

*Journal of British Studies* 61 (July 2022): 676–701. doi:10.1017/jbr.2022.56

© The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the North American Conference on British Studies. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

## “I Have Never Felt More Utterly Yours”: Presence, Intimacy, and Long-Distance Marriages in the First World War

*Aimée Fox* 

**Abstract** The unique anxieties experienced by married couples remain under-examined aspects of both the First World War and the early twentieth century. Drawing on the writings of four upper-middle-class couples, this article reveals the complex ways in which couples sought to maintain intimacy across transnational time and space during the war. The author argues that, elements of modern marriage were clearly present in these relationships. Wartime separation gave couples space to develop new forms of intimacy and affection. Through creative, often abstract, alternatives developed to affect a sense of presence, spouses were able to know, embody, and imagine one another. While separated couples frequently desired and imagined physical reunion, its fleeting nature was emotionally wearing and often undermined intimacy and togetherness in immediate and long-lasting ways. Exploring the subjective experiences of these couples challenges the tendency to periodize marriage in distinct categories such as patriarchal or companionate, and also invites us to reframe our understanding of the spatial dimensions of separation and intimacy.

**B**lanche Lloyd was a dedicated correspondent. Throughout the First World War, she wrote weekly letters to her husband, George, a member of Parliament and yeomanry officer in the British Army. Their correspondence reveals much about the nature of intimacy at a distance in wartime. Blanche’s letter to George on 2 July 1915 typifies their correspondence, touching on a range of topics—the irregularity of the mail, the state of the household finances, news from family, and the latest political gossip. On the last page, however, her account of the everyday gives way to an impassioned, emotional disclosure: “It sometimes just astonishes me that I can go on living at all day after day without ever seeing you or hearing your voice & yet I have never felt more utterly yours—or more really close to you—in spite of everything. . . I love you if possible twice as much as I did this time last year.”<sup>1</sup> The sentiments conveyed in Blanche’s letter highlight the complex

I thank the four anonymous reviewers for their generative and encouraging reports on this article. Their suggestions strengthened the article immeasurably. Special thanks are also due to Anna Brinkman-Schwartz, Meggie Hutchison, Sarah McCook, David Morgan-Owen, and James Pugh for their thoughtful and valuable comments on earlier drafts of this article. I am grateful to the Churchill Archives Centre for permission to quote from Lord and Lady Lloyd’s papers, and to the Dawnay family for allowing me to quote from papers held in their possession and at the Imperial War Museum. Please direct any correspondence to [aimce.fox@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:aimce.fox@kcl.ac.uk).

<sup>1</sup> Blanche to George, 2 July 1915, Papers of Lord Lloyd, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, GLLD4/19A. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as CAC.)

series of affects from wartime separation and crises on couples' emotional intimacy. On the one hand, the letter describes the obvious desire for closeness and a frustration that certain sensory experiences were denied them. At the same time, Blanche claims never to have felt closer to George, underlining the spatially contingent and subjective nature of intimacy and the possibility of maintaining it in long-distance marriages in a time of total war.

In the past two decades, historians have done much to challenge binary notions of a distinction between *war* and *home* fronts during the First World War. That research has revealed the war's ubiquitous influence on domestic life, and it has exposed the ways that idealized versions of home and everyday routines underpinned the combat motivation and coping strategies of many on the front lines.<sup>2</sup> An important part of this discourse is the inclusion of both the family and the relationship at war, enabling a range of voices, particularly women's, to play a larger role in understanding the experience of conflict.<sup>3</sup> Recent research has (re)focused on the majority of women who remained in the home during the war, performing domestic and emotional support for their families as housewives or caregivers. This shift has resulted in an important addition to historians' understanding of women's emotional lives.<sup>4</sup> Yet limited source material still remains a challenge in recovering and hearing these voices, as well as in identifying aspects of ordinariness and the everyday, particularly in women's lives.

This article contributes to the recent exploration of the domestic and everyday by focusing on the nature of marriage and the experiences of married couples in wartime. The "unique anxieties" faced by married couples remain "under-examined" facets of both the First World War and the early twentieth century more broadly.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Martha Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine: Paul and Marie Pireaud in the Great War* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 17–18, 23, 228; Helen McCartney, *Citizen Soldiers: The Liverpool Territorials in the First World War* (Cambridge, 2005), 89–120; Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, 2008), 7–8; Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War* (London, 2009), 4–5, 14–46; Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War* (Manchester, 2009); Alex Mayhew, "British Expeditionary Force Vegetable Shows, Allotment Culture, and Life behind the Lines during the Great War," *Historical Journal* 64, no. 5 (2021): 1355–78.

<sup>3</sup> Christa Hämmerle, "You Let a Weeping Woman Call You Home?: Private Correspondence during the First World War in Germany," in *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600–1945*, ed. Rebecca Earle (Aldershot, 1999), 152–82; Kate Hunter, "More Than an Archive of War: Intimacy and Manliness in the Letters of a Great War Soldier to the Woman He Loved, 1915–1918," *Gender and History* 25, no. 2 (2013): 339–54; Rachel Patrick, "An Unbroken Connection? New Zealand Families, Duty, and the First World War" (Ph.D. diss., Victoria University, 2014); Carol Acton, "The Delightful Sense of Personal Contact That Your Letters Aroused: Letters and Intimate Lives in the First World War," in *Landscapes and Voices of the Great War*, ed. Angela K. Smith and Krista Cowman (New York, 2017), 77–92; Bart Ziino, "Always Thinking in the Other Part of the Globe: Australians and the Meaning of Wartime Correspondence," in *Proximity and Distance: Space, Time and World War I*, ed. Romain Fathi and Emily Robertson (Melbourne, 2020), 149–64; Alex Mayhew, "A War Imagined: Postcards and the Maintenance of Long Distance Relationships during the Great War," *War in History* 28, no. 2 (2021): 301–32.

<sup>4</sup> See Karen Hunt, "A Heroine at Home: The Housewife on the First World War Home Front," in *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*, ed. Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas (Basingstoke, 2015), 73–91; Susan R. Grayzel and Tammi M. Proctor, introduction to *Gender and the Great War*, ed. Susan R. Grayzel and Tammi M. Proctor (Oxford, 2017), 1–9; Karen Hunt, "Gender and Everyday Life," in Grayzel and Proctor, *Gender and the Great War*, 149–68.

<sup>5</sup> Martha Hanna, "The Couple," in *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, vol. 3, *Civil Society*, ed. Jay Winter (Cambridge, 2014), 6–29, at 8. See also, for example, Jessica Meyer, "Not Septimus Now": Wives of Disabled Veterans and Cultural Memory of the First World War in Britain," *Women's History*

Marriage in the early decades of the century has tended to fall between two more recognized categorizations—Victorian and modern marriage—both of which have diverse and rich historiographies. While scholars have done much to challenge the view of the Victorians as sexually repressed, Victorian marriage, particularly among the middle and upper classes, remains characterized by emotional restraint, self-control, patriarchal authority, and separate spheres.<sup>6</sup> The publication of Marie Stopes's *Married Love* in 1918 is often seen as an important moment in the transition from Victorian to modern marriage, prophesizing the “dawning of a new era of mutual love.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, mutuality in marriage has been seen as helping to define “what was ‘modern’ about twentieth-century Britain,” with its focus on mixing between the sexes, shared sexual pleasure, and companionate marriage.<sup>8</sup> Some scholars have aligned these changing understandings of heterosexual marriage and love with new ideas associated with the making of the modern self, such as interiority and authenticity.<sup>9</sup> As Claire Langhamer argues, even before the Second World War, the “language of interiority and personality development was replacing that of character and self-control,” with choice, fulfilment, self-discovery, and self-realization proving central to the making of the modern self.<sup>10</sup> Taken together, then, these arguments suggest that selfhood and intimacy not only relate to one another in complex ways but also connect with broader ideas around modernity and what it meant to be modern.<sup>11</sup> As James Vernon has observed, the “modern social condition . . . engendered new forms of intimacy, affection, and self-knowledge.”<sup>12</sup>

These arguments about intimacy and modernity require us to reexamine the way historians periodize our understanding of marriage and the ways in which ideas of intimacy function to define when marriage became “modern.” Existing works tend to leave underdeveloped how, when, and why the transition from Victorian to modern marriage occurred, and the fractured, incomplete ways in which that transition took place.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, framing this transition in terms of overarching categorizations of Victorian and modern risks obscuring the multifaceted, contingent, and

---

*Review* 13, no. 1 (2004): 117–38; Nancy Christie and Michael Gavreau, *Bodies, Love, and Faith in the First World War* (Basingstoke, 2018); Martha Hanna, *Anxious Days and Tearful Nights: Canadian War Wives during the Great War* (Montreal, 2020).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Phyllis Rose, *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages* (1983; repr., London, 2020); Pat Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics, 1860–1914* (Oxford, 1988); Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York, 2005), chap. 11; Jennifer Phegley, *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England* (Santa Barbara, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Alana Harris and Timothy Willem Jones, “Introduction: Historicizing ‘Modern’ Love and Romance,” in *Love and Romance in Britain, 1918–1970*, ed. Alana Harris and Timothy Willem Jones (Basingstoke, 2014), 1–20, at 15; Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception, 1800–1975* (Oxford, 2005), 125.

<sup>8</sup> Marcus Collins, *Modern Love: An Intimate History of Men and Women in Twentieth-Century Britain* (London, 2003), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Harris and Jones, “Introduction: Historicizing ‘Modern’ Love and Romance,” 2.

<sup>10</sup> Claire Langhamer, “Love, Selfhood, and Authenticity in Post-war Britain,” *Cultural and Social History* 9, no. 2 (2012): 277–97, at 278.

<sup>11</sup> George Morris, “Intimacy in Modern British History,” *Historical Journal* 64, no. 3 (2021): 796–811, at 806.

<sup>12</sup> James Vernon, *Distant Strangers: How Britain Became Modern* (Berkeley, 2014), 50.

<sup>13</sup> Important exceptions to this include Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England, 1918–1963* (Cambridge, 2010); Christie and Gavreau, *Bodies, Love, and Faith in*

personal ways that married couples explored new forms of intimacy, which often occurred at different rates and for different reasons.

