Geneviève Warland (ed.), ***Experience and Memory of the First World War in Belgium. Comparative and Interdisciplinary Insights.*** Historische Belgienforschung 6 (Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2019, 228 pp., ISBN 978 3 8309 3855 2).

By fully embracing the inter-disciplinary potential of studying the First World War and its memory, this volume offers a welcome break from historians talking primarily to and writing primarily for other historians. As such the collection, the product of a major research project involving fifteen researchers from five Belgian universities, is 'not just another book on the First World War', as its editor so rightly announces in her introduction (11). Rather, its seven substantive chapters have turned, as Annette Becker explains in her preface, all of Belgium into an academic laboratory. Each chapter is a work of collaboration between two or more historians, psychologists, political scientists, literary and media studies specialists and translation studies experts. Not only do the chapters underscore the kinds of exciting work that can come out of cross-disciplinary research but they also help us to reconsider the importance of the historical study of the First World War. Above all, they show how inherently flexible history as a discipline can be.

As Geneviève Warland explains in her introduction, the analytical heart of each chapter revolves around the interconnection between emotion, experience and memory. Part 1 focuses on diary writing and the history of emotion. Both chapters in this section – the first authored by Rose Spijkerman, Olivier Luminet and Antoon Vrints, the second by Geneviève Warland and Olivier Luminet – integrate psychology research methods and approaches in their historical analysis. The first focuses on the 'act of diary writing' in wartime, a subject that is surprisingly understudied. The chapter describes diary writing as an emotional strategy and connects its functions in human psychology with the diary-writing behaviour of soldiers on Belgium's European frontline. Many soldiers wrote diaries as a coping mechanism, as a form of emotional regulation and as a way to provide structure to what was otherwise a largely unstructured and/or destructive daily routine.

The second chapter follows on by explaining how diaries provide excellent primary source materials to investigate the immediacy of experience and perception, as opposed to the retrospective biases that we might employ to make sense of our own past over time. It also argues that the anti-German sentiment present in the wartime diaries of two of Belgium's most prominent contemporary historians, Henri Pirenne and Paul Fredericq, offers valuable insight into why German scholars were kept from joining a range of transnational academic networks in the early 1920s. The chapter

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highlights that the attempts to keep Germans and Austrians out of these *Entente*-dominated networks depended as much on 'situated cognition', namely perceptions of emotional and moral outrage, as it did on rational explanations. The historical and psychological analyses in the chapter offer complimentary lenses into the importance of anger as a motivating force. Furthermore, the chapter is a powerful reminder that all academic enterprise is conducted by people, for whom reason and rational consideration might easily be counterbalanced by personal bias and the emotive power of outrage.

Part 2 focuses on the interactions between literature, culture and commemorative practices. Its first chapter, by Myrthel Van Etterbeeck and Karla Vanraepenbusch, is particularly excellent. It offers a compelling explanation of how the German massacres of Belgium communities in 1914 quickly became mediated stories, pregnant with meaning for all who encountered them. Those meanings reverberated and continue to reverberate in commemorative practices across Belgium, but particularly in its 'martyr towns'. By contrasting the ways in which two urban communities – Liège and Antwerp – were mobilised as 'martyr towns' in post-war fiction and in town planning (including in the assignment of street names), Van Etterbeeck and Vanraepenbusch offer an exciting and engaged explanation as to how 'the war' remains more present in some of Belgium's urban centres than others.

The following chapter, entitled 'Dulce et decorum est: reading First World War poetry', is less convincing. Authored by four scholars, the chapter focuses on how the translations of well-known English war poets by Flemish author Tom Lanoye (in 2000) have been read and interpreted by critics and student audiences alike. The researchers gauged the emotive impact of the translations by asking students about their perceptions of them, with a particular focus on pacifism. Their findings were less than conclusive: 'the poems did not induce an overall tendency to endorse more positive attitudes [towards peace]' (126). While a negative finding in itself might be important, by the end of the chapter, I was left pondering whether the authors' confident claim that they had uncovered 'stimulating avenues for further research' is all that warranted (132).

In contrast, Chapter 3 by Valérie Rosoux, Pierre Bouchat and Olivier Klein, on the representation of peace in First World War commemorative practices across the EU, makes for fascinating reading. Based on a massive social psychology project involving input from historians and political scientists who studied the responses to the war in 21 countries, this chapter uses careful historical and political contextualisations to compare the ways in which Belgium, France, Germany, Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina commemorated the war during the recent centennial. In doing so, it stresses not only how differentiated the politics of memory around the First World War remain but also ponders the limits of reconciliatory ethics, especially when a population is unwilling to see their wartime history outside of the trope of victimhood.

Part 3 expands the subject of memory dynamics even further by drilling down into two types of memory practices in Belgium: the use of postage stamps to ascribe an 'official' commemorative narrative and the mobilisation of pacifist messages in commemorative museum exhibitions about the war in the year 2014. Both chapters offer a distinct historical arc to their analyses. The chapter on postage stamps, authored by Chantal Kesteloot and Laurence Van Ypersele, explains how stamps formed the backdrop of the mediation of the meanings of the war both as it waged and subsequently. Rather appropriately, the final chapter co-authored by Pierre Bouchat, Olivier Klein and Valérie Rosoux, highlights the inherent paradoxes of memory work. The authors of the chapter point out how historical accuracy and the focus on individual stories in museum exhibitions about the war might actually inhibit an individual's ability to sustain their commitment to pacifism in response.

Altogether, this collection is much more than a book on Belgium in, at and after the First World War, although it is a highly welcome addition to the growing body of work in English on the subject. It is well worth the attention of anyone who works on the history and memory of warfare, be it the 1914-1918 cataclysm or any modern conflict.

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