

Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature

Volume 41

Issue 2 *Writing 1914-1918: National Responses
to the Great War*

Article 6

6-15-2017

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Recommended Citation

Hobbs, Arabella L. (2017) "Regretful Ruminations: Jacques Rivière's *L'Allemand*: Souvenirs et réflexions d'un prisonnier de guerre," *Studies in 20th & 21st Century Literature*: Vol. 41: Iss. 2, Article 6.
<https://doi.org/10.4148/2334-4415.1939>

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Regretful Ruminations: Jacques Rivière's *L'Allemand*: Souvenirs et réflexions d'un prisonnier de guerre

Abstract

This article examines Jacques Rivière's post-war work *L'Allemand: Souvenirs et réflexions d'un prisonnier de guerre* (1918) 'On German nature: memories and reflections of a prisoner-of-war,' as a response to the conflicting nexus of Catholicism and French nationalism in the aftermath of the First World War. A damning account of the German race, *L'Allemand* exposes Rivière's tussle with his wartime and post-war identities, most strikingly exhibited in his moral distancing from the text he was to eventually publish. In resuscitating Rivière's now forgotten text, this article engages with the post-war reception of a work whose peculiar context bears witness to the liminal status of those detained in First World War prison camps caught between trench and captor nation, enmity and empathy.

Keywords

First World War, Prisoners, Franco-German relations, Regret

Regretful Ruminations: Jacques Rivière's *L'Allemand: Souvenirs et réflexions
d'un prisonnier de guerre*

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Mon pauvre livre . . . je le déteste, je l'exècre, et si j'avais seulement un tout petit peu de courage, j'en arrêteraï l'impression . . . (*Correspondance 1914-1917* 69)

My wretched book . . . I hate it, I loathe it, and if I only had a grain of courage, I would put a stop to its publication . . .¹

Un livre des plus précieux pour nous aider à résoudre "l'énigme Allemande", qui absorbe en ce moment l'attention et fait par instants le désespoir de tous les bons esprits. C'est une analyse psychologique très poussée, mais fondée sur l'expérience, - sur l'expérience la plus authentique, puisque l'auteur a été pendant trois ans prisonnier en Allemagne et qu'il a appris à comprendre le caractère allemand en le subissant. Aucune amertume cependant. Au contraire un grand effort de modération et d'impartialité. (*Correspondance 1914-1917* 93)

An important book designed to help us come to grips with the "German enigma," a topic which occupies a great deal of attention these days and, on occasion, no small amount of despair. It is an in-depth psychological analysis, but one based upon experience of the most authentic kind since the writer was held captive for three years in Germany and thus came to understand the German character. No bitterness however. Rather, a great effort to maintain moderation and impartiality.

Held captive by the Germans from 1914 to 1917, Jacques Rivière wrote prolifically during his internment. Of this output, his study of the German people, *L'Allemand*, 'The German' illustrates the unusual dynamics of a consistent encounter with the enemy in a war famed for the faceless enemy of the opposing trench. This encounter produced a text that is extraordinary for the ways in which it disavows the Catholic position of post-war reconstruction while at the same time lamenting the intransigent nationalist posture adopted throughout much of the text.

As Leigh Gilmore writes, "the coincidence of trauma and self-representation" reveals a great deal through the expression of its limits or inconsistencies, the point at which trauma and self-representation no longer

coalesce together but rather become antagonistic impulses (2). This line of reasoning draws upon now-established work in trauma studies by scholars such as Cathy Caruth.² Here, I suggest that Rivière's *L'Allemand* represents the complexity of French Catholic writing in the post-war period, encapsulating such problems as the representation of the fully realized Catholic self in the face of war.