Drawing on the writings and letters of four upper-middle-class couples during the First World War, I use small, intimate histories to speak in this article to broader questions around the nature of modern marriage and intimacy in early twentieth-century Britain.<sup>14</sup> In demonstrating the complex ways in which husbands and wives sought to maintain intimacy across transnational time and space during the war, I argue that elements of modern marriage and the modern self, expressed through practices and discourses such as self-talk, reflexivity, and interiority, were clearly present in these relationships, thereby complicating categorizations of marriage as either Victorian or modern. Tracing the life cycles or what could be called the *biographies* of these wartime relationships demonstrates the varied ways that couples related to one another. While we must be cautious in assuming that war suddenly gave rise to introspective exchanges, it did involve sustained periods of separation, requiring couples to conduct their marriage primarily through correspondence.<sup>15</sup> Where this correspondence exists, it can offer an important, suggestive view on the intimate and amorous lives of couples in this period. Separation gave couples the space to develop new forms of intimacy and affection, often emboldening them to discuss sexual practices and desires. By sending letters and gifts, invoking the domestic and everyday, and thinking of past and future lives together, husbands and wives created a sense of each other's presence, enabling them to know, embody, and imagine one another. Conversely, while couples frequently desired and imagined physical reunion, its fleeting nature in wartime could be emotionally draining and even undermined intimacy and togetherness in immediate and long-lasting ways.

I have approached this study in three parts reflecting the cadence of these wartime marriages, from departure to separation to reunion. Letters and diaries reveal that the act of departure and concerns over distance and danger enhanced feelings of separation. During separation, couples sought to negotiate the exigencies that kept their intimate lives in suspense. Within their correspondence, I found a constellation of ways that couples constructed, created, and imagined intimacy throughout the war. Their letters reveal the extent to which complex, multilayered forms of presence strengthened, reaffirmed, and often revitalized relationships that were physically torn apart by war. Their writings also detail the bittersweet nature of reunion and physical togetherness, which, though frequently desired, was often blighted by a sense of dread. By charting the cycle of anticipation, reunion, and separation, I explore the tension between imagination and reality and detail how the emotionally wearing nature of wartime reunion could affect the intimate rhythms of couples' lives.

I chose to focus on these four married couples—Blanche and George Lloyd, Cis and Guy Dawnay, Jean and Ian Hamilton, and Linnet and Philip Howell—for a variety of reasons. They all had links to the British Army, all came from upper-

---

*the First World War*; Tanya Cheadle, *Sexual Progressives: Reimagining Intimacy in Scotland, 1880–1914* (Manchester, 2020).

<sup>14</sup> On the use of small history in studies of intimacy, see George Morris, "The Trance of Mrs Thompson: Mediumship, Evidence, and Intimacy in Early Twentieth-Century Britain," *Twentieth-Century British History* 32, no. 4 (2021): 608–29.

<sup>15</sup> Clémentine Vidal-Naquet and Anne Stevens, "Putting Emotions on Paper: Conjugal Relationships of French Couples during the First World War," *Clio: Women, Gender, History* 47 (2018): 115–36, at 117.

middle-class backgrounds, and all experienced extended wartime separation due to the husband's service in the Middle East and the Mediterranean region. Underlying such conceptual justifications, however, is the simple reality that their papers have survived in remarkably full condition, including significant correspondence from the four women. As Mark Seymour points out, one of the challenges facing historians interested in tracing emotions is that "frequently the archival sifting process throws emotional traces to the winds."<sup>16</sup> However, the nature of these collections is such that the emotional lives of these individuals are largely preserved. It is, of course, important to consider how and why these unique collections came to be preserved so well and to acknowledge the limits of what they can tell us.

The papers and correspondence of these four couples exist because of various instances of archival accident and serendipity. First, the husbands were able to preserve their wives' wartime letters because of the privilege afforded to them by their military appointments, either as staff officers or in command, and return home letters for safekeeping. The preservation of the female civilian voice then is exceptional.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, though subject to censorship, the correspondence has survived largely unadulterated. Letters were often sent via trusted friends or by the King's Messenger, which protected against tampering, opening, or investigation. This arrangement granted couples some freedom of emotional expression. Finally, the women's papers (including several unpublished diaries and memoirs) survived after the war because of their husbands' relative military or political significance. Their papers were incorporated into their husbands' collections, preserved because of whom they married, rather than for their own sake.<sup>18</sup> The survival of these collections is complemented by the literacy, education, and articulateness of the couples themselves, allowing them to record their emotional lives eloquently on paper that "happened to be preserved in the amber of the archive."<sup>19</sup>

Unsurprisingly, although we know much about the military and political exploits of some of these famous husbands, we know very little about their emotional lives and even less about those of their wives.<sup>20</sup> Although some historians of women's history have recently focused on genteel and elite women, the women considered in this article were neither elite enough nor ordinary enough to fit neatly into previous trends in histories of women and war.<sup>21</sup> They remain hidden behind their more visible sisters in uniform and the workforce, or behind the wives and confidantes of prime ministers.<sup>22</sup> The tendency to overlook these women is, in part, due to their class and political proclivities. As Joan Beaumont argues, such "patriotic" women

<sup>16</sup> Mark Seymour, "Epistolary Emotions: Exploring Amorous Hinterlands in 1870s Southern Italy," *Social History* 35, no. 2 (2010): 148–64, at 149.

<sup>17</sup> Such preservation was uncommon. See Hanna, *Anxious Days and Tearful Nights*, 19–20.

<sup>18</sup> See Ann Oakley, *Forgotten Wives: How Women Get Written Out of History* (Bristol, 2021), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Seymour, "Epistolary Emotions," 164.

<sup>20</sup> See John Charmley, *Lord Lloyd and the Decline of the British Empire* (London, 1987); John Lee, *A Soldier's Life: General Sir Ian Hamilton, 1853–1947* (Basingstoke, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> June Purvis, "A Glass Half Full? Women's History in the UK," *Women's History Review* 27, no. 1 (2018): 88–108, at 92.

<sup>22</sup> For examples of the latter, see A. J. P. Taylor, ed., *My Darling Puss: The Letters of Lloyd George and Frances Stevenson, 1913–41* (London, 1975); Michael Brock and Eleanor Brock, eds., *H. H. Asquith Letters to Venetia Stanley* (1982; repr., Oxford, 2014).

were "generally middle class, militaristic, and imperialistic."<sup>23</sup> This description captures much about the nature of the wives discussed here. However, patriotic or pro-war women have been "less attractive to study, less worthy than radical left wing women."<sup>24</sup> Exploring the intimate lives of these women can make visible their experiences, agency, and feelings as more than just embellishments to their husbands' lives.

Archival serendipity aside, the relationships of these four couples to one another, in addition to their differences as couples, also contributed to their selection. Whether as family, friends, or acquaintances, the four couples knew each other in various ways.<sup>25</sup> Cis Dawnay and Linnet Howell were first cousins and members of the well-known Buxton family—an old East Anglian family that had a long association with radicalism and progressive social causes. Several of the women had friendships with one another. Despite their differing views on politics and suffrage, Blanche Lloyd and Linnet Howell became friends before the war, while Blanche and Cis Dawnay, initially relying on each other for intermittent emotional support, developed an intimate friendship as the war progressed, often dining together and attending lectures. Though slightly older than the other three, Jean Hamilton was acquainted with Blanche Lloyd, who moved in similar social circles; Blanche often dined with Jean's siblings. The women's husbands were also acquainted, primarily through shared interests and careers. Guy Dawnay, Philip Howell, and George Lloyd were members of the same dining club, while all four men spent significant periods of their wartime service in military theaters located beyond the Western Front, including Egypt, Gallipoli, Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Salonika. Although Ian Hamilton did not socialize with the others, he knew Philip Howell through their shared military careers, and he served as Guy Dawnay and George Lloyd's commanding officer at Gallipoli, working in close contact with both.

While these couples came from the same social class and experienced largely happy unions, they differed in several ways, particularly in the length and nature of their marriages. At the outbreak of war, Jean and Ian Hamilton had been married for twenty-seven years, Cis and Guy Dawnay for eight, the other two couples for just under three. Their courtships and engagements also diverged. Blanche and George Lloyd's courtship began in May 1911, leading to their engagement that July and marriage in November; Linnet and Philip Howell had been friends for several years prior to their courtship, which formally began in summer of 1910 and resulted

<sup>23</sup> Joan Beaumont, "Whatever Happened to Patriotic Women, 1914–1918?," *Australian Historical Studies* 31, no. 115 (2000): 273–86, at 282–83.

<sup>24</sup> June Purvis, "The Women's Party of Great Britain (1917–1919): A Forgotten Episode in British Women's Political History," *Women's History Review* 25, no. 4 (2016): 638–51, at 647. Several scholars are producing important scholarship on right-wing women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; see the following: Clarisse Berthezène and Julie Gottlieb, eds., *Rethinking Right-Wing Women: Gender and the Conservative Party, 1880s to the Present*, (Manchester, 2017); Julie Gottlieb, "Guilty Women," *Foreign Policy, and Appeasement in Inter-war Britain* (Basingstoke, 2015); Eliza Riedi, "Imperial Women and Conservative Activism in Early-Twentieth-Century Britain: The Political World of Violet Milner," *Women's History Review* 22, no. 6 (2013): 930–53.

<sup>25</sup> The biographical information provided in this paragraph and the next is drawn from the following: a range of articles and notices in the *Times* (London); Charmley, *Lord Lloyd*; Lee, *A Soldier's Life*; Celia Lee, *Jean, Lady Hamilton 1861–1941: A Soldier's Wife* (London, 2001); Rosalind Howell, *Philip Howell: A Memoir by His Wife* (London, 1942).

in their engagement in Easter 1911 and a hasty registry office marriage that September. Throughout the course of their marriages, the four couples experienced separation differently. Jean and Ian Hamilton had spent significant time apart due to Ian's military deployments during his service in the Second Anglo-Boer War and a subsequent eighteen-month appointment as an observer during the Russo-Japanese War. The other three couples experienced no significant periods of separation before the outbreak of the First World War. Guy Dawnay had left the army in 1910 for a career in finance, George Lloyd joined the yeomanry only in March 1914, and for many of Philip Howell's military postings, Linnet moved with him.

In and of itself, the correspondence of these couples may only amount to "a singular epistolary peephole."<sup>26</sup> Yet when taken as a whole, the similarities, not only in the discursive rules governing their correspondence but also in their emotions, preoccupations, and intimate practices, provide us important insights into the dynamic nature of intimacy between married couples in the early twentieth century.

## DEPARTURE

"Not through my veil, darling, it is unlucky," Jean Hamilton teased her husband as he hastily kissed her farewell at a busy Charing Cross station. About to depart to command the forces at Gallipoli, Ian was put out. "Why do you say that?" he retorted, hurt. "Too bad to say unlucky." Ian was feeling sensitive around unlucky dates and occurrences. Earlier that morning, the date—the thirteenth—had played on his mind, despite Jean quickly noting that the thirteenth was always a lucky day for her. He wanted a book to take with him to Gallipoli; Jean had picked up off her bed *La Mort de Quelqu'un*, but Ian would not take it: even the title was unlucky.

