



# SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS IN THE FRENCH TRENCHES

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**ABSTRACT:** The First World War has been described as an exceptional moment of comradeship, so great that it was able to break even the strongest class barriers. Were social distances and class hierarchies temporarily forgotten or abolished for the millions of Frenchmen of diverse origins who were called to arms in defense of their country? The article is about this novel experiment, provoking encounters and contacts on a huge scale and often for the first time, between an overwhelming majority of manual workers and petty employees of humble extraction, and a small number of bourgeois and intellectuals. It tells the story of the discovery, by the French bourgeoisie of the Belle Epoque, of the ordinary people who fought in the trenches.

**KEYWORDS:** class barriers, intellectuals, social differences, World War I

Much has been written about intellectuals during the Great War, be they artists, writers or scholars.\* We now have a good understanding of the influence of war on literature, poetry, painting, music, or scientific disciplines.<sup>1</sup> Many historians have written books about the astonishing “mobilization of intellect” in war propaganda.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, we know very little about the behaviour of the members of the educated upper classes who were sent into the trenches, and sometimes died there. This question was completely erased, after the war, by the representational primacy of veterans’ associations. They imposed the image of a “fire generation”<sup>3</sup> which should be “united as at the front” (motto of the main association, the “Union nationale des combattants”<sup>4</sup>). In all countries, but particularly in the French army, the First World War has been described, first by contemporary writers, then by scholars, as an exceptional moment of comradeship, so great that it was able to break even the strongest class barriers: “Soldiers who in civilian life would not even have exchanged

*French Politics, Culture & Society*, Vol. 36, No. 2, Summer 2018: 1–27



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Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at Harvard University  
doi:10.3167/fpcs.2018.360201





words because of class barriers became soul mates in the trenches” the historians Leonard V. Smith, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, and Annette Becker recently wrote.<sup>5</sup>

Were the trenches of the Great War the scene of a social osmosis? Were social distances and class hierarchies temporarily forgotten or abolished for the millions of Frenchmen of diverse origins who were called to arms in defense of their country and had to share the dangers and hardships of life in the front lines? For many former students from the bourgeoisie, trench warfare was an unprecedented experiment in social promiscuity: even if the republican regime had set up a compulsory conscription in 1889, many undergraduates were able to enlist together in elite battalions intended to make them reserve officers, or they simply circumvented the obligation. The famous war writer Henri Barbusse, for example, was exempted from military service and had to volunteer in 1914. So what can we make of this novel experiment, provoking encounters and contacts on a huge scale and often for the first time, between Parisians and *provinciaux*, between peasants and city-dwellers, between an overwhelming majority of manual workers and petty employees of humble extraction, and a small number of bourgeois and intellectuals?

I aim to present some key themes in my book on this subject.<sup>6</sup> My purpose, when starting the study dealing with this topic, was to write a social history of the trenches. Its origin lies in a paradox. Why, unlike witnesses of the time, have historians written so little, especially in France during the last twenty years, about class differences in the trenches?<sup>7</sup> The following discussion describes this paradox in a little more detail.

On the one hand, several studies have looked at the violence of warfare in the Great War in a “cultural” or “anthropological perspective.”<sup>8</sup> But these books provide little information about class and social differences in the trenches, both in terms of lifestyles and in terms of attitudes toward the war. In the eyes of these scholars, the reason for this is clear: all soldiers, regardless of their ranks: rank-and-file, non-commissioned officers (NCOs) or officers, fought the same war. All of them, rich or poor, faced the same machinegun bullets and shelling overhead. In fact, it became a characteristic of this conflict: as people of all backgrounds faced the same horrific conditions in the trenches as one, the war itself helped break down the class barriers of the time.

On the other hand, wartime diaries and correspondence, and in particular those of famous witnesses such as Guillaume Apollinaire, Louis Pergaud, Maurice Genevoix, Marc Bloch, Roland Dorgelès, Henri Barbusse, etc., mention on almost every page the “working class men” or young peasants they met in the trenches. In testifying about the world of the trenches and the trials of mud and bombardment, these writers also deliv-





ered a rare, if seldom noticed, account of their discovery of popular classes. Their visions of the soldiers with whom they rubbed shoulders, whether it was a matter of their “comrades” or “their men,” highlighted the strong social differences that were simultaneously maintained and displaced during the conflict. Why, then, have historians made so little mention of the references to social and cultural differences in such historical sources?

As the First World War was a time of exceptional geographical and social mixity, by virtue of both its magnitude and its duration, my initial goal was to study social encounters and class relationships in the trenches. But, for reasons which I shall return to at length below, the encounters have been depicted only through the eyes of members of the literate elites of French society. Therefore the study delved into something like a one-way discovery—the discovery, by the French bourgeoisie of the belle époque, of the ordinary people who fought in the trenches. To pursue this matter I followed two major guiding principles.

The first principle consisted in describing how—with which prejudices, through which glasses, toward what ends—the intellectuals of the time, mostly consisting of students, scholars, novelists, artists, doctors or lawyers discovered those men of the lower classes whose existence they had ignored or simply looked down upon until mobilization. As we can see, I usually use the term “intellectuals” to designate the population of witnesses referred to in the article. The term may seem inappropriate because it encompasses sometimes different profiles—are doctors and lawyers necessarily intellectuals? Clearly, it does not refer exclusively to the intellectuals born with the Dreyfus Affair, people who publicly engage in critical thinking against the state, even if some of the war witnesses were activists during the Affair. I use it for lack of a better word to describe the fraction of the elites who wrote the great majority of the available war testimonies. They were members of the cultural rather than the economic bourgeoisie—the latter fought in the trenches but did not write much about the experience. More importantly, they shared a common education through attendance at the “lycée.” The classical Greco-Latin-seventeenth-century culture that was taught there formed the basis for their shared conviction of the superiority of “French civilization.” During these years of training, they acquired the writing and moral style that made their testimonies so recognizable beyond their political or religious differences. And, more importantly perhaps, they acquired the certainty that it was up to them to say how the world should go. That is what constitutes them as a group, and why I call them “intellectuals.”

The second aim of the investigation was to reconsider the status and function of patriotism in the Great War, for patriotism lay at the heart of almost every writer’s testimony. From the very start of the war, these intel-



lectuals were troubled by the attitude of the people. Indeed, they were surprised by what they considered to be a lack of idealism and will among the other soldiers. Therefore, these men came to clearly reaffirm not only the terms of their own martial commitment, but also what they considered as their role in the education of the people. Had teaching played a role in their pre-war professional lives or not, all of them, even journalists or lawyers, tried to read edifying pages about the war in the trenches or to straighten out those of the soldiers who seemed too unmotivated for them. The investigation of those testimonies leads to a paradox with regards to the usual perception of the Great War as a melting pot and thus temporary osmosis of social groups. Even in the trenches, these intellectuals were keen to maintain their intellectual identity through writing, reading or thinking in silence. By staying away for the most part from card games, songs, alcohol, and parties, they maintained a moral and physical gap between them and the boisterous craftsmen and peasant soldiers in whom they perceived a lack of commitment. Consequently, the conflict no doubt constituted an important point of crystallization of those social boundaries.

