras in combat zones was strictly forbidden unless previously authorized, for reasons of military security. Private photographs thus represent a deliberate transgression of military authority, yet a relatively large number were taken.<sup>33</sup> While fighting on the Vosges front between 1915 and 1918, private Marcel Felsler managed to photograph several dozens of his fellow soldiers: close friends, comrades-in-arms, a cigarette between their fingers, or busy with artisanal creations, or at table around a meal, their images captured during a moment of calm. The rigidity of the pre-war photographic ritual, with its serious faces and solemn poses, disappeared somewhat in the exceptional circumstances of the war. Moments of sharing, momentary escapes from the war, the photographs—carefully preserved by soldiers or sent to their families—speak of the re-creation of intimacy in the company of fellow soldiers.<sup>34</sup>

Threats to private space and intimacy, which were unavoidable in the trenches, also weighed on civilians. Their experience of war has been misunderstood for a long time, and has recently been the subject of several important studies, as much in the context of the 1914 invasion as in that of the occupation.<sup>35</sup> Rural and urban areas destroyed by battles, pillaged houses, family heirlooms scattered at the will of invasions and occupations—all of these things left lasting traces of what the war meant, of the extent of its assaults on the body, on domestic spaces, on everyday objects. In describing destroyed houses, numerous witnesses compared them to mutilated bodies, as if to underscore that they were not only material goods but fragments of one's identity. In this way, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabriel Hanotaux recalled his home *département* of the Aisne and its "desert of broken-down walls, of gaping windows, of facades that let black tears fall down their faces in the rain drowning them."<sup>36</sup>

The violence of modern warfare therefore reached all the way into private or intimate space. It was even sometimes deliberately aimed at such space. It is not by chance that in phases of invasion or withdrawal, unstable and dangerous periods, armies spent their fury by attacking houses on the inside, soiling them with excrement or vandalizing them, as the German army did during the conquest of Belgium and Northern France in the summer of 1914 and during its defeat in the fall of 1918.<sup>37</sup> Through the deliberate degradation of what belonged to the enemy, soldiers emphasized the distance between national identities. The enemy became the object of revulsion and disgust. Group boundaries were re-affirmed. What remains to be written here is a history of defilement, which, as the anthropologist David Le Breton explains, "constitutes a real or symbolic threat to a sense of identity,"<sup>38</sup> along with its corollary, a history of disgust.<sup>39</sup>

Testifying under oath before a French commission charged with investigating the crimes of the German army, a French lieutenant colonel described his arrival in the Château de Bauzemont, in the Meurthe-et-Moselle *département*, on 21 October 1914: "The castle's rooms were in an indescribably dirty



state. In the billiard room in particular, a large amount of fecal matter was spread over the floor..."<sup>40</sup> The mayor of Sempigny, in the Oise *département*, made the same observation when he came back to his village in the spring of 1917, after it had been evacuated by German troops: "The houses had been left in revoltingly dirty state. There was garbage everywhere, excrement in the furniture drawers, in the armoires, and even in our milk jug."<sup>41</sup> Anthropologists rightly emphasize the close connections among various forms of violence during periods of invasion: the destruction of homes, the destruction of cemeteries, and sexual violence against women. All target the enemy in its most private aspect, by harming both the memory of families and their lineage.<sup>42</sup>

In 1915, the American novelist Edith Wharton received authorization to visit the Meurthe-et-Moselle *département* in order to participate in the distribution of food and medical supplies. She was able to enter a variety of houses, and in an article written for *Scribner's Magazine*, she described the deliberate damage done to them by the invading armies: "The photographs on the walls, the twigs of withered box above the crucifixes, the old wedding-dresses in brass-clamped trunks, the bundles of letters laboriously written and as painfully deciphered, all the thousand and one bits of the past that give meaning and continuity to the present—of all that accumulated warmth nothing was left but a brick-heap and some twisted stove-pipes!"<sup>43</sup> To attack homes—spaces that surround people, protect them, and contain their memories—is to stamp them indelibly with the conquerors' mark and assault the inhabitants' very identity. The beds that formerly welcomed the inhabitants' bodies were now deliberately soiled.<sup>44</sup> Mantel clocks and grandfather clocks were broken: the stopped time marked forever the moment of destruction.<sup>45</sup> The desecration of domestic space, a space of conviviality and hospitality, also made the return to intimacy more difficult.

Different modes of resistance emerged in reaction to these acts of aggression. When domestic spaces were threatened, people clung more tightly to objects, which were hidden or taken into exile in the hope of preserving some part of prewar life. Forced displacement during periods of invasion sent floods of refugees out on the road, taking mattresses and furniture with them, even when such encumbrances risked slowing them down in their flight. Lacking much material value, these fragments of a past life acquired a strong symbolic value: they spoke of the warmth, if not the comfort of prewar life, the promise of recreating domestic space in exile, and doubtless, over the long term, the dream of returning home. "It was not rare to see a household with no clothes except what they had on, dragging with them a sack full of various kinds of embroidered linen: tea doilies, placemats, piano covers, table centerpieces, nightdresses with Richelieu embroidery, pocket squares, bed sheets, and napkins embroidered in *fil tiré*," remarked the sub-prefect of Blanc, in the Indre *département*, who saw refugees from the north pass by in 1914. "It was not a costly item from a department store, it was not an antique knick-knack that the woman of the house chose as a souvenir of the home that she might never



return to; it was the table linen and bed linen, which spoke of all the intimacy of life up to that point."<sup>46</sup>

Lastly, along with the radicalization of war in the twentieth century, there was an increased surveillance of everything having to do with private space, whether surveillance by the State or by other socializing institutions such as churches and other associations. Anything that risked obstructing the general mobilization was identified and taken under control. Various kinds of "personal time" were perceived as time stolen from the cause; the organization of soccer matches, the operating hours of theaters, music halls, and cafés were all carefully regulated in the name of respect for morale. The promotion of self-discipline in matters of food was an integral part of the economic mobilization. The roles assigned to each age group were redefined. The case of children, as several recent studies indicate, is particularly telling.<sup>47</sup> Children ultimately were the focal point of attention, both because they embodied the future and because they symbolized the continuity of French society. Children were made part of the war effort via a diffusion of the culture of war in the schools, although it is not easy to evaluate the true impact this might have had on children.<sup>48</sup>