Jean felt awful about her remark. Putting her head in the carriage window, she explained, "I only did not want you to kiss me through my veil." Ian said crossly that if it was unlucky for him to kiss her through her veil, she should not have said it. As she watched his train leave for Dover, a friend approached her: "Don't watch him out of sight," she warned, "it's not lucky."

Jean felt terribly saddened by the whole event.<sup>27</sup> So did Ian. "What a horrid hasty parting," he wrote in a hurriedly scrawled letter on the train to Dover. "I'd much rather . . . have had no one down but you, or else have said a proper goodbye—no veils—at home."<sup>28</sup> A range of emotions surfaced over the hours and days after his departure: numbness, abandonment, nostalgia. The day after their fraught parting, Jean remembered how she had looked at Ian's "dark head on my shoulder, just before he looked up at me with his blue, blue eyes, and thought 'How soon you will be gone, and when will your head be there again.'"<sup>29</sup> Departure meant sudden absence. It was no longer possible for couples to express love and affection

<sup>26</sup> Seymour, "Epistolary Emotions," 150–51.

<sup>27</sup> Jean Hamilton's diary, 13 March 1915, Papers of General Sir I. S. M. Hamilton, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London, 20/1/2. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as LHCMA).

<sup>28</sup> Ian to Jean, 14 March 1915, LHCMA, 20/1/2.

<sup>29</sup> Jean's diary, 14 March 1915, LHCMA, 20/1/2.

through the physical interaction that accompanied quotidian life. Instead, the intimacy and presence engendered through physical acts had to be translated into written form, altering for many couples established forms of emotional expression. Writing to one another then had to suffice to accomplish the goal of achieving continuity, which often required the renegotiation of intimate, affective ties.<sup>30</sup>

Historians of both war and migration have shown how letters were essential to emotional survival, resilience, and the creation of meaning during separation.<sup>31</sup> Letters speak to the "intimacy of absence" in epistolary discourse. Esther Milne describes letter writing as a "dance between absence and presence," because writing a letter signals the absence of the recipient yet simultaneously bridges the gap.<sup>32</sup> Like a dance, letter writing is performative; it is not a transparent source of information about individual lives. Instead, it is an "epistolary masquerade" that requires the reader to pay attention and interrogate what is included, what is left out, and what is unstressed.<sup>33</sup> Whether through military censorship or self-censorship, couples passed over certain matters or remained silent on them. In a letter describing horrific scenes on the Western Front, Alan Dawnay, Guy's brother, asked him to "keep this letter entirely to yourself" and not utter "a word about discomfort" to Alan's wife. "It would worry [her]," he wrote, "which I would not have for the world."<sup>34</sup> Whether it was the realities of war, extramarital affairs, sickness, or even the liberation of separation, letters hid things. Yet while it is futile to assume truth and authenticity in epistolary discourse, the existence of letters between husbands and wives does provide the opportunity to explore the "nominally private domain" of an intimate relationship.<sup>35</sup> As both Sonia Cancian and Mark Seymour have suggested, such intimate correspondence makes visible the invisible, restoring an interior dimension to our understanding of the past.<sup>36</sup>

The physical distance experienced by couples transitioning from face-to-face togetherness to a reliance on letter writing was jarring. Speaking to the perceived inadequacy of the letter as a form of emotional expression, Ian, for example, felt that he had "five million things to say" to Jean but that they were "no use writing."<sup>37</sup> For the four couples at the center of this article, hundreds of miles

<sup>30</sup> Marcelo J. Borges, Sonia Cancian, and Linda Reeder, introduction to *Emotional Landscapes: Love, Gender and Migration*, ed. Marcelo J. Borges, Sonia Cancian, and Linda Reeder (Urbana, 2021), 1–18, at 14.

<sup>31</sup> See Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine*; David A. Gerber, *Authors of Their Lives: The Personal Correspondence of British Immigrants to North America in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 2006); Roper, *Secret Battle*; Mayhew, "A War Imagined"; Borges, Cancian, and Reeder, *Emotional Landscapes*.

<sup>32</sup> Esther Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email: Technologies of Presence* (Abingdon, 2010), 52.

<sup>33</sup> David A. Gerber, "Epistolary Masquerades: Acts of Deceiving and Withholding in Immigrant Letters," in *Letters across Borders: The Epistolary Practices of International Migrants*, ed. Bruce S. Elliott, David A. Gerber, and Suzanne M. Sinke (Basingstoke, 2006), 141–57; Susan J. Matt, "Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out," *Emotion Review* 3, no. 1 (2011): 117–24, at 119.

<sup>34</sup> Alan Dawnay to Guy, 7 November 1914, Dawnay Family Papers. (Hereafter this uncatalogued private collection is abbreviated as DFP).

<sup>35</sup> Matt Houlbrook, "A Pin to See the Peepshow": Culture, Fiction and Selfhood in Edith Thompson's Letters, 1921–1922," *Past and Present*, no. 207 (2010): 215–49, at 226.

<sup>36</sup> Sonia Cancian, "The Language of Gender in Lovers' Correspondence, 1946–1949," *Gender and History* 24, no. 3 (2012): 755–65, at 756; Seymour, "Epistolary Emotions," 150.

<sup>37</sup> Ian to Jean, 14 March 1915, LHCMA, 20/1/2.



characterized separation, as the husbands spent significant periods in military theaters in the Middle East and the Mediterranean region. With home leave an uncertain prospect, such lengthy periods of “uninterrupted absence” could exacerbate the anxieties associated with wartime separation.<sup>38</sup> While communications technologies like letters and even telegrams helped bridge the temporal and spatial divide, creating new opportunities to simulate togetherness, adjusting to that medium was difficult. Letters between Britain and the Western Front often reached the recipient in a matter of days, but those sent to more distant theaters could take weeks to arrive or simply not arrive at all. On 27 March 1915, two weeks after Guy’s departure for Gallipoli, Cis remarked how “we drop a letter into the post & no one knows what happens then! or if it can ever reach its destination and in what period!”<sup>39</sup> Three weeks after his departure, Guy was still hoping to hear from home: “It seems so long since I did, and I am just longing for a letter!”<sup>40</sup> It took until 2 April for Guy and 6 April for Cis before they were back in touch with one another. Frequent commentary on this fragmentation of correspondence, such as remarks about delayed birthday wishes, the unpredictable arrival of letters, or the loss of mail through a ship sinking demonstrated how hard it was for couples to bear.<sup>41</sup> “Dreadfully concerned” that her letters were not reaching George in Egypt, Blanche wrote, “It is heart rending to think of everything taking so long to reach you and I know how cut off it makes one feel.”<sup>42</sup>

For many couples, their feelings and responses to separation were shaped not just by the physical distance but also cultural attitudes toward theaters of combat, the Middle East in particular, aggravating concerns around a spouse’s safety. Many of these theaters featured prominently in the British cultural imagination, whether through the image of the “bloody Turk,” or the myths and legends of the classical world. The departure of a partner across great expanses into an imagined world of grandeur and terror compounded feelings of distance. Imaginative geographies of the “Middle East” and “Arabia”—often used interchangeably—were couched in the language of myth, romance, and exoticism. Depicted as an “oriental land of fantasy” with “references to the *Arabian Nights*. . . on everyone’s lips,” these spaces existed in the “geographical and cultural imaginary” rather than in mere cartographic definitions.<sup>43</sup> For Gallipoli, the gateway to Constantinople, associations with Troy and with Hero’s (and latterly Lord Byron’s) swimming of the Hellespont firmly fixed its location in the British imaginative landscape.<sup>44</sup> When Cis hoped she

<sup>38</sup> Patrick, “An Unbroken Connection?”; Andrew J. Huebner, *Love and Death in the Great War* (Oxford, 2018), 175–77, 242–43; Hanna, *Anxious Days and Tearful Nights*.

<sup>39</sup> Cis to Guy, 27 March 1915, DFP. Cis started numbering her letters later in the war; thus earlier references do not include numbers.

<sup>40</sup> Guy to Cis, 31 March 1915, Papers of Major-General G. P. Dawnay, Imperial War Museum, London, 69/21/1. (Hereafter this repository is abbreviated as IWM).

<sup>41</sup> Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine*, 295; Solveig Zempel, *In Their Own Words: Letters from Norwegian Immigrants* (Minneapolis, 1991), xiii–xiv.

<sup>42</sup> Blanche to George, 5 June 1915, CAC, GLLD4/19A.

<sup>43</sup> Priya Satia, *Spies in Arabia: The Great War and the Cultural Foundations of Britain’s Covert Empire on the Middle East* (Oxford, 2008), 13–14; Priya Satia, “Sideshow at the Center: British Campaigns in the Middle East during the Great War,” *Annales HSS* 71, no. 1 (2016): 79–115, at 84–85.

<sup>44</sup> *The Shaping of Turkey in the British Imagination, 1776–1923*, ed. David S. Katz (Basingstoke, 2016); Rachel B. Davies, *Troy, Carthage, and the Victorians: The Drama of Classical Ruins in the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* (Cambridge, 2018).

might be pregnant with twins, for example, Guy, then stationed on a ship in the Aegean, suggested naming them Hero and Leander. ("Too like carriage horses!" exclaimed Cis.)<sup>45</sup> Blanche sought out copies of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, while Jean began reading about Constantinople, visualizing key sites. "What a city of blood and beauty and *Arabian Nights* adventures," she mused.<sup>46</sup>

Though embedded in the British imagination, these regions were often marginalized and peripheral during (and indeed after) the war, despite the enormous scale and impact of these military theaters. The dominant view of particularly those portions under Ottoman rule was "quasi-colonial," subject to the legacies of nineteenth-century Orientalism.<sup>47</sup> Prior to the Great Eastern Crisis (1875–1878), British writers "venerate[d] the exotic and seductive" Ottoman Empire in nostalgic terms as often as they condemned it.<sup>48</sup> Yet during the Eastern Crisis, William Gladstone's rhetoric of racial degeneracy, imperial decline, and sexual depravity intensified long-standing tropes such as the "lustful" or "terrible Turk."<sup>49</sup> Such stereotypes as "a degenerate nest of bloodthirsty tyrants at worst, or a decaying fleshpot of 'Oriental' vice at best," profoundly influenced the couples' concepts of the region.<sup>50</sup>

This language of degeneracy and decline underpinned racialized anxieties around disease. As Philippa Levine argues, fears of disease were "frequently magnified in colonial contexts,"<sup>51</sup> linked to climate and environment and also to "native crowd-living," with diseases such as cholera and plague seen as "distinctly Asian."<sup>52</sup> Cis's books on Turkey, for example, dwelt on the unsanitary conditions and "unhealthiness" of Turkish towns.<sup>53</sup> The inconsistent arrival of letters often led spouses to fear the worst, heightening these anxieties. Blanche, "rather worried" that George had been taken ill, wrote asking him to "please just tell me how you are in health every now and then . . . it's a solid comfort just to hear."<sup>54</sup> For Cis, too, "long silence" stoked her anxieties about disease: "Terrors seem to get hold badly. . . All the horrors of Disease that you are liable to catch have been much with me this last week, and I have felt the aching apprehensiveness of them terribly."<sup>55</sup> The sudden death from smallpox of their husbands' mutual friend, Sam Cockerell, intensified these fears. On hearing the tragic news, Blanche shocked her friends (and husband) by travelling to Egypt despite the military's efforts to keep women away

<sup>45</sup> Guy to Cis, 11 April 1915, IWM, 69/21/1; Cis to Guy, 28 April 1915, DFP.