To follow those two main links, the methodology I used is a common one. It had three steps. First, I made a database of mostly published testimonies for which I could find three biographical elements for each author: their educational background, their occupation in 1914, and their military trajectory throughout the conflict. In a set of about 2,000 testimonies referenced in libraries or archives, 733 met these three criteria. Then, I delimited in this total of 733 a corpus of forty-two individuals, a procedure based on the following idea: if I wanted to track their process of social discovery, the testimonies need to have been written up at the time, day by day during the conflict. The texts were originally private writings that became public, often several decades later, when they were published. The texts also had to be written by men from the literate bourgeoisie who lived with ordinary infantrymen because they started the war in the ordinary ranks, i.e., not as officers. Finally, I tracked down all references to social interactions in the trenches, albeit seemingly insignificant ones, within the war correspondence and diaries of these selected witnesses. The following discussion provides a few examples of the traces I found in the sources.

The first one occurs when the infantryman and novelist Henri Barbusse, in a letter to his wife asking for gaiters, insisted that she choose “an article not too fancy, not too officer like, something thick, solid, unsophisticated and unpolished. It would be a thousand times better,” he writes.<sup>9</sup> The second is when André Kahn, a lawyer who was then 26 years old, wrote to his correspondent: “I have learned something these last days: to roll cigarettes.”<sup>10</sup> Yet another testimony describes how Fernand Léger noticed with some bitterness that he “always got it wrong” in the

trenches, before concluding “they have very little esteem for me, I am useless.”<sup>11</sup> Significantly more crudely, Jean Norton Cru noticed in a letter describing the soldiers around him: “I have a conscience; it seems they do without one.”<sup>12</sup>

By collecting this type of evidence, the aim of the investigation consisted in seizing a canonical corpus not to locate what is universal, but on the contrary to identify the numerous gaps between the experiences of members of the educated upper classes and those of the great majority of soldiers. My goal was to achieve a reading of war diaries and correspondences that was not only different, but I hope, more comprehensive from a sociological point of view.<sup>13</sup> Following the overview of this research project, a question remains unanswered: how and why do I claim to speak about class relationships by using sources produced by soldiers who are members of the upper class? That is to say, why not write the same story based equally on the accounts of lower-class soldiers and those of the upper class?

### A Story of Uneven Sides

This was not a question of lack of sources. From the 733 available published or “archived” testimonies that constituted my database, a third were written by individuals stemming from lower classes (140) or from the lower middle class (89).

**Table 1.** Population structure of published witnesses by social group (for details on the nomenclature, see the annex at the end of the article)

	Number	%
Lower Classes	140	20%
Lower Middle-Class	89	13%
Upper Middle-class	110	15%
Upper Classes	373	52%
Total	712	100%

**Table 2.** Number of testimonies by period and social position of the witness

	From 1915 to 1920	From 1921 to 1939	From 1940 to 1977	From 1978 to 2011	Total
Lower Classes	1%	4%	3%	91%	100% (140)
Lower Middle-Class	4%	2%	2%	91%	100% (89)
Upper Middle-class	39%	12%	3%	46%	100% (110)
Upper Classes	46%	17%	6%	31%	100% (373)
Total	31% (221)	12% (84)	4% (31)	53% (376)	100% (712)

Until the 1980s, the only soldiers' accounts to be published were those of members of the upper classes, as shown on Table 2. Since 1978, however, popular writings have above all been published, starting with the famous war diaries of Louis Barthas, a cooper.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, there are plenty of sources available for those wishing to write a social history of the trenches as seen from the ground up. However, these popular witness statements say nothing about class relationships in those trenches. Why is that? The reason for this great silence over class relationships in popular writings is the mode of recruitment into the French army before the war. On the one hand, craftsmen, manual workers, and farmers performed a military service for two or three years in the military district of their birth (three years between 1889 and 1905, two after 1905). This service therefore did not cause a change of social background. They were enlisted with other men of their age and of the same social milieu. They often found friends, neighbors, and sometimes family members enlisted with them. Upon mobilization, they always found relatives, brothers or cousins, in any case men of the same social and geographical background, surrounding them.<sup>15</sup> They had therefore little reason to speak about social differences in their testimonies.

On the other hand, the situation was quite different for the intellectuals—defined as people holding a high school diploma (a “baccalauréat”) before 1914. They were a very small elite group, hardly 2 percent of an age group, around 7,000 boys on an average annual total of 316,000 draftees.<sup>16</sup> Almost all of them came to Paris to pursue their higher studies. Militarily speaking, these young men were often exempted or allowed to perform a shorter military service of only one year, often in a battalion to become a reserve officer. When mobilization came, they were randomly sent to regiments far away in provinces where they didn't know anyone.

For that reason, the intellectuals under study found themselves socially isolated in a foreign environment. For those with a higher education degree who left as rank-and-file soldiers, the isolation was both an objective reality and a subjective feeling. An objective reality because the likelihood they would find someone similar to them in their military milieu was very low. At best, they would have found only one other former undergraduate among the fifty men who made up every military “section” in the French army. A subjective feeling because social isolation became a real factor as they found themselves surrounded by soldiers who often did not speak the same language as they, but rather a form of dialect (“patois”). This experience of social isolation explains why many of the intellectuals sought the company of officers to palliate their loneliness. It also explains why they told their families on a daily basis about those strange men of the lower classes they met at the front, thereby becoming the main source of

this study. Just as when we speak of the unfamiliar when we discover a foreign country, so too the intellectuals in the trenches wrote about what was unknown to them: soldiers coming from the lower and lower middle classes with all their habits and cultural specificities.