Any threat to the patriarchal status quo or to sexual morality also came under fire. This "politicization of the body," evident in all societies at war but especially so in the context of total war, took various forms: the reaffirmation of gender roles via war propaganda, the call for the denunciation of immoral practices, the condemnation of adultery, the expansion of family policy, the strict regulation of prostitution.<sup>49</sup> The focus on sexualized bodies (more so on women's than men's) and on controlling their drive is a good indicator of dangers and tensions in wartime: the feeling of a loss of manhood in soldiers, suffering as they did from the separation from their loved ones and from the fear of adultery, fear of the loss of privacy, of displaced peoples on the move, venereal disease. In certain cases, the war was perceived as an opportunity for moralizing. On the family policy front, victory was played out in such a way that re-populating the country became a national duty.<sup>50</sup>

### Letters and the Construction of Intimacy

Wartime puts men and women at a distance. It also separates family members and groups of friends.<sup>51</sup> It gives paramount importance to written correspondence, that privileged link between the front lines and the home front in the case of World War I, especially during the first months of the conflict, when soldiers had not yet accrued leave.<sup>52</sup> In combat zones, letters were waited for, read, and re-read, sometimes learned by heart; they were carefully treasured, kept close to the body, in shirt and jacket pockets, like relics of another life. They had their own materiality: smells, mud stains, ink stains, blood stains. They were delivered to soldiers in the heart of the chaos of the front lines, opening a window onto somewhere else, another temporality and other







places. Mail delivery at the front was a sacred ritual that gave some rhythm to the extreme slowness and boredom of military life. Soldiers took advantage of periods of inactivity in order to write back to their loved ones, to reassure them, to manage their affairs and property from a distance. In all these respects, World War I does not differ from other conflicts, except that it represents a distinct turning point in the history of letter writing, especially in France. Without a doubt, the French had never before written to each other so much. According to some estimates, nearly a million letters were sent daily to the French Army alone.<sup>53</sup> The records of the Army Chief of Staff tell us that three to four million letters traveled between the front lines and the home front every day.

Of course, several interpretations of this widespread social practice are possible. On a global scale, the impressive number of letters written and received illustrates the profound literacy of European societies before the outbreak of the Great War, the place of writing in the public sphere, and finally, how a practice formerly limited to the educated classes became commonplace. Thanks to the exceptional source that is the *contrôle postal aux armées*, soldiers' letters give us a precise view of the way troops' morale evolved during the conflict.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the letters allow us to explore the changing relationships of couples and the expression of feelings in the period 1914–1918, provided that homogenous documentary sources are used over the long term<sup>55</sup> and provided that one does not succumb to the illusion that people express themselves openly and without any reserve in their letters.<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, letter writing is a social practice with its own set of codes, and its rules are well known: at the beginning of the letter, a reminder of the conditions in which the letter is being written; references to feelings of absence, frustration, and missing loved ones; attempts to make up for the distance by means of the letter being sent.<sup>57</sup> In wartime, furthermore, letter writing is subject to the double constraint of military censorship and self-censorship, which prevents soldiers from revealing in much detail the violence of combat, in order to spare their families. The letters that the novelist Henri Barbusse wrote to his wife Hélyonne, daughter of the Parnassian poet Catulle Mendès, give a good example of this. In early January 1915, Barbusse's regiment took part in the battle of Crouy, in the Soissons sector. On the 11<sup>th</sup>, when fierce combat was at its height, he wrote: "For two days—yesterday and the day before—there really hasn't been any way [to write to you], since we have been so busy in the trenches this time ... At the present moment, we're still really being bumped around." On the 14<sup>th</sup>, Barbusse limited himself to noting that "the week was rather intense." It was only on the 25<sup>th</sup>, under pressure from his wife's questions, that he admitted reluctantly: "we had, in the end, in our section, one man out of every two knocked out."<sup>58</sup>

The way soldiers spoke was rarely used in letters addressed to civilians. It was a "fresh idiom," crude and coarse, as Paul Fussell has called it in regard to the Second World War,<sup>59</sup> a language forged in order to seal the bond between





comrades-in-arms. Soldiers experienced a kind of bilingualism, which points to the existence of two intertwined identities: the slang of the trenches between brothers-in-arms, and the language of civilians in their epistolary relationships with the home front. In the same way that objects of war such as shells and cartridges were re-fashioned by the soldiers into jewelry, crucifixes, or vases and then sent to their families, the soldiers' words underwent a similar metamorphosis before being used in letters home.

More fundamentally, following the conclusions of the historian Odile Roynette, the soldiers were often "little inclined to expressing confidences or to opening up, conforming in this way to the models of a taciturn virility, rooted in them by their upbringing, military training, and the ordeals of combat."<sup>60</sup> France's mobilization for war took place through the exaltation of manliness and courage, the repression of sentimentalism, and the disapproval of expressing private emotions openly, since the collective interest took precedence. Not only did the war take up the masculine behavioral codes refined in the nineteenth century, it heightened them by stigmatizing those who were the most fragile or emotional.<sup>61</sup> What must then be deciphered in letters from the wartime years are the strategies put into play by soldiers for expressing their emotions without contravening the dominant model of virility. Feelings about brothers-in-arms that could not be spoken—worry for a wounded man, the pain felt when a friend died—were more easily expressed for the animals that accompanied soldiers into combat zones, particularly horses, comrades in misfortune in the hell of the trenches. Describing animal suffering, such as the agony of wounded horses on the battlefield, seems to be their way of talking about the experience of war, using the physical proximity of animals and soldiers in combat zones, and humanizing domesticated animals. Soldiers grieved for their horses, openly expressing sorrow for wounded animals and violently condemning the harsh treatment they suffered.<sup>62</sup>

