

Female Heroism in First World War France:
Representations and Lived Experiences

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This study is an evaluation of female heroism as it was both represented and experienced in First World War France. In order to investigate representative ideas about women's heroic wartime roles and acts, the first half of the thesis explores the ways in which different aspects of female heroism were presented in dominant, often patriarchal wartime discourses. The second half of the thesis provides the material for comparison, with an analysis of first-hand accounts by two women who were both presented as heroic in the First World War, but whose roles and social backgrounds differed considerably. As such, the two halves of the thesis enter into a 'dialogue' which ultimately helps us to garner a clear and nuanced understanding of the complex ways in which female heroism was defined and represented during and after the First World War.

A study of heroism in First World War France has value because the concept of wartime courage and bravery was bound up with the notion of national fortitude and civic duty in a country which suffered under invasion and occupation. As such, a study of the characteristics of female heroism also relates to broader questions of French national identity in wartime. Equally, it relates to the ways in which gender discourses functioned and evolved under such circumstances. Finally, this study sheds light on the ways in which individual women engaged with these broader discourses in their own self-presentations.

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List of Abbreviations

AN Archives Nationales, Paris

APP Archives de la Préfecture de Police, Paris

BMD Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand, Paris

BNP Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris

BSC UoL Brotherton Special Collections, University of Leeds

HRC ATX Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin

NA National Archives, London

SHD Service Historique de la Défense, Vincennes.

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Introduction

This study explores the ways in which female heroism was both represented and experienced in First World War France. As a more specific means of doing so, the five chapters that follow explore how the presentation of female heroism in dominant wartime discourses compared with that of first-hand accounts by women who occupied heroic roles. Conducting a study of heroism in First World War France is important because heroism was bound up with the notion of national fortitude and civic duty in a country which suffered under invasion and occupation. A study of female heroism can tell us, more broadly, about the ways in which gender discourses functioned, and how women have been represented in times of war and peace.

Defining heroism as female

Before this can be achieved, it is necessary to address the complexities associated with defining heroism, typically understood to be a male quality, as female. When the hero was first conceptualized in classical discourses, ancient codes established that he showed exemplary masculine courage. Whether remembered fanatically for dying an honourable warrior death in battle or heroised on the basis that he was a brave individual undertaking a moral quest, in the ancient world it was almost always because he was a man that a hero could be a hero. In Greek mythology the word *ανδρεία* or *andreia* was translated to mean courage, but also manliness. Thus, the qualities pertaining to a 'real' man were directly linked with the quality of being heroic.

Two seminal ancient texts grappled with definitions of the 'courageous man':¹ Plato's Socratic 'conversation' *Laches*, and Aristotle's later *Nicomachean Ethics*. These texts provide us with useful definitions of courage, describing it as the quality of one who fought, and who died a fearless and noble death.² Heroism was considered to be embodied in those who nobly endured and who stayed at their posts.³ It was 'the knowledge of that

¹ *The Dialogues of Plato translated into English with Analyses and Introductions*, trans. by B. Jowett, vol. 1, 3rd edn. (London: Oxford University Press, 1892), p. 105.

² *Ibid.*, p. 98.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

which inspires fear or confidence in war, or in anything'.⁴ Despite Plato's suggestion that one did not need to be engaged in armed combat in order to be brave and heroic, when the character Nicia in *Laches* was asked if others could be heroic, it was with only animals and children in mind that he answered. Women were left out of the conversation altogether. When coupled with the repeated representations of heroism as inherently male, and the etymological significance of *andreia*, the omission from ancient definitions of heroism serves as evidence to support the theory that women simply could not be heroes in the ancient world.

However, the prodigious exclusion of women from ancient definitions of heroism did not endure throughout the course of Europe's post-Roman evolution. An inaugural aim of this introduction is to suggest that French representations of the female hero emerged over time, and the distinct attachment of masculine virility to heroism began to wane.⁵ The more social 'visibility' that women achieved or were permitted over the centuries, the more the concept of female heroism began to appear and be accepted in the collective imagination. In this way, many foundational heroic characteristics set out in ancient sources such as *Laches* and *Nicomachean Ethics* began to be applied to French women as well as men.

Medieval poet Marie de France succeeded in constructing some of the first representations of female heroism. The *Lais* female characters, such as the mistress in *Lanval*,⁶ had the potential to subvert traditional heroic norms embodied in male characters. On her white steed, the mistress spared Lanval the court's judgement, and whisked him off to Avalon thereby usurping the heroic role of the active, combative male

⁴ Ibid., p. 103 and Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by W. D. Ross, The Internet Classics Archive, online resource by Michigan Institute of Technology, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.3.iii.html> [accessed 21 August 2016].

⁵ The semantic objective of employing the American term 'female hero' throughout the study instead of the British preference in feminist history for 'heroine' (Birkett and Wheelwright, p. 49) has been to reflect the overwhelming wartime comparisons between male and female heroism which operated simultaneously in cultural representation as well as personal writings. It has also helped to avoid any misinterpretation of the word 'heroine' to mean fictional female character.

⁶ Marie de France, *The Lais of Marie de France*, 2nd edn, trans. by Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby (London: Penguin Classics, 2009).

hero, and undermining the stereotype of the Arthurian knight.⁷ Female heroism was evoked in some of the earliest and most radical feminist discourse, such as Théroigne de Méricourt's revolutionary speech in March 1792 which called on French women to arm themselves like ancient heroes in battle formation as Amazons in the fight for a true *Patrie*.⁸ Other representations of female heroism were manifest over the centuries in depictions of a militarized Jeanne d'Arc, and a steadfast and allegorical Marianne. Their images were continually reproduced, and are still valued now for their potential to function as powerful, politically partisan icons of France. Interestingly, both Jeanne and Marianne still bring with them vestiges of the ancient world, the former with her coat of arms and the latter with her Phrygian cap. Although not principally deployed with any feminist intent,⁹ they have nevertheless been recognized as females in heroic guises.

Third Republic Heroisations: The *Bazar de la Charité* fire

In the modern context, female heroism was further redefined so that by the run-up to the First World War the concept of more 'everyday' and less allegorical women's courage had been introduced. One significant example is the popular press's evocation of aristocratic, Catholic female martyrdom at the 1897 *Bazar de la Charité* fire in Paris.¹⁰ On the afternoon of 4 May the projection equipment at the annual charity event caught fire. 126 people died, of whom the majority were aristocratic women. Conservative

⁷ Jane Chance, *The Literary Subversions of Medieval Women* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 54.

⁸ De Méricourt, Théroigne, *Discours prononcé à la Société fraternelle des minimes, le 25 mars 1792, l'an quatrième de la liberté, par Mlle Théroigne, en présentant un drapeau aux citoyennes du faubourg S. Antoine* (Paris : Imprimerie de Demonville, 1792), p. 7.

⁹ A 2016 press controversy in France saw Manuel Valls use Marianne's bare-breastedness as an argument for a ban on the 'burkini', a swimsuit for women who wear burkas. One negative response to his appropriation of France's republican icon came from historian Mathilde Larrere, who referred to Marianne's image as part of an 'artistic code', and not a feminist symbol. 'Topless Marianne remark by PM Manuel Valls stirs French row', *BBC News Online*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-37219723> [accessed 21 August 2016].

¹⁰ Venita Datta, *Heroes and Legends of Fin-de-Siècle France: Gender, Politics, and National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) and Geoffrey Cubitt, 'Martyrs of charity, heroes of solidarity: Catholic and Republican responses to the fire at Bazar de la Charité Paris 1897', *French History*, 21:3, 2007, pp. 331-352.

understandings of piety and elevated social class were defining conditions which prompted the press to heroise the bravery of the female victims.

The Catholic Church and the conservative press celebrated the heroism of victims such as high-society duchess and daughter-in-law of Louis d'Orléans, Sophie d'Alençon. According to a special October edition of *Les Contemporains* devoted to Alençon and the other female martyrs, the duchess was famously concerned with the plight of those less well off than herself, and during the fire itself, was resolute in her mission to be the last to leave, reportedly believing everyone else's salvation to be more important than her own. The article indicates that such levels of self-abnegation were spiritually motivated, with a certain Mlle L claiming that the duchess could be seen in her final moments, next to her stall, immobile, and looking upwards, as though she was having a celestial vision.¹¹ Ancient definitions of male heroism embodied in noble endurance and staying at one's post were modified to include women in evocations of Alençon in this dutiful guise.

The *Bazar de la Charité* incident also tells us much about the ways in which original definitions of heroism were increasingly departed from in order to favour the most topical concerns of the time. Reflective of long-term political and social fluxes in France, women were 'written in' to the reports of the fire in a process of political appropriation, when conservative, right wing discourses were less intent on depicting their warrior instinct, and more concerned with framing them as devotees of the church, and the old regime. As such, the victims' heroism was further modified to include exaltation of the core upper class value of female piety, and how it was this value that motivated their willing to act heroically. Alençon's will, cited in detail in the *Contemporains* article, reportedly made numerous demands such as burial in religious dress, no flowers, and a simple coffin. The piece depicted her closeness with God, claiming that 'qui la voyait prier croyait voir un ange [...] elle assistait chaque matin à la messe de six heures'.¹² Further religious discourse could be found in a speech made by the Cardinal Perraud, bishop of Autun, which framed the mass of the *Bazar* victims within a redemptive discourse:

¹¹ *Les Contemporains*, 10th October 1897.

¹² *Les Contemporains*, 10th October 1897,

Dieu a mis à part des créatures bonnes, généreuses, dévouées; il leur fait l'honneur immense de les associer à l'œuvre de réparation accomplie par Jésus-Christ au prix des hosties de propitiation: leurs souffrances et leur mort ne profitent pas seulement à elles pour leur salut éternel, elles deviennent des rédemptrices, elles expient des iniquités individuelles ou sociales.¹³

Evocations of aristocratic, Catholic female martyrdom in reports of the 1897 fire provide us with an excellent example of the ways in which long-standing ideals of heroic masculinity were eroding by the turn of the century in France. In this case, the ideal of heroic male death in battle gave way to the politically appropriated female heroism embodied in noble and feminine forms of martyrdom, religious duty and 'voluntary redemptive self-sacrifice'.¹⁴ The reportage also tells us that in advance of the First World War, heroism was still perceived to be a lofty concept, largely embodied in *ancien régime* ideals of nobility and Catholicism.

Female Heroism in War

Having established that female heroism was more of an accepted phenomenon in Third Republic France than it had been in the nation's past, a key opening question in this study asks what impact the context of the first total war had on the development of pre-war definitions of female heroism, with their classical roots. In order to answer this question, some discussion of the Belle-Époque is included in chapters one to three, in order to compare pre-war representations of female heroes with those produced in wartime. The simple answer to the question suggests that heroic wartime discourses included women more readily,¹⁵ with less insistence on *noblesse*, and with more vigour as part of a national and personal response to the experience of war. Their inclusion reflected the extent to which some ideals of heroism from ancient Greece and Rome were important models for First World War heroism, and that, originating in the hands of the elite, educated classes,

¹³ *Les Contemporains*, 10th October 1897.

¹⁴ Geoffrey Cubitt, 'Martyrs of charity, heroes of solidarity: Catholic and Republican responses to the fire at Bazar de la Charité Paris 1897', *French History*, 21:3, 2007, p. 331-352. p. 340.

¹⁵ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips's primary definition of discourses as the 'patterns' of language diffused in various 'different domains of social life' has informed the use of the term 'discourse' in this study. Jørgensen and Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: Sage, 2002), p.2.

they could filter through cultural representation to reach a more mainstream audience. Women were more visible in wartime discourses because they occupied a prominent role in 1914 France when compared to their ancient forbears, not least because the First World War was a catastrophe that required and therefore legitimized the heroism of the *whole* nation in order to survive.

In wartime propaganda posters, for example, women in devoted positions of endurance embodied the concept of female patriotism and courage, and clearly echoed Nicia's ancient claim that displays of bravery inspired confidence in war. They also proved that Laches' assertion of the ancient quality of perseverance was, to a large extent, still valued in the much more modern context of First World War France, when representations of female heroism framed feminine endurance as a key heroic quality. Although women's heroism was not only evoked in terms of their moral and material contribution to the war effort, propaganda imagery foregrounded nationalist ideals which relied on women to do their duty to the nation. In chapter two the analysis of this source material provides an interesting *entrée en matière* from which to explore the multiple ways in which other twentieth century ideologies also legitimized the representing of women as heroes. Given this multiplicity of representation, an important thread of this study has also been the interpretation of nuance and complexity in messages about women's heroism. As such, the discussion of roles which were both celebrated and demonized helps to reflect the fine line that lay between perceived heroism and perceived anti-heroism in wartime France.

Methodologies

The corpus of primary source material is made up of wide-ranging press exemplars, published works and unpublished manuscripts and archival documents such as memoirs and official and personal letters. Previously un-mined sources are introduced throughout the thesis, with chapter five in particular bringing to the field brand new documentation uncovered at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas. The source materials are interrogated for their varying representative function, the circumstances surrounding their production including the motivations of the author and the intended reception, and responses. The aim is to convey as effective an impression of French culture as possible

and to show an understanding of the politics of gender representation, both from the point of view of widespread, dominant discourses, and from individual women themselves.

This study is underpinned by three methodological frameworks: the concept of hegemonic masculinity, cultural history and theories of autobiography. A sociological term, hegemonic masculinity was first coined in the late 1990s and was defined as ‘a lived experience, and an economic and cultural force’ which depended on certain ‘social arrangements’,¹⁶ ‘in a given historical setting’,¹⁷ which provides ‘a specific strategy for the subordination of women’.¹⁸ It has been a helpful theory with which to elucidate the socially constructed state of gender relations in the ‘historical setting’ of First World War France. At this time, when French women had no civic rights, hegemonic masculinity was reflected in the ways in which patriarchal society established and regulated its power. It was also reflected in how this power was used to control the way that women were represented. It even impacted on the ways that women represented themselves, as chapters four and five reveal. At the time, this control was held by French journalists, advertisers, propagandists, academics, law-enforcers, politicians, and the medical profession.

With this definition of hegemonic masculinity in mind, one might question the value of it as a framework in a study of female heroism, a quality that one would expect to be concealed as much as possible in a social system governed by the power of the male establishment. In a kind of modern *obéissance* of the ancient heroic code, heroism was still thought to be at the heart of the First World War culture of hegemonic masculinity, because as R.W Connell argues, ‘to be culturally exalted, the pattern of masculinity must have exemplars who are celebrated as heroes’.¹⁹ An apparent discord thus presents itself: even though female heroism had become a more widely acknowledged possibility,

¹⁶ Mike Donaldson, ‘What Is Hegemonic Masculinity?’ *Theory and Society*, 22:5, Special Issue: Masculinities, Oct., 1993, pp.643-657, p. 645.

¹⁷ R. W Connell, ‘An Iron Man: The Body and some Contradictions of Hegemonic Masculinity’, in *Sport, Men and the Gender Order: Critical Feminist Perspectives*, ed. By Micheal A. Messner and Donald F. Sabo (Champaign: Human Kinetics, 1990), pp. 83-95, p. 83.

¹⁸ Donaldson, p. 645.

¹⁹ Connell, p. 94.

hegemonic masculinity still had the potential to challenge it on the basis that heroism was believed to be a naturalized facet of what it was to be a man. This study therefore asks whether entrenched ‘forces’ of hegemonic masculinity continued to understand female heroism as an unnatural, unusual and potentially subversive phenomenon, or whether it allowed for the exaltation of women in the circumstances of war.

In order to facilitate an analysis of both dominant portrayals and heroic individuals’ own documented experiences, the discussion of women’s wartime heroism is presented across two parts: ‘Representations’, and ‘Lived Experiences’. Part One has been based on the study of a broad selection of primary and secondary source material. Given the emphasis on dominant, hegemonic discourses in this part of the thesis, the majority of these sources can be defined as ‘culturally representative’. That is to say they connect ‘meaning and language’ to the culture of First World War France.²⁰ Cultural history has been a useful framework for historical analysis since the 1980s, when culture began to occupy a more prominent position as a means of examining a historical circumstance. More specifically in the French context, this culturally representative source material exemplifies the concept of *culture de guerre*, which was defined, in the early 1990s by French historians Annette Becker and Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau as a set of representations, which were unique to the duration of the conflict.²¹

Depictions of female heroism in early twentieth century France were largely subject to a system of representation which already organized and classified the concept of gender according to the aforementioned ‘strategy for the subordination of women’.²² Hegemonic masculinity was connected to culture in that those producing some of the most prominent cultural representation were responsible for its ‘u h as popular novels and poems, songs, photographs, paintings, sculptures, and some unpublished archival sources which

²⁰ Stuart Hall, ‘The Work of Representation’, in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed., by Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), pp. 13-74, p. 15.

²¹ Jean-Yves Le Naour, ‘Le champ de bataille des historiens’, 10 November 2008, *La Vie des Idées* <http://www.laviedesidees.fr/Le-champ-de-bataille-des.html> [accessed 8 September 2016].

²² Donaldson, p. 645.

reflected the hegemonic agenda have made up the source material in the first half of the thesis.

Part One, ‘Representations’, includes three chapters. The first chapter analyses the similarities and differences between peace-time and wartime representations of Jeanne D’Arc and Marianne. It investigates the ways in which these icons of nation were seen to embody heroism and were appropriated in order to serve various contextual and political purposes. Chapter two moves away from the allegorical and the iconic, to focus on the ways in which wartime representations of conservative middle-class womanhood heroised women’s public and private heroic wartime duty to the nation. Like chapter one, the discussion begins with the Belle-Époque in order to map the ways in which complex representations of bourgeois womanhood changed once the war broke out. In doing so, the discussion aims to decipher whether or not the popular portrayal of female heroism changed in a time of national strife and external threat. The third chapter, ‘Complex Female Heroism: A Case-study of Attitudes towards Female Industrial Workers in the First World War’ is concerned with the heroism of the woman war worker as a role which was less consensual than ideals of middle-class womanhood. It asks whether the woman worker could be considered a war hero or an anti-hero. The discussion in this chapter exposes the complex cultural and political representations of their role which, again, reflected fluxes between peacetime and wartime attitudes.²³

Part Two, ‘Lived Experiences’, comprises the fourth and fifth chapters. These are case study chapters which explore the wartime roles of two female heroes who were born just three years apart: a French double agent called Marthe Richard, and Marthe Bibesco, a

²³ Prime Minister René Viviani’s August 1914 circular *Aux Femmes françaises* called on the paysanne, or female agricultural worker to heroically do her duty in defending the soil of France and replacing those who were leaving for the battlefield. Viviani’s words drew a direct link between the heroism of the battlefield and that of the farm field. He emphasised the demand on the *remplaçant* to assume an alternative role as provider, not just of national produce, but also of a means of survival or even victory for France. The farm worker was thus a further example of the potential for women’s war roles to be heroised in a kind of alternative call-to-arms. René Viviani, *Aux Femmes françaises* (1914) Département d’Indre online documentation, http://www.indre.fr/docs/Archives/Service_educatif/Dossiers_pedagogiques/placards_1ere_GM.pdf [accessed 12 April 2017]. Though this study acknowledges the paysanne as a significantly heroised women’s war role, it is not discussed in detail since the focus here is on urban and professionalized roles.

French-Romanian princess who was a Red Cross nurse in Bucharest and who went on to become a famous writer. Using only two case study examples has the potential to limit the overall effectiveness of this second ‘part’, and therefore presents us with challenges. In acknowledgement of these challenges it is important to state the reasons for this choice. One reason, discussed in the section that follows, relates to the situating of this analysis among existing analyses of their life stories. A second explanation for the focus on these particular women was the fact that they began life on distinctly different paths. Richard was born into a *petit-bourgeois* family from Blamont in Meurthe-et-Moselle, and climbed socially throughout her life. Bibesco’s elevated social class, on the other hand, was fixed at birth. Their different life paths enable a rich comparison which calls into question not only the issue of gender, but also that of social class. Not only that, their different profiles raise a key sub-question which asks whether this difference affected the ways in which their heroism was appraised. More importantly still, it also asks whether it had any impact on the ways in which they themselves created or defended their own heroic reputations.

Using published and unpublished personal writings as the principal texts under analysis, these chapters go some way to garnering a ‘response’ from individual women who were subject to forces of hegemonic masculinity. In order to do this, the voices of the two women themselves are foregrounded so as to decipher the extent to which they recognized their own heroism. Though Richard and Bibesco occupied roles which were believed by many to be heroic, interpretations of their heroism varied greatly. A second principal aim of the case study chapters has therefore been to decode attempts that they made in their personal writings to interact with perceptions of their own war roles either as part of a process of self-heroisation or self-defence. Bound up with this is also an investigation into the extent to which they responded and related to pre-existing hegemonic discourses of female heroism.

Parts one and two relate via the aforementioned ‘dialogue’ between the voices of hegemonic representation and those of female lived experience. As well as giving us a broad understanding of the ways in which female heroism was understood and represented in wartime, this dialogue also tells us much about how individual women negotiated with, or indeed fitted themselves within such representative frameworks.

Further, the two parts of the thesis also connect history ‘from above’ with history ‘from below’, successfully and originally.

Literature Survey

Part One compliments existent compendiums which explore French women’s war roles more generally, by cultural historians such as Margaret Darrow, Susan Grayzel and Françoise Thébaud. With a fresh and concerted focus on the specific quality of female heroism, it is unique in its contemplation of the ways in which messages heroising women in war echoed the tenets of traditional, ancient heroic discourse. It also adds new source material to the tradition of analyzing binary wartime interpretations of specific and ‘marginal’ roles which played on gender stereotypes such as nurses, from Alison Fell, Christine Hallett and Y. Kniebhieler, *marraines de guerre* by Susan Grayzel and JeanYves Le Naour, and war widows by Peggy Bette and Stéphanie Petit.

The two chapters in Part Two are informed by feminist autobiography theory, which first emerged in the early 1980s. In corroboration with Victoria Stewart’s assertion that texts that may not always ‘count’ should still be considered in the autobiography category, these chapters interpret both published autobiography and auto-fiction, and ‘less polished, or “finished” texts’, such as diaries intended for publication, or personal notes and manuscripts.²⁴ Research from historical biographers such as Elinor Accampo tells us about the merits of recognizing the potential of women’s personal writings to ‘speak back’ at more dominant discourses which, in turn gives us an idea of the extent to which the personal writings of heroic women showed awareness of, corroborated or challenged the stereotypes to which they might have been subject.²⁵

The case-study chapters represent a contribution to the ‘writing-in’ or reappearance of female subjectivity and authenticity in the autobiographical canon, a process which has

²⁴ Victoria Stewart, *Women’s Autobiography: War and Trauma* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 22.

²⁵ Accampo, Elinor, *Blessed Motherhood, Bitter Fruit: Nelly Roussel and the Politics of Female Pain in Third Republic France* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2006).

recently been enabled by research in cultural, social and feminist history.²⁶ They seek to identify the extent to which Richard and Bibesco were aware of the implications of ‘seeing’ the war as non-combatants and women.²⁷ Whilst there is a significant body of work which addresses the lack of historiographical engagement with the trauma responses of female non-combatants and medical personnel by Margaret Higonnet, Carol Acton and Jane Potter, and Victoria Stewart, our access to women’s responses to the specific quality of wartime heroism is still extremely limited. In order to confront this limitation, the case-studies explore the impact of occupying non-combatant roles on individual women’s ability to write about their own ‘subject position’ as heroic.²⁸ Finally, the discussion of Richard and Bibesco’s heroism adds to ongoing scholarly attempts to understand the relationship between subjectivity and history, which are being undertaken across the disciplines.

To return to questions of representation in Part Two, the second motivation for the focus on Richard and Bibesco relates to originality. Neither women’s war role has so far been the central subject of any contemporary academic research. Two popular biographies of Richard were published in 2006, one by Elisabeth Coquart and one by Natacha Henry. A chapter of Raymond Ruffin’s popular book *Les Espionnes du XX siècle* (2000) is also devoted to Richard. But none of these sources have resisted indulging in the more sensationalized aspects of her life. Further, the angle from which these writers have presented Richard’s life story means that none of them have conveyed a sense of her own voice. Similarly, there exists two popular Bibesco biographies separated by a decade, Ghislain Diesbach’s *La Princesse Bibesco: La Dernière Orchidée* (1986) and Christine Sutherland’s *Enchantress: Marthe Bibesco and her World* (1996). Other than these two books, Bibesco is often cited in articles which are concerned primarily with Romanian elite society and the European migration, or which discuss Bibesco’s well-known writing career. In bringing these two women to greater prominence in this field of historical

²⁶ Margaret Higonnet, ‘Authenticity and Art in Trauma Narratives of World War I’, *Modernism/Modernity*, 9:1 (January 2002), pp. 91-107, p. 104.

²⁷ Carol Acton, ‘Diverting the Gaze: The Unseen Text in Women’s War Writing’, *College Literature*, 31:2 (Spring 2004), pp. 53-79, p. 57.

²⁸ Stewart, p. 1.

analysis, we are able to garner a wider impression of the ways in which female heroism was not only conceptualized and represented, but also self-portrayed.

The value of studying both private expressions and public prescriptions of gendered wartime experience has been recognized by a variety of scholars including Accampo, and also Carol Acton.²⁹ But such comparisons have been drawn within different frameworks; Acton with a focus on wartime expressions of male and female grief, and Accampo within the realms of ‘new biography’ which considers reactions to New Woman Nelly Roussel, as well as her own responses.³⁰ In sum, then, it is with a specific interest in female heroism that this study also recognizes the merits of comparing private and public expressions of wartime experience. As such, it foregrounds the intersection of the hegemonic voice and the voice of lived experience when it came to the treatment of women as heroes. It thus contributes significantly to the broadening of our cultural knowledge of the period, adds new material to a current scholarly prerogative in the historical analysis of the First World War, and continues to raise important questions about the legacy of French women’s contributions.

²⁹ Carol Acton, *Grief in Wartime: Private Pain, Public Discourse* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 2.

³⁰ Elinor Accampo, *Blessed Motherhood, Bitter Fruit: Nelly Roussel and the Politics of Female Pain in Third Republic France* (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 2.

Part One: Representations

Chapter One

Heroic Female Role Models in France: Jeanne d’Arc and Marianne from the Belle-Époque to the First World War

Classical philosopher Angela Hobbs’ scholarship on heroism in ancient Greece discusses the extent to which the appropriation of individual role models in Platonist thought came to represent different social values of the time. Plato’s theories, as discussed by Hobbs, help to explain how role models were used in ancient culture to inspire and motivate communities to act or think in a particular way according to contemporary concerns and ideologies. In her text *Plato and the Hero: Courage, Manliness and the Impersonal Good*, Hobbs discusses the *thumos*,³¹ or ‘readiness to look for role models’,³² and the central space that these role models occupied in Plato’s ethics. She then builds on our understanding of what role models signify for the individual, suggesting that they bring ‘general inspiration and motivation’, to act as ‘a guide when faced with a difficult situation’,³³ such as war, or as a benchmark for moral actions and decisions, fulfilling ‘a deep need in the individual’.³⁴ She also evokes ‘a state of real yearning to emulate the

³¹ *Thumos* was a Greek word to define one element of the human psyche; ‘spiritedness’. In Plato’s Republic, as Angela Hobbs explains, this is thought of as ‘anger, aggression and courage; self-disgust and shame’ a sense of justice, indignation and the desire for revenge; obedience to the political authorities though not necessarily to one’s own father; a longing for honour, glory and worldly success; some interest in the arts but a fear of intellectualism; a preference for war over peace and increasing meanness over money’. Angela Hobbs, *Plato and the Hero: Courage, Manliness and the Impersonal Good*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.3.

³² Hobbs, p. 59.

Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard appreciate Platonist understandings of role models when they discuss the ways in which feminism has ‘revivif[ied] ancient narratives to arm contemporary struggles’. *Laughing with Medusa*, published in 2008, draws directly on Plato’s predictions about role models continuing to reproduce themselves. Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard, ‘Introduction’, in *Laughing with Medusa: Classical myth and feminist thought*, ed. by Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 1-20, p. 2 and 6.

³³ Hobbs, p.60.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.61.

heroes of old' as part of an individual's fundamental and pedagogical development.³⁵ Plato identified role models as being central to giving structure, shape and understanding to a person's existence, whilst at the same time remaining an important ethical benchmark for their own actions. Hobbs summarizes: 'role models are normally supplied by our culture',³⁶ and the individual figures deployed as role models in a given culture tend to 'epitomize[s] that society's current values'.³⁷ She also makes the important point that 'role models [...] would seem to have an intrinsic tendency to reproduce themselves'.³⁸

Two cultural historians who address the significance of the reproduction of role models in the more modern context of the nineteenth century are John Price and Geoffrey Cubitt. Price's work on 'everyday heroism' in Britain refers to 'moral inspiration through the exemplary actions or narratives of the great and good in order to address the problems of society' as 'an established element of cultural discourse in the mid and late nineteenth century'.³⁹ And Cubitt suggests, with reference to the same 'golden age of hero making' in France,⁴⁰ that 'heroic reputations are products of the imaginative labour through which societies and groups define and articulate their values and assumptions'.⁴¹ Ethnic nationalist Maurice Barrès confirmed a French affectation for revivifying role models when he wrote, in 1928, of 'cette puissance de résurrection qu'il y a dans notre nation comme dans aucun autre peuple'.⁴²

Two of the most popularly reproduced or 'resurrected' role models in Belle-Époque and wartime France were Jeanne d'Arc and Marianne. Their case studies are the subject of

³⁵ Ibid., p.61.

³⁶ Ibid., p.67.

³⁷ Ibid., p.67.

³⁸ Ibid., p.68.

³⁹ John Price, 'Heroism in Everyday Life': The Watts Memorial for Heroic Self Sacrifice', *History Workshop Journal*, 63:1 (Spring 2007), pp. 254-278, p. 262.

⁴⁰ Venita Datta, *Heroes and Legends of Fin-de-Siècle France: Gender, Politics and National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 168.

⁴¹ Geoffrey Cubitt, 'Introduction', in *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives*, ed. by Geoffrey Cubitt and Allen Warren (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 1-27, p.13.

⁴² Maurice Barrès, *Le Cœur des femmes de France* (Paris: Plon, 1928), Z BARRES-279, BNF, p. 200.

this chapter. Although they were by no means the only female heroes evoked over this time period, they were each considered to be figure heads of one side of the ideological battle between the right and the left that had characterized French politics and society since the Revolution. However, both models were instrumentalized by writers, artists and thinkers across the political spectrum, which further complicates the picture. Reductively speaking, Jeanne d'Arc belonged to the right-wing, catholic camp, and Marianne was traditionally known as a representative of the Republic. They were both re-incarnated in the nineteenth-century *imaginaire*.⁴³ In turn, they appeared in First World War cultural mobilization to inspire those 'consuming' their myths, both consciously and subconsciously. People from all backgrounds, from Paris to the provinces, accessed them via the press, propaganda imagery, theatre, and high and popular culture such as the *Images d'Épinal*, brightly-coloured prints depicting popular personalities.⁴⁴

In many ways their images gave people a sense of meaning and a greater understanding of the experiences through which they were living. In consuming role models from historic eras, French men and women were motivated to follow their heroic and exceptional example. As Hobbs's work suggests, they also found in these models the morality and integrity that they needed to navigate their own way through the unstable late nineteenth-century, and into wartime. In the background, however, intensive political and ideological agendas manipulated these role models, and their images were thus 'reified and [...] resurrected',⁴⁵ as part of a process of 'mass politics',⁴⁶ enabling the further development of what John Merriman defines as 'modern political life'.⁴⁷

⁴³ John Merriman defines the French *imaginaire* as 'the mental universe [...] of ordinary people'. John Merriman 'Lecture 9: General Boulanger and Captain Dreyfus', *HIST 276: France since 1871*, Yale University, 3rd October 2007, <<http://oyc.yale.edu/history/hist-276/lecture-9#ch2>> [accessed 2 June 2015].

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Joe Lunn, Review of Allen J. Frantzen, *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the First World War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), University of Chicago Press Books website, <<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/B/bo3629949.html>> [accessed 6 July 2014].

⁴⁶ Mass politics, for Merriman, refers to the 'reach' of news enabling a mass audience, even illiterate people, to 'imagine religious and political and military events' in the late nineteenth century. Merriman, <<http://oyc.yale.edu/history/hist-276/lecture-9#ch2>> [accessed 2 June 2015].

⁴⁷ Ibid.

This chapter exposes the similarities and differences between peacetime and wartime representations of Jeanne and Marianne. The political poles that they each represented in the Belle-Époque era, though subject to shifts, were generally fixed and therefore they tended to be identified as partisans of opposing camps in the wider political debate that had defined the long nineteenth century. However, when war broke out, their meanings became less politically partisan, and the ideological gulf between them closed. Rather than being adversarial role models whose images challenged each other in sources of cultural and political mobilization as they were in the Belle-Epoque years, in wartime Jeanne and Marianne came together in support of the nation, and represented more universal, less politically situated values. The fact remained, however, that there were layers of enduring complexity behind their various depictions.

As well as being politically appropriated by the right and the left, representations of Jeanne d'Arc and Marianne also exposed more complicated social tensions. This was particularly the case in relation to their role in gender politics. Various evocations used them as talismans for political or social messages. Popular interpretations often foregrounded these messages, rather than considering any potential power and agency derived from their gender, which supports historian Ruth Harris's argument that 'heroic images of women - such as Marianne or Jeanne d'Arc - have nothing to do with women's political power'.⁴⁸ Thus, despite being appropriated in order to 'vocalize the most powerful of personal and social politics',⁴⁹ this rarely included political engagement with the plight of women in French society, and they themselves were rarely thought of as spokespeople for female civic engagement or rights.

However, once they were in the hands of the patriarchy, if their images lacked in the markers of 'ideal' womanhood, they were nevertheless interpreted in decidedly gendered terms. In response to such interpretation, their appearance was modified so as to appear

⁴⁸ Ruth Harris, 'The Child of the Barbarian: Rape, Race and Nationalism in France during the First World War', *Past & Present*, 141:1, (November 1993), pp. 170-206, p. 206.

⁴⁹ Katie Fleming, 'Fascism on stage: Jean Anouilh's *Antigone*', in *Laughing with Medusa: classical myth and feminist thought*, ed. by Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 163-187, p. 163.

more ‘feminine’ in the guise of exemplary and abstract other-worldly beings, innocent virgins and young girls. On the basis that these modifications took place, this discussion also challenges Platonic theories about role models as *wholly* inspirational or popularly endorsed entities and instead exposes binary representations of Jeanne d’Arc and Marianne. The complex system of representation, which did not merely portray these female role models as good and worthy, showed that they were subject to some criticism, largely waged on the basis of their gender.

1.1 Jeanne d’Arc

Historian and mythographer Marina Warner, who identifies the foundations of Jeanne d’Arc’s heroic legend and the ways in which it has been popularly ‘reproduced’ over time, also investigates the importance of Jeanne’s gender. Warner’s *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism*, does not focus exclusively on France, nor does her scholarship address any era in particular, instead mapping the centuries since Jeanne’s death. But she does suggest that in order for Jeanne’s story to re-create itself in the centuries following her death, those contributing had to find a context that appropriately facilitated the commemoration of an extraordinary female case and an ‘earlier, more familiar’⁵⁰ sphere of reference; namely ‘heroines of the bible’⁵¹, classical and religious female heroes. Warner makes numerous references to those portraying Jeanne with classicism firmly in mind. She mentions, for example, those who gave Jeanne the same physical characteristics as Greek and Roman female heroes, as warrior-maiden, and explains that: ‘to any classically trained reader, Jeanne immediately and even unconsciously stepped into a category of women made familiar by mythology and history’.⁵² Jeanne’s connections with these classical foremothers both legitimized her enduring image as female hero and allowed others to step into the same category, employing her as their figurehead.

⁵⁰ Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 200.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p., 202.

Crucial to understandings of the role of Jeanne's gender is the concept that in inspiring these comparisons with antiquity, and in building dominant discourses of heroism based on folklore, Jeanne's legend has been 'tamed' throughout time. She needed to be remembered and recognized as a special and yet palpable case, so that whoever had rights to it also controlled it; that it was understood as unusual or exceptional, a case of unequivocal heroism which had more to do with her unique and exclusive relationship with God and the King, her virginity and her warrior role than it did with the 'condition' of being a woman. Hers was thus a female heroic example which historically underwent enforced and controlled re-contextualizing by those who chose to use her case in their discourses, so that the gendered aspects of her role could be effectively and appropriately managed. This chapter shows that the context of the First World War in particular called for the further 'taming' of Jeanne's role model in order that she fitted with social and cultural wartime ideals.

The following section explores the ways in which Jeanne was 'resurrected' as an example of a certain standard of Catholicism in nineteenth-century discourses. It then discusses the ways in which her legend was looked upon negatively by some observers and was, in response to this, modified in order to make it sit alongside specific ideals of womanhood. The discussion then focusses on wartime appropriations of Jeanne in dominant and more minority discourses, once again exploring the restructuring of her legend, in line with pacifist views about glorified heroism and more widespread anxieties about images of militarized women.

1.2 Jeanne in Belle-Époque France

In nineteenth-century right-wing Catholic representations, Jeanne d'Arc had long been established as the right's warrior-woman, whose martial potential, coupled with an inherent and somewhat paradoxical resistance to actual cruelty or killing, aptly bolstered discourses of exemplary and untouchable patriotism and devotion.⁵³ She was sometimes thought of as a female hero on the basis that she exhibited the same qualities and

⁵³ Datta, p. 170.

behaviours as a male hero; she stepped into a non-traditional fighting role, showed bravery, courage, and a tendency towards militarism. Her ‘achievements’ were ‘recognizably superlative’,⁵⁴ mainly because she was believed to be God’s representative on earth and because she was prepared to sacrifice herself in the name of Catholic duty.

Jeanne was most frequently depicted wearing full armour in what Nadia Margolis calls a ‘Joan-as-Napoleon’, representing ‘earthly, military triumph’.⁵⁵ But she was also sometimes featured wearing an olive wreath, particularly on commemorative French medals and coins from the turn of the century. Both symbols also encouraged comparison with Greek demigoddess of warfare, Athena. Classicist Sue Blundell explains that Athena ‘is represented as a highly androgynous figure, who involves herself in both masculine and feminine activities; and this ambiguity seems to be encapsulated in her virgin status’.⁵⁶ Blundell also refers to the warrior maiden’s ‘more masculine qualities’, which identify her as a ‘special case rather than a role model’.⁵⁷ Jeanne, in comparative guises, shared with Athena an exemplary virginity, an indistinct gender, a warrior instinct, closeness to God and separation from other mortal women. In fact, Blundell explains, in Ancient Greece virginal demigoddesses like Athena were accepted as honorary males, particularly if, like her, they occupied roles more often associated with men in Greece’s patriarchal culture: protector of the polis; war strategist; and female hero. Similarly, Jeanne’s virginity, in addition to her woman-warrior profile, and her role as saviour of the city of Orléans secured her a similar place in modern French discourses.

In the late nineteenth century heroism became more democratized and, as Venita Datta argues, ‘heroes [...] were accessible to the ordinary man or woman’.⁵⁸ As chapter two shows, examples of ordinary, ‘everyman’s’ heroism were even more frequently circulated during the war. So if Jeanne’s heroism was historically celebrated because she was an

⁵⁴ Norma Lorre Goodrich, *Heroines: Demigoddess, Prima Donna, Movie Star* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), p. xxii.

⁵⁵ Nadia Margolis, ‘The ‘Joan Phenomenon’ and the French right’, in *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc*, ed. by Bonnie Wheeler and Charles T. Wood (New York: Garland, 1996), pp. 265-288, p. 269.

⁵⁶ Sue Blundell, *Women in ancient Greece* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), p.26.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.191.

⁵⁸ Datta, p. 159.

exceptional being, how was she still such an important role model in France at the turn of the century and during the war? It was Jeanne's familiarity and the tradition of her cult, re-appropriated over the centuries, which bridged the gap between her other-worldly, saintly status and modern French society. Nevertheless, her role model was kept at arm's length, as *both* good and symbolic, yet untouchable and, reassuringly for some, mystical.

Though Jeanne d'Arc was traditionally presented as a role model in right-wing discourses, Gerd Krumeich and Geoffrey Cubitt discuss examples of a late nineteenth and early twentieth-century cultural tendency in which both the left and the right aimed to 'own' her.⁵⁹ Krumeich and Cubitt choose to focus on Jeanne's potential to embody, and be appropriated by, opposing political positions in the late 1800s, a time of intense political 'bipolarization',⁶⁰ heightened by such polemics as the Dreyfus Affair,⁶¹ and the rise in Boulangism.⁶² Krumeich's article, 'Jeanne d'Arc between Right and Left', offers a thorough understanding and explanation of the 'monopolization' of the 'cult' of Jeanne d'Arc,⁶³ and compliments an investigation into the way her 'enduring' heroic 'myth[s] and symbol[s] of Western Culture' subsequently went on to be received in the context of war.⁶⁴

Krumeich explains that in the early 1800s those on the left, in particular Henri Martin and Jules Quicherat, had presented a new set of source material on, and therefore an

⁵⁹ Gerd Krumeich, 'Joan of Arc between right and left' in *Nationhood and Nationalism in France: From Boulangism to the Great War, 1889-1918*, ed. by Robert Tombs (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), pp. 63-73, and Geoffrey Cubitt, 'Martyrs of charity, heroes of solidarity: Catholic and Republican responses to the fire at *Bazar de la Charité* Paris 1897', *French History*, 21: 3 (2007), pp. 331-352.

⁶⁰ Datta, p. 146.

⁶¹ Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer, underwent his second court martial in Rennes in 1899, on charges of passing secret documents to the Germans. The charges were proven to be a conspiracy against Dreyfus, and writer Emile Zola helped to expose those French officers responsible. The affair was seen by the left as an effort to scapegoat and demonise Jews, and by the right as an attempt to destroy France's Catholic identity. Dreyfus received a pardon later in 1899, but in 1903 the case was re-opened and re-appropriated by Jean Jaurès on the left, who sought to expose further injustices facing Dreyfus.

⁶² Datta, p.148.

⁶³ Krumeich, p.72.

⁶⁴ Lunn, <<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/B/bo3629949.html>> [accessed July 2014].

‘epistemological renewal’⁶⁵ of, Jeanne’s role and impact, based on theories about her representative value as a maid of the people, and her rejection by France’s elite.⁶⁶ Jeanne had, at this point, been reborn in the Republican mind as ‘the daughter of a peasant, a daughter of the people who [...] was betrayed by her king and burned by the church’.⁶⁷ Marina Warner also writes of this left-wing political rebirth: ‘the angelic was pulled down to earth, literally, stripped of its wings, halo, ethereal bodilessness, and located in the human sphere, the world of the senses, in nature, and particularly in *natura naturans*, the world of the soil’.⁶⁸ Jeanne’s cult, now in secular hands, fitted well with Republican discourses as a ‘daughter of the soil’.⁶⁹ She was a shepherdess occupying a pastoral, Arcadian space reminiscent of the Ancient Greek idyll. Jules Bastien-Lepage’s 1879 realist portrait of Jeanne as a peasant woman in her home [figure 1] was a good example of this tendency to re-frame Jeanne in a more pastoral and less idealized setting. In the painting she wore simple working clothes as she experienced divine visions. Her face was ruddy and worn, and appeared haunted rather than majestic. Such alternative appropriations marked her initiation into the brief battle between the right and the left, which used Jeanne’s legend as a ‘scaffold’ for their ideological messages.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Krumeich, p.65.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.64.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.64.

⁶⁸ Warner, p.241.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Allan J. Frantzen, *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice and the Great War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 152.



Figure 1: 'Jeanne d'Arc', Jules Bastien-Lepage, 1879

It was ultimately the church and the right who won her back, however. As Krumeich explains, the late 1890s marked a backing off of the left's hold on Jeanne, and saw the right's re-appropriation. Figures from the *Action Française*, such as Maurice Pujo, commended Jeanne's bravery, linking it to the fact that she 'contravened all established laws-those of her sex, her place in society, common practice, and the established order', and that this contravention, rather than any threat she posed to order, proved her to be strong enough to fight against what Pujo saw as a 'false order' in late nineteenth-century France, one established by 'Jews and Freemasons', as opposed to those with a conservative, Catholic vision for the future of the country. To this end she was used as a core figure in anti-semitic campaigns surrounding the Dreyfus Affair, and was appropriated as a 'baptised aryan' by figures such as Edouard Drumont.⁷¹ Ultimately, as both Warner and Jennifer Kilgore explain, it was a right-wing fear of secularization and socialism that prompted the *Action Française* to call for Jeanne's beautification and canonization in 1920.⁷²

⁷¹ Jennifer Kilgore, 'Joan of Arc as Propaganda Motif from the Dreyfus Affair to the Second World War', *Revue LISA/LISA e-journal* [online], 6:1 (2008) <<http://lisa.revues.org/519>>, [accessed 20 June 2015].

⁷² Warner, p.264.

Jeanne was also a particularly effective representative of Catholicism given the increased feminization of religion that, for example, French historian Ivan Jablonka remarks upon in his interpretation of two late nineteenth-century paintings which feature Catholic practice. Jablonka notes that ‘les taux de pratique des femmes sont beaucoup plus importants. Comme fidèles, religieuses ou enseignantes, elles participent à une féminisation du catholicisme au XIXe siècle’, before citing Gérard Cholvy’s suggestion that the Catholic faith allowed women social roles outside of the home. Jeanne embodied these examples of the feminization of Catholicism because, as a woman, she was believed to be a representative of God sent to help Charles VII. She was pious but not passive, and she operated in an active and heroic guise outside of the domestic sphere. Her spiritual qualities would continue to be referred to during the First World War, when she was used as a representative for Catholic militarism, martyrdom, faith and national devotion.

The 1897 fire at the *Bazar de la charité* in Paris, mentioned in the introduction, provides us with another good example of Jeanne d’Arc’s pre-war appropriation in discourses of upper-class Catholic heroism. The bazar was funded by a *comité des dames du monde* headed up by the Countess Greffulhe, renowned beauty and friend of Marthe Bibesco, the case study of chapter five. Jeanne’s image as a Catholic role model was put to good use in framing victim testimonials with messages about death by burning, as well as references to female catholic martyrdom, philanthropy and majesty. For example, a preacher of the Dominican order, Marie-Joseph Ollivier gave a speech on 8 May 1897 at Notre Dame in memory of the victims. He compared them directly to Jeanne: ‘aujourd’hui vous nous apparaissez, comme Jeanne d’Arc sur la nuée rougeâtre du bûcher, entourées de lumière, et montant vers la gloire, où vous attend l’Inspirateur de votre charité et le Rémunérateur de votre sacrifice’.⁷³

According to Geoffrey Cubitt, the political and religious remembrance process following the incident was another ‘struggle for interpretative control’ in which Jeanne was used as

⁷³ Marie-Joseph Ollivier, *Les Victimes de la charité : discours prononcé à Notre-Dame de Paris le 8 mai 1897 au service funèbre célébré pour les victimes de l’incendie du Bazar de la charité* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1898), p. 14-15.

a pawn in an ideological battle, exposing ‘the elusive complexities of Church-State politics and of Catholic-Republican relationships at the end of the nineteenth century’.⁷⁴ The complexities of these relationships were revealed in scathing responses from right-wing sources such as the newspaper *Les Contemporains*. These responses criticized various secular reports of Ollivier’s testimonial, according to which the victims had gloriously sacrificed themselves in order to redeem France’s sins.⁷⁵ *Les Contemporains* called this kind of reportage, which referred to Ollivier as ‘l’abominale prêtre’ amongst other things,⁷⁶ ‘la presse hostile’, and claimed that it distorted his words as though he intended to make an indirect attack on the government, whereas in reality he merely sought to denounce the Revolution and its leaders.⁷⁷ The article was also critical of Louis Barthou for not including in his speech the name of God, claiming that his rhetoric would have been perfect had he shown himself to be a good Christian.⁷⁸

The Catholic, right-wing ‘Joan-as-Jesus’⁷⁹ worked well as a weapon in anti-secular discourses of remembrance which foregrounded exceptional and heroic female martyrdom and also militarism in response to the incident, also comparing the female victims with male self-sacrifice in military battle. For example, Cubitt explains how commentators drew tenuous comparisons between the circumstances of Jeanne’s execution and the accidental fire.⁸⁰ She was the perfect fit as ‘symbol of a specifically Catholic conception of French identity’, ‘pawned’ as part of right wing attempts to regain ‘control of her official memory’ after Republican attempts to ‘own’ her over her feast day in 1894.⁸¹

⁷⁴ Cubitt, ‘Martyrs of charity, heroes of solidarity’, p. 352.

⁷⁵ B/A 1313, APP.

⁷⁶ *Le Jour*, 6 May 1897.

⁷⁷ *Les Contemporains*, 10 October 1897, p. 8, ‘La presse hostile, s’emparant de ses paroles, travestissant sa pensée, voulut voir une attaque indirecte au gouvernement, quand l’orateur n’avait voulu que stigmatiser la Révolution et les loges’.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷⁹ Margolis, p. 269.

⁸⁰ Cubitt, ‘Martyrs of charity, heroes of solidarity’, p. 347.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Cubitt presents some of the same ideas as Angela Hobbs, identifying the ‘edifying effects that the spectacle of virtuous acceptance of suffering might have had on other members of society’.⁸² He suggests that Jeanne’s position as role model, and the instructive potential that her legend had in the context of the *Bazar* fire, would have acted as a cultural ‘provider’ of ‘inspiration and motivation’, to guide the mourning process and, in turn, the responses to the political appropriation that lay beneath it.⁸³

There were, however, appropriations of Jeanne that were not so firmly situated within the right-wing, catholic sphere, such as the example of self-declared atheist Sarah Bernhardt’s stage representations. Bernhardt starred in two plays as Jeanne; one in 1890 and the other in 1909. Both castings were evidence of the politically unifying potential of Jeanne’s cult in pre-war France. Venita Datta explains that she ‘found little evidence of attempts to denigrate Bernhardt as Jeanne in 1890 and in 1909’⁸⁴ in the two productions, and therefore that the reception of Jeanne portrayed by Bernhardt was a point of agreement for both left and right. Anti-semitic voices, like Léo Taxil or the newspaper *L’Intransigeant*, were less likely to criticise Bernhardt’s performance because the character’s transcendental quality as national hero overrode the significance of a Jewish woman playing the role, for example.⁸⁵ Bernhardt was a controversial character because she was a New Woman who famously took on male character roles.⁸⁶ Her choice to play Jeanne d’Arc was not only motivated by her affinity for Jeanne as a national symbol, but also served as a means of improving her own public image. In taking on the role of such a religious and virtuous figure, she could distance herself from any criticism that might have been launched against her as a Jewish ‘New Woman’.⁸⁷ Her appropriation of Jeanne as a role model was thus bound up with the honour of emulating a national hero, and also

⁸² Ibid., p.348.

⁸³ Hobbs, p.60.

⁸⁴ Datta, p.166.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.153.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

with her own gendered self-awareness, and how she might use the role model to legitimise her public role as an actress.

The triggering of a nationalist revival in France by events such as the 1905 First Moroccan Crisis and the resignation of Théophile Delcassé,⁸⁸ as well as an increasing perceived threat from Germany, led to traditional social norms being more firmly embedded in popular discourses as a means of establishing stability and order. Rather than ‘belonging’ to one particular party, Bernhardt’s two representations of Jeanne firmly situated her as an epitome of national unity for *all* French people at this time, when role models were being chosen with more and more consensus.⁸⁹

Certainly, Bernhardt’s problematic public identity succeeded in creating a universally accessible and ‘consensual’ Jeanne on the stage and this went some way to influencing political receptions of her performance.⁹⁰ However, there is little doubt that Jeanne continued to be the preferred idol of the right until the war. As well as being the ‘property’ of the right-wing male political elite, her value as a Catholic saint was also evoked at the turn of the century by the relatively small number of Christian feminist organizations. Her image was embraced as part of their mission and campaigns to reconcile ‘the liberal, or social Catholic movement’ with suffragism.⁹¹ The *Fédération Jeanne d’Arc*, founded by ‘liberal Catholic’ Marie Maugeret in the early 1900s, held an annual *Congrès Jeanne d’Arc*,⁹² the first being in 1904, inviting Catholic women to discuss issues such as suffrage and political rights, as well as charitable and social initiatives.⁹³ The *Ligue des Femmes*

⁸⁸ Eugen Weber, *The Nationalist Revival in France 1905-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959).

⁸⁹ Datta, p. 178.

⁹⁰ Datta, p. 143.

⁹¹ Steven C. Hause and Anne R. Kenney, ‘The Development of the Catholic Women’s Suffrage Movement in France, 1896-1922’, *The Catholic Historical Review*, 67:1 (January 1981), pp. 11-30, p. 13.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ James F. McMillan, ‘Wollstonecraft’s daughters, Marianne’s daughters, and the daughters of Joan of Arc: Marie Maugeret and Christian feminism in the French Belle Époque’, in *Wollstonecraft’s Daughters: Womanhood in England and France, 1780-1920* ed. by Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 186-197, p. 194, and Margaret Darrow, *French Women and the First World War: War Stories of the Home Front* (London: Berg, 2000), p. 25.