A few examples may be given of the social isolation that intellectuals faced when reaching the front. The historian Jules Isaac, co-author of a famous textbook, wrote in 1915 to his wife: "where we fight, where we suffer and where we die: the common folks are, together with a minute minority of "bourgeois" who perform their duty with honesty or who are too naïve to duck out of it."<sup>17</sup> In July of the same year, Jules Puech, Ph.D. in Law, asked: "But where do the intellectuals remain? Killed, hidden in safe jobs, fighting on the front lines, or reformed? In any case over here, they are few and far between."<sup>18</sup> The young tax official Jean Leymonnerie specified, on his incorporating of "class 15" (he was 20 years old in 1915): "I am the only fully certified student of my company. It has already cost me a few extra chores, including sweeping the room three mornings in a row."<sup>19</sup>

## The Forty-Two

Once this point was established—intellectuals are, because of their social isolation, the only ones writing about social differences—among the 733 witnesses within my database for which I had found three biographical characteristics: their educational background, their occupation in 1914, and their military trajectory throughout the conflict, I was able to select forty-two of them following three extra criteria.

The first criterion is obviously their common belonging to the upper classes. Most of them came from bourgeois families, with the attributes that came with it: house servants, a "Miss" or Fraulein for the children, high school studies with Latin as main course discipline, music and "British" sports for the kids. In short, all of the rank-and-file intellectuals were overqualified for the job ahead.

The other two criteria are connected to the meeting I aim to describe of these two opposite ends of the social spectrum. According to the second criterion, my forty-two actors were chosen because they were not officers. They began the conflict as rank-and-file soldiers or as non-commissioned officers (NCOs). This choice was essential so that my witnesses lived, ate, and slept with the other soldiers. Officers, on the other hand, had separate bedrooms and kitchen. The daily encounters between officers and soldiers were by nature strongly hierarchical.

The third and last criterion was for their testimonies to have been recorded in the form of diaries or letters written at the time. When an author

produced many kinds of texts, I chose letters or diaries rather than novels, reflections or memories. For example, I chose Barbusse's letters to his wife rather than his novel, *The Fire (Le Feu)*. Similarly, I picked letters from the doctor and art critic Élie Faure instead of his novel *The Holy Face (La Sainte Face)*. Indeed, it is in his letters, and not in *Le Feu*, that Barbusse mentioned the gaiters he was wearing, which were very common and not what an officer would necessarily relate. And it was in his letters to his friends, and not in *The Holy Face*, that Élie Faure wrote "I find myself very afar from them when I talk to them, and yet I feel very close when I watch them act."<sup>20</sup>

If we combine these three criteria to make a choice among the 733 edited testimonies available, there are in the end no more than 100 letters or diaries written at the front by members of the upper classes who began the war as rank-and-file soldiers or NCOs. It is in this selection of 100 testimonies that I have chosen my forty-two witnesses. Some are very famous (Apollinaire, Louis Pergaud, Marc Bloch, Fernand Léger, Robert Hertz, Maurice Genevoix, Henri Barbusse, Roland Dorgelès, Léon Werth, Élie Faure, Teilhard de Chardin), others remained unknown, partly because they did not survive the war. I tried to cover the whole political and religious spectra. Young students, singles, and married men with children are represented.<sup>21</sup> They could have been a little more or a little less numerous. In fact, they could not have been much more because forty-two "heroes" already constitute an important group of characters in a narrative. Their number is not the most important methodological point. The major point is the fact that I tried to exhaust the documentation provided by each of these testimonies, using as much as possible of each text so as to take into account the contextual thickness of each case.

### **"Me and My Batman"**

Following the forty-two witnesses from one end of their military experience to the other, I described the social encounters in the trenches in three distinct directions. The first step of the study introduces the idea of a material history of the hierarchies within the French army. The second asks the question: could we look at the Great War as a time when social domination was reversed? Finally, I try to understand the desire of the intellectuals to remain themselves by writing, reading, and thinking.

The first section of the book shows how the hierarchy of ranks within the army modeled the social hierarchy in the civilian population at the time. It explores the privileges accorded to the officers, the difference in military pay, and the obvious rule that dictates that the position of officer should be reserved for the elites of civilian society. Of particular interest is





**Figure 1.** Lieutenant in front of his shelter looking at his batman brushing his shoes, January 1916.

*Source :* Collections “La Contemporaine,” Fonds Valois (photographic section of the army), VAL\_109\_156, album « Marne » n°60 cote T1051/35406.

the relationship between the officers and their orderlies, as they were known in the French ranks, or batmen or even “soldier-servants,” as they were first known in the British Army during the First World War.

What surprised me at this point was the fact that young students would consider it perfectly natural, obvious, or even logical to be granted a handyman or domestic servant. Take, for example, the case of Marcel Étévé, 20 years old, student of the *École normale supérieure de la rue d’Ulm*, fresh young officer, talking about his batman. As in figure 1, which was the cover of the book, Étévé could have been the officer reading his newspaper while discreetly monitoring the cleaning of his boots:

My orderly, Sempé, is a real gem. When we change sector, I needn’t tell him anything: he knows or guesses what I must take with me in my bag, and what he must carry in his. I go for a few minute’s walk, and on my return everything is ready. And his dedication is absolute: never grumbles, always happy and very discreet. He shares my dug out at the moment: he sleeps in the alcove under my straw bedlike canvas. We share head and body lice left, right and centre, but I do not hear him, see him or feel him. It’s perfect.<sup>22</sup>

What surprised me even more is that some of my heroes, although simple rank-and-file soldiers themselves, managed to acquire the equivalent of an

orderly for themselves, among their companions in misfortune. André Kahn, a lawyer, was a stretcher bearer (rank-and-file), but he too had a man, “a nice factory worker” named Donnay, whose services he shared with another soldier: he is a “good fellow,” writes Kahn, “whom we use, Batisse and I, as a batman.”<sup>23</sup> Unlike officers’ batmen, who were officially paid by the army, it must be assumed here, even if Kahn did not write it, that he paid Donnay out of his pocket.

What I tried to understand is precisely why the proletarians and middle classes alike accepted to be classed and ranked militarily in dominated and dominating positions. This led me to think about the transposing of social habits from the civilian world into that of the trenches. The certainty of students being granted a batman goes back to their childhood in bourgeois houses where they had a battery of staff to serve (attendant, maid, cook, etc.). As we have seen, Étuvé wrote about his batman like a lady talking about her house staff. That’s also why none of the intellectuals served as batmen. Even if the man in that function, relatively protected, avoided fighting, all bourgeois soldiers would have felt humiliated in such



**Figure 2.** “Me and my batman”

*Source:* Photograph with a caption on its back: “Behind the Calonne Trench, me and my batman,” officer from the 129st Infantry Regiment, Historial de la Grande Guerre, Péronne, cote 2 PHO 266.1.

a position. The forty-two-year-old jurist and volunteer for the war, Jules Puech, to whom it had been proposed to become batman to avoid excessively hard work in the trenches, preferred to refuse the offer. "Several comrades were astonished that I did not show up (!!!)," he wrote to his wife before concluding: "This gives you an idea of the general mentality."<sup>24</sup> Puech thought it inconceivable to accept such a position. Quite to the other extreme, the acceptance of their status by the lower classes clearly shows how they interiorized the concept of domination at the workplace, whether in farms, workshops or factories. Figure 2 shows how such domination was embodied.