In 1916, whilst still interned at Koenigsbrück prisoner-of-war camp in Germany, Rivière wrote an essay entitled "Le Catholicisme et la Société" 'Catholicism and Society,' later published in *A la Trace de Dieu* 'In Search of God' (1925). In it, he acknowledges the power of Catholicism to penetrate political boundaries "comme un fantôme qu'on ne peut arrêter" (25) 'an unstoppable ghost.' According to Rivière, Catholicism finds its apogee in war since its Gospel exceeds the boundaries of nationhood: "Mais il a sur tous les autres cet avantage incomparable, qu'il subsiste même au milieu de la guerre, qu'il se glisse au centre de l'horreur et qu'il y répare encore ce qui peut être réparé. L'Évangile a été prêché à toutes les nations, et tant que l'on reste dans le plan de l'Évangile les nations n'existent plus" (107) 'It has the incomparable advantage of existing in plain sight in the heart of war, of inserting itself in the midst of horror and healing what can be healed. The Gospel has been preached to all nations and within this context, nations can be said to no longer exist.' Separating out Charles Péguy's high rhetoric of Catholicism and nationhood, "cette vieille devise que la France est la fille aînée de l'Église," (102) 'the old idea that France is the eldest daughter of the Church herself,' Rivière insists that nationalism is a base instinct rooted in physicality: "Le sentiment national, c'est l'instinct de conservation de nos rudiments psychologiques les plus nus, les plus véritablement initiaux" (103) 'Nationalism is the basest of all our survival instincts, the most brazen, the most primal.' Moving towards the pacifist convictions laid out in his fourteenth *Carnet de guerre* 'War diary,' Rivière discounts any association between *le sentiment national* 'national feeling' and Christianity, since a shared conviction of faith or ideology across enemy lines renders its exceptionalism redundant:

La preuve matérielle en est donnée par ce fait, auquel ni le socialiste, ni le catholique ne semblent penser. C'est que, dans la tranchée d'en face, se trouvent à coup sûr un socialiste et un catholique, et qui croient, eux aussi, combattre chacun pour leur cause. Ce seul fait suffirait à décider de l'indépendance absolue du sentiment national et de la foi chrétienne. (104)

The incontrovertible evidence is this—a fact which no socialist or Catholic seems to have considered—in the opposite trench are without doubt a socialist and a Catholic who each believe themselves to be fighting for the same cause. This alone should be evidence enough to prove the difference between nationalism and the Christian spirit.

Although the essay does not debase nationalism entirely, it does condemn the use of nationalism to incite violence, a fundamentally un-Christian act: “Il peut désirer d’un grand Coeur mourir pour sa patrie, mais il ne peut vouloir sincèrement tuer, vouloir risquer de paraître devant Dieu avec cette tache effroyable sur la conscience” (106) ‘He might desire with his mighty Heart to die for his country, but he cannot sincerely wish to kill, to appear before God with this frightful stain upon his conscience.’ The violence of nationalism and God’s love are antagonistic impulses that detract from the fundamental choice between belief and unbelief.

Given these sentiments, it is curious that at the same time that Rivière was elaborating a philosophy of Catholic pacifism and social action, he was also in the process of writing his inflammatory study of German nature, eventually published in the 1919 *Nouvelle revue française* ‘The New French Review’ under his own editorship. Far from the high-minded tone of his collected essays, *L'Allemand* publicly airs his vendetta towards his German captors. Divided into two parts, the first part “D’après nature” ‘Observations’ studies Germanness as observed during his three years of daily contact as a prisoner. The second, “A l’en croire” ‘To be believed’ is a commentary on German philosopher Paul Natorp’s articles on the nature of German genius published in the review *Deutscher Wille: des Kunstwarts* ‘The Preservation of German Art’ in 1915. As the full title of the work—*L'Allemand, souvenirs et réflexions d’un prisonnier de guerre* ‘The German, memories and reflections of a prisoner of war’—suggests, Rivière’s analysis of German nature is formed, unapologetically, by personal experience. Yet, as I want to suggest more fully, the second part of the text forms the basis of an appeal to a more objective form of analysis through philosophical reasoning. This tension between subjective and objective perspectives is most apparent in the preface where the will to Catholic social reconstruction and its opposing instinct of post-war nationalistic hatred are regretfully contemplated by Rivière. More laterally, the text exhibits the obstructive nature of personal experience during a decade of what John Horne has termed spiritual and cultural “demobilization” (102).