<sup>46</sup> Jean's diary, 10 October 1915, LHCMA, 20/1/3.

<sup>47</sup> John Horne, "A Colonial Expedition? French Soldiers' Experience at the Dardanelles," *War and Society* 38, no. 4 (2019): 286–304, at 289; Satia, "Sideshow at the Center," 82.

<sup>48</sup> Cameron Whitehead, "Reading beside the Lines: Marginalia, W. E. Gladstone, and the International History of the Bulgarian Horrors," *International History Review* 37, no. 4 (2015): 864–86, at 869.

<sup>49</sup> Whitehead, "Reading beside the Lines," 873–75; M. Hakan Yavuz, "Orientalism, the 'Terrible Turk' and Genocide," *Middle East Critique* 23, no. 2 (2014): 111–26, at 112.

<sup>50</sup> Nazan Çiçek, "The Turkish Response to Bulgarian Horrors: A Study in English Turcophobia," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 1 (2006): 87–102, at 88.

<sup>51</sup> Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York, 2003), 323.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Peckham, "Critical Mass: Colonial Crowds and Contagious Panics in 1890s Hong Kong and Bombay," in *Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settings: Empires on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, ed. Harald Fischer-Tiné (Basingstoke, 2016), 369–91, at 376.

<sup>53</sup> Cis to Guy, 27 March 1915, DFP.

<sup>54</sup> Blanche to George, 5 February 1915, CAC, GLLD4/19A.

<sup>55</sup> Cis to Guy, 3 April 1915, DFP.

from the front, determined to see George and to nurse him if he had been infected. Cis's response was a series of ardent pleas to Guy for him to be vaccinated before "it is too late."<sup>56</sup>

The distance and dangers associated with service in these theaters led to an anxious and uncertain period of separation for soldiers and their families. Managing this spatial, temporal, and emotional separation required couples to adjust to "marriage by correspondence," creatively rethinking and reorganizing their intimate lives at a distance. As the war progressed, long-distance marriages were increasingly sustained through the construction and reconstruction of a sense of shared presence—using a variety of means to facilitate feelings of togetherness.<sup>57</sup> In these ways, couples could be "near, in touch and together" even when great distances forced them apart.<sup>58</sup>

## SEPARATION

"A most lovely morning, darling heart, steaming among the 'Isles of Greece,'" wrote Guy, four days into his journey to Gallipoli, "and how I wish you were here!" His letter described the marvel of seeing a fine sunset at sea ("a great flaming bank of red and gold"), the smoking island of Stromboli, and the Greek isles ("with the pink glow that one has heard of").<sup>59</sup> Guy's journey to the front was for him as for many other soldiers an important stage in the establishment of new forms of intimate expression. As Cis later remarked, the war forced them to live "in each other's minds and hearts."<sup>60</sup> Separation required them to create presence and intimacy in new ways. Objects and intimate practices and the senses they awakened enabled couples to "bridge time and geographical place" and thus to create a singular, embodied togetherness even when physically remote.<sup>61</sup> Though the letter writers often decried them as inadequate compared to physical togetherness, these creative forms of intimacy allowed for the maintenance of an "absent presence" in very practical ways, challenging the assumption that intimacy relies solely on face-to-face contact.<sup>62</sup> We can understand these different forms in three ways: *knowing* a spouse's interior and corporeal life, *embodying* the loved one in intimate practices such as gift giving, and *imagining* them through objects, spaces, and memories.

As shown above, letters constituted a powerful means of connecting the home and war fronts. They also allowed spouses to engage in modern discourses of interiority such as the intimate practice of "self-talk" and detail their corporeal lives and bodily routines, helping spouses in seeking to know each other.<sup>63</sup> Wives especially wished

<sup>56</sup> Cis to Guy, 27 March 1915 and 17 April 1915, DFP.

<sup>57</sup> Loretta Baldassar, "Missing Kin and Longing to Be Together: Emotions and the Construction of Co-presence in Transnational Relationships," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 29, no. 3 (2008): 247–66, at 252, 263.

<sup>58</sup> Anthony Elliott and John Urry, *Mobile Lives: Self, Excess and Nature* (New York, 2010), 100.

<sup>59</sup> Guy to Cis, 16 March 1915, IWM, 69/21/1.

<sup>60</sup> Cis to Guy, 2 April 1917, no. 169, DFP.

<sup>61</sup> Dania Habib, "Virtual (Dis)Connectivities: Mobile Intimacy and Presence for Women in Long Distance Relationships" (PhD diss., University of Montréal, 2014), 108.

<sup>62</sup> Clare Holdsworth, *Family and Intimate Mobilities* (Basingstoke, 2013), 136–38, at 136.

<sup>63</sup> Elwin Hofman, "How to Do the History of the Self," *History of the Human Sciences* 29, no. 3 (2016): 8–24, at 17–18.

for openness and authenticity, wanting to read and feel their husbands on the page—to know their inner self and bear witness to their physical and emotional frailty.<sup>64</sup> Philip's honest disclosure of his "feelings and thoughts and despairs" reassured Linnet, who longed to "take your darling head between my hands and kiss and kiss you to drive all the bothers away."<sup>65</sup> George, who was often very forthcoming about his vulnerabilities and anxieties, particularly about his work, asked Blanche, "Do you mind my worrying you about all these things? They are just our life together aren't they, or the least important part of it. But still they belong to us both."<sup>66</sup> An imperative for sincerity, truthfulness, and honesty underpinned this desire to know about a spouse's interior life—that they should hide nothing.<sup>67</sup> Yet such detail was not always forthcoming. Jean, for example, desired greater openness from Ian, but several of his letters told her nothing of "his inner life," nor any of his "struggles, difficulties, anxiety." "How far away he seems," she confided to her diary.<sup>68</sup> Spouses expected and feared omissions during their separation. Focusing on information that would connect rather than distance them often led to feelings being hidden.<sup>69</sup> Guy, for example, did not want Cis to know how upset he was at the sale of his family's ancestral home in Yorkshire, a process that she oversaw in his absence. According to his brother, Guy was "very miserable about it all. . . but he is most anxious that Cis shd [*sic*] not know this ever. . . he even doubts that what she did was for the best."<sup>70</sup>

While Guy felt unable to voice his true feelings about the house sale, Cis found the distance from Guy liberating, enabling her to offer honest disclosures about her feelings. Absence opened up a discursive space for her to engage in the intimate practice of "self-talk," exploring feelings and thoughts that were harder to articulate in person.<sup>71</sup> As George Morris argues, intimacy and selfhood are related in complex ways: intimacy is important in the construction of the self, and ideas of selfhood shape intimate interactions.<sup>72</sup> Cis's letters embody this relationship between intimacy and the self through her discussion of marriage, her attitudes toward sex, and her dual identities as wife and mother. After their tenth wedding anniversary, she addressed Guy's worry that their married life had lacked "glorious moments of abandonment," confiding how she felt torn between being a mother and being a wife. Adding to her concern was her grief of losing a baby in 1912 and anxiety over the health of their youngest daughter: "Nothing but fear for the children comes between you and me—and it's this fear that dries up my spirits, and my happiness."<sup>73</sup> Similarly,

<sup>64</sup> Meyer, *Men of War*, 45–46.

<sup>65</sup> Linnet to Philip, 26 January 1916, Papers of Brigadier-General P. Howell, LHCMA, 12/4.

<sup>66</sup> George to Blanche, 20 February 1916, CAC, GLLD4/1A.

<sup>67</sup> Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email*, 59; Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine*, 14.

<sup>68</sup> Jean's diary, 6 July and 3 August 1915, LHCMA, 20/1/3.

<sup>69</sup> Suzanne M. Sinke, "Maintaining Relationships and Creating Epistolary Personae: (Not) Articulating Emotions in the Letters of a Viennese Family of the Mid-Twentieth Century," in Borges, Cancian, and Reeder, *Emotional Landscapes*, 147–62, at 150.

<sup>70</sup> Alan Dawnay to his sister, 12 December 1916, Papers of Colonel H. Pryce-Jones, National Army Museum, London, 2009-10-7/3451.

<sup>71</sup> Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email*, 52; Cancian, "The Language of Gender in Lovers' Correspondence, 1946–1949," 758.

<sup>72</sup> Morris, "Intimacy in Modern British History," 806.

<sup>73</sup> Cis to Guy, 14 July 1916, no. 109, DFP.

responding to a letter from Guy about passion in relationships, she devoted considerable time to not just expressing her feelings but also creating and expanding on them through the process of reflexivity:

You know darling I have for long known that my—not want of passion, but sort of deadness to it, has at times dreadfully jarred on you—I have known this, and I have known also that I have tried to overcome it, by trying to play at it—and it has often come to me as a sort of nightmare, that I cannot give you what you want as my mind or body? seems so amazingly against it . . . I hate feeling that I wilfully suppress any side to you but I feel sometimes you ask something I can't give—and I would if I could—Guy darling, don't think me cold or hard or dulled in feelings.<sup>74</sup>

Cis's letters reveal both self-discovery and authenticity, divulging her inner thoughts and feelings in response to her husband's honest disclosures on their life and marriage.<sup>75</sup> Separation, then, spurred intimacy. In some cases, it also encouraged furtive steps toward mutuality. Cis's reading of *Married Love* and Guy's request that she send him a copy, for example, reveal a couple seeking to become sexually literate together.<sup>76</sup> Cis also admitted how she had "relished" reading a copy of *La Vie Parisienne*, a mildly erotic French magazine that Guy had sent her.<sup>77</sup>

Alongside attempts to know a spouse's inner life and emotions, contemporary advice at the time deemed knowledge of quotidian and bodily routines as essential to maintaining a strong and happy marriage. Couples should try to strike the right balance between imagination, "love vocabulary," and "little details of the day's doings"<sup>78</sup>; reflections on the mundane, the everyday, and trivial chat kept couples connected. Guy, for example, frequently provided Cis with a detailed account of his daily routine, noting when he woke up ("about 6 or 6.30"), his various tasks, his mealtimes, and when he went to bed.<sup>79</sup> Women's letters often included details of their wartime work, health complaints, sleeping patterns, diet, and menstruation. Linnet's "curses" and Cis's "grannies" found explicit mention in correspondence to husbands, suggesting an openness in their relationships that has been underappreciated in accounts of Edwardian marriage.