On the left, the young officer stands proudly at rest, looking like a child happy with the toys he received for Christmas. On the right, the batman, who carries bottles of water and bags, was a head shorter than his young officer. This is not a coincidence: at the end of the nineteenth century, men from the middle class, among them many officers, were ten to fifteen centimeters taller than the average. To be sure, the officer sent the picture to his family with the caption "Me and my batman." But this does not mean that he did not give a copy to his batman, and that the latter preserved it if he survived. Unlike well-to-do middle-class people, ordinary people did not consider service to an officer degrading, because the latter was almost always considered a "gentleman." Moreover, the rare cases of post-war inter-class links often involved exchanges, replete with condescension and respect, between an officer and some of his former soldiers something like the paternalistic relations between a boss and his workers.

### The World Upside Down?

The second section of the study explores the idea that the trenches constituted a place where ordinary social hierarchies were not only questioned, but possibly reversed or even abated. Could we look at the Great War—not warfare but daily life in the trenches<sup>25</sup>—not just as a brief moment of social mixing, but possibly a time when social domination was reversed?

This reversal often occurred when it came to the distribution of the daily chores, particularly when it came to the maintenance of the trench system. Consider for a moment how dramatic a change in perspective and state of mind intellectuals must have experienced: in August 1914, all of them thought they were leaving their homes for a short, heroic war in which they would no doubt re-live the mass uprising of the revolutionaries one century earlier (the "levée en masse"). From November 1914, however, with the start of the trench war, they found themselves having to strengthen or rebuild the front defenses. And in this environment, those cultured, edu-

cated intellectuals who were so used to having and sharing an opinion and to managing others found themselves, through their sheer incompetence, dependent on others. Being in a close relationship with the people is one thing, but to obey the orders of loudmouthed peasants is another.

After a few weeks or months, even the least physically trained began to adapt. They all admitted it: "I'm toughening up." Manual skills and practical knowledge were, however, much harder to acquire. Indeed, the first months in the war of the trenches exposed their clumsiness very clearly, particularly when compared to the manual dexterity of their lower-class comrades. It must be said in their defense that the conflict required manual skills and practical competence that were little known in well-off circles. Marcel Papillon, for instance, a farmer's son, tells his parents how his manual "speciality" is to build "smokeless" chimneys so as to not be spotted by the enemy.<sup>26</sup>

Most often it was through an acknowledgement of their sheer lack of skills that the intellectuals, embarrassed or bewildered, viewed their new standing. Durkheim's student Robert Hertz conceded to his wife: "It is a shame that I am so bad at this (logging). Fortunately, as sergeant, I only serve as a foreman."<sup>27</sup> Jules Puech also explained to his wife how "he [sought] to have his clumsiness with his shovel and incompetence with his pickaxe be forgiven."<sup>28</sup>



**Figure 3.** What digging a trench means (1916, in the Soissonnais)

Source: Gallica BNF. Agence Rol, BNF, département estampes et photographie, EI-13 (474).

This lack of skills of course had direct consequences for the living conditions of these intellectuals, even if many eventually learned to survive with rations, build a makeshift shelter or steal to survive. On 9 September 1914, during the battle of the Marne, when the army supply lines were broken by the French withdrawal, professor and mayor of Quimper, Henri Jacquelin, specified that "he tried, in vain, to milk a cow in an abandoned barn."<sup>29</sup> It is possible that the animal had no more milk to give. Nevertheless, the comparison two days later with the unit of one of his comrades, chemistry professor Émile Carrière, is a cruel one: "There are cows grazing all around, many comrades have been milking them" (11 September 1914).<sup>30</sup> He himself did not risk it. Another example, with Jules Puech again. He also told his wife of the lengthy debates between soldiers as to when the storm would come. He listened to them and observed while plenty of them were busy building themselves makeshift shelters. When the rain finally came, soldier Puech was left bare-headed under the storm.<sup>31</sup>

These examples show that trench warfare is indeed one of those rare times of temporary reversal of the ordinary domination in place in the class system. Many witness accounts clearly point to this reversal of roles, particularly when the intellectuals compared their sudden social fall from grace to their previous way of life. It is then that we can see that they never quite abandoned a certain class ethnocentrism. Pierre-Maurice Masson, professor of literature at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, a former student of the *École normale supérieure*, wrote to his wife: "You should see the dean of the University walking around in clogs."<sup>32</sup> Émile Carrière, the chemistry professor, specifies in his personal diary: "For as I wear the same uniform as they do, my father's own workers feel allowed to address me with "tu," talking to me so rudely. We all live here in a state of extreme physical and moral promiscuity."<sup>33</sup> Henri Fauconnier, future *prix Goncourt* winner of 1930 who made his fortune in a rubber plantation in Malaysia, compared his situation to that of his service staff: "I am both the boy, cook and courier ... and yet I remember how it irritated me even to hear Kasavan sweep in the next room."<sup>34</sup> Writer Roland Dorgelès explained how he ate pork pie and cheese in the early hours of the morning. It reminded him of the civilian world when he was so disgusted by those Parisian factory workers who did the same before going to work: "Do you know what I ate this morning at 8.30? (woke up at 5 am): pork pie and cheese... when back then I used to look with a certain contemptuous wonder at the masons who would have a bite to eat on the street at the pub door... those times are long gone..."<sup>35</sup>

In fact, those individuals would often end up questioning their own self worth simply due to their sheer lack of appropriate practical skills and knowledge. This deficiency might lead them to greater inaction and therefore condemn them to be marginalized or in some cases even bullied by their

squadron. "I don't think they really hate me. But despite my best efforts, we are still far apart from each other," P.-M. Masson explained.<sup>36</sup> "I wonder if I either intimidate them or disgust them," J. Puech wrote.<sup>37</sup> Artist Fernand Léger was one of those intellectual soldiers who found his arrival to the front a most difficult time for he felt that he was properly pushed aside, saying:

I dare not get involved. No matter how small the initiative I take, it is always the wrong one, never right. They can tell straight away, they never allow me to help with anything positive, and rightly so. They can see things much clearer than I do, which saddens me. My training is hard.