The 1918 *Avant-Propos* ‘foreword’ engages the non-imprisoned reader ethically, envisaging a type of reading rooted in empathy. As a prisoner, Rivière frames his portrait of German nature as a product of frustration: “Tous les jours j’avais à subir leurs taquineries: il me semblait de bonne guerre de la brandir, en réponse, aux yeux du monde entier” (8) ‘Every day I had to endure their goading: it seemed fair game to me to brandish this in front of the world as a response.’ Soon after, however, he admits that the wider consequences of publication call into question his authorial responsibility: “Plus généralement, avais-je le droit de contribuer pour si peu que ce fût, à l’augmentation de la haine et de la douleur dans le monde? M’était-il permis d’alimenter de mes remarques ce monstrueux capital, déjà si difficile à liquider?” (9) ‘More generally, did I have the right to contribute—

for whatever it was worth—to the increase in hatred and pain in the world? Should I have nourished with my remarks the monstrous wealth of these sentiments, already so difficult to dissipate?’ By voicing his misgivings in a series of rhetorical questions, Rivière opens up a relationship between his experiential self and the reading public that casts his written enterprise into doubt: “En d’autres termes, la vision allemande m’était apparue, non pas bien entendu aussi juste, mais aussi nécessaire que la mienne . . .” (11) ‘In other words, the German perspective appeared to me not only as fair as my own but also just as necessary.’ By acknowledging the ways in which the text might figuratively dissolve national identities rather than reinforce them, Rivière foregrounds the ways in which the altered subjectivity of the prison-self forms the unstable center of the text.

Sight, both literal and metaphorical, besets the 1918 *Avant-propos*. Opening his remarks with the admission that the text could very easily not have been published—“Les pages qu’on va lire ont bien failli ne jamais voir le jour” (7) ‘The pages you are about to read very nearly didn’t see the light of day’—Rivière plays on the precarious conditions of visibility within captivity and the position of the work as both private repository of frustration and public document. This tension is further amplified by the admission that in making his ideas visible to the world, a very personal vision would act as a deserved punishment for the collective sins of the German people. Rivière concedes that its insight risks blinding a post-war audience turned toward reconciliation: “. . . qui risquerait ensuite de nous aveugler” (10) ‘. . . that could risk eventually blinding us to its consequences.’ Developing further the metaphor of blindness, Rivière edges towards a formulation of nationalism as a form of inescapable bigotry in time of war: “Il ne faut pas dire tout à fait qu’on devient aveugle; la clairvoyance de bien des esprits s’exaspère; mais elle prend un cours circulaire et comme enchanté; elle ne sait plus sortir de l’enceinte magique où une invisible puissance l’a enfermée” (12) ‘It wouldn’t be right to say that we have become blind as such; the clairvoyance of plenty of people is exasperating; but it takes on a circular and almost enchanted form; as if it can’t break out of the magic boundary where an invisible power has locked it in.’ Caught in the blindness of his own nationalism but able to see beyond it with the benefit of hindsight, the *Avant-propos* justifies the publication of the text by preempting the objections it may raise: “Vais-je ajouter un chapitre à cette littérature féroce et précaire, que je ne puis lire moi-même sans dégoût?” (14) ‘Will I really add to this ferocious and precarious literature that I myself can hardly read without disgust?’ In being alert to the short-sightedness of his enterprise while at the same time presenting a cogent set of reasons for his motives, Rivière makes the case for the text as the vehicle for his emotional survival: “Ceci n’est pas un jugement, une mise en accusation de l’Allemagne, du genre de celles que dressent quotidiennement nos journalistes et nos hommes d’État. On ne trouvera pas dans mon livre l’appareil solennel de la justice . . . Je ne me place pas à un point de vue transcendant; je fais

de l'hygiène, comme on dit" (17) 'This is not a judgment, an accusation leveled at Germany, of the kind our journalists and statesmen proffer daily. You won't find in my book the solemn apparatus of judgment . . . I don't pretend to be in any kind of objective position; I'm simply cleaning up after myself, as they say.'