Françaises declared its mission in the press the following year, referring to Jeanne as an aspirational benchmark in its Catholic mission:

Rendre la France à son Roi Jésus, ramener notre patrie aux traditions qui l'ont sacrée
Fille aînée de l'Église, voilà notre but. Que les âmes de bonne volonté viennent se
grouper autour de nous. Mères chrétiennes, femmes françaises, bataillons pour
l'Église, pour la France.⁹⁴

Maugeret endorsed many equal rights for women, but was scathing towards those who left their domestic and familial responsibilities altogether in pursuit of these rights.⁹⁵ And despite the emergence of more 'disruptive' representations of female identity such as the 'New Woman' at the turn of the century,⁹⁶ enduring femininity and maternity remained at the heart of the majority of feminist evocations of female identity, particularly those featuring or appealing to middle and upper-class women. As Jeanne was not traditionally thought of in the popular imagination as maternal or domesticated, feminist discourses like Maugeret's - appropriating her role model as part of their rhetoric - were inconsistent with other representations of Jeanne as virgin, cross-dresser or warrior woman. In order to make Jeanne's legend more 'palatable', she was therefore either infantilised so as to 'appear so appealing, so tender, so noteworthy'⁹⁷ in reducing the powerful 'moral dilemmas or consequences' that she might have posed as a woman for her 'votaries'.⁹⁸ Alternatively, she was represented as self-abnegating, calm, devoted and virtuous.

There were also more minority voices in the women's movement that appropriated Jeanne as their role model. Socialist Madeleine Pelletier, who occupied a very different feminist position, incorporated Jeanne into her early turn-of-the-century rhetoric. Joan Wallach Scott explains that Pelletier was well aware of the 'stark exemplar' that a historical figure

⁹⁴ Musée du Diocèse de Lyon, *Ligue des Femmes Françaises 1901*, <<http://museedudiocesedelyon.com/MUSEEduDIOCESEdeLYONliguefeminine.htm>> [accessed 13 June 2014].

⁹⁵ Hause and Kenney, p. 14.

⁹⁶ Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. 14.

⁹⁷ Warner, p.266.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.267.

such as Jeanne might add to her own personal discussion of role models.⁹⁹ Pelletier encouraged women to point their daughters in Jeanne's direction as part of a drive to instil in them ideas about a stronger, more decisive and militant feminism. And her choice to foreground Jeanne as a central figure in this campaign had a personal benefit, exposing 'the importance she attached to locating herself within a historical tradition made up of activist heroines', like Jeanne.¹⁰⁰

Pelletier might have taken inspiration from the British suffragettes for whom Jeanne was the patron saint.¹⁰¹ For the suffragettes, Jeanne represented the right mix of militancy and female virtue. She was represented in nineteenth-century WSPU publications, for example, and was evoked by Elsie Howey who dressed as her in armour and rode on horseback to celebrate the release of Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence from Holloway prison in 1909.¹⁰²

Despite Jeanne's consensual potential in a time of intense nationalism, the battle for her 'ownership' continued to wage in the Belle-Epoque.¹⁰³ Her legend was also unfavourably regarded by some observers around the turn of the century, devaluing her representative worth somewhat. Even on the right, figures such as Anatole France sought to deny her a heroic legacy and to damage her reputation in his 1908 historical biography *La Vie de Jeanne d'Arc*. France claimed that she received too much praise and that her relative celebrity was undeserved.¹⁰⁴ He was, in the eyes of those who criticised his actions at the *Action Française*, as deceitful and treacherous as the *Cour de Cassation* in its attempt to pardon Alfred Dreyfus in another event which sparked a process of political

⁹⁹ Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 159.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁰¹ Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 85.

¹⁰² Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 296.

¹⁰³ Datta, p. 144.

¹⁰⁴ Martha Hanna, *The Mobilization of Intellect: French Scholars and Writers During the Great War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

appropriation. In his negative portrayal of Jeanne, France was thought to be destroying the legacy of one of the country's reliable national heroes and thus directly betraying his homeland and inadvertently siding with her enemies.

Thus, Jeanne's exceptional and yet recognizable example was usually deployed as an ideological weapon in polarized political debate in nineteenth-century discourses, but it was also modified. In the minds of the Belle-Époque right-wing male ruling elite, for example, she was usually reassuringly thought of as a young girl unable to 'pose the same threat to men that a 'real' woman might'.¹⁰⁵ Jeanne's ambiguous sexuality was another reassuring status as far as many fin-de-siècle men were concerned, because her lack of 'true' femininity did not threaten their masculinity.¹⁰⁶ She was safely defined as asexual and infantile, and the elements of her legend that did not 'fit' with ideals of womanhood promoted in nineteenth-century Catholic discourses were either underplayed or clearly set out as exceptional. On this basis she was unlikely to incite non-conformity in other French women. She was also occasionally evoked to add credibility and appeal to more minority voices. Overall though, Jeanne was largely a construction of the dominant patriarchal imagination and thus, as Margaret Darrow argues, 'rather than speaking specifically to women, the femininity of abstract ideals serves to exclude women, by defining the public and the universal as masculine'.¹⁰⁷ This was also the case when it came to Marianne's metaphorical potential as symbol of the Republic in Belle-Époque and wartime discourses, as the second half of this chapter shows.

1.3 Jeanne in Wartime Discourses

By the time the First World War broke out Jeanne d'Arc had been a long-established tool in the campaign to promote a right-wing, Catholic version of French national identity. In the months leading up to the outbreak, her cult provided a reassuring religious justification for war that worked in line with this campaign. In wartime, rather than being a pawn in a political battle, her appropriation was less partisan and more straightforwardly

¹⁰⁵ Datta, p. 168.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁰⁷ Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p.24.

nationalist; she was France's daughter, still largely the property of the right, but with more power herself to transcend political divides. She was a national iconographical stronghold. Her 'virginity' had once been a catholic weapon against the Republican enemy, but in a national emergency it came to represent, moreover, the ability of France to confront a hostile Germany.

Jeanne's militarized image was widely used in wartime nationalist propaganda imagery to stand up ideologically against the threat of German barbarism. It was Jeanne's personal experience of North-Eastern France, having grown up there in a previous age, which enabled those in whose hands her legend lay to use her in discourses which showed this same territory under threat, and to give her a role in the nationalist fight.¹⁰⁸ For example, Jeanne guided French and colonial infantrymen into battle in a wartime poster [figure 2]. The poster's caption took language directly inspired by the H. Leclercq 1906 translation of her trial: 'Si je n'y suis, que Dieu m'y mette, et si j'y suis, que Dieu m'y garde'. The echoes of Jeanne's own words, which only differed in the sense that the verb *tenir* is used rather than *garder*, were suitably adapted to the modern wartime context in which French soldiers found inspiration in her love of homeland, her faith in God and her strength to conduct herself heroically in battle in the name of something greater than herself.

References to Jeanne in collections of wartime stories or accounts by both male and female writers were also widespread. *Reflets de guerre: Août 1914-août 1915* (1916) by Marguerite Silvère, for example, was a collection of nationalist and patriotic poems, one of which was dedicated to Maurice Barrès and appealed to Jeanne to afford France's men victory in sacrifice:

Et tu ne pourras pas, ô Jeanne, sœur divine,
Refuser la Victoire à ces héros-enfants;
Ils offrent, comme toi, leur vie en sa fleur fine;

¹⁰⁸ Kilgore, <<http://lisa.revues.org/519>>, [accessed 20 June 2015].

Donne-leur un été de myrtes triomphants!¹⁰⁹

Another female-authored text to use Jeanne d'Arc as an integral point of reference and symbol of nationhood was patriotic children's book *Ce que j'ai vu de la guerre* (1915) by Jeanne Rollin. When, for example, Rollin described the German army's arrival in Rheims, she reported them discarding their meat bones by throwing them at a statue of Jeanne.¹¹⁰ This was a powerful image, not only of the uncivilized behaviour of the German aggressor, but also of their rejection of French Catholicism and virtue, as embodied in the statue of Jeanne, and it therefore successfully demonized the invaders on multiple levels. Rollin interestingly chose a reference to Jeanne in the 'vocabulaire' section of her book, contextualising the word 'déguerpir' with the following heroic example from Jeanne's life: 'quitter un lieu par force. Jeanne D'Arc fit déguerpir les Anglais d'Orléans'.¹¹¹ Details like this tell us that *Ce que j'ai vu de la guerre* can be seen as an example of the popularity of Jeanne's cult embedded in the wartime moral education of French children, both linguistically and iconographically.



Figure 2: 'Sur la route de la victoire', French propaganda poster, S de Solomko

¹⁰⁹ Marguerite Silvére, *Reflets de guerre. Août 1914-août 1915* (Paris: C. Faure, 1916), p. 30.

¹¹⁰ Jeanne Rollin, *Ce que j'ai vu de la guerre* (London: Constable, 1915), p.37.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

Au Souffle de la Grande Guerre: Poèmes héroïques (1917) by Marc Villan featured the poem, ‘Reims aux vandales’, which also described the invasion of Rheims and addressed the German invaders directly, insisting that despite their violent actions, ‘vous n’effacerez pas nos gloires d’autrefois’.¹¹² Villain’s reference to Jeanne appeared alongside other Christian heroes in the next stanza, as he continued his defiant proclamation about the strength of the French spirit to hold on to its heroic past:

N’ayant pu défiler dans notre capitale,
 Vous pouvez démolir chaque vitrail ovale,
 Vous n’effacerez pas Jeanne D’Arc, ni Dunois,
 Ni Clovis et ses francs, ni Remy [...] ¹¹³

Maurice Barrès was another nationalist writer to champion Jeanne’s value as a representative weapon in the fight against Germany. In *Le Coeur des femmes de France*, a book about French women’s patriotism in wartime, Barrès drew on the polarity between Jeanne’s ‘pitié divine’,¹¹⁴ her virginity, her universality and her super-humanity, and the ‘méchanceté diabolique’¹¹⁵ and ‘affreuse culture’¹¹⁶ of ‘l’Allemagne prussifiée’.¹¹⁷ In sum: ‘Quelle image de la civilisation française à opposer à la culture prussienne!’¹¹⁸ Barrès also used Jeanne’s role model to call for solidarity across the ideological landscape, referring to her as an ‘haute figure, française et universelle, honorée en France par tous les partis et, dans tous les peuples, par tous les esprits qui ont de l’humanité’.¹¹⁹ He proudly claimed that the French army took influence and inspiration from Jeanne’s own chivalric conduct:

¹¹² Marc Villan, *Au souffle de la Grande guerre: poèmes héroïques* (Paris: Imprimerie Charzat, 1917), p. 22.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Maurice Barrès, p. 203.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 207.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 203.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 216.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 164.

Jeanne avait apporté avec elle [...] la volonté de vaincre, de marcher sur les difficultés pour les prendre corps à corps: elle était ce que sont aujourd'hui encore les soldats de la France: générosité, vaillance, allégresse, honneur, acceptation du sacrifice, unanimité.¹²⁰

In an attempt to prove how French Alsace-Lorraine was, Barrès made many references to Jeanne's modest beginnings in Domrémy, and to her spiritual connection with her birthplace. Given the traumatic memory of the Franco-Prussian war, the region had become highly symbolic for ethnic nationalist figures like Barrès, for whom Jeanne was a valuable and easily identifiable icon in a continuing wartime propagandist process which victimized her homeland and demonized Germany.

During the war, women's groups also continued to evoke Jeanne. Women's conservative Catholic groups continued to resist the feminist label and tended to reject suffragism in the name of domestic responsibility. Elizabeth Macknight argues that these rejections were motivated by the fact that they were essentially still oppressed by patriarchal 'social order' which situated women outside of the political sphere.¹²¹ These groups continued to make use of Jeanne's potential as martyr in their wartime rhetoric and followed a more mainstream tendency to drop her name as part of a list of Christian icons. For example, the January 1917 issue of the *Bulletin des institutrices catholiques de l'enseignement primaire* harked back to the hey-days of French Catholicism: 'Notre coeur brûle toujours une vive flamme d'amour pour la patrie de Clovis, de Saint Louis, et de Jeanne D'Arc'.¹²² And in the December issue of the same year, the *Bulletin* mentioned Charles Péguy's 1908 conversion to Catholicism and claimed him to have been influenced, in part, by the role model of 'la bienheureuse Jeanne D'Arc'.¹²³ Péguy had, by 1917, become one of Jeanne d'Arc's main Catholic supporters.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 195.

¹²¹ Elizabeth C. Macknight, 'Why Weren't They Feminists? Parisian Noble Women and the Campaigns for Women's Rights in France, 1880—1914', *European Journal of Women's Studies* (May 2007), 14: 2, pp. 127-140, p. 130.

¹²² *Bulletin des institutrices catholiques de l'enseignement primaire*, January 1917, p. 14.

¹²³ Ibid., December 1917, p. 51.

Like the support in the pre-war era from minority voices like Madeleine Pelletier, there were also less dominant feminist discourses celebrating Jeanne's heroism in wartime. Her cult was evoked as part of wartime suffragist rhetoric. For example, in the 'Simple causeries' section of the March 1917 issue of *La Femme de France*, the recent Parliamentary Commission's consideration of the female vote in municipal elections was discussed. The periodical addressed Alexandre Dumas Fils posthumously, commenting on the resonance of his speech about the injustice of Jeanne d'Arc, were she alive, not even being able to vote in the country that she alone saved:

Rejouissez-vous, ô mâne de Dumas fils, vous, le grand précurseur qui vous désoliez spirituellement en pensant que <<Jeanne D'Arc ne pourrait pas voter pour les conseillers municipaux de Dorémey, dans ce beau pays de France qu'elle avait sauvé! >> Jeanne d'Arc voterait, demain.¹²⁴

Though there was less conflict over the ownership of Jeanne's role model in wartime in comparison to the pre-war era, her reputation as an armour-clad woman-warrior still forbade her a heroic reputation in some minds. Mona Siegal points out that other minority voices, such as pacifist teachers, for example, sought not to heroise warfare, and thus resisted using material during and after the war that exploited the glorified 'cult of national heroes' in which Jeanne, exclusively as a woman, occupied a place.¹²⁵ Pacifist feminist Marcelle Cappy's 1916 manifesto *La Défense de la vie* assertively denied France's 'heroic' past, rejecting the Durkheimian collective consciousness that endorsed heroism, calling it merely a 'résignation du troupeau qui a peur des chiens'.¹²⁶ For Cappy, the grand narratives should have been buried in favour of new ways of viewing humanity, ways which did not glorify desire or destruction. Along these lines, she mocked the rhetoric of a girl's *collège* inspector whose idealized hour-long speech at prize-giving she recalled.¹²⁷ Jeanne d'Arc was one of the heroes that he cited in order to inspire the female students, and Cappy reported that the audience, all girls, were not in the slightest bit inspired or even

¹²⁴ *La Femme de France*, March 1917.

¹²⁵ Mona L. Siegal, *The Moral Disarmament of France: Education, Pacifism, and Patriotism, 1914-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 2.

¹²⁶ Marcelle Cappy *La Défense de la vie* (Paris: Librairie P. Ollendorff, 1916), p. xi.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.140.

interested in what he was saying.¹²⁸ Rather, they showed embarrassment at his grandiose ‘*orgeuil de la patrie*’,¹²⁹ his praise of the ‘*grands ancêtres*’,¹³⁰ claiming it to be a futile harking back to a bygone era that had no bearing on the experience of war, certainly not from a pacifist point of view: ‘*tout cela était mort et M. L’Inspecteur couronnait un cadavre*’.¹³¹

As well as pacifist skepticism over the ‘harking back’ and glorifying of a violent past which heroized those involved, including Jeanne, her gender led other commentators to view her warrior guise with disdain. Wartime imagery portrayed her in a martial role and situated her within the realms of ‘the male art of war’.¹³² This was a troubling association for some wartime observers at a time when French women, although not allowed to fight, were increasingly involved in wartime enterprise nevertheless. It was thus feared by some commentators that women’s attention had drifted away from their primary role in the home and that they also threatened to usurp men in employment. Thus, a certain wariness about Jeanne’s militarism became particularly manifest during the war, as did attempts made to counteract it. As discussed in more depth in the chapters that follow, this wariness referred more broadly to widespread attitudes towards French women in wartime roles.

These attempts to counteract Jeanne’s militarised profile included the popular insistence that she preferred to be away from conflict and enjoyed the pastoral home. Warner claims that ‘her joy in battle is made little of, and one story is repeated and repeated until it gains widespread credence: all she wanted to do after Charles’s coronation was to go home and look after sheep again’.¹³³ Venita Datta also remarks on the claim that Jeanne ‘was more comfortable with her banner than she was with her sword’.¹³⁴ In this sense, attempts were sometimes made to drag Jeanne away from her potentially transgressive role as warrior,

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹³² Datta, p. 170.

¹³³ Warner, p. 216.

¹³⁴ Datta, p. 170.

and back into the confines of conservative femininity, as had been the case before the war.

An example of the undermining of Jeanne's military prowess was A. Willette's 1918 drawing of an 18 year old Jeanne from 1429 alongside a 78 year old Georges Clemenceau in the November edition of *Le Rire Rouge* [figure 3]. Although depicted wearing a full coat of arms, there was a childlike look about her as she stood in the foreground with Clemenceau's hand overlapping her own on a sword stuck in the ground. Burning in the background was Rheims cathedral, a tragic repetition of history. She appeared innocent, infantile, pretty and physically unimposing. In fact, her stance suggested that she was inexperienced and unstable on her feet, rather than standing firm and representing any decisive threat. Although underplaying Jeanne's military potential, the drawing did not seek to undermine her power as a transcendent national stronghold. Above her head was a break in the smoke from the cathedral fire which created a halo effect, and her sword supported both her and Clemenceau and France therefore, so much so that he no longer needed to rely on his cane.

Likewise, a *revanchist* New Year postcard for 1915 [figure 4] showed Jeanne again in military dress, but rather than making any martial gestures, she was passively and ethereally positioned in the sky above two Alsatian women outside Rheims cathedral. This image, not a satirical one like that in *Le Rire Rouge*, situated Jeanne as a spiritual, virginal and virtuous vision which incited the traditionally feminine women below not to act combatively, but rather to remain dignified and patriotic in their pursuit of retribution. Their manner and dress suggested that these women, although outside the home presumably having been to worship, were returning to a domestic setting. Such postcards promoted an alternative to Jeanne's woman-warrior image in consciously moving her away from the battlefield, and bringing her closer to an ideal of traditional, domestic womanhood. In turn, they also inspired French women to continue acting in accordance with this ideal, believed to be an exemplary form of patriotic female heroism in wartime, as the next chapter shows.

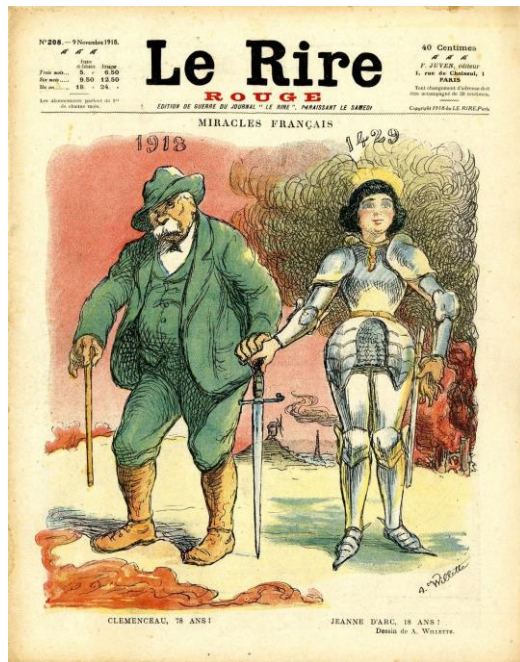


Figure 3: 'Miracle Français', front cover illustration for *Le Rire Rouge*, A. Willette, 9 November 1918



Figure 4: Revanchist postcard celebrating the New Year, January 1915

Whilst some commentators, such as Barrès, enthusiastically identified and modified Jeanne's attributes in the heroic conduct of French women, others suggested that she should be dismissed as a wartime icon altogether on the basis that her gender identity was cause for concern at a time when women were required to embody traditional womanhood more than ever. Writer Jules Bertaut, for example, whilst praising Jeanne's past heroism, also pointed out that her virile, militarist appearance was no longer appropriate, and that First World War female heroism should be re-located in the less grandiose and more humble examples of ordinary French women.¹³⁵ In a time of conflict, Jeanne was therefore considered to be an ambiguous and divisive role-model for women, but could still represent a useful embodiment of nation, provided she represented a more normative gender role.

¹³⁵ Jules Bertaut, 'Les Femmes de la guerre', *Le Temps*, 15 September 1915.

1.4 The Republican hero: Marianne

The focus of the discussion now turns to representations of the other main female role model ‘resurrected’ in wartime France: Marianne, hero of the First Republic. Formally introduced in 1792, she was an allegory of Liberty and a descendant of the Roman Goddess Libertas. A female representative of nation, she pointed to a break with the heritage and order associated with the *Ancien Regime*, and embodied a radical rejection of the monarchical tradition. This section considers first her largely political appropriation or exclusion in Belle-Époque discourses. Then it discusses the transformation of her representative value from partisan of republicanism in multiple and varying politicized pre-war guises, to a more universal national icon in her various wartime appearances, whilst heeding the ways in which her value as an allegory affected the ways in which her gender was represented. It examines the ways Marianne was represented in roles that were untraditional for many French women; in militarized, and industrial working roles which promoted nationalist devotion to, and support for, the war effort. Finally, it investigates the ways in which she was also made to embody more traditionally ‘prescribed’ women’s roles, in representations of motherhood, youth, beauty and feminine devotion.

French historian Maurice Agulhon’s volumes on Marianne have comprehensively decoded her political appropriation in terms of internal and external politics, history and class. They have also mapped the deployment of her role model officially, on statues, busts, and medals, and unofficially, in the press and propagandist texts, from 1789 through to 2001 when *Les Métamorphoses de Marianne* was published. Agulhon does not, however, consider at any length Marianne’s gender as a significant factor in her representation. Therefore, in response this section also considers the ways in which a consideration of gender might prompt a re-interpretation of her portrayal in First World War sources.

The Hellenistic age popularized allegories which were heavily relied upon in propagandist discourses in nineteenth-century Europe. ‘Abstract concepts’ were

‘project[ed] onto the female body’,¹³⁶ and in this way female figures were popularly employed as ‘feminised’¹³⁷ allegories of nation: Victory, Justice, Liberty, Love, Faith and Hope.¹³⁸ Examples included Germania, Italia Turrata, Britannia and Lady Liberty. Most notable in France was Marianne, ‘the incarnation of Republican France, with one breast bared’.¹³⁹ She was the female hero of the secular left, a significant icon of the revolution, the Republic and, in many ways, the antithesis of Jeanne d’Arc’s Catholic iconography. She was heroic because she supported her ailing nation. She was also heroic because she endured and survived instability and conflict, despite attempts by anti-Republican ideology to challenge her, and she is still used as a powerful allegorical tool in French discourses today.

First appearing in the French Revolution as an unnamed woman with Grecian headdress, Marianne, as she later became known, was originally the exclusive property of left-wing regions in the south of France, where rebellion against authority was particularly rife. Agulhon explains that she represented Liberty in this period, and stood against monarchical absolutism, anti-clericalism and aristocracy, quickly becoming an emblem of state.¹⁴⁰ He also points out that, like Jeanne d’Arc, Marianne’s historical roots in antiquity gave her credibility and popularity as a revolutionary lynchpin.¹⁴¹

In the same way that Jeanne’s piety and devotion to God were seen by those who endorsed her legend as beautiful qualities, Agulhon suggests that Marianne’s role model evoked the beautiful and universal concept of Liberty in the very specific context of the French Republic.¹⁴² Yet he is quick to point out the extent to which her allegorical weight shifted

¹³⁶ Ann Fairfax Withington, ‘Review: Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form by Marina Warner’, *Winterthur Portfolio*, 22:1 (Spring 1987), pp.105-107, p.105.

¹³⁷ Susan Grayzel, *Women and the First World War* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p.10.

¹³⁸ Maurice Agulhon explains that ‘on reconnaît la Justice à sa balance, la Vérité à son miroir, l’Agriculture à sa gerbe de blé, une rivière à l’urne dont elle répand l’eau, etc. et la Liberté au bonnet phrygien’. Maurice Agulhon, ‘Marianne, réflexions sur une histoire’, *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 289:1 (1992), pp. 313-322, p. 314.

¹³⁹ Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, p.12.

¹⁴⁰ Agulhon, ‘Marianne, réflexions sur une histoire’, p. 314.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

¹⁴² Maurice Agulhon, *Les Métamorphoses de Marianne: L’imagerie et la symbolique de 1914 à nos jours* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001), p. 8-9.

over time depending on political, social or cultural context and on which ideological group was appropriating her cult at any point.

1.5 Marianne in Belle-Époque Discourses

Before discussing binary representations of Marianne in dominant wartime discourses and in gender terms, this section briefly considers the period leading up to the war. As an example, Agulhon explains that her caricature in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century press was fragmented over several representative guises, each with different political meanings. She represented the ‘good’ Republic, that is, as anti-revolutionary and anti-clerical. Equally, she was presented as a Republic to neither particularly like nor dislike: that which Agulhon calls ‘neutre’, but one that was equally mocked in the satirical press.

The far-left also used her as a means of criticising bourgeois republicanism. In the March 1902 edition of *L’Assiette au beurre*, for example, Marianne was depicted in one of Louis Morin’s social ‘masque’ drawings [figure 5] as a wooden doll with a grotesquely large head, Phrygian cap and red shroud, standing over a crowd of working class men, women and children. The caption read : ‘Les braves gens!... Pourvu qu’on leur permette de crier: ‘Vive la République!’ ça leur suffit, et voilà trente ans qu’ils oublient de nous réclamer les retraites ouvrières!...’. Here the Republic was depicted as exploiting naive working class people who had embraced republicanism without knowing that it did not always honour their rights or their entitlement. But equally, the governmental, bourgeois left also appropriated her role model in its discourses in order to provide a backlash to such far-left criticism. Agulhon adds that according to some caricatures there were two internal Republics in Belle Époque France; the ‘nation’ and the ‘régime’, with a different Marianne representing each. The former was depicted as ‘belle (et donc bonne), la France vraie, celle des vrais soucis historiques, et des traditions séculaires’, and the latter as ‘hideuse la France officielle, celle que masquent le régime et sa diplomatie d’apparence’.¹⁴³ Marianne was also used by the bourgeois right to poke criticism at the

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 285.

moderate and extreme left. In this case, she was often presented as a revolting shrew which needed to be exterminated.



Figure 5: 'Masque Politique', Louis Morin, *Assiette au beurre*, 15 March 1902

Agulhon adds that the Phrygian cap was not always included in representations of republic at the turn of the century, because of the revolutionary connotations that it was believed to embody. By 1876 the Republicans had a majority in the chamber of deputies. But given the conservative majority still residing over the Senate, republican effigies had to pose no revolutionary threat if they were to be accepted as credible emblems.¹⁴⁴ Agulhon lists examples of images, busts and medals on which allegorical women were thus depicted at the time without their Phrygian cap, in a 'less aggressive' guise which did not evoke militant and violent revolutionary pursuits, still fresh in the minds of many French people.¹⁴⁵ Another of Morin's 'Masque' drawings called 'Le choix d'un masque' [figure 6], clearly showed the extent to which such revolutionary danger was feared. It depicted a bourgeois man given the option by a feminine, flirty Marianne to assume one

¹⁴⁴ Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and symbolism in France, 1789-1880*, trans. by Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 162.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 164. It was feared that the red Phrygian cap would commemorate the anarchical activity of revolutionary insurgents like the *sans-culottes* and the *bonnets rouges*, who famously adopted the cap of liberty.

its icon and running the risk of appearing too revolutionary, particularly in the light of the right's 'sully' of the cap, the left preferred to use the classical and allegorical figure of Truth, Marianne's republican sister, a nude woman, believed to be honest in her willing to bare all.¹⁴⁸ This choice still worked in line with the increase in the use of female allegories that characterized the first few decades of the Third Republic,¹⁴⁹ but Truth invited minimal controversy as a figurative weapon with which to fend off right wing anti-Semitic propaganda during the affair.

The Dreyfus Affair thus signified Marianne's temporary omission from leftist discourse in favour of a less contentious female allegory. Her treatment during it served as a reminder of the power still to be found in her iconography, at this point deemed disadvantageous by the left who rejected her image, perhaps in an effort not to tarnish its favourite talisman in such a divisive issue. This omission also proved that she could represent an ideological weapon which, as in the case of Jeanne, was ironically used to promote messages about a political world in which women had no involvement. Thus, rather than standing in as a representative of women's political enfranchisement, Marianne, like Jeanne, was understood to be merely a universal abstraction, at times excluded from the conversation altogether.

1.6 Marianne in Wartime Discourses

When the war came, Marianne's representative value evolved in the same way that Jeanne came to symbolize more than right-wing politics alone. Marianne's role model was democratized, so that she was no longer a partisan symbol of Republican zeal, and became instead a national symbol of wartime *patrie*, and nationalist fervour.¹⁵⁰ Like Jeanne d'Arc, but to a greater degree, in the war years Marianne thus became a more ubiquitous secular symbol. Her allegorical significance also provided a useful alternative to displays of personal, autocratic leadership at a time when this was still feared by many.¹⁵¹ The

¹⁴⁸ Christopher E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p.156.

¹⁴⁹ Forth, p.156.

¹⁵⁰ Agulhon, *Les Métamorphoses de Marianne*, p. 30.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Phrygian cap was re-instated in wartime, when nations sought to define themselves strongly. The cap was thus partly a marker to identify her as French, because other symbols associated with the nation had held similarities with foreign ones. Maurice Agulhon cites the lion, for example, commonly used in French civic sculpture but most notably associated with Great Britain, as one example.¹⁵² The militancy associated with the cap was also an appropriate addition during this period of energetic nationalism, particularly in the early war years.

As I have argued, despite giving prominence to an image of a woman, female allegories did not necessarily communicate a strong message about gender. In fact, token female allegories actually communicated messages about male values. Of Truth, Christopher E. Forth writes, she ‘was safely represented by an abstract woman because, according to the logic of allegorical representation, it was assumed that real women could not be relied on to tell the truth’,¹⁵³ despite the apparent honesty of Truth’s nudity. Maurice Agulhon’s suggestion that Marianne ‘tient largement au goût de l’allégorie inhérent à notre culture classique, ainsi qu’à l’attrait de la féminité plus ou moins sensuelle pour les artistes et leur publique’, supports Forth’s point: Marianne carried more sexless representative weight than universal female characteristics.¹⁵⁴ Added to this was the fact that such wartime female metaphors had never been alive and therefore never had a ‘story’ for people to commemorate in the same way that they did in the case of Jeanne, and thus did not necessarily embody human female conduct. It was for this reason that Marianne was easily deployed and facilitated, in patriarchal roles, as head of state, or as army leader. Her metaphorical value allowed her to represent war roles that would not have been accessible to French women because she quite simply was not representing French women. Nor was she necessarily appealing to them. Plato’s theory about emulating role models is here challenged on the basis that Marianne inspired, but did not necessarily incite mimicry. Those consuming her image would not try to simulate her portrayed actions and would instead be consciously and subconsciously ‘accustomed’ to regarding

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁵³ Forth, p. 156.

¹⁵⁴ Agulhon, *Les Métamorphoses de Marianne*, p. 29.

her role model as a representative for the strength of the Republic at a time of conflict, rather than a tangible female role to be imitated.

Marianne was frequently associated with military activity in propaganda and press imagery. On the eve of the war, in the middle of the nationalist revival, the front cover of *Le Petit journal* [figure 7] depicted Marianne sat a short distance away from a battle, yet the fighting was still decipherable in the background, and she wore a coat of arms. The caption read: ‘La France pacifique, mais résolue à se faire respecter’. Marianne’s sword was set firmly into the ground. Her image was produced in order to symbolise patriotic sacrifice, as well as France’s peaceable attitude, ‘sans doute, mais énergique, digne, résolue, en face du danger possible’.¹⁵⁵ The message was slightly contradictory, claiming France’s peace-loving nature and yet suggesting that the country might not resist the threat of war, but overall it gave Marianne the duty of defending resolutely against Germany.



Figure 7: *Le Petit Journal* front cover, 16 March 1913



Figure 8: War bonds poster, Georges Scott, 1917

¹⁵⁵ *Le Petit Journal*, 16 March 1913, p. 82.

By 1917, she had moved into the centre of the battle, and appeared in Georges Scott's war bonds poster [figure 8] in an untraditional role for a woman, this time heading up an army and clutching a torn *tricolor* with an aggressive, determined facial expression. As Agulhon points out, she seemed to drift just above the ground in some representations, such as the 1915 postcard by Mug [figure 9], which shows a girlish Marianne in a larger scale than the soldiers that she is rallying, floating ethereally just above them, and was therefore more like a young deity than what he calls 'réelle'.¹⁵⁶ These military associations were thus separated from the aspirations of French women on the basis that Marianne did not occupy a 'human' space in some public imagery, and thus could not tangibly be imitated. This untouchable, militarized other-worldliness did not, however, take away from the impact that her heroic role model had in wartime, because she guided the nation through hardship by illustrative example.



Figure 9: 'La Marseillaise' postcard, Mug, 1915

¹⁵⁶ Agulhon, *Les Métamorphoses de Marianne*, p. 38.

She was often featured bearing one breast, reminiscent of the mythical Amazon warrior-women, whose sexuality was adapted in the name of their militaristic intent, the right breast being cut off in infancy to facilitate more effective range of movement in combat.¹⁵⁷ It is quite possible that such a mythical significance was deliberately carried over in various modern ‘resurrections’ of Marianne which sought to depict her as powerful and martially capable.

However, this particular image of the bare-breasted militarized Amazon was not the only one echoed in the context of modern war. Several sources pointed to a re-working of the myth. For example, in 1917 American suffragist Gertrude Atherton observed Valentine Thompson, high-society Parisian lady and founder of *La Vie féminine* newspaper, as being ‘of the Amazon type, with dark eyes and hair, a fine complexion, regular features, any expression she chooses to put on, and she is always the well-dressed Parisienne in detail as well as in effect’,¹⁵⁸ combining military heroism with domesticated feminine devotion. Yvonne Pitrois also made reference in *Les Femmes de la Grande Guerre 1914-1915-1916* to ‘toute un phalange de vaillantes femmes’, when describing women who were not involved in the fighting.¹⁵⁹ Once man-loathing and feared creatures who rejected their femininity and maternity in favour of fighting battles, comparisons of real and allegorical females to Amazon-women were blended, during the war, with more conservative ideals of womanhood and re-configured for dominant discourses to promote a wide range of defiant, heroic and adept women’s wartime activity. And although her allegorical value meant that there was no risk of French women emulating Marianne’s militarist conduct, it is also important to acknowledge that minority discourses such as Atherton’s and Pitrois’ were nevertheless able to militarise and heroise individual or small groups of women, adding to the strength of Marianne’s wider and more recognizable representative worth as national symbol.

¹⁵⁷ Blundell, p. 59.

¹⁵⁸ Gertrude Atherton, *The Living Present* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1917), p. 100.

¹⁵⁹ Yvonne Pitrois, *Les Femmes de la grande guerre 1914-1915-1916* (Geneva: Jeheber, 1916), p. 33.

As well as supporting the troops in battle, the figure of Marianne was also used to bolster the war effort behind the lines, as manifest in further wartime imagery. She often took on a working-class guise, symbolising her closeness to the *peuple* as well as the Republican ideal of popular sovereignty. In this sense Marianne was positioned as though an earthly woman, but always identifiable by her Phrygian cap, which immediately re-defined her as untouchable metaphor, not to be emulated, but instead to be revered, respected and also protected. On this basis, too, her gender was not of significance in the same way that Jeanne's was. A poster which was distributed in schools [figure 10], for example, featured a farmer Marianne with cap and tricolor cape, carrying a harvested sheaf of wheat dappled with red and blue poppies. Behind her was a German soldier holding a pistol to her back and a knife in his other hand. The caption read 'L'Allemagne a traîtreusement attaqué la France pacifique en août 1914', and embraced the popular wartime tradition of identifying archetypes and symbols as representatives of nations, albeit those victimised in the unfolding of war.

With likely reference to imagery like René Lelong's 1920 *Crédit National* poster [figure 11] which showed Marianne as a blacksmith striking iron with an anvil alongside working men, Agulhon sums up her working class depiction well: 'Marianne qui moissonne, ou qui guide un cortège d'ouvriers, ou encore qui manie elle-même, contre toute vraisemblance, en exhibant un torse aussi gracieusement féminin que possible, le lourd marteau du forgeron'.¹⁶⁰ As well as leading the nation's army to battle, and harvesting the nation's crops, she could also graft to forge, shape, and reconstruct the iron future of France as a blacksmith, all whilst remaining recognizable as a woman.

¹⁶⁰ Agulhon, *Les Métamorphoses de Marianne*, p.27.



Figure 10: Wartime poster with caption, 'L'Allemagne a trahéusement attaqué la France pacifique en août 1914'



Figure 11: Crédit National poster, Rene Lelong, 1920

In other examples of cultural mobilization, Marianne revealed both breasts, symbolising 'motherhood and abundance', communicating 'the bountiful and all-inclusive nature of republicanism',¹⁶¹ but also suggesting a consideration for the welfare of the country. She was presented explicitly as the mother of *la Patrie*, holding close to her bosom all of the orphans of war and the victims of Alsace-Lorraine, and offering up her plentiful biological resources to a country in need of protection, nourishment and, most importantly, future citizens. Marianne's bare-breastedness, pointing to nourishment of the nation, echoed the ever-present pronatalist undercurrents that ran throughout the war, and promoted the strength of the French mother to support a healthy growing population. The February 1914 edition of the *Bulletin mensuel de l'Emancipation, syndicat des*

¹⁶¹ *Los Angeles Times*, 11 April 2011, 'For France's Marianne, big breasts aren't always better' <<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2011/04/are-these-sculptures-breasts-too-large.html>> [accessed 28 May 2014].

institutrices et des instituteurs du Nord, for example, drew on the ‘inépuisables mamelles de Marianne’ as part of its rhetoric.¹⁶²

Agulhon, during a brief moment of gender analysis, points to the significance of representing a woman: ‘La femme est faible, la femme est mère, la femme, surtout, est amante, autant de thèmes opportunément exploités’.¹⁶³ Whilst Forth’s argument about the overwhelming tendency for the use of allegory to communicate male concepts is valid when it refers to representations of Marianne ‘usurping’ male roles as a combatant or a heavy-industry worker, it is immediately challenged by these alternative representations of Marianne as mother. When she was portrayed to epitomise the dominant ideals of womanhood, her role model was not interpreted without an understanding of her condition as a woman and how this added to the messages that she was helping to convey, particularly in wartime when women were believed to have their own duties to fulfil. In fact, in many ways, traditional models of womanhood embodied by Marianne were often disseminated in wartime cultural mobilization to incite women to devote themselves to husband and country. Images of maternal Marianne were thus an exception to the rule in that they posited her womanhood as a key component of her representative value, and re-situated her as more human than abstraction. Given the pronatalist agenda and the importance of motherhood in wartime France, the Marianne-mother image was ‘stable’, and was rarely contested in any complex counter-representations or critical caricatures, unlike images of militarised or working Marianne.

One of Agulhon’s arguments about her allegorical significance suggests that Marianne was positioned, in propaganda imagery, specifically in relation to men. He describes how she typically kissed or embraced a French *poilu* husband. A good example of this portrayal is Théophile Steinlen-Alexandre’s 1915 drawing *La France embrasse un mutilé* [figure 12]. In the drawing the figure in the Phrygian cap was thankful for the sacrifices that the man had made for his homeland, and was responsible for the care of France’s war

¹⁶² *Bulletin mensuel de l'Emancipation, syndicat des institutrices et des instituteurs du Nord*, February 1914.

¹⁶³ Agulhon, *Les Métamorphoses de Marianne*, p. 27.

wounded. She perfectly accepted, facilitated and celebrated the heroism that her compatriots had been enacting on the front line. Steinlen-Alexandre's other drawings represented Marianne in a similarly supportive and self-abnegating guise which suggested public duty, virtue and hope. *Pour les réfugiés de la Meuse* [figure 13], also from 1915, showed her in a strongly philanthropic and charitable light as a stabilising and enduring force, preserving France's integrity.



Figure 12: 'La France embrasse un mutilé', Théophile Steinlen-Alexandre, 1915



Figure 13: 'Pour les réfugiés de la Meuse', Théophile Steinlen-Alexandre, 1915

Rather like the way in which Jeanne d'Arc's regional origins provided a useful basis for the demonization of the German 'barbarian', offerings such as Steinlen-Alexandre's, of Marianne as the epitome of selfless, altruistic and patriotic virtue functioned as an antithesis to the enemy's fundamental inhumanity. This antithetical value emerged from Lucien Métivet's satirical vignette of Germania and Marianne, published in the April 1918 edition of *La Baïonnette* [figure 14] in the midst of the Ludendorff Offensive at a time when the German army was regarded as more bellicose than ever. Marianne appeared on the front cover illustration as beautiful, happy young woman alongside Germania, who was old, grumpy, and obese, her *pickelhaube* having been snatched from her by Marianne. The story inside 'Marianne et Germania: Histoire d'un bonnet et d'un casque', followed both symbols from their 'birth', through to the outbreak of war.

Marianne was consistently portrayed in the story as beautiful, feminine, youthful and virtuously virginal in rejecting various suitors. She was slim, received a well-rounded education and enjoyed the pleasures of life. Germania, on the other hand, was a grotesque baby, born in thick, round glasses and a *pickelhaube* helmet. She grew into a revolting old glutton, eating four meals in the evening, reading Schopenhauer and being less than picky about choosing a suitor. In the final part of Métivet's story, Germania was shown deceptively channelling national production into weaponry manufacture in order to ambush Marianne. But Marianne would seize her helmet in the end, as Métivet assured his readers.

At the end of her 1916 article on satirical representations of nation called 'La Femme en France: <<Germania>>',¹⁶⁴ Marguerite Boulenger examined the ways in which other nations, embodied as women, were represented in the European press more widely. She identified France, 'une jolie femme, qui ressemble fort à Marianne'.¹⁶⁵ In this example, Marianne's girlish, feminine traits were set up in strong opposition with Germania's shrew-like ugliness and greed. The particularities of Marianne's gender: femininity, beauty and youth, were called upon to mark her goodness, honesty, and integrity in order to further demonise the enemy.

¹⁶⁴ *Nouvelles de France*, 14 December 1916, p. 476.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*



Figure 14: Front cover of *La Baïonnette*, 18 April 1918

Although Marianne was largely used to represent various messages diffused by the patriarchal political echelon and was thus not entirely understood as being female, she was, like Jeanne, not exempt from attacks on the basis of gender, particularly if those reviewing her wartime presence in dominant discourses did not separate her allegorical significance from her potential to incite certain behaviours in individual French women. Eugène Pellissier's 1915 poem 'Le conscrit et le vétéran', published in his collection *Les Barbares*, provides a good example of anti-Republican sentiment in wartime cultural representation. Marianne was demonized in the poem during a conversation that took place between the elder and younger soldiers. She was described by them as having dragged France into the war, leaving her citizens exploited and helpless:

Entre nous on peut bien le dire,
 Fussions-nous dix fois plus nombreux
 Tant que cette gueuse respire,

Nous ne serons jamais heureux.¹⁶⁶

Therefore, as well as being celebrated in military or working roles, Marianne was also occasionally ridiculed in anti-Republican rhetoric, firstly as a means of reinforcing her powerlessness as a metaphor, and secondly, in order to make her look inept, revolting, or out of place in the body of a woman. Agulhon suggests that representations in the satirist press, for example, were almost more telling than official representations such as statues or busts in wartime. The latter merely depicted a noble Marianne, whereas the former added further dimensions to her appropriation.¹⁶⁷ Caricatures were more likely to reintroduce the Phrygian cap after it had been shunned in ‘official’ representations, for example, because there was less fear of an anti-revolutionary backlash to these particular representations.¹⁶⁸ For the most part, Agulhon explains, Marianne’s physical presentation provided clues as to the ideological origin of the producer: a beautiful and alluring female figure was the product of Republican discourses, whereas an ugly Marianne was the output of adversaries.¹⁶⁹ As this discussion has shown, such representations were mass-produced, and drawing conclusions about Marianne’s various appearances is still not a clear-cut process.

Wartime caricatures carried on the Belle-Époque tendency for negative depictions of Marianne in extreme-left or anarchist discourses by ridiculing her. Despite devoting themselves principally to the morale and support of French soldiers and thus presenting outward facing anti-German messages above all, representations of Marianne in magazines like *Le Rire rouge* still pushed a political message which criticized the Republic. Further, gender anxieties present in France during the war were also exposed alongside these political battles. On the front cover of the June 1916 edition of *La Baïonnette* [figure 15], for example, Marianne was depicted as a young girl, unsuitably dressed in tricolor skirt and heeled shoes, yet proposing to fight with a spear in her hand. She was also portrayed in Maurice Radiguet’s wartime drawing *Marianne et son 75*

¹⁶⁶ Eugène Pellissier *Les Barbares* (Paris: Jouve & Cie, 1915), p. 11.

¹⁶⁷ Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir*, p. 271.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

[figure 16], in charge of a 75mm field gun, sleeves rolled up and firing at a group of German soldiers, decipherable by the spikes of their *pickelhaubes*. But despite successfully fending off the enemy, she was misplaced in this role as she wore heeled shoes. Marianne's feminine appearance in both satirist sources suggested no adeptness at, and thus no threat to the masculine activity of war. They therefore immediately undermined the image of a militarized woman. This time, the markers of her gender, subtle additions to the overall message of the images, ultimately eroded the depiction of a woman attempting to offer a militarized contribution to the war effort. But, as with attempts to down-play Jeanne d'Arc's militarism, these images also exposed deep anxieties about militarized women in France and the threat that they would pose, in the minds of some observers, to male roles and, ultimately, to masculinity itself.¹⁷⁰ Even Marianne, so often a 'sexless' embodiment of nation, could not be seen to be crossing this line.



Figure 15: *La Baïonnette*, 29 June 1916

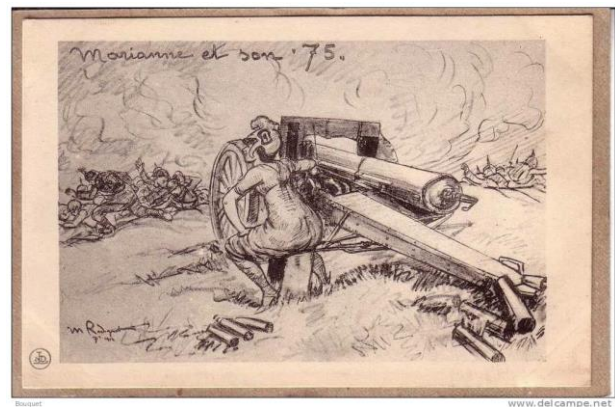


Figure 16: 'Marianne et son 75', Maurice Radiguet, 1915

¹⁷⁰ See Chapter Two for a full discussion of gender anxieties which prompted the exposure of certain women's roles, and the 'minimization' of others in dominant Belle-Époque and wartime discourses.

1.7 Conclusion

Jeanne d'Arc and Marianne were not the only prominent female myths to be called on as part of French cultural mobilization at the turn of the century, and into the First World War. Other allegories, and Greek and Roman goddesses, were also popularly 'resurrected'. For example, as part of the 1900 'Universal Exposition', the *Gare de Lyon* in Paris featured bas-reliefs of classical female figures such as sirens and allegories of Paris and Marseilles, as well as female nudes to symbolise the industrial and commercial significance of rail transport. Georges Récipon's sculpture of an ancient female figure riding a *quadriga* and holding an olive wreath on top of the *Grand Palais*, also built for the Exposition, was a further example of the popularity of the female body in Belle-Époque public imagery and architecture. Of course, allegories were also a preferred motif of war memorials. Odon Abbal's study of memorials in traditionally left-wing stronghold Hérault in the Languedoc-Roussillon between 1914 and 1918 for example, explores other representations of Republic embodied in female figures such as Victory.¹⁷¹ Abbal, in mentioning those female figures who are not decipherable as allegories, points out that many were used simply to convey humanity, grief, mourning, calm and piety as a reminder that, for a large number of French people, the post-war period was not about glory but about loss and irreversible upset.

Another popular female figure deployed in representations of the same period was the Virgin Mary. As the Marquise de la Franquerie explains in *La Vierge Marie dans l'histoire de France*, she appeared after the Franco-Prussian War as protector of Lorraine on many religious monuments and objects produced at the time. Her restorative power continued to be evoked throughout the war, when various plaques, ceremonies and monuments were erected in her honour, in the hope that history would not repeat itself.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ Odon Abbal, *Les Monuments aux morts de l'Hérault, 1914-1918* (Montpellier: UMR 5609 du CNRS, Université Paul Valéry-Montpellier 3, 1998), p.66.

¹⁷² Marquise de la Franquerie, *La Vierge Marie dans l'histoire de France* (Cadillac: Groupe Saint-Rémi, 2005).

It is important, finally, to note the potential for Marianne and Jeanne to morph with these other myths and symbols of female heroism or embodiments of nation, depending on the contexts in which they were evoked. Abbal, for example, draws on Injalbert's statue of the Republic as a giant, bare-breasted woman holding a laurel wreath to the sky and piercing a German helmet with her sword, which was reminiscent of some of the more explicitly identifiable depictions of Marianne. Another example was a New Year postcard [figure 17] from 1916 showing a female figure in Grecian dress, holding an olive branch, with one breast bared. She represented a pictorial and symbolic merging of Marianne and Athena. But Jeanne was also shown with olive wreaths, particularly on coins from the turn of the century, and could equally be represented as an amalgam of herself and the goddess of war. Representations of female bodies thus did not always provide a straightforward basis for interpretation, as this chapter has acknowledged.



Figure 17: New Year postcard, January 1916

The use and appropriation of the Marianne and Jeanne's 'cults' in the French Belle-Époque and the First World War depended on who was appropriating them and for what reason. Their differing representations as part of peace- and wartime cultural mobilization therefore reflected some of France's most topical political and social values. For most, Jeanne was an exceptional, Athena-like icon of national and regional pride and military triumph in times of strife and in response to the barbarity of enemy forces. At times, she was also a shepherdess whose militarism gave way to gentle, feminine and reliable innocence. Marianne had significant metamorphic value, as a leader, a military figure, a

worker, a mother and a girl. And, as this chapter has shown, the most popularly diffused guises of both role models were subject to the subversion. Whichever way they were interpreted, those who consumed their image, whether on posters, sculpture and artwork, or in novels and plays and poetry, were being encouraged at times of political turmoil or conflict and hardship to emulate these models hailing from inspirational ancient eras. They had the potential to reassure people, encouraging them to find in themselves the same levels of bravery and fearlessness.

But there were more complex forces governing the dissemination of their images both before and during the war. These included responses to the political ideology that they endorsed; manipulation within the substrata of such ideology; the need to simplify or clearly define associated allegorical symbols such as Marianne's cap; and backlashes or adaptations to the markers of gender. Joan B. Landes' study of public female embodiments of nation in eighteenth-century France highlights the fact that very little had changed since the revolutionary age, when the female body as nation was both suspect *and* useful as an idol which persuaded men to devote themselves to her, and when 'images', could 'just as often make trouble, disrupt as well as secure desired identifications'.¹⁷³ The interpretive status quo for icons like Marianne and Jeanne d'Arc, by the time the First World War was underway, revealed similarly ambiguous and sometimes contradictory conjectures about these public female role models. The social and political landscape in which they appeared would, in turn, also significantly impact on representations and ideals concerning French women in the Belle-Époque and the First World War. This is the subject of the chapter which follows.

¹⁷³ Joan B. Landes, *Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 1.

Chapter Two

‘Guardians of Morality’: Images of Bourgeois Female Heroism in Belle Époque and First World War France.

This chapter examines shifts in the representation of conservative middle-class womanhood in France from the Belle-Époque to the First World War. The discussion observes the ways in which the turn of the century was a time of political and social change which had a distinct impact on gender discourses. Whilst conservative ideals of female conduct were still upheld in the late 1800s, they were also beginning to give way to more radical and divisive feminist ideals such as the cultural phenomenon and literary figure known as the ‘New Woman’. This development was halted with the advent of the First World War, so that traditional women’s roles were re-instated after 1914, and even more so after 1916, as a means of gender jurisdiction during the socially destabilising era of occupation and conflict. In other words, normative ideas about how a woman should behave and where she should operate were systematically implemented in order to re-enforce a wider sense of social stability. As such, conservative bourgeois womanhood, historically defined in relation to maternity, domesticity and femininity, and having evolved briefly to occasionally incorporate more radical feminist ideals towards the turn of the century, was re-instated once more as a deeply heroic wartime role, attached to wider, universal notions of wartime heroism, such as patriotism, and sacrifice.