The most recent work on wartime correspondence has given us more complete versions of soldiers' letters, breaking with an editorial tradition that expurgated their most personal aspects. The correspondence between Paul and Marie Pireaud, published by Martha Hanna, offers some superb passages describing the pain of absence and of missing the beloved's body: "How I long to come back home to taste once again those caresses that you promised me and to forget, as you put it, the rest of the world. I am holding on to your letters and if you do not keep your promises, I will show them to you and remind you that you promised to make me a truly happy man," wrote Paul.<sup>63</sup> In another register, the correspondence between Constant and Gabrielle M., recently published by Jean-Yves Le Naour, expresses sexual desire in a very crude way. This couple from the Jura, married since 1904, experienced war as a physical separation, as a painful lack of intimacy that progressively transformed their exchange of letters, from June 1915 until Constant's death in Salonika in 1916, into a kind of erotic game where the vocabulary of sex was used in all its forms, in all its diversity, with spectacular vigor and inventive-





ness.<sup>64</sup> Intimacy here was perceived as a sort of horizon of the future. Perhaps their intimacy would even be renewed, reinvigorated by the experience of war? Would lovers love better, more passionately, when they reunited after the war?

At most, the marital correspondences of the Great War renegotiated the “epistolary pact” codified in the nineteenth century, as described in detail by Roger Chartier.<sup>65</sup> They constructed intimacy in the midst of the trenches, where a collective lifestyle prevailed.<sup>66</sup> Whereas couples writing letters in peacetime staged the very conditions in which the letter was written (the writer alone in a room of the house, imagining away the absence of the beloved), the soldier described the moment when he took up the pen as time stolen from the war and from the overwhelming presence of his comrades-in-arms. “Here I am again next to you, for since I am unoccupied, I would consider my day ill spent if I did not approach this pitiful piece of paper in order to chat with you for a moment,” wrote Marcelin Prosper Foirac, a farmer from Quercy, at the beginning of a letter to his wife Joséphine.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, because they circulated within the heart of the family sphere, letters doubtless contributed to strengthening the bonds between those who waited feverishly at home for news of their loved ones.<sup>68</sup> The historian Michelle Perrot has an excellent way of putting it: letters were “the lifeblood of families.”<sup>69</sup>

But this epistolary pact also had its limits, and most soldiers were aware of them: the impossibility of managing the domestic sphere from a distance, the anguish men felt at being deprived of their traditional role, the fear of infidelity and adultery, and more fundamentally, a feeling of mutual incomprehension that inevitably left its mark on the relationships between soldiers and civilians. How could war be described to civilians who had never left their home village or region? How could the countryside destroyed by combat be compared to the countryside in peacetime? The climate of one’s area of origin to the harshness of winter or heat waves spent in the trenches? The language of wartime letters is made up of compromises and approximations. No one was fooled by it; most people accepted it, most of the time. “What mud, what mire, what night marches in the ditches! You cannot imagine,” wrote Henri Barbusse in a letter to his wife. “It’s impossible to give you an idea. You have to see it,” a young Marcel Papillon confirmed in a letter to his parents.<sup>70</sup> The postwar transition period would be, then, a key moment in reconstructing identities and redefining the ways in which intimacy functioned—a moment when those who had been separated had to learn to live together again, without the mediation of the written word.

### **Renegotiating Intimacy After Returning from the War**

When they came home, veterans and civilian refugees sometimes had to face the terrible realization that next to nothing remained of the life they had





known. "The land is inaccessible, the roads are blocked, the bridges broken, the pathways diverted," according to the testimony of the historian Gabriel Hano-taux, originally from the Aisne, a *département* that had been almost 90 percent destroyed by the end of World War I. Of his family home, "nothing remained: everything had been pillaged before the fire. I took up a square of faience and said to my family when I went home: here's your house."<sup>71</sup> Reconstruction must then begin: post-war periods inevitably hesitate between modernization and *reconstitution* (the term used by those who lived through the Great War). Whenever any reconstruction proved impossible, the victims of disaster often kept with them the key to their old house, a photograph, or a blueprint.

Sometimes, carrying on a name was a sign of the attempt to cope with the loss of a loved one, in keeping with the tradition of honoring the memory of the deceased. People readily named newborns after someone who had died in the war. This was the case with the philosopher Louis Althusser, baptized with the name of his mother's first fiancé, a pilot killed in action. He wrote, "When she looked at me, it was doubtless not me she saw, but behind my back, under an infinite imaginary sky forever marked by death, someone else, this other Louis whose name I bore but who I was not, this dead man in the sky of Verdun and the pure sky of a past that was always present."<sup>72</sup> In Normandy, the little village of Allemagne [Germany] changed its name (a difficult one to have, it is true, after the Great War) to Fleury-sur-Orne, in memory of the vil-lage of Fleury-devant-Douaumont, which had been completely destroyed dur-ing the battle of Verdun.

The return home meant that the moment of reunion with family and friends had finally come, but at what cost? Postwar societies in mourning were taking stock of the number of casualties, of "those who would never return"—and those who came home alive often had a difficult time living with what the psychiatrist William G. Niederland would later call Survivor Syndrome, in the wake of World War II.<sup>73</sup> On the day the armistice was signed, 11 November 1918, the writer Jane Catulle-Mendès, whose son Primice had been killed in April 1917, noted these simple words in *La Prière sur l'enfant mort* [Prayer Over the Dead Child]: "Tears... tears..." She added, "The mere thought of those handsome soldiers, like him, who will be welcomed home in the light of day, makes me collapse with uncontrollable despair."<sup>74</sup> Others lived in expectation of additional news about their loved ones. To write the history of the return to the intimacy of private life requires being attentive to the reunions of differ-ent kinds of bodies: the emaciated bodies of prisoners of war, bodies worn out by the fatigue of war, the bodies of those young soldiers barely out of adoles-cence when they left for the front, and who returned taller and more mature—in other words, bodies that their loved ones sometimes struggled to recognize.

Yet more obstacles appeared after months of separation. Concurrent ways of narrating the conflict were sketched out by those who had lived through it. Veterans often complained of civilians' inability to understand them, but at the same time, argued that their experience of war was impossible to describe.