Anxiety equally overwhelms the 1924 preface, made plain in the repeated references to sight as both objective and misleading. Describing the imperfections of his manuscript after a period of reprieve, Rivière condemns its exaggerations and lacunae, which now appear very clearly to him having revisited it: ". . . ses lacunes, ses exagérations, les préoccupations subjectives qui en compromettent la thèse, m'ont sauté aux yeux avec plus d'évidence encore que je ne m'y attendais" (i) '. . . its lacunae, exaggerations and subjective preoccupations which compromise the thesis, leapt before my eyes with more proof that I had been expecting.' He goes on to admit that time has altered his perspective on Germanness since the end of the war, "Je ne vois clair qu'au contact de la vie" (ii) 'Only upon contact with the world can I see clearly,' but concludes that a more protean analysis of the German people would be incompatible with the ethnic portrait that he has drawn. "Comme on l'a noté, mon portrait de l'Allemand, c'est aussi un portrait du Français, L'Allemand ici est peint tel que peut le voir (ou plutôt tel que ne peut pas le voir) le Français,—dont apparaissent tous les défauts, toute la nervosité, tous les dégoûts natifs irraisonnés" (iii) 'As we have noted, my portrait of the German is also a portrait of the French. The German is clearly depicted here just as I would depict the French,—in all his faults, anxiety, and inherent and irrational quirks.' However, despite his credentials as a literary critic, Rivière admits to a wilful myopia when it comes to German literature, an aspect he neglects to include in his portrait: "Qu'eussé-je vu, si j'eusse été plus distrait de moi-même et plus vacant?" (iv) 'What could I have seen if I had been less self-involved and more open?'

Part one, "D'après nature," is divided into four chapters. Sketching a moral portrait of the German soul based on anecdotal evidence, each chapter concentrates on certain (negative) character traits. Essentializing the character traits of the Germans by recalling their primitive nature and their original state of savagery, "Je ne nie pas qu'il soient des barbares" (23) 'I can't deny their barbarity,' Rivière reproaches the Germans for their indifference: "Plus que d'avoir ravagé, pillé, incendié, et massacré, je lui en veux de se résumer si facilement, de se réduire à si peu de chose. Ce que je ne puis lui pardonner, c'est son néant intérieur" (27) 'More than having ravaged, pillaged, burnt and massacred, I rail at the German for reducing himself to the basest possible instinct. That's what I can't forgive, his inner vacuity.' Tormented by German morality, which he describes as second-rate, Rivière enumerates instance after instance where Germans fall short of any kind of magnanimity. Although their treatment of Russian prisoners inspires fear due to the unthinkable forms of torture they inflict, their failure to inspire any kind of moral fear in the hearts of the French inmates is perceived by Rivière as even worse.

Chapter Three constitutes a damning assessment of German intellect: “. . . il y a chez l’Allemand une sorte d’ignorance congénitale du vrai, qui mérite d’être étudiée de près” (109) ‘. . . there is a sort of congenital ignorance in the German that deserves to be studied up close.’ Unabashed by what is morally, or even empirically, right or wrong, the German simply carries out what is possible, or what can be made to appear that way: “Le vrai, c’est tout ce qui peut être rendu vraisemblable” (110) ‘The truth is simply what can be made possible.’ In this way, their invasion of Belgium in 1914 formed part of a strategy of pragmatism, just like the bombing of a French Cathedral on Good Friday is tiresome to the Germans but not monstrous: “Son canon à longue portée a eu la sottise d’aller aboutir, le Vendredi Saint, dans une église où il y avait du monde et de faire de la bouillie. C’est ennuyeux; et il est vraiment difficile de se débarbouiller de l’affaire” (123) ‘His roving cannon had the foolishness to end up, on Good Friday, in a Church where there was a crowd. How tiresome, and how difficult to disentangle oneself from the matter.’