Ideals of conservative bourgeois womanhood throughout this chapter, as well as reactions to more radical projections of femininity, are understood to have been engineered according to the kind of ‘repressive hypothesis’ that Michel Foucault defined in his 1976 essay *L’Histoire de la sexualité*. Foucault defined the hypothesis as a rationale of ‘traditional’ sexuality which was circulated in order ‘to ensure population, to reproduce labor capacity, to perpetuate the form of social relations: in short, to constitute a sexuality

that is economically useful and politically conservative'.¹⁷⁴ Underpinning the argument in this chapter is therefore the theory that hegemonic messages about the importance of traditional gender roles sought to regulate women's lives for a variety of reasons throughout the period in question.

Class is of particular significance in a discussion of conservative ideals of womanhood both before and during the war, because the factors that qualified the 'brand' of wartime female heroism that is presented in this chapter were almost uniquely embodied by middle-class women. They were predominant in the home as mother-educators, and they epitomised the middle class preoccupation with Christian morality. They were also able to 'feminize' themselves better than working women, because they had access to wealth and the outside pursuit of consumerism, where they could find clothing and novel beauty products and could frequent *grands magasins* as well as private couturiers.

Equally, however, French women from the leisured classes at the turn of the century were those believed to represent the biggest threat to social order. The ease with which some bourgeois women were beginning to opt for a public as well as a domestic life meant that they were more socially 'visible' and, thanks to their new found access to formal secondary education, could exercise increasing influence. Added to this was the fact that it was largely middle class women who were represented in the growing feminist movement. Their image therefore came to be modified by those with more radical views on their position in Belle-Epoque society. Therefore, although bourgeois womanhood still had its roots in tradition and was easily re-visited and heroised during the war, its potential as a subversive social 'condition' also explains the emergence of the 'New Woman' profile by the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, 'The History of Sexuality', trans. by Robert Hurley, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed by Leitch, V.B. et al. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001), pp. 1648-1659, p.1659.

¹⁷⁵ The 'New Woman' phenomenon did not originate in France, and is understood to be a late nineteenth-century international feminist ideal, with endorsement from American, German, British and French thinkers. The term had been in use since 1894 and was believed to have been introduced by Irish writer Sarah Grand in her article entitled 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question'.

However, from 1905 onwards when French nationalism intensified and attempts to quell fears about a threatened social order were crucial, it is unsurprising that the majority of the dominant ‘traditionalising’ messages in circulation began to comment with even more intent on the qualities of bourgeois femininity. Introducing the idea that messages about women’s roles and duties extended beyond the allegorical or representational figures of Marianne and Jeanne d’Arc discussed in chapter one, this chapter maps the shift in dominant cultural images of bourgeois women, from staple female archetype or radical ‘New Woman’, both of which gave way to wartime representations of the bourgeois woman as national hero.

2.1 Archetypal Bourgeois Womanhood in the Belle-Epoque

By the late 1800s, French society had upheld a long-established and gendered system of ‘liberal’ honour.¹⁷⁶ Although honour was historically a male concept, female honour was recognised in French society but, as Andrea Mansker argues, it was a ‘domestic and passive form of honour rooted in their sexual virtue’,¹⁷⁷ only exercised in the bourgeois home, and was therefore limited to the particularities of gender. Mary Louise Roberts draws our attention to the nineteenth-century bourgeois embodiment of this domestic female honour: ‘the self-sacrificing ‘angel of the house’ who slavishly devoted herself to the maintenance of her home and the nurturance of her husband and children’.¹⁷⁸ Republican discourses deemed the differentiation of female honour a ‘natural fact’; and a fact that apparently justified the barring of women’s access to political equality.¹⁷⁹

The quality of knowing and doing what was morally right was a key part of conducting oneself honourably as a French woman when this traditional ‘code of honor’ had been

¹⁷⁶ Mary Louise Roberts offers up a definition of ‘liberal’ in the context of ideologies of womanhood, stating that the term ‘indicates the more general assumptions, ideals, and values of the moderate middle classes dominating French culture by the 1890s’. *Disruptive Acts*, p. 4.

¹⁷⁷ Andrea Mansker, “‘Mademoiselle Arria Ly Wants Blood!’: The Debate over Female Honour in Belle Epoque France”, *French Historical Studies* 29:4 (Autumn 2006), pp. 621-47, p.623.

¹⁷⁸ Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing gender in postwar France, 1917-1927* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 8.

¹⁷⁹ Robert A. Nye, ‘Review of Andrea Mansker, Sex, Honor and Citizenship in Early Third Republic France’, *H-France Review* 12:85 (July 2012), p.p. 1-4, p.1.

under threat from ‘a host of democratising forces’ throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁸⁰ In the face of threat, the ‘angels of the house’ were thought of as ‘guardians of morality’.¹⁸¹ As well as being products of an unstable political and social climate in Europe at this time, male and female honour occupied distinctly different positions in society. This difference in social positions reflected beliefs about women’s identities; their ‘biological and social’ standing, their representative worth as ‘symbols’ of family virtue, their ‘sexual virtue’, their defencelessness and dependency, their non-citizen status, and their natural capacity for self-sacrifice and peacefulness. All of this was opposed to a ‘physical capacity for violence’ on which male honour invariably centred.¹⁸²

Perhaps the most powerful quality possessed by a bourgeois woman, according to nineteenth and early twentieth-century ideology, was potential or realised maternity. Becoming a mother was regarded as the pinnacle of a woman’s life because it enabled her to adopt a pure and ‘natural’ nurturing and caring role which did not require her to take part in public affairs. A pro-natalist agenda, dating back to the seventeenth century with Louis XIV’s 1666 policy, tells us much about the extent of depopulation fears, and implemented women in the overall success or failure of population growth.¹⁸³ In the light of this agenda, nineteenth-century messages endorsing motherhood worked hard to suggest that they were more than capable of achieving success. Thus, maternalist discourses provide us with a good example of the ideological manipulation of women’s honour in the name of the French family which was motivated by wider social concerns.

Along with motherhood and domesticity, middle-class femininity and beauty played a role in pre-war constructions of ‘ideal’ womanhood. The Belle-Epoque was known as the

¹⁸⁰ Mansker, p. 623.

¹⁸¹ Susan Grayzel, ‘Changing lives: gender expectations and roles during and after World War One’, British Library website, <<http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/changing-lives-gender-expectations>> [accessed 29 April 2015].

¹⁸² Mansker, p. 623.

¹⁸³ Leslie Tuttle, *Conceiving the Old Regime: Pronatalism and the Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

‘beautiful age’,¹⁸⁴ when the foundations of ‘beauty culture’ were first laid.¹⁸⁵ Largely the preserve of the middle and upper classes, beauty and fashion were large-scale industries by this point. The fruits of such industries were presented in imagery as a uniquely female preoccupation. Cosmetics boutiques could increasingly be seen on the *grands boulevards* of Paris, and bourgeois French women were creating *cabinets de toilettes* in their homes as spaces designed for beautifying oneself. An article in one of several nineteenth-century fashion and beauty periodicals,¹⁸⁶ *L’Illustrateur des dames et des demoiselles* reviewed *L’Art de la Toilette* by fashion expert Mademoiselle Mariette and suggested that the book successfully instructed women from lower social classes to emulate the ‘art de la toilette’ of the society lady.¹⁸⁷ Finally, in the Belle-Epoque consumerism became ‘democratized’ with the birth of the *grands magasins*.¹⁸⁸

As Paula J. Martin points out in her biography of plastic surgeon Suzanne Noël, the concept of beauty had occupied a significant place in French society for hundreds of years.¹⁸⁹ Martin notes that female beauty became more prescriptive in the early years of the twentieth century, alongside the growth of advertising and marketing campaigns which encouraged women to aspire to a particularly conventional image of femininity. She also attributes the interest in female attractiveness at this time to developments in science and medicine, which began to posit anthropological ideals of body composition, youth and beauty, such as facial symmetry. Finally, she points out that expectations of

¹⁸⁴ Claude Conyers, ‘Courtesans in Dance History: Les Belles de la Belle Époque’, *Dance Chronicle*, 26 :2, (2003), pp. 219-43, p. 219.

¹⁸⁵ Paula J. Martin, *Suzanne Noël: Cosmetic Surgery, Feminism and Beauty in Early Twentieth-Century France* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p.35.

¹⁸⁶ Others included *La Mode de Paris*, *L’Illustrateur des Dames*, *La Mode Universelle* and *La Mode pour tous*.

¹⁸⁷ *L’Illustrateur des dames et des demoiselles*, 1861, <<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k852271s/f12.image.r=L'Illustrateur%20des%20dames%20et%20des%20demoiselles>> [accessed 24 May 2016].

¹⁸⁸ Robert D. Tamilia *The Wonderful World of the Department Store in Historical Perspective: A Comprehensive International Bibliography Partially Annotated*, <<http://faculty.quinnipiac.edu/charm/dept.store.pdf>> [accessed 21 May 2015], p. 5.

¹⁸⁹ Martin, p.35.

the female body were dictated by advancements in fashion and the increasing number of opportunities that women had to buy fashionable clothing.¹⁹⁰

Writing in 1886, Fashion journalist Octave Uzanne praised the French fashion industry for concerning itself with ‘toutes parts de l’art de la femme; tout ce qui peut concourir à sa grâce, à la beauté de ses formes, aux charmes de son visage’.¹⁹¹ Fashion historian Valerie Steele argues that representations of femininity like Uzanne’s, manifest in fashion from 1880 to 1914,¹⁹² ‘fetishized’ the woman ‘as an art object’, which, when clothed in a prescribed ‘feminine’ manner, ‘transformed herself into a new sort of being, half doll, half idol’;¹⁹³ ‘an expensive and desirable object’.¹⁹⁴ In other images of women, such as the popular posters from the 1890s that American historian Annemarie Springer analyses, much influence was taken from artists like Botticelli, and the Pre-Raphaelite movement, and thus the ‘medieval look’;¹⁹⁵ ‘blonde and blue-eyed with long hair, slender necks and oval faces, small breasts, and thin, elongated limbs’ was prevalent.¹⁹⁶ This particular brand of feminine beauty was often related to virginity and other worldliness,¹⁹⁷ in line with ‘bourgeois morality’, which, according to Springer, ‘required that animal instincts be suppressed in favor of purity of the soul’.¹⁹⁸ Representations of femininity and beauty were thus a means of encouraging women to occupy visually appropriate roles, and further solidified traditional images of women in the mind of those perceiving them.

Steele’s discussion of the wearing of lingerie provides a good example. She explains that even dressing in lingerie, which could give women an opportunity to express their

¹⁹⁰ Martin, p.36.

¹⁹¹ Octave Uzanne, *La française du siècle : modes, moeurs, usages* (Paris: A. Quantin, 1886) p. 270.

¹⁹² Valerie Steele, ‘Femme Fatale: Fashion and Visual Culture in Fin-de-siècle Paris’, *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, 8:3 (2004), pp.315-328, p. 316.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.319.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

¹⁹⁵ Annemarie Springer, ‘Some Images of Women in French Posters of the 1890s’, *Art Journal*, 33: 2 (1973), pp. 116-124, p. 117.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.119-20.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

sexuality and femininity, when done in the private sphere became part of a domestic role, enabling wives to be ‘not only a homemaker but also a lover’.¹⁹⁹ The ways in which the sexually liberating act of wearing lingerie was subverted so as to represent dutiful and domestic purpose was proof of attempts to instate traditional bourgeois womanhood at this time.

On the topic of women’s fashion, cultural historian Rachel Mesch gives the example of a return to a new ‘gentler, healthier’ *Fourreau-Corset de la Faculté* invented by Madame Desbruères and advertised in a 1911 edition of *La Vie Heureuse*. The corset embodied a mix of traditionalism and modern progress when it came to French women’s physicality, and the advert promised to conserve elegance whilst making life generally more comfortable, and preventing the internal organs from being harmed.²⁰⁰ This particular design feature would have appeased widespread natality fears and developing preoccupations with women’s reproductive health, already manifest in publications like the 1897 *Académie de Médecine’s Annales de gynécologie et d’obstétrique : maladies des femmes, accouchements* which cited ‘l’action désastreuse’ and ‘compressive du corset’ in pregnancy.²⁰¹ Women who wore the *Fourreau-Corset de la Faculté* were thus seen to be conserving their beauty and femininity whilst being more mindful of their procreative faculties.

Dressmaking and embroidery trends took influence from nature, drawing associations between the domestic and pastoral, and the serenity, authenticity and virginity of the women who wore the pieces. Aesthetic markers such as fur, long skirts and cinched waistlines emphasised womanliness and respectability. But mostly, women’s fashion was viewed as an exceptional and ‘safe’ means with which women might express themselves. Along these lines, Steele states that ‘men reassured themselves that fashion was the art of

¹⁹⁹ Steele, p.323.

²⁰⁰ Rachel Mesch, ‘Having It All. In France. 100 Years Ago’, <http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2012/09/having_it_all_in_belle_poque_france_how_magazines_remade_the_modern_woman_.html> [accessed 24 May 2016].

²⁰¹ *Annales de gynécologie et d’obstétrique: maladies des femmes, accouchements*, ed. by Drs Paul Jules Tillaux, Adolphe Pinard and Félix Louis Terrier (Paris: G. Steinheil, 1897), p.80.

being feminine, uniting love and beauty'.²⁰² Thus, beauty and femininity were key concepts in dominant discourses which sought to define or construct bourgeois womanhood.

In sum, traditionalist gender re-assertions in the Belle-Epoque were widespread and centred on concepts of gendered honour, domesticity, femininity and beauty. Female honour was exercised in the home, and femininity was best embodied in traditional images of women as mothers and wives in domestic roles. Although these re-assertions seemed to constitute a backward step for those trying to promote the idea of a 'New Woman',²⁰³ appearing as they did to re-situate women in the domiciliary sphere where their role was passive, such messages would go on to represent a key foundation for the evolution of 'everyday' heroism in wartime, which acknowledged and was embodied in women who merely did their duty, without going beyond it.

2.2 Progressive Representations of Bourgeois Womanhood in the Belle-Epoque

Although it provides us with a definition of the repressive hypothesis, Foucault's 1976 essay sought to dispute its power in nineteenth-century France. The essay claimed that 'peripheral sexualities' came to the fore and were 'listened to' over the century.²⁰⁴ In presenting the 'disruptive acts' of several 'highly visible women' who 'discarded the script for orthodox gender roles by mimicking masculine behavior',²⁰⁵ Mary Louise Roberts' 2002 book *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-Siècle France*, supports Foucault's stance. Roberts' work argues that 'New Women' such as Marguerite Durand or Sarah Bernhardt proved that there was an alternative to domesticity. In operating on the periphery of 'normal' womanhood, women like them successfully rejected normative expectations, in pursuit of a life outside the private sphere.

²⁰² Steele, p.327.

²⁰³ Such as those promoting the 'New Woman' ideal.

²⁰⁴ Foucault, p.1660.

²⁰⁵ Lenard R. Berlanstein, 'Ready for Progress? Opinion Surveys on Women's Roles and Opportunities in Belle Epoque France', *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 27:1 (Spring 2009), pp. 1-22, p. 1.

In opposition to mainstream conservative views on female honour which linked it to domesticity, in endorsing the 'New Woman', feminist figures 'appropriated male discourses of honor', developing and extending the influence of contemporary, traditional ideals of womanhood in order to promote her wider role in society, rather than insisting on her reputation in the home.²⁰⁶ Official reports of an extra-parliamentary commission which was established in 1903 to revise the French regulatory administration showed the commission's only female member, feminist, abolitionist and organiser of the *Conseil National des Femmes Françaises*, Avril de Sainte-Croix, encouraging public debate on prostitution and gender roles. Sainte-Croix used her position to express the wide-reaching impact of female honour in French society as part of the proceedings. Appealing implicitly to those who were critical of 'double standards' in bourgeois marriage, but speaking explicitly on the grounds of national health and family honour, she advanced that women carried out a heroic patriotic duty as guardians of the home in peacetime, when their husbands were dishonourably indulging in prostitution in the public sphere, potentially passing on venereal disease. For the feminist camp, 'the women who demanded their husbands' respect, loyalty, and sexual fidelity were defenders of the honour of the family and could lay claim to equal, if not superior, moral status' as the men who visited brothels.²⁰⁷ No doubt influenced by the themes set out in works of fiction by European writers like Irish feminist Sarah Grand, Sainte-Croix's appeals were accompanied by the attempts of other women to seek 'restitution from men who had impregnated them', on the basis of sexual autonomy.²⁰⁸

Máire Cross explains that the discussion of political affairs in Marguerite Durand's 1897-founded feminist newspaper *La Fronde*, which was created and published by a team of women, was further proof that 'women were implicated in public debate and no longer

²⁰⁶ Datta, p. 17.

²⁰⁷ Nye, p.4.

²⁰⁸ Datta, p.17.

marginalised'.²⁰⁹ Individuals such as suffragist Hubertine Auclert had publicly campaigned for maternal instinct to be recognised as the honourable saviour of the French nation in her 1885 *Programme électorale des femmes*.²¹⁰ And more moderate feminists like *Femina* journalist Junia, similarly believed in 'privileging domesticity' but, in turn, 'opening opportunities for the exceptional women who could not or would not conform'.²¹¹

Though it was widely argued by moderate feminists that a woman's moral and physical qualities lent themselves to motherhood,²¹² they tended to reject messages that suggested maternity was the only way that women could shape and influence future generations. Instead, inferences of a wider social function were made with an ultimate view to increasing their involvement in political life. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, in their chapter on women's contributions to European welfare states, explore early twentieth-century moderate feminist ideas which drew on the further-reaching social impact of women's maternal capacity, beyond the private sphere. Of 'middle-class women who were free from domestic drudgery and had the educational and financial resources to campaign for social welfare programs and policies',²¹³ Koven and Michel argue that their 'maternalist discourses' which focussed on 'women's capacity to mother' actually aimed 'the values of care, nurturance, and morality' at society more generally, and 'often

²⁰⁹ Máire Fedelma Cross, 'La Fronde: Fin de siècle feminism at the dawn of a new era', in *New Perspectives on the Fin De Siècle in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century France*, ed. by Kay Chadwick and Timothy Unwin (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), pp. 95-117, p. 104.

²¹⁰ Jane Freedman, 'Fin de siècle feminism: The mouvement pour la parité', in *New Perspectives on the Fin de siècle In Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century France*, Ed. By Kay Chadwick and Timothy Unwin (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), P.82.

²¹¹ Berlanstein, p. 16.

²¹² There were exceptions to this argument however, particularly in the socialist feminist camp. Madeleine Pelletier, for example, fully endorsed birth control. And in her 1911 work *L'Emancipation sexuelle de la femme*, (Paris: M. Giard & E. Brière, 1911) chapter three is entitled 'Le droit à l'avortement'.

²¹³ Seth Koven, and Sonya Michel, 'Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States, 1880-1920', *American Historical Review*, 95: 4 (Oct. 1990) pp. 1076-1108, p.1078.

challenged the constructed boundaries between public and private, women and men, state and civil society'.²¹⁴

It was precisely women's influence in bourgeois marriage, both privately and publicly, that Avril de St. Croix had been campaigning for when it came to female honour in the face of male promiscuity. That traditional arguments about maternity and womanhood were at the root of these feminist discourses showed how important typically 'feminine' attributes were in any attempt to prove that women were suitable for public and legislative influence in the pre-war era.

The concepts of beauty and femininity were also used a 'way in' for the dissemination of feminist messages about women's political or social potential. *Femina*, a bi-monthly magazine with a wealthy upper-class readership from Paris which originally aligned itself with 'the feminine movement',²¹⁵ often featured articles on beauty, fashion and celebrity. Ideas about femininity published in magazines like *Femina* did not restrict its influence to the home. Like Sainte-Croix's ideas about honour and Auclert's concern with maternity, the magazine urged middle-class women to maintain their womanliness, but also to aspire to have roles outside of the home. Even visual representations of more 'modern women' produced by feminists in a similar publication, *La Vie Heureuse*, placed much emphasis on the ways in which such women elegantly and gracefully conserved their femininity, despite taking on less conservative roles, including the pursuit of sport.²¹⁶

As well as couching messages about more influential and progressive 'new' womanhood in the discourse of traditional bourgeois women's roles, some commentators posed a more direct challenge to convention. The visual markers of conservative bourgeois womanhood

²¹⁴ Ibid., p.1079.

²¹⁵ According to Lenard Berlanstein this was done for fear of association with feminism, which, Editor Pierre Lafitte believed his readers might associate with 'a dangerous effacement of sexual difference', Berlanstein, p. 3.

²¹⁶ Mesch,

<http://www.slate.com/articles/double_x/doublex/2012/09/having_it_all_in_belle_poque_france_how_magazines_remade_the_modern_woman_.html> [accessed 24 May 2016].

on popular posters from the 1890s which depicted virtuous, neo-classical, doll-like figures could be seen alongside more sexualised and less ‘chaste’ images of womanhood on promotional posters for entertainment establishments like the *Folies-Bergère* music hall, for example. Other artistic representations of bourgeois women hinted at a desire for autonomy outside of the traditionally established parameters of womanhood. Annemarie Springer’s suggestion that such decadent depictions of women titillated and shocked but, by their very nature, still remained ‘veiled’ and ‘unreal’; unable to ‘offend’,²¹⁷ does not take away from the fact that sexualised women, portrayed outside of the domestic sphere, appearing vainly interested in their appearances and frivolously enjoying the single life, threatened to subvert more conservative profiles of women as virtuous home-makers, wives and mothers.

In addition, as well as insisting on the conventional aspects of bourgeois womanhood, the fashion industry sometimes encouraged ‘alternative’ modes of femininity. Not only were women themselves seen to take great pleasure in developing a means of self-expression and individuality through fashion,²¹⁸ but designers also encouraged an enthusiasm for fashion and thus a ‘negligent’ feminine interest in something other than their traditional role, annexed to the men in their lives.²¹⁹ Decadent couture pieces, for example, subverted ‘natural’ design and instead projected what was a threatening image to some, ‘of the fashionable woman as externalized surface without organic interiority’, and thus without the traditional markers of virtue, honesty and maternity.²²⁰ Some clothing design was believed to boost a bourgeois woman’s growing freedom,²²¹ and was ‘threatening in conjunction with her (perceived) growing social power’, thus provoking an uneasy reaction in observers.²²² And the popularity of capes and feathers in the early 1900s gave

²¹⁷ Springer, p.117.

²¹⁸ Steele, p.327.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.322.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.325.

²²¹ Greg Buzwell, ‘Daughters of decadence: the New Woman in the Victorian fin de siècle’, *British Library Online*, <<http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/daughters-of-decadence-the-new-woman-in-the-victorian-fin-de-siecle#authorBlock1>> [accessed 20 May 2016].

²²² Steele, p.324.

the impression of flight, and symbolised a desire to escape from the social constraints that underpinned traditional notions of bourgeois womanhood.²²³

2.3 Rising Nationalism and the Re-instatement of the *Femme au Foyer* Role Model

The period from 1905 onwards represented a turning point in the production of these ‘new’ images and messages about bourgeois womanhood which had been evolving alongside the feminist goals of the time. Events in the run up to the war such as the 1905 First Moroccan Crisis and the resignation of Théophile Delcassé triggered a nationalist revival in France.²²⁴ Henri Poincaré’s reaction promoted national pride, and appealed for “‘national union” on behalf of the social status quo’.²²⁵ As part of this period of heightened nationalism, traditional social norms became embedded more firmly than ever as a means of establishing stability and order.

Even though the ‘New Woman’ figure had only just begun to be more prominent by this point, radical examples which posed a serious threat to gender norms were targeted and suppressed as part of the nationalist revival. As much as projected images of unpopular feminists and ‘New Women’ like Madeleine Pelletier and Jane Dieulafoy were quashed, and feminism embodied in a ‘cigar-smoking Amazon who neglected her children for her weekly feminist meetings’, was instead presented once more in the press, literature and propaganda, as a worrying projection of femininity.²²⁶

Lenard R. Berlanstein draws effectively on the impact of the nationalist revival on discourses of gender in his article on opinion surveys in *Femina*. He focuses on one particular survey from 1911, in which the readership was asked the following questions: ‘Given the state of our society, do you think that it is proper for a young woman to seek the highest university degrees? If a woman obtains the highest degrees, should she be

²²³ Springer, p.121.

²²⁴ Weber.

²²⁵ David E. Sumler, ‘Domestic Influences on the Nationalist Revival in France, 1909-1914’, *French Historical Studies*, 6: 4 (Autumn 1970), pp. 517-537, p. 537.

²²⁶ Mansker, p. 638.

eligible to teach in a lycée for boys?’.²²⁷ This was a topical issue at the time, because the Rouvière sisters had very recently gained access to higher education at the *École normale supérieure* and the *École polytechnique* thanks to their excellent academic results. Berlanstein’s presentation of the survey’s findings shows that the majority of those who answered the questions were not in favour of women accessing higher education and teaching roles. He points out that the outcome was surprising given the enthusiasm communicated by earlier surveys which had shown the readership to be in support of the concept of women occupying other new roles such as professionals or sportspeople.

Berlanstein suggests that the 1911 survey was rigged in line with increased nationalism, and cites the Second Moroccan Crisis as a further event in the nationalist revival which took place between the survey questions being released and the results being published. In order to appear patriotic, the editorial board at *Femina* sought to publish only results that were seen to support social order and which ‘went against the grain of the new construction of femininity’ that had been slowly built by the magazine up until that point.²²⁸ That which Berlanstein deems the suppression of enthusiastic responses to the prospect of more progressive women’s roles in the 1911 survey and the reasons that he gives for this, show that conscious efforts were made in the run up to the First World War in France to re-establish the status quo when it came to ‘proper patriotic attitudes’, gender being tightly encompassed in these attitudes.²²⁹ It also shows that an unstable political climate, and the need to unite as a nation were key factors provoking the re-imposition of cultural traditions, even by more progressive ideologies such as feminism.

2.5 Wartime heroisations of bourgeois womanhood

When the war broke out, nationalist discourse implied that every French person was required to be a hero. For this reason wartime demands dictated a return to tradition, and a process of heroisation re-visited and re-affirmed patriarchal ideals of gender which did not threaten social order at a time when attention needed to be directed to an external

²²⁷ Berlanstein, p. 12.

²²⁸ Berlanstein, p. 13.

²²⁹ Ibid.

enemy, rather than an internal menace such as the changing image of womanhood. Described by Mary Louise Roberts as the ‘historical roots’ of post-war gender anxieties, the promotion of traditional ideals of womanhood during the conflict itself were derived from feelings of masculine ‘exile’ by men sent away to the front, and male self-consciousness about the significance of changes in women’s lives because of the war. The outcome was the perception of a ‘collapse of conventional gender roles’,²³⁰ and a general sense of fear about the collapse of ‘civilisation’ itself given how important ordered gender roles were believed to be in the upholding of wider social structures in France.²³¹ Among the multiple manifestations of these fears was the belittling of munitions workers with the diminutive nickname, *munitionettes*, and the framing of their characters as rapacious and mercenary as discussed in chapter three. Another example of this was the wartime demonizing of female spies as sexually threatening and suspicious, as discussed in chapter four.

Any women’s role which occupied a prominent position in war culture exposed the ‘crisis-prone’ side of hegemonic masculinity.²³² Alongside Roberts’ work, Francis Dupuis-Déri’s scholarship on discourses of masculinity in crisis feeds into the hegemonic masculinity framework because it suggests that evidence of male anxieties revealed a direct response to potential gender equality brought about by women’s more ‘visible’ social and civic roles in wartime: ‘La <<crise de la masculinité>> participe d’un refus de la part des hommes de l’égalité et de leur reaffirmation de l’importance d’une différence hiérarchique entre les sexes’.²³³ Dupuis-Déri argues that the crisis reflected ‘une stratégie

²³⁰ Roberts, *Civilization without sexes*, p. 8-9.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 7. Such a collapse of civilisation had also been the feared implication of women achieving full citizenship at the turn of the century because, as Jane Freedman argues, ‘real equality between the sexes would efface the necessary distinction between men and women and would lead to confusion between the masculine and the feminine’. Jane Freedman, ‘Fin de siècle feminism: The *mouvement pour la parité*’, in *New Perspectives on the Fin De Siècle in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century France*, Ed. by Kay Chadwick and Timothy Unwin (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), pp. 75-95. The same fears carried over into wartime.

²³² Donaldson, p. 645.

²³³ Francis Dupuis-Déri, ‘Le Discours de la <<crise de masculinité>> comme refus de l’égalité’, *Recherches féministes*, 25:1 (2012), pp. 89-109, p. 92.

de défense de l'«ordre social patriarcal»»,²³⁴ and was often accompanied by a further strategy to try to minimize the activity of women who sought to have a more prominent role, blaming them for the destabilizing impact that this was believed to have had on masculinity.²³⁵

Middle class women, the subject of this chapter, were suspected of being responsible for what were seen as troublesome shifts in bourgeois respectability, enjoying a busier social calendar during the war and thus not always being concerned with 'keeping the home fires burning' for their absent men.²³⁶ In the same way that visual projections of femininity and beauty had been a cause for concern in the pre-war era, bourgeois women in particular were suspected of being self-interested, frivolous and indifferent if they paid too much attention to their appearance.²³⁷ A 1917 postcard [figure 18] showing 'les modes de guerre' featured illustrations of a Red Cross nurse and two working women, in opposition with two fashionable society ladies. The former women were given the subtitle 'celles qui se tiennent', whilst the latter two were called 'celles qui tiennent', highlighting the difference between those who took up their wartime duty and those who were concerned about being seen 'fagotées à la mode de 1913', as the caption stated. The 1916 *Rêves de guerre: une femme de France à ses soeurs françaises*, by pseudonymed writer Nadine, was mildly critical of bourgeois women's beautiful, opulent appearances, their love of fragrance, clothing, and entertainment. The book appealed to this frivolity, addressing 'vous, jolies filles de vingt ans, pour qui le rire est la vie' and advising that such girls heeded the solemnity of war and the heroism of those fighting it: 'vous ne devez pas oublier non plus ceux qui sont morts pour défendre vos blanches chambres...'.²³⁸

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 93.

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 97.

²³⁶ Margaret Darrow, 'French Volunteer Nursing and the Myth of War Experience in World War I', *American Historical Review*, 101:1 (February 1996), pp.80-106, p. 82.

²³⁷ Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p. 64 and p. 68.

²³⁸ Pseud. Nadine, *Rêves de guerre: une femme de France à ses soeurs françaises* (Paris: E. Aubin, 1916), p. 18.



Figure 18: 'Les Modes de guerre', postcard, 1917

The stereotype of inappropriate light-mindedness was commented on outside of France too. American writer Gertrude Atherton explained in 1917 that 'the average American woman [...] is firm in the belief that all French women are permanently occupied with fashions or intrigue'.²³⁹ Despite many commentators heroising bourgeois women's tendency towards wartime philanthropy, this too was the subject of criticism. On the basis of class injustice, for example, Edith Wharton bemoaned 'the silly idiot women who have turned their drawing-rooms into hospitals (at great expense), and are now making shirts for the wounded', thereby 'robbing the poor stranded *ouvrières* of their only means of living'.²⁴⁰ However, the impact of these wartime gender anxieties on the image and representation of middle-class women did not always precipitate slanderous discourses as they did in the case of the other female war roles discussed in chapters three and four. The purpose of the discussion that follows is to show that in response, the social and sexual norms attached to what was understood as 'true' and traditional bourgeois womanhood were shored up and heroised, as part of an insistence that those who embodied these norms should remain 'exactly as they were'.²⁴¹

²³⁹ Atherton, p. xi.

²⁴⁰ Dwight, Eleanor, *Edith Wharton: An Extraordinary Life* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), p.183.

²⁴¹ Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p. 64.

As becomes clear from a reading of studies like Berlanstein's, the re-visiting of more conservative ideals of womanhood in the immediate run up and during the war was not on the wartime agenda of the hegemony alone. Alison Fell and Ingrid Sharp suggest that 'the vast majority of French feminists put their campaign for women's suffrage aside in order to concentrate their efforts on patriotic and charitable activities to aid the war effort'.²⁴² Womanly ideals like maternalism were found more explicitly at the forefront of feminist discourse,²⁴³ and were summed up with one of the mainstream feminist arguments at the time: 'La maternité ne doit jamais abdiquer'.²⁴⁴ Figures like journalist and vice-president of the *Union Française pour le Suffrage des Femmes*, Jane Misme, stressed the importance of the home and the hearth, and the safety of the mother's love and care particularly during this time of threatened abnormality.

Behind the scenes, Fell and Sharp argue, the campaigns, seen to be promoting 'dominant expectations of women', were sometimes doing so in order to continue advancing 'their own cause'.²⁴⁵ Therefore, the same conservative ideals of womanhood also became the tools of the feminist campaign, which was prepared to push its visible suffrage goals to one side, and to retract more radical projections like the phenomenon of the 'New Woman', all in favour of being seen to support national unity in conflict. The intention was that this support might earn them their objectives in the long run. A voice of the time,

²⁴² Alison S. Fell and Ingrid Sharp, 'Introduction: The Women's Movement and the First World War', in *The Women's Movement in Wartime: International Perspectives, 1914-19*, ed. by Alison S. Fell and Ingrid Sharp (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) pp. 1-17, p.6.

²⁴³ Maternalism was a central message of pre-war mainstream feminism in France and Britain. Sharon Ouditt discusses British maternal pacifism, suffragism and socialism, and a woman's 'special concern for the creation and preservation of human life' as being a tool in promoting her 'vast potentiality of latent political activity' and successfully turning the 'aching maternal heart into an informed and potentially active citizen'. Popular and exclusively feminine qualities such as philanthropy and indeed maternity were therefore at the forefront of the suffrage argument. It would be thanks to these qualities that 'a less barbaric, more egalitarian system' could emerge. Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.132-133 and p.145 and Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). As Fell and Sharp discuss, the same beliefs about maternity were also characteristic of the *Union française pour le suffrage des femmes*.

²⁴⁴ Françoise Thébaud, *La Femme au temps de la guerre de '14* (Paris : Editions Stock, 1994), p.59.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.11.

Gertrude Atherton also commented in deep support of the French feminist campaign, that ‘while doing everything to help and nothing to embarrass their Government’ they ‘never permit the question to recede wholly to the background’.²⁴⁶ Thus, in the same way that Jeanne D’Arc and Marianne were stripped of some of their partisan qualities for the sake of the national war effort, so too did feminists strip their campaign of extremes, ‘normalising’ their prescriptions of ideal middle class womanhood. Nevertheless, their goals had not disappeared, and they never fully endorsed the idea that women in war could be heroic if they stayed where they were. Instead, they posited ‘a different, better femininity during the war and in the future’.²⁴⁷

With the conflict looming, and the prospect of women and men being separated out into the fighters and the non-fighters, the polarity between the non-combatant woman and the ‘masculine qualities of courage, vigour and independence defined as the essence of honor’, was sharpened.²⁴⁸ Margaret Darrow describes this polarity as a ‘neat gender sequestration that the war rhetoric had ordained, that masculinity was locked in combat on the battlefield while femininity waited in abeyance at home’.²⁴⁹ Julie Wheelwright comments on the differentiating emotional factors when it came to gendered war roles, using language reminiscent of ancient heroic discourse: ‘love is the province of women while glory is the terrain of men’.²⁵⁰ The war also brought the concept of heroism to the fore. In cultural mobilisation, heroism, like glory, was still largely reserved for men who ran risks on the battlefield, while the ‘angel of the house’ profile lived on behind the lines.

The focus of this second half of the chapter on wartime is the latter half of the conflict, when characterisations of heroism evolved and were fine-tuned. A certain stoicism came

²⁴⁶ Atherton, p. 210.

²⁴⁷ Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p. 64. According to the hegemonic masculinity framework, in joining this process of conforming those who were be expected to heroise women without hesitation were likely to inadvertently perpetuate hegemonic masculinity in the ways that they went about doing so, Messerschmidt, p. 65.

²⁴⁸ Mansker, p. 632.

²⁴⁹ Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p.148.

²⁵⁰ Julie Wheelwright, *Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed as Man in Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Happiness* (London, Pandora, 1989), p.28.

to characterise representations of both male and female heroism, both at the front and at home. By 1916 the notion, promoted by the likes of Commander-in-chief Robert Nivelle,²⁵¹ that the next battle would win the war had eroded significantly, and Verdun had served as a devastating example of this. Morale amongst the French troops had dropped, and continued to drop throughout 1917.²⁵² The tone of ‘war rhetoric’ followed suit, and it was no longer sufficient to promote messages of hope about a quick win. By the time Clemenceau’s anti-defeatist policy was introduced at the end of 1917, resulting images of heroism came to be characterised by less energy and enthusiasm.²⁵³ Thus, a 1916 ‘Paris Day’ charity poster by Francisque Poulbot [figure 19] portrayed two *mutilés de guerre* looking defeated and self-conscious as the children of France saluted them. The image suggested patriotic sacrifice, but also the hopeless destruction of war. A 1917 poster by Jean Droit [figure 20], produced for the third war bond campaign, was captioned with ‘Debout dans la tranchée que l’aurore éclaire, le soldat rêve à la victoire et à son foyer’. The poster depicted the physical and emotional entrenchment of war by 1917. The soldier appeared still resolute, yet was standing, static, and represented a stark contrast to propagandist sources from earlier in the war, such as *La Française*, a heroic song by Camille Saint-Saëns and Miguel Zamacoïs and commissioned in 1915 by daily broadsheet *Le Petit Parisien*, with its vigorous refrain evoking an energetic Allied offensive:

‘En avant contre la trahison’

Des bandits sans honneur, sans foi:

Les Alliés ont pour devise:

‘La Justice et le Droit!’²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ Elizabeth Greenhaigh, *The French Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

²⁵² Greenhaigh, p. 206.

²⁵³ Elisabeth Coquart, *Marthe Richard: De la petite à la grande vertu* (Paris: Editions Payot & Rivage, 2006), p. 90.

²⁵⁴ Photograph of François Vendel, ‘ma guerre’, <<http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu/fr/contributions/10188#prettyPhoto>> [accessed 18 May 2015].

In addition to less energetic and enthusiastic projections of male combat, moralising discourses such as *Vous êtes braves; restez fort* by the anonymous ‘Une Française’ and *Le Vrai héros* by socialist vicar Louis Comte also grappled with definitions of heroism in order to suggest that French soldiers could not be thought of as heroic if they indulged in the immoral threats of war: alcohol and prostitution. Comte in particular, subverted nationalist rhetoric from the earlier war years, writing that,

‘Vous êtes héros, c’est entendu [...] mais il y a un courage que vous ne possédez pas et qui, cependant, est indispensable pour faire de vous des héros au sens complet du mot, des héros bien français; c’est le courage qui consiste à se colleter avec soi-même, contre soi-même et, quoi qu’il en coûte, à vaincre ses passions mauvaises’.²⁵⁵

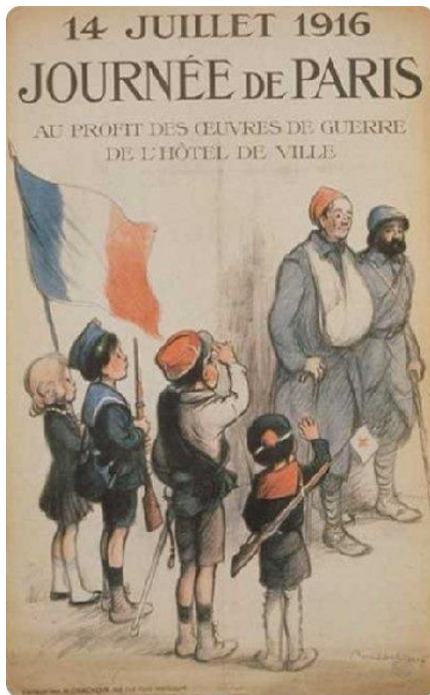


Figure 19: ‘Paris Day’ charity poster, Francisque Poulbot, 1916



Figure 20: Poster for third war bond campaign, Jean Droit, 1917

Bound up with these stoic messages conveyed by later wartime propagandist sources was an image of a supportive middle-class female role tasked with ‘keeping the home fires

²⁵⁵ Louis Comte, *Le Vrai héros* (Paris: Fédération abolitionniste, 1916), p.11.

burning', a central behaviour in representations of women's meaningful and heroic contribution to the war. Patriotic devotion was a key heroic quality for both men and women because an inherent part of supporting France meant fearlessly and defiantly rejecting the enemy and pursuing moral victory in a variety of roles and situations. It also meant giving up one's life for another. As Nicole Hudgins suggests, 'judging from the visual culture of the war, French women were [...] needed as symbolic, spiritual support, and to provide a rationalisation for the war and its continuation, despite international and activist calls for peace'.²⁵⁶ In *La Française dans la guerre*, novelist, literary critic and president of the *Société des gens de lettres*, Gaston Rageot,²⁵⁷ stated that French women possessed a burning desire to serve their men and in doing so, to serve the homeland.²⁵⁸ While the men on the front were enacting their own brand of patriotic heroism, women at home had no lesser role to play on the same basis. Rageot likened male and female roles in terms of civic duty: 'Leur enthousiasme civique a correspondu à l'élan militaire des hommes'.²⁵⁹ In Rageot's optimistic opinion, the war represented a time when the most steadfast and striking wartime 'nouveau' representing a break with the legacy of the 'ancien régime' was the involvement of French women in national life, but only in patriotic and supportive roles.²⁶⁰

Most women fitting this profile were still not tasked with earning a wage, and their occupation before the war had been the supervision and running of the home. Further, many wealthy women publicly led or were involved in charitable initiatives such as the *Réconfort du soldat* which created comfort packages for soldiers. The concept of national duty now attached to this philanthropic, class-based and traditionally feminine role, however, was more resonant and more heroic than ever before.

²⁵⁶ Nicole Hudgins, *Hold Still, Madame: Wartime Gender and the Photography of Women in France during the Great War* (St Andrews: Centre for French History and Culture of the University of St Andrews, 2014), p. 3.

²⁵⁷ Rageot later wrote for *Le Flambeau*, the *Croix de Feu* League newspaper.

²⁵⁸ Gaston Rageot, *La Française dans la guerre* (Paris: Attinger Frères, 1918), p. 6.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.3.

Margaret Darrow tells us that ‘the smile, the freshly laundered curtains, and plump babies only added up to feminine heroism if they were achieved as a triumph over tears. There could be no heroism without sacrifice and no sacrifice without suffering’.²⁶¹ For the supportive middle-class female role to be celebrated as heroically patriotic in the unique cultural and military landscape of the First World War, mothers and wives, womanly, feminine and beautiful ladies enduring the conflict were still required to make a variety of sacrifices in the name of a variety of causes, be it marital or filial love and devotion, or quite simply in not allowing their war roles to ‘de-feminise’ or ‘un-beautify’ them. And such a requirement was universal: the March 1917 edition of feminist publication *L’Action féminine* also drew on such feminine sacrifice, featuring Avril Sainte-Croix’s article which stated clearly that members of the *Conseil National des Femmes Françaises* were ‘convaincues que le triomphe de notre juste cause dépend autant du dévouement, de la résistance morale et matérielle de l’arrière, que l’héroïsme du front’.²⁶² Re-positioned within the framework of ‘enduring’ heroism, women found themselves in sole charge of home life without the men of the family. Their honour was therefore no longer ‘owned’ by someone else. Finding the strength and resilience to merely continue to do one’s duty in the dangerous context of war involved new kinds of sacrifice, and meant acting honourably, in the name of family honour, in relatively new ways.

Revanchist sentiment further contributed to the heroisation of bourgeois French women in dominant discourses during the war. A range of commentators drew on the ever-lingering and painful legacy of 1870-1871. Deaf catholic writer Yvonne Pitrois’ 1916 collection of anecdotal stories *Les Femmes de la Grande Guerre 1914-1915-1916* made much of the heroic enduring legacy of women in the Franco-Prussian war, claiming that ‘les vertus que nos mères, nos aïeules ont montrées en 1870-1871 se retrouvent avec les transformations que le temps et l’évolution des mœurs leur ont apportés - chez leur filles et petites-filles de 1914-1915-1916’.²⁶³ Maurice Barrès also made use of messages about

²⁶¹ Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p. 66.

²⁶² *L’Action Féminine*, March 1917.

²⁶³ Yvonne Pitrois, *Les Femmes de la Grande Guerre 1914-1915-1916* (Geneva: Imprimerie Albert Kundig, 1916), p. 6.

the strength of women's regional attachment in the 1870 war through the lens of the First World War as part of his ethnic nationalist rhetoric. In *Le Coeur des femmes de France*, he devoted a whole section to Alsace-Lorraine, claiming that the women of the region had suffered during the Franco-Prussian War in order to uphold 'Frenchness' and to instil patriotic and spiritual resilience in the family against all odds: 'Quand toute résistance était devenue impossible, c'est la femme alsacienne qui a maintenu pieusement la France au foyer des familles, et les jeunes filles déjà, de toute leur âme, proclamaient la sainteté de la patrie française'.²⁶⁴ He told the lengthy story of women who had been punished in the name of their love of France, such as Mademoiselle Guérin de Wallersbach from Guentrange, who was imprisoned for 'son amour bien connu de la France'.²⁶⁵ He also cited women's associations in Alsace-Lorraine which had nurtured anti-German sentiment in the region and had worked hard to keep ties with France alive throughout the war, stating that 'dans ces groupements de jeunes filles, on se passait la France de la main à la main'.²⁶⁶ For Barrès and Pitrois, there was a direct link between the earlier heroism of women from the region, and the obligation that they claimed many French women felt in doing their patriotic duty to the war effort when their fathers, brothers and sons were doing theirs.²⁶⁷ The women who had suffered in 1870-1871 had a key heroic role in revanchist messages during and after the First World War because they were regarded as devoted patriots who, despite the difficulties they faced, still made it a priority to support France, to promote traditional French womanhood, to demonise the enemy and to maintain the stability and spirituality of the home and the family.

As chapter four illustrates, revanchist sentiment was also a key motivating factor communicated in personal writings by heroic wartime women from Alsace-Lorraine. The case-study in chapter five, French-Romanian princess Marthe Bibesco, wrote with reference to the women of the region that 'je comprenais enfin que, sur les femmes, la

²⁶⁴ Maurice Barrès, p. 133.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 149.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 136.

²⁶⁷ Pitrois, p. 6.

marque toute-puissante de leur Epoque suffit à créer la ressemblance, aussi visible dans les individus que dans le style des monuments'.²⁶⁸ When she used the term 'ressemblance', Bibesco referred to the feminine desire evoked in Barrès' work, to maintain and promote a distinct version of 'Frenchness' in the face of regional occupation.

The following sections map in more detail the specific ideals which qualified bourgeois womanhood as heroic in a stoic display of wartime endurance, from 1916 onwards. As we will see, the values of maternity, separate spheres, femininity and beauty, all factors which had defined pre-war bourgeois womanhood, were forcefully foregrounded during the conflict. By way of anchoring French national identity and even civilisation itself at a time of intense social and moral instability, war rhetoric closely associated female heroic qualities with normative images of middle-class women.

2.4 Maternity

Before, during and after the war, the potential to be a mother was that which best singled a woman out as heroic.²⁶⁹ Published after the war but with a contextual focus on the war years, *Le Coeur des femmes de France* presented a lengthy case for the importance of good mothering in times of national strife, stating that 'il faut que nos enfants sachent bien qu'il vaut mieux pour eux n'avoir plus de papa qu'un papa lâche - pourvu qu'ils aient une maman vaillante et gaie'.²⁷⁰ Given Barrès's attachment to the ethnic nationalist doctrine, it is unsurprising that his comment highlights the significant role that women were believed to have in 'defining, through reproduction, the boundaries of culture,

²⁶⁸ Bibesco, Marthe, '*Pourquoi j'écris? De peur d'oublier la vie*': *Ainsi parla... la Princesse Bibesco (paroles recueillies par Georges R. Manue)*, (Paris: Editions Nisson, 1929), MFICHE 8-Z-25161 (5), BNF, p. 23.

²⁶⁹ This applied to almost all women's roles according to writers like Rageot, who believed wartime commitments to have been undertaken, 'd'un même zèle, d'une même tendresse, la tendresse maternelle', Rageot, p. 1.

²⁷⁰ Barrès, p. 29.

ethnicity, and nationality within modern states’, and that on this basis he saw the critical and heroic role that they had in safeguarding French society under threat.²⁷¹

As well as using the concept of heroic motherhood to promote a crucial role in the ‘ethnic’ future of the country, a heavy emphasis on maternity revealed the extent to which mainstream public narratives prescribed ‘correct’ womanly behaviour. Mona Siegel suggests, for example, that ‘social concerns about the possible impact of women’s emancipation’ was what ‘focused public attention on the idea of motherhood as women’s natural social role’.²⁷² Much ‘advice’ for women was inspired by ‘one of the major obsessions of the time’:²⁷³ continuing *natalité* fears which had heightened in wartime and were most prevalent from 1915 onwards.²⁷⁴ Such fears prompted public discourses to ‘depend’ on women as providers of future generations, heroically defying attempts by the enemy to destroy the population. Women ‘were asked to sustain, and ideally to raise, the birth-rate by replacing men lost in battle, channelling their sexuality into reproduction as well as production’.²⁷⁵ It was thus widely upheld that carrying out an exemplary patriotic duty in giving life to the nation’s future heroes was a heroic function in itself. War literature followed suit, with publications such as the 1916 abolitionist text mentioned earlier, *Vous êtes braves; restez fort* which, by definition, privileged ‘the traditional

²⁷¹ Richard S Fogarty, ‘Race and Sex, Fear and Loathing in France during the Great War’, in *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe’s Twentieth Century*, ed. by Dagmar Herzog (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 59-90, p.60.

²⁷² Mona Siegel, ‘“To the Unknown Mother of the Unknown Soldier”: Pacifism, Feminism, and the Politics of Sexual Difference among French *Institutrices* between the Wars’, *French Historical Studies*, 22:3 (Summer 1999), pp. 421-451, p. 433.

²⁷³ Mathilde Dubesset, Françoise Thébaud, and Catherine, Vincent, ‘Female Munitions Workers of the Seine’, in *The French Home Front, 1914-1918*, ed. by Patrick Fridenson (Oxford: Berg, 1993), pp. 189-219, p. 194.

²⁷⁴ Rageot, p.27, refers in 1918 to ‘La France, qui a tant besoin d’enfants’. See also Judith Wishnia, ‘Natalisme et nationalisme pendant la première guerre mondiale’, *Vingtième-Siècle revue d’histoire*, 45 :1 (Jan-March 1995), pp.30-39. *Natalité* fears eventually culminated in the post-war law of 31 July 1920, which forbade abortion and anti-contraception propaganda. The February 1913 edition of *L’Illustration* reported a slight improvement in infant mortality rates with data from the *Assistance et hygiène publique* showing a 25% drop between 1906 and 1910 for babies aged between 0 and 1 year. But the issue of infant mortality and dropping birthrates increased again once war broke out, becoming an integral part of messages recruiting female patriotic support.

²⁷⁵ Susan R. Grayzel, ‘Mothers, Mairaines, and Prostitutes: Morale and Morality in First World War France’, *The International History Review*, 19:1 (Feb 1997), pp. 66-82, p.82.

family and [...] the civic duty of reproduction'.²⁷⁶ The opening pages looked ahead to the impact of wartime conduct on the fate of the post-war population stating that 'il nous faut, pour le travail formidable à entreprendre après la guerre, une population saine, des familles nombreuses. Les aurons-nous? Oui, si chacun se met en face de ses responsabilités. Non, si par manque de discipline, nous sacrifions l'avenir au plaisir de la minute présente'.²⁷⁷ *La Mobilisation féminine en France: 1914-1919*, by the *Effort Féminin Français* association pointed out, in another example, that female doctors in particular were notoriously and dutifully concerned with childcare in wartime, and had offered free courses and 'hands-on' placements in crèches and infant care homes for bourgeois women to receive adequate training in order that the babies of France be best equipped to grow into healthy adults.²⁷⁸

Perhaps the most prominent media in which the maternal and feminine 'republican mother' was depicted was nationalist propaganda, the war bond poster campaigns being a good example. A 1917 poster by Georges Redon [figure 21] produced for the third war bond campaign showed a woman from Alsace-Lorraine who, in the absence of her husband, was defenceless as she bravely faced the war alone with her child. And the caption, urging the public to make contributions to the war bond campaign, focused on the impact that the war was having on the family and on children in particular: 'Pour que vos enfants ne connaissent plus les horreurs de la guerre'. The mother's role continued; all she could do was think of the safety, protection and comfort of her young child as she struggled, alone, to protect her from the dangers of war.²⁷⁹ The mother's steadfast devotion to the girl, to her native region, and to France's future proved her to be self-abnegating and heroic in the framework of enduring maternal heroism.