Indeed, he is upset at the thought of losing his stature, and feels very much downgraded: "they have very little esteem for me, I am useless."<sup>38</sup>

At the same time, one should not paint a completely dark picture. For once they had become aware of their manual limitations, my forty-two actors soon discovered within themselves certain skills and talents they did not suspect and which fascinated them. Many of them were surprised at their curiosity about the skills demonstrated by the lower classes: they described, for instance, their physical ability, how they found it so easy to cut trees or build waterproof shelters. They were particularly impressed by their intimate knowledge of the natural environment, and especially how they recognized animal noises with such ease. Many scholars noted that country people, often well versed in walking their animals back to the farm on dark winter nights, found it much easier to move without falling between the trenches than they did, whilst they often slid in the mud and fell heavily during those dark winter nights of 1914. Most of them then went on to say that they found a guide who led the way for them and whose rucksack they grabbed onto to avoid falling.

So the argument is the following: When it comes to heavy work, scholars' witness accounts fluctuate between fascination and repulsion. According to them, other soldiers were either or both full of fortitude and without conscience or reason, good with their hands yet falling over drunk, or surprisingly creative with their slang whilst irritating with their constant chatter. In other words, the scholars felt they predominated in mental intelligence whilst the other soldiers were physically smart and able.

### **How to Remain Themselves?**

This temporary inversion of social domination reversed back to "normal" during rest time. Indeed, when work stopped, these intellectuals sought to counteract the violent social upheaval they faced, doing what they did best: they strived to keep alive those reflective engagements that were so



**Figures 4 and 5.**  
Promiscuity in a shelter  
(Verdun, November 1916  
and Dugny, Meuse, April  
1917).

*Source:* Collections “La  
Contemporaine,” Fonds Valois  
(photographic section of the  
army): VAL\_198\_115, album  
Meuse n°30 cote B4253/75759  
and VAL\_190\_047, album  
Meuse n°22, cote G502/92628.



familiar to them. They continued to think, read, and write in spite of the mud and shells.

The best examples of this reinvestment in their intellectual and scholarly practices are those of sociologist Robert Hertz, who turned into an ethnographer of peasant soldiers,<sup>39</sup> painter Léger who, for lack of painting, wrote relentlessly,<sup>40</sup> and Marc Bloch who planned out his thesis work from the front line.<sup>41</sup> There is also P. M. Masson who finished his dissertation and organized it *viva voce* from the trenches at the front. He had planned it all for April 1916—the jury was ready—yet his leave was revoked in February. It was the start of the battle known today as Verdun. The literature professor did not survive.<sup>42</sup>

To understand this desire for the scholars to remain themselves, it is essential to keep the chronology of the conflict in mind, and its slow descent into immobility. At first they left for war with a mixture of curiosity and suspicion about others. They were on foreign ground. But as the war progressed, in all its paralysis and promiscuity, there was a growing bitter stiffening of attitudes by scholars who tried everything to remain or once again become themselves, surrounded with their books and pencils and always ready with a good word.



**Figures 6 and 7.** Where to write, read, and think quietly?

*Source:* Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon, cote Est. 2251.





**Figures 8 and 9.** Where to write, read, and think quietly?

*Source:* Collections “La Contemporaine,” Fonds Valois (photographic section of the army): VAL\_095\_097, album Marne n°47 cote A1763/105521 and VAL\_095\_017, cote N1018/92416.

As we can see in figures 6 to 9, men were to write, read, and think under the eye and sometimes amid the shouts and plays of the others. They had to endure under the weight of other people's opinion.<sup>43</sup> This was true for all the soldiers. But with the lack of freedom, privacy, time, space or even a basic table on which to write, the intellectuals had never felt so strongly about where they came from and how remote from their backgrounds they had become. In some ways the war led them to experience the condition of the woman writer described by Virginia Wolf: they missed, in the real sense of the word, this *Room of One's Own*, the office which in a former life served as their home and refuge (see the case of Robert Hertz on the next pictures before and during the war, at his desk and in front of a poor hut).



**Figure 10.** Sociologist Robert Hertz before and after, at his desk and at the front, in front of his poor hut near Verdun during the winter 1914–1915.

Source: © Collège de France, archives du Laboratoire d'anthropologie sociale, Fonds Robert Hertz: on the left Douai 1905–1906 with his wife (FRH 08.P.11.030) and on the right Hertz in the Wœvre, 1915, standing up with "*Le Temps*" (The Time) in his hands and having tea with his two NCO's colleagues (FRH 05.C.04.07).



**Figure 11.** Sociologist Robert Hertz before and after, at his desk and at the front, in front of his poor hut near Verdun during the winter 1914–1915.

*Source:* © Collège de France, archives du Laboratoire d'anthropologie sociale, Fonds Robert Hertz: on the left Douai 1905–1906 with his wife (FRH 08.P.11.030) and on the right Hertz in the Wœuvre, 1915, standing up with “*Le Temps*” (The Time) in his hands and having tea with his two NCO’s colleagues (FRH 05.C.04.07).

They were confronted with a loss of the power of self-determination, and the events around them forced them more than ever to continue to be themselves. This was especially true if they hoped to preserve their moral integrity and thus keep a coherent picture of who they were and what they wanted to achieve in engaging mind and body in the war effort. In their attempts to stick to what they knew best, however, they reminded others that they came from a world very different from their own, thus reinforcing their differences from the men with whom the war had forced them to live. In reality, those exercises of the mind even deep in the trenches also constituted a class differentiation. They became impatient and resentful of the endless card games, popular songs, and most especially the heavy drinking that they often overtly despised. The book is the tale of this slow growing tension: their search for an intellectual identity and their descent into a vicious circle whereby they kept to their inner selves at the price of remaining at a distance from others.

Finally, the lengthening war was also the discovery of disillusionment and disappointment. Of course, the disillusion transcended social boundaries. But it did not assume the same form in all social groups. Intellectual-

als' disillusionment had its own trajectory. They had gone to war with a fresh revolutionary spirit at heart. Yet they noticed that the others did not share their idealism: how did they put up with such harsh conditions with so few ideals of their own, intellectuals wondered. Most of the latter engaged in practical investigations of the patriotism of the soldiers around them. Above all, and from then on, they sought to correct the situation and regain control over these misled and misguided citizens. They began lecturing others as to what to think of the war and how to fight it. How did they lecture? They simply took to preaching from a pulpit once more as they did in classrooms, tribunals or as editors of newspapers in the past—or they started to read to those men extracts from patriotic brochures and texts such as the “letters to all Frenchmen,” written by their masters who remained in the capital. They recited authors such as Barrès or Lavissee or simply read out loud the latest news. Robert Hertz wrote to his wife Alice:

You see, only the Catholics and Socialists know why they fight. Others are simply very patient and good-humoured at heart, but their basic peasant reasoning speaks against the war and refuses to acknowledge its necessity. They display a sort of instinctive disdain for the lyrical word. I read the Socialist manifesto to them, articles from Barres, Lavissee's one to the French soldiers.<sup>44</sup>

Of course they acknowledged that none of their efforts succeeded: “none of that seemed to gain their interest,” Hertz concluded (“Rien de tout cela n'a paru mordre”). The men did not want to be lulled by fine words when they bathed in mud all day, especially the morning after a New Year's party. But even if their failure to move those men could segregate these intellectuals more and more, it also enabled them themselves not to give up. With rare exceptions, they persevered in showing willpower and determination. They wished to be a good example to others. They could not renounce the patriotic drives that had led them to enlist wholeheartedly in the first place, nor did they want to.