Insults aside, Rivière concedes in the fourth chapter of part one that the Germans should not be totally condemned. Instead, he singles out their extraordinary will as evidence of their wartime efficiency: “La volonté a chez l’Allemand une force et une étendue qui passent de beaucoup l’ordinaire. Elle va partout, elle s’applique à tout, elle opère tout. Elle est infatigable et sans défaut, elle est pratiquement infinie” (129) ‘The German will has a force that far exceeds the ordinary. It goes everywhere, applies itself to everything, carries everything out. It is tireless, without flaw and practically infinite.’ Drawing together the threads of earlier chapters, Rivière insists that the Germans’ indifference to humanity is what allows them to wage war with ruthless efficiency; German nature is a moral *tabula rasa* that grants them the perfect disposition for the indignities of war.

In part two, Rivière switches from the anecdotal material of his time as a prisoner of war, his *souvenirs* ‘memories,’ to his *reflexions* ‘reflections,’ which he frames less as reflections than as an empirically objective study of German nature. Using German philosopher Paul Natorp’s philosophical treatise on the word *Deutschtum* ‘Germanness’ as a comparative yardstick to his own observations, Rivière suggests that his remarks in part one are in line with the observations he made as a prisoner. Leaving aside the dubious objectivity of his enterprise, the very attempt to achieve impartiality through Natorp proves that both the French and the Germans believe in the essentialism of race. Seen from this angle, part two is less an anecdotal tirade bolstered by unflattering portraits of Germans but rather represents an earnest attempt to embody the Christian ideals of compassion and peace laid out in the rest of his prison corpus.

Unsurprisingly, once he begins his analysis, objectivity is hard to sustain. Juxtaposing Natorp’s theory of race with his own analysis, Rivière soon contests many of Natorp’s claims. Taking issue with Natorp’s claim that the Germans are a

unified race not given to the excesses of individualism but rather bound by a “continuité supérieure” (136) ‘superior longevity,’ Rivière retorts that this claim springs from “une impuissance analytique” ‘analytic shortcomings’ (the title of the second chapter of part two). Building on his allegation of analytical inferiority in the second and third chapters, Rivière claims that the German disregard for the individual leads to a false sense of synthesis that culminates in a confused melange of rules and logic. Criticizing the way in which Natorp constantly tries to elevate the Germans to the first rung of the intellectual hierarchy (145), Rivière does manage to concede that even French philosophers have failed to achieve impartiality due to their wartime propaganda. However, the spirit of fair play does not last long:

Sans doute, mais chez eux ce fut justement un effet de la guerre. Ce sont gens que la guerre a mis hors d’eux-mêmes, a chassés de leur maison; eux aussi en un sens, ils sont des “réfugiés”. Au contraire, il faut admirer et détester combien le tour pratique donné par Natorp à sa réflexion est naturel. Il n’a même pas eu à le lui donner; elle l’avait déjà; cette serviabilité, c’était son allure spontanée Ce qui chez nous est maladie, chez lui est constitutionnel. (181)

Without a doubt this was a consequence of the war. These are the people whom the war had left fractious driven from their houses; they too in some senses, are “refugees.” On the contrary one has to admire and loathe in equal measure the ease Natorp gives to his reflections. He didn’t have to add it; it was there already; this propensity came quite naturally What to us is a sickness is to him natural.