For their part, prisoners of war struggled to take stock of a painful experience that in many ways had transformed them. Civilians who had not fought had to suffer with seeing all they had endured forgotten, since official memory generally tended to privilege the soldiers' experience.<sup>75</sup> Because of changes in society during the conflict and the prolonged absence of soldiers, and due to their radically different ways of life, men and women sometimes found it problematic to renegotiate their relationships with each other. The upheaval in these relationships has been amply studied in the general context of postwar societies and public space: economic competition between men and women, debates over full citizenship rights for women.<sup>76</sup> Insofar as the private sphere is concerned, however, there remains work to be done. What normative discourses do postwar societies develop about the role of fathers, about gender roles, about sexuality, the place of children in the family unit and the relationships between the generations? What is the impact of war on the life of a couple and on family life, and how can this impact be evaluated?

By using documentary sources that involve writing the self (diaries, letters) but also judicial sources (divorce decrees, family court records, the laws concerning minors), medical archives, and the methods of oral history,<sup>77</sup> historians can explore new territory in the history of the First World War. All these sources pave the way for understanding the relationship of individuals to their own body, to their familiar haunts, and to their family and friends, in a postwar world where every aspect of life was slated for reconstruction: the perception of time and space, the system of norms, and even the sense of the future. To study the return to private life and the renegotiation of intimacy allows us to examine the complexity of the mechanisms at work when a society turns away from war.

These mechanisms are all the more complex because a kind of nostalgia linked some individuals to the wartime period. "He began to miss the war. Well, not the war. The wartime years. He had never gotten over it. He had never been able to find the rhythm of life again. He was still living in the day-to-day of the war. In spite of himself," wrote Aragon in *Aurélien*.<sup>78</sup> If the former participants in the conflicts sometimes struggled to reintegrate the family circle and the private sphere, it was also because the solidarity they felt with their fellow soldiers had been a decisive factor in their survival. "We are marked with a secret sign that you cannot see," Jules Isaac asserted in 1919. "We have come back from the dead."<sup>79</sup>

The "nostalgia for the front" described by the theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in a famous work<sup>80</sup> goes even farther: his was a nostalgia for an exceptional experience of faith, where the believer, stripped of all superfluity, had to face danger constantly and thus had to give himself over completely to God. "I cannot do without the battlefield anymore," he admitted. The counterpart to nostalgia is a kind of disillusion that dominates postwar life and whose history largely remains to be written. Within the family unit, some children had a difficult time adjusting to the return of their father and the





sometimes awkward reaffirmation of his authority. On a collective scale, the rejection of the return to ordinary life could occur through a “disinvestment in the future” that a number of veterans experienced. “We found old newspapers on our table, unopened letters from the month of August, 1914; we read about our plans from that time, we tried to resume our usual occupations again. And none of all this seemed in the least worthy of interest to us. Many gaps, many absent men,” remarked Pierre Champion, a veteran of World War I, in a book published in 1924. He added, “We had dreamed of a new world, and what we found instead was a very gray, monotonous one.”<sup>81</sup>

“Normalization” was one of the fundamental notions of the postwar transition period, whether it was used to describe relationships between individuals, family structures, or consumer culture. But what does it describe? In some cases, the attempt, which was of course impossible, to return to prewar times, thus a failed attempt at “restoration.” Elsewhere, it referred to fierce reintegration into the norm, a standardization of behavior. In any case, the idea of a “return to normalcy,” expressed by many writers, was rapidly shown to be unsatisfactory, for it gave the impression of continuity between prewar and postwar norms. Reality was different: the postwar world reinvented its norms, taking into consideration the experience of the war. It is unlikely, for example, that levels of violence could be evaluated in the same way in the wake of a conflict as brutal as World War I, as George Mosse’s work suggests.<sup>82</sup>

For some fifteen years, the future of violence in war has given rise to a number of studies addressing the issue of “brutalization” (some prefer the term *ensauvagement*, “making savage”) of postwar societies. Originating in criminology and then in the psycho-social study of veterans, questions about individual violence after the return from war has given way to work on collective violence, especially on the transfer of battlefield violence to violence in the political arena after the war.<sup>83</sup> This polarization of behavioral norms should not cause other areas of research to be overlooked. The history of bodily sensibilities during wartime is in its infancy;<sup>84</sup> for the postwar period, it remains to be written. What we do know is that the first kind of re-adaptation that veterans had to deal with was the return to the sensory environment of peacetime. In their notebooks and in their letters, most soldiers noted the “silence” that fell over the front on the morning of 11 November 1918. Others spoke of how difficult it was for them, once home, not to look at the countryside through an infantryman’s eyes—not to imagine trenches there, or anticipate danger lurking behind bushes and instinctively look for shelter. For example, this speech by a school principal in Bayonne, imbued with a pacifism that characterized veterans’ groups in the 1930s: “At the end of the war, back in my village, my lovely Basque village—and here again I blush at the thought of admitting this abominably twisted thinking to you, but I want to be completely truthful—it was through warriors’ eyes that I saw our gorgeous countryside, covered in greenery and flowers. Here on that ridge, a terrific spot for a combat squad to take up position; there, a superb ambush route; farther





on, in that subsidiary summit, an ideal position for a machine gun. Oh, the beautiful waves of enemy infantry it would mow down! Everywhere, in the most lovely settings, the most peaceful—the obsession with combat, with killing, with death..."<sup>85</sup>

For still others, the sight of blood, odors that were too strong, or anything else that reminded them of their combat experience was unbearable<sup>86</sup>. At a conference held in Strasbourg several years ago, Étienne Bloch shared a memory of his father, the eminent historian Marc Bloch, who was a veteran of World War I: "I think I never heard my father talk about the war. This silence was broken only once and I will tell you under what circumstances, for this memory is forever inscribed in my mind. That day, we were in an antique shop in a small city, I don't know which one anymore, and my father abruptly went outside, leaving my mother and me behind... He could not bear the sight of the mannequins leaning against a wall. It reminded him too much of the corpses that were his constant companions during the war."<sup>87</sup>