²⁷⁶ Elisa Camiscioli, *Reproducing the French Race: Immigration, Intimacy, and Embodiment in the Early Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 127.

²⁷⁷ Une Française, *Vous êtes braves; restez fort* (Paris: Fédération abolitionniste, 1916), p.3.

²⁷⁸ Borel, Emile, Mille de Montmort, Ctsse Bertrand de Mun, *La Mobilisation féminine en France 1914-1919: Documentation rassemblée par la société 'L'effort féminin français'* (Paris: Imprimerie 'Union', 1919), p. 30 and p. 76.

²⁷⁹ This image clearly depicted the memory of the Franco-Prussian war embodied in the child's doll which wore regional costume. It communicated *revanchisme*, bound up with more recent wartime nationalism and enduring anti-German sentiment.



Figure 21: War bond poster by Georges Rédon, 1917

Other war bond posters also posited motherhood as a central message, appealing to the popular awareness of the importance of a woman's primary duty to her family and to her country. They emphasised familial togetherness and unity, providing a reassuring and strong image, corresponding with the patriotic allegiance that was a central marker of 'traditionally' heroic female roles. A 1918 poster by Jacques Carlu [figure 22] depicted an agricultural family, with a ploughed field decipherable in the background. The male figure was a *poilu* and the women was simply dressed with an untidy appearance. Their son held an olive branch to represent hopeful victory. Albert Besnard's 1917 drawing [figure 23] depicted a less socially-situated couple, proving that grandiose and ancient glorified heroic models did not disappear altogether in imagery towards the end of the war. The mother held an olive branch symbolising hope, reconstruction and renewal in the face of adversity. In such a guise she was represented like Athena, as a provider and nurturer for her husband and child.



Figure 22: War bond poster by Jacques Carlu, 1918



Figure 23: War bond poster by Albert Besnard, 1917

These propagandist messages about maternal heroism and stoicism were used to describe the motherhood of empire as well as that of metropolitan France. In a poster for the 1918 Algerian campaign [figure 24], an Algerian woman was depicted bidding goodbye to her husband who was leaving to fight for France. The caption read her own encouraging words, ‘Souscrire, c’est hâter son retour avec la victoire’. The woman appeared virtually unable to acknowledge her husband’s loving goodbye, however, and instead held onto her child’s hand resolutely, looking outwards, so focused was she on her own task of enduring and caring for their child in preparation for his return.

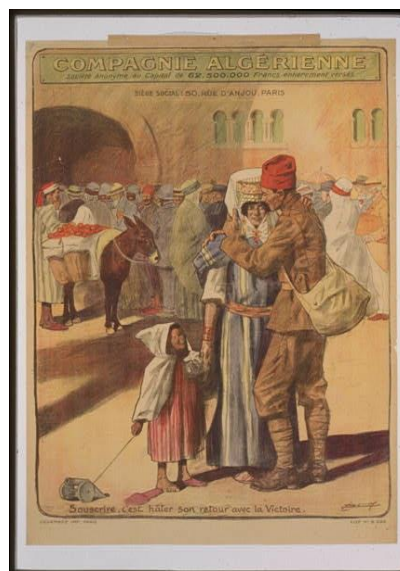


Figure 24: *Compagnie Algérienne*, 1918, ‘Souscrire, c’est hâter son retour avec la victoire’.

Those with objectives other than the advocacy of war, or the heroisation of a traditional wartime image of motherhood as part of a repressive pronatalist agenda, also contributed to messages about the importance of maternity for a nation in strife. The moderate feminists, although aiming to improve women's status in society more 'softly' during the war than they had in the period preceding it, joined in with discourses which empowered middle-class women with what was seen by many as the most vital role in the future of the French people. The pacifist camp equally endorsed maternity as a key message about female resilience, but this time in rejecting violence. The 1917/1918 edition of *La Mère Educatrice*, a feminist pacifist magazine written mainly by educated women, offered advice strictly within a conventional domestic framework, inviting women to 'rester bien docilement dans la tradition populaire'.²⁸⁰ Pacifist teacher Madeleine Vernet's opening piece, 'Aux femmes! Aux mères!', described what she called the ignorance of war, and compelled women to act as maternal saviours of the nation in conflict:

D'où viendra la lumière? Le flambeau que nous attendons, quelle main va le prendre et l'élever sur nos têtes ? Quelle main? — Il faut que ce soit la tienne, [...] Ecoutez, les mères — toutes les mères — Avez-vous toujours fait tout votre devoir?²⁸¹

The duty of the 'vaillante maman', according to Vernet, was to educate her children 'correctly' and to embrace a moral and social responsibility which would elevate her above the immorality of war and therefore situate her in the role of saviour of the nation, 'victimized' by the injustice and horror of violence. Using heroic language such as 'devoir', Vernet heroised maternity in order to engage her female readers in their potential for exemplary civic duty, pointing out the invaluable role that this would represent in wartime, when they could give life, just as war was taking it away.²⁸²

The idea that mothers might influence the greater moral good, and that there was an inherent need for this, formed the basis for Vernet's gendered heroisation of mothers in the later war years. Her choice to do this also showed that heroic motherhood was not

²⁸⁰ *La Mère éducatrice: revue mensuelle d'éducation populaire*, October 1917-September 1918.

²⁸¹ *La Mère éducatrice: revue mensuelle d'éducation populaire*, October 1917-September 1918.

²⁸² Mona L. Siegel, *The Moral Disarmament of France: Education, Pacifism, and Patriotism, 1914-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 118.

merely about a duty to facilitate the prolonging or enacting of war. Indeed, anti-war thinkers like Vernet built a heroic discourse around motherhood that resisted the evils of conflict. Her rhetoric thus provides us with an interesting contrast to sources such as the war bonds posters and Barrès's works. Finally, discourses positing the strength of maternal morality also built on pre-war attempts to suggest that women could exercise wider social and even political competency and were thus worthy of involvement in France's wider agenda. This was particularly important to pacifists like Vernet, who went on to set up the *Ligue des femmes contre la guerre* in 1921, and believed womanhood - and motherhood in particular - to be a weapon against future wars.

2.5 Separate spheres

Despite the fact that from 1916 onwards and in the post-war period more and more bourgeois women took on work outside the home,²⁸³ throughout the war itself their place was still thought of as being in the private sphere. Class remained a defining factor in their heroic positioning as maintainers of morale, humbleness, loyalty, familiarity and education. Although a domestic, interior world was thought to be a bourgeois woman's domain, discourses depicting the domestic sphere sometimes referred to other 'appropriate' feminine spaces away from the fighting fronts. While supererogation remained largely the preserve of men during the war, a simple doing of one's duty in the domestic sphere was a legitimately recognised phenomenon that occupied a central role in discourses of female heroism in the latter war years.

Subconsciously, the physical and emotional home-front polarity bred mistrust and anxiety, as Darrow and Roberts suggest. And yet in a variety of discourses which sought to heroise women for multiple reasons, an overwhelming tendency and a political logic drew positive comparisons between the heroism of the two, situating the woman's heroic role at home in relation to the man's heroic role on the front line. The heroism of an 'alternative' service behind the lines was also embodied to some extent in other female

²⁸³ Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes*, p. 12.

war roles such as industrial workers and spies for example, as discussed in chapters three and four.

But these relational comparisons did not necessarily place women in equivalently heroic positions. Remarking on the use of military language to describe women's philanthropic activities in the Belle Epoque, Geoffrey Cubitt suggests that 'the aim' was rather to 'affirm the division between male and female activity, by implying that the same kind of vocation and the same sense of duty drew women'.²⁸⁴ Cubitt's statement was true of wartime comparisons between heroic masculinity and heroic womanhood, which can be further understood with reference to Margaret Higonnet's 'double helix' theory.²⁸⁵ Higonnet's theory refers to the figurative 'gap' that separated men and women, and claims that this 'gap' never widened or narrowed, but rather that it 'moved' as gender roles changed. In wartime, men moved to the front line, and women moved to occupy men's roles, socially and economically. The 'gap' separating the roles remained the same as it would have been in peacetime, when men were in work and middle-class women at home. Higonnet's theory suggests that 'relationships of domination and subordination' were 'retained through discourses that systemically designate unequal gender relations'.²⁸⁶ Related to discourses of traditional bourgeois womanhood and the concept of heroism, the double helix theory would also suggest that female heroism was prevented from equalling or usurping male heroism.

Higonnet's theory is open to contestation, however. Mona Siegel, for example, offers up another perspective, writing that the war caused 'traditional bonds of interdependence' between men and women to 'suspend, though not to sever',²⁸⁷ which rejects the consistency and continuity inferred by Higonnet. Since many of the women's roles discussed in this thesis as a whole were popularly represented as *remaining* in the social,

²⁸⁴ Cubitt, 'Martyrs of charity, heroes of solidarity', p. 342.

²⁸⁵ 'Introduction', in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, ed. by Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel and Margaret Collins Weitz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 1-18, p.6.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Siegel, *The Moral Disarmament of France*, p.114.

cultural and economic domain that they had occupied in peace (or making a sideways move as opposed to taking a man's job), they did not 'move forward' in wartime as men did. The 'double helix' gap was therefore sometimes widened. Further, the women whose personal writings are analysed in chapters four and five showed little awareness of the social shifts that inspired double helix theory and instead upheld that their heroism was equivalent rather than subordinate to that of men.

It was advanced in popular narratives like Rageot's *La Française dans la guerre* and *Vous êtes braves; restez fort* that a woman could be as heroic as a man if she merely did her 'domestic duty' and maintained a safe and familiar home for her family during the conflict. The latter source stated, for example, that 'il faut qu'à l'arrière, au milieu de ses terribles préoccupations, la femme conserve le foyer intact; il faut qu'elle élève ses enfants dans le sentiment du devoir'.²⁸⁸ Susan Grayzel's work also foregrounds this theory, suggesting that 'the role of women was [...] to maintain the necessary illusion that war had 'altered nothing', that the 'home' was preserved and that they [...] remained unchanged'.²⁸⁹ Grayzel claims that female patriotism was thought of as 'grounded not in the abstract love of country or in ideas of duty and honour, but in home and family life'.²⁹⁰ Her argument suggests that wartime messages from the likes of Barrès and Pitrois which heroised a love of the homeland as the central motivating factor for many women, did not tell the full story.

An example of a feminine female hero enduring the war alone at home was featured in a wartime postcard [figure 25] showing a middle class woman holding the national flag and imagining French infantrymen in battle. Her stance was not militant; instead it was maternal, gentle and serene. The significance of the *tricolor* added a tone of ritual and tradition to the image, and identified the woman as virtuous and devoted. The postcard's caption read 'C'est péril de mort pour quiconque y touche...N'en approche pas Allemand farouche' and functioned as a warning to the enemy. The woman was represented as a

²⁸⁸ *Vous êtes braves; restez fort*, p. 4.

²⁸⁹ Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*, p. 206.

²⁹⁰ Grayzel, 'Mothers, Mairaines, and Prostitutes', p.66.

valued national saviour who was to be protected at all costs. The image united the realms of femininity and masculinity, of passive beauty and militant male heroism, of gentle devotion and stoic support of the nation from the bosom of the home.



Figure 25: Wartime postcard, DIX

In this, and all of the other propaganda images that foregrounded maternity in the previous section, the vestiges of the public front and the private domestic spheres were decipherable. Whether a soldier with weapon in hand next to his wife and child, or a portrait of a family man away at war, and a mother alone tucking her child into bed with its favourite toy, the dichotomy between the home and the war zone was evident. Alan J. Frantzen suggests that images such as the war bond posters, on public display, reminded soldiers of home and thus served as visual reassurance that their wife was carrying out her own heroic duty as much as he was.²⁹¹ And the effects of a visual reminder of home for men had the same reassuring effect on women who saw the markers of war in the posters because they were reminded that their men were being ‘courageous’ at the

²⁹¹ Allen J. Frantzen, *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice and the Great War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p.55.

front.²⁹² The connection between male heroism and chivalry, and dependable, enduring, devoted and painful female heroism borne out of a love for the home and the family was therefore strongly communicated.

In the same way that traditionalist discourses of maternity were appropriated by those who had begun in the Belle Epoque to promote women's civic 'reach' beyond the home, less mainstream wartime images of bourgeois women also glorified or idealised domestic safeguarding. Some suffragist texts, for example, intentionally sought to frame women's heroism within the domestic sphere. Feminist suffragist Léon Abensour showed an awareness of comparisons between the female 'hero of the hearth' and the male hero on the battlefield: 'Elles donnent leur chair et leur âme comme les hommes donnent leur sang'.²⁹³ He claimed that it was 'aux hommes de bâtir à la frontière une muraille d'aurain; aux femmes de sauvegarder les forces vitales du pays'.²⁹⁴ He made use of the motto, 'je maintiendrai', which he claimed expressed 'un courage passif' and 'la fière devise française' in the face of Russia and Britain allowing their female population to enter the military.²⁹⁵ Finally, he asserted that women actually preferred to remain dutifully at home maintaining all as it had always been for family members displaced by war.²⁹⁶

Abensour discussed the work of wife of the Belgian Minister of Justice, Madame Carton de Wiart, in order to expand on his claims that it was a woman's heroic duty to stay at home. Carton de Wiart felt strongly that her children should witness the devastation for themselves, and refused to escape to France in 1914. She stayed behind in Belgium, creating soup kitchens, distributing correspondence, and enduring intrusive surveillance by suspicious German troops until she was eventually arrested and spent three months in Moabit prison. Abensour drew on her self-proclaimed mission to 'affirmer, à la face de

²⁹² Ibid., p.183.

²⁹³ Leon Abensour, *Les Vaillantes: Héroïnes, Martyres et remplaçantes* (Paris: Librairie Chapelot, 1917), p. 22.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p.139.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

l'Europe, que les civils « tiendraient »'.²⁹⁷ Given his suffragist persuasion it is possible that Abensour's use of the word 'civils' was loaded, because it was by definition a female responsibility to maintain normality at home and do one's duty in the war. Along these lines, he expressed an 'estime profonde' for female heroes like Carton de Wiart, who 'entretint la flamme du foyer et défendit seule les intérêts familiaux'.²⁹⁸

Abensour also cited the comments of Julie Siegfried, president of the *Conseil National des femmes françaises* throughout the war who, in support of abstention from the 1915 Hague congress, based her rhetoric on a French woman's duty to make her own, feminine, sacrifices alongside those fighting the war, in protecting the home and in striving against the hasty pursuit of 'justified' peace:

Les temps sont durs, les jours sont longs et les nuits souvent angoissantes, mais la femme sent également que les heures qu'elle traverse sont uniques au point de vue du rôle sacré qu'elle a à jouer dans l'humanité. Elle prend confiance en elle-même en voyant que l'homme compte sur elle pour être la gardienne du foyer. Avec les combattants elle veut une France nouvelle, plus belle, plus grande et elle comprend qu'une paix hâtive briserait l'idéal pour lequel elle sacrifie ses joies intimes et sa vie présente.²⁹⁹

Siegfried wished to convey the extent of the sacrifice that French women were prepared to make in helping to defend France. Her message was particularly interesting because, like the seemingly antithetical philosophies of Abensour and the nationalist propaganda poster campaign, it suggested that women had their own equivalent stake in defending the home as the combatants who were heroised for protecting it from the front and were thus placed in a defensive war role themselves. As a feminist commentator who also believed that domestication was a defining factor of female heroism, Abensour was careful to point out that suffragist organisations such as the *Union Française pour le Suffrage des Femmes (UFSF)* did not seek to overthrow normative gender roles and instead used them as a framework for their public rhetoric: 'Loin de l'abandonner, ce

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p.225.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p.307.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 130.

foyer familial, les féministes veulent en faire parvenir l'image au moins dans les tranchées. Et elles restèrent l'âme de la grande famille'.³⁰⁰

La Mobilisation féminine en France 1914-1919 by *L'Effort féminin française*, a committee made up of aristocratic women, touched upon the importance of bourgeois women's roles in the home, noting that small businesses were forced to close when women were seen to be neglecting their domestic duties in the name of commerce.³⁰¹ Also contributing to the 'force' of the 'armée féminine française' was, according to *La mobilisation féminine*, the 'riche reserve' that was bourgeois women's housework and motherhood.³⁰² Further emphasis was placed on pivotal roles occupied by such 'gardiennes des foyers' in wartime,³⁰³ and how these roles, although not representing anything above civic duty were brave and heroic nonetheless, especially in towns near to the front: 'la première rôle des femmes dans les villes dévastées a été de demeurer sur place et de continuer, tant que c'était possible la vie de la cité'.³⁰⁴ Finally, it was their understanding of, and attachment to, the comforts of the home that motivated those women cited to help war refugees find accommodation and to furnish it for them 'comme chez eux'.³⁰⁵

Declaring that 'I came to France to write about the French',³⁰⁶ in order to collect material for her essay collection *The Living Present* (1917), Californian suffragist writer Gertrude

³⁰⁰ Ibid., p.97.

³⁰¹ Marcelle Wehrlé Mun, Ctesse Camille de Marbo, Mme Émile Borel, *La Mobilisation féminine en France (1914-1919)*. *Documentation rassemblée par la société "L'Effort féminin français"* (Paris: Union, 1919), p. 12.

³⁰² Ibid., p. 15.

³⁰³ Ibid., p 69.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 70.

³⁰⁶ Gertrude Atherton, *Life in the War Zone* (New York: New York Times, 1916), p. 21. Also decipherable from a reading of this text was Atherton's desire to 'educate' people from her native California about the suffering of war, from which they were believed to be far removed. She wrote that news of American aid initiatives would 'resound to the glory of California, which, with the entire West, lags far behind New York and the other Eastern States in practical sympathy for the sufferers of war', p. 71. She cited shortly afterwards a 'certain type of smug American, who, without experience or imagination, has refused to believe in the attendant horrors of war' as well as 'self-righteous citizens, who

Atherton³⁰⁷ spent three months in 1916 visiting French upper class female acquaintances and ‘having the thousand and one phases of women’s work to examine’.³⁰⁸ The reason for documenting her observations, she explained, was ‘in the hope of doing something for that great country in my own way’.³⁰⁹ Moreover, Atherton sought to paint a true and heroic picture of French women in order to engage American women on the eve of the country’s entry into the war.³¹⁰

Atherton’s references to the separate sphere ideology included assured suggestions that ‘exemplary women of the bourgeoisie [...] turn out in force at the great periodicities of life, but otherwise to live and die in the bosom of The Family is the measure of their ambition’³¹¹ and that the upper class *foyer* was a place ‘where the mother is a sovereign who is content to remain within the boundaries of her own small domain for months at a time, particularly if she lives not in an apartment, but in a *hôtel* with a garden behind it’.³¹² For Atherton, traditional women’s roles were heroic when carried out within the domestic sphere, but also when carried out *just* outside it in an ‘extended’ home. This was best represented by roles like teaching and nursing, which still fitted within the traditional framework of feminine duty.

Although domesticity or other traditional, mostly ‘interior’ women’s roles like teaching or nursing were heroised during the war for a variety of reasons, the fact remained that

have grown fat on the European war’, suggesting that works such as hers might encourage them to visit and witness the aftermath of war in France, p. 72.

³⁰⁷ The heroic discourse that Atherton employed in her work serves as evidence that messages about French female heroism in wartime were also transmitted and disseminated by non-French voices.

³⁰⁸ Atherton, *Life in the War Zone*, p. 15

³⁰⁹ Atherton, *Life in the War Zone*, p. 92-3. Her visit to France in 1917 was not her first; she had been visiting since the last 1880s.

³¹⁰ Atherton, *The Living Present*, p. xiii: ‘If some American woman writer with a public, and who was capable through long practice in story writing, of selecting and composing facts in conformance with the economic and dramatic laws of fiction, would go over and study the work of the Frenchwomen at first hand, and, discarding generalities, present specific instances of their work and their attitude, the result could not fail to give the intelligent American woman a different opinion of her French sister and enlist her sympathy’.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.60.

³¹² *Ibid.*, p.59.

middle class women were also carrying out roles which operated entirely outside of the private sphere, such as administrative positions in banks or in the military. How, if at all, did commentators approach this reality? Feminist sources like Atherton showed an awareness of the potentially damaging reputation that this kind of work might give women, claiming that it would undeniably ‘rouse in disappointed or apprehensive men the meanest form of sex jealousy’,³¹³ and therefore picking up on some of the gender-based anxieties prevalent during wartime that were discussed earlier. For the most part, however, feminist spokespeople worked hard to legitimize women’s employment outside the home, describing it, significantly, as a temporary phenomenon. They argued staunchly and repeatedly that men would feel confident that their women were acting heroically in their interests and in the interests of France, for a reassuringly limited period of time; limited being the operative word. In this sense, careful acknowledgements of the temporary nature of women’s heroism in certain wartime arenas, and intentional reassurances that women assuming new roles was a temporary phenomenon supported Higonet’s double helix theory because such discourses suggested that as men would ‘move back’ after the conflict, so too would women.

For example, in direct response to fears about ‘collapse of conventional gender roles’ and a consequent change in women’s lives, Léon Abensour eagerly pointed out to the reader that newly-instated female tram workers ‘ne songent pas à usurper leur place et nulle concurrence féminine n’est à craindre ici pour après la guerre’.³¹⁴ Journalist and socialist pacifist Marcelle Capy also felt the need to explain women’s wartime conduct outside the home. Capy famously rejected tradition on many levels, and she was not attached to concepts of motherhood and domesticity that underpinned many of the discourses discussed in this chapter. Nor was she intent on reinforcing messages about patriotic civic duty and support of the war. However, she also worked hard to defend women’s interest in pastimes other than housework and childcare as a means of inadvertently quelling criticisms of women as frivolous and coquettish. In line with recent developments in

³¹³ Ibid., p.242. Here she showed awareness of the negative receptions of women’s war roles circulating throughout the war that Mary Louise Roberts discusses in some depth.

³¹⁴ Abensour, p.45.

consumer culture, she showed a desire to reassure her readers that female shoppers, usually from the middle classes were not necessarily greedy or self-interested. She reminded them that they were able to respectfully decline from actually spending any money: ‘le plaisir de voir est de meilleure qualité que celui d’acheter [...] On contemple les teintes, les reflets; on aime la douceur de l’étoffe entre les doigts qui palpent, la transparence des cristaux, le luxe des draperies...et on passe’.³¹⁵ Capy’s comments responded to prevalent views that women’s behaviour was shameful if they made purchases in wartime, and reassured those fearful of their new-found visibility outside the home, that women knew how to avoid the ‘corruption’ of a public life.

Similarly, Abensour, clearly trying to assert messages about normative gender roles, also encouraged his male readers to find comfort in the prospect of a post-war return to tradition, suggesting that women took on roles solely on the basis that it enabled them to make their own short-lived patriotic contribution to the war effort, rather than for reasons of greed or economic ambition. He wrote that women coped with the situation ‘courageusement avec cette seule pensée qu’elles sont mobilisées comme leurs époux, qu’elles seront libérées en meme temps qu’eux et en meme temps qu’eux rentreront dans leurs foyers’.³¹⁶ Similarly, for Abensour, the ‘*remplaçantes*’ were motivated to endure their own hardship on the basis that those on the front line were too. He wrote that ‘celles qui [...] se consolent en songeant à leurs chers poilus qui là-haut ont la vie encore plus dure’.³¹⁷

In sum, to a large extent a variety of dominant and more marginal discourses linked women’s lives at home to their heroism in wartime. Those faithfully residing in the domestic space that was thought to be ‘natural’ helped to exhibit the strength of the French family and the French nation; they held a vital and yet typified responsibility, again relating to the maintenance and stability of the private sphere. At a time when France’s territory was under threat and when homes close to the front line were quite

³¹⁵ Capy, p. 129.

³¹⁶ Abensour, p.46.

³¹⁷ Abensour, p. 44. The very term ‘*remplaçante*’, confidently coined by Abensour, suggested novelty and impermanence.

literally being destroyed, the ideal of domestic endurance behind the lines embodied in the middle-class woman defending the bosom of the country's heroes, was strategically posited as one of the most patriotic and dutiful wartime comportments of all. The virtue of this woman's role was derived from her two-fold display of obedience, as supporter of those who were sacrificing their lives on the battlefield and defender of the home, and as compliant subject who abided by the conventions dictated by her gender.

2.5 Femininity and Beauty

Republican minister Louis Barthou famously complimented the smile and the ladylike elegant conduct of French volunteer Red Cross nurses, who tended to be middle-class. He claimed their universal beauty to be the saving grace of the warring nation.³¹⁸ Femininity and beauty were key characteristics which, along with social class, motherhood and the separate sphere ideology, helped to influence heroisations of traditional women's roles in wartime France such as Barthou's.

Most apparent in the press, propaganda and wartime literature, the link between female heroism, and femininity and beauty was constructed in order to show that by consciously attempting to keep up their appearance in wartime, French women were not allowing themselves to become 'unwomanly', despite the suffering and hardships that they faced. They were posited as heroic precisely because they managed to occupy invaluable roles without representing anything other than the traditional philosophies of womanliness and beauty. Thus, they were seen to be adhering to the social code which distinguished the masculine from feminine and vice versa, and which underpinned many of the discourses seeking to position them in line with normative gender order.³¹⁹ As Valerie Steele argues, using the example of fashion, women caring for their appearance was traditionally looked upon as a feminine priority, and thus was often a reassuring sign of an 'appropriate' difference between men and women which did not threaten gender order.

³¹⁸ Darrow, 'French Volunteer Nursing and the Myth of War Experience in World War I', p. 93.

³¹⁹ Freedman, p.87.

The December 1917 *Revue professionnelle de la mode française*, proudly remarked on French women's modesty and adaptability when it came to wartime fashion.³²⁰ Although the writer's remarks upheld the femininity of French women, they also described them as respectful and stoic of appearance in response to the war, informing readers that 'les modèles de demi-saison [...] restent sobres et discrets' and that women were no longer seen in velvet, felt, fur, or the colour pink. A further passage added that 'les femmes, et c'est un Bonheur pour vous, mes chères lectrices, sont toujours coquettes malgré la guerre'.³²¹ In this context, 'coquette' referred to being well turned out rather than flirtatious. Two months later, as part of a piece on 'modes de guerre', the front cover of *Le Petit écho de la mode* prescribed a 'costume nationale' using illustrations of three bourgeois women in the home, reverentially dressed in dark colours and simple patterns, one of them reading a newspaper article entitled 'Restrictions'.³²² The message was much the same as that in the *Revue*; that women were graciously modifying their appearances so as to be respectful in wartime. But these messages also foregrounded the concept that women were making their own sacrifices, living in austerity and adapting themselves accordingly.

The French couture industry began to thrive after the first year of war and it was a key marker of national pride. As such, debates about France's role in the pan-European import and export trade were aligned with wider discourses of nationalism. In the first issue of fashion magazine *Les Élégances Parisiennes*, President of the *Association des tissus et matières textiles et de la délégation des industries créatrices de la mode* M. Kempf, expressed concern about the fact that France had used only German shipping firms before the war and that certain exports had been under German border control. He expressed his protectionist sentiment, writing that, 'il faut, et ceci dépend de nous, faire en sorte que notre commerce reste entre nos mains jusqu'au bout, afin de ne pas nous exposer à livrer le secret de nos affaires à nos concurrents'.³²³ A further article in the same issue came up

³²⁰ *La Revue professionnelle de la mode française*, 1 December 1917, p. 3.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³²² *Le Petit écho de la mode*, 24 February 1918.

³²³ *Les Elegance Parisiennes*, 1 April 2016, p.5.

with an alternative to replace the previously popular Leipzig fashion trade show. Proposing to hold the show in Lyon instead, the Mayor, Monsieur Herriot, was to open the fair to all Allied nations. The article also told readers about a strict ‘marque intersyndicale’, to be implemented by the chamber of commerce and an inter-union trade mark committee.³²⁴ The mark, introduced in response to the propensity of German pieces infiltrating the French market with fake French authentication marks, would tell traders and buyers that an item was authentically French, ‘alors que le produit français reste français’.³²⁵ As well as articles like these, *Les Éléances Parisiennes*, featured numerous illustrations of bourgeois women wearing the latest styles and cuts from the couture industry. As a pictorial manifestation of the magazine’s protectionist agenda, the figure of the middle class woman was thus seen to endorse such messages about the importance of ‘Frenchness’ in wartime fashion, trade and industry.

The men around them also had expectations of women's beauty. Steele’s explains that these expectations led to the fetishisation of women as objects, dolls and idols in the Belle-Epoque and throughout the war in line with traditional discourses of womanhood which objectified the French woman as a ‘decorative [...] ornament[s]’ who ‘was expected to beautify herself and her home, as well as attend to her husband and children’.³²⁶ Along these lines, in many wartime sources feminine beauty was thus also credited by both male and female commentators as a source of masculine respite and as a reassuring distraction from the masculine pursuits of politics and warfare.

Yet, like maternity and the domestic sphere doctrine, female beauty was not always used in nationalist or patriotic discourses. In fact, as was the case with reassuring the population that bourgeois women operating outside the home were a temporary phenomenon, many feminist sources endorsed traditionally feminine representations of women. Gertrude Atherton was one ideologically more marginal commentator to

³²⁴ Ibid., p.6.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Roberts, *Disruptive Acts*, p.3.

comment on the impact of feminine beauty on the men observing it, when she described a *depôt des isolés*,³²⁷ at which a ‘line of charming women with kind bright eyes, [...] simply dressed’,³²⁸ gave out doughnuts as ‘an impromptu treat for the soldiers’.³²⁹ Atherton mused on whether the women had been chosen ‘as much for their aesthetic appeal to the exacting French mind as for their willing to help’.³³⁰ For writers like Atherton, who saw feminism as a truly international ideology, conforming to gender ‘norms’ in wartime proved to be a better way of avoiding the bad press associated with more radical ideas about French womanhood that had begun to emerge more energetically around the turn of the century.³³¹ It also provided a legitimate basis on which their voice might be heard. Further, in the same way that Madeleine Vernet subverted a nationalist attachment to maternity, attaching it instead to the fight *against* war, so too did Marcelle Capy deem true female beauty a universal and organic achievement of nature that no human destruction could deny,³³² rather than being related to a woman’s desire to support her nation in war: ‘il est impossible de tuer le sourire de la beauté’.³³³ Capy called glamour and elegance a feminine duty, and the desire to bedeck oneself an organic process, like the sun’s own course across the sky.³³⁴ She rejoiced that women upheld their beauty, calling it ‘une des plus grandes joies de ce monde’.³³⁵ For Vernet a pacifist brand of maternalism was a weapon against the destruction and repulsion of war; for Capy, natural female beauty represented another weapon and needed to be celebrated and respected.

³²⁷ A base depot for soldiers from divided regiments awaiting re-deployment.

³²⁸ Atherton, *The Living Present*, p.13.

³²⁹ Atherton, *The Living Present*, p.12.

³³⁰ Atherton, *The Living Present*, p.12-13.

³³¹ Christine Bard, *Les Filles de Marianne. Histoire des féminismes 1914-1940* (Paris: Fayard, 1995), p.27.

³³² Capy, p. 126.

³³³ *Ibid.*, p.132.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

The positive benefits of French women's beauty were also regularly noted by Atherton. One of the prettiest students at the *école féminine* in Passy,³³⁶ was described in *The Living Present* as having 'red gold hair', just like Joan of Arc. The Duchess d'Uzès, an *infirmière major* who was instrumental in the relocation of field hospitals at the front, was also described as 'one of the reigning beauties of Paris', as well as being 'one of the best dressed'.³³⁷ And the appearance of another *infirmière major*, Madame Dugas, was depicted at length:

When I met Madame Dugas, once more I wondered if all Frenchwomen who were serving or sorrowing were really beautiful or if it were but one more instance of the triumph of clothes. Madame Dugas is an *infirmière major*, and over her white linen veil flowed one of bright blue, transparent and fine. She wore the usual white linen uniform with the Red Cross on her breast, but back from her shoulders as she walked through the streets with us streamed a long dark blue cloak. She is a very tall, very slender woman, with a proud and lofty head, a profile of that almost attenuated thinness that one sees only on a Frenchwoman, and only then when the centuries have done the chiselling.³³⁸

Atherton then went on to describe Dugas as 'the most strikingly beautiful woman I had ever seen'.³³⁹ Likewise, 'President of the first, or noblesse, division of the Red Cross',³⁴⁰ the *Société Française de Secours aux Blessés Militaires* the Comtesse d'Haussonville, was 'not only [...] a great lady, but she looks the rôle',³⁴¹ and 'her figure could hardly have been more perfect at the age of thirty'.³⁴²

Atherton used similar language to describe the widows that she met at the *Association d'Aide aux Veuves Militaires de la Grande Guerre*.³⁴³ Created in 1915 by a group of aristocratic widows and headed by Madame Goujon and the 'remarquable'³⁴⁴ Baroness

³³⁶ A training school for young girls to train in aspects of hospitality.

³³⁷ Atherton, *The Living Present*, p.162.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.95.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.134.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³⁴⁴ *Le Courier de l'Oise*, 4 September 1921.

Lejeune, by May 1916 the association offered emotional and material help to 2, 000 widowed women who either ‘applied for assistance’, or ‘were discovered suffering in lonely pride’ and consoled them in their loss.³⁴⁵ The service, Atherton explained, was particularly targeted at ‘poor women without the alleviations of wealth and social eminence, many of them a prey to black despair’.³⁴⁶ She spent some time with the Paris branch and whilst there she pondered the figure of the upper class war widow, saying,

I wondered then, as I had wondered many times, if all the young French women really were beautiful or only created the complete illusion in that close black-hung toque with its band of white crepe just above the eyebrows and another from ear to ear beneath the chin. When the eyes are dark, the eyebrows heavily marked, no hair visible and the profile regular, the effect is one of poignant almost sensational beauty.³⁴⁷

Like Atherton, Léon Abensour was also keen to establish true elegance and femininity as central to ‘valiant’ female war roles. He sought to crush existing stereotypes stemming from gender anxieties about women’s appearances becoming masculinised in line with their assuming of men’s roles in the war, from working outside of the home to taking on the role of head of the family. Instead, he reassured his readers that femininity and beauty were intact amongst France’s female population. For example, reflecting the shift from growing radicalization at the turn of the century back to discourses of conservative middle class womanhood with the rise of pre-war nationalism and the war itself, he wrote about a transformation in the appearances of members of the *Conseil national de femmes françaises* from ‘déguisement masculine’ and ‘cheveux courts’, to ‘chapeaux élégants - voire excentriques - et robes de grands couturiers, ou sévères toilettes bourgeoises, cheveux blond vénitien, ou respectables têtes blanches’ at the most recent congress.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁵ Atherton, *The Living Present*, p.79.

³⁴⁶ Atherton, *The Living Present*, p.78.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.79.

³⁴⁸ Abensour, p.8.

2.6 The H el ene Balli case

Discourses of bourgeois heroism of the hearth framed women as nameless, and rarely singled out or officially remembered women as individuals in the same way that wartime rhetoric gave centre stage to martyrs such as Edith Cavell.³⁴⁹ However, there were exceptions to this rule, and some bourgeois women were identified by name for their heroism. But it is important to note that, as this chapter has demonstrated, such women who were singled out occupied positions at the upper end of the bourgeoisie. In other words, they had wealth and occupied altruistic roles which usually involved them investing family money in wartime charitable initiatives. One individual who was given prominence for her heroism in public discourse was aristocrat Madame H el ene Balli, whose philanthropic *R econfort du soldat* initiative consisted of sending comfort packages to recently injured or recuperated French soldiers just about to return to the front. Balli was singled out because she was a wealthy member of high society, but also perhaps because the *R econfort du soldat* was an internationally-recognised initiative with a committee of prominent French and American figures, many of them women. Public praise for Balli's work often linked her closely with the domestic sphere, and congratulated her on being able to show such valuable and selfless enterprise without needing to stray too far from her own home.

Thus, a July 1916 article in *Le Figaro* describing Balli's devotion, charitable nature, and the success of her initiative despite many challenges,³⁵⁰ also hastened to add that she did not need to leave her home in order to carry out her work, celebrating the fact that the *R econfort du soldat* was ' tablie chez elle'.³⁵¹ This comment reinforced the idea that Balli's heroism was 'contained' in a domestic setting.

³⁴⁹ See discussion of women's war roles in chapter three.

³⁵⁰ *Le Figaro*, 20th July 1916, 'depuis le mois de janvier, nous avons envoy s au front 800 paquets individuels, trouv  des emplois   des reform s, et form  des membres   un certain nombre d'amput s [...] elle a foi que cet  lan de bienfaisance sera d'autant plus puissant chez les protecteurs de cet oeuvre, qu'ils r alisent journellement le surcroit de tache que la guerre imposera de plus en plus'.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

In addition to this, a 1917 postcard [figure 26] featuring *Rédemption*, a poem by André Soriac, a soldier in the 277th infantry regiment, was dedicated to Balli. The poem told a soldier's story of a woman who died when her son was away at the front line, and described not only the son's grief, but also expressed regret that his mother would not be alive to receive his *croix de guerre*:

Six mois plus tard, Poulot sanglote au cimetière:

- Maman!...Maman! .. c'est moi! .. Pardonne à son enfant.

<< Qui t'apporte aujourd'hui sa belle croix de guerre!...>>³⁵².

The poem was an example of life at home intersecting with the male pursuit of war and a non-traditional reversing of roles so that the young son mourned the loss of his mother rather than an elderly bereaved mother representing the tragic loss of war. That the poem was dedicated to Hélène Balli is significant because she was considered a hero of the home front just like the long-suffering mother in the poem, and because of the connection that she had with the activity of the soldiers on the front line, despite remaining in the domestic sphere in order to carry out her work.

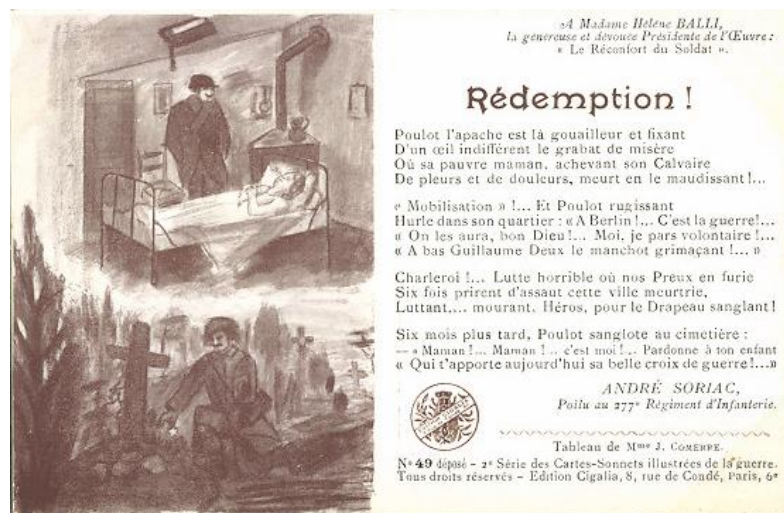


Figure 26: *Rédemption*, André Soriac, 1917 postcard

³⁵² André Soriac, *Rédemption*, second series of illustrated wartime sonnet cards (Paris: Edition Cigalia, Paris 1917).

Alongside numerous countesses, and duchesses, Hélène Balli's³⁵³ heroism was also evoked in *The Living Present*. Atherton made much of her invaluable, feminine war work which allowed her to remain largely in a domestic environment and a philanthropic role. She described Balli as wealthy, fashionable and 'feminine'. She made much of her 'reform' from 'femme du monde [...] what our most strident feminists call parasitic' through a state of terror and loneliness in Paris when war broke out, to her decision to take on a role working tirelessly for the war effort.³⁵⁴ Most significant for Atherton was Balli's awareness of the reciprocity between home and front: 'like all the Frenchwoman to whom I talked, and who when they plunged themselves into work expected a short war, she is determined to do her part as long as the soldiers do theirs'.³⁵⁵

In *The Living Present* Hélène Balli's appearance was given much attention, as though part of her fulfilling of her heroic wartime role meant proudly remaining beautiful at home in the face of hardship whilst the men were doing their duty at the front. Her upper class altruism and 'goodness' was associated with beauty and femininity. She was described as possessing a 'gracious presence and lovely face', which, Atherton suggested, had a real function in the context of war: 'although her beauty has always been a pleasure to the eye, perhaps it is now for the first time paying its great debt to nature'.³⁵⁶ Atherton stated that 'she has done her share in keeping up the morale of the men'³⁵⁷ and that she 'makes them forget the sad monotony of their lives, even the pain in their mutilated limbs, and the agony behind their disfigured faces'.³⁵⁸

Finally, a *Pathé* film called *L'oeuvre du réconfort aux soldats* was produced in 1916 to showcase Balli's initiative. Throughout the film the division between men and women was made clear, and the markers of femininity and domesticity were omnipresent. The

³⁵³ Towards the end of the war Balli was also on the General Committee of the America's Allies Co-Operative Committee formed on May 1st 1918, an international war relief organisation under which the Trench Comfort Packets Committee also operated.

³⁵⁴ Atherton, *The Living Present*, p. 5.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.22.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.23.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.22.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.23.

first and second scenes showed female, upper-class committee members distributing packages and cigars to soldiers from behind a makeshift table in some barracks. Standing static throughout, they were spatially set apart from the men, who were constantly moving along the line to collect their parcel. The penultimate scene did see women mixing spatially with the soldiers, as Félix Mayol entertained them all with an impersonation of a woman concerned with her hair style. And in the final scene, Edmée Favart gave out bunches of flowers to the soldiers who distributed them amongst themselves. Therefore, initially occupying distinct spatial areas, men and women did eventually mix, but the subject matter bringing them together was, interestingly, feminine frivolity and vanity enacted by a male entertainer.³⁵⁹ The flowers in the final scene provided a powerful domestic image of femininity, serenity and ‘prettiness’, which contrasted strongly with the poilus’ heavy hands and dirty uniforms. The association with home that the flowers had for the men in the film was visible, as they looked touched to receive the bouquets. But they also looked uncomfortable handling them, as though much time had passed since they had come into contact with such a feminine vestige of home.

It is unclear whether or not the film featured Hélène Balli herself, as the Pathé ‘description’ of the first scene merely described ‘les Comités français et américains’ which were ‘composés de femmes’, and could be seen distributing comfort packages at the barracks. But the film certainly celebrated her scheme, with prominent entertainers Edmée Favart, Lyse Berté and Félix Mayol endorsing it with their involvement.

³⁵⁹ The issue of female vanity as imitated by Mayol in the film was a concern for some observers who were critical of what they considered an innate female preoccupation with looking good and in fashion. Margaret Darrow gives the example of Red Cross nurses were believed, by some, to be more concerned about looking good in their uniforms than treating patients. Darrow explains that ‘a typical claim was that women volunteered only in order to be able to wear the Red Cross uniform, which had quickly become a fashionable sign of social prestige. French women, especially Parisian women, moralists lamented, would go to any length in order to be in fashion’. She argues that these opinions were in response to ‘such an easy assimilation of the feminine to the masculine military project’ that was embodied in the increase in nurses during the war. Darrow, ‘French Volunteer Nursing and the Myth of War Experience in World War I’, p. 94-5.

2.7 Conclusion

Beginning with an analysis of the shifting representation of women's moral and social roles in Belle-Epoque France, this chapter has asserted that certain aspects of these traditional bourgeois qualities were heroised during the First World War by a range of commentators, in nationalist propaganda campaigns and utopian discourse, in maternal feminist pacifism and perhaps less predictably, in suffragist discourse. The heroisation of maternal, domestic, and feminine roles and behaviours in wartime narratives defined them as such specifically in the context of war, on the basis that these roles represented selfless devotion to the support of the French family and the nation, and required the maintenance of the home whilst a significant percentage of the male population was away. Seen as perhaps the most powerful display of patriotism by many, and dominating the visual and the textual narratives for specifically female heroism when *la patrie* was under threat, the image of the wife and mother represented a new form of heroism for women which departed from the ancient concepts of supererogation in a militarised role. Instead, these women embodied a noble and simple doing of one's duty, the significance of which was not to be underestimated in the conditions of war, where duties were clearly defined and undeniably gendered.

Returning to the argument outlined at the beginning of the chapter, the discussion has also sought to underline the reasons why this particular 'brand' of female heroism was prescribed in dominant discourses. In addition to the explicit patriotic devotion that they embodied, and at a time when 'any connection between women and war' was considered with 'pervasive unease',³⁶⁰ women who were seen to be fulfilling their 'natural' role in difficult circumstances were also easily and reassuringly categorised as heroic on the basis that they did not pose a threat to the revered social order, so strongly anchored in French society by gender and sexuality. Praising this kind of female heroism was a response to war that had broad resonance particularly in the challenging latter years, not only for those ideological positions which sought to project and therefore reinforce social

³⁶⁰ Darrow, 'French Volunteer Nursing and the Myth of War Experience in World War I', p.82.

order and the traditions of civilisation, but also for those who had alternative, underlying agendas such as a longer term campaign for the vote or for future peace.

Having considered how and why the building blocks of middle-class womanhood were situated in relation to ideals of heroic patriotic duty and gender order, the third and final chapter in Part One focusses on the complex case of the French working class woman. For those women who had worked before 1914, but who began contributing more directly to the national war effort once France had signed the declaration, the conflict represented a rise to greater prominence in the press and in political debate which sometimes cast them as national heroes. But, as the discussion also points out, a heroic reputation was not always easy to achieve, due to their class and the very nature of their patriotic contribution.

Chapter Three

Complex Female Heroism: Attitudes towards Female Industrial Workers in First World War France

In contrast to chapter two which discussed fluxes in traditional images of noble and heroic bourgeois womanhood, this chapter focusses on a less consensual form of female heroism, one which was publicly opposed at the same time as being heroised before and during the First World War: the woman war worker. To this end, a case study of female industrial workers forms the basis for the chapter, and sheds light on the complexities associated with cultural and political representations of their role. They, unlike the models of bourgeois beauty, domesticity and motherhood discussed in the previous chapter, were certainly not considered heroic without question. The discussion also considers the unique wartime context as a further catalyst for binary views on working women's heroic potential, showing that pre-existing views were moulded to fit wartime discourses. To give context to an overall investigation of these binary wartime views, the chapter begins by briefly investigating interpretations of female employment in industry in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, in order to gain an understanding of the extent to which these interpretations were to be further adapted to suit the context of conflict.

3.1 Interpretations of Industrial Work in the Belle-Epoque

As James Macmillan argues, women working in industry was not novel in the nineteenth century. He admits, however, that during this period the problematizing of this role was indeed a new development, and sought to spotlight some of the social implications of women's work. Growing scruples and reservations about women's employment in industry, manifest in interpretations and representations of their working life, were motivated in the first half of the century by fears about the disruption of social and moral order under the Second Republic and Second Empire.³⁶¹ Macmillan gives the example of

³⁶¹ James F. McMillan, *France and Women, 1789-1914: Gender, Society and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 112.

Catholic reformists who at this time ‘declared themselves to be troubled by the presence of women in the new factory-based labour force, on the grounds that this was an encouragement to promiscuity and moral depravity’.³⁶² In the latter half of the century, however, the double-edged need to improve production, whilst also improving population growth, became more of a priority. Both needs were driven to a large extent by the looming threat from Prussia. After a defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1871, which was, in part, blamed on impotent French blood and a decline in physical force,³⁶³ dominant pro-natalist discourses gathered energy. Infant mortality was still high.³⁶⁴ Unsuitable working conditions were seen to have a negative effect on the female body and thereby risked compromising its reproductive capacity at a time when the vitality of the nation’s new-borns had to be boosted. Though the majority of female industrial workers were single, it was therefore married women who tended to be the most heavily criticised because, in taking on this work, they were seen to be irresponsibly jeopardising their contribution to the future of the population.

In response to such beliefs, women’s employment was regulated by law in 1892 so as to best facilitate fertility and pregnancy in the decades leading up to the war.³⁶⁵ This law included restrictions on working hours and the abolishment of better-paid night work.³⁶⁶ Such legislation did not take into account women workers’ own views and was established with the mind-set that ‘industrialisation was destroying the family’ and

³⁶² Ibid., p. 111.

³⁶³ As predicted by Benedict-Augustin Morel as early as 1857. Jean-Yves Le Naour, *Misères et tourments de la chair durant la Grande Guerre: Les mœurs sexuelles des Français 1914-1918* (Paris: Aubier, 2002), p. 11.

³⁶⁴ *Femmes et travail au XIXe siècle : enquêtes de La Fronde et La Bataille syndicaliste : Aline Valette, Marcelle Capy*, présentation et commentaires par Marie-Hélène Zylberberg-Hocquard, Evelyne Diebolt (Paris : Editions Syros, 1984), p. 17.

³⁶⁵ Joshua H. Cole, ‘“There are only good mothers”: The Ideological Work of Women’s Fertility in France before World War I’, *French Historical Studies*, 19:3 (Spring 1996), pp. 639-72, p. 642, and Diebolt and Zylberberg-Hocquard p. 15. Investigations into the poor health of working mothers extended to a concern for the upbringing of children, who were to be protected at all costs against immorality and criminality believed, particularly by British degeneration theorists such as Edwin Chadwick, to be an effect of industrial work during pregnancy.

³⁶⁶ Karen Offen, ‘Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France’, *American Historical Review*, 89:3 (June 1984), pp. 648-76, p. 657.

therefore the future of France's defence force.³⁶⁷ Such views were less accepting of the presence of women in industrial employment than those held by figures such as republican senator and social welfare advocate Paul Strauss who wished to adapt the workplace to accommodate reproductive potential *as well as* economic output.³⁶⁸ Along these lines, it was widely believed that if women were to continue working outside of the home, they should not be required to physically handle any heavy-duty working matter and that they should deal only with the lightweight fabrics and materials.³⁶⁹

As chapter two shows, the primary role of bourgeois woman had historically been defined by discourses of motherhood and home-keeping, both by those who opposed women's increased social visibility and those who sought to improve it. Motherhood was also understood to be a more universal marker of womanhood, extending to the working classes. But very few reports on female industrial work and life were published in the second half of the nineteenth century.³⁷⁰ Despite several important legislative changes to women's working conditions being implemented in the early years of the Third Republic, the press still did not want to release material on a role which was renowned for posing a threat to a woman's reproductive health.

One advancer of theories around the detrimental effect of industrialisation in the pre-war era was Republican Minister Jules Simon who published *L'Ouvrière* in 1861. For Simon, the negative effects of industrial work for women had nothing to do with dangerous working conditions. Nor did he explicitly bemoan the development of their economic roles. Rather, in his opinion, work in industry had caused a fundamental and worrying change to the role of woman and family in society: 'la femme, devenue ouvrière, n'est plus une femme'.³⁷¹ Simon was fearful about the working woman coming into contact with and being under the direction of men other than her husband and being separated

³⁶⁷ Macmillan, *France and Women, 1789-1914*, p. 178.

³⁶⁸ Strauss was also responsible for proposing an 1899 law to the senate for the protection and aid of mothers and infants.

³⁶⁹ Diebolt and Zylberberg-Hocquard, p. 6.

³⁷⁰ Diebolt and Zylberberg-Hocquard, p. 18.

³⁷¹ Jules Simon, *L'Ouvrière* (Paris: Hachette, 1861), p. vi.

from her home and her children, for whom she might become a stranger.³⁷² He claimed that ‘le foyer est mort; la mère épuisée n’a pas la force de préparer des aliments [...] voilà la famille telle que les manufactures nous l’ont faite’.³⁷³ He lamented the growing use of wet nurses and childminders, the abandonment of children during the working day and the increasing lack of moral and maternal education for children. For Simon, these circumstances would ultimately result in two things: the degeneration of the French population, and a poverty-stricken proletariat toiling to produce a thriving industry.

Journalist Jules Huret, in his 1897 *Enquête sur la question sociale en Europe*, focused one chapter on the *Association coopérative du capital et du travail*, and the *Société du Familistère Godin & Cie*, set up in Guise in 1880 by social justice campaigner Jean-Baptiste André Godin. Huret, who was shown around the commune which housed an entire community living and working, described the multiple ways in which Godin funded the utopian *familistère*, offering cheap rents and free education to its inhabitants. But most significantly linked to the dominant discourses circulating about women’s roles at the time was Godin’s memorial statue, erected after his burial in the *familistère* gardens. According to Huret’s description, the statue asserted an idealised vision of the French proletarian family and the dichotomy between man working and woman mothering. On the right was a worker, symbolising ‘Travail’, and on the left a breast-feeding woman, symbolising ‘Maternité’, the two co-existing functionally, each clear embodiments of gendered social duties. Huret’s choice to end his report on the *familistère* with an admiring description of the statue revealed his own belief that those icons depicted were aspirational gender roles for the working class family in the Belle-Epoque.