In the chapters that follow, the chasm between the objective and the subjective continues to widen. In keeping with the French wartime view of Kantian philosophy as the harbinger of German aggression, Rivière accuses Kant of having extended the “connaissance de l’Absolu à la loi morale” (191) ‘knowledge of the Absolute to moral law.’ In this way, Germans lack the finesse of moral contemplation, or true sophistication; they are will without intelligence, efficiency without thought. This observation gathers speed in the penultimate chapter “Culture et barbarie” ‘Culture and Barbarianism,’ where a possible German victory is equated with a return to barbarism:

J’ai spécialement pris soin de retenir le plus longtemps possible le gros mot de barbarie. J’ai même condamné l’emploi qu’on en fait couramment pour stigmatiser certains défauts allemands que je crois avoir montrés d’une qualité toute différente. Mais enfin voici le moment arrivé où je ne puis plus

m'empêcher de le lâcher . . . même si la révolution du monde par l'Allemagne devait représenter un progrès matériel positif, je prétends que ce ne pourrait être qu'au prix d'un retour à la plus effrayante barbarie intellectuelle. (201)

I took special care to withhold the serious claim of barbarity for as long as possible. I even condemned its current employment as a means of stigmatizing certain German defaults that I believe myself to have shown in an entirely different light. But now the moment has come when I can no longer hold back . . . even if the German world revolution ought to represent positive material progress, I maintain that this could only be at the expense of the most terrifying return to intellectual barbarity.

On the following page, Rivière defines intellectual barbarism as the inability to recognize excellence. Citing Goethe in an attempt to restore neutrality to his claim (202), he maintains that German barbarianism stems from a total lack of sensitivity to the nuances of humanity. In the final chapter, Rivière returns to the brute force of the German nature in the chapter entitled “La jeunesse de l’Allemand” ‘German youth.’ Further condemning the German will, he concludes rhetorically: “Et qu’y a-t-il de moins intéressant que la jeunesse?” (216) ‘And what could be less interesting than the young?’

Pierre Nora suggests in “Between Memory and History, Les Lieux de Mémoire” that the relationship between French history, memory, and the nation exhibits a curious symbiosis at all stages (7-26). The ability of the French to recognize themselves as French, or to know and transmit the essence of Frenchness, is made abundantly clear in *L’Allemand*. As the literary product of resistance, *L’Allemand* draws upon certain myths of Frenchness that see the French as the embattled defenders of their territory: myths that grew out of the commune in 1870 and were cemented by the French at Verdun (16). By conjuring a national self-consciousness, or an imagined community of the French beyond his prison walls, Rivière was able to retaliate against his German aggressors by inscribing his individual experience into a broader narrative of moral superiority. As Thomas Scheff notes, we should not be surprised that, in wartime, nationalism became the dominant lens for interpreting the position of the self (168).

What is unusual, however, is the way in which *L’Allemand* ironically reproduces in its content a model of history that Rivière sought to supersede in his other prison writings. Where, then, to place the text in the wider corpus of Rivière’s work? And how can we explain the anomaly that the work represents within the context of his avowed aims for peace and reconstruction as evinced in his writing on Catholicism and society?

The mixed reaction to the text by high-profile literary and philosophical figures in France such as André Gide and the French Catholic philosopher Gabriel Marcel proves that its publication in the post-war moment was as divisive as it was cohesive. Gide saw in it a portrait not of the Germans but of Rivière himself: “l'intérêt que l'on prend à vous lire, vient, sans doute, de ce que, souvent, en peignant l'Allemand et en vous opposant à lui, vous vous peignez du même-coup vous-même” (56) ‘the interest one has in reading you, comes, without a doubt, from the fact that often, in depicting the German and opposing yourself to him, you end up depicting yourself,’ while Marcel enthusiastically welcomed its publication as confirmation of the “foncière plasticité” ‘sinister slipperiness’ of Teuton nature (134). As Anne-Rachel Hermetet has examined in her study of the *Nouvelle revue française* in the 1920s, editors and contributors to the review alike mourned the collapse of humanist values in the aftermath of the war, casting doubt on the possibility of literature itself (2). Upon taking up editorship of the publication in 1919 (a position Rivière held until his death from typhoid in 1925), he firmly asserted the primacy of art and literature, emphasizing the need for the demobilization of minds. And yet not only *L'Allemand*, but also the content of the *Nouvelle revue française* in the immediate aftermath of the war reveal the impracticality of his early philosophy. The question of Franco-German relations could not be transcended by literature, and Rivière came under pressure to adopt the nationalist line by his literary associates Jean Schlumberger and Marcel Drouin. Moreover, as Gide's article “Réflexions sur l'Allemagne” ‘Reflections on Germany’—published in the *Nouvelle revue française* in 1919 and explicitly inspired by Rivière's *L'Allemand*—shows, devotees and contributors to the review were unable to ignore the fate of Germany within Europe without asserting France's intellectual primacy: “The German, who is never an individual himself, does not sense the individuality of anyone or anything; he has never learned draftmanship. France is the great drafting school of Europe and of the entire world” (186).