By trying to hold on to a sense of knowing about each other in both an interior and corporeal sense, couples sought to maintain a connection with one another despite the exigencies of war, using their letters to create what David Gerber has called a "singular transnational space."<sup>80</sup> Infusing correspondence with the everyday also gave these men the space and opportunity to (re)engage with the domestic rhythms of

<sup>74</sup> Cis to Guy, 18 January 1917, no. 154, DFP. Unfortunately, Cis destroyed some of Guy's more intimate letters to her before she deposited his papers at the Imperial War Museum in the 1960s.

<sup>75</sup> Deborah Thien, "Intimate Distances: Considering Questions of 'Us,'" in *Emotional Geographies*, ed. Joyce Davidson, Liz Bondi, and Mick Smith (Abingdon, 2005), 191–204, at 193.

<sup>76</sup> Cis to Guy, 5 November 1918, no. 351, DFP.

<sup>77</sup> Cis to Guy, 15 December 1918, no. 381, DFP. See Angélique Ibáñez Aristondo, "Seduction, Aggression, and Frenchness in *La Vie Parisienne* (1914–1918)," *French Cultural Studies* 33, no. 1 (2022): 40–58.

<sup>78</sup> As quoted in both Hunter, "More Than an Archive of War," 345, and Houlbrook, "A Pin to See the Peepshow," 244; Mary Holmes, "Intimacy, Distance Relationships and Emotional Care," *Recherches Sociologiques et Anthropologiques* 41, no. 1 (2010): 105–23 (online at para. 32, <https://doi.org/10.4000/rso.191>).

<sup>79</sup> Guy to Cis, 23 May 1915, IWM, 69/21/1.

<sup>80</sup> Gerber, *Authors of Their Lives*, 92.

home. Martial and marital masculine identities converged, reaffirming Jessica Meyer's point that these two identities were not mutually exclusive.<sup>81</sup> For wives, disclosures of their day-to-day lives formed an important part of that shared space, though they worried that their letters might seem dull or "terribly domestic and small."<sup>82</sup> Just as long-distance relationships could not survive on imagination alone, maintaining them required more than just routine. That balance between imagination and the everyday was a difficult one to strike—as correspondents indicated they were painfully aware.

While the content of correspondence provided details of spouses' thoughts and everyday lives, the actual act of sending and receiving a letter enabled the embodying of the other person. A letter's prior physical proximity to its author, for example, meant it worked metonymically, taking the "physical place of the longed for person."<sup>83</sup> As Blanche wrote to George, a letter from him was "almost like seeing your dear face, or hearing your beloved voice, or feeling your arms around me."<sup>84</sup> The letter not only involved a "simulacrum of presence" by conjuring up the writer through characteristic phrases or mistakes but also acted as a tactile representation of the other person as it traveled physically from one person to another.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, at the start of their separation, Cis wrote how "it is a pleasure to feel you will hold & touch this paper, in fact will be the next person to handle it."<sup>86</sup> An olfactory aspect often complemented the haptic nature of letters, underlining the interrelatedness of practices, objects, and senses. Opening a letter and catching the scent of a wife's perfume, for example, invoked both sensual and sensory memories that brought the two into closer touch.<sup>87</sup> Guy's trip to Cairo's scent bazaar almost resulted in his buying perfume for Cis, but he confessed he did not know "what you would (or would NOT) like!" Another intimate practice underlay this exchange, however: the thought of the perfume "coming back to me in your beloved letters . . . telling me of your love."<sup>88</sup>

Though Guy does not appear in the end to have bought any perfume, the intimate practice of gift giving was another means of embodying a spouse. Much like a letter, a gift served as an expression of the self, carrying the essence of the giver along with it and acting as a "point of intimate contact that collapses the geographical reality of separation."<sup>89</sup> The displaying or wearing of gifts ensured the maintenance of an absent presence and the continued visibility of that person.<sup>90</sup> Cis cherished Guy's gifts of a Persian silk and a grey kimono—the latter frequently worn when dining

<sup>81</sup> Meyer, *Men of War*, 30, 44.

<sup>82</sup> Cis to Guy, 9 April 1916, no. 95, DFP.

<sup>83</sup> Baldassar, "Missing Kin and Longing to Be Together," 257. See also Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email*, 53.

<sup>84</sup> Blanche to George, 4 March 1915, CAC, GLLD4/19A.

<sup>85</sup> Liz Stanley, "The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences," *Auto/Biography* 12 (2004): 201–35, at 209. See also Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge, 2005), 1–32.

<sup>86</sup> Cis to Guy, 15 April 1915, DFP. Original emphasis.

<sup>87</sup> See Michael Roper, "Nostalgia as an Emotional Experience in the Great War," *Historical Journal* 54, no. 2 (2011): 421–51, at 434.

<sup>88</sup> Guy to Cis, 28 January 1917, IWM, 69/21/2.

<sup>89</sup> Houlbrook, "A Pin to See the Peepshow," 236.

<sup>90</sup> Holdsworth, *Family and Intimate Mobilities*, 136.

with family. Wearing the garment in social settings provided her with an opportunity to bring Guy into conversation, thereby maintaining and reaffirming his presence within their social and domestic worlds. These luxurious items were also highly tactile. They could be held, used, and adored, heightening the embodied and sensory connection between spouses. Both the silk and the kimono engendered feelings of physical comfort: first, through the touch of textiles on the skin, and secondly, through the objects' emotional meaning.<sup>91</sup> By wrapping herself in these gifts, Cis physically wrapped herself in the embodiment of her husband's affections. His selection of such objects spoke to the feeling of being remembered or thought of. One can see this in the comforts and parcels sent to soldiers, essential to sustaining family ties at distance, maintaining morale, and ensuring that troops knew they were not forgotten.<sup>92</sup> It was no different for spouses back home. Receiving a box of "amber cigarettes" from George thrilled Blanche (a "little extra reminder. . . to show you are thinking of me"), while Linnet delighted in the gift of a scarf from Philip. "It may be a failing of the female mind that clings to symbols, rituals and outward visible signs," she remarked, "but I certainly possess it."<sup>93</sup>

Gift giving also encompassed the exchange of photographs. Though two-dimensional, a photograph enabled the viewer to read a three-dimensional reality, imbuing it with meaning and sentiment.<sup>94</sup> A photograph was as much a form of presence as it was a token of absence, as it could "literally traverse the gap of separation."<sup>95</sup> The image could be spoken to, caressed, and kissed. It could be proudly displayed or pasted into a private diary. Couples often arranged to have professional portraits taken for each other. From the very act of choosing and visiting a photographer to the selection and eventual sending of images, the exchange constituted another intimate practice.

Photographs were fuel for the imagination, but they were also a reminder of real life and so could be a source of anxiety. Some women were concerned that the reality captured in a photograph would undermine the imagined ideal in their husband's mind. The results, even from the best society photographers, were often disappointing. Linnet bemoaned to Philip how awful her photographs were, declaring, "Tho' I am hideous nowadays, I consider it the duty of a photographer to make me look more beautiful than I really am."<sup>96</sup> Several months later she wrote to him, somewhat tongue in cheek, that despite her "grey hairs, wrinkles, withered yellow flesh, toothless gums, and atrophied hair," he must still go on "being the perfect husband and thinking me the only nice person in the world (which I am)."<sup>97</sup> Cis dared not even send Guy the photographs she had taken in early 1917 as they were "such

<sup>91</sup> Alice Dolan and Sally Holloway, "Emotional Textiles: An Introduction," *Textile* 14, no. 2 (2016): 152–29, at 155.

<sup>92</sup> See Roper, *Secret Battle*; Roper, "Nostalgia as an Emotional Experience in the Great War," 428–29.

<sup>93</sup> Blanche to George, 26 April 1916, CAC, GLLD4/19B; Linnet to Philip, 22 March 1916, LHCMA, 12/4.

<sup>94</sup> Tim Dant and Graeme Gilloch, "Pictures of the Past: Benjamin and Barthes on Photography and History," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (2002): 5–23, at 18–19.

<sup>95</sup> Catherine Moriarty, "'Though in a Picture Only': Portrait Photography and the Commemoration of the First World War," in *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914–18*, ed. Gail Braybon (Oxford, 2003), 30–47, at 36; Mayhew, "A War Imagined," 309–12.

<sup>96</sup> Linnet to Philip, 22–23 February 1916, LHCMA, 12/4. Original emphasis.

<sup>97</sup> Linnet to Philip, ca. May/June 1916, LHCMA, 12/4.

dismal failures. . . I can't bring myself to pay £4.4.0. for them when they are so frightful!"<sup>98</sup> Another set taken later were much the same—"so horribly bad."<sup>99</sup> This second episode led her to reflect that Guy's time away had transformed her into someone she was not and that sending him such "dreadful" photographs would turn his dream into a "grotesque" nightmare: "You see I am not Beautiful or White or half the things you think, and my heart is heavy with thinking how different you will find me in the body to what I am in your mind."<sup>100</sup> Blanche, too, experienced anxieties about George's possible disgust at the reality of her aging body: "I dreamt. . . you had got tired of me because I had grown so old and ugly!"<sup>101</sup> While photographs functioned as a constant reminder of loved ones, there were concerns that the reality of such images could undermine the imagined, longed-for body and affect intimate relations, particularly when physical togetherness was finally achieved.