What was understood but left unspoken most of the time was the failure or difficulty of returning to normalcy, which moreover took various forms: the violence of gender relations, the marginalizing of disabled soldiers; or, in the family circle, a feeling of disillusionment when the actual return did not correspond to the one the soldier had imagined. There was, in fact, a gulf separating all that people had imagined during the conflict—the return home long dreamed of by soldiers and their families in their letters,<sup>88</sup> the physical rehabilitation of disfigured veterans as celebrated in propaganda—and the reality of forlorn widows, fragile couples, disabled soldiers prevented from contributing to economic life.<sup>89</sup> "I would have wanted Guynemer's love!" confided a young woman in the readers' letters section of the women's magazine *Femina*. "My dearest desire would have been to share his life ... to fly far away with him, forever!!!"<sup>90</sup>

After the war, numerous articles in medical journals theorized impotence as "trench illness" and as a symptom of the contrast between desire and reality.<sup>91</sup> In the nineteen twenties and then in the nineteen thirties, the physiologists Wilhelm Stekel and Léon Strominger, as well as the psychiatrist Sacha Nacht, studied the relationship between the Great War and sexual problems. Some veterans said they were "out of proportion" to the new conditions of life in peacetime, while others perceived themselves as "diminished." When he published *Aurélien* in 1944, the key novel about the return from the Great War, Louis Aragon provided one of the most successful portraits of all that happens during a postwar transition period: how identities vacillate, how difficult it is for survivors to re-integrate a new sense of time and space and to renegotiate the complex relationship with a loved one.

How can we show the imperfections, the failures, and the tensions (sometimes temporary) that were manifested at the end of the war, when we strain to perceive its harshness at such a distance? In other words, how can we retrace all the stages of a return to intimacy, with its risks, hesitations, and





uncertainties, during the course of a long and sometimes painful reconstruction of individual identities? The study of the discourses of the immediate postwar period, or more specifically, the conditions in which survivors spoke out, constitutes an important piece of the history of a return to intimacy. Civilians often reacted with horror to the war stories of recently demobilized soldiers, which made them reluctant to offer further testimony. Discharged in 1919 after two years at war, the philosopher Brice Parain described the story of his return to civilian life, particularly the reaction of his younger brother: "I showed him the dark scars in the skin on my face, I spoke only in slang. This scared him a bit."<sup>92</sup>

To talk about intimacy depends not only on the ability to reflect on oneself and to share one's feelings, but also on the desire (or refusal) to reveal oneself, and therefore, to pass on a part of the burden to someone else—a spouse, child, or close friend. For survivors of a war and a postwar transition period, any attempt to speak of the difficulties of a return to normalcy is perceived as a transgression: a transgression against all those—and there were many—who showed the desire not to get weighed down by the misfortunes of the past, but to finish as quickly as possible with the war;<sup>93</sup> a betrayal of the dead, of whom the survivors generally saw themselves as the spokesmen and because of whom no living soul had the right to complain.

To speak out takes time. It sometimes happens by means of evasive tactics, and always requires an effort. Some preferred to take refuge in silence, which is the ultimate challenge for a historian. It was the silence of survivors who saw their experience as impossible to communicate, "as if each man found himself mysteriously stricken with a disease of language," Jean Paulhan wrote in 1941.<sup>94</sup> A silence that was an inability and a refusal to communicate, but that also allowed for a return to oneself, putting the tumult of the world at a distance.

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## Notes

1. Georges Lecomte, *L'Illustration*, 20 November 1920, 363. According to Jean-François Jagielski, the evening newspaper *L'Intransigeant* instigated this original ritual, with the symbolic family chosen by the Ministry of Pensions. Jagielski, *Le Soldat inconnu: Invention et postérité d'un symbole* (Paris: Éditions Imago, 2005), 121–22.
2. Antoine Prost and Jay Winter, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Chapter 1.
3. In the vast bibliography on this topic, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau's article, arguing for a new type of history, is noteworthy: "Pour une histoire de la douleur, pour une histoire de la souffrance," in *14–18 Aujourd'hui* (Paris: Noésis, 1998).
4. For a general overview of the status of the sources and of the methodological issues of this history of sensibilities, see especially Alain Corbin, "Le vertige des foisonnements. Esquisse panoramique d'une histoire sans nom," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* (January–March 1992): 103–26.
5. Christophe Prochasson analyzes these debates in *14–18: Retours d'expérience* (Paris: Tallandier, 2008).
6. It is Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau in particular who reads World War I as an anthropological turning point, in *Combattre: Une anthropologie historique de la guerre moderne (XIX-XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2008). See also Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, "Mourir par les gaz: une transgression anthropologique?" in *Gaz! Gaz! Gaz! La guerre chimique, 1914–1918* (Milan: 5 Continents éditions, 2010), 77–92.
7. Demographic history has produced major works of synthesis, such as Michel Huber's *La Population de la France pendant la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1931), written while Huber was Director of the General Statistics Bureau of France, precursor to the current INSEE (Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques), and Jacques Dupâquier, *Histoire de la population française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988), tome 4. On the statistical uncertainties surrounding the number of casualties in the Great War, see Antoine Prost, "Compter les vivants et les morts: l'évaluation des pertes françaises en 1914–1918," *Le Mouvement Social* 2008 (222): 41–60.
8. For example, Annette Becker, *Les Monuments aux morts: Mémoire de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Errance, 1991); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Cinq deuils de guerre, 1914–1918* (Paris: Agnès Viénot éditions, 2001); Carine Trevisan, *Les Fables du deuil. La Grande Guerre: Mort et écriture* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2001).
9. Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, "La Grande Guerre: le deuil interminable," *Le Débat* 104 (March–April 1999): 117–30.
10. Jacqueline de Romilly, *Jeanne* (Paris: Éditions de Fallois, 2011), 49.
11. Raoul Girardet, "L'ombre de la guerre," in *Essais d'Ego-Histoire*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque des Histoires, 1987), 139.
12. It would be helpful to have a better idea of the impact of wars on these mourning rituals prior to World War I. For example, what were the traces that the Napoleonic Wars left on the lives of French families? Natalie Petiteau offers interesting perspectives on this topic in *Lendemain d'Empire: Les soldats de Napoléon dans la France du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: La Boutique de l'Histoire, 2003), as does Alan Forrest in his classic book, *Napoleon's Men: The Soldiers of the Revolution and Empire* (Hambledon and London: Continuum, 2002).
13. Sophie Delaporte, *Les Gueules cassées* (Paris: Agnès Viénot, 1996).
14. Olivier Lepick, *La Grande Guerre chimique, 1914–1918* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1998) and "Des gaz et des hommes: populations civile, militaire et opin-