Thus, working class women in the Belle-Epoque were judged on the extent to which their lifestyles challenged historically entrenched ideals of motherhood and womanhood attached to the domestic sphere. Having been topical in the period of *revanchisme* after the Franco-Prussian defeat, the effects of industrial work on reproductive potential had

³⁷² Ibid., p. v.ii

³⁷³ Ibid., p. vi.

long been a national concern, and this was heightened in the late 1890s when women were first admitted to heavy industry.³⁷⁴ Although, in reality, such women were less attached to the *foyer* than the middle class women discussed in chapter two, various attempts were still made to solidify ‘normative’ projections of working class femininity at home as a means of fixing an overall social ‘position’ which they could occupy in society without impacting on the hegemonic status quo. When the First World War came, however, this process of fixing working class gender for the sake of the population and social reconstruction, although still a dominant priority, would at times give way to a newer national priority: the industrial war effort. In wartime, negative images of working women were therefore sometimes subverted so as to be re-framed heroically, in line with the concept of service and sacrifice for the nation.

3.2 Women’s Industrial Labour in Wartime France

Messages expressing fear about the ways in which women’s industrial work impacted on their ‘rightful’ role continued to circulate during the war. For many, their work continued to be a detriment to their ‘traditional’ purpose in life. Still identifiable in press sources after 1914 was the belief that they were endangering their own health and therefore their primary role as mothers, for example. French historian Michelle Zancarini-Fournel cites a 1916 article in trade union periodical *L’Union des métaux* and the proceedings from the September 1917 *Comité fédéral national des métaux* meeting on the female workforce, both of which condemned women’s work in war industry as not conducive to pregnancy or even fertility, and as representing a worrying antithesis of the ‘appropriate’ female domestic role. Zancarini-Fournel suggests that opinions such as these went some way to ‘délégitimer le travail des femmes à l’extérieur du foyer’ amongst the trade unions,³⁷⁵ despite the fact remaining that most female workers needed to make a living and were, at the same time as being demonised, required in post as part of the national war effort.

³⁷⁴ Diebolt and Zylberberg-Hocquard, p. 38.

³⁷⁵ Zancarini-Fournel, Michelle, ‘Femmes, genre et syndicalisme pendant la grande guerre’, in *1914-1918: Combat de femmes, Les femmes, pilier de l’effort de guerre*, ed by. Evelyne Morin-Rotureau (Paris: Editions Autrement, 2004), pp. pp. 98-111, p.106.

The criticism of women in industrial war work, regardless of its form, was therefore a good example of the censorious discourses that targeted women who occupied roles that were in any way removed from their 'rightful' primary duties. This was especially the case concerning working class women, for whom industrial work had been a necessity and for whom economic activity was not novel. Socialist Minister of Armaments Albert Thomas's view that munitions workers had been driven from the home was an inaccurate statement,³⁷⁶ given the large number of women who had moved horizontally from long-term jobs in other industries such as textiles, into armament production.³⁷⁷ In her report of a week spent working in a munitions factory, feminist pacifist Marcelle Capy explained in December 1917 that this move was mostly made under duress given how unpleasant armament manufacture was in comparison: 'Leurs mains qui maniaient l'aiguille et créaient les délicates frivolités parisiennes se tendent aujourd'hui implorantes vers la machine de fer et l'obus lourd aux épaules frêles'.³⁷⁸ Capy also cited a former embroiderer, a nurse and a dancer, for example,³⁷⁹ who had made a similar move in order to earn higher wages, only attainable in the munitions factory because 'il n'y a qu'elle qui donne travail et pain'.³⁸⁰ Although this was not, as Thomas attempted to frame it, a new phenomenon, women workers were still being targeted more frequently in wartime for what was believed to be the neglect of their natural role.

Scholars such as Laura Lee Downs, Laura Levine Frader, Jean-Louis Robert, and Mathilde Dubeset, Françoise Thébaud and Catherine Vincent have published extensively on the dominant negative receptions of women workers in literature and the press between 1914 and 1918.³⁸¹ But this work has largely neglected to observe the shift

³⁷⁶ Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p.13.

³⁷⁷ *La Lanterne* newspaper stated that 'mainte midinette se présente à l'usine de guerre', 12 August 1917

³⁷⁸ *La Voix des femmes*, 17 December 1917.

³⁷⁹ *La Voix des femmes*, 12 December 1917.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁸¹ Laura Lee Downs, *Manufacturing Inequality: Gender division in the French and British Metalworking Industries, 1914-1939* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995). Laura Levine Frader, 'From Muscles to Nerves: Gender, "Race" and the Body at Work in France 1919-1939', *International Review of Social History*, 44:7 (December 1999), pp 123-147. Jean-Louis Robert, 'Women and Work in France during the First World War', in *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in*

from peace to wartime and how this transition affected the ways in which female factory workers were viewed by social and political commentators. The aim of the remainder of this chapter is therefore to investigate how the unique and disastrous circumstances of international conflict firstly added to, and then eroded the criticisms that had been launched against women workers in late nineteenth century rhetoric such as Jules Simon's work, or Catholic reformism. It uncovers the ways in which women's wartime industrial work, although by no means consensually regarded during the war, was heroised as patriotic, defiant and even typically 'feminine'.

3.3 Negative Wartime Attitudes

The latter half of the war was characterised by a drop in nationalist fervour and a rise in stoicism and sobriety in attitudes to the conflict. As chapter two established, 1917 was a particularly significant year as far as civic and military dissent in France was concerned. The army mutinies along the Western front represented the confrontation between soldier and high command, over issues such as leave, living conditions in the trenches, and issues of family welfare at home, as well as a refusal to accept recent offensive policy.³⁸² Another main source of dissent in France at the time was industrial unrest and strike action. Factory working conditions had seemed bearable at the time when the war was believed to be a short lived disaster, but by 1916 it was clear that the conflict was to last for some time, and it was at this point that unrest became more widespread.³⁸³ Laura Lee

Europe, 1914-1918, ed by. Richard Wall and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp.251-66. Dubesset et al., 'Female Munitions Workers of the Seine'.

³⁸² Denis Rolland, *La Grève des tranchées: Les mutineries de 1917* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967). John Horne also discusses the 'impôt du sang' and draws on the tensions surrounding those who give their lives for France in combat, and those who were considered to be shirkers, who contributed to an alternative and unofficial civilian mobilisation in war industries behind the lines. As part of this discussion Horne refers to an 'acute crisis of morale in the Spring of 1917 provoked by the failure of Nivelle's 'final' offensive', and to 'the 'lassitude' by late 1917 of the soldiers of the older classes, who had suffered long separations from established homes'. John Horne, 'L'Impôt du sang': Republican Rhetoric and Industrial Warfare in France, 1914-1918, *Social History*, 14:2 (May 1989), pp. 201-23, p. 210 and 217.

³⁸³ Roger Magraw, 'Paris 1917-1920: Labour protest and popular politics' in *Challenges of Labour: Central and Western Europe 1917-1920*, ed. by Chris Wrigley (New York: Routledge, 2002) pp. 125-148, p.128.

Downs argues that the authorities feared that two sources of dissent – army mutinies and strikes - were not actually distinct from one another, which explains why Parisian law enforcement suspected the strike leadership to have involvement with the mutineers on the front line.³⁸⁴

As the conflict progressed, female strike action in France steadily increased compared with a calm 1914 when the mission of the *Union Sacrée* was respected, and national unity remained largely intact. By the latter war years the growth of the industrial female force had reached an all-time high, being 20 percent higher than it had been before the war.³⁸⁵ And women stood in a relatively stronger position as employees in industry; during the period 1914 to 1917 the number of female employees in the labour force grew steadily.³⁸⁶ By 1915 nearly a quarter of personnel in the metalwork industry were women, and many factories employed a female workforce representing 30 to 50% of the total staff.³⁸⁷ In May and June 1917 this increasing female labour force showed its strength and solidarity,³⁸⁸ when women munitions workers undertook a series of union-organised and large scale revolts which threatened the factories and streets of Paris and the provinces.³⁸⁹

Represented by the Federation of Metal-Workers, the Confederation of Trade Unions of the Seine and the Inter-Union Action Committee against the Exploitation of Women,³⁹⁰ the munitions workers' demands included a reversal of wage-cuts, and an increase in living allowances, as well as improved working conditions.³⁹¹ But although their pleas were backed to some extent by Albert Thomas and several voices from the medical

³⁸⁴ Laura Lee Downs, *Manufacturing Inequality: Gender division in the French and British Metalworking Industries, 1914-1939* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 120.

³⁸⁵ Dubesset et al., 'Female Munitions Workers of the Seine', p.185.

³⁸⁶ Robert, p. 252.

³⁸⁷ Laura Lee Downs, 'Les Mairaines élues de la paix sociale? Les surintendentes d'usine et la rationalisation du travail en France, 1917-1935', *Le Mouvement social*, no. 164 (July-Sept 1993) pp. 53-76, p. 57.

³⁸⁸ *La Lanterne*, 12 August 1917.

³⁸⁹ Maude Basse-Krueger, 'From the 'union parfaite' to the 'union brisée': The French Couture Industry and the *midinettes* during the Great War', *Costume*, 47:1 (2013), pp. 28-44, p. 29.

³⁹⁰ Dubesset et al., 'Female Munitions Workers of the Seine', p. 200.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.204.

profession,³⁹² they were situated in a war role which differed vastly to traditional notions of ‘appropriate’ women’s wartime contribution such as motherhood, homemaking,³⁹³ charity, philanthropy, nursing, or even working in ‘feminine’ industries like textiles,³⁹⁴ or lace-making. The gap between the home and the factory, defined with Margaret Higonnet’s ‘double helix’ theory, had widened substantially with the increase in women entering heavy industry due to the war. Given the preponderance of this less traditional role, the reputation of the female munitions worker also came to be strategically vilified, mostly in various wartime press sources which were particularly dominant around the time of the 1917 industrial action.

There were two main arguments on which this wartime vilification was based. The first framed munitions workers as a dangerous threat to male roles and masculinity more generally. In contrast to dressmaking, armament manufacture was heavy industry, and required what was considered by some to be an uncharacteristic amount of strength for women. In reality, women in munitions work represented no more of a ‘disruptive act’ than that represented by female workers in the previous century, throughout which they had been engaged in textiles and manufacturing, sometimes carrying out physically demanding tasks. But negative male responses to female war work in heavy industry

³⁹² Nurse Alice Landes, for example, published advice for women to combat the ill effects of standing all day. *L'Ouest Éclair (Caen)*, 18th May 1918, p. 3.

Roger Perkins, American professor of hygiene and bacteriology and medical associate of the scientific attaché to the America Embassy in Paris, published a post-war report in October 1919 entitled ‘A Study of the Munitions Intoxications of France’, which retrospectively revealed the overwhelming amount of harmful dinitrophenal to which the workers were exposed. Thomas’ ‘Thomas Scale’ promised equal piecework pay for men and women doing the same jobs. But many employers failed to establish the scale, and Thomas’ measures were as much about ensuring continued production in the pressured wartime climate as they were about giving the female workers more rights in the name of economic and social equality. Moreover, his gestures went largely unappreciated, and the female workers were arguably dissatisfied with his proposals for an interim solution, because they went on to launch more vociferous and violent strike action only two months later. *Public Health Reports (1896-1970)*, 34:43 (October 1919), pp. 2335-2374.

³⁹³ James F. Macmillan sums this up well: ‘*l’ouvrière* was manifestly a woman who failed to correspond with the idealized image of the ‘angel of the hearth’: and to flout the gender order constructed around the ideology of domesticity and the *femme au foyer* was to challenge the social order itself’, *France and Women, 1789-1914*, p. 110.

³⁹⁴ 70% of personnel in textiles manufacture were female in the pre-war era. Zylberberg-Hocquard, and Diebolt, p.14.

increased during the war in response to Albert Thomas's recruitment circulars in 1915, which concertedly aimed to insert more women into heavy industry. These responses revealed increasing fears about the so-called 'masculinisation' of women operating more visibly in such industries,³⁹⁵ thereby making them a subject of 'hantise' as far as many of their male co-workers were concerned.³⁹⁶ Scholarship on the interwar period by Mary Louise Roberts,³⁹⁷ Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer³⁹⁸ amongst others, gives further evidence which highlights the prevalence of gender-related fears originating during the war about what became of women without men, not only in terms of their defencelessness, but also in terms of their sexuality. Their research comments on that which Ana Carden-Coyne calls 'a common view in Europe and the Anglophone world', that 'modern war degraded humanity, affecting moral standards'.³⁹⁹ It was a concern for those witnessing the evolution of women's accession to male industries that female sexuality might somehow have been altered in line with increased economic independence.

These co-workers were also fearful about 'dilution',⁴⁰⁰ about wages being driven down and about them becoming redundant because women could be hired on a lower wage.⁴⁰¹ Alongside the loss of faith in the establishment that was characterized by the 1917 army

³⁹⁵ Top-down discourses went some way to perpetuating the reservations of male workers. Trade unions, for example, represented another mouthpiece for asserting the working woman's 'rightful' place in the home as wife and mother, in a show of 'atavistic loyalty to the ideology of domesticity' and thus did little to encourage men to fully embrace the concept of women in industrial work, Magraw. p. 131.

³⁹⁶ Zancarini-Fournel, p.106.

³⁹⁷ Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes*.

³⁹⁸ Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer, *The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars: Gender and Sexual Identity after World War One* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

³⁹⁹ Ana Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.213.

⁴⁰⁰ Magraw, p. 128.

⁴⁰¹ Francis Dupuis-Déri, 'Le Discours de la <<crise de masculinité>> comme refus de l'égalité', *Recherches féministes*, 25 :1 (2012), pp. 89-109, p. 96.

Jean Yves Le Naour sums up the wartime anxieties of male co-workers: 'Selon eux, ils ont été dupés, joués, diminués par des femmes qui ont saisi l'occasion de leur absence pour les remplacer et jouir d'une toute nouvelle et incroyable indépendance', Le Naour, "'Il faut sauver notre pantalon": La Première Guerre mondiale et le sentiment masculin d'inversion du rapport de domination', *Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'histoire critique*, <<http://chrhc.revues.org/1866>>, [accessed 17 November 2015].

mutinies,⁴⁰² growing accusations of *embusquage* or shirking launched at the male workers who were not fighting at the front and were instead working alongside women in some of the same roles represented yet more threats to masculinity.⁴⁰³ These fears were further heightened by the threat of arrest that loomed if employees were to protest over any of these concerns.⁴⁰⁴

Male anxieties manifested themselves in many ways. The sexual conduct and morality of female employees was placed under considerable scrutiny in humiliating sexual examinations and health checks imposed by factory owners and inspectors.⁴⁰⁵ In addition to ensuring that the workers were morally reliable and fit enough to work, this physical surveillance also provided evidence of the pro-natalist objective of the time to keep the maternal body fit for purpose.⁴⁰⁶ From December 1914, police commissioners and superintendents had also been ordered by the War Ministry to survey their movements for evidence of incriminating, sabotaging or criminal behaviour or perceived laziness.⁴⁰⁷ An Interior ministry accident book, for example, logged an incident at a St Brienne horseshoe manufacturers when a young women stopped the function of a punching block, as an instance of ‘sabotage’, even though the log stated that she had done so because she had needed to rest for a few minutes.⁴⁰⁸ And a 9 July 1915 memo from the security branch of the Ministry outlined the importance of employing ‘une surveillance rigoureuse’ in factories. The memo demanded that police enforce ‘des mesures exceptionnelles de surveillance et une répression énergique des actes de sabotage ou des attentats criminels’, whenever necessary.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰² Ian Sumner, *They Shall Not Pass: The French Army on the Western Front 1914-1918* (London: Pen and Sword, 2012), p. 206.

⁴⁰³ Magraw, p. 130, and Horne.

⁴⁰⁴ Magraw, p. 130.

⁴⁰⁵ Dubesset et al., ‘Female Munitions Workers of the Seine’, p. 179.

⁴⁰⁶ Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, p.49. It is important to note there were also female departmental *inspectrices* as of an 1882 law, Diebolt and Zylberberg-Hocquard, p. 10.

⁴⁰⁷ Downs, p. 140.

⁴⁰⁸ F/7/13356, AN.

⁴⁰⁹ F/7/13356, AN.

More evidence of manifestations of fears around the ‘incongruity of women’s work in jobs formerly gendered male’,⁴¹⁰ came in the form of press sources which highlighted attempts to reposition the female industrial worker in a less subversive workplace guise as a means of re-asserting traditional gender roles in a daily environment that was thought of as ‘abnormal’ for women. This was done via the foregrounding of articles which gave details about how their tasks had been adapted according to the particularities of gender. On the outside, published evidence of measures which seemed to alleviate the strain of industrial work for women were supportive of their wellbeing. *La Lanterne*, for example, discussed the ways in which munitions manufacture was made easier for women, with the provision of better tools, machines and mechanisms to ease the moving of material and equipment, such as wheeled tables.⁴¹¹ However, this evidence also defined women workers clearly as different and as less capable than men, thereby also aiming to alleviate some of the masculine anxiety associated with fears of workplace usurpation or post-war disempowerment and redundancy.

Further separating the pre-war era from the war was the atmosphere of civil unrest which had been exacerbated by specific wartime conditions and attitudes. The cost of conflict was high. The resulting bread, sugar and meat rations,⁴¹² and pressures to work longer hours to tighter targets put a strain on the working civilian population causing it, too, to run low on energy for war work. It was therefore in response to these unique economic circumstances of conflict that female munitions workers felt inclined to strike over working conditions. In turn, their strike action predisposed them to further scathing criticism in certain discourses which accused them of being irrational and mercenary and more interested in their own financial wellbeing than the safeguarding of the nation. The second argument which demonised munitions workers during the war therefore suggested

⁴¹⁰ Levine Frader, p. 129.

⁴¹¹ *La Lanterne*, 12 August 1917.

⁴¹² ‘L’économie de guerre’, *Reseau Canopé* website, for le réseau de création et d’accompagnement pédagogiques

<http://www.cndp.fr/crdpreims/memoire/bac/IGM/connaissances/guerre_economique.htm,> [accessed 20 October 2015].

Sumner, p. 207.

that in pursuit of an improved working life, the women were neglecting their duty to support the nation in conflict. This was particularly critical at a time when the nation's 'heroes' were away at the front paying their blood tax in defence of France.

A document detailing a series of strikes at Bourges in May 1918, referred to trade unions as 'extrêmement dangereux' and as exercising, 'sous le couvert de préoccupations corporatives, une action purement révolutionnaire [...] les seules thèmes qu'ils développent sont: la paix à tout prix'.⁴¹³ Those engaging in industrial action were accused of being 'franchement pacifiste[s]' and of constituting 'uniquement une protestation contre la guerre' in letters from General Gages, manager of a Bourges construction factory to Louis Loucheur, arms minister on 12 February and 2 May 1918. Gages also insinuated that they were driven by the tenets of the Russian Revolution.⁴¹⁴

A police report from 2 January 1917 listed 'les principaux éléments de trouble dans la population ouvrière' in the wake of strikes at the Langlée rubber factory in Chalette, commenting on the character, the moral and private conduct and marital status of female strikers, and the reasons why they might have been motivated to strike. Among those women singled out was Louise Morisseau who was considered to be 'peu intelligente', Gabrielle Delorme who was apparently nervous, irritable, anarchist, and dangerous, Berthe Bouquinville who inherently loved conflict, and Ellen Gouilleaux who was supposedly loose in morals, fanatical and violent, with a good father who could not control her.⁴¹⁵ And further reports of arrests on the morning of 31 May 1917 also named individual women. They called Marie Pouchet 'aggressive et insolente' and remarked on her numerous lovers. Marguerite Testud was 'peu sérieuse et peu assidue' with 'un caractère très exalté'. Pauline Dantan, although believed to have a 'conduite privée bonne', was also believed to have acted out of pure discontentment. Finally, there were

⁴¹³ 7 N 678-681, SHAT, Vincennes.

⁴¹⁴ 7 N 678-681, SHAT, Vincennes.

⁴¹⁵ F/7/13361, AN.

women like Caroline Martin who lacked independence of thought and therefore had been caught up in the action and easily influenced.⁴¹⁶

This demonisation was manifest in nationalist reactions to the strike action, also demonstrative of shifts in general attitudes towards the war in 1917. As the memory of the International Women's Day demonstration in Petrograd in February 1917 was only too fresh in the minds of those who feared a revolutionary female force, the strikers were blamed by the authorities for prolonging the war,⁴¹⁷ or for acting in 'out-and-out sabotage of the war effort',⁴¹⁸ because they were preventing the provision of arms to the forces. Downs remarks that they were believed to have the potential to 'spread the pacifist 'contagion' to the men in uniform'.⁴¹⁹ Roger Magraw agrees that 'the spring of the 1917 strikes were believed to have been 'contaminated' by 'pacifist' rhetorical overtones'.⁴²⁰ Indeed, police reports referenced posters, circulars and letters which called on female workers to unite in industrial action as a means of revolting in the name of peace.

In response, the national camp was suspicious of figures like pacifist Louise Saumoneau, who wrote on behalf of the *Comité pour la reprise des relations internationales*, about 'absinthe nationaliste', which 'poisoned' women of the proletariat into believing in the nationalist image of the barbaric enemy, which she deemed to be a falsehood, instead claiming that evil could be committed by any army.⁴²¹ But Saumoneau's main aim was to encourage working women to take part in the social fight, to stand up for their rights and to pursue a social revolution which would abolish social class.⁴²² However, despite figures like Saumoneau insisting that their writings should be reproduced and circulated

⁴¹⁶ F/7/13366, AN.

⁴¹⁷ Zancarini-Fournel, p.108.

⁴¹⁸ Dubesset et al., 'Female Munitions Workers of the Seine', p.203.

⁴¹⁹ Downs, p. 135.

⁴²⁰ Magraw, p.130.

⁴²¹ Mathilde Dubesset ; Françoise Thébaud ; Catherine Vincent, 'Quand les femmes entrent à l'usine : les ouvrières des usines de guerre de la Seine 1914-1918 vol. II', (unpublished Masters Thesis, Université de Paris 7, 1973-1974), 331 DUB 2, BMD.

⁴²² 'Femmes du proletariat', *Comité d'action féminine socialiste pour la paix contre le chauvisme*, date unknown, in 'Antimilitarisme et sabotage 1915-1920' dossier, AN F/7/13349.

as far as possible, there is little evidence to prove that such calls reached a large number of women workers.⁴²³ Therefore it is likely that fears surrounding the pacifist potential of women workers, provoked by figures like Saumoneau, far outweighed their actual engagement in anti war activism as part of their professional lives.

As Yannick Ripa points out, nationalist ideology was further threatened in 1917 by a rise in the anti-war campaign, with the breakdown of the *Union Sacrée* and defeatism in the military.⁴²⁴ An example of Clemenceau's anti-defeatist regime in action was the arrest of teacher H  l  ne Brion on accusations of distributing pacifist propaganda. Responses to the munition's workers strikes demonstrated the same sentiments. The nature of the action, seen to be bold and anticipative of significant social change, was not only criticised by those who felt that the women involved were attempting to 'climb' above their 'station' in the 'greedy' and 'mercenary' demands they were making.⁴²⁵ They were also considered to be the cause of internal rifts in France and were blamed for 'endangering the country' because they were thought to pose a direct challenge to the concept of national unity that was so coveted during the war.

Negative responses to the strike activity also exposed fears, in those who sought to upkeep normative gender stereotypes, about the messages being diffused by certain commentators who had suggested before and during the strike activity, that the national devotion and hard work embodied in women's industrial labour could easily legitimise arguments for increased women's political rights in the future. In her *La Fronde* report on pre-war women's industrial labour from 15 December 1897, Feminist Socialist Aline Valette, had stated that 'l'industrialisation de la femme' would equate both to a 'source d'intraduisibles souffrances' and the 'promesse de future liberation'.⁴²⁶ And Marcelle Capy also suggested that in 1913, salaried work represented an unknown freedom which

⁴²³ Dubesset et al. 'Quand les femmes entrent    l'usine: les ouvri  res des usines de guerre de la Seine 1914-1918 vol. II', p. 346.

⁴²⁴ Yannick Ripa, *Les Femmes, actrices de l'histoire, France, de 1789    nos jours*, (Paris: Armand Colin, 2010), p. 100.

⁴²⁵ Dubesset et al., 'Female Munitions Workers of the Seine', p.206.

⁴²⁶ Zylberberg-Hocquard and Diebolt, p. 43.

signified the potential for active future participation in society. Given the recession of the formal campaign for rights once the war broke out, comments from journalist Marguerite Jouselin, in *Le Monde Illustré*, and a separate article in *La Lanterne* proved that there was still an implicit strategy in place which used women's war work to prove their deserving civic responsibility. Both articles expressed certainty that munitions workers' industrial action also showed that they were not politically ignorant and could join the case for women's political involvement in the post-war era.

Jouselin's piece entitled 'L'Emancipation de la femme', published during one bout of strikes in January 1917, championed the wider-reaching significance of women's work in heavy war industry. She claimed that 'ce que les femmes accomplissent déjà actuellement nous est un sur garant de ce qu'elles réussiront alors...'.⁴²⁷ Similarly, the tone in *La Lanterne* article, 'Le Travail féminin dans les usines de guerre', was hopeful about the impact of women's growing economic responsibility on their future civic involvement in general, claiming that 'les femmes [...] ont conquis pendant cette guerre l'égalité économique, seule base de tous les autres droits'.⁴²⁸ Indeed, increased rights were already being granted: the year of the strikes also marked the year that the *Loi Violette* was established, which gave women guardianship for the first time.⁴²⁹

Suggestions like those from Capy, Valette and Jouselin prompted male-authored sources to depoliticise women in response to feeling disempowered at the thought of sharing politics with them. An example of this response was *Faut leur rentrer d'dans!*, a popular war song in which fears relating to the potential for an increase in women's rights were decipherable. The opening lines, for example, read 'mes amis faut pas s'laisser faire! Les femmes s'mel'nt de nos affaires'.⁴³⁰ These lyrics point to fears about women entering *any*

⁴²⁷ *Le Monde Illustré*, 13 January 1917, p.27.

⁴²⁸ *La Lanterne*, 12 August 1917.

⁴²⁹ Rageot, p. 29.

⁴³⁰ *Faut leur rentrer d'dans!*, lyrics by Plebus, music by Edouard Jouve, B/A 709, APP.

part of the male realm, including politics. Indeed, the next lines read, ‘J’me tords quand j’vois des femm’s cochers, Pourquoi pas des femmes députés ?’.⁴³¹

There were also some representations that stripped the female strikers of their political agency and re-framed them as even more powerless pawns, with press accusations of ‘strike cultivation’, whereby the action had allegedly been motivated by ‘paid agitators, or even the Germans’.⁴³² There was reason to believe, according to a letter from the *Service de Garde et de Protection des Etablissements travaillant pour la Défense Nationale* and the *Direction de la Sûreté Nationale* to the French War Ministry, that Germany was actively recruiting workers to spy on French munitions factories and that it was also sending a substance that would sabotage the functioning of factory machinery.⁴³³ The neo-Malthusian propaganda machine even incited fears about lower class women gathering at work and circulating ‘unhealthy and antisocial suggestions’ about sabotaging the future of the population as popularised by figures such as Parisian obstetrician Adolphe Pinard. Seen as defeatists, or as pacifists, the women strikers’ perceived ‘anti-patriotic’ or ‘anti-war’ approach to industrial mobilisation was viewed by many supporters of the war as a typically female response given widely held beliefs about ‘natural’ and innate feminine pacifism.⁴³⁴ Overall, negative responses to women’s industrial war work developed with the course of the latter war years and exposed fears about women no longer relying on, or instead usurping the male workforce and about the wider significance of, and reasons for, strike activity. These responses show us that gender stereotypes were often still at the heart of wartime responses to female industrial action, and to women’s industrial work more broadly.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² Dubesset et al., ‘Female Munitions Workers of the Seine’, p.205, and Downs, p. 138-39.

⁴³³ 18 August 1917, F/7/13356, AN, *Direction de la Surete Nationale*.

⁴³⁴ Le Naour, ‘la femme naturellement pacifiste parce que mère’, Jean-Yves Le Naour, “‘Il faut sauver notre pantalon’: La Première Guerre mondiale et le sentiment masculin d’inversion du rapport de domination’, <<<http://chrhc.revues.org/1866>>>.

3.4 The Heroisation of Women Workers

Despite the prevalence of popular negative receptions of female industrial workers and in particular those who engaged in strike action, there were a significant number of sources during the war which sought intentionally and publicly to defend and heroise the work of the same women. These sources celebrated the work of those in armament factories, often in zealous reports of devotion and hard work, even after the 1917 industrial action had taken place. *Les Modes*, a monthly decorative arts review specific to women, for example, featured a piece in the June 1917 issue entitled ‘Nos Munitionnettes’ by Nite in the ‘Les Femmes pendant la guerre’ pages. The article disproves French historian Jean-Louis Robert’s claim, made in the 1980s, that ‘not a single illustration of the *munitionnette* had appeared in the popular press during the war’,⁴³⁵ because the front page featured a large photograph of a woman working in an armament factory in Lyon. Inside there followed more images of women in munitions factories; this time photographs of them making rockets, turning and milling at the Thomas-Houston factory, making shell cases, and transporting shells on specially made wooden wheelbarrows at the Renault factory in Billancourt. Nite’s article was highly celebratory, calling the nicknamed *munitionnette* ‘charmante’, describing the women as possessing ‘un petit air pimpant, propre, -et net’, and drawing on their ‘grace’, their smile, and their beauty.⁴³⁶

In addition to assertions of normative gender stereotypes which had been well entrenched since the Belle-Epoque, there was an openness during the war to the idea that women and men could and should join together in heroic support of the nation. Similarly to bourgeois female heroism discussed in chapter two, when the working woman was heroised by a variety of observers, it was firstly on the basis that she was believed to represent a projection of normative femininity and secondly because she was believed to be doing her own patriotic duty to the nation and to the men who were away at the front.

⁴³⁵ Robert, p. 265.

⁴³⁶ *Les Modes : revue mensuelle illustrée des Arts décoratifs appliqués à la femme* (Paris: Manzi, Joyant et Cie, 1917), p.2.

For example, as part of Nite's celebratory message, she was keen to point out the fact that the work in the factories did not prevent the workers from appearing as women 'should'. She reassured her readers that their overalls hid dresses underneath and that the workers sought a colour of overall that matched their skin tone or hair colour. She also claimed that the uniform was fashioned so as to appear more flattering and that the unsightly bonnet was worn in such a way that a few complimentary strands of hair escaped out of the front and framed the face. The workers' bare necks were visible vestiges of 'le corps gracieux et soigné' that lay beneath the work wear: 'Cendrillon qui cachait son joli pied, devait laisser voir une nuque charmante'.⁴³⁷ The article summarised that 'le travail n'empêche pas d'être joli. Le démon de la coquetterie ne perd pas ses droits, même à l'usine'.⁴³⁸ As well as praising them for their femininity, however, Nite also gave the women workers credit for their conscientiousness, calling them 'attentives', 'insoucieuses', 'actives', 'infatigables',⁴³⁹ and claiming that they 'semblent bien connaître l'importance de leur rôle'.⁴⁴⁰ She thus sought to frame them as capable and suited to the work, as well as loyal to their perceived primary role as feminine women. The article remarked that those women who Nite had visited carried out their work in the factory in the same way that they might have undertaken a feminine past-time: 'on a l'impression, à voir certaines femmes, plus rapides et plus gracieuses, qu'elles jouent sans cesse - oh! Toujours la même phrase, aussitôt recommencé que finie - sur quelque invisible et muet piano'.⁴⁴¹

Nite also observed the markers of femininity in factories, in the form of flowers in vases, and coloured silk draped over the factory lamps in order to soften the environment. These touches were particularly significant given the fact that, as *Les Modes* also reported, an official and ever-growing list of jobs that only women could do in munitions manufacturing was in existence by this point. The exclusion of men in some areas of the

⁴³⁷ *Les Modes*, p. 5.

⁴³⁸ *Les Modes*, p. 4.

⁴³⁹ *Les Modes*, p. 3.

⁴⁴⁰ *Les Modes*, p. 4.

⁴⁴¹ *Les Modes*, p. 3.

job therefore led to the feminisation of a space that had previously been the sole preserve of male workers. Such writings thus responded to anxieties about the virilisation of women in industrial work, reassuring readers that male and female heroism in wartime could be separately embodied and distinguished.

Like Nite, nationalist Gaston Rageot sought to convince his readers that factory workers could legitimately be heroic whilst remaining feminine. In his 1918 book *La Française dans la guerre* his description of a large metalwork factory featured physically strong and imposing women, who at the same time displayed all the markers of femininity; a pure white arm appearing from a dirty sleeve, or a graceful curl escaping from a cap, or the inescapable and ‘feminine’ condition of being fatigued.⁴⁴² Rageot reminded his readers that female munitions workers did once undertake traditionally feminine tasks such as knitting and housework:

Des jeunes femmes graves, vêtues de cuir, sculpturales. Les machines qu'elles dirigent travaillent comme celles des hommes, mais d'un rythme plus régulier, semble-t-il, plus continu, à cause de la douceur de leurs mouvements et de leur vigilance. Il reste de la ménagère dans la tourneuse d'obus et les femmes font de la métallurgie comme du tricot.⁴⁴³

Minority voices with firmer ideological intentions, like feminist suffragists Léon Abensour and Gertrude Atherton did not deliberately or overtly seek to ‘re-feminise’ the women about whom they wrote in the same way that writers such as Rageot and Nite did. Indeed, as we will see, Atherton often heroised the transformation of their bodies as a result of the heavy manual work that they carried out. But to some extent both she and Abensour still felt the need to present munitions workers as remaining loyal to their role in the home or in more ‘feminine’ industries a means of presenting a reassuring outlook on French women during the war. If less mainstream writers like these had insisted on portraying women who had deliberately turned their backs on the hearth, they would have struggled to garner support for their cause. Instead, representing women who were not trying to ‘be men’ enabled them to promote messages about the strength and patriotism

⁴⁴² Rageot, p. 18: ‘« La femme fatigüe! » dit un contremaitre’.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., p. 4.

of women in war in more traditional ways, even if such women had been prompted to take on unfamiliar working roles.

Abensour emphasised the importance of workplace initiatives like the factory crèches and breast feeding rooms which added to the sense of the ‘travail familial’ side of war work.⁴⁴⁴ He also pointed out that despite doing heavy duty manual work in the factory, the women’s hands were actually ‘faites pour les caresses d’amantes et les maternelles gâtées’.⁴⁴⁵ Rather than using verbs such as ‘master’ or ‘operate’, he chose the verb ‘domesticate’ when referring to the ironwork that the women carried out.⁴⁴⁶ Gertrude Atherton who, on the whole, made fewer attempts to ‘feminise’ her description of the munitions workers’ physicality, did go so far as to remind her readers that femininity was not altogether absent from their appearance: ‘their heads are always charmingly dressed [...] and as they invariably powder before filing out at the end of the day’s work, it is probable that a comfortable reliance may still be placed upon the eradicable coquetry of the French woman’.⁴⁴⁷ For the most part, though, she described a strong and muscular, even masculinised workforce. But the reader was always reminded of the more traditional role they had previously occupied:

The women had high chests and brawny arms. They tossed thirty-and forty-pound shells from one to the other as they once may have tossed a cluster of artificial flowers.⁴⁴⁸

3.5 The Dichotomy of Sacrifice

In addition to being heroised on the basis that they were believed to do heroic work in a womanly manner, munitions workers were also commended for their patriotic duty to the war effort and devotion to the absent men at the front. On 5 July 1917 Popular daily *Le Petit Parisien*⁴⁴⁹ published a short piece entitled ‘Hommage de <<munitionettes>>’,

⁴⁴⁴ Abensour, p. 73.

⁴⁴⁵ Abensour, p. 73.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Atherton, *The Living Present*, p. 39.

⁴⁴⁸ Atherton, *The Living Present*, p. 39.

⁴⁴⁹ Claiming to be one of the first ‘apolitical’ newspapers in Third Republic France, *Le Petit Parisien* was the most popular and widely-circulated daily.

which praised the conduct of more than 3, 000 female munitions workers from a Saint Mandé factory who grouped together at the *Place de la Nation* and cheered with bunches of flowers to celebrate the entry of America and its soldiers into the war. The women held a collection at the factory in order to cover the costs of the demonstration. For those observers who feared unpatriotic motivations of the munitions workers on strike, this was a good example of a heroic female workforce showing support of the ‘male art of war’, which was believed to be a key factor for many who reported on their efforts. Relating this duality between women’s war work and front line activity to the earlier discussion about women’s health and the health of the nation, a December 1916 article in Communist newspaper *L’Humanité* reporting on healthcare for female factory workers claimed that ‘leur intérêt et celui de la nation sont identiques’.⁴⁵⁰

Perhaps the most significant example of the heroisation of munitions workers was their endowment, in propagandist, nationalist war rhetoric, with a share in heroic war sacrifice close to that made by soldiers. Laura Lee Downs and John Horne discuss the ways in which the home front workforce was considered ‘in the official rhetoric of the munitions mobilization’ to be working in ‘another field of military service [...] as an alternative type of combatant’,⁴⁵¹ Horne with reference to male workers and Downs with reference to female workers. Horne notes that as a direct result of the 1915 Dalbiez law, for example, 350 000 soldiers who were better matched to work behind the lines and were therefore deployed to armaments factories, were believed to be making alternative wartime sacrifices albeit no longer engaged in armed combat. Horne also discusses Albert Thomas as a figure who promoted the idea that enacting sacrifices in the name of national defence was equivalent to enacting them in combat.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵⁰ *L’Humanité* article, 6 December 1916, F/7/13366 *Surveillance des usines; activité syndicale; état d’esprit; sabotage 1915-1917, Département de la Seine plus Les délégués d’Ateliers*, AN.

⁴⁵¹ Horne, p. 208.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

Indeed, direct evidence of Thomas’s reference to the ‘sacrifice’ of workers could be found in the published version of his 1915 speech entitled ‘French munition workers’ sacrifices and aims : a message to British workers from the French minister of munitions’. In it, Thomas praised the ‘French working classes’ who ‘went forward with enthusiasm’, believing at the outbreak of war that ‘they must make the

This concept of an alternative mobilisation behind the lines could thus also apply to women workers, who were compared in some war rhetoric with soldiers. According to Downs, ‘the manifest inequality of sacrifice, at the front and in the factory’, was successfully challenged with the image of the female munitions worker, seen to be making her own sacrifices.⁴⁵³ A 1918 war pamphlet *Les Soeurs*, for example, made the claim that women factory workers ‘sont fières de penser qu’elles comptent parmi les forces de l’armée de leur pays’.⁴⁵⁴ Though this was the only direct comparison that the pamphlet made between civilian and military mobilisation, it also framed the female weaponry manufacture personnel as the indispensable saviours of the front line forces:

Que de fois les *Tommies* et les *Poilus* ne durent-ils pas se faire petits dans les tranchées, afin de mieux se protéger des obus que l’ennemi ne cessait de leur envoyer, pendant des heures et des heures, tandis qu’ils voyaient leurs camarades mutilés et tués à leurs cotés, sans pouvoir mettre fin à de telles horreurs, car ils étaient incapables de répondre au feu de l’ennemi, n’ayant pas assez de canons ni d’obus. Ils demandaient à cor et à cri : plus d’hommes, plus de canons, plus d’obus ! C’est alors que les femmes de France et de l’Angleterre, en permettant aux ouvriers de devenir soldats, prirent leurs places devant leurs établis et leurs tours, dans les poudreries, les fabriques d’armes blanches, les usines où se fondent les canons et où se chargent les obus, afin de produire ces munitions dont nos soldats avaient si grand besoin. C’est grâce à leurs efforts qu’il fut possible de défendre Verdun et Calais.⁴⁵⁵

The pamphlet then went on to draw much attention to the hardship and even the threat of death that the female munitions workers faced in carrying out such work: ‘la mort hélas! ne les épargnait pas au milieu d’épouvantables accidents inévitables dans de tels besognes’.⁴⁵⁶

In a similar vein, *La Mobilisation féminine en France 1914-1919* written by a committee of aristocratic women, referred to munitions workers as ‘l’armée féminine française’.⁴⁵⁷

fullest sacrifices to gain liberty for the whole world, to win a happier life and a greater freedom for the proletariat of all countries’, Albert Thomas, *French munition workers' sacrifices and aims: a message to British workers from the French minister of munitions* (London: Munitions Parliamentary Committee, 1915).

⁴⁵³ Downs, p.134.

⁴⁵⁴ *Les Soeurs* (Paris: Dept. of Information, 1918), War Pamphlets 1914/18/SOE, BSC, UoL, p. 6.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁷ Mun et al., p. 6.

And the 1915-1916 *Le Livre d'or de l'héroïsme féminin: Guerre 1914-1916*, by the *Comité de la bibliothèque de la femme nouvelle* proudly referred to the 'vaillantes françaises, qui, pendant la Grande Guerre, ont accompli leur devoir simplement comme des soldats'.⁴⁵⁸ Gaston Rageot claimed that factory workers 'loved' their lathe like a weapon with which they could contribute to the war effort: 'ce n'est pas l'appât du gain qui l'attache à son tour. Elle l'aime comme une arme, comme un engin de guerre', before referring to them as 'ces sombres et rudes combattantes'.⁴⁵⁹

Press comparisons of women workers to combatants were also in circulation. *Les Modes* observed one woman who carried out her work with a real sense of defiance and duty to her country: 'on sent que vraiment, indifférente au reste, celle-là s'acquitte d'un devoir'.⁴⁶⁰ The same article likened the work of female munitions workers at one particular factory to patriotic duty on the battlefield: 'Rien que dans l'établissement ou nous sommes, elles sont quatre mille: un régiment!...'.⁴⁶¹ *La Lanterne* identified the women workers' 'probité professionnelle, amour du métier, absorption totale d'être par sa tâche' which it claimed 'apparaissent avec une exceptionnelle puissance chez les néophytes de la région du Travail et de la Patrie'.⁴⁶² All of these examples prove to us that there was a wartime intent to relate the defiance and conscientiousness of the female munitions workers to specifically patriotic devotion like that being displayed on the front line. In evoking a sense of equal duty and sacrifice for men and women, producers of these messages promoting dichotomous sacrifice attempted to build women into the wider picture of wartime heroism, a quality usually preserved for France's men. Heroic discourse in twentieth-century total war was thus re-constructed in the popular imagination to include those not fighting on the front line. It was now applicable to women who endured in traditional roles in the home, who carried out alternative, less

⁴⁵⁸ *Le Livre d'or de l'héroïsme féminin: Guerre 1914-1916* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Femme nouvelle, date unknown (wartime)), p. iii, Fonds Marie Le Gac-Salonne - Broc MF 2165, BMD.

⁴⁵⁹ Rageot, p. 18.

⁴⁶⁰ *Les Modes*, p. 4.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² *La Lanterne*, 12 August 1917.

traditional work in factories and, as the last two chapters show, worked as spies and nurses.

3. 6 Peripheral Heroisations: Gertrude Atherton and Marcelle Capy

Away from dominant press and nationalist rhetoric, there were more marginal voices also attempting to paint a heroic picture of female war workers for different reasons. Gertrude Atherton's suffragist text, *The Living Present*, showcased French women workers as possessing a steadfast resilience, as supporting the male cohort at the front, as bringing very specific feminine qualities to the masculine workplace, and as patriotically trying to carve out a role that might in some way meet a national need like that being fulfilled by heroic combatants in the war zone. She chose to represent them in this way in order to allay the aforementioned public fears circulating in response to the profile of the woman war worker. However, the desire of writers like Atherton to promote a zealous and positive force of munitions workers did not indicate that she would completely refrain from drawing on alternative and sometimes nontraditional images of womanhood as part of her suffragist agenda, even if this risked further aggravating pre-existing negative attitudes.

For example, rather than satisfying the theory that women's bodies had been transformed detrimentally so that they might be worryingly incapable of carrying or raising children, Atherton's 1917 account celebrated stronger, more hard-working bodies which enabled a more heroic, physically demanding task and which carried the markers of hard-working heroism for all to see. Her description of the munitions workers' 'high chests and brawny arms' was a good example of the pride that she felt when she observed them carrying out their duty.⁴⁶³ Certainly in her eyes, the workers were not behaving in a delinquent manner, and their bodies did not represent a troubling image of womanhood. Thus, considering Atherton's more militant approach, her tendency to criticise more mainstream feminist discourses like Madeleine Vernet's maternalist stance, her full advocacy of women's 'economic independence' and protestation of 'the double standard', it makes sense that

⁴⁶³ Atherton, *The Living Present*, p. 39.

she provided an antithetical alternative to damning pictures of frail female bodies and the ills of women's work.⁴⁶⁴ *The Living Present* provided an alternative mode of heroisation which idealised the changes to women's bodies brought about by war work rather than speculating about the negative effects that it might have on their reproductive system or their general vitality.

A second dimension to Atherton's suffragist heroisation was her positing of messages about the equality of sacrifice. In her book she cited the sentiments of the workers themselves in a description of their pleas to the male manager of a munitions factory to take them on. Their demands, according to Atherton's recollection, were made on the basis that they felt they had their own role to play in supporting those engaged on the front line:

One and all looked on the verge of a decline with not an ounce of reserve vitality for work that taxed the endurance of men. But as they protested that they not only wished to support themselves instead of living on charity, but were passionately desirous of doing their bit while the men were enduring the dangers and privations of active warfare, and as his men were being withdrawn daily for service at the Front, he made up his mind to employ them and refill their places as rapidly as they collapsed.⁴⁶⁵

According to the manager, as women they were not the 'calibre' of worker capable of engaging in munitions manufacture, and Atherton did not omit this from her commentary.⁴⁶⁶ Nor did she deny that it was out of necessity that he employed them, and that he expected them to fail. But she did use his dubiousness and reluctance to emphasise the strength and impact of the women's heroic willing to involve themselves in the war effort, despite the fact that some of them were indeed without physical health and vitality. It was the strength of their plea and determination that prompted him to take them on. The fact that Atherton followed this with a passage describing how well they had adapted

⁴⁶⁴ Emily Wortis Leider, *California's Daughter: Gertrude Atherton and Her Times*, (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 1991). p.6.

⁴⁶⁵ Atherton, *The Living Present*, p.38.

⁴⁶⁶ Susan Grayzel contextualises some male attitudes towards women workers in French factories: 'many male workers, especially union officials, were hostile to the introduction of women [...] fearing that they would drag down wages and dilute the strength of unions because, in France, as elsewhere, women's wages were kept below those of men'. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War*, p.31.

to the work and what an exemplary and impressive workforce they had proven themselves to be, further supported her point:

It was as I walked along the galleries and down the narrow passages between the noisy machinery of the rest of that large factory that I asked the superintendent again and again if these women were of the same class as the original applicants. The answer in every case was the same.

[...] Their skins were clean and often ruddy. Their eyes were bright. They showed no signs whatever of overwork. They were almost without exception the original applicants.⁴⁶⁷

Artherton's account went so far as to completely subvert Vernet's lamenting of female factory workers' 'appauvrissement physique', claiming that the factory work had actually rejuvenated a previously weak and frail group of women.⁴⁶⁸ Atherton portrayed the workers that she observed as having defiantly and heroically taken on the job of providing for France's war effort and having physically flourished in the process.

In another attempt to glorify the munitions workers' activity, Atherton chose to make a controversial comparison between the women she observed and Amazons, who, in the ancient context 'shunned as far as possible the entire male sex, and for life',⁴⁶⁹ were highly militarised and skilled in battle, and lacked one breast. As discussed in the introduction, the complexities associated with the transplantation of the ancient and mythical Amazon into a more modern concept thus included a negative association with barbarous female militarism and monstrous violence, anti-patriarchal attitudes and a less than 'womanly' appearance. Nevertheless, Atherton made good use of her own classical education, deploying this image several times throughout *The Living Present* and successfully subverting the Amazons' historical significance so that for her, the Amazon-workers represented revered authority, strength and heroism rather than female deviance. When discussing the working conditions and wages in the munitions factories she

⁴⁶⁷ Artherton, *The Living Present*, p. 39.

⁴⁶⁸ *La Mère Educatrice*, 1919-1920, p.35.

⁴⁶⁹ Jenny March, *The Penguin Book of Classical Myths*, (London: Penguin, 2009), p.467.

remarked that their male colleagues ‘never dreamed of disobeying those Amazons whose foot the Kaiser of all the Boches had placed on their necks’, for example.⁴⁷⁰

Such positive references, in Atherton’s writing, to hitherto largely negative female myths proved that in the context of the second half of the First World War in France, the figure of the ‘new amazon’ was radically exemplified and could be used as a complimentary reflection of French women working towards servicing the nation by contributing vigourously to the war effort.⁴⁷¹ It was on this basis that Atherton drew on the figure of the woman warrior in her war writing, as a strong, and forcefully patriotic female figure who worked hard for her own country, rather than a terrifying example of rejected femininity and inherent violence.

Not only did Atherton use the image of the Amazon to posit female physical capability and independence in the workplace, but she also used it to directly challenge some of the most damning public opinion on women’s contribution to heavy industry in wartime France. Interestingly, her account responded to many of the discourses surrounding the 1917 strike action. As well as defending the working conduct of the female munitions workers she also, as was the case when she included the story of a floristry worker who felt it her duty to equal the war work of her male relative, showed an awareness of the issue of sacrifice and the gendered sharing of suffering and burden in wartime France that formed part of the female strikers protest rhetoric. Making use of the ancient comparison once again thus also allowed Atherton to evoke the notion of female military service, by means of locating the Amazonian warrior woman on the factory floor.

Discourses which sought to heroise the work of female factory personnel were not unilaterally focused on their physical and emotional strength and their compliance, however. Some commentators on the left chose to evoke the figure of the victim-hero woman worker as representative of a new ‘brand’ of heroism unique to the context of the First World War. In a speech entitled ‘Femmes du proletariat, où sont vos maris? Ou sont

⁴⁷⁰ Atherton, *The Living Present*, p.40.

⁴⁷¹ Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War*, p.204.

vos fils?’, and written for the 1915 International Conference of Women Socialists in Bern, the word of the *Comité d’action féminine socialiste pour la paix contre le chauvisme* identified the painful shame, poverty, suffering and isolated existence that the woman worker was forced to face. The speech made clear its desire to re-write the dominant messages which sought to endow women with heroic repute on the basis that they defended France and ‘procured’ the country its future generations.⁴⁷² Instead, it urged working class women to rise up against the evils of war and to become a new kind of national hero: ‘L’Humanité toute entière fixe son regard sur vous, femmes du prolétariat des pays belligérants. Devenez les héroïnes, les sauveurs!’.⁴⁷³

Also amongst those who did not seek to heroise working women according to the ‘grand narratives’ of heroic nationalism, was Marcelle Capy. She refused to criticize them on the basis of ‘irresponsible’ womanhood, greed, or anti-patriotism like so many around her. Having already published accounts of her observations of French women’s work in a variety of industrial labour roles in *La Bataille Syndicaliste* in 1913, Capy went on to publish several similar accounts in the feminist newspaper that she edited, *La Voix des femmes* in 1917 and 1918, this time based on her own experience working for several days alongside women in munitions manufacture. Capy’s voice, like Atherton’s, is significant because she offers the views of another highly engaged, politically and socially motivated woman, rather than representing the patriarchal mouthpiece from which could otherwise be heard the most ‘audible’ reservations about female industrial labour. Furthermore, the difference in her portrayal of women workers between 1913 and 1917 provides a good example of the ways in which pacifist interpretations of women’s industrial work evolved during the war.

The *Bataille Syndicaliste* accounts had been cynical towards scientific management, blaming it for the fact that, to her mind, ‘l’ouvrière n’existe plus. C’est une marionnette qui va, qui vient en fonction des appareils placés devant elle [...] l’ouvrière est la servante

⁴⁷² F/7/13349, AN. Antimilitarisme, après 1914. Speech by *Comité d’action féminine socialiste pour la paix contre le chauvisme* ‘Femmes du prolétariat, ou sont vos maris? Ou sont vos fils?’, March 1915.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

de la machine. C'est l'application du système de Taylor dans toute son horreur'.⁴⁷⁴ She had called factory workers 'passive slaves' and had criticised their acceptance of the situations that they faced.⁴⁷⁵ Such cynicism exposed her views on the evils of the modern factory as a dehumanising and profit-driven entity which exploited and devalued its workers. Her views, conveyed with a scathing tone at times, tended to cast women as victims of industrialisation, incapable of representing themselves. This did little to endow them with any heroic repute at all.