For many soldiers, though, photographs were essential to imagining family and domestic life. Guy kept a portrait of Cis next to his bed ("I see it and think of you the last thing before I go to sleep," he wrote), accompanied by photographs of his two eldest children. Writing to his daughter, he described the importance of those photographs: "When I get your letters I look at the photographs and see you and feel as if you were talking to me."<sup>102</sup> Here, again, we can see how the interrelatedness of objects and senses could enhance that absent presence. It was as if the material medium of both letter and photograph had been eclipsed and the temporal and spatial obstacles between them overcome. Powerfully, this example revealed the "emergence of a fantasy of bodily proximity"—an *imagining* of the absent loved one.<sup>103</sup>

Imagined presence relies on memory and imagination to sustain a feeling of closeness with those who are absent.<sup>104</sup> Some scholars conceive of imagined presence as based on idealized memories and hopes, focusing on the past and the future, while others suggest that it exists in the present, invoked by "imagining interaction with one another" via certain emotional markers or simultaneity—in which correspondents felt as if they shared the same moment in time.<sup>105</sup> It was often highly sensory, triggered by a variety of stimuli including objects, places, and spaces. Through these means and others, spouses could "recapture the 'feel' of intimacy" they shared with one another.<sup>106</sup> As such, imagined presence was not solely bound

<sup>98</sup> Cis to Guy, 19 March 1917, no. 166, DFP.

<sup>99</sup> Cis to Guy, 5 September 1917, no. 199, DFP.

<sup>100</sup> Cis to Guy, 12 October 1917, no. 207, DFP.

<sup>101</sup> Blanche to George, 5 July 1916, CAC, GLLD4/19B.

<sup>102</sup> Guy to daughter, ca. 8 June 1915, DFP.

<sup>103</sup> Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email*, 9.

<sup>104</sup> Kristin Atwood, "Maintaining 'the Family' during Deployment: Presence Work by Military Families" (PhD diss., Calgary University, 2014), 47.

<sup>105</sup> Andy J. Merolla, "Relational Maintenance during Military Deployment: Perspectives of Wives of Deployed US Soldiers," *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 38, no. 1 (2010): 4–26, at 14; Carol Acton, "'You Yourself Are Here Now Looking over My Shoulder as I Write': Emotional Dialogue and the Construction of a Shared Intimate Space in First World War Letters," *L'Atelier* 8, no. 1 (2016): 194–219, at 202.

<sup>106</sup> Elliott and Urry, *Mobile Lives*, 102.



within the borders of imagination but evoked through the materiality of bodily sensations and experiences.<sup>107</sup>

Objects like letters could trigger a fantasy of physical proximity—that the absent person was somehow present—the written words echoing in the reader’s ears, as Guy experienced it. Just as powerful, though, were the emotionally evocative settings of space and place, particularly when full of objects, scents, and the idiosyncratic arrangement of personal possessions. Immersion in these meaningful environments enabled spouses to “recreate a sense of their absent partner’s presence.”<sup>108</sup> In the early months of their separation, something about Guy’s bedroom stimulated a sense of closeness for Cis. Less than three weeks into their separation, she wrote to him that his bedroom made “such an impression on me that I have to keep going in and out.”<sup>109</sup> He had left his poetry notebook behind, too, which satisfied her desire “for you and your mind.” On her “dark days,” her consolation was that “I still feel you about so much, a sort of spiritual presence in the house and a feeling of glamour about your room.”<sup>110</sup> Blanche voiced similar feelings. A week after George’s return to the front, she was “only just beginning to bear to go into the smoking room again,” yet the “spell of the heavenly time we had together” was “all round me, keeping me warm.”<sup>111</sup> In some sense, despite their physical absence, Guy and George had never really left home. Their presence saturated their respective domestic worlds, speaking again to the creation of a singular transnational space. Yet this was not always the case. For Jean, there was no glamour or spiritual presence. Instead, the house was “grim and forbidding.” “I hate the house without Ian,” she wrote. “This house seems only a gaudy empty shell without [him].”<sup>112</sup> Here, then, one witnesses the differences in feelings between these women: Jean’s rational, rather secular response to her home without Ian, Cis’s and Blanche’s spiritual, almost enchanted feelings around their respective domestic spaces.

Such meaningful environments were not always domestic. Religious buildings, gardens, even hotels could be similarly affective places. Being in such places could trigger remembrance of fond memories from when couples were physically present, leading to an imagining of past and future togetherness. The relationship between imagination and memory is a powerful one. By recalling something, we employ imagination, and by imagining something and exploring it, draw on memory.<sup>113</sup> Linnet’s excursions to the Essex countryside, for example, brought back memories of her courtship with Philip. This remembering of being-in-place and remembering through place allowed her to access memories that provided the framework for an idealized, imagined future.<sup>114</sup> “Do you remember how we used to sit in the summer house at the end of the garden?” she wrote to Philip during a

<sup>107</sup> Habib, “Virtual (Dis)Connectivities,” 104.

<sup>108</sup> Merolla, “Relational Maintenance during Military Deployment,” 14.

<sup>109</sup> Cis to Guy, 4 April 1915, DFP.

<sup>110</sup> Cis to Guy, 8 October 1915, DFP.

<sup>111</sup> Blanche to George, ca. October 1916, CAC, GLLD4/19C.

<sup>112</sup> Jean’s diary, 1 June 1915, LHCMA, 20/1/2.

<sup>113</sup> Owain Jones, “An Emotional Ecology of Memory, Self and Landscape,” in Davidson, Bondi, and Smith, *Emotional Geographies*, 205–18, at 210.

<sup>114</sup> See Hunter, “More Than an Archive of War,” 345.

visit to Thaxted. "We'll come here together when the war is over and have our long postponed wedding and [our daughter] shall be bridesmaid."<sup>115</sup> An excursion to Harrogate prompted a similar reaction from Blanche. Driving past the "dreadful" Prospect Hotel where George stayed during their courtship, Blanche wove past and future together, musing on their mutual affection for one another: "Every night when I go to bed I think how nice it will be when some day I have you there again to abuse me for not undressing quick enough, and for having too many blankets on and then kicking out Jones and just putting your arms right round me. It does make me feel safe that, it always did, it does even to think of it."<sup>116</sup> Through references to specific places, settings, and the physical togetherness of their bodies, Linnet and Blanche conveyed and invoked a sense of intimacy with their husbands, locating them in a shared domestic world and imaginary space.<sup>117</sup>

The linking of memories to future hopes spoke to the way that time could seemingly pleat inwards or collapse. Yet long distances and the fragmentation of correspondence during wartime often forced couples to live in different temporal routines. Throughout their separation, they attempted to imagine and occupy temporal continuity with one another.<sup>118</sup> One way of doing this was through emotional markers such as remembering past events, dates, or anniversaries. These significant autobiographical events served to enhance intimacy at a distance, providing common reference points and reinforcing a sense of shared identity. On their twelfth wedding anniversary, Cis recalled their wedding night. "Well my darling do you remember lying side by side shivering with fright 12 years ago," she wrote. "What babes we were and how innocent."<sup>119</sup> For Guy, the anniversary brought back his own memories of the first night of their honeymoon: "Do you remember, my beautiful one?"<sup>120</sup> This important event, reencountered through the process of remembering and the reflexive act of writing, served to strengthen the couple's intimacy and heighten the anticipation of their physical reunion.

The element of simultaneity—bringing each other to mind at a particular time of the day, or attempting to share in each other's routines or activities—could be used to complement these emotional markers. Imagining one another in this way was an oft-adopted solution to separation.<sup>121</sup> George, for example, asked Blanche to pass on his love to their son ("I often say goodnight to him just when I know he must be going to bed," he wrote), a clear attempt to keep time with domestic rhythms back home.<sup>122</sup> While it was more difficult for wives to share in their husbands' rhythms and routines, efforts to mirror some of their activities could be as simple as reading the same book—*Hamlet* in Blanche and George's case, passages from the Bible for Cis and Guy. For Linnet, celestial objects—a common motif—provided a

<sup>115</sup> Linnet to Philip, 2 March 1916, LHCMA, 12/4.

<sup>116</sup> Blanche to George, 3 September 1915, CAC, GLLD4/19A.

<sup>117</sup> Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email*, 203.

<sup>118</sup> Michelle Thomas and Nicholas Bailey, "Out of Time: Work, Temporal Synchrony and Families," *Sociology* 43, no. 4 (2009): 613–30, at 624.

<sup>119</sup> Cis to Guy, 11 July 1918, no. 313, DFP.

<sup>120</sup> Guy to Cis, 14 July 1918, IWM, 69/21/3.

<sup>121</sup> Roper, *Secret Battle*, 92.

<sup>122</sup> George to Blanche, 8 February 1916, CAC, GLLD4/1A.

more permanent, shared form of simultaneity.<sup>123</sup> In the early months of their separation, she would often describe to Philip the natural world around her. “Darling, I’ve just been out in the garden,” she wrote in February 1916, “and the stars were so lovely I wondered if you were looking at them—a little moon lying on her back.”<sup>124</sup> Though hundreds of miles away, they were still under the same moon and stars, bringing their disparate experiences together in relation to specific celestial and temporal points.<sup>125</sup> Sharing in activities by keeping in time, bringing each other to mind at certain times of day, feeling and imagining that “you must be thinking of me as much as I am thinking of you,” engendered togetherness.<sup>126</sup> As Linnet wrote after the war, “In spite of the lands and seas that lay between us, we seemed to be in touch with each other through some mystical participation in each other’s lives.”<sup>127</sup>

Through their attempts to know, embody, and imagine one another, married couples developed new ways of communicating and connecting, helping them to strengthen and renew their relationships. For some, the distance and separation brought about by war led to greater emotional intimacy. Distance did not make them strangers. Instead, it created space for modern practices of the self, such as interiority, authenticity, and self-talk. Through these practices, spouses sought to understand and (re)discover themselves, exploring—via the ostensibly private space of a letter or diary—particular desires, fears, and hopes. Such practices also enabled spouses to understand one another better. Through this emotional self-examination and introspection, they remembered and reencountered past events and experiences, building a fantasy of future togetherness where bodies could be seen, touched, and experienced.

## REUNION

Whether it was Linnet’s desire to feel Philip’s “rough hands and rough face” or Guy’s wish to “[feast] my eyes on the beautiful sight” of his wife, couples frequently imagined and anticipated being together again.<sup>128</sup> As the previous section has illustrated, intimacy was not necessarily a product of physical proximity, yet the anticipation of physical reunion with a loved one—to “be there” and experience them—recurred as a theme in their correspondence.<sup>129</sup> This togetherness could be realized in a number of ways. In rare cases, it was through women visiting theaters of war for a short time or living there for the duration of the war. More often, it manifested in home leave, which provided an opportunity for physical togetherness during the war. Yet the emotional turmoil of anticipation-reunion-separation meant that physically being together could be a double-edged sword: it could be a soothing balm after months

<sup>123</sup> See, for example, Mirjam Milharčič Hladnik, “‘People Cannot Live on Love Alone’: Negotiating Love, Gender Roles, and Family Care between Slovenia and Egypt,” in Borges, Cancian, and Reeder, *Emotional Landscapes*, 57–74, at 63.