- ions publiques face à l'arme chimique pendant et dans l'immédiat après Grande Guerre," in *Gaz! Gaz! Gaz!* 25–53.
15. Ruth Harris, "The Child of the Barbarian: Rape, Race and Nationalism in France during the First World War," *Past and Present* (October 1993): 170–206; Susan Grayzel, "The Maternal Body as Battlefield: Rape, Gender and National Identity," in *Women's Identities at War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 50–85; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *L'Enfant de l'ennemi* (Paris: Aubier, 1995; republished in 1999).
  16. Jean-Yves Le Naour, *Le Soldat inconnu vivant* (Paris: Hachette, 2002), Chapter 2.
  17. Monique Eleb et Anne Debarre, eds., *Architectures de la vie privée: Maisons et mentalités, XVII<sup>e</sup>-XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris et Bruxelles: A.A.M. et Azan, 1989, republished in 1999); Philippe Ariès and George Duby, eds., *Histoire de la vie privée* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1987), Volume 4: *De la Révolution à la Grande Guerre*. Translated into English as *A History of Private Life, Volume 4: From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1994).
  18. Alain Corbin, *Le Miasme et la Jonquille: L'odorat et l'imaginaire social, XVIII<sup>e</sup>-XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Aubier, 1982).
  19. Alain Corbin, ed., *L'Avènement des loisirs, 1850–1960* (Paris: Aubier, 1995).
  20. Reviel Netz, *Barbed Wire: An Ecology of Modernity* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004).
  21. Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 52.
  22. Eric J. Leed develops this idea of a progressive initiation into the experience of war in *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) and more recently, so does Leonard V. Smith, *The Embattled Self: French Soldiers' Testimony of the Great War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), Chapter 1.
  23. Robert Hertz, *Un ethnologue dans les tranchées, août 1914–avril 1915* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2002).
  24. We are dealing here with two contiguous areas of research—the history of perception and the history of emotional life—that are used in two distinct areas of historiography. On the history of perception, see especially the work of Jean-Paul Aron, David Howes, Guy Thuillier, and recently, the issue of the *American Historical Review* entitled "The Senses in History" (116, 2, April 2011). On the history of emotions, see Lucien Febvre's famous article, "How to Reconstitute the Emotional Life of the Past," in *A New Kind of History and Other Essays*, ed. Peter Burke, trans. K. Folca (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), originally published in *Annales d'histoire sociale* III (1941), and in his *Combats pour l'Histoire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1953), and the work of Peter Stearns and Alain Corbin, among many others.
  25. Ernst Junger, *Storm of Steel*, trans. Michael Hofmann (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 8.
  26. Henri Barbusse, *Lettres à sa femme, 1914–1917* (Paris: Buchet Chastel, 2006), 73–74.
  27. Alain Corbin addresses this question of the hierarchy of the senses and their equilibrium in "Histoire et anthropologie sensorielle," *Anthropologie et société* 14, 2 (1990), republished in Alain Corbin, *Le Temps, le désir et l'horreur* (Paris: Aubier, 1991), 227–44. For World War I, see the work of Santanu Das (*Touch and Intimacy*), André Loez ("L'œil du chasseur. Violence de guerre et sensibilité en 1914–1918," *Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques* [EHESS, April 2003]), and Tait Keller's interesting observations in "The Mountains Roar: The Alps during the Great War," *Environmental History* 14 (April 2009): 253–74.
  28. Nicholas Saunders, *Trench Art: Materialities and Memories of War* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003); Annette Becker, *La Guerre et la foi, de la mort à la mémoire, 1914–1930* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1994), translated as *War and Faith: The Religious*





- Imagination in France, 1914–1930*, trans. Helen McPhail (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998); Martha Hanna, “A Republic of Letters: The Epistolary Tradition in France during World War I,” *American Historical Review* 108, 5 (December 2003): 1338–61. Historians have addressed this question of the struggle against dehumanization in various ways: some emphasize the way rules of prewar society were bent and rewritten in the context of life in the trenches (Martha Hanna uses the concept of “bricolage,” invented by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984), while others take a psychological approach, using the notion of “resilience,” which has been quite prevalent for some years (cf. Joanna Bourke, in *Life after Death* ed. Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann, 2003, 10).
29. Jean-Yves Le Naour, *Misères et tourments de la chair durant la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Aubier, 2002) 334 et sq.
  30. Jean-Jacques Becker et Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, eds., *Encyclopédie de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Bayard, 2004).
  31. “L’archéologie de la Grande Guerre,” in *14–18 Aujourd’hui*.
  32. On historians’ work with objects from the Great War, see especially Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Les Armes et la Chair* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2009).
  33. Jean-Marie Linsolas, “La photographie et la guerre: Un miroir du vrai ?” in *Vrai et faux dans la Grande Guerre*, ed. Christophe Prochasson and Anne Rasmussen (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2004), 96–111.
  34. Marcel Felser, *Un regard sur la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Larousse, 2002).
  35. John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011); Annette Becker, *Les Cicatrices rouges 14–18, France et Belgique occupées* (Paris: Fayard, 2010).
  36. Gabriel Hanotaux, *L’Aisne dans la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1919).
  37. For an interpretation of the destruction wrought in the summer of 1914, see John Horne, “Corps, lieux et nation. La France et l’invasion de 1914,” *Annales HSS* 1 (janvier-février 2000): 73–109. Michaël Geyer analyzes the context of the destruction that occurred in the autumn of 1918 in his article “Insurrectionary Warfare: the German Debate about a *Levée en masse* in October 1918,” *The Journal of Modern History* 73 (September 2001): 459–527.
  38. David Le Breton, *La Saveur du monde: Une anthropologie des sens* (Paris: Métailié, 2006). See also Dominique Memmi, et al., “La fabrication du dégoût,” *Ethnologie française* 41 (2011): 5–16.
  39. For example, in *L’Odeur de l’ennemi, 1914–1918* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010), Juliette Courmont studies olfactory revulsion concerning the enemy. In the spring of 1915, the physician Edgar Bérillon published a brochure entitled *La Bromidrose fétide de la race allemande* [The Fetid Body Odor of the German Race]. In it, he defends the thesis of fundamental differences between the body odors of the French and the Germans. Comparable examples may be found, in publications addressing physical appearance (Germans can be recognized by their coarse facial features) and in denunciations of the German language and by extension German music for their alleged roughness.
  40. *Rapports et procès verbaux d’enquête de la commission instituée en vue de constater les actes commis par l’ennemi en violation du droit des gens* 300 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1915), 156.
  41. *Rapports et procès verbaux d’enquête de la commission instituée en vue de constater les actes commis par l’ennemi en violation du droit des gens* 96 (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1917), 115.
  42. Véronique Nahoum-Grappe, “Anthropologie de la violence extrême: Le crime de profanation,” *Revue internationale des sciences humaines* 174 (December 2002): 601–60.