Given the mixed critical response to the book from all corners of the literary establishment and, most confusingly, from Rivière himself, I propose that *L'Allemand* represents the ambiguity of the post-war period, what Anne-Louise Shapiro terms the “crisis of historical thinking” (117-18). This is not a new idea; critics of the First World War from Paul Fussell to Jay Winter have, in their separate ways, posited the war as a “crisis of consciousness.”³ However, more nuanced than the ubiquitous “crisis of consciousness” that greeted the war is the manner in which the text asserts dominant—and perhaps dying—beliefs about national identity, both French and German, at the same time as they asserted their demise. Such instability surrounding national identity speaks directly to the ambiguities of the interwar period, encapsulated by the plight of the *Gueules cassées* ‘mutilated faces’ at Versailles in 1919. As Shapiro goes on to observe, the alignment between national identity and national mission became difficult to disentangle in the post-war period

as the commitment to patriotism was harder to defend: “The effects of unrestrained patriotism seemed readily and horrifically apparent; at the same time, it seemed evident that the nation needed some renewed, acceptable sense of itself in order to begin the process of emotional and physical recovery” (120).

Rivière announces the failures of his project before the reader has had a chance to encounter them. Instead of interpreting the venture as an exercise in guilt as Yaël Dagan has done, I want to argue for the text as an important meditation on history itself that proliferates contradictions rather than erasing them.⁴ Through the inclusion of his regrets surrounding the publication in both the 1918 and 1924 forewords, Rivière foregrounds the difficulty in providing a war narrative that can fix history into categories of national identity. Equally, in contrasting his own subjective and anecdotal evidence of German nature from the perspective of the oppressed French prisoner with a portrait of German nature written by a German, Rivière points to the impossibility of providing any kind of objective narrative. The juxtaposition of experience with analysis thus invokes the historian’s task of sifting through different accounts of the same phenomenon in order to achieve impartiality, however elusive that may prove to be. By allowing the account to be multi-vocal through the inclusion of Natorp’s perspective, Rivière seems to signal the ways in which the solidifying of historical narrative around essentialism or fixed characteristics such as those of national identity will always disappoint. Implicit, then, in Rivière’s decision to publish both his memories and reflections is the recognition that the war experience must engage with the contradictions of the process of narrating an historical moment.

Notes

1. All translations are my own.
2. See especially Caruth, Felman and Laub, and Hacking. Taken together, their work explores the myriad possibilities (and problems) of trauma’s relationship to testimony.
3. Both Fussell and Winter examine the ways in which the trauma of the First World War precipitated a rupture of continuity with the collective consciousness that came before it (see Winter 9). While Winter sees this “crisis” or break with consciousness as responsible for a more traditional type of mourning than has often been suggested, Fussell famously traces the shift from romanticism to modernism in aesthetic sensibilities as a consequence of the war.

4. Yaël Dagan provides a comprehensive analysis of *L'Allemand*, eventually concluding (with the help of psychoanalytic theory) that wartime guilt for not having fought on the Front Line was a deciding factor in the text's genesis: "La culpabilité joue un rôle central dans le fonctionnement de Rivière" (175) 'Guilt plays a central role in Rivière's thinking.'

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