<sup>124</sup> Linnet to Philip, 7 February 1916, LHCMA, 12/4.

<sup>125</sup> Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email*, 60.

<sup>126</sup> Cis to Guy, 12 July 1916, no. 108, DFP.

<sup>127</sup> Howell, *Philip Howell*, 175.

<sup>128</sup> Linnet to Philip, 20 February 1916, LHCMA, 12/4; Guy to Cis, 30 August 1918, IWM, 69/21/3.

<sup>129</sup> Holdsworth, *Family and Intimate Mobilities*, 138; Baldassar, “Missing Kin and Longing to Be Together,” 260–61.

of separation, but that fleeting time together could have a destabilizing and agonizing effect that undermined the emotional authenticity of physical togetherness. Indeed, continual partings were emotionally wearing, requiring the negotiation of a series of endings and beginnings, which affected the "experiencing of relation to the other," often painfully revealing the tension between the anticipation and the reality of physical reunion.<sup>130</sup>

The prospect of physical reunion with a spouse was frequently an exhilarating, longed-for event that was conveyed in highly sensory language. Recounting her two-month sojourn in Greece, Linnet recalled the surprise of one aristocratic woman she met who exclaimed, "Oh! Then you only came to see your husband?" Linnet mused on the woman's surprise at length: "But what else for? . . . I had come to snatch some moments from Fate . . . The thrilling certainty of it all . . . The aloneness of the past months heightened the joy of renewed union in mind, heart and body. . . To be able to talk freely, to pour ourselves out in the blissful release of complete intimacy—with no reserve at all."<sup>131</sup>

Sensory language similarly infused Cis's letters to Guy, anticipating their reunion after an eighteen-month absence: "I do feel so longing to have you here to see & touch and talk to."<sup>132</sup> Cis too keenly anticipated sexual reunion, not just in hopes of conceiving but "to feel you near—really near in the flesh—will it be wrong to enjoy it!"<sup>133</sup> Yet, as the prospect grew nearer, feelings of nervousness, apprehension, even dread intruded, particularly if this was not a couple's first reunion. The frenetic nature of togetherness, the need to try to "make the most of every minute," led to a longing for normalcy and a life of "peace and quiet."<sup>134</sup>

Even before their husbands left for home, women were steeling themselves for the acute joy and pain of reuniting. When that elusive home leave or sojourn occurred, physical reunion partially assuaged some of the feelings of longing and missing. As both John Urry and Katie Walsh have argued, individuals have a "compulsion to proximity."<sup>135</sup> Physical presence provides context often missing from other forms of human exchange. It allows individuals to read (through touch or sight) what the other is thinking, detect their body language, and sense their response. This emotion work is essential for communicating love and for developing "extended relations of trust" that endure during periods of distance and solitude—intrinsic to military service in overseas theaters.<sup>136</sup> Physical presence satisfied sensual contact between couples, particularly the ability to touch—the "most acute bearer of private knowledge and emotion," but a sense that cannot be directly represented.<sup>137</sup> Indeed, as Linnet mused, "The impressions that we carry with us of the absent, of whom we are constantly thinking, are liable to mislead."<sup>138</sup> Their misleading

<sup>130</sup> Holmes, "Intimacy, Distance Relationships and Emotional Care," para. 27.

<sup>131</sup> Howell, *Philip Howell*, 207.

<sup>132</sup> Cis to Guy, 7 December 1917, no. 220, DFP.

<sup>133</sup> Cis to Guy, 8 May 1918, no. 269, DFP.

<sup>134</sup> Cis to Guy, 7 April 1917, no. 171, DFP.

<sup>135</sup> John Urry, "Connections," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 22 (2004): 27–37, at 29; Katie Walsh, "Geographies of the Heart in Transnational Spaces: Love and the Intimate Lives of British Migrants in Dubai," *Mobilities* 4, no. 3 (2009): 427–45, at 437.

<sup>136</sup> Urry, "Connections," 31; Walsh, "Geographies of the Heart in Transnational Spaces," 437.

<sup>137</sup> Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, 27–28.

<sup>138</sup> Howell, *Philip Howell*, 206.

nature could be for better or worse. In Linnet's case, the reality of Philip surpassed the impression of him that she had created during their separation. While she expected a level of happiness at seeing him, that happiness "reached ecstasy."<sup>139</sup> She saw, experienced, and sensed him in new ways. During a day trip to the Acropolis, she mused on his face and body: "Was it the light that revealed classic planes of relief in Philip's face and gave an almost unearthly radiance to his features? He stood . . . against that background of land and sea and marvellous works of men's hands, yet it seemed to me the beauty of the human form that stood there was unsurpassed."<sup>140</sup> On one of their last days before Philip's return to Salonika, they walked from Kaisariani to Athens, an amble punctuated by "rests" that were "less on the score of physical fatigue than to enjoy the *sense of each other*, in the quiet and complete solitude of the mountain-side with the hot aromatic smell of the herbs we crushed underfoot."<sup>141</sup>

For some women, though, the actuality often failed to live up to anticipation. Ian's inauspicious homecoming from Gallipoli exposed the dissonance between the longed-for, imagined event and its reality. Days before his arrival, Jean confided how "utterly thankful" she was that Ian was "returning with all his arms and legs, his blue eyes and his sunny smile."<sup>142</sup> On the evening of his return, they walked in the moonlight and "talked and talked, or rather Ian talked and I listened. It was the happiest homecoming for Ian I have ever had. It was sweet to feel he needed me, and the shelter of his own home."<sup>143</sup> However, in the following morning's cold light, Ian looked "haggard—worn—does not sleep. . . It breaks my heart to see the look I do see now in my Ian's face, and realise the strain it is on him to keep up at all."<sup>144</sup> In the women's writings, words like *strained*, *thin*, and *tired* were often used to describe husbands' diminished bodies. On George's return from Mesopotamia, for example, Blanche noted that he looked "very thin," but otherwise "wonderfully well."<sup>145</sup> In anticipation of subsequent leave, she moderated her expectations. When George came home for good, Blanche remarked in her diary that he was "tired and seedy. . . but on the whole definitely less ill than I expected to see him."<sup>146</sup> As with the anxieties Cis, Linnet, and Blanche felt around their own bodies, we witness here, through the female gaze, a similar tension between the strong, imagined male body and the real, often frail one.

While reunions gave couples the opportunity to reaffirm sensual and intimate contact physically, its temporary, fleeting nature could have a disruptive effect on everyday patterns of intimacy. Reunions could be fraught, even agonizing experiences, often described in violent language. They threw into disarray the domestic, everyday routines that had provided a degree of normalcy during periods of separation. For Cis, Guy's first two home leaves were "wild and hectic" and "a whirl, a flight, an agitation."<sup>147</sup> Husbands too found home leave unsettling. George wrote

<sup>139</sup> Howell, 206.

<sup>140</sup> Howell, 209.

<sup>141</sup> Howell, 213. Emphasis added.

<sup>142</sup> Jean's diary, 20 October 1915, LHCMA, 20/1/3.

<sup>143</sup> Jean's diary, 22 October 1915, LHCMA, 20/1/3. Original emphasis.

<sup>144</sup> Jean's diary, 23 October 1915, LHCMA, 20/1/3.

<sup>145</sup> Blanche's diary, 13 September 1916, CAC, GLLD28/4.

<sup>146</sup> Blanche's diary, 27 April 1918, CAC, GLLD28/7.

<sup>147</sup> Cis to Guy, 18 January 1916, no. 73, DFP; Cis to Guy, 28 November 1917, no. 216, DFP.

to Blanche afterward that while it was "so wonderful" being with her again, "it was all such a visit of explosions, wasn't it?"<sup>148</sup> In many cases, other commitments that required attention limited the time that husbands could spend in reestablishing intimate routines. Guy's first period of home leave, for example, necessitated his spending long days at the War Office: "Cis and I had so little time together—except those 4 days at Beningbrough," he told his mother.<sup>149</sup> On one of George's leaves, Blanche noted how the first few days were spent "mapping out plans and settling who he must see, and what business it was necessary for him to do."<sup>150</sup> Husbands often operated largely outside the domestic routines and rhythms even when at home, despite the extensive emotion work wives had done "keeping time" with them when apart.

Even the opportunity for sexual reunion proved emotionally wearing both during and after leave.<sup>151</sup> The desire to conceive while husbands were at home was acute. On the last day of George's leave in late 1916, Blanche visited her gynecologist to discuss the challenges of "starting another baby, which I have so far been hoping for in vain."<sup>152</sup> She had tried to conceive during a previous leave in December 1915, to no avail. Her doctor could not give her an answer but told her to come back if there was "no result" in a month's time.<sup>153</sup> Similarly, the absence of Cis's periods after Guy's leave gave her hope of a much longed for pregnancy. Unfortunately, she did not conceive during the war years. Writing weeks after Guy's first leave, Cis recounted her "shock and sadness! My granny has appeared! I can't help laughing and weeping all in one for really after all our efforts it is most dreadfully disappointing. . . I had taken such care these last days—and really I thought I had made the most of my opportunities. . . Perhaps it is the fact of your going away, indefinitely, which upsets me more than I know, and does the trick."<sup>154</sup>

Her menstrual period's arrival led her to wonder why "it is so hard for me to have children," believing one of the reasons was the "exquisite agony" of Guy's leave, which "upsets me too much."<sup>155</sup> The bittersweet nature of leave and the need to make the most of time together disrupted all the everyday routines and cadences. By 1917, Cis had begun to dread the prospect of leave and the way that the time apart stretched out in front of them: "It is now almost 19 months since you went and I don't know how to contemplate a leave of 3 weeks and then to face another 19 months. Of course. . . you and others will say it won't be another 19 months—but you would all have said it wouldn't be 19 months when you went away before."<sup>156</sup>

When the temporary reunion inevitably came to an end, it was a wrenching experience that often prompted a visceral response, feelings of sadness accompanied by anger, resentment, and despair. When the army cut short Philip's leave by a day, Linnet initially blamed him for that "bitter blow," her whole self rising up in

<sup>148</sup> George to Blanche, 20 October 1915, CAC, GLLD4/1A.