43. Edith Wharton, *Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belpport* (New York: Scribner's, 1918) 58. Republished in 1918 as volume III of the series *The War on All Fronts*.
44. A fine study of the symbolic function of the bedroom as a private space can be found in Michelle Perrot, *Histoire de chambres* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2009). On the place of household linen in nineteenth century France, see Alain Corbin's groundbreaking article, "Le grand siècle du linge," *Ethnologie française* XVI (1986), republished in *Le Temps, le désir et l'horreur* (Paris: Aubier, 1991).
45. Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, "Découvrir les ruines de sa maison dans la Somme, en août 1918," in *Les Reconstructions en Picardie*, ed. Anne Duménil et Philippe Nivet (Amiens: Encrage, 2003), 71–86.
46. Ernest Gaubert, "Scènes et types de réfugiés (notes d'un sous-préfet)," *Revue de Paris*, 15 May 1915, 376–400, quoted by Philippe Nivet, *Les Réfugiés français de la Grande Guerre: Les "boches du Nord"* (Paris: Economica, 2004), 225–26.
47. "Enfances en guerre," *Vingtième siècle, revue d'histoire* 89 (January–March 2006); Manon Pignot, *Allons enfants de la patrie: Génération Grande Guerre* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2012).
48. Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre des enfants 1914–1918* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1993 and 2004), epilogue: "Ce qu'enfant pense" [what a child thinks]. This complex question of the war's psychological impact on children has generally been addressed thanks to the collaborative work of historians and psychiatrists. See for example Manon Pignot and Roland Beller, in *La Guerre des crayons: Quand les petits Parisiens dessinaient la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Parigramme, 2004). As appealing as it is, this approach sometimes runs the risk of not taking sufficient account of the historicity of feelings, and to apply anachronistic frames of reference to the past.
49. Luc Capdevila, François Rouquet, Fabrice Virgili, Danièle Voldman, *Hommes et femmes dans la France en guerre (1914–1945)* (Paris: Payot, 2003); François Rouquet, Fabrice Virgili et Danièle Voldman, eds., *Amours, guerres et sexualité, 1914–1945* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).
50. On the Great War as a means of regeneration, see Jean-Yves Le Naour, *Misères et tourments de la chair durant la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Aubier, 2002).
51. If the history of relationships between husbands and wives during the Great War has been the subject of numerous studies, quoted below, that of friendship still remains to be written. Several possible avenues of research seem clear: friendship in the trenches and initiation into war, networks of friends and the circulation of news between the front lines and the home front, groups of friends as "circles of mourning."
52. In the summer of 1914, no system of leave had been organized or arranged for what was thought to be a conflict of short duration. It was only in June 1915 that General Joffre allowed soldiers to take a week's leave, by turns, to see their families. See Emmanuelle Cronier, *L'Échappée belle: Permission et permissionnaires du front à Paris pendant la Première Guerre mondiale* (Thesis defended at the Université Paris-I, 2005).
53. Gérard Bacconnier, André Minet, and Louis Soler, *La Plume au fusil: Les poilus du Midi à travers leur correspondance* (Toulouse: Privat, 1985).
54. Bruno Cabanes, *La Victoire endeuillée: La sortie de guerre des soldats français (1918–1920)* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004). See also Bruno Cabanes, "Ce que dit le contrôle postal," in *Vrai et faux dans la Première Guerre mondiale*, ed. Christophe Prochasson and Anne Rasmussen (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2004), 55–75.
55. This is the case with the wealth of war correspondence published in the early 1990s, where one finds moreover the worst (letters rewritten, taken out of context) and the best. In any case, this corpus is large enough to serve as a solid base of documentation for a history of intimacy in wartime.
56. Christophe Prochasson, "Aimer et gouverner à distance. Aperçus sur la correspondance familiale durant la Grande Guerre," in *Éloignement géographique et cohésion*