Capy made clear her views on wartime nationalist heroic discourse in her 1916 book *Une Voix de femme dans la mêlée*. She deliberately exposed what she believed to be the ridiculousness of those who deployed over-enthusiastic jingoistic rhetoric. For example, in the book's foreword she referred to the 'anciens', those who were deeply attached to France's ancient ancestry as 'les vieillards gâteux trépignaient d'héroïsme en sucrant leur tisane'.⁴⁷⁶ She sarcastically called men from the Académie Française, or the nationalist press, 'ces <<chevaliers>> de la civilisation latine<>>'.⁴⁷⁷ Another social and political group, the pro-natalists, many of whom Capy called 'les vieilles barbes inaptés à l'art militaire',⁴⁷⁸ and the 'sonneurs d'héroïsme', were also the target of her condemnation.⁴⁷⁹ In criticising flamboyant uses of the heroic tradition in wartime France, Capy reduced the very concept to nonsensical and empty and made clear her opinion that war and violence were futile.

However, this is not to say that Capy did not evoke her own alternative 'brand' of female heroism during the war. Indeed in being able to rally against the uses of heroic nationalism by certain political and social groups, she proved that she had a good knowledge of its origins. In five weekly accounts of her own experiences posing as a munitions worker in *La Voix des femmes* in late 1917 and early 1918, depictions of an inherent working class

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 119.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 86.

⁴⁷⁶ Marcelle Capy, *Une Voix de femme dans la mêlée: Le manifeste d'une indignée pendant la grande guerre*, 2nd edition (Paris: Editions entre temps, 2015), p. 20.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 59.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 110.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 111.

women's powerlessness and inertia gave way to messages about their heroic sacrifice and endurance. These wartime descriptions were more empathetic, and more evocative than the 1913 *Bataille* reports, harsh judgements from which were less decipherable. She sidelined some of her earlier cynical views for the sake of her wartime agenda, which commented overall not on bellicose or grandiose feats of glorious heroics, but instead on the extent to which the war had further exacerbated social and economic working class injustice. In order to do this, she evoked the image of the victim-hero, who was unfortunate in her lot, but who nevertheless toiled in the face of extreme hardship. Instead of presenting female heroism as something to be celebrated with jingoistic and patriotic pride, Capy's heroes were therefore more likely to arouse pity in her readers. She did not project images of sturdy and impressive female heroism like Atherton, rather she contributed another, more realistic dimension to the reporting of women's war work.

Capy believed that the women worker's wartime heroism was derived from their ability to withstand the unrelenting hardship of war factory life, the absence of respite, and the terrible living conditions. In short, it was heroism born out of female sacrifice. But most shocking of all were her descriptions of the the physical appearance of the women, and the ways in which their bodies were suffering as a result of the labour: 'Les visages se décomposent. Les yeux s'enfoncent, les joues se creusent, les lèvres s'abaissent. Les bras meurtris demandent grâce. Les jambes fléchissent. Le regard fixe, la bouche lourde, le corps appesanti, les vêtements collés à la peau'.⁴⁸⁰ Unlike commentators such as Abensour and Rageot, who reported on various measures put in place to minimise the hardship of women's factory work, such as wheeled seating,⁴⁸¹ Capy repeatedly described the workers in her factory as 'toujours debout',⁴⁸² or 'constamment debout'.⁴⁸³ She urged her readers to reject any observer who deemed women's munitions work light, or easy, or that sought to deny the reality of the physical hardship associated with it, declaring that

⁴⁸⁰ *La Voix des femmes*, 28 November 1917.

⁴⁸¹ Abensour, p. 72.

⁴⁸² *La Voix des femmes*, 28 November 1917.

⁴⁸³ *La Voix des femmes*, 17 December 1917.

‘il faut avoir faim pour faire ce metier’,⁴⁸⁴ and pointing out that the pains of the job left twenty percent of workers ill on a daily basis.⁴⁸⁵ Her experience of such hardship during her brief stint in the factory led her to describe her own physical pain: ‘Au bout d’une heure j’ai les reins brisés, les épaules meurtries, les jambes gourdes, les paumes douloureuses. Je dois faire appel à ma volonté pour continuer’.⁴⁸⁶

3. 7 Ideological Motivations

This section on the heroisation of women workers shows that different definitions of female heroism by a variety of ideologies were politically motivated, and revealed much about the varying objectives for publishing on women’s war work more generally. In both dominant discourses like Rageot’s, and more marginal discourses such as Atherton and Abensour’s texts, women workers carried out their jobs with pride and strength, their bodies reflected this, and yet they were mostly successful in maintaining their femininity. They were described grandiosely as saviours of the nation, happy to carry out their tasks, however demanding. The writers told of how some even flourished in the process. Rageot’s portrayal of female heroism was prompted mostly by patriotism. But there was also a declared awareness in his writing that the increased presence of women in industry after 1915 was to be a fleeting phenomenon. He named them ‘ouvrières improvisées’.⁴⁸⁷ Particularly significant is Nicole Hudgins’s argument that these messages were clear in their intent not to draw attention to ‘the emancipation of the French woman, but rather her virtuous self-sacrifice’, with an emphasis on the temporary nature of the work.⁴⁸⁸ And many positive reactions to women’s war work focused less on the concept of progressive shifts in gender roles, and more on a specifically feminine understanding that *temporary*

⁴⁸⁴ *La Voix des femmes*, 28 November 1917.

⁴⁸⁵ *La Voix des femmes*, 17 December 1917.

⁴⁸⁶ *La Voix des femmes*, 17 December 1917.

⁴⁸⁷ Rageot, p. 18.

⁴⁸⁸ Hudgins, Nicole, *Hold Still, Madame: Wartime Gender and the Photography of Women in France during the Great War* (St Andrews: Centre for French History and Culture of the University of St Andrews, 2014), p. 5.

sacrifice was essential, even if this meant stepping out of a traditional position in the name of the war effort.

By complete contrast, suffragist rhetoric by Atherton and Abensour politically engineered the heroisation process as a means of proving what Laura Lee Downs calls ‘women’s aptitude for citizenship’, testified to by their ‘patriotic sacrifice’ in war work.⁴⁸⁹ Although, like Rageot at times in his attempts to reassure his readers that some aspects of women’s changing economic roles were temporary and unique to the war, Abensour did so as a means of appearing sufficiently moderate to a French audience that was still apprehensive about the concept of altering women’s rights. But the fact remained that he was a suffragist, and it is clear that he had a more radical underlying intent. Atherton, being an American and publishing further away from dissenting voices, was better able to express explicitly the extent of her designs on the post-war era and her excitement about the potential impact of an enduring legacy of wartime heroism enacted by French women from all backgrounds.

Finally, other marginal discourses from the likes of Marcelle Capy showed an awareness of the significance of women contributing to weapons manufacture, from a pacifist point of view. During the war she highlighted the moral tensions between the need to work to survive in weaponry manufacture, and the worrying contribution that this made to the destruction of life. She deplored the necessity to earn a wage in this way. Therefore she did not seek to evoke the concept of heroism for the greater good of France in the same way that figures such as Rageot did, because she refused to endorse scientific management, nor the production of arms. Instead, she placed emphasis on the inglorious and individual struggles of working class women, providing a socialist account of incidental and sacrificial heroism motivated by economic survival and endurance.

It is also important to consider that not all heroisations of women were governed by the concept of gender. Whilst women’s rights were certainly at the heart of Gertrude

⁴⁸⁹ Laura Lee Downs, ‘War Work’, in *The Cambridge History of the First World War, Volume 3: Civil Society*, ed. by Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 72-95, p. 74.

Atherton's discourse, pacifist reports like Capy's, when examined alongside other texts which foregrounded the victim-hero such as Henri Barbusse's 1916 novel *Le Feu: Journal d'une escouade*, framed heroism as working class quality as well as gender-specific one. Barbusse's novel, which followed a squadron of working class infantry soldiers, was also written with honest realism. Like Capy, Barbusse did not shy away from portraying the harsh realities of trench life, discussing the hopeless and yet universal suffering and destruction associated with war rather than the glorious military heroism favoured by nationalist writers such as Charles Maurras or Léon Daudet. In the same way that Capy heroised factory workers on their ability to endure hardship, so too did Barbusse's novel commend human willing to tolerate impossible circumstances. Indeed, Leonard Smith discusses the ways in which *Le Feu* was read by women who sought to find out more about the heroism of men on the front line.⁴⁹⁰ The undeniable similarities between the ways in which Capy and Barbusse both heroised the capacity of working class groups to endure hardship suggest that a broader aim of left-wing socialist pacifists during the war was to promulgate a message about class, first and foremost.

3.8 Conclusion

Just as dominant and more marginal representations of Jeanne d'Arc and Marianne positioned them as national heroes *or* as problematic projections of womanhood, female industrial workers were thought of as frighteningly masculinised, defeatist shirkers of their domestic and maternal responsibility, or as commendable, patriotic and self-abnegating, depending on the political or ideological stance of the observer.

This chapter has shown that ideological standpoints framed the munitions workers' profile in a variety of ways. On the one hand they were commended in the mainstream press as a preferential alternative to publishing the realities of industrial unrest. On the other, they were belittled or condescended to, their gender dictating that the job be 'made easier' for their 'meek' constitutions and according to their 'natural' role. An ability to

⁴⁹⁰ Leonard V. Smith, "Women Readers of Henri Barbusse: The Evidence of Letters to the Author," in *Warfare and Belligerence: Perspectives in First World War Studies*, ed. by Pierre Purseigle (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 347-58.

adapt and master the more laborious or skilled areas of the job was celebrated, but only on the basis that this required superlative determination and was to remain an exceptional circumstance in a time of national crisis.

Negative receptions of female munitions workers and their strike action revealed a desire for institutional and rhetorical control. Fears, evident in the press and propagandist sources and police reports, related to the extent to which the workers progressed in terms of their economic potential and therefore the extent to which they were believed to be rejecting their 'rightful' place in the home and family and risking the health of the maternal body. Another clear concern was the apparently anti-patriotic conduct of the strikers, the deeper root of which was seen as the complete and irreversible disruption of social order brought on by the war.

Those who were not invested in controlling the social order, or those who hoped for eventual changes to the ordinance of gender, such as the suffragist writers mentioned here, did not abstain from perpetuating traditional ideals of womanhood, but this was done to reassure those interpreting their work that women had no need or desire to disrupt the status quo. Uncontroversial messages about domestic influences for example, although perhaps not always reflecting the true views of the commentator, were a strategic means of promoting the heroic potential of French women workers. Antithetical and less idealised pacifist messages like Marcelle Capy's, however, sought to expose the harsh realities of armaments manufacture as a means of situating her own rhetoric firmly within anti-war, socialist discourse. For this reason she mostly sought not to describe the women in her account as particularly bound by their gender. Rather she presented the significant difficulties associated with working for the war effort.

Finally, it is important to note that there are very few accounts written by women workers which tell of their experiences. Therefore, historians today continue to discuss a faceless mass of women whose needs, motivations and reactions were and are still hidden from view, and whose example found itself in the hands of those wishing to exercise control over public understandings of social and gender order, through the lens of gendered contributions to the war effort. The two case study chapters that follow this, although not

investigating working class women's heroism, do go some way to addressing the scholarly lack of testimony, because they introduce the voices of two female heroes whose war roles were also received without consensus.

Part Two: Lived Experiences

The rationale behind this study's two part structure is to give an impression of the ways in which French women interacted with widespread heroising discourses, both during and after the First World War. Part One situated specific heroic roles and icons within broader definitions of, and responses to female heroism. With this breadth in mind, the female hero profiles discussed in Part One have been treated representatively so as to garner a clear picture of key heroic characteristics that can be traced throughout this thesis, and applied to a wider variety of French women's war roles than that presented here. As such, the case studies which make up Part Two are not necessarily required to reflect the specific roles discussed in Part One, since the intention is not to set out a formulaic mirroring of representation and lived experience. Rather, this thesis brings together a study of the hegemonic heroisation process with analysis of the ways in which two specific women interacted with this process in the light of their own heroic positions.

The primary source material examined in this second part includes some press and fiction exemplars, and official correspondence from military and law enforcement authorities. But the main corpus is made up of the published and unpublished works of the two case study subjects themselves, which took the form of auto-fiction, and personal writings including manuscripts and private letters. Giving unpublished works a legitimate place in a discussion of autobiography opens up the possibility of discerning a clear difference between 'intentionality', that is to say the deliberate articulation of the female self for public dissemination, and 'unintended' private expressions and understandings of them.⁴⁹¹ The aim is to interpret the extent to which the two women in question showed an awareness of the heroic characteristics that were thought to define women in similar positions, and to draw on the ways in which they interacted with such definitions in their own public and private personal writings. This second part is informed by feminist autobiography theory, as a method which guides our feminist readings of women's personal narratives. Since the variety of autobiographical sources under examination

⁴⁹¹ Paul Jay, 'What's the Use?: Critical Theory and the Study of Autobiography', *Biography*, 10:1 (1987), pp. 39-54, p.40.

varies so greatly across chapters four and five, the questions asked of these sources relate to the contextual space in which they were produced, and the associated complexities with the use of the 'I' in a given space. In other words, women's autobiographical writings of differing forms will not be considered to provide an unmediated access to the past, but will rather be read through a critical lens which questions the choice to publish or not,⁴⁹² the framing of a certain voice, and resistance to, or corroboration with, the hegemonic categorization of female identity.

Archetypes of Female Espionage and Red Cross Nursing

The two women discussed in Part Two, Marthe Richard and Marthe Bibesco, held paid and unpaid jobs during the war, one as a double agent and the other a Red Cross nurse. As mentioned, these heroic war roles are not included in the analysis as a means of mirroring those roles discussed in Part One. Thus, it is necessary to briefly outline the extent to which spies and nurses, like middle class women, women workers and icons of Republic and nation, were considered heroic in dominant discourses, and why. The characteristics that made them heroes, rather than the particularities of the roles themselves, are important in this half of the study, since the responses of the women in question to such characteristics, as well as their attempts to embody them, were the focus of the source material analysis. This is the case both in terms of heroisation and demonisation, as we will see.

Chapter Four introduces Marthe Richard who, over the course of 1915 and 1916, worked for the French counter-espionage agency in an undercover role extracting intelligence from a German naval attaché in northern Spain. As a formal intelligence agent who earned 1000F a month, Richard occupied a role which was heavily stereotyped during and after the First World War. It is thanks to the work of historians such as Tammy Proctor and Margaret Darrow that we have an understanding of dichotomous female spy archetypes that were in circulation in France and the rest of Europe before, during and after the First World War. Their scholarship has shown that according to dominant cultural imaginings

⁴⁹² This is particularly significant in the case of Marthe Richard (chapter four), whose choices to publish and republish auto-fiction coincided both with periods of fame and ill public repute.

of the female spy figure, usually from the right-wing, nationalist camp, she could be a virtuous and heroic martyr, or a self-interested, mercenary and sexually menacing villain. Like the women workers discussed in chapter three, the popular profile of the female spy was therefore not considered to be heroic without question. A brief discussion of pre-existing French and Belgian stereotypes according to Proctor, Darrow and also Olivier Forcade, Laurence Van Ypersele, Emmanuel Debruyne and Julie Wheelwright, gives context to a study of Marthe's own personal writings.

Before the war, espionage had become a source of widespread insecurity.⁴⁹³ This was partly due to late nineteenth-century polemics such as the Boulanger and Dreyfus Affairs. The legacy of these controversies was to live on well into the twentieth century, as they had exposed the possibility of clandestine betrayal breeding suspicion about the concepts of loyalty and allegiance to France. They had also increased revanchist preoccupations manifest in right-wing nationalist movements like the *Action Française*, one of the groups which was to criticise Marthe Richard during the War. As well as representing growing nationalism and xenophobia,⁴⁹⁴ the work of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century spy fiction writers like William Le Queux and Paul Bertnay also fuelled a kind of 'spy mania', or 'quasi-collective psychosis' relating to the threat of German agents in France.⁴⁹⁵ And, with regards to suspicious women, the Franco-Prussian War, which was eternally present in the minds of the 1914-1918 generation, had its own problematic memory of the conniving enemy spy. There were popular stories about figures like the Baroness Madame de Kaulla, for example, who seduced the French General de Cissey when he was imprisoned in 1870 in Hamburg, and was then redeployed years later to extract French Foreign Office intelligence from him when Germany received news of re-

⁴⁹³ Emmanuel Debruyne, 'Espionage', in *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin, <<http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/espionage>> [accessed 11 April 2016].

⁴⁹⁴ Olivier Forcade and Sebastien Laurent, *Secrets d'État: Pouvoirs et renseignement dans le monde contemporain* (Paris: Armand Collin, 2005), p. 14.

⁴⁹⁵ Debruyne, 'Espionage', <<http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/espionage>> [accessed 11 April 2016].

organised troops.⁴⁹⁶ Negative histories of untrustworthy men and women associated with some of France's most devastating social, political and territorial conflicts were thus already circulating well before the First World War broke out.

Proctor and Forcade help us to see that a heroic reputation was often reserved for French wartime agents who knowingly gave their lives for God and country, such as devout Catholic Louise de Bettignies. A heroic reputation like hers had firm roots in the early veneration of heroes in Homeric poetry, in which 'the local practices of hero-worship [...] are clearly founded on religious notions of heroic immortalization'.⁴⁹⁷ Women who had died whilst working as spies were immortalised in French culture after their deaths as hero-martyrs.⁴⁹⁸ It was on the basis that a woman was truly devoted to and close to God that she was generally exempted from negative criticism and given hero status. In this instance we can see echoes of another Homeric heroic ideal, which defined heroes as 'descended from the immortal gods themselves'.⁴⁹⁹ It is for this reason that figures like de Bettignies, who was captured by the Germans, and who died of natural causes in a Cologne hospital, was given the title of 'The Jeanne d'Arc of the North' by the Bishop of Lille at her funeral in 1920. The Bishop's speech justified the comparison on the basis that Jeanne and Louise had shared "the same love of the fatherland [...] the same solicitude for the wounded, whether friend or foe, the same invincible will to repel threats and accept martyrdom, the same supernatural serenity in the face of death".⁵⁰⁰ The veneration of De Bettignies in this way provides us with another example which substantiates the discussion, in chapter one, of wartime appropriations of Jeanne D'Arc which

⁴⁹⁶ Tom Moon, *Loyal and Lethal Ladies of Espionage* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2000).

⁴⁹⁷ Gregory Nagy, 'Heroes and the Homeric Iliad', University of Houston, <<http://www.uh.edu/~cldue/texts/introductiontohomer.html>> [accessed 13 April 2016].

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁰ Quoted in Alison Fell and Emmanuel Debruyne, 'Model Martyrs? Remembering First-World-War Resistance Heroines in Belgium and France', in *Mnemosyne and Mars: Artistic and Cultural Representations of Twentieth-century Europe at War*, ed. by Peter Tame, Dominique Jeannerod, and Manuel Bragança (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), pp. 145-65, p. 150.

foregrounded her steadfast and heroic catholic devotion, and her self sacrifice in the name of *la Patrie*.

Spies who survived the war, such as Louise Thuliez,⁵⁰¹ and Belgian Marie de Croÿ, were given largely unquestioned heroine status in the post-war period, because their roles were considered to be religious, virtuous, virginal, and lacking in the sexual agenda that was the alleged preserve of irreligious, often fictionally constructed, prostitute-spies like Mata Hari.⁵⁰² Magnus Hirschfeld's *The Sexual History of the World War* (1930), is a useful source from which to apprehend some of the anxieties and sexual stereotypes associated with female spies. Director of the 1919-founded Berlin 'Institute for Sexual Science', Hirschfeld reflected on a virgin-whore dichotomy with reference to De Bettignies, whom he exempted from the realms of immoral eroticism on the basis that she also possessed a love of France and a hatred of Germany above all else.⁵⁰³

Existing scholarship on Belgian espionage by Van Ypersele and Debruyne tells us that surviving agents who did not embody devotion to God were also sometimes heroised at times after the war for the role they had in the Allied victory. They attended post-war ceremonies and memorial inaugurations and enjoyed a 'héros de la fête' profile.⁵⁰⁴ When considered *en masse* as part of an espionage network, they were celebrated as 'héros obscurs',⁵⁰⁵ for their 'héroïsme obscur', their 'dévouement total', and their 'intelligence qui n'est pas nécessaire aux militaires qui portent l'uniforme'.⁵⁰⁶ The same messages were disseminated in France, where agents had also proved themselves to be an

⁵⁰¹ According to a letter from the *Directeur des Renseignements Généraux et des Jeux* to the Police Commissioner dated 29 May 1934, attempts had been made to contact Thuliez on Richard's activity in the 1930s, but her address could not be found, 1 W 209-59468, APP.

⁵⁰² Tammy Proctor, *Female Intelligence: Women and Espionage in the First World War* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 124.

⁵⁰³ Magnus Hirschfeld, *The Sexual History of the World War* (New York: Falstaff Press, 1937), Bamji Collection/HIR,BSC, UoL p. 270.

⁵⁰⁴ Laurence Van Ypersele and Emmanuel Debruyne, *De la guerre de l'ombre aux ombres de la guerre: L'espionnage en Belgique durant la guerre 1914-1918, histoire et mémoire* (Brussels: Editions Labor, 2004), p. 96.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁶ Georges de la Fouchardière, 'Rehabilitation d'une arme trop décriée', publication, 1936, DOS RIC, BMD.

invaluable source of vital intelligence. They had run personal risks, usually alone and with varying degrees of personal or professional support. They were taken captive having devoted themselves to their mission. When viewed in this way they represented a transgressive and new ‘brand’ of female heroism,⁵⁰⁷ and their own accounts and the accounts of others even elicited comparisons between warfare and the combat of espionage, armed and unarmed, behind the lines and in the shadows.⁵⁰⁸ A February 1933 article in *La Voix du combattant* applied this principle, for example: ‘si le soldat qui tue est un héros, l’espion qui surprend les secrets de l’ennemi, qui fait sauter un bateau, un pont, un viaduct, l’espion qui assassine, est aussi un héros’.⁵⁰⁹

However, dead or alive, female spies were not given a heroic reputation in all cases. Proctor brings to light the other side of the virgin-whore dichotomy that negatively stereotyped female agents like Mata Hari. These spies were often popularly considered to represent the selfish pursuit of a wage and of sexual fulfilment thus being, as Van Ypersele and Debruyne argue, the ‘antihéros par excellence’.⁵¹⁰ Proctor discusses ‘the foreign, sexualized female spy’, who ‘became a useful foil in media, fiction, and popular imagination’.⁵¹¹ Her research suggests that added to pre-conceptions about immorality and ‘sexual perversion’ was the belief that these characteristics were even the desired ‘ingredients’ of official espionage programmes, because female sexuality had the potential to unlock enemy secrets.⁵¹² Exacerbated by ‘cultural images’ such as the ‘film vamp’,⁵¹³ or Mata Hari,⁵¹⁴ this belief exposed another dimension to unfavourable and ‘de-heroising’ post-war interpretations of the female spy’s role. The idea that the spy-whore

⁵⁰⁷ Olivier Forcade, « L’espionnage féminin ou un nouvel héroïsme au combat en 1914-1918 », in *Actes du colloque ‘Les femmes et la guerre de l’Antiquité à 1918’*, de l’Université de Picardie Jules Verne, Amiens 15-16 octobre 2007, dir. Marion Trevisi, Ph. Nivet (Economica, 2010), p.p. 361-373, p. 361.

⁵⁰⁸ Van Ypersele and Debruyne, p. 74.

⁵⁰⁹ *La Voix du combattant*, 4th February 1933.

⁵¹⁰ Van Ypersele and Debruyne, p. 10.

⁵¹¹ Proctor, p. 3.

⁵¹² Proctor, p. 2.

⁵¹³ Hirschfeld, p. 259.

⁵¹⁴ Proctor, p. 3.

role might have been engineered from above as well being perpetuated by popular culture, was a key cause for concern for many commentators because it meant that immoral female sexual behaviour was, to some extent, acknowledged by the state.

Along these lines, links were often built in the *imaginaire* between female spies and other archetypal guises such as prostitutes or renegades,⁵¹⁵ because they operated publicly as well as privately, threatened to spread disease or deviance, and could exercise ‘real or imagined power’ over men.⁵¹⁶ Hirschfeld believed that female espionage was inherently connected to sexuality, criminality and ‘eroticism’, and claimed that female spies often took narcotics and alcohol in order to withstand the pressures of the job. Hirschfeld’s matter-of-fact commentary informs us of the view that ‘just as in general criminology, the brothel is a breeding ground of crime, so it was in the wider sense a breeding ground for espionage’.⁵¹⁷ French historian Chantal Antier’s research actually goes some way to substantiating prejudices like Hirschfeld’s, since it tells us that recruits and intelligence were indeed actively sought in the prostitution community.⁵¹⁸

Some women also came to be recognisably associated with dangerous concepts of myth, half-truth, deception and manipulation ‘in the quiet corners of life’,⁵¹⁹ where they could occupy a dominant and yet menacingly subversive role as,⁵²⁰ what Margaret Darrow calls, the ‘ubiquitous [...] Lady in the Hat’.⁵²¹ If a woman looked even remotely out of place in any given environment, she was automatically the subject of suspicion.⁵²² Double agents like Marthe Richard, who was sent to fashionable Spanish tourist resort San Sebastian in order to mix with the German diplomatic community, were suspected of using their sexuality to extract desired information. This enabled commentators to couch

⁵¹⁵ Forcade, p. 362, and Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p. 272.

⁵¹⁶ Proctor, p. 124-25.

⁵¹⁷ Hirschfeld, p. 169.

⁵¹⁸ Chantal Antier, ‘Espionnage et espionnes de la Grande Guerre’, *Revue Historique des armées* vol. 247 (2007), <<http://rha.revues.org/1963>> [accessed 10 May 2016].

⁵¹⁹ Proctor, p. 124.

⁵²⁰ Proctor, p.124.

⁵²¹ Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p. 268.

⁵²² *Ibid.*

their profiles not only in sexually subversive terms, but also as deceptive and incongruous.⁵²³

Further examples of attempts to negatively stereotype female spies come from French journalist Jean-Marc Binot and British writer Julie Wheelwright, who both point out the ways in which they were popularly believed to be inept at taking on the technical aspects of their job. Some male secret service colleagues, for example, considered them to be ‘a liability in the field’⁵²⁴ and cast them as indiscreet, rather too chatty and unable to grasp the technicalities of warfare.⁵²⁵ Writing in the interwar period, Hirschfeld managed to associate this supposed ineptitude with sexuality, claiming that an innate eroticism detracted from a female spy’s ability to do her job, and that supposedly only one in every thousand female war spies was ‘efficient’ in the role.⁵²⁶

Chapter five, the second case study chapter of this second part, explores the heroism of French-Romanian novelist and princess through marriage, Marthe Bibesco. During the First World War Bibesco was director of, and qualified Red Cross nurse at the Automobile Club Hospital number 118 in Bucharest. Over the last four decades, several scholars, such as Margeret Darrow, Christine Hallett, Susan Grayzel, Maria Bucur and Alison Fell have published on wartime and postwar representations of the heroic French and Romanian Red Cross nurse as a ‘cultural construct’ of the First World War.⁵²⁷ This body of scholarship tells us that ‘secular’, upper class,⁵²⁸ volunteer nurses who were admitted to work on, or very close to, the Western and Eastern front lines were as far away from the domestic sphere as was imaginable for a woman. They were therefore heroised on the basis that they put their safety at risk but managed to maintain their

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Julie Wheelwright, *The Fatal Lover: Mata Hari and the Myth of Women in Espionage* (London: Collins & Brown, 1992), p. 6.

⁵²⁵ Jean Marc Binot, *Héroïnes de la Grande Guerre* (Paris : Fayard, 2008), p. 252.

⁵²⁶ Hirschfeld, p. 259.

⁵²⁷ Alison S. Fell and Christine E. Hallett, ‘Introduction’, in *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives*, ed. by Alison S. Fell, Christine E. Hallett (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 1-16, p. 4.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

virtuous femininity as the utmost in obedience to the needs of their nation. American suffragist Gertrude Atherton, writing in 1916, praised the ‘beautiful charming coquetry’ and ‘exterior perfection’ of French Red Cross nurses, whom she described as ‘courageous’, selfless, and stoic in the face of both ‘material’ and ‘moral difficulties’.⁵²⁹ She complimented the nurses on their ability to feminise the spaces in which they were working, with flowers, drapery and artwork or framed photographs of their loved ones.⁵³⁰

Although not nuns like the other main group of French war nurses,⁵³¹ Red Cross volunteers were sometimes cast as ‘nun-like’ and dutiful mother types, who were professionally capable and reassuring figures.⁵³² Feminist suffragist Léon Abensour, who called the figure of the Red Cross nurse ‘heroïque et sublime’, was one such wartime commentator to endow them with the same stoic devotion as the nun-nurses.⁵³³ He observed them as austere and representative of France’s very soul under their veils, and claimed that they offered up their love as a means of paying a ‘dette sacré’ in wartime.⁵³⁴ In them he saw patriotic devotion, as well as a constant desire to better themselves professionally in the name of their patients. He drew further religious connections, comparing Jeanne d’Arc and one Red Cross nurse who showed saintly bravery.⁵³⁵ A further reminder of the discussion of heroic icons in chapter one, Abensour’s wartime appropriation of Jeanne evoked a sense of sisterhood and sought to connect her fearlessness and humanity with that of the nurse, also a wartime icon of sorts in her own right. Other examples of cultural representation such as *La Française dans la guerre*, by Gaston Rageot, confirmed that Red Cross nurses fulfilled both gender and professional

⁵²⁹ Atherton, *The Living Present*, p. 147.

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ Fell and Hallett, p. 2.

⁵³² Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p. 158.

⁵³³ Abensour, p. 19.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., p.168.

roles as he drew on their ‘infatigable tendresse d'un coeur universellement maternel’, which had already proved itself in previous francophone wars.⁵³⁶

Marthe Bibesco’s father had been educated in France, having been a part of the political migration of Romanian intellectuals to Paris in the wake of the 1848 Wallachian Revolution. Though Marthe achieved social and intellectual status in France as a result of this diaspora, at the time when Romania entered the First World War in 1916 she was nursing in Bucharest. Maria Bucur’s work is a valuable source of information on the heroisation of Romania’s nurse-heroes. For example, honorary head of the Romanian Red Cross and a trained nurse herself, Princess Marie was framed in the popular imagination during and after the war as an exemplary precedent to whose heroism other women might aspire but that they were unlikely to match. When she appeared in her nurse’s uniform after the war came to Romania, she was believed to be embodying her own sacrifice as well as the sacrifice of her country: the uniform came to represent a mourning dress after the death of her son from typhoid in October 1916.⁵³⁷ Marie was famed for her supererogation, delivering hands-on care in hospitals that were overrun with patients, and putting her own life at risk among the contagious. She was celebrated for not shying away from the risks of the front line, and as a result, she was known as ‘an icon [...] of patriotism and selfless devotion’.⁵³⁸ Bucur adds that this heroisation process deliberately used her function as a royal authority figure to legitimise Romania’s role in the war and to rebuff potential misgivings about the country’s *Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen* dynasty. As the daughter of Queen Victoria’s son Prince Alfred, the British press was unsurprisingly interested in Marie’s heroic role in her adopted kingdom. Reported speech from Marie in a wartime interview from British tabloid magazine *The Bystander* confirmed Bucur’s theory about her value as a propaganda mouthpiece to justify

⁵³⁶ Rageot, p. 9, and Abensour, p. 85.

⁵³⁷ Maria Bucur, ‘Between the Mother of the Wounded and the Virgin of Jiu: Romanian Women and the Gender of Heroism during the Great War’, *Journal of Women's History*, 12:2 (Summer 2000), pp. 30-56, p. 42.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Romania's war role: she apologetically admitted that 'I know that the Allies have all had a terrible drain on their resources of every kind', before calling on her homeland to help: 'my hope is that England, my native country, will be able to send my own special departments some assistance'.⁵³⁹ In the interview she was called a self-abnegating and 'generous-minded lady', who even cut the session short, reminding the journalist that she needed to get dutifully back to work: 'shortly I must return to my hospital'.⁵⁴⁰

Bucur's interest in the ways in which female heroism was remembered in the interwar period using published wartime personal writings also helps to build a picture of the ways in which other Romanian Red Cross nurses were regarded by their own people during the conflict. She uses the example of military personnel such as Nicolae Russu Ardeleanu, whose autobiography recalled meeting a variety of Red Cross nurses, possibly even Bibesco herself, in Bucharest, and documenting their actions as 'selfless, courageous', patriotic, self-sacrificing, dignified and 'devoted'.⁵⁴¹

One of the most prominent arguments to emerge from research on First World War Red Cross nurses suggests that they were thought to embody examples of patriotic devotion which was almost equivalent to the masculine sacrifice of war.⁵⁴² Alison Fell, in particular, has explored the ways in which this heroisation was transmitted into the immediate post war era and the 1920s, when commemorative culture in France and Britain evoked visual and iconographical equality between nurses and soldiers.⁵⁴³ Illustrative of this theory, Léon Abensour declared that nurses collaborated with soldiers in the quest for victory against Germany and therefore deserved the same heroic legacy

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ 'A Talk with Queen Marie', *The Bystander*, 25 October 1916, p. 184.

⁵⁴¹ Maria Bucur, *Heroes and Victims: Remembering War in Twentieth-Century Romania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), p. 83.

⁵⁴² Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p. 136.

⁵⁴³ Alison S. Fell, 'Afterword: Remembering the First World War Nurse in Britain and France' in *First World War Nursing: New Perspectives*, ed. by Alison S. Fell, Christine E. Hallett (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 172-193.

as those who died on the battlefield.⁵⁴⁴ This near-parity of sacrifice was also reflected in the dynamic between the care-giver and the patient, because the devotion and the instinctive attention of the Red Cross nurses perfectly facilitated the continuing heroism of their male patients. They offered them care, respite and a feminine presence which reminded them of what they were fighting for: the homeland.⁵⁴⁵ Fell's research links the popular foregrounding of this sacrificial and dutiful caregiving to the promotion of women's civic engagement and wider ideas about suffragism in the post war era. As far as the campaign for the vote was concerned, if women could prove themselves to be concerned about the nation at war, they were deserving of full citizenship in the aftermath.

The figure of the Red Cross nurse, like the female spy, was an ambivalent one however. Most academic studies since the 1970s have pointed out that as well as being heroised, they were also considered by some commentators to represent less than heroic values and behaviours. As well as being thought of as inappropriately sexualised,⁵⁴⁶ dangerously liberated and coquettish fashion-victims who paraded around in their uniforms with vain pride,⁵⁴⁷ Margaret Darrow outlines a belief that some Red Cross nurses were selfishly pursuing a treasonous agenda,⁵⁴⁸ separate to that of their warring nation 'under a hypocrite's veil of patriotic devotion'.⁵⁴⁹

Stereotypes like those of spies and Red Cross nurses, attached themselves less to the particularities of a given role, and more to a dominant impression of the 'kind' of woman who occupied it. To what extent did Richard and Bibesco, who occupied archetypal roles,

⁵⁴⁴ Abensour, p.88.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁴⁶ Yvonne Knibhieler, 'Les anges blancs: naissance difficile d'une profession féminine' in *1914-1918: Combats de femmes, Les femmes, pilier de l'effort de guerre*, ed. by Évelyne Morin-Rotureau (Paris: Éditions Autrement, 2004), pp. 47-63, p. 51.

⁵⁴⁷ Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p.147, 'A typical claim was that women volunteered only in order to be able to wear the Red Cross uniform, thus perpetuating the pre-war 'doll' who would go to any length to be in fashion'.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

negotiate with, corroborate or contest the characteristics that were believed to make them heroes? And how did commentators draw on ideals of female heroism when they publicly and privately interpreted their war roles? Part One provided a broad analysis of female heroism defined as a set of qualities derived from a recognized wartime need to do one's duty in terms of, paid, unpaid, and iconic 'work'; the two chapters that follow continue this analysis, introducing a 'bottom-up' history which focuses on the responses of heroic women to the dominant characterizing of female heroism already at play during the war, and interpreted in Part One.

Chapter Four

‘Un soldat, auquel son rôle ne permettait pas de porter un uniforme...rien de plus, rien de moins’: Marthe Richard’s *Guerre Secrète*⁵⁵⁰

This chapter introduces the case study of Marthe Richard, whose life story featured in the French imaginary, from the 1930s onwards, as an infamous tale of heroism, myth, espionage and sin. A native of Lorraine, Richard became a double agent during the First World War – a role which, like that of the women workers discussed in chapter three, was constructed by some as heroic and patriotic, and by others as potentially treacherous and untrustworthy. She went on in the post-war era, to develop a significant public role as one of the first female municipal councillors of Paris, and, most crucially, as the woman behind the *Loi Marthe Richard* of 1946 which criminalized brothels in Paris and the Provinces.

Richard published six auto-fictional books based on her life experiences, including the following, discussed in this chapter: *Ma vie d’espionne au service de la France* (1935) which spanned the years 1915 to 1917; *Espions de guerre et de paix* (1938), which recalled some episodes of her First World War activity, but mainly focused on the interwar years and the Second World War; and *Mon destin de femme* (1974) which was Richard’s final autobiographical work, beginning with the story of her birth in 1889, and ending in 1973. Both *Ma vie d’espionne* and *Espions de guerre et de paix* were strategically republished by S.L.I.M in 1947, a year after the *Loi Marthe Richard* was promulgated. These auto-fictional works, as well as press clippings, police files and the published work of Richard’s colleagues make up the primary source material for this chapter. Two published biographies have also provided significant secondary references. The case study format of the chapter enables a discussion of the ways in which Richard, and others, constructed her life story in response and in relation to discourses of female heroism.

⁵⁵⁰ Marthe Richard, *Mon Destin de femme* (Paris: Opera Mundi, 1974), p. 377.

The chapter grapples with Richard's heroism through three distinct critical and contextual lenses: wartime, the 1930s and the post-Second World War era. It explores the extent to which the public role that she deliberately carved out for herself in the decades following the First World War impacted on the extent to which her wartime contribution to state espionage was retrospectively considered worthy of heroic repute by others. It brings to light Richard's awareness of some of the prescribed characteristics of female heroism discussed in chapters one to three, and shows how she used this awareness to endorse, contest or exploit such discourses in the building of her own profile as a spy and hero-veteran. As established at the beginning of Part Two, the overarching purpose of both this, and the final chapter on Marthe Bibesco, is to explore the ways in which individual heroic women responded to the ideals of female heroism set out in the first three chapters, which attempted to situate women within the parameters of a set of heroic characteristics.

Following a chronological structure, this chapter reveals that Richard was subject both to heroisation and to criticism, on the basis that she was believed to embody several of the same characteristics as the dominant stereotypes discussed in the existent scholarship: patriotism and regional allegiance, and personal risk on one hand, and self-interest, untrustworthiness, and links to prostitution on the other.⁵⁵¹ It also reveals how those who did seek to heroise her role adapted her life story in order to make it conform fully to the heroic stereotypes of female espionage.

4.1 Marthe Richard's War Role

When the First World War broke out, Marthe was 24. Her husband Henri, a wealthy fish merchant whom she had met in 1907, and who had financially supported her pursuit of hobbies, including automobiles and aviation, was initially given a reservist desk job in Le Mans, working for the British ambulance service. Marthe volunteered as an auxiliary nurse in a military hospital near the Panthéon in Paris. The couple married on 13 April 1915, by which time Marthe was still beleaguered by an earlier career in prostitution, and

⁵⁵¹ Richard represented a complex case because she had a difficult and erotic past and naturally possessed the *sang froid* to represent an efficient prostitute-agent archetype, but she was also heroised on the basis that she devoted herself and her mission to her love of France and her hatred of the German enemy and therefore had the potential to resist criticism launched against some of her 'immoral' behaviour.

had failed to obtain her removal from the 1908 Nancy *police des moeurs* prostitution roll. Henri was sent to the front in August 1915 after the *Loi Dalbiez* was passed, which identified and sent to the front those still not engaged in active service.

In 1915, Marthe had held a pilot's license for two years. At this point, she tried to campaign for the official formation of a French women's aviation corps, the proposed *Union Patriotique des aviatrices de France*. Her request was never granted on the basis that the French authorities refused to admit women to the armed forces. Having apparently observed Richard from afar as she frequented aviation circles in these first years of the war, Captain Georges Ladoux of the *deuxième bureau* or French counter intelligence agency initially suspected her of being a German spy because of her presence at airfields, her possession of the pilot's license and the fact that she owned a plane.⁵⁵² He enlisted the help of Georgian-born agent Joseph Davrichachvili, who set about surveying her. Once convinced that she was not operating suspiciously, Ladoux implored her to join his service.

Henri Richer was killed in action at Massiges in May 1916. His death affected Marthe enormously and proved to be a key motivating factor in her decision to accept Ladoux's offer. She agreed to be deployed, the following month, to neutral Spain, where she was employed from 1916 to 1917, first by the *deuxième bureau* of the French *Section de centralisation des renseignements* and then also by the German intelligence agency, under naval attaché Hans Von Krohn. Richard undertook the tasks that Von Krohn assigned her which included finding out about the movement of French troops, photographing evidence of aerial destruction at the hands of the Germans, and identifying new lines of defence around Paris. Still also a French agent, she simultaneously collected intelligence on planned German naval offensives, such as U-52, which targeted the French Basque coast and which she relayed back to Ladoux, who in turn gave her false information on the French forces for the benefit of the German intelligence agency.

⁵⁵² Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p.273.

Also amongst Marthe's professional achievements during this time was her bringing to the attention of the French authorities a coveted German invisible ink formulation, a German submarine battle plan, and a clandestine enemy route through the Pyrenees. She also caused the arrest of several enemy spies, and sabotaged a plan to plant weevils in Argentinian Allied wheat stores by drowning them herself whilst on a ferry crossing from Spain. Finally, she found out the combination for the safe containing vital German intelligence documentation which belonged to Von Krohn.⁵⁵³

After a year spent operating as double agent S.32 and *Alouette*, Marthe reported experiencing frustration with Ladoux because his communication had become insufficient. Unaware that her employer had been implicated in the Turmel Affair a month prior to her letter, and was, in fact, under arrest, she went to the German ambassador, Maximilian Von Ratibor and told him all that had been revealed to her by Von Krohn, including the combination for his safe. She then went back to the *deuxième bureau* Paris headquarters, where she was seen by Ladoux's replacement, colonel Goubé, to whom she also revealed all. This put an end to Marthe's role in First World War espionage.

Decades later, the lawyer who defended Richard in a 1952 court case perfectly summed up the reception of her First World War role. In Swiss daily *Feuille d'avis de Neuchâtel*, Pierre Jacquet was reported to have declared that 'Marthe Richard fut longtemps considérée comme une héroïne et [...] maintenant on la traite de tout'.⁵⁵⁴ Marthe's was one of the most problematically interpreted cases of female heroism from the First World War years. At times, and for some, she was a true hero. Though she had some early critics, in the interwar years she was largely believed to have acted, during the war, out of patriotism and devotion to her native region Lorraine, highly symbolic in the decades following Germany's seizure of the region in the Franco-Prussian War. She had professed an evolving hatred of Germans and Germany. On this basis it was difficult to deny her a heroic reputation. After the Second World War, however, she entered a different public

⁵⁵³ *Mon Destin de femme*.

⁵⁵⁴ 'Le journaliste Galtier-Boissière (fondateur du <<Crapouillot>>) aux prises avec Mme Marthe Richard', *Feuille d'avis de Neuchâtel*, 26 June 1952, p. 1 and p. 7.

arena as one of the first female Parisian municipal councillors. Her new-found civic and legislative role, and the power that she exercised once in this role, led to her First World War activity being publicly and lastingly criticized once more.

4.2 Public Receptions of Richard: Wartime

A caustic commentary on Richard's role during the First World war came from Léon Daudet, in an article entitled 'Un accident intéressant' that he published in right-wing journal *L'Action Française* on 27 July 1917, and which reported on a car crash that Marthe had been involved in nineteen days previously with Von Krohn, Davrichachvili and Von Krohn's chauffeur. Daudet's article was published during the second significant wave of spy mania in wartime France, when anti-defeatist policy was beginning to be heavily implemented. Such mania affected women who were believed to be acting covertly against France's national interests in any context, as well as those easily defined as spies. As mentioned in the previous chapter, school teacher Hélène Brion, whose house had been searched just days before 'Un accident intéressant' was published, and who was later arrested for circulating pacifist materials, was another woman who became a victim of the popular myth of female deceitfulness. After Brion's arrest, the press criminalized her activity and suggested that she represented a dangerous example of 'unfeminine' conduct. A November 1917 issue of *Le Matin*, for example, featured an uncomplimentary photograph of her, with the caption 'Hélène Brion, en costume masculin'.⁵⁵⁵ The article also called her an anarchist. Although Brion was remembered as a teacher more than anything else, those who defended her, including fellow pacifist Madeleine Vernet, suggested that the campaign which defamed her for being a dangerous and suspect character, had also implicitly accused her of being a spy.⁵⁵⁶ In drawing negatively on this implication, Vernet highlighted the extent to which the female spy was regarded as a threatening and suspicious figure in the latter wartime years. This regard helps to explain

⁵⁵⁵ *Le Matin*, 19 November 1917.

⁵⁵⁶ Madeleine Vernet, *Une Belle Conscience et une Sombre Affaire* (Paris: Société d'Édition et de Librairie de L'Avenir Social, 1917), p. 8.

why Daudet's attack on Richard was as scathing as accusations launched against Brion around the same time.

Daudet's article claimed that his intent was merely to 'expose the facts' about Richard's movements in Spain, and to let the French authorities draw their own conclusions.⁵⁵⁷ In reality, he did include his own implicit judgments: 'Apprenez en outre que, de Madrid à Irun, il y a en circulation deux express et le Sud Express chaque jour. Il est trop facile de comprendre pourquoi von Krohn et son compagnon avaient choisi la route, avec tous ses accidents éventuels, et la nuit!'.⁵⁵⁸ He included a translation of the original report from the *Heraldo de Madrid* with an aim of raising suspicions about Richard's activities in Madrid, making further comments such as,

On ne sera pas étonné de mon insistance à m'enquérir des personnalités des compagnons du chef d'espionnage boche von Krohn, auprès de la Préfecture de Police et de la Sûreté Générale. Il n'est pas impossible, sans doute, de savoir qui sont exactement: Mme veuve DE RICHER, née Marthe Betenfeld, <<naturelle de Blâmont>>; JOSEPH DAVRICHEWY, né à Gori (Russie) et naturalisé français; ERNEST REVY, chauffeur?⁵⁵⁹

Daudet, intent on defaming Richard on the basis that he felt she could not be trusted, published a further article on 11th August, asking his readers to consider once again, 'QUE FAISAIENT EN COMPAGNIE DE VON KROHN CETTE MADAME DE RICHER ET CE JOSEPH DAVRICHEWY, SUR LES ROUTES D'ESPAGNE. DANS LA NUIT DU 7 AU 8 JUILLET DERNIER? [...] CES PERSONNES RESTAIENT ENFERMEES PENDANT DES HEURES ENSEMBLE'.⁵⁶⁰ He specifically sought to identify 'cette mystérieuse personne',⁵⁶¹ and accused Richard of appearing seven years older than she actually was and of having men's clothes in her trunk. He offered his readers seemingly water-tight evidence, as well as several witnesses, to prove to them that he was not 'atteint d'espionnisme' and that Richard's activities required the attention

⁵⁵⁷ *L'Action Française*, 31 July 1917.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 11 August 1917.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*

of the authorities.⁵⁶² Daudet's desire to root out France's enemies was a personal one and drove him to declare in the article that if the police failed to take his claims seriously, he would pursue Richard's case himself. He had been instrumental, at a time when suspicions about underground activity ran high in France, in bringing about the demise of *Le Bonnet Rouge*, a pacifist newspaper that Clemenceau targeted as part of his 1917 anti-defeatist policy and with which Marthe had had dealings in the past.

But this, and Daudet's further attempts to attack Richard, were limited in success. His claims about an enemy plot involving Switzerland, Spain and Monaco were censored in the press, for example, and he was never given the attention he sought from the two *commissions de l'armée* and the *Sénat*.⁵⁶³ Hence, the earliest example of public slander against Richard came from an individual who was indeed a victim of spy 'psychosis' and who represented the kind of anti-defeatist mentality that led to the arrest of Brion two months later. Furthermore, Daudet's attempts to raise suspicion in 1917 had little impact, since Richard was still generally cast as a national hero for two decades following the war.⁵⁶⁴

4.3 Receptions: The 1930s

In the 1930s, spy narratives, fictional and testimonial, enjoyed a spike in popularity.⁵⁶⁵ Spy novels sought to provide heroic examples of espionage from the war,⁵⁶⁶ and special collections emerged, in which the genre bound French or Allied espionage with other genres such as *roman noir*, or adventure. Charles Robert-Dumas sold up to forty thousand copies of his series based on the *deuxième bureau*'s work in the war, and the Baudinière series *La Guerre Secrète* printed sixty volumes. The popularity of spy fiction in the thirties reflected an interwar fascination with espionage, framed by the events of 1914-

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ Coquart, p. 89-90.

⁵⁶⁴ Debruyne, 'Espionage', <<http://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/espionage>> [accessed 11 April 2016].

⁵⁶⁵ Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p. 269.

⁵⁶⁶ Van Ypersele and Debruyne, p. 153.

1918 and prompted by ‘international insecurity, totalitarian politics [...] political polarization’, and an inherent fear of adversaries that would follow France into the second international conflict of the century.⁵⁶⁷ In 1914, *Lectures pour tous* magazine had summed up France’s attitude towards outsiders: ‘C’est l’honneur du caractère français qu’il répugne de toutes ses forces à l’emploi de la trahison et de la perfidie. N’oublions pas toutefois à quelques terribles mécomptes nous exposent notre confiance excessive et notre crédulité vis-à-vis des étrangers installés chez nous pour y accomplir de louches besognes!’⁵⁶⁸ This national sentiment, influenced by the history of French memory, was to filter into the interwar spy narratives which featured enemy agents in particular.

According to Michael Barry Miller, French spy narratives represented a key turning point in dominant discourses of espionage, and firmly re-positioned French spies as heroes, thereby usurping previous negative stereotypes of menace and deceit.⁵⁶⁹ They built a ‘manufactured mystique’ around spies like Richard,⁵⁷⁰ and created ‘extraordinary adventures’ to satisfy a widespread public need to read this genre of fiction, which glorified the secret war.⁵⁷¹ Miller claims that this heroisation of spies who had previously been negatively stereotyped in some cases, represented an attempt to ‘relocate heroism’ after the war and to attribute it to those who were not necessarily fighting in front line combat.⁵⁷² One reason for this, was to identify the individualism of heroism,⁵⁷³ which had its roots in the ancient world, where the heroic code applied to the solitary hero. This was part of a wider post-war process to ‘humanise’ the legacy of such a dehumanising war; the first industrial conflict when heroism was no longer grandiose and the preserve of the

⁵⁶⁷ Michael Barry Miller, *Shanghai on the Métro: Spies, Intrigue, and the French between the Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 14-15.

⁵⁶⁸ Unknown, ‘L’espionnage dévoilé’, in *Lectures pour tous: revue universelle et populaire illustrée* (Paris: Hachette, 1914), pp. 1977-1920, p. 1977.

⁵⁶⁹ Miller, p. 198.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., p. 199.

⁵⁷² Ibid., and, p. 200.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., p. 200.

lone and ancient hero, and became instead the territory of a faceless mass of ‘ordinary’ wartime men and women.

One such spy narrative, published in 1932 by head of the French counter-espionage agency and Marthe Richard’s employer, Georges Ladoux, released details of Richard’s First World War role. The fictionalised biography *Marthe Richard: Espionne au Service de France*, was published as part of a four-book series entitled ‘Mémoires de guerre secrète’, reflecting the popularity of the genre during this time.⁵⁷⁴ Indeed, Ladoux claimed that he had been informed by the works of several crime fiction writers such as Arthur Conan-Doyle and Maurice LeBlanc.⁵⁷⁵ It combined Ladoux’s recollections with Marthe’s reported speech. According to biographer Natacha Henry, it was at this point, and due to editorial worries about difficulties in pronunciation, that Marthe Richer became Marthe Richard.⁵⁷⁶ It is also at this point that her heroic reputation skyrocketed, Ladoux’s account giving Richard public prominence that she had not yet experienced. Biographer Elisabeth Coquart claimed that it made of Marthe ‘ni plus ni moins qu’un Jeanne d’Arc des temps modernes, héroïque au lit, héroïque dans les sous-marins, héroïque partout!’.⁵⁷⁷ Though Coquart was writing in 2006, decades after Richard’s death, this biographical comparison of the two women from Alsace-Lorraine not only gave readers an impression of the ways in which her heroism was publicly sensationalised, but it also likened Richard’s case to other divisive and multi-faceted interpretations of iconic female heroism, this time Jeanne, who is discussed in chapter one.

The opening pages featured Ladoux’s overall judgement on Richard: he named her a ‘héroïne’.⁵⁷⁸ Throughout the book, he evoked positive discourses of heroic female

⁵⁷⁴ Forcade, p. 361 and p. 363.