<sup>149</sup> Guy to his mother, 4 October 1915, National Army Museum, 2009-10-7/3606. Beningbrough Hall, the Dawnay family's ancestral home, was sold in late 1916.

<sup>150</sup> Blanche's diary, n.d. [September 1916], CAC, GLLD28/4.

<sup>151</sup> See Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine*, 261–62; Hanna, "The Couple," 23.

<sup>152</sup> Blanche's diary, 17 October 1916, CAC, GLLD28/4.

<sup>153</sup> Blanche's diary, 17 October 1916, CAC, GLLD28/4.

<sup>154</sup> Cis to Guy, 7 October 1915, DFP.

<sup>155</sup> Cis to Guy, 8 October 1915, DFP.

<sup>156</sup> Cis to Guy, 29 November 1917, no. 217, DFP.

“angry protest at the outrage of the perpetual partings.”<sup>157</sup> Numbness and uncertainty were overriding emotions for others. Blanche found every separation worse than the last, yet confided to her diary, “How easy it would be to let him go for a whole year if I could only know for certain that he would come back safe at the end of it and we should not have to say good-bye again.”<sup>158</sup> The uncertainty that accompanied separation fueled the tyranny of time through the “horrible feeling of the clock ticking away seconds all the time.”<sup>159</sup> While time could concertina and collapse with the receipt of a letter or photograph, it stretched out inexorably when measured from the point of a soldier’s departure into an unknown future.<sup>160</sup> Wives noted the time from the moment of separation in diaries and correspondence: a day, a week, five weeks . . . nineteen months. To cope with such uncertainty, they reengaged with support networks and reestablished the routines that had been discarded during that brief period of reunion. “There is nothing to do but be busy,” Cis wrote eleven days after Guy’s departure. “I worked all the morning at my Hospital Depot, and made about 20 bandages. Then I went to Fulham and weighed about 50 babies!!! so my time was occupied.”<sup>161</sup>

Much like the initial departure, the ending of leave forced couples to readjust to intimacy at a distance, requiring them to fall back once again on “abstractly imagined” forms of intimacy to feel close.<sup>162</sup> Doing so proved challenging as the joy and pain of reunion seemed to diminish those intimate practices that had sustained—and would continue to sustain—their relationships. Letters were “such ridiculous things when I have so lately been talking to you and seeing your face,” wrote Blanche, but “they will just have to do as a makeshift till I get you back again.”<sup>163</sup> Separation after a period of togetherness seemed to stretch even further both the time and distance between individuals. The death of a spouse—the ultimate instance of separation—stretched that time and distance beyond comprehension. After Philip was killed in October 1916, Linnet kept an intermittent diary for several years, detailing her thoughts and feelings on his death. While she “scoffed” at, even “rather hated” Spiritualism, she engaged in an individual form of “secular spiritualism” to try to maintain an intimate connection with Philip and to bridge the distance between life and death.<sup>164</sup> At times, she was convinced she could *feel* his presence in their home and *hear* him talking to her. (“Sorry Linny,” she thought she heard him say.)<sup>165</sup> Her attempts to maintain intimacy with Philip did not cease after his death. During the war, letters and photographs had been essential to their intimacy, but Linnet hid away these “symbols and material aids to remembrance” in the belief

<sup>157</sup> Howell, *Philip Howell*, 213.

<sup>158</sup> Blanche’s diary, 18 October 1916, CAC, GLLD28/4.

<sup>159</sup> Blanche’s diary, 17 October 1916, CAC, GLLD28/4.

<sup>160</sup> Ziino, “Always Thinking in the Other Part of the Globe,” 149.

<sup>161</sup> Cis to Guy, 14 October 1915, DFP.

<sup>162</sup> Holmes, “Intimacy, Distance Relationships and Emotional Care,” para. 7.

<sup>163</sup> Blanche to George, 8 April 1915, CAC, GLLD4/19A.

<sup>164</sup> Linnet’s diary, n.d., LHCMA, 12/1/4. For discussion of Spiritualism during the First World War, see Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1998), 54; Rachel Patrick, “Speaking across the Borderline: Intimate Connections, Grief and Spiritualism in the Letters of Elizabeth Stewart during the First World War,” *History Australia* 10, no. 3 (2013): 109–28.

<sup>165</sup> Linnet’s diary, n.d., LHCMA, 12/1/4.

that these artifacts only "impeded one's spiritual vision."<sup>166</sup> Instead, she tried to find new ways of connecting with him, including automatic writing, séances, and a pilgrimage to the Western Front where she took his pocket diary and followed in his footsteps. She felt that if she could "make a little more effort," she "should be able to reach Philip and be united with him."<sup>167</sup> Yet, as for many widows, despite her myriad attempts, the fact of Philip's death confronted her.<sup>168</sup> Just as she admitted that she "never altogether attempted to fathom the depth of . . . agony" associated with his death ("it was unspeakable, beyond tears, beyond analysis," she wrote), she tried but never could overcome the sensory and bodily divide that now separated them.<sup>169</sup> While distance could be "transformed into closeness" for some couples, for Linnet an empty space remained.<sup>170</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Couples sought to maintain intimacy in complex ways across time and space during the First World War. The exigencies of war required them to conduct their marriage by correspondence. Through the survival of this correspondence, we are granted a peephole into the nature of contemporary intimacy with these four upper-middle-class couples finding new ways to relate to one another. Born between 1853 and 1880, these individuals came of age in the Victorian period; self-control, emotional restraint, and character were still important to them. However, within their wartime correspondence and writings, they exhibit a curiosity about their own and each other's intimate lives and how they might be changing. They were discovering and expressing themselves in ways that reflected a desire for more overt emotional expression and tentative steps toward mutuality. For some, these steps were halting. Jean and Ian, for example, remained less than comfortable revealing themselves emotionally on the page. Jean's heavy reliance on her diary for introspection and self-discovery reaffirms that the journey from patriarchal to companionate marriage was not linear or deterministic but often protracted, contested, and incomplete.<sup>171</sup> Yet overall for these couples, one can see an emphasis on interiority, authenticity, and emotional self-examination—key elements to the making of the modern self and, by extension, an important part of modern intimacy. Whether through George and Philip's vulnerability, Blanche's desire to be held by her husband in bed, or even Linnet's attempt through Spiritualism to explore the "deepest recesses" of the self, a clear sense of self-awareness and introspection emerges in their writing.<sup>172</sup> While none of these couples were sex radicals, some explored the possibilities of

<sup>166</sup> Linnet's diary, [ca. July 1918], LHCMA, 12/1/4.

<sup>167</sup> Linnet's diary, n.d., LHCMA, 12/1/4.

<sup>168</sup> See Hanna, *Anxious Days and Tearful Nights*, 213–14; Patrick, "Speaking across the Borderline," 102–3, 201–2; Patrick, "Unbroken Connection?"

<sup>169</sup> Annotated unpublished sections of Linnet's biography of Philip, n.d., LHCMA, 12/1/3.

<sup>170</sup> Thien, "Intimate Distances," 193.

<sup>171</sup> Christie and Gavreau, *Bodies, Love, and Faith in the First World War*, 14, 285; Szreter and Fisher, *Sex before the Sexual Revolution*, 197, 385.

<sup>172</sup> See Vernon, *Distant Strangers*, 50; Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago, 2004).



mutual pleasure, as seen in Cis's reading of *Married Love* and Guy's request that she send a copy to him.

Charting the biographies of four couples during war uncovers the specificities of their married lives. Foregrounding the small history of these couples, exploring how they discovered, embraced, or shied away from new forms of intimacy and emotional expression, highlights the need to reconsider binary categorizations of marriage as either patriarchal or companionate, either "Victorian" or "modern." Overarching narratives and categorizations have value in enabling understanding of change and continuity over time, yet, writing the history of intimacy on a small, local basis is not antithetical to this endeavor. That the marriages of these four couples bore the hallmarks of both Victorian and modern marriage speaks not only to the fractured and incomplete transition between these two categorizations but also to those very ideas of change and continuity associated with narratives of modernity. Their correspondence and diaries reflect how modernity could be a localized and partial process.<sup>173</sup> Evidence of interiority and self-discovery is present in Guy's wartime letters, for example, yet after the war he wrote of being steeped in an "old fashioned, Catholic and sacramental point of view towards marriage."<sup>174</sup> Similarly, while Jean's writings provide evidence of self-examination and a sense of interiority, her views on sexual pleasure in marriage remained patriarchal, as she wrote how "the meaning of conjugal rights" outraged "every atom" of her being and it was "no use telling me sexual passion is a beautiful thing."<sup>175</sup> These overlapping characteristics speak to the slippery, unstable, and contingent nature of modern intimacy and marriage.

Exploring the subjective experiences of these couples also invites us to reframe our understanding of the spatial dimensions of separation and intimacy. The spatially opposed concepts of distance and proximity, for example, coexisted through the sending of a letter or photograph, or through the discourses of interiority and authenticity enabled by the very existence of such distance; time together and time apart were interwoven elements of intimacy.<sup>176</sup> How individuals imagined and understood their ability to feel and sense each other across time and space affected how they imagined and understood distance. It was not so much a matter of miles or travel time as an "emotional mapping" stitched onto the fabric of their lives.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, closeness did not necessarily mean the same as physical nearness. Spouses certainly strove for physical proximity, reaffirming the importance of being there; yet, as much as they longed for it, instances of physical togetherness could be artificial, destabilizing, and painful experiences. After fleeting weeks of leave were over, the aftereffects were felt for weeks and months. Intimacy, then, manifested in multiple and often elastic ways. The product of both social and spatial relations, it could be stretched out, connecting people at a distance, often through the

<sup>173</sup> H. G. Cocks, "Modernity and the Self in the History of Sexuality," *Historical Journal* 49, no. 4 (2006): 1211–27, at 1213.

<sup>174</sup> Guy to Miss Constance MacColl, 29 January 1938, IWM, 69/21/3.

<sup>175</sup> Jean's diary, 23 February 1914, LHCMA, 20/1/2.

<sup>176</sup> Holdsworth, *Family and Intimate Mobilities*, 143.

<sup>177</sup> Anne M. Cronin, "Distant Friends, Mobility and Sensed Intimacy," *Mobilities* 10, no. 5 (2015): 667–85, at 682.

creation of a shared imaginary space woven from memories and future hopes. The diverse means of channeling intimacy shown by these wartime letters suggests that "spatialities of intimacy" are far more extensive and flexible than we might think—whether the divide between couples was marked by hundreds of miles or the valley of death itself.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>178</sup> Walsh, "Geographies of the Heart in Transnational Spaces," 443.