## Conclusion

Were the trenches of the Great War the scene of a social osmosis? They were not. The reading of the letters and diaries of literate men at the front shows, on the contrary, that a highly differentiated class ethos endured. This material defies the image of a community of soldiers whose former civilian differences dissolved under the double effect of shared patriotism and suffering. To put it another way, the relative equalization of the conditions of existence (all soldiers, from the rank-and-file to the contact officer,

exposed to mud and danger) did not remove the deep differences in moral habits and lifestyles.

But the interest of the study is not limited to noticing differences. Beyond this rather unsurprising conclusion (by what magic would the class relations existing in France in the early 1910s suddenly have disappeared?), I hope to have shown what were the intellectuals' behavior and attitudes on the front lines. The correspondence of the intellectuals reveals the emotional specificity of their war commitment. Whatever their position in the army (weapon, rank, function), whatever their professional, political or religious differences, they shared, with rare exceptions, the same class reaction in facing the events of the war.<sup>45</sup> This reaction or reflex is manifested in common attitudes towards other soldiers (a mixture of paternalism and sometimes exacerbated pessimism), to the hierarchy (unfailing loyalty), and through the form of their own commitment (a matter of personal will, a mobilization of the soul).

This class reaction was not limited to the French. The French intellectuals looked very much like the boys from the British public schools studied by Peter Parker,<sup>46</sup> the Italian intellectual soldiers<sup>47</sup> or the German students whose spiritual commitment was also celebrated through the publication of their letters.<sup>48</sup> The study of the social encounters on the front deserves a European comparison, as the ethos of the young elites of the time was a continental one.<sup>49</sup>

Richard Hoggart, in his famous book *The Uses of Literacy*, has a remarkable formula to indicate what distinguishes the working class from the elites. For one thing, he argues, the working class is not asked to take on the world head on, while the elites consider that it is their duty, something they have to do. He writes: "By and large, seems to be the note that is struck, we are not asked to be the great doers in this world; our kind of life offers little of splendour or of calls for the more striking heroisms, and its tragedies are not of the dramatic or rhetorical kind."<sup>50</sup> I could not better summarize the attitude of intellectuals in the trenches of the Great War.

Such an attitude has major implications for what was called the *Union sacrée*, or *Burgfrieden* in German. Consider the example taken from a letter written by the Jewish historian Jules Isaac to his wife Laure: "I met a new NCO in the company. He is a member of the "Action française" [Charles Maurras' anti-Semitic right-wing movement]. But what surprised me the most is that I discover that I had much more to say to him than to many of my soldiers."<sup>51</sup> There may be no better illustration of the *Union sacrée*: it was not a question of transcending social boundaries, but rather the fact that men who were politically fighting each other before the war, in France especially during the Dreyfus affair, discovered that they shared common goals during the war—to be faithful servants of their national state.

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## Notes

\* I want to thank Katia Mariot and Daniel Schiff for their help in writing this text. I have also greatly benefited from the comments and rewriting of the FPC&S reviewers and editors.

1. See for examples Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914–1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Frank Field, *British and French Writers of the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994); Wolfgang Iser, *Literature at War, 1914–1940: Representing the “Time of Greatness” in Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites, *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Peter Hoeres, *Krieg der Philosophen: Die deutsche und die britische Philosophie im ersten Weltkrieg* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004); Nicolas Beaupré, *Écrire en guerre, écrire la guerre: France, Allemagne, 1914–1920* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2006); Leonard V. Smith, *The Embattled Self: French Soldiers’ Testimony of the Great War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007); David Aubin and Catherine Goldstein, eds., *The War of Guns and Mathematics: Mathematical Practices and Communities through World War I in France and its Western Allies* (Providence, RI: American Mathematical Society, 2014).
2. Martha Hanna, *The Mobilization of Intellect: French Scholars and Writers during the Great War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Roland N. Stromberg, *Redemption by War: The Intellectuals and 1914* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1982); Christophe Prochasson et Anne Rasmussen, *Au nom de la Patrie: Les intellectuels et la Première Guerre mondiale, 1910–1919* (Paris: La Découverte, 1996) et Christophe Prochasson, “Intellectuals and Writers” in *A Companion to World War I*, ed. John Horne (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 323–337.
3. Bruno Cabanes, “La ‘Génération du feu’: aux origines d’une notion,” *Revue historique* 641 (2007): 139–150; Jean-François Sirinelli, “La génération du feu” in *14–18: Mourir pour la patrie* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), 298–312.

4. See Antoine Prost, *Les Anciens Combattants et la société française*, vol. 3 *Mentalités et idéologies* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1977).
5. Leonard V. Smith, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, and Annette Becker, *France and the Great War, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 99.
6. Nicolas Mariot, *Tous unis dans la tranchée? 1914–1918, les intellectuels rencontrent le peuple* (Paris: Seuil, coll. "L'univers historique," 2013 and "Points Histoire," 2017).
7. For partial exceptions, dealing with social differences at war more than with social encounters, see André Loez, "Between Acceptance and Refusal: Soldiers' Attitudes Towards War," in *1914–1918-Online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 8 October 2014, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10461>; Benjamin Ziemann, *War Experiences in Rural Germany, 1914–1923* (Oxford: Berg, 2007); Alexander Watson, "Voluntary Enlistment in the Great War: A European Phenomenon?" in *War Volunteering in Modern Times: From the French Revolution to the Second World War*, ed. Christine G. Krüger and Sonja Levsen (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 163–188; David Englander and James Osborne, "Jack, Tommy and Henry Dubb: The Armed Forces and the Working Class," *The Historical Journal* 21, 3 (1978): 593–621; Gary D. Sheffield, "The Effect of the Great War on Class Relations in Britain: The Career of Major Christopher Stone DSO MC," *War & Society* 7, 1 (1989): 87–105 and *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 130–134; Bernard Waites, *A Class Society at War: England 1914–1918* (Leamington spa: Berg, 1987); or John G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).
8. For general overviews, see Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), or Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Combattre: Une anthropologie historique de la guerre moderne (XIX<sup>e</sup>-XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris: Seuil, 2008). Specifically on the Great War, see Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14–18: Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2003).
9. "Un article pas trop chic, trop officier, quelque chose de solide, épais, et simple soldat, non verni. C'est mille fois préférable." Barbusse to his wife, 23 July 1915, in Henri Barbusse, *Lettres à sa femme: 1914–1917; précédé de son Carnet de notes du front* (Paris: Buchet Chastel, 2006 [1937]), 198.
10. Kahn to his wife, 17 October 1914, in *Journal de guerre d'un juif patriote: 1914–1918* (Paris: Éditions Jean-Claude Simoën, 1978), 32.
11. "Mes initiatives" tombent toujours "mal à point, jamais juste," et conclut: "ils ont très peu d'estime pour moi, je suis un inutile." Léger to Poughon, 5 October 1914, in Fernand Léger, *Une correspondance de guerre à Louis Poughon, 1914–1918*, Les Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne, Hors série/archives (Paris: Éditions du Centre Pompidou, 1990), 12.
12. "J'ai une conscience, eux semblent s'en passer." Cru to his sister Alice, 31 May 1916, in *Lettres du front et d'Amérique: 1914–1919*, ed. Marie-Françoise Attard-Maraninchi and Roland Caty, forward by Jean-Marie Guillon (Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2007), 158.

13. See Nicolas Mariot, "Avec qui on écrit l'histoire: Le cas du témoignage combattant dans l'historiographie française de la Grande Guerre," *Genèses. Sciences sociales et histoire* 95 (June 2014): 138–159.
14. *Poilu: The World War I Notebook of Caporal Louis Barthas, 1914–1918* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), translated from the French *Les Carnets de guerre de Louis Barthas, tonnelier, 1914–1918*, introduction and afterword by Rémy Cazals (Paris: La Découverte, 2014 [1978]).
15. See Jules Maurin, *Armée, guerre, société: Soldats languedociens (1889–1919)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1982).
16. See ministère du Travail et de la Prévoyance sociale, Statistique générale de la France, *Annuaire statistique*, vol. 33 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1913), résumé rétrospectif, Instruction, Tab. I Degré d'instruction des conscrits depuis la classe de 1832, 18 (Online on [www.gallica.bnf.fr](http://www.gallica.bnf.fr)).
17. "Là où on se bat, là où on écope et là où on meurt: le peuple y est et une infime minorité de bourgeois qui font honnêtement leur devoir ou trop candides pour se defiler." Isaac to his wife Laure, 19 January 1915, in Jules Isaac, *Un historien dans la Grande guerre: Lettres et carnets, 1914–1917*, ed. Marc Michel (Paris: Armand Colin, 2004), 72.
18. "Où sont donc les intellectuels? Tués, embusqués, au feu, réformés? En tout cas il n'en pleut pas ici." Puech to his wife Marie-Louise, 14 July 1915, in Marie-Louise and Jules Puech, *Saleté de guerre! Correspondance 1915–1916*, ed. Rémy Cazals (Maisons-Laffitte: Éditions Ampelos, 2015), 46.
19. "Je suis le seul bachelier complet de ma compagnie. Cela m'a déjà valu quelques corvées en supplément, notamment de balayer la chambre trois matins de suite." Diary, 20 December 1914, in Jean Leymonnerie, *Journal d'un poilu sur le front d'Orient*, présenté par Yves Pourcher (Paris: Pygmalion, 2003), 46.
20. "Je me sens très loin d'eux quand je leur parle, très près quand je les regarde agir." Faure to his friend Francis Jourdain, 16 December 1914, in Élie Faure, *La Sainte Face, suivi de Lettres de la Première Guerre mondiale* (Paris: Bartillat, 2005 [first edition Paris: Crès, 1918]), 333.
21. See Mariot, *Tous unis dans la tranchée*, chap. 2 "Portrait de groupe avant la bataille," 33–61 ("Group portrait before the battle").
22. "Mon ordonnance Sempé est une perle. Quand nous déménageons de secteur, je n'ai rien à lui dire: il sait ou devine ce que je dois prendre avec moi dans ma musette, ce qu'il doit mettre dans le sac; je vais faire un tour de quelques minutes, et quand je reviens tout est prêt. Et d'un dévouement entier: jamais ne rouspète, toujours content et très discret. Il partage ma cagna en ce moment: il couche dans la niche au-dessous de mon auge à paille. Nos puces s'échangent de haut en bas et de bas en haut; mais je ne l'entends pas, je ne le vois pas, je ne le sens pas. C'est parfait." Étévé to his friend René Maublanc, 27 July 1915, in Marcel Étévé (lieutenant), *Lettres d'un combattant (août 1914–juillet 1916)* (Paris: Éditions Hachette, 1917), 76.
23. C'est "un bon camarade qui nous sert, à Batisse et à moi, de tampon." Kahn to his wife, 25 January 1915, in *Journal de guerre d'un juif patriote*, 98.
24. "Plusieurs camarades s'étonnaient que je ne me présente pas (!!!). Ceci te donne la mentalité générale." Puech to his wife Marie-Louise, 9 November 1915, in *Saleté de guerre*, 174.
25. It is obvious that the combat was a tragic moment of equality between men of all conditions facing death or injury. It is well known, for example, that the



officers' mortality rate was higher than that of non-commissioned men in British and French armies. But equality in exposure to danger does not mean any reshaping of the hierarchy. Moreover, it must be remembered that the assaults in the no man's land fortunately represented a small part of the time spent on the first lines.

26. Letter to his parents, 26 December 1914, in *Marthe, Joseph, Lucien, Marcel Papillon. "Si je reviens comme je l'espère": Lettres du front et de l'Arrière, 1914–1918* (Paris: Perrin, 2005 [2003]), 58.
27. "Dommage que je sois si mal doué de ce côté [le bûcheronnage]. Heureusement que, comme sergent, je ne sers que de contremaître." Robert Hertz to his wife, 16 September 1914, in Robert Hertz, *Un ethnologue dans les tranchées: Lettres de Robert Hertz à sa femme Alice*, présentées par Philippe Besnard et Alexander Riley, préfaces de Jean-Jacques Becker et Christophe Prochasson (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2002), 54.
28. "Comment se faire pardonner d'être maladroit avec ma pelle et insuffisant avec ma pioche." Puech to his wife, 31 July 1915, in *Saleté de guerre*, 76.
29. Diary Jacquelin, 9 September 1914, in *De la rue d'Ulm au Chemin des dames: Histoire d'un fils, trajectoire d'un homme, 1902–1918*, ed. Claire Jacquelin (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), 134.
30. Diary, 11 September 1914, in Émile Carrière, *Un professeur dans les tranchées, 1914–1916*, diary and letters edited by Daniel Carrière (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005), 41.
31. Puech to his wife, 29 August 1915, in *Saleté de guerre*, 100–101.
32. "Il faut imaginer le vice-doyen de l'université en sabots." Pierre-Maurice Masson to his wife, 5 January 1915, in *Lettres de guerre: Août 1914–avril 1916* (Paris: Hachette, 1917), 35.
33. "Parce que je porte le même uniforme qu'eux, les propres ouvriers de mon père se croient immédiatement autorisés à me tutoyer, à me parler grossièrement. Nous vivons tous ici dans un état de promiscuité physique et morale extrême." Diary, Carrière, 9 September 1914, in *Un professeur dans les tranchées*, 39.
34. "Moi que ça gênait d'entendre Kasavan balayer dans la pièce d'à côté." Henri Fauconnier to his fiancée, décembre 1914, in Henri Fauconnier, *Lettres à Madeleine, 1914–1919* (Paris: Stock, 2006), 43.
35. "Sais-tu ce que j'ai mangé ce matin à 8h30? (réveillé à 5h): du pâté de porc et du fromage ... Et naguère je regardais avec une curiosité un peu méprisante les aide-maçons qui, le matin, cassaient la croûte à la porte des "chauds de vin" ... Oui, c'est loin tout cela." Roland Dorgelès to his mother, 19 June 1915, in Roland Dorgelès, *Je t'écris de la tranchée: Correspondance de guerre, 1914–1917* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2003), 297.
36. "Je crois qu'ils ne me détestent pas. Mais malgré tous mes efforts, nous sommes encore loin les uns des autres." Masson to his wife, 20 April 1915, in *Lettres de guerre: Août 1914–avril 1916*, 81–82.
37. "Je me demande si je les intimide ou si je les dégoûte." Puech to his wife, 21 July 1915, unpublished letter.
38. "Je n'ose ne me mêler de rien. La moindre initiative que je prends, elle est toujours mal à point, jamais juste. Ils le sentent tout de suite et jamais ils ne me confient quoi que ce soit de positif et avec raison. Ils voient beaucoup plus simple que moi, cela me désole. Je suis à une rude école.... Ils ont très peu d'estime pour moi, je suis un inutile." Léger to Poughon, 5 October 1914, in *Une correspondance de guerre à Louis Poughon*, 12.

39. See Robert Hertz, *Sociologie religieuse et anthropologie: Deux enquêtes de terrain (1912–1915)*, edited and commented by Stéphane Baciocchi and Nicolas Mariot (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2015).
40. Léger to Poughon, 29 January 1916, in *Une correspondance de guerre à Louis Poughon*, 58.
41. Marc Bloch, *L'Histoire, la guerre, la résistance* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), 234.
42. *Lettres de guerre. Août 1914–avril 1916*, XX.
43. André Loez, "L'espace public des tranchées: "Tenir" sous le regard des autres en 1914–1918," in *La Grande Guerre: Pratiques et expériences*, ed. Rémy Cazals, Emmanuelle Picard, and Denis Rolland (Toulouse: Privat, 2005), 259–268.
44. "Vois-tu, les catholiques et les socialistes seuls savent pourquoi ils se battent. Les autres ont seulement un excellent fond de patience et de bonne humeur, mais leur raison paysanne proteste contre la guerre et refuse son assentiment. Ils ont une sorte de répugnance instinctive à la phrase, au lyrisme. Je leur ai lu le manifeste socialiste, du Barrès, l'article de Lavissee aux soldats de France." Hertz to his wife Alice, 1 January 1915, in *Un ethnologue dans les tranchées*, 175.
45. These exceptions are precisely due to the popular social origin of some of the intellectuals. For example, the novelist and 1910 "prix Goncourt" Louis Pergaud was used to hunting when he was a teacher in a small village. He already knew the life and customs of the peasants of the Jura province when he came to the front. Unlike most of his colleagues, he agreed to go and drink (too much) alcohol with the other soldiers.
46. Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos* (London: Constable, 1987).
47. See Mario Isnenghi, "La Grande Guerre" in *L'Italie par elle-même: Lieux de mémoire italiens de 1848 à nos jours*, ed. M. Isnenghi (Paris: Éditions Rue d'Ulm, 2006 [1997]).
48. On the anthologies of fallen students' letters published by the philosopher Philipp Witkop (*Kriegsbriefe gefallener Studenten*, 1916, 1918 et 1928), see Wolfgang G. Natter, *Literature at War, 1914–1940: Representing the "Time of Greatness" in Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).
49. See Watson, "Voluntary Enlistment"; Sonja Levsen, *Elite, Männlichkeit und Krieg: Tübinger und Cambridger Studenten 1900–1929* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005); Thomas Weber, *Our Friend "The Enemy": Elite Education in Britain and Germany before World War I* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).
50. Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1957), 63.
51. Isaac to his wife Laure, 24 July 1915, in *Un historien dans la Grande guerre*, 119.
52. His website is <http://nicolas.mariot.cnrs.free.fr/>.
53. See Christophe Charle, *La République des universitaires, 1870–1914* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), annexe 1, 473.



## Appendix

**Table 3.** Nomenclature of the database made and used by the French historian Christophe Charle in his work<sup>53</sup>

Lower classes	Lower or popular classes	Worker, agricultural laborer, craftsman, cartwright, docker, domestic, little farmer, cooper, weaver, gardener
Lower middle-class	Lower middle-class	Clerk, headmaster, small shopkeeper, sales representative, primary school teacher, hotelkeeper, employee, clerk of the court
Upper middle-classes	Upper middle class (civil servants)	Office manager, captain of police, railway station master, accountant public, state employee of the finances, state employee of the post offices, inspector, junior, sensory officer
	Upper middle class (private sector)	Stockbroker, business agent, architect, jeweler, trader, agent, entrepreneur, art dealer, negotiating in grains, printer, engineer, pharmacist, small manufacturer, craftsman teacher
Upper classes	Senior official and politicians	Deputy, military officer, civil senior official, diplomat, prefect, engineer of the State
	Law occupations	Lawyer, attorney, magistrate, lecturer in law, solicitor
	Intellectual fractions	Artists, writers, journalist, doctor, musician, minister, secondary school teacher and professor of the university, the rabbi, the veterinarian
	Wealthy fractions	Banker, brewer, manufacturer, founder of society, company owner, property owner, person of private means, important trader