⁵⁷⁵ Wheelwright, *The Fatal Lover*, p. 110.

⁵⁷⁶ Natacha Henry, *Marthe Richard: L’aventurière des maisons closes*, 2nd edn (Paris Editions Punctum, 2006), p. 72.

⁵⁷⁷ Coquart, p. 123.

⁵⁷⁸ Commandant G. Ladoux, *Marthe Richard: Espionne au service de la France* (Paris: Librairie des Champs-Élysées, 1932), p. 7.

espionage and consistently praised her character and her activities. He made grandiose comparisons of Marthe to military heroes like the Marshal Turenne who died under canon fire at the battle of Salzback in 1675.⁵⁷⁹ He called the sources of submarine intelligence collected by Richard ‘infiniment précieuses’.⁵⁸⁰ He also reported on the personality traits that he considered to be key factors driving her willing and her personal sense of duty to act in wartime. He referred in particular to her reliable instinct,⁵⁸¹ her ability to cope with the unknown,⁵⁸² her passion and self-assuredness,⁵⁸³ her ability to master her nerves,⁵⁸⁴ her skill at being discreet,⁵⁸⁵ neither imposing her own views nor taking too much heed of the views of others,⁵⁸⁶ and her ‘witch-like’ control over others.⁵⁸⁷ This included, at times, the control of Von Krohn with whom she readily fought, as Ladoux put it, a duel.⁵⁸⁸ When describing Marthe’s character, he attributed her reserved nature to the condition of being a Lorraine native, suggesting that the pain of the past had conditioned the inhabitants:

Elle incarne avec vigueur ces deux qualités qui sont la racine du tempérament lorrain: une absence d’émotivité qu’aucune surprise ne peut ébranler, et une ténacité qu’aucun obstacle ne rebute. Elle est bien l’une des filles de ces marches de l’Est, installées au confluent de deux grandes races dont les flots viennent perpétuellement se briser sur leur sol tourmenté et qui conserve, sous les alluvions, mêlées de sang des grandes caractères fondamentaux, inscrits à plein relief sur les côtes de la Meuse et gravés dans la vie d’une Jeanne d’Arc ou d’un Raymond Poincaré: la confiance en soi au service de la volonté.⁵⁸⁹

But Ladoux did not represent an uncomplicated authority on Richard’s life story. Firstly, he had his own agenda and sought to boost his reputation, which had been sullied when he was arrested in October 1917 on charges of spying against France. He thus used the

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 65.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 183.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., p. 38.

⁵⁸² Ibid., p. 189.

⁵⁸³ Ibid., p. 44.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 48.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 61 and p. 30.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 20.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 75.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 218.

spy fiction genre to revive the popularity of the secret agent icon as a means of drawing attention not only to Marthe's heroism, but also to himself. Secondly, Ladoux's account was at least partly responsible for conceiving and propagating the myths and discrepancies that were to accompany Marthe and her public reputation for decades to come. Early on in his book, for example, he presented his readers with extracts from two letters concerning Marthe that he claimed to have personally received in April 1916. One of the letters, from a young aviator, advised Ladoux to be wary of her on the basis that she frequented flight training camps without anyone knowing her purpose, and that she spoke German and thus 'pourrait fort être un agent boche'.⁵⁹⁰ The other letter, again from a member of the aviation world and a friend of Henri Richer, praised her intellect and cited Marthe's requests to wear a male aviator's uniform in the hope that she might have passed as a pilot when her own plans to create the women's aviation corps were rejected. In anticipation of potential responses to such an unconventional suggestion, the letter reassured readers that, 'Dieu sait cependant si elle est femme!', before recommending that Ladoux considered employing her.⁵⁹¹

Ladoux's account also failed to report on certain episodes of her life, such as her engagement in prostitution, or the pregnancy that she faked in 1917 in order to frighten von Krohn into letting her use the Germans' clandestine route through the Pyrenées in order to see a French doctor. Such omissions were made in order to construct an 'untarnished' profile of his protagonist which left his readers unlikely to contest her heroism. Ladoux was only too aware of a minority of individuals who had already started to speculate about her intentions during the war or the extent to which she was truly deserving of a heroic reputation, including Daudet, and also journalist Georges La Fouchardière. However, with or without knowing it, as early on as 1932 Ladoux was helping to blur the lines between the myth and reality of Richard's life.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 21.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., p. 22.

Marthe Richard: Espionne au service de la France was adapted for the screen in 1937.⁵⁹² Directed by Raymond Bernard, the film had a high-profile cast, with Marthe played by Edwige Feuillère, and Von Krohn, renamed Von Ludow and played by Eric Von Stroheim. The script drifted from Ladoux's original and fictionalized events further still. Marthe's parents had been shot by Von Ludow in 1914 and prior to the main events of the film, for example, and she had a fiancé named André who escaped from the front line to meet Marthe. Artistic licence obviously afforded discrepancies like these which demonized the enemy and heroised the protagonists. But they were also reflective of Paris-Film's self-declared propagandist intent to reflect growing patriotism at a time when international conflict threatened once more.⁵⁹³

Bernard's production contributed directly to 1930s heroisations of Richard. Feuillère was characterized as an evolving hero, who developed from vulnerable and innocent Alsace youth to an accomplished and emotionally hardened *deuxième bureau* agent. Her heroic motivations, attested to by Richard herself in her personal writings, were set out clearly in the first scene between she and Ladoux's fictional presence, commandant Raymond, during which she declared simply that 'je veux servir'.⁵⁹⁴ When Raymond suggested that she serve as an auxiliary nurse, Richard expressed her desire to involve herself directly with the enemy in order to avenge the deaths of her parents: 'je veux avoir affaire à eux directement comme un soldat, je veux leur faire du mal'.⁵⁹⁵ Bernard's Marthe knew how to shoot a pistol. She was firm, respectable, feminine, attractive, young, and conscientious. From early on in the film she was set up in direct opposition with Mata Hari, played by Delia-Col, who plotted a simultaneous scheme with another German commander. Richard was the demure, 'good' spy; Mata Hari the 'bad', sexualized spy.

In the final scene between Marthe and Von Ludow, she revealed her true identity with emotion and patriotic resentment. The tears which streamed down her face were followed

⁵⁹² *Marthe Richard: Espionne au service de la France*, dir. by Raymond Bernard (Paris Film, 1937).

⁵⁹³ Henry, p. 83.

⁵⁹⁴ *Marthe Richard au service de la France*, dir. by Raymond Bernard (Paris Films, 1937).

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

by an angry outburst which reflected the pain of her attachment to home and family. In fact, Bernard emphasized her distress by scripting Von Ludow's fictionalised suicide in response. The film thus added to Richard's most prolonged period of heroic repute, using cinema and fiction to embellish her life story and to depict her as a faultless victim of war with a desire for personal vengeance at the centre of her risky and ambitious mission.

Thanks to Ladoux's novel and Bernard's film, Marthe also became more popular in the press throughout the 1930s.⁵⁹⁶ Coquart claims that during this time she was 'l'espionne la plus célèbre de l'Héxagone',⁵⁹⁷ and states that 'pas seulement un agent reconnu, elle est devenue héroïne nationale'.⁵⁹⁸ She was awarded the *Légion d'honneur* in 1933 as an 'expression de gratitude de la patrie envers son agent secret'.⁵⁹⁹ *La Voix du combattant's* piece on the award informed its readers that 'grâce à Marthe Richard, notre deuxième bureau reçut et utilisa des renseignements précieux'.⁶⁰⁰ The article admitted that there were those who questioned the sexual morality of her activity,⁶⁰¹ but the journalist, Georges Pineau, upheld that morality in wartime was not to be called into question, urging his readers to remember that Richard had risked her life, and that she therefore merited the decoration without question.⁶⁰² *Paris-Soir*, which published excerpts from Richard's *Ma Vie d'espionne* daily in 1934 before it was generally released a year later, chose to include the proud subtitle 'Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur'.⁶⁰³ A municipal councillor of Lunéville proposed naming a Blâmont street after her, and the newspaper

⁵⁹⁶ Coquart, p. 132.

⁵⁹⁷ Binot, p. 261.

⁵⁹⁸ Coquart, p. 120.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ *La Voix du combattant*, 4 February 1933.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.: 'pour arriver à ses fins, a-t-elle employé des moyens qui...des moyens que..., enfin des moyens que, seule, une femme peut utiliser'.

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ *Paris Soir*, throughout 1934. But, as Danièle Déon Bessière points out, the accolade was considered by some not to honour Richard's own heroism, and rather to honour the financial aid that her second husband and financial director of the Rockefeller Foundation, Thomas Crompton, had offered in the restoration of the Versailles Petit Trianon building.

L'Indépendant de Lunéville tried to campaign for a statue of Marthe on horseback in the town square.⁶⁰⁴

Thanks to the fame that she found after the publication of the book and the film, Richard gave public lectures about her espionage activity between 1934 and 1938, but she was placed under close surveillance by the French authorities who were concerned that she might leak information about the activities of the *deuxième bureau*. In May 1937, for example, she was summoned to the Parisian Police headquarters and required to vow that she would discuss espionage in general, would speak for only seven or eight minutes, and would not divulge the details of her own wartime missions.⁶⁰⁵ Proving their concerns to be unfounded, Richard described her reputation as ‘acclamée’.⁶⁰⁶ But she was no less careful to portray an edited version of her 1916 and 1917 experiences that aligned itself with Ladoux’s romanticized, fictionalized account, rather than giving a detailed description of her intelligence work.

In addition to the success of these public events, she also recalled receiving much applause whilst giving a speech on the risks of espionage and counter-espionage at a public ex-servicemen’s event at the *Opéra municipal de Marseille* in 1936.⁶⁰⁷ Similarly, a report following a December 1937 conference at the *Théâtre des Ambassadeurs* where Richard was a special guest included written details of ‘applaudissements’.⁶⁰⁸ The conference host was cited referring to her alongside other spies as ‘des héros’, and Marthe’s own description of her heroic motivations were significantly documented: ‘elle explique qu[e] [...] pour être espion, il faut être animé de la volonté de servir son pays’.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁴ De La Fouchardière, ‘Réhabilitation d’une arme trop décriée’.

⁶⁰⁵ Letter from Police captain, 10 May 1937, 1 W 209-59468, APP.

⁶⁰⁶ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 291.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁸ Report, 15 December 1937, ‘Conférence de Marthe Richard et de Marcel Berger sous les auspices des “Grandes Conférences des Ambassadeurs”’, Théâtre des Ambassadeurs, 14 December 1937’, 1 W 209-59468, APP.

⁶⁰⁹ Report, 15 December 1937, ‘Conférence de Marthe Richard et de Marcel Berger sous les auspices des “Grandes Conférences des Ambassadeurs”’, Théâtre des Ambassadeurs, 14 December 1937’, 1 W 209-59468, APP.

Further helping to shape the ‘unofficial’ veteran status that she began to carve out for herself in the 1930s was an invitation from a Commander of the American Legion in Paris to a meeting and dinner also attended by the Russian Imperial Guard in December 1934.

Though the 1930s represented a time when Richard was recognised as heroic by most, there were still those who criticised her. It was satirical *Canard Enchaîné* journalist Georges de La Fouchardière who, during this decade, reverted back to negative stereotypes, accusing Richard of cuckoldry, dishonesty and sexual manipulation, and comparing her to a deuterocanonical Judith; Von Krohn to Holofernes.⁶¹⁰ His intention was to subvert popular heroic receptions of Richard’s role because, according to him, war was not an event from which one should derive notoriety. Defining war as ‘intégralement dégoûtante’, he called Richard’s conduct in neutral Spain, closely aligned with the German cohort, ‘honteuse au point d’être déshonorante’.⁶¹¹ He asked his readers how it was possible that people like Richard could brag about their war role.⁶¹² In an attempt to minimise the memory of Richard’s wartime heroism, La Fouchardière claimed that she was only given her *Légion d’honneur* thanks to Ladoux’s book and deplored the fact that she was given the decoration over Mata Hari, who he framed not only as a martyr, but also as an unfortunate case who had not even been awarded the title posthumously. De la Fouchardière’s argument was to be revived, and mirrored exactly some forty years later by Parisian police chief Charles Chenevier, as we will see.

4.4 Receptions: Post-Second World War

After a period of relative quiet from 1938 onwards, Richard’s role became subject to public scrutiny once again, in 1945. This was the first year that women had the vote and were able to stand in the Paris municipal elections, and Marthe was one of nine females elected. She became councillor for the fifth sector which included the third, fourth, tenth and eleventh arrondissements. Up until this point she had generally been popular amongst Parisians who credited her as a hero-veteran of the war and a holder of the *Légion*

⁶¹⁰ De La Fouchardière, ‘Réhabilitation d’une arme trop décriée’.

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

⁶¹² Ibid.

d'Honneur. However, during the 1940s and 1950s Richard's First World War role was used as a scaffold for certain defamatory responses to the *Loi Marthe Richard*, promulgated the year after her election. A process of institutional libel ended up denying her the heroic veteran status that the *Légion* could have afforded her in the postwar period.

At this time, a debate over the closure of the brothels, or *maisons de tolérance*, in France had been waging for many years, with the right showing itself to be largely in favour of keeping them open, on the basis that prostitutes were thought to have an important social role,⁶¹³ and figures on the left such as communist André Carrel declaring the need to close the *maisons* down because they were believed to represent a modern form of slavery. In this climate of post-war France, the *maisons* were also being remembered as having been a hotbed for wartime collaborationist activity, and as a 'hospitable' place for the Germany enemy to take pleasure in what France had to offer. The abolitionist *Mouvement républicain populaire* was thus formed in November 1944 to campaign for the eradication of such social scourges: brothels, pimping and the trafficking of women. A member herself and a national hero, her prostitution career still not known by her colleagues, Marthe became the figurehead of the campaign. A year later she signed the controversial *Loi Marthe Richard* which abolished the French brothel system.

As a direct result of her increased visibility and her new role in a divisive social polemic, Richard's public profile grew in prominence once again during this time. So, too, did her reputation as a 'deceptive schemer', undeserving of a heroic legacy.⁶¹⁴ Pierre Jacquet's observation of a turning point after which Marthe reported a greater occurrence of insult directed at her thus implicitly referred to the passing of the highly-denounced law,⁶¹⁵ because this moment marked a shift in attitudes towards her heroism.⁶¹⁶ It was at this

⁶¹³ Henry, p. 130.

⁶¹⁴ Coquart, p. 82, 'Vraies héroïnes ou fausses intrigantes, les femmes espionnes foisonnent dans les deux camps'.

⁶¹⁵ *Feuille d'avis de Neuchâtel*, 26 June 1952, p. 1 and 7.

⁶¹⁶ Alain Corbin, *Women for Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 350.

point, and in response, that Richard pursued the strategic and defensive 1947 republication of *Ma vie d'espionne* and *Espions de guerre et de paix*.

Some examples of scathing criticism were decipherable from the mid-1940s onwards. This criticism, mainly launched from some sectors of the political right, responded to her controversial legislative role as the woman who went on to shut down organised prostitution in 1946. But it also tended to build on earlier allegations of ‘myth-making’. It was the way in which she made selective use of her wartime experience that caused some to regard her publicly and privately as hungry for fame and heroic repute. She had managed to keep her personal connection with prostitution away from the public eye and her colleagues in the municipal council were thus unaware. Lurking in the records was a Nancy police *notification* from 21 August 1905 which recorded her in prostitution inspections and obliged her to report to the local *police de mœurs*. Yet she, and those close to her such as Georges Ladoux, had elected to omit any mention of her prostitution in Nancy and Paris from their accounts.⁶¹⁷ Despite having successfully concealed this unfavourable episode of her life, Richard was more criticized than heroised because she was believed to have derived celebrity status from the tragedy of war in deliberately publishing the most heroic aspects of her war role. She was also accused of strategically framing herself as the virtuous saviour of disadvantaged women in her later social role.⁶¹⁸ She was thus largely remembered as an untrustworthy and self-interested individual who attracted the disdain and mistrust of the press and the authorities.⁶¹⁹

By 1947, when the bulk of the libel against Richard had been launched, her espionage career in the First World War merely provided a contextual and sometimes unfavourable

⁶¹⁷ Despite deliberately concealing this detail from her past, she did use her role in the drawing up of the closure law to address some of the difficulties that she had faced earlier in life, including articles like number five, which ordered the destruction of prostitution files in order to protect women with difficult pasts. Henry, p. 166.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁶¹⁹ As late as 1977, *Le Monde* looked back over thirty years of abuses, calling them ‘les délices d’une certaine presse et d’un certain monde’. *Le Monde*, 9 May 1977: ‘une bien jolie vieille dame de quarante-vingt-huit ans, qui s’était attiré, en 1947, la haine de la police et du milieu en menant campagne pour la fermeture des maisons closes’.

backdrop. Ironically, some observations came close to apprehending Richard's most tightly kept secret, suggesting that her activity in Spain with von Krohn was sexually dubious and that she was thus not far removed from being a prostitute herself. For example, wife of the recently closed 'One-Two-Two' brothel owner Marcel Jamet, Fabienne, commented cynically that although Richard had been a First World War spy and had made attempts to carve a 'Jeanne D'Arc de la Vertu' profile for herself as of 1945,⁶²⁰ she had effectively prostituted herself in Spain: 'Alors, Marthe Richard aide l'armée française avec ses charmes....quelle blague!'.⁶²¹ Jamet's comment, although in direct response to the impact of Richard's municipal council activity on her husband's livelihood, also tells us that the popular stereotype of the eroticised First World War prostitute-spy endorsed by Magnus Hirschfeld was still deployed in the 1940s as means of giving further grounds to attacks on Richard's integrity. Further, the sarcastic comparison of Jeanne to Richard drew Jamet close to figures such as Anatole France, mentioned in chapter one, who sought to subvert heroisations of Jeanne D'Arc on the basis that her heroic status was undeserved, and had the potential to blind people to her flaws.

In the 1940s, Jean Violan-Davrighachvili also began to make use of a wartime stereotype which cast female spies as untrustworthy myth-makers. He began a process of retracting his earlier positive views on Richard, published in line with the sensationalist demands of the spy-fiction genre, in his 1933 'Mémoires de guerre secrète' book *Dans l'air et dans la boue: Mes missions de guerre*.⁶²² In a *France-Dimanche* piece from 3 August 1947 he now called her 'une imposteuse' and 'ni une héroïne nationale, ni une espionne de grande classe', before claiming that her only use to Ladoux had been as a fictionalised figure,

⁶²⁰ Henry, p. 172.

⁶²¹ Ibid, p. 173.

⁶²² Neither Ladoux nor Davrichachvili, who published under the 1930s 'Mémoires de Guerre Secrete' series, were any more 'reliable' authorities on her life than Marthe herself. Ladoux had been arrested in October 1917 on charges of spying and was placed under house arrest until January 1919 when the case was withdrawn, only for him to be re-arrested shortly afterwards on suspicion of disseminating security information and was finally acquitted in March. And Davrichachvili was, as Jean-Marc Binot puts it, just a much of 'un drôle de zigue, mythomane et trompe-la-mort, qui a déjà <<cases du bois>> à plusieurs reprises', Binot, p. 250.

helpful in boosting the captain's profile, and the profile of French espionage in general, after his arrest.⁶²³ Davrichachvili's slander was repeated in two other books, *La Verité sur Marthe Richard* in the same year, and *L'Imposture de Marthe Richard* from 1954.

The second international conflict is considered by Hanna Diamond to have negatively impacted on receptions of women's war roles. Diamond's work tells us that post-Second World War France gave context to the widespread moral judgement of groups of women 'who were thought to have chosen the "wrong" course' between 1939 and 1945.⁶²⁴ Reflective of a greater tendency for such damnation, an article in extreme-right monthly *Le Crapouillot* from 1951 looked back at the female spies of the First World War through the lens of 1939-1945 and subjected them to fierce stereotyping.⁶²⁵ The article made judgements about the ways in which female spies had conducted themselves in the conflict that had come before. Just as Hirschfeld had done some thirty years previously, the article referred to them as incompetent, imprecise, melodramatic, easily fatigued and unable to withstand the stress of the job, whilst being also easily bored. Moreover, it claimed that they became romantically attached to the enemy too easily.⁶²⁶

In the light of both these negative post-war stereotypes, and critical attitudes towards Richard's municipal role, a particularly damning article about Richard herself appeared in this edition of *Le Crapouillot*. Like Violan-Davrichachvili, the journalist attacked her for being a mythomaniac who upheld 'sa fiction d'espionne' and who 'a été aidée dans la fabrication de sa légende par le capitaine Ladoux'.⁶²⁷ Clearly thought of as significant for *Crapouillot* readers was the fact that Richard had needed her 'apologistes' including Henri Maunoury, chief of staff at the Paris Police Prefecture during the war. The article

⁶²³ *Le Crapouillot*, no. 15, (May 1951), p. 44.

⁶²⁴ Hanna Diamond, 'A New Dawn? French Women and the Liberation', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 23:6 (2000), pp. 729-38, p. 731.

⁶²⁵ Nicholas Hewitt, 'Non-Conformism, 'Insolence' and reaction: Jean Galtier-Boissière's *Le Crapouillot*', *Journal of European Studies*, 39:3 (September 2007), pp. 277-94, p. 291.

⁶²⁶ *Le Crapouillot*, no. 15, (May 1951), p. 37.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

also chose to conclude the section on Richard with cynical words from Jean Violan-Davrichachvili's *France-Dimanche* article.

Another commentator to make accusations about Richard's supposed selective self-heroisation and myth-making skills was the Director of *Le Crapouillot*, Jean Galtier-Boissière. In June 1952, an article in French-Swiss newspaper *Feuille d'avis de Neuchâtel* reported Galtier-Boissière to have denounced Richard's services to France, calling her a criminal and a thief, and accusing her of cover ups. This led her to respond in the criminal court. Richard's plea of defamation and intent to cause harm was not only launched on the basis that Galtier-Boissière had made accusations of imposture,⁶²⁸ but also because on the front cover of *Le Crapouillot*, her image was published directly alongside Mata Hari's with the captions 'Mata-Hari: Danseuse et courtisane, présumée espionne, fusillée à la Caponnière' and 'Marthe Richard: Agent double, héroïne post-fabriquée, décorée de la Légion d'Honneur'.⁶²⁹ Such a front cover 'mise-en-scène' was, as the *Feuille d'avis* article highlighted, considered by Richard to be 'une insulte', despite the fact that Mata-Hari was not presented in Richard's own accounts as particularly undesirable compared with the scathing public criticism launched towards her. In fact, as was the case in *Ma Vie d'espionne*, and as was picked up on by Galtier-Boissière's defence team, Richard actually aligned herself and her activities with those of Mata Hari: 'Lady McLeod, c'était Mata-Hari qui, elle aussi, partait en mission. Nos deux destins se croisaient en Espagne'.⁶³⁰ But, as the *Feuille d'avis* article quickly reminded the reader, details of Richard's heroism were being viewed in articles like that published in the *Crapouillot* through a thirty three year-old lens. Interpretations of her role as First World War spy were heavily influenced by her more recent social activity, as well as by negative responses to French women's involvement in the Second World War. And as soon as the

⁶²⁸ *Feuille d'avis de Neuchâtel*, 26th June 1952, p. 1 and 7.

⁶²⁹ *Le Crapouillot* no. 15, (May 1951).

⁶³⁰ Marthe Richard, *Ma Vie d'espionne au service de la France* (Paris: S.L.I.M, 1947), p. 108. The *Feuille d'avis* journalist reported Galtier-Boissière's lawyer, Maurice Garçon, as stating that 'Quant au rapprochement Mata-Hari-Marthe Richard [...] il est en toutes lettres dans les mémoires de Marthe Richard', p. 7.

subtitle ‘La fameuse loi’ appeared half-way through the piece, the report turned to Galtier-Boissière’s defence, which exposed alleged fabrications such as her false claim of the non-stop Le Crotoy-Paris flight record in February 1910, when in reality she landed her plane in Bourgogne and took the train to Zurich. The reported comment from the defence in the article read: ‘et voilà la belle histoire du record Paris-Zurich 1910’.⁶³¹ This was a particularly significant example of libel, because it came just three years after she was exposed as having not had French citizenship at the time of her election and the promulgation of the 1946 law. She was English by her second marriage, her first repatriation request denied in 1937. In response, therefore, to both the 1946 and law, and this latest exposure, the piece questioned the integrity of those who had voted for it, called Richard an ‘inéligible’ due to her citizenship, demanded that Galtier-Boissière be acquitted, and asked that ‘on renvoie cette dame à son roman et à ses impostures’.⁶³² The *Feuille d’avis* journalist added a tongue-in-cheek comment which read, ‘Qui a raison? Qui a tort? Qui dit vrai et qui dit faux? On ne sait pas’.⁶³³

Despite ever-growing public criticism, Marthe was still remembered in a *France-Soir* article as ‘Marthe Richard-la-grande-espionne-française’ almost twenty years later, in 1971. The article reported on Richard’s recent appearance in ‘Une femme et sa légende’, a *Dossiers de l’Ecran* episode dedicated to her and broadcasted after a showing of the 1937 Bernard film. Despite the fact that the programme was believed by many to heroise Richard, the *France-Soir* journalist, Jean Dutourd, defended what he considered to be a televised ambush. According to Dutourd, Marthe was subjected to a ‘vivisection’ that was all the more cruel given that she was 82 years old at the time.⁶³⁴ His article criticised the spectators for failing to question apparent accusations launched against her, which included questioning her municipal role on the basis that she was a British citizen in 1946 after having married Englishman Thomas Crompton in 1926, and stripping her of a right

⁶³¹ *Feuille d’avis de Neuchâtel*, 26 June 1952, p. 1 and 7.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶³⁴ *France-Soir* 2 March 1971.

to the *Légion d'honneur* because it was allegedly given to her in memory of him after his death in 1928. Nevertheless, Dutourd's article staunchly defended Richard, calling her 'une âme forte', suggesting that if she had the strength to confront the *Dossiers de L'Ecran* presenters as an elderly woman, there should be no doubt about her 'true' ability to confront an espionage mission at the age of 27.⁶³⁵

Exactly when Marthe's past life of 'prostitution' was publicly exposed is unclear. And it is even less clear whether or not those who referred to it were referring to her role in Spain from 1916 to 1917, or whether they had gained access to earlier records which showed her involvement in prostitution in Nancy as a teenager. When *Mon Destin de femme* was released in 1974, the press was still seemingly unaware. A *Le Monde* review of the autobiography upheld some of the enduring myths about female spies from the three major wars, 1870, 1914 and 1939 claiming that their stories had been relegated to ancillary status on bookshop shelves.⁶³⁶ The review made certain accusations about exaggeration in Richard's story but it faithfully retold her version, not mentioning anything to do with prostitution. It was slightly later in the decade that critics like Charles Chenevier began to cloak the controversy and unreliability of her wartime recollections with an even more outrageous charge: that she had banned the very business in which she was engaged as a young woman. Bolstering De La Fouchardière's earlier comments, ex-deputy director of the *police judiciaire* Chenevier published *La Grande Maison* just two years after *Mon Destin de femme*. Chenevier's book followed some of the infamous criminal cases with which he had been involved in his 59 year career, and included a chapter on Marthe Richard called 'L'espionne qui venait du chaud et qui n'existait pas...'.⁶³⁷ In it, Chenevier exposed all of the episodes of Marthe's life that had been covered up by her and those who had heroised her: namely, her involvement with prostitution in Nancy and the failure of the 1910 Le-Crotoy-Zurich record. Chenevier's vituperative claim that 'j'aime les joueurs mais je haïs les tricheurs' accused Richard of

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

⁶³⁶ *Le Monde*, 22 February 1974.

⁶³⁷ Charles Chenevier, *La Grande maison* (Paris: Presses de la cite, 1976).

being the latter, of being a reprobate, and suggested that she was unaware of the difference between truth and fiction.⁶³⁸

Chenevier's book accused Richard of cheating, lying, showboating, playing a fake role for the benefit of the public, and usurping glory and notoriety.⁶³⁹ It set about trying to deconstruct the heroic profile supposedly constructed in the *Dossiers de l'Ecran* programme. In order to do so, Chenevier called her an inauthentic hero, recommended that her example be left out of official history as far as possible, and appealed directly to her: 'Non! Marthe Richard, vous n'êtes pas Jeanne d'Arc'.⁶⁴⁰ Like De La Fouchardière before him, Chenevier compared the worthy sacrifice of Mata Hari to the unworthy limelight-seeking behaviour of Richard.⁶⁴¹

To assert his views, Chenevier took part in a *Radioscopie* interview in December 1976. When asked by the interviewer why he had such strong opinions on 'l'espionne venue du 'chaud'', he made implicit reference once again to her involvement in prostitution, telling the interviewer about what he considered to be 'problèmes en ce qui concernait sa vie privée bien sûr'.⁶⁴² In the same way that De La Fourchardière had questioned Marthe's heroism in the First World War, *La Grande Maison* questioned the heroism of her activity in the Second World War when she claimed to have joined the resistance, remarking that the '39-45 spies had been 'les combattants de l'ombre qui évitent les flashes de l'actualité et refusent surtout les feux de la rampe', before mentioning the 47 French women who gave their lives over the six year conflict.⁶⁴³ With these martyrs in mind, he stated that he could not abide 'les tricheurs' like Marthe, whose case annoyed him on behalf of 'ces femmes françaises qui sont mortes anonymement; qui sont mortes courageusement'.⁶⁴⁴

⁶³⁸ Online extract from Charles Chenevier, 'L'espionne qui venait du chaud et qui n'existait pas...', in *La Grande Maison* (Paris: Presses de la cite, 1976). <<http://www.aassdn.org/xldg10014.htm>> [accessed 15 April 2016].

⁶³⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁴¹ 'Blâmont Info', regional website, <<http://blamont.info/textes391.html>> [accessed 14 April 2016].

⁶⁴² 'Charles CHENEVIER, ancien sous-directeur de Police judiciaire', *Radioscopie*, 15 December 1976 <<http://www.ina.fr/audio/PHD97002390>> [accessed 8 April 2016].

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

Completely stripping Richard of any heroic entitlement by separating her example from examples of ‘true’ courage and martyrdom, Chenevier was clear about who he believed deserved and did not deserve a heroic reputation. Although the historical basis for their views differed by two decades, Chenevier, as well as De La Fouchardière some forty years before him, believed that Richard had enjoyed the limelight a little too much.

4.5 Richard’s Self-Heroisation

Richard’s First World War activity and subsequent attitudes towards her and her role, provide us with a prime example of the contrast between the documenting of lived experience and its representation in the hands of other commentators. As American historian Tammy Proctor claims, the study of individual female spies has tended to focus solely on biography or on cultural representations, which points to a lack of scholarship on personal writings.⁶⁴⁵ Indeed, the varying projections and interpretations of Marthe Richard’s life story and the criticism launched at her alleged ‘mythomaniac’ tendencies have already been tackled, and even launched afresh in recent work by writers such as Jean-Marc Binot, Elizabeth Coquart, Raymond Ruffin and Guy Breton.⁶⁴⁶ That the ‘truth’

⁶⁴⁵ Proctor, p. 4.

⁶⁴⁶ Coquart, p. 257. Coquart discusses others’ accusations of Richard’s perceived mythomania at length, herself adding that ‘Marthe sait jouer la sincérité quand il le faut’, thus suggesting that there were inconsistencies when it came to Richard’s reporting of the truth.

Binot, p. 260. Binot describes *Mon Destin de femme* as an ‘autobiographie proche du conte de fées’.

Ruffin, *Les Espionnes du XX siècle* (Paris: Editions France-Empire, 2000). Ruffin expresses much cynicism relating to Richard’s use of poetic licence when he lists her supposed achievements as an agent in Spain: ‘Le récit de ce voyage au Maroc s’avère encore plus rocambolesque que tous les autres car pour se procurer un visa Britannique, Marthe se serait tout bonnement présentée au consul anglais en lui expliquant sa mission, sa situation, et aurait réclamé la protection d’un <<suiveur>>! N’importe quel apprenti espion ferait un bond en lisant cette énormité! C’est absolument effarant!’.

Ruffin finds Richard’s recollections of her Pyrenées crossing ‘ahurissant’, accuses her of distorting facts into ‘pure invention’ (117) and hastens to add comments such as ‘à supposer que ce plan ait été bien réel’ (114) and ‘on patauge véritablement dans l’invraisemblance!’, claiming both her and Ladoux to have published ineptitudes, taking their readers for ‘des sacrés naifs!’ (115). ‘Ladoux et Marthe Richer – Richard peuvent reposer en paix sur leurs affabulations, leurs mensonges, leurs piètres intrigues et leurs trames grandguignolesques [...] un personnage qui, s’il méritait effectivement une certaine considération pour son travail d’agent secret, ne valait pas cette débauche d’écrits et de films’ (124).

Guy Breton *Les beaux mensonges de l’Histoire* (Paris: Le Pré aux Clercs, 1999) p. 219-223. Breton calls his chapter on Richard ‘L’histoire rocambolesque de Marthe Richard’, and gives it the subtitle ‘ou l’on voit que l’héroïne nationale a fondé sa légende sur une incroyable imposture’. His chapter presents the ‘real’ story of her life, referring to her ‘mensonges’ and her capacity to present events as they would be presented in a children’s storybook.

of Richard's published recollections is subject to debate is not at the core of this chapter, which does not seek to 'trace' Richard's steps as recorded by others. Nor does it attempt to decipher or draw conclusions about any 'true', 'palatable',⁶⁴⁷ or 'plausible' story of her life. Rather, this discussion adds to scholarly engagement with histories of female spies that are little-known today, and fulfils a need to bring to the fore self-presentations, as well as representative or second-hand reports.

Having explored the extent to which a range of commentary on Richard's war roles evoked various positive and negative archetypes of female espionage over three distinct periods of time, the following material now turns to an investigation into the ways in which she used life writing to carve out a heroic profile in response to such commentary. To do so, she drew on both myth and reality in order to align herself with popular understandings of First World War heroism. She also attributed to herself traditional heroic conduct such as risk taking and patriotic motivation in order not only to fend off critical press observations, but also to deflect sources of information which sought to expose the more controversial episodes from her past and her private life.

This section is based on three of Richard's auto-fictional and autobiographical works: *Ma vie d'espionne au service de la France* (1935), *Espions de guerre et de paix* (1938), and *Mon destin de femme* (1974). These three texts are the richest sources of information on her First World War role and they reveal much about the way in which she regarded herself and her role in wartime, at pivotal moments during the five decades that followed. In order to give further structure to a discussion of Marthe's own voice, the discussion will focus firstly on her relationship with the traditional heroic concepts of risk, danger, sacrifice, duty and revenge. Secondly, it will consider the role that her gender and her regional identity played in her heroism, whether that be inspiring it, facilitating it or motivating it. Thirdly, it examines source material up to the last decade of her life in order

⁶⁴⁷ Dea Birkett and Julie Wheelwright, "'How could she?': Unpalatable Facts and Feminists' Heroines", *Gender & History*, 2:1 (March 1990), pp. 49–57.

to interrogate the extent to which Marthe considered her own role in the First World War to be heroic, and how she responded to the critical voices of those who denied it.

In her 1930s works Richard emulated the spy-fiction genre, adopting dramatic techniques and describing arguably implausible happenings which suggested a certain degree of poetic licence for which she was, and still is, heavily criticised.⁶⁴⁸ She omitted her involvement in prostitution from all publications, claiming later in life that it was her experience in a Nancy custody cell, for an undisclosed reason and where she met some prostitutes, which inspired her later philanthropic role in the municipal council. She feigned complete shock at the concept of sexual seduction as part of a professional role, when Ladoux suggested the possibility that she might attract von Krohn into bed as part of her spy mission in Spain.⁶⁴⁹ She also excluded from her own accounts details of a 1913 plane crash injury which left her infertile, and the failed Le Crotoy-Paris flight record.⁶⁵⁰ It is with the benefit of Marthe's account that one can easily identify her justifications for creating heroic myth and illusion from time to time; in response to some of the criticism launched most fervently against her in the 1940s, 1950s and 1970s. After the 1913 plane crash, for example, she reported in *Mon Destin de femme*, that the newspapers had announced that she had died in the accident. The national press, claiming that she had died when she was still alive, was thus commenting imprecisely on her well before she took on a wartime role or was forced to confront slander from Daudet and Le Fouchardière.

⁶⁴⁸ Coquart, p. 57: 'c'est bien d'elle, n'est-ce pas, cette manière de frauder, de tromper, de manipuler pour parvenir à ses fins, de se mettre en avant, de faire croire à ce qu'elle n'est pas en réalité?'. A 2006 New York Times article described Richard as 'Blessed with the boldness of a true pathological liar', *New York Times Online*, 3 August 2006, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/03/arts/03iht-blume.html?pagewanted=all&r=1&>> [accessed 6 April 2016].

⁶⁴⁹ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 135: 'Je n'ai jamais exercé le talent que vous me supposez'.

⁶⁵⁰ Coquart, p. 57, and <<http://blamont.info/textes393.html>> [accessed 14 April 2016].

4.6 Being Useful and Taking Risks

Marthe wrote that from a young age she desired to be engaged in adventure. She described this desire as an inner ‘demon’,⁶⁵¹ defining herself as a masochist; always drawn to that which could harm her.⁶⁵² She suggested that she was a curious character, who tended to attach little sentimental importance to anything, but who was nonetheless intrigued by what life had to offer. This admission of a lack of emotional attachment was manifest in many ways in her personal writings, from comments about being more interested in her passion for automobiles than her passion for her first husband,⁶⁵³ and about her capacity to distance herself emotionally from the sexual encounters with von Krohn that were an integral part of her role as a spy in Spain,⁶⁵⁴ to her refusal to engage emotionally with the experience of war: ‘Mais, à la guerre, on ne fait pas de sentiments!’.⁶⁵⁵ As well as suggesting that she possessed the ideal character traits for an espionage role, Richard also gave these examples of her self-confessed lack of emotional investment as a means of ‘speaking back’ at dominant messages diffused in sources such as the 1951 *Crapouillot* article, which claimed that female spies were too emotional to be professional.

On the death of both husbands, however, Marthe did express loss, and an uncharacteristic emotional emptiness. Of Henri she wrote: ‘J’ai perdu le seul être au monde qui m’a vraiment aimée, plus qu’un mari, un compagnon pour tous les instants, pour toutes les pensées, l’homme qui m’a faite ce que je suis’.⁶⁵⁶ And when she recalled the death of her second husband, she commented in *Espions de guerre et de paix* that ‘j’eus la grande douleur de perdre ce qui me rattachait encore à la vie’, a memory that she expressed almost identically in *Mon Destin de femme*, 27 years later.⁶⁵⁷ But whilst Richard recalled emotional responses to the deaths of her husbands, in the case of Henri this led her to

⁶⁵¹ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 320.

⁶⁵² *Ma Vie d’espionne*, p. 122.

⁶⁵³ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 92

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

enrol in Ladoux's service and was thus a key motivating factor in her choice to take on a heroic war role. In fact, she admitted to feeling able to engage emotionally only once the war was over, by a compliment from Thomas Crompton's father during a visit to London before they were married. She recalls that Mr Crompton called her marvellous, told her that her role was magnificent, and stated that he was very pleased with her. Richard told her readers of the uncharacteristic warmth that she felt in response: 'ce témoignage de confiance, cette affection si spontanément offerte me touchent infiniment et me reconcilient avec le genre humain'.⁶⁵⁸

By her own admission Marthe had been easily bored since childhood and could appear stubborn and remiss, but deep down she claimed that she was always ready to defend her 'usefulness' as a French woman to the best of her ability.⁶⁵⁹ The need to be useful was about stimulating herself in a life which she essentially found quite tedious. When war broke out, her 'démarche personnelle' centred on her sense of self-worth and on the role that she occupied during the conflict.⁶⁶⁰ This quickly developed into a patriotic, humane and, at times, nationalist need to make herself useful for the greater good of her country. She told her readers that, 'j'essaie par tous les moyens d'être utile à mon pays'.⁶⁶¹ For Marthe being 'inutile' was like a physical affliction and the act of doing what she defined as useful was a life blood. In *Ma Vie d'espionne* she claimed; 'l'action seule pourra calmer mon chagrin ou tout au moins m'en éloigner'.⁶⁶² The same sentiment lived on in her memory causing her to reassert, 27 years later, that 'seuls l'action et le sentiment d'être utile me donneront une raison de vivre'.⁶⁶³ Throughout *Mon Destin de femme* and particularly with reference to the early war years, when she had yet to carve out a role for

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 284.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ma Vie d'espionne*, p. 190.

⁶⁶⁰ Van Ypersele and Debruyne, p. 75.

⁶⁶¹ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 106.

⁶⁶² *Ma Vie d'espionne*, p. 42.

⁶⁶³ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 115.

herself, she compared the feeling of uselessness to that of being physically ulcerated, admitting that she was ‘obsédée par le désir de me rendre utile’.⁶⁶⁴

Perhaps one of the most painful expressions of uselessness that Marthe shared was her response to the 14 February 1917 German submarine attack on the Boucau blast furnaces near Bayonne. The *Gazette de Biarritz* cited thirty injured.⁶⁶⁵ Marthe documented her response using almost identical language in both *Ma Vie d’espionne* and *Mon Destin de femme*, drawing on the fact that she shed tears for the dead and for her own powerless self, asking the question, ‘Pourquoi surmonter tant de dégoûts, gâcher une jeunesse avide de liberté si, par incurie, par sottise, il ne m’était pas permis d’avoir ce réconfort moral: l’utilité?’, and stating that ‘je me sentis vide de courage. Mon effort avait été inutile. Le doute me ravageait’.⁶⁶⁶

From her reflection on a 1915 *Bonnet Rouge* film that she was due to star in, it was clear that Richard had her own ideas about what constituted ‘true’ and useful heroism:

Si je peux obtenir l’autorisation de voler dans le Midi, il me donnera le premier rôle d’un film dans lequel, pour l’édification des poilus et des civils, j’incarnerai une héroïne aviatrice qui se sacrifie pour son pays! C’est bien ce que je voudrais faire en réalité! Il faut me contenter de l’illusion... hélas!⁶⁶⁷

The film was never made, but the fact remained that having to be content with the creation of a heroic illusion rather than herself enacting the heroism that she wanted to enact was a source of much frustration for Marthe. As soon as war had broken out, her desire to act on the need to be useful as an alternative to the pain of doing nothing became more intense. She volunteered as an auxiliary nurse at the Panthéon military hospital in Paris shortly after the outbreak. And, as mentioned previously, she attempted to set up the all-female aviation corps in 1915 in response to the fact that, according to Richard, ‘les aviatrices sont, comme moi, ulcérées de ne rien faire’.⁶⁶⁸ Thus, her actions over 1914 and

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁶⁶⁵ *Gazette de Biarritz*, 14 February 1917.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ma Vie d’espionne*, p. 232.

⁶⁶⁷ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 103.

⁶⁶⁸ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 100.

1915 were precursors to the purposeful role that she would finally be able to fulfil for the *deuxième bureau* in 1915 and 1916.⁶⁶⁹

Marthe made her innate need to respond to feelings of uselessness and to serve a distinct and useful purpose in life one of the most ‘audible’ of her heroic intents. She framed it as a key motivating factor which enabled her to persevere when the demands of her role as double agent became challenging. This was the first step in emphasising the heroism of her life story. Though she admitted to starting off her career as double agent with some doubts about her ability to take on what Ladoux was asking of her, when recalling her revelation to colonel Goubé in *Ma Vie d’espionne* at the end of her mission in Spain, she confidently responded to her earlier fears of failure, pointing out that in fact, ‘j’ai accompli des actes qui étaient souvent au-dessus de mes forces’.⁶⁷⁰ Such supererogatory acts included the giving of her body to von Krohn; a business-like ‘sacrifice’ that she was prepared to make on the basis that she was sterile,⁶⁷¹ and in order to necessarily cement his feelings for her. But moreover, this, and other ‘intenable sacrifices’,⁶⁷² were enacted ‘par amour pour ma Patrie’,⁶⁷³ and ‘avec l’espoir d’une revanche qui, à la fois me justifierait et me soulagerait’.⁶⁷⁴ All in all, expressions of such sacrifice bolstered the heroic reputation that she was seeking to build through her personal writing.

Another heroic facet of her character that she foregrounded as part of this process of self-heroisation was Richard’s sense of duty to others as a French woman.⁶⁷⁵ Bound up with this sense of duty was also a sense of revenge ‘sans conditions’, firstly for the death of Henri, and then more generally for the loss of human life and the cruelty of the enemy.⁶⁷⁶ To Ladoux, she reported saying that ‘mes sentiments de Française, la haine que m’inspire

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ma Vie d’espionne*, p. 275.

⁶⁷¹ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 146.

⁶⁷² *Ma Vie d’espionne*, p. 246.

⁶⁷³ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 132.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 270.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ma Vie d’espionne*, p. 275 and *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 280.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ma Vie d’espionne*, p. 41.

von Krohn, et le souvenir de mon mari mort, m'ont fait poursuivre jusqu'au bout la mission que vous m'aviez confiée'.⁶⁷⁷ When she met a woman whose husband had been killed at the front, she professed that 'mon désir de servir pour venger ces souffrances atroces s'ancre plus fortement encore en moi'.⁶⁷⁸ And this desire for vengeance endured into the 1930s, when she still reported feeling the need to seek revenge for her fallen colleagues who had died whilst fulfilling a similar role.⁶⁷⁹

Richard claimed to be more afraid of defeat than death and was thus willing,⁶⁸⁰ or even hoping, to confront risk and danger: 'J'aime à jouer avec le feu, avec le danger, avec les soupçons'.⁶⁸¹ Being able to express joy in risk-taking during the war enabled her, in turn, to refer to another heroic life episode, linking her fearlessness as a spy to her impressive flying career, when the probability of having an accident was high and thus, had she been fearful, she would not have been one of so few women to obtain the pilot's licence. Sometimes she described her cunning, and readers enjoyed moments of dangerous dramatic irony such as her success in naming the Madrid beauty salon that von Krohn bought her as a secure location from which he could direct his espionage ring, 'Le Miroir Aux Alouettes'. Representing a secret revelation of her *deuxième bureau* code name, the shop even had a brightly lit sign above the door, further mocking von Krohn's ignorance.

Among the more 'active' and easily recognisable pursuits of heroic peril that she chose to recall, was her passage through the clandestine German Pyrenées route to France with only a smuggler and her dog, facing capture by a customs agent. She summed up her attitude to risky and dangerous episodes like this pragmatically, claiming that, 'l'espionnage exige de subtilité et de souplesse. Menacé de tous côtés, l'espion doit être assez habile pour pressentir les écueils et les déjouer',⁶⁸² and that 'l'espionne, l'agent

⁶⁷⁷ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 271.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁶⁷⁹ Marthe Richard, *Espions de guerre et de paix* (Paris: S.L.I.M, 1947), p. 148.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ma Vie d'espionne*, p. 197.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶⁸² *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 214

double que je suis, peut se trouver dans des situations dramatiques. J'en ai pris les risques. Il ne s'agit pas de reculer'.⁶⁸³ Finally, as a means of defining her role, she stated, with acceptance that 'je suis espionne, et je dois en supporter les conséquences'.⁶⁸⁴

4.7 Heroic *Revanchisme*

A reading of Richard's account thus reveals that she sought to embody a kind of heroic code in her approach to sacrifice, revenge risk and supererogation. As well as being driven by a love of *la Patrie* and a need for revenge for the death of her husband and for the loss of innocent life, she was also inspired by a love of her homeland, Lorraine. Expressions of this attachment endured throughout her autobiographical works and, at times, developed into the kind of ethnic nationalist sentiment which emanated from the rhetoric of fellow Lorraine native Maurice Barrès. A particular affinity for her childhood home seemed ironic given her own admission that she had a destructive relationship with her mother and was desperate to leave Blâmont and Nancy as soon as she could. But outweighing painful and negative memories was clearly the empathy she felt towards the invaded territory, and an inherent *revanchisme* which had 'trickled down' from Parisian bourgeois nationalists to families on the ground like the Betenfelds. Like many of their generation, Marthe's parents had lived through the Franco-Prussian war,⁶⁸⁵ so her revanchist expression was not only framed by a love of homeland, but also by a distinct anti-German sentiment which intensified, according to her accounts, during the First World War. By the time she was operating under cover for the *deuxième bureau*, the significance of having a Lorraine identity in another war had come to reflect an ever-present 'retributionist' theme, most clearly decipherable in her last autobiography, published in 1974.

⁶⁸³ Ibid., p. 218

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 240.

⁶⁸⁵ *Ma Vie d'espionne*, p. 125: 'Les parents de ma mère avaient, en 1871, quitté Metz pour ne pas devenir Allemands'.

Of her mother, Marthe wrote, 'C'était une rude femme, une belle Lorraine; solide, intelligente, qui avait élevé cinq enfants. Elle avait connu la guerre dans son jeune âge, elle la retrouvait maintenant', *Ma Vie d'espionne*, p. 124.

Marthe frequently expressed an awareness of being a Lorraine native, writing that ‘Lorraine, je suis née pour servir la France’,⁶⁸⁶ and ‘je suis française d’abord. Je puis même dire plus que française, parce que Lorraine’.⁶⁸⁷ She also suggested that Lorraine was one of the most patriotic regions of France, making reference to ‘le vieil atavisme lorrain’, to describe a strong local ancestral ‘type’.⁶⁸⁸ This ethnic nationalist definition of regional identity based on ‘blood’, along with her frustration at not feeling useful in the early moments of the war were to incite her eventual heroic conduct, and she made this clear to her readers: ‘Je m’y ronge les sangs, ce sang de Lorraine, qui coule tumultueusement dans mes veines pendant que les hommes se battent et souffrent, je suis, à ne rien faire, obsédée par le désir de me rendre utile’.⁶⁸⁹ When she was away from France, she recalled Lorraine often being on her mind. She discussed the particularities of the Lorraine native’s nature, and was able to find links between her capacity to endure suffering, and her origins; her ‘coeur de Lorraine habituée à la guerre, à l’invasion, à la douleur’.⁶⁹⁰

This attachment to her homeland was often described by Richard as a painful one, particularly when it came to the German enemy. Generational hatred, deeply entrenched since the 1870 War, had shaped her experience of a regional upbringing which had led her to be wary of German accents,⁶⁹¹ and had advised her from childhood to despise those like von Krohn.⁶⁹² She used the metaphor of injury, again, to express her personal difficulty at being required to collaborate with him and his colleagues, describing the unmerited shame of betraying her country as being like a wound.⁶⁹³ She berated herself for appearing to respond to his desire when really she hated him on the sole basis that she

⁶⁸⁶ *Espions de guerre et de paix*, p. 103.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ma Vie d’espionne*, p. 44.

⁶⁸⁸ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 145.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁶⁹⁰ *Espions de guerre et de paix*, p. 201.

⁶⁹¹ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 119: ‘un accent allemande qui ne peut tromper mes oreilles lorraines’.

⁶⁹² *Espions de guerre et de paix*, p. 12: ‘en Lorraine, enfant, on m’a appris à vous haïr’.

Ma Vie d’espionne, p. 100: ‘C’était bien là l’image de Allemagne que, depuis mon enfance en Lorraine, on m’avait fait détester’.

⁶⁹³ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 261.

was a French woman and he was a German man. She recalled the times when she deliberately feigned a pro-German outlook, for example when she wore black, yellow and red at a German Navy High Command soirée in Cadix in order to impress von Krohn's acquaintances. And she described the hateful expressions of guests at a diplomatic dinner party at the von Krohn family house in Madrid during which one guest remarked, in German, that all French women were prostitutes. In these situations Marthe had to claim ignorance because she had led von Krohn to believe that she did not understand German. But she did understand, and she relayed her internal response to the readers of *Ma Vie d'espionne*: 'ces paroles me firent découvrir l'importance de ma mission, de mon rôle, et ce rôle me sembla moins amer. Ma haine de Française supplantait ma haine de femme'.⁶⁹⁴ Though she heroically claimed to have found motivation in having to be reticent and falsely ignorant, she did not hide her distress at being required to divide her loyalties at times. For example, she remembered boldly admitting to von Krohn that she felt no attachment to his culture, that she merely needed to earn a wage, and that this was why she had been willing to join his service.

4.8 Heroic femininity

Among the personal values that Richard strategically foregrounded in order to depict her heroism, her attachment to Lorraine, and the anti-German sentiment that this attachment engendered, were not the only factors that helped her to persevere with her personal and patriotic objectives. She made clear to her readers that another important side of her heroic conduct was the way in which she used her relationship with the visual, emotional and practical manifestations of her gender, to facilitate her mission. As a woman who operated outside of the domestic sphere, who voluntarily risked her life, and who did not embody stoicism or understatement, Richard countered many dominant discourses, discussed in chapter two, which sought to connect femininity to conservative domestic ideals of heroic womanhood and maternity. She was open about never wanting to become a mother once married, writing in 1974 that she had told Henri, 'j'ai, moi, une peur

⁶⁹⁴ *Ma Vie d'espionne*, p. 118.

maladive de la maternité [...] non, j'ai vu trop d'enfants malheureux...je veux rester libre'.⁶⁹⁵ And whilst Ladoux's book suggested that Marthe did recognise wartime gender dynamics which traditionally placed women passively at home and men actively at war,⁶⁹⁶ in her own untraditional and active role she showed that she was prepared to exploit these dominant discourses of femininity in order to achieve her goals as a spy. Furthermore, because she was aware that her untraditional qualities made her susceptible to some of the negative myths around female spies, she responded by framing her heroism within the realms of reassuring femininity.