- familiale (XV<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, ed. Jean-François Chauvard et Christine Lebeau (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2006), 181–206.
57. Vincent Kaufmann, *L'Équivoque épistolaire* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1990).
  58. Henri Barbusse, *Lettres à sa femme, 1914–1917* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 2006), 58, 59, 75.
  59. Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
  60. Odile Roynette, *Les Mots des soldats* (Paris: Belin, 2004), 8.
  61. André Loez, "Tears in the Trenches: A History of Emotions and the Experience of War," in *Uncovered Fields: Perspectives in First World War Studies*, ed. Jenny Macleod and Pierre Purseigle (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 211–26.
  62. On all these points, I refer the reader to the work of Gene Tempest, *Horses on the Western Front: Redefining the Nature and Experience of Modern War, 1914–1918* (Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, work in progress).
  63. Martha Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine: Paul and Marie Pireaud in the Great War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).
  64. Constant and Gabrielle M., *Des tranchées à l'alcôve: Correspondances amoureuse et érotique pendant la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Imago, 2006).
  65. Roger Chartier, ed., *La Correspondance: Les usages de la lettre au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1991). On the protocol governing love letters, see also Martyn Lyons, "Love Letters and Writing Practices: On *écritures intimes* in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Family History* 24 (April 1999), 232–39.
  66. Beginning in 1915, the creation of "war godmothers" by the organization "La Famille du Soldat" [The Soldier's Family] provides another example of this "construction of intimacy." Initially, the goal was to put soldiers without any family in touch with female correspondents, to whom they would write and who would send them letters and packages in return. But soon, "war godmothers" were discredited by rumors that presented them not as maternal or protective figures but as potential objects of sexual desire. The performative nature of letter writing is aptly illustrated here, where close bonds were formed between people who did not know each other, as well as the ambiguous nature of the idea of intimacy, understood both as a soldier's fundamental need and as a menace to the moral order. See Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 30 et sq.
  67. *Vie et mort d'un fantassin quercynois: Lettres de Marcelin Prosper Foirac à sa femme Joséphine (1914–1915)* (Archives départementales du Lot, 2000), 100.
  68. A distinction must be made with those photographs that circulated between the front lines and the home front: they were signs of the passing of time, such as when soldiers received photographs of children who were growing up; a material aid to memory, helping young children remember their father who had left for war; necessary objects in the mourning process. On this last point, see Marita Sturken, "The Image as Memorial: Personal Photographs and Cultural Memory," in *The Familial Gaze*, ed. Marianne Hirsch (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 178–95.
  69. Michelle Perrot, *Le Journal intime de Caroline B.* (Paris: Éditions Montalba, 1985), 140.
  70. Marthe, Joseph, Lucien, Marcel Papillon, "*Si je reviens comme je l'espère*": *Lettres du front et de l'arrière, 1914–1918* (Paris: Grasset, 2003), 175.
  71. Hanotaux, *L'Aisne dans la Grande Guerre*.
  72. Louis Althusser, *L'Avenir dure longtemps* (Paris: Stock / IMEC, 1992), 48.



73. Bruno Cabanes, "Le syndrome du survivant. Histoire et usages d'une notion," in *Retour à l'intime au sortir de la guerre*, Bruno Cabanes et Guillaume Piketty (Paris: Tallandier, 2009), 199–212.
74. Jane Catulle-Mendès, *La Prière sur l'enfant mort* (Paris: A. Lemerre, 1921), 290.
75. For World War I, this instance of competing memories has been analyzed by Annette Becker in *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Noésis, 1998).
76. There is an immense bibliography on these topics. See especially Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*. For a comparative approach, see for example Margaret Randolph Higonnet, dir., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1987). On representations of gender in the aftermath of the Great War, see Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917–1927* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).
77. Unlike England, with the Imperial War Museum in London, France does not have a large repository of oral testimony from soldiers in the Great War or from women who worked in factories during the war, although oral history interviews have been conducted with those who were children during the war. See in particular Pignot, *Allons enfants de la patrie*, and "1918–1919. Retour des hommes et invention des pères ?" in *Retour à l'intime au sortir de la guerre*, ed. Cabanes and Piketty, 37–50.
78. Louis Aragon, *Aurélien* (Paris: Gallimard, collection Folio, 2007), 29–30 (first edition, 1944). On this key novel, see Carine Trévisan, *Aurélien d'Aragon: Un nouveau "mal du siècle"* (Besançon: Annales littéraires de l'Université de Franche Comté, 1996).
79. Jules Isaac, "Nous les revenants," *La Revue de Paris*, 1919.
80. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "La nostalgie du front," *Études* 153, 20 November 1917, republished in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Écrits du temps de la guerre (1916–1919)* (Paris: Grasset, Les cahiers rouges, 1996), 173–84 (First edition, 1965).
81. Pierre Champion, *Françoise au calvaire* (Paris: Grasset, 1924).
82. George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).
83. The validity of Mosse's thesis has been called into question, for France, by Antoine Prost, "The Impact of War on French and German Political Cultures," *The Historical Journal* 37, 1 (1994): 209–17. For a comparative history of postwar violence, see the important perspectives introduced by the conference "Paramilitary Violence after the Great War, 1918–1923," organized in Dublin, by John Horne and Robert Gerwarth, in December 2008. Some papers presented at the conference were published in *Contemporary European History* 19 (2010).
84. For example, André Loez, *Culture sensible et violence de guerre: Trois approches de l'expérience de guerre des combattants français en 1914–1918* (D.E.A. dissertation, École des hautes études en sciences sociales, directed by Christophe Prochasson, 2001); Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*.
85. "Discours de notre ami Brana, directeur d'école de Bayonne, à l'occasion de la remise de la rosette qui lui fut faite," *Cahiers de l'Union fédérale*, 15 August 1936.
86. See in particular the special issue on shell shock in the *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, 1 (January 2000), and more recently, on the case of France, Gregory Thomas, *Treating the Trauma of the Great War: Soldiers, Civilians and Psychiatry in France, 1914–1940* (Baton Rouge : Louisiana State University Press, 2009).
87. Étienne Bloch, "L'expérience de la Première Guerre mondiale," in *Marc Bloch, l'historien et la cité*, Pierre Deyon et al. (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 1997), 147–48.
88. Clémentine Vidal-Naquet, "Le couple en France pendant la Première Guerre mondiale," dissertation in progress, directed by Christophe Prochasson, EHESS.





89. Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999).
90. Quoted by Dominique Fouchard, "L'empreinte de la Première Guerre mondiale dans les relations de couple: ce que disent les corps," in *Retour à l'intime au sortir de la guerre*, ed. Cabanes and Piketty, 236.
91. Antoine Porot et André Hesnard, *Psychiatrie de guerre: Étude clinique* (Paris: Alcan, 1919).
92. Brice Parain, *De fil en aiguille* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 87.
93. On the difficulties of "turning away from war" such as they appear in the narratives of World War I veterans, see Smith, *The Embattled Self*, Chapter 4: "The Novel and the Search for Closure."
94. Jean Paulhan recalls the "silence of the soldier on leave" in *Les Fleurs de Tarbes* (1941), republished in 1990 (Paris: Gallimard, collection Folio.)