Indeed, Richard was living in a society in which if a woman, or a female icon, who did occupy an 'untraditional' and more active role, ideals of femininity were reinforced in order to remind her that she could and should still 'look the part'. Chapter one shows that Jeanne d'Arc's less traditional guises were adapted throughout the Belle Epoque and the First World War so as to conform to more traditional popular visions of womanhood, for example. A piece entitled 'La mode chez les aviatrices', from a March 1912 edition of *La Revue aérienne*, featured interviews with women-pilots Marie Marvingt, Miss Béby-Paris, and Mathilde Moisant. For the benefit of any readers who might have been alarmed by the interviewees' insistence that practicality was the most important aspect of their dress, the journalist Annie Wanss went some way to undermining them by reasserting their ability to combine this practicality with feminine elegance. The piece included pictures of Moisant both glamorously and femininely dressed, looking stern 'à la ville', and one showing her practically dressed and smiling, 'en aviatrice'.⁶⁹⁷ It was clear from the photographs which outfit Moisant herself preferred. For the purposes of Wanss's article though, the heroism of female aviators had to be bound up as much with femininity as with their confrontation of risk and danger: 'Etait-il possible de montrer de façon plus péremptoire que la grâce féminine n'entend pas négliger demain le royaume des airs'.⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁵ *Mon Destin de femme*, p.65.

⁶⁹⁶ Ladoux, p. 100. Ladoux reported Richard's words: 'le guerrier a toujours présent à l'esprit la femme: mère ou soeur, épouse ou maitresse'.

⁶⁹⁷ *La Revue Aérienne*, 10 March 1912, p. 128.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Dominant pre-war discourses like Wanss's, as discussed in chapter two, attempted to situate 'untraditional' women in traditional guises as far as possible. Already occupying a marginal space, Richard sought to share with her readers the extent to which her own feminine appearance helped her to drive her untraditional wartime mission at key points. But rather than being an essential means of her asserting her gender in the name of social compliance, Richard used the markers of gender and her physical attractiveness tactically to seduce or to manipulate a person or situation, thereby representing the popular prostitute-spy figure at times, who also used seduction as a professional tactic. But Marthe preferred to describe this tactic as one of glamour and necessity rather than sexual deviance, and thus resisted aligning herself with some of the more complex virgin-whore spy stereotypes.

She became more mindful of the impact that her dress might have on others before she became an agent. She remarked on Dr Chautemps from the *Panthéon* hospital suggesting that she keep her nurse's uniform on when travelling to the front as it was, according to him, 'toujours un avantage'.⁶⁹⁹ In this comment she showed an awareness of discourses of female heroism that glorified and sanctified the work of volunteer nurses. But this was to be the only time when her outward appearance reflected a commonplace or easily-recognisable role. From this point on she adapted Dr Chautemps' sentiment, using various outfits to shroud the truth of her activity in any given place, but remaining aware of the effect that they might have on those around her. And rather than expressing self-consciousness about her deceitful appearance, she looked upon her ability to create this false persona as an act of necessity and heroism. For example, when she went to accept Ladoux's offer of a job, she pointed out that she removed her mourning dress and put on a new and more elegant outfit that she had feared she would never get to wear.⁷⁰⁰ At this point, she showed a preparedness to move away from tradition and to turn her back on the feminine duty of mourning, in order to fulfil her new duty to espionage. Again, she described her arrival at the roulette table for the first time in Saint Sebastian strictly in

⁶⁹⁹ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 108.

⁷⁰⁰ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 117.

terms of her appearance: ‘jeune, brune aux yeux bleus, vetue de noir, je fis, je l’avoue, une entrée qui me flatta’.⁷⁰¹

During her first few days in Spain her objective was to draw attention to herself, and she further manipulated her image so as to create a strong sense of identity, in terms of nationality and social class. She appeared as a true Parisian, in lightweight white or purple summer dresses. In the evenings she wore gowns to the casino and theatre, in order that she appeared at home alongside high society women. She told her readers at another time that ‘je m’habillai simplement en petite femme sportive [...] Toutefois je pris bien soin de choisir ma toilette, sachant l’effet que produit l’élégance française sur la convoitise allemande’.⁷⁰²

She also confessed to using her understanding of the effects of a feminine appearance in other ways, such as when she tried to horrify ‘le conquérant’ by wearing an unattractive, long-sleeved night gown, smearing her face with night cream and putting her hair in rollers the first time she and von Krohn shared a hotel room.⁷⁰³ She foregrounded an interest in the beauty industry as a means of encouraging von Krohn to buy her the ‘Miroir aux Alouttes’, where he would also receive his agents. She wrote about positioning herself in feminine poses in order to overhear his dealings at the shop, pretending to read fashion magazines, or serenely taking out a compact mirror as if to check her hair. And having previously been cooked for by von Krohn’s maid, Marthe explained that she insisted she take over. In inserting herself into a more traditional and domestic act in the kitchen as a cover-up for her less traditional intelligence role, she had more access to the comings and goings of von Krohn’s agents. She also used her knowledge of beauty procedures to dye the hair of one of his other female agents a distinctive colour, which led to the woman’s arrest by the French. She aimed to be seen to behave as if a ‘typical’ woman, preferring to go to beauticians, hairdressers and clothes shops in order not to attract attention to the ‘atypical’ role that she was carrying out in reality. Finally, she drew

⁷⁰¹ *Ma Vie d’espionne*, p. 78.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁷⁰³ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 146.

on undeniable female physiology, faking a pregnancy with von Krohn's child so that she could tread the German passage through the Pyrenées.

Richard used her knowledge of gender stereotypes and how to subvert them, sometimes with delight, in order to carve out a heroic persona when recalling this period of her life. In consciously trying to embody feminine norms, she suggested that she was somehow exempt from them herself and could therefore productively manipulate them for her own ends and for the sake of the French nation. But she also felt the need to feign normative womanhood, that is to say femininity, beauty, passivity and sometimes domesticity, in order to deflect any potential negative stereotyping of her role by the critical observers who continued to perpetuate myths of villainous, conniving and sexually loose female war spies.

4.9 A War of Her Own

Others were aware of the relationship between the markers of Marthe's gender and her heroic role as a double agent. Georges Ladoux, for example, mentioned at one point in *Marthe Richard: Espionne au service de la France*, that she left behind her in his office 'comme une nappe traîtresse de gaz asphyxiants, l'odeur de l'«éternel féminin», le parfum alors à la mode et dont les marraines de guerre saupoudraient leurs lettres d'amour aux rudes gars des tranchées...pour les jeter énervés et ravis dans la bataille'.⁷⁰⁴ But most significant about his fleeting comparison of Marthe's role to patriotic women's letter writing for the benefit of adopted *filleuls* at the front, were the references to poison gas and battle which suggested a connection between Marthe's sphere of operation and that of the armed combatant. Ladoux's choice of lexical field thus helped to situate her, in terms of patriotism, sacrifice, risk and duty, alongside France's 'true' and unquestioned heroes.

As discussed previously, the concept of 'alternative' military service behind the lines during the First World War was already in circulation in wartime discourses. Janet Lee's work on the British FANY examines the 'feminine appropriation of military heroism'

⁷⁰⁴ Ladoux, p.100-101.

among volunteers, who referred to the concepts of comradeship, duty, courage and suffering as a means of including themselves in discourses of masculine sacrifice of the front line.⁷⁰⁵ John Horne, whose argument frames a discussion of the heroic sacrifice of women workers in chapter three, suggests that munitions work away from the fighting fronts was also considered to be an alternative contribution to military service.⁷⁰⁶ And, as examined in chapter three, press comparisons of women workers to combatants were in circulation during the First World War, and likened their work and conduct to patriotic duty enacted on the battlefield.

In terms of female espionage as an alternative military service, Tammy Proctor writes about a ‘gendered army of intelligence workers [...] a military force of foreign soldiers’ created as part of the 1917 *Dame Blanche* network organised by the British War Office.⁷⁰⁷ Whilst Proctor refers, to some extent, to the formal militarisation of these network members including women, her comment also hints more generally at the potential for comparisons to be drawn between espionage and combat.⁷⁰⁸ In the case of France this was a more significant connection given the reluctance of the French forces to employ women as auxiliary workers throughout the First World War. Clearly aware of the scope for such comparisons, Marthe’s personal writings show a distinct awareness of the heroising potential of portraying her will to join the fight. She made use of pre-existing discourses of ‘alternative’ service to describe her attempts to engage, as well as drawing parallels between herself and her actions, and combatants and warfare, both in her roles as aviator in the early war years, and as a double agent. The frequency with which she did so, and her clear knowledge of the wartime tradition of attributing heroic sacrifice to those behind the lines therefore suggests that she deployed such references and comparisons as another means of self-heroisation.

⁷⁰⁵ Janet Lee, ‘Sisterhood at the front: Friendship, comradeship, and the feminine appropriation of military heroism among World War I First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY)’, *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 31:1 (January–February 2008), pp.16–29, p. 25-29.

⁷⁰⁶ Horne, p. 208.

⁷⁰⁷ Proctor, p. 77.

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 78. This is also discussed by Van Ypersele and Debruyne in the case of Belgian espionage.

Having obtained her *brevet de pilote* in 1913, Richard recalled her intense desire to be militarised in *Mon Destin de femme*: ‘Je veux absolument servir dans une unité de combattante’.⁷⁰⁹ She told her readers that in 1915 she showed awareness of the potential of women to be usefully mobilised, when she pleaded with General Hirschsauer, director of military aviation, for the official formation of a French women’s aviation corps. The proposed *Union Patriotique des aviatrices de France* was to have its headquarters at Marthe’s Paris home. Alongside Richard, the group included Elise de la Roche, Carmen Damédoz, Miss Picard, and Belgian Helene Dutrieu, who no longer wanted to fly herself, and two other women who were above the oldest age of mobilisation for men, and thus were not demanding the right. The *Union*’s proposition included offering to transport troops, material and medicines by air. Marthe was cited in a July 30 1915 article from *Le Petit Journal*, appealing that all members had appropriate training and qualifications and were worthy of the tasks that they aspired to carry out. In turn, the newspaper heroised her personally and within the confines of socially ‘normal’ gender order, calling her a woman with an energetic and youthful spirit, and remarking that she spoke about confronting risk as though she were telling the story of a shopping trip to the department store, the space traditionally occupied mainly by bourgeois women at the time.⁷¹⁰ This comment was followed up by another double-edged remark that had France not been enduring war, the concept of female heroism would be thought of as a joke, but given the circumstances, people had become quite accustomed to the idea that women could carry out heroic and patriotic acts comparable to those being carried out on the front line, and that this had become much less of a shock.⁷¹¹

Despite *Le Petit Journal*’s partly encouraging message, Siân Reynolds reminds us that in practice, ‘the First World War both launched aviation and made it more demonstrably a male activity’.⁷¹² Richard was politely denied her request to form the *Union*, but not

⁷⁰⁹ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 100.

⁷¹⁰ Julien Neutres, ‘Le grand magasin, « temple de la Femme »’, *Histoire par l’image (online)*, <<http://www.histoire-image.org/etudes/grand-magasin-temple-femme>> [accessed 24th April 2016].

⁷¹¹ *Le Petit Journal*, 30 July 1915.

⁷¹² Siân Reynolds, *France between the Wars: Gender and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 66.

without Hirschauer's admission that hers were 'offres généreuses' and that she had shown 'sentiments élevés' and 'dévouement patriotique'.⁷¹³ Next, on hearing news that suggested Britain had created a female battalion on 1 March 1915, Richard approached the Parisian branch of the British aviation force, who regrettably claimed that non-nationals were not permitted to engage for Britain.⁷¹⁴

It was precisely on the basis that she was refused the opportunity to formally use her skills and attributes in combat and therefore to have a role in the war, that Richard developed such an avid and vocal interest in the similarities between the heroism that she was eventually able to carry out as a spy-soldier in the 'guerre secrète' and the heroism enacted on the front line by soldiers. As Margaret Darrow's chapter on France's refusal to militarise women suggests, this refusal did not relate to an unwilling on the part of women like Marthe.⁷¹⁵ Rather, it reflected bureaucratic reservations about the civic implications of female military service, about the emasculating potential of a female presence in the armed forces, and about fears of a general threat to traditional gender roles.⁷¹⁶

When recalling Hirschauer's refusal to allow the creation of the aviation corps she responded with defiance, writing that 'moi! Je ferai comme les autres! Ou plutôt non, je ferai la guerre aussi; les antiféministes finiront bien par accepter les aviatrices et s'ils ne nous veulent pas, je me ferai espionne!'.⁷¹⁷ In the preface to *Ma Vie d'espionne* she described espionage as the only wartime 'front' that remained accessible to her after General Hirschauer's rejection.⁷¹⁸ She questioned the 'visibility' of wartime sacrifice and the honouring of glory on the basis that the heroism of soldiers could be seen, and heroism like hers was hidden from view. Along these lines, she would compare the war

⁷¹³ Coquart, p. 66.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid., p. 71. The British WRAF was actually founded in 1918, and did not employ women as pilots.

⁷¹⁵ Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p. 229-230.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid.

⁷¹⁷ *Ma Vie d'espionne*, p. 31.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

‘à découvert’,⁷¹⁹ with the ‘guerre secrète’ or ‘bataille dans l’ombre’,⁷²⁰ in which spies; ‘les soldats’, ‘tombent silenceusement’.⁷²¹

In her autobiographical works, Richard expressed the view that her engagement in the secret service was her own ‘mode’ of engagement in warfare. She made use of the language of heroic combat: ‘bataille’,⁷²² ‘glorieux’, ‘sacrifice’, ‘sang’,⁷²³ ‘gloire’,⁷²⁴ ‘combattant’,⁷²⁵ ‘arme’,⁷²⁶ ‘soldat’.⁷²⁷ She chose verbs such as ‘servir’ and ‘conquérir’ to describe her activity. She drew close causal links between her heroic work as an agent, and the heroism being carried out on the front line. For example, after drowning the weevils that she was tasked with transporting to Argentina in order to cause an infestation in Allied flour stocks, she designated herself as the saviour of the French troops: ‘plus rien à craindre pour le pain quotidien de nos guerriers’.⁷²⁸ In the conclusion to *Mon Destin de femme*, Marthe outlined the way in which she had come to regard her own First World War role as she reflected on her life:

Comme ceux qui sont morts au combat, tués par l’ennemi, comme ceux qui ont donné leur vie sciemment, ou, innocents, ont succombé sous les bombardements. J’étais un soldat, auquel son rôle ne permettait pas de porter un uniforme...rien de plus, rien de moins.⁷²⁹

Just prior to her involvement with Ladoux and the secret service, she compared ‘male’ war to ‘female’ war, frequently expressing frustration that her immersion in the ‘bataille des fleurs’ pot to be underestimated in itself in Marthe’s view. In a 1937 edition of *Minerva*, she was quoted urging women to pick up the weapons that they had available

⁷¹⁹ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 116.

⁷²⁰ *Ma Vie d’espionne*, p. 166.

⁷²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7

⁷²² *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁷²³ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 107.

⁷²⁴ *Ma Vie d’espionne*, p. 8.

⁷²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁷²⁶ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 116.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 377.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁷²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 377.

to them, if not the gun, then ‘des armes tout aussi redoutables: la ruse, la coquetterie, l’adresse’.⁷³⁰ Given Richard’s willing to manipulate her appearance as one example, she believed these metaphorical weapons to be at her disposal as a spy, too.

The spy-combatant comparisons were useful to Richard in the legitimisation of her war activity. She drew on wartime discourses of alternative heroism, like those discussed in Janet Lee and John Horne’s work, to fit her own example. She was thus able to carve out a role that she believed met a national need like that being fulfilled by heroic male combatants in the war zone. Selective recounted episodes, such as her failed request to form the *Union Patriotique des aviatrices de France*, proved to her readers that she had all the will to involve herself in combat on the same basis that men were involved, but that she was denied this and thus strived to achieve the same level of patriotic and personal engagement wherever possible during her mission in Spain.

4.10 Richard’s Responses to Criticism

The final pages of this chapter address Marthe’s responses to the waves of criticism launched against her over the decades. Perhaps one of the most telling ways in which Richard responded was to republish *Espions de guerre et de paix* (originally published in 1938) and *Ma Vie d’espionne* (1935) the year after the *Loi Marthe Richard* was passed. For the first time, stories of her wartime heroism had now been positioned strategically in confrontation with her more recent public and controversial social role. In reminding French readers of her valiant patriotism and cunning risk taking during the First World War, she gave herself an opportunity if not to rebuff some of the slander, at least to deflect or distract from it. Aside from this tactical republishing ploy, other retaliative methods of Richard’s included frequent references to her official decoration for wartime heroism in the preface to *Ma Vie d’espionne*:

Le 23 janvier 1933, le gouvernement me nommait chevalier de la Légion d’honneur.
Que ceux qui mêlerent alors leurs sarcasmes aux éloges que cette distinction me

⁷³⁰ *Revue Minerva*, 3 January 1937.

valut lisent le récit *véridique* de ma vie d'espionne, et qu'ils disent ensuite si cette glorieuse récompense leur semble imméritée.⁷³¹

The word 'véridique', commonly used in interwar spy fiction,⁷³² was italicised in the text as a means of emphasizing and defending the credibility and heroism of her war story.

She included a further defensive declaration of credibility, taking into consideration the popular imagination which had begun to mould her into a deceitful and untrustworthy figure. She asserted that her wartime role had been brave and honourable above all else:

Ma vie d'espionne! J'écris ces mots avec fierté. Etre espionne pendant la guerre, ce n'est point comme on se l'imagine parfois, se lancer dans une aventure romanesque dont le danger aiguise le plaisir ; ce n'est pas jouer à la femme fatale, tourner les têtes, surprendre des secrets qu'on livre contre des monceaux d'or.⁷³³

This remark exposed an inconsistency in Marthe's writing, however, given the fact that all of the 'imaginary' aspects of espionage listed by her in this declaration had been central to her published works by this point, with their dramatic, spy fiction style, and poetic license. From the moment that she had begun to emerge as a national hero against the backdrop of Ladoux's book and Bernard's film, she began to lament those commentators who treated her badly in the press, when in reality they were not as numerous as she would have her readers think, and only one or two examples are available to us today. Nevertheless, her desire to be taken truthfully was so intense that she risked being seen to heavily self-contradict and flagrantly construct myths. This claim to an unglamorous experience of espionage, when compared with her equal claims to heroism and glory, exposed a clear internal tension between a commitment to self-heroisation, and an awareness of the need to respond to others' accusations of untrustworthiness.

Nearly two decades on, *France-Soir* was to revisit the concept of truth in Richard's case, referring to her as possessing 'une vérité intérieure des êtres, une vérité des âmes, plus vraie que celle qui ressort des vieux papiers triomphalement exhibés par les petits flics de

⁷³¹ *Ma Vie d'espionne*, p. 8.

⁷³² Van Ypersele and Debruyne, p. 153: 'ces récits, qui mêlent allègrement histoire et fiction, insistent pourtant sur leur caractère <<vrai>>'.

⁷³³ *Ma Vie d'espionne*, p. 7.

l'Histoire'.⁷³⁴ As well as being preemptive of imminent public slander by figures like Charles Chenevier, Jean Dutourd's comment went some way to reinforcing what Richard had said years previously, because it negated the power of what it called a hasardous demystification process, of which Richard had famously been a victim in the press, most notably since the 1940s.⁷³⁵ Dutourd also helped to rebuild truth and credibility around what she had been saying herself as an alternative to the views of those interpreting her role less favourably.

Three years after Dutourd's defense, Richard published *Mon Destin de femme*. Although the autobiography upheld the sensationalist tone of her 1930s works, and did indeed present a heroised account of her life, she also gave some alternative motivations for her heroic conduct, and she proudly projected a more nuanced and self-aware version of her experiences. She allowed her readers greater access to her internal world, recalling more of her thoughts and feelings and portraying her vulnerability. She referred to 'mes ennemis' who, apparently still reeling after the passing of the *Loi Marthe Richard*, had engineered her arrest and imprisonment in June 1954 for allegedly selling a stolen bracelet. With reference to the national press, she wrote of the same alleged theft episode that,

Ils vont tout rappeler: demain, les colonnes des journaux seront édifiantes, mes faits et gestes, mes amours et ma névrose! Ils passeront <<l'héroïne de 14-18>> au crible, pour me rendre ridicule, avec leurs mots vulgaires. Son histoire! Une blague... Ce sera là l'explosif à retardement, l'aboutissement d'une persécution.⁷³⁶

Richard had spent time deliberately appealing to popular literary trends with her earlier published work. In this last book she tended to her own need for self-preservation and public credibility. Away from the demands of the spy fiction genre, and away from a time when nationalist pride and the greater good was less of a staple heroic characteristic than it had been in the interwar years, she sometimes even reverted back to a more personal and emotional justification for her acts in *Mon Destin de femme*:

⁷³⁴ *France-Soir*, 2 March 1971.

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷³⁶ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 363.

Si, après avoir cru au bonheur, si, après avoir perdu un mari qui me comblait, je n'étais pas devenue une espionne, haïe des uns, décorée de la *Légion d'Honneur* par d'autres, que parce que n'ayant plus rien pour rattacher à la vie, j'ai voulu donner, au delà de la mort de l'être que jamais la preuve de ma fidélité et de mon amour en le vengeant ? [...] Je n'ai peut-être commencé ce rôle d'espionne et attaché cette étiquette à mon nom que pour échapper à mon chagrin.⁷³⁷

Although largely reflecting the same processes of self-heroisation as her earlier works, the subtle differences in delivery and self-portrayal between *Mon Destin de femme* and *Ma Vie d'espionne* and *Espionnes de guerre et de paix* help us to identify her final work as her relinquishment of the spy fiction genre and her intention to present autobiography as opposed to auto-fiction. Throughout her corpus, and even at a time when she enjoyed public fame, she felt the need to state that truth, and true heroism, were at the core of her accounts.

Never abandoning her projection of a clear sense of legitimate wartime purpose, Richard sought authorisation from the courts to seize all copies of Chenevier's *La Grande maison* in 1976. It is for this reason that existent copies no longer include the 'L'espionne qui venait du chaud et qui n'existait pas...' chapter. According to daily broadsheet *Le Monde*, the judge in the case stated that the tolerance with which Richard had approached her critics up to that point should not be taken to mean that she had lost all ability to dispute personal injustice.⁷³⁸ The case against Chenevier's account was to be her last major public exploit, and proved that she was prepared to continue overseeing the development of her heroic reputation in old age, even if this meant repeatedly taking legal action in response to those who sought to undo it.

4.11 Conclusion

Up until the point at which she began to embody an unfamiliar and prominent public role as a woman who, according to many had the potential to disrupt social order by closing the brothels and who, more importantly, 'made the law', Richard was positioned in French culture as a heroic and deserving unofficial veteran. This paper brings to

⁷³⁷ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 376.

⁷³⁸ *Le Monde*, 15 November 1976.

light significant links between her increased public role, and the 1940s erosion of her unofficial war hero one. Writing about British spies after both world wars, Vanessa Medeiros makes the claim that two ways in which women attempted to assert a heroic legacy and to resist the shift from ‘hero’ to ‘housewife’ was by ‘continued secrecy (code names), and by re-telling their stories through autobiographies’. Medeiros suggests that agents had to work hard to uphold an official or unofficial veteran status after war in order to avoid a return to domestic roles. This is precisely what Marthe Richard did throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and continued to do throughout the rest of her life. But her ‘hard work’ was directed less at the deliberate evasion of domesticity and more at the heroic legacy that she sought to carve out for herself in deviation of negative stereotypes to which she was particularly subject given her war role, and her later legislative one. Whether true or false, accurate or embellished, her choice to portray herself in the way that she did shows us, firstly, that she considered her actions to be heroic and, secondly, that she had the clear intention for others to view her heroically too.

But what about the further complications associated with being a female hero? Was Richard aware that this was not always an easily-assumed position? She was conscious of the prescribed role that women were encouraged to occupy in the early twentieth century. She remembered how she felt in Blâmont at a young age, for example, writing that she had wanted to escape the ‘narrow’ life that she had been born into, and asking her readers,

Serai-je l’esclave des préjugés et des traditions qui, depuis des siècles, enferment les femmes dans un carcan? Un mari, des enfants? Une maison? Travailler le soir, le ménage, et, comme le racontent devant moi si crument les ouvrières, à l’atelier, subir, après ces journées de labour les caprices de ‘l’homme’, le mari, qui vous prend pour la ‘chose’ et qu’on vous a obligé à épouser sans amour, sans rien connaître de l’existence? Non, ce sort ne sera pas le mien.⁷³⁹

On one hand, as a means of expressing her views on the fate of many women, Richard did make consistent attempts to subvert them, regarding herself as equal to male

⁷³⁹ *Mon Destin de femme*, p. 19.

combatants, and therefore ‘assisting’ her ‘fellow heroes in war’,⁷⁴⁰ and reporting little inhibition when entering ‘untraditional’ spheres for a woman, such as aviation.

On the other hand, she was careful not to appear too over zealous with her combat-non-combat comparisons and her forays into ‘unfeminine’ realms. In a letter regarding her request to form the *Union Patriotique des aviatrices de France* published in *Le Petit Parisien* in September 1915, Richard deliberately and compliantly stated that ‘nous ne demandons pas à aller au front, puisque notre situation de femmes ne nous permet pas de jouer un rôle actif’.⁷⁴¹ That her behaviour often suggested a different personal view and that, in reality, the *Union* sought to fulfil a highly active role in the war, suggested that she was writing to best appeal to those readers who feared the militarisation of women,⁷⁴² and who might still grant her wish if she reassured them that the *Union* would uphold traditional gender roles.

Though she was indeed fearful of a ‘narrow’ and domestic life, and though she had a role in the 1945 law which campaigned against certain injustices imposed on women,⁷⁴³ these were never convictions strong enough to make her join the feminist movement. Biographer Elisabeth Coquart claims that ‘la transformation ou la disparition de la société patriarcale n’est pas son problème’, and that Richard had little interest in the feminist campaign.⁷⁴⁴ She also took active steps so as not to be seen to be interested in the cause, being one of three spokeswomen from wartime organisations which had formed in response to the prohibition of female enrolment in the military, to back ‘away from

⁷⁴⁰ A. A. Long, ‘Morals and Values in Homer’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, vol. 90 (1970), pp. 121-139, p. 123.

⁷⁴¹ *Le Petit Parisien*, ‘Les aviatrices demandent à servir la patrie’, 30 September 1915.

⁷⁴² Margaret Darrow explains that this fear related to the connection between military service and the right to citizenship that this connection would enable. She adds that there were more subconscious fears among French people about the masculinisation of women, or the feminisation of the armed forces, should women be admitted. Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p. 299-230.

⁷⁴³ In *Mon Destin de femme*, for example, she included her views on women in prisons as part of her prison reports as municipal councillor. She spoke out against conditions for female inmates and the imprisonment of pregnant women, p. 326.

⁷⁴⁴ Coquart, p. 136 and Henry, p. 207.

aspects of their initial proposals that most threatened the gender system', rather than campaigning for changes to it.⁷⁴⁵

In an article from *Le Jour* from October 1934, Richard was introduced as courageous and intelligent. However, the way that the first few lines of the piece were worded suggested that these qualities were ordinarily considered to be masculine. The statement began describing the less traditional aspects of various roles she had occupied, but was careful to counteract these with details of her distinctly feminine powers of seduction. Marthe's own reported comments in the article included 'je suis femme avant tout'.⁷⁴⁶ She was featured claiming that women who had been dressing *à la garçonne* since the 1920s were rejecting their 'pouvoir de seduction' and that they should return to pre-war fashions, making sure to 'rester des jeunes filles' and knowing their place no matter what their role.⁷⁴⁷ The article included further quotations from Richard which asked 'à quoi bon vouloir se mêler à la vie politique?', and which asserted that a woman's place was, rather, nowhere but in the home.⁷⁴⁸ When asked by the journalist how it was that she had wanted to be mobilised in the war, she claimed that the context was different, that 'chacun devait servir son pays' and that her own motivation was a nurturing need to look after those close to her rather than an ideological impetus. In this case, she professed a personal desire to relieve Henri of his front line duty.⁷⁴⁹

By 1947, the year she republished *Espionnes de guerre et de paix* and *Ma Vie d'Espionne*, she held the political role to which she had seemed so averse thirteen years earlier. Yet she was still happy for this traditionalist view, expressing a longing for the simplicity of domestic womanhood and peace, to be disseminated:

⁷⁴⁵ Darrow *French Women and the First World War*, p.243.

⁷⁴⁶ 'Marthe Richard est contre le féminisme et les allures garçonnières', *Le Jour*, 1 October 1934.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid.

Demain, je retournerai dans mon foyer, je ne trouverai pas autour de moi la paix que j'aurais tant aimée, les bras d'un homme jeune qui n'aurait jamais connu aucune guerre ? Il me parlerait de son métier, de ses outils, de son travail, que sais-je ?⁷⁵⁰

Crucially this comment, made just a year after the unpopular *Loi Marthe Richard* had been voted in, now had a more political overtone, and reflected Richard's need for support in the face of increasing criticism. At this point, as one of the first women to be elected to the Paris municipal council, Marthe embodied an unfamiliar and prominent public role as a woman who, according to many had the potential to disrupt social order by closing the brothels, whether her personal ideology on women's roles had changed since 1938 or not. She risked further compromising her reputation if she were to endorse anything other than a normative, conservative form of womanhood. In sum, the main reason for Richard's conscious attempts to portray herself in a positive light related solely to her own case and not to the campaign for women's rights.

Writing about British spies after both world wars, Vanessa Medeiros makes the claim that two ways in which women attempted to assert a heroic legacy and to resist the shift from 'hero' to 'housewife' was by 'continued secrecy (code names), and by re-telling their stories through autobiographies'.⁷⁵¹ Medeiros's argument suggests that agents had to work hard to continue being heroes after war in order to avoid a return to domestic roles. This is precisely what Richard did from the 1930s to the 1970s. But her hard work was directed less at the deliberate evasion of domesticity and more at the heroic legacy that she sought to carve out for herself in deviation of negative stereotypes to which she was particularly subject given her war role, her later legislative role and, to those who were privy, her earlier life of prostitution.

Marthe Richard remains an example of a woman who defined herself as heroic, who was defined by others as such and can still be defined today as such. And despite her personal convictions about women's rights and roles, her own role still represented a significant deviation from the ideals of traditional womanhood which had historically helped to

⁷⁵⁰ *Espions de guerre et de paix*, p. 50.

⁷⁵¹ Vanessa Medeiros, 'British Women in Espionage: From Heroes to Housewives', *Liberated Arts: a journal for undergraduate research*, 1:1 (2015), pp. 1-13 p. 2.

define female heroism in wartime. Instead of being a symbol of religiosity, passivity, maternity, domesticity and beauty without purpose and being called a hero along these lines, she actually embodied an active alternative, was unfamiliar and threatening to some, and thus had to be content enjoying only moments of heroic reputation. An investigation of her personal writing shows that her behaviour negated dominant messages which tried to position her as too emotional to do her job, as untrustworthy, or as mercenary and sexually dangerous.

The various discourses which appraised Richard's role, both positively and negatively as a spy, as an aviator, as a municipal leader and as a woman with a difficult past were so prevalent and easy to come by that a central aim of this chapter was to allow the space for an in-depth analysis of Marthe's own voice as a means of foregrounding her responses, but also as a means of gaining a better understanding of her choices to depict a heroic wartime role. Whilst an investigation of her personal writings has been rewarding, and the resulting analysis original and valuable, the difficulty of deciphering the fictional from the factual remains. Therefore, whilst one is able to 'hear' her voice through her first-person narratives, the lack of informal or unpublished source material, coupled with her preference for a heavily fictional framework, and her capacity to omit, to embellish and to dramatise, her voice will only ever be heard in the way that she intended. Nevertheless, it is also precisely because survivors like Marthe Richard were able to reveal their own motivations that bringing their voices to the fore is so vitally important to the study of female heroism in First World War France, as a means of responding to the overwhelming monopoly of dominant discourses which sought to eclipse it.

Chapter Five

Supererogation and 'l'héroïsme de guerre idéale': The Princess Bibesco

French-Romanian Princess and Red Cross nurse, Marthe Bibesco was another woman who embodied First World War heroism. This chapter explores the extent to which Bibesco's conduct during the war was considered heroic by others both during and after the conflict. As was the case with the study of Marthe Richard's life, the discussion also reveals whether or not Bibesco herself showed an awareness of, and made use of popular heroisations of Red Cross nursing to frame herself as a hero during and after the war. The chronology is not as broad as the Richard case-study, with a principle focus on two periods: October 1916 to December 1917, and the early 1930s.

Born in 1886, Marthe Lahovary was the daughter of French-educated Romanian Minister to France, Jean Lahovary. The Lahovary family was wealthy, middle class and influential. Marthe was educated from a young age in English, German and French, and the family spoke only French to each other at home. Marthe's mother, with whom she had a difficult relationship as the 'unwanted' daughter,⁷⁵² took the children to France every year for several months, where they would mix with prominent establishment figures such as the Empress Eugénie.

The Lahovary family's longstanding emotional and physical attachment to France reflected a recent historical trend of political migration of the Romanian elite to Paris since the Wallachian Revolution of 1848. In order to evade the Russian *Regulamentul Organic* regime at home, this wealthy migratory wave sought professional training and further education in France. In this exotic central European haven, which since the 1812 Russian campaign had also been heavily anti-Russian, they found kinship. As such, Paris could masquerade as an 'imaginary eastern European' beacon of culture,⁷⁵³ and Marthe's

⁷⁵² Marthe's only brother, George, died of typhoid in 1892 and Emma Lahovary never recovered from the loss.

⁷⁵³ Monica Spiridon, 'Bucharest-on-the-Seine', *Lingua Romana*, 1:1 (2002) <http://linguaromana.byu.edu/spiridon.html> [accessed 8 June 2016].

family were considered to be among the most prominent of the migrants. Indeed, an article declaring her death in 1973 called the Lahovary's one of 'ces familles roumaines qui considéraient un peu la France comme leur seconde patrie'.⁷⁵⁴

In line with the bourgeois Romanian trend of marrying into wealthy boyar families, Marthe was wed to George Valentine Bibesco, son of a Wallachia hospodar.⁷⁵⁵ Her writing career began during a diplomatic mission in Persia that she attended with George in 1905. Her debut novel in a long repertoire of French language works, *Les Huits Paradis*, inspired by the trip and backed by figures such as by *Le Temps* journalist Claude Anet and Maurice Barrès, was published by Hachette in February 1908. In May 1909, the novel was awarded the *Prix de l'Académie Française*. This made Bibesco the prize's youngest recipient.⁷⁵⁶

The strong connection with Paris, nurtured by her parents' love of France, enabled Marthe to begin a lifetime of dual residency, spending winter in the Faubourg St. Germain and the rest of the year at Posada or the other family home near Bucharest, a Byzantine palace at Mogoşoaia. She enjoyed literary and social fame in Paris, and forged friendships with some of the most prominent writers, diplomats and high society figures of the time, such as Marcel Proust, Jean Cocteau, Arthur Mugnier, the Countess de Greffulhe, and Aristide Briand. She also had a close relationship with Princess Marie and Prince Ferdinand of Romania who would often come to stay with Marthe at Mogoşoaia.

Her own marriage being fraught with George's infidelities, Marthe's friendships with men other than her husband were numerous. She was closely connected to, and corresponded regularly and intimately with British Army General Christopher Birdwood Thomson, French aristocrat Charles-Louis de Beauvau-Craon, and, in the 1930s, Labour Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald. But perhaps most significant to interpretations of

⁷⁵⁴ 'La Princesse Bibesco est mort à Paris', *Le Soir*, 30th November 1973, DOS BIB, BMD.

⁷⁵⁵ Like Marthe Richard's husband Henri, Bibesco was an aviation and motorcar enthusiast, becoming president of the *Fédération Aéronautique Internationale* in 1930. He was also involved in military aviation, and owned a cement factory near one of the two family homes, Posada.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

her wartime heroism was the affectionate relationship that she formed with the Kronprinz Wilhelm. She was back at Posada when he paid a state visit to Romania in 1909 during which they began a relationship, exchanging letters and occasionally visiting each other up until roughly half way through the First World War.

Although a Francophile ever since the 1848 migration, the fact remained that Marthe's homeland was under the monarchical rule of the Hohenzollern dynasty.⁷⁵⁷ For some European minds this automatically made Romanian people, including her, suspicious citizens.⁷⁵⁸ As we will see, the close connection that she had with German royalty was instrumental for those people who came to defame her war role during and after the conflict.

This chapter shows that Marthe Bibesco was heroised on the basis that she represented many of the same valiant qualities as those thought to be embodied in other French and Romanian volunteer nurse-heroes. She also recognized these qualities in herself. However, although she was exempt from accusations of seduction or flirtation, in her guise as a Red Cross nurse she did fall victim to allegations of wartime treason and self-interest both during and after the war which re-positioned her at times in line with some of the more negative representations of the role.

A study of her heroism as a nurse is all the more valuable because in scholarly engagement it is *not* for her nursing career that Marthe Bibesco has been chiefly remembered. Although her wartime humanity and patriotism was undeniable according to many commentators during the war and in the decades that followed, she was famed as a high-profile cultural go-between and a rising literary star and remembered as such in work by Monica Spiridon, Estratia Oktapoda and Onorina Botezat. Further, her life has often been studied on the sole basis that her social sphere of reference was impressive and has therefore helped to inform scholars about twentieth-century intellectual and elite

⁷⁵⁷ Spiridon, 'Bucharest-on-the-Seine', <http://linguaromana.byu.edu/spiridon.html> [accessed 8 June 2016].

⁷⁵⁸ Ghislain de Diesbach, *La Princesse Bibesco: La Dernière Orchidée* (Paris : Librairie Académique Perrin, 1986), p. 216.

European life more broadly. The heroism of Marthe Bibesco, key actor in the cultural diaspora of Romanian middle classes in France since the mid nineteenth century, acclaimed writer, and society figure who corresponded personally with a host of prominent European personalities has therefore tended to eclipse the heroism of Marthe Bibesco, Red Cross nurse.

Related literature on Romanian women's heroism includes Bucur's 2000 article, 'Between the Mother of the Wounded and the Virgin of Jiu: Romanian Women and the Gender of Heroism during the Great War'. However, although Bucur does discuss Romanian women's First World War heroism, her research focusses uniquely on Princess Marie and Ecaterina Teodoroiu's function as two popular didactic embodiments, of 'idealized, normative gender roles' in the case of the former, or of Jeanne d'Arc-like and virginal un-womanhood in the case of the latter.⁷⁵⁹ She does not include any discussion of Marthe Bibesco.

Finally, Christine Sutherland and Ghislain de Diesbach's biographies of Bibesco focus only in passing on her nursing role in Bucharest, and make little of the ways in which her wartime role was interpreted. Further, both biographies use the same primary source material, and neither has consulted the Harry Ransom Center's Bibesco Collection, which is the main archival source on which the discussion in this chapter is based.

Thus, not only does this final chapter continue chapter four's original discussion of lived experiences of female heroism as a key basis for comparison with dominant representations discussed in chapters one to three, but it also uncovers significant new archival material in its analysis of both Bibesco's heroic wartime conduct as a Bucharest nurse, and responses to this conduct. An investigation of this new material adds to our understanding of the ways in which the documentation, the projection and the self-portrayal of female heroism influenced wider attitudes towards women's stake in the Allied war effort.

⁷⁵⁹ Bucur, 'Between the Mother of the Wounded and the Virgin of Jiu', p. 42.

5.1 Bibesco's Experience of War

By 1914, Romania had already suffered the toils of two Balkan wars as Eastern European nations fought for domination. Marthe had been awarded a healthcare merit for her work with the ambulance service during the Cholera epidemic of 1913 and a commemorative medal for assistance with the Romanian army's Danube crossing of the same year. When her native country joined the Allies in August 1916 with national unification in mind,⁷⁶⁰ Marthe was 30. She began working in Red Cross Hospital 118 in Bucharest, carrying out general nursing duties, assisting with operations, and administering chloroform.⁷⁶¹

Marthe's mother was looking after her eleven-year-old daughter Valentine in Lausanne, and the princess was living at Mogoșoaia, which she had transformed into an important 'political salon' for diplomatic comings and goings.⁷⁶² Being closest to her father and uncle, she had developed an interest in, and knowledge of, international politics. Her war diary recalled all of the famous world leaders, politicians and prominent international representatives who had signed the visitor's book at the palace. In May 1915, for example, she organised a reconciliation between Romanian Conservative factions, inviting Triple-Entente supporters Take Ionescu and Nicolae Filipesco to work towards the fusion of the Conservative Nationalist Party in preparation for Romania's entry into the war the following year.⁷⁶³ Further evidence of her interest and involvement in international diplomacy was Bibesco's earlier central role in festivities in Constantza in June 1914, as part of an unsuccessful plan to distance Romania from the Triple Alliance and ally with Russia by matching one of Nicholas II's daughters to Marie and Ferdinand's son Carol.⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁶⁰ V. N. Vinogradov, 'Romania in the First World War: The Years of Neutrality, 1914-1916', *The International History Review*, 14:3 (August 1992), pp. 452-461, p. 460.

⁷⁶¹ 'Mémoire' in dossier, unknown, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁷⁶² Christine Sutherland, *Enchantress: Marthe Bibesco and her World* (Canada: Harper Collins, 1996), p. 109.

⁷⁶³ 'Mémoire' in dossier, unknown, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁷⁶⁴ Diesbach, p. 209 and Sutherland, p. 97-98.

Before examining Marthe's personal wartime heroism in detail, this section maps her attitudes towards war and humanity, giving context to a discussion of some key decisions she made in 1916 and 1917. It interrogates her political or personal judgements of war and conflict, questioning the extent to which she believed in concepts such as duty behind the lines, or gendered ideas about duty and sacrifice. Finally, it asks whether this belief helped to explain or legitimise her heroic choices in wartime.

In the section of her war diary that covered 2 October to 25 November 1916, the date on which she left Mogoşoaia to take up residence in hospital 118, Marthe's ideas about war were clearly decipherable. The first entry was concerned with a leg amputation with which she assisted. The patient, a Romanian soldier called Dabrinioï to whom she administered chloroform, was visibly concerned about the impact that the amputation would have on his reputation in his home village. The princess drew on messages about the heroism of masculine warrior sacrifice in order to reassure him that he would be gloriously received by the villagers:

Tu seras fameux dans ton village - on t'entendra venir de loin - chacun dira: c'est Dobrinioï qui est revenu de la guerre, avec une pension et sa jambe de bois. Le Dimanche, toutes les filles du village ne voudront danser qu'avec toi.⁷⁶⁵

She painfully recalled the conversation she had with Dobrinioï about his fruit trees at home, in order to distract him from the sound of his own blood rushing into the bucket below.

This mode of reassurance was for Dobrinioï's benefit alone though, because every instance of internal dialogue where the realities of war were concerned tells us a different story about Bibesco's attitudes to conflict. She called the operating table on which Dobrinioï lay 'la table de sacrifice [...] tendue de linges blancs comme une sainte table

⁷⁶⁵ 'Manuscript first draft of H.H. The Princess Bibesco's 'Diary' during World War I, 2 October -25 November 1916', *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC UTA.

pour la sainte communion'.⁷⁶⁶ She also stated that 'rien ne soit divin', and made a further reference to the table as 'l'autel de la patrie', which 'dégoutte de sang' and for which 'il faut mourir' nevertheless.⁷⁶⁷ She claimed that 'notre amour crée des divinités qu'il nourrit de sacrifices humains'.⁷⁶⁸ She declared that spirituality was of very little comfort in the seconds before one these sacrificial victims was about to die. And after the procedure was complete, she looked upon Dobrinoï with pity: 'on le descend sur la civière. On étend sur lui sa couverture. A gauche, la couverture touche à plat. Ce n'est plus qu'une moitié d'homme. Un mutilé'.⁷⁶⁹ Instead of the operating table being a site of glory, and the 'operation' of war more broadly being about heroic sacrifice for a greater good, there was something solemn and hopeless about her descriptions. Writing of 'la petite [...] la faible armée roumaine',⁷⁷⁰ and the 'petit peuple roumainais', her reluctance to heroise the act of war and her preference for tragic realism was all the more recognisable.⁷⁷¹

In discussions with Simone, her chamber maid, we can also decipher her views on war and faith. Simone was a patriotic Catholic, and claimed to believe staunchly and without question in an Allied victory, aided with the unflinching will of God. Bibesco, although never denying that she believed in God, found Simone's view to be naïve. Equally, Bibesco's account suggests that Simone was challenged by what she interpreted as the Princess's unpatriotic, or even Germanophile stance. In response to Simone questioning her on religion, Marthe proposed that religious beliefs could prevent people from thinking objectively about the realities of the conflict as they were experiencing them.⁷⁷² In war, the relationship between humanity and religion was not to go unquestioned according to her, and she was wary of the concept that religion and humankind alone could sustain itself, when all around her she was witnessing destruction which seemed to contradict this

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷⁷² Ibid.

theory. She therefore admitted her ‘inquiétude’ and impious feelings towards humanity.⁷⁷³

An entry from the day she left Mogoşoia responded in detail to another of Simone’s questions, which demanded her overall opinion on the war:

Quelle fut au juste mon opinion? Elle fut ce que les évènements le faisaient, en dehors des hommes, et comme elle n’était pas toute faite, je passai pour n’en point avoir....Simone pourtant me croyait germanophile chaque fois que les évènements l’étaient, c’est à dire le plus souvent. Nadige me suspectait fortement d’hérésie quand je me bornai à lui faire remarquer que ni Calais, ni Paris, ni Verdun n’étaient pris – et la Grèce est un pays formé d’îles et de presque îles. Je fus un instrument inutilisable dans la guerre de salons. Je nourrissais dans mon domaine un monstre solitaire: l’athéisme politique.⁷⁷⁴

Bibesco felt deeply self-conscious about not having any opinion in particular, and rather than admitting her neutrality she claimed political atheism as a means of avoiding doing so. It is true that she always expressed a deep love for rural Romanian society, attached to its ancestral customs as depicted in her 1929 novel *Isvor, le pays de saules*. But based on her wartime declaration of political atheism, the fact that she also led a consistently cosmopolitan existence, and that she maintained relationships with figures like the Kronprinz well into the war years, it is clear that she did not embrace the kind of nationalist sentiment that other war heroes such as Marthe Richard embraced.

In fact, by 1916 Wilhelm was advising her that Romania should try to stay out of the conflict, and she was writing about her gratitude to the German authorities who had authorised her visits to the prisoner of war camps.⁷⁷⁵ The fact that she did not attempt to demonise those Germans with whom she felt an affinity did not reflect a Germanophile side to her. Instead it showed that she did not see nationality in wartime as intrinsically

⁷⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁵ Diesbach, p. 248.

alienating.⁷⁷⁶ As well as not quite knowing her overall opinion of the war, in her personal writings she also resisted the temptation to place blame anywhere in particular. In fact, she sought to set herself apart from those around her whose blind nationalism troubled her. She interpreted her husband and her brother-in-law's jingoistic view of nation and attack against the Germans as distinctly different to her own: 'leur réaction est différente, voilà tout [...] je reste seule avec mes résolutions'.⁷⁷⁷

Bibesco also sought to separate herself from the grand narratives that provoked such reactions in warring populations. In response to her cousin Virginie's comments heroising the fallen men who had left behind children, Marthe decided that those who had died *without* having become fathers deserved to be remembered as heroes on the basis that they were unlikely to be represented at all: 'ceux-là ne seront plus représentés'.⁷⁷⁸

In sum, Bibesco rejected dogmatic nationalist ideals which posited war as an opportunity to display heroic patriotism and dutiful hatred of the enemy, and which heroised death as glorious and worthwhile sacrifice. So how can we conceive of her as female hero? In response to this question, we can suggest that although her personal views on heroism never reached the grandiose heights of figures like Marthe Richard, she did see the value and the necessity in engaging with the concept of heroism, her treatment of Dobrinoi's case being a good example. Moreover, when it came to projections and interpretations of her own wartime role, she actually did bring to bear some significant yet modified features of heroic discourse, as the following section will show.

5.2 Wartime Heroism: 1916 and 1917

The Princess made a pivotal decision in November 1916 to remain at her post at Hospital 118 in Bucharest when the city was about to be invaded by the German army. Instead of being evacuated to Jassy along with the rest of the governing class, she appealed for

⁷⁷⁶ Diesbach, p. 212.

⁷⁷⁷ 'Manuscript first draft of H.H. The Princess Bibesco's 'Diary' during World War I, 2 October - 25 November 1916', *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC UTA.

⁷⁷⁸ Diesbach, p. 231.

herself and three French St Vincent de Paul nuns on her staff to stay behind until she was able to treat all of 120 soldiers who needed medical care, before being evacuated themselves. As well as being motivated by a sense of personal and professional duty, the decision was also given context by Marthe's love of homeland. As the preceding section pointed out, she did not subscribe to the tenets of wartime nationalism but she did adore the particularities of her 'home'. However, she did not use these particularities as a tool to position Romania in opposition to another nation, and she expressed a similar fondness for the everyday life and customs of other countries such as France, Switzerland and even Germany. Further, though her cosmopolitan outlook remained with her throughout her life, in wartime, it was a sense of dignity, sadness and loss that prompted her patriotic declarations. In her war diary she wrote, as she left Mogoşoaia for Bucharest, that 'notre orgueil s'attache à ces arbres'.⁷⁷⁹ And when reflecting back on the horror of war in a 1925 edition of *Vogue*, she described the 'strengthening air' of the mountains around Mogoşoaia which had inspired in the Romanian people the resilience to rebuild after the conflict it had endured.⁷⁸⁰

She did not describe the choice to stay behind as an easy one, however. She wrote of the extent of her devotion to her patients by noting the 'nomenclature des difficultés que je devais vaincre chaque jour pour mener à bonne fin mon oeuvre'.⁷⁸¹ The decision to remain contravened article twelve of the Swiss Red Cross statute which ordered that Red Cross personnel be evacuated to a neutral country on threat of invasion. But Bibesco sent her request to stay to Alexandre Marghiloman, President of the Romanian Red Cross, citing article 1 of the Geneva Convention, which outlined that invaded warring nations were permitted to leave behind a number of medical staff to help treat those who could

⁷⁷⁹ 'Manuscript first draft of H.H. The Princess Bibesco's 'Diary' during World War I, 2 October-25 November 1916', *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC UTA.

⁷⁸⁰ Princess Bibesco, 'My Romania', *Vogue*, 65.12, 15 June 1925.

⁷⁸¹ Undated *La Nympe Europe*: Unpublished proposed volumes [La Nympe Europe en guerre] 301.2, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, HRC, UTA.

not be evacuated.⁷⁸² Her request was granted, and was endorsed by several important figures.

This supererogatory decision to stay was appraised by others and described by herself in unpublished personal writings, both at the time and with the passage of later decades. The Prince and Princess both wrote letters of support and visited her to congratulate her on her heroic conduct before leaving for Jassy.⁷⁸³ The French minister in Bucharest, Charles de Beauvoil also supported her decision, and General Henri Berthelot sent his *aide-de-camp* to congratulate her personally on her bravery. Interior minister Jean Bratiano and his wife Elise interpreted Bibesco's decision as righteous and candid, Elise telling her in a letter that 'vous faites bien de rester'.⁷⁸⁴ Counsellor of the French *Société de secours aux blessés militaires* and director of the hospital which eventually received some of Bibesco's patients, the Vicomte d'Harcourt, also visited her at Hospital 118 to congratulate her for staying.⁷⁸⁵ Finally, the mother superior who granted permission for the three nuns, Marguerite Gauthier, Marguerite Germain and Julie Castellani to remain by Marthe's side was reported to have been 'assurée que la Princesse Bibesco ne quitterait jamais son poste'.⁷⁸⁶

Marthe's war diary, which was never published, but which was written with the intention to publish, gave an account of her last days in residence at Mogoşoaia before she left to reside at Hospital 118. She had previously been commuting the eleven miles that separated the palace from her place of work by car, but out of fear that the Germany army

⁷⁸² 'Le belligérant, obligé d'abandonner des malades ou des blessés à son adversaire, laissera avec eux, autant que les circonstances militaires le permettront, une partie de son personnel et de son matériel sanitaires pour contribuer à les soigner', *Convention de Geneva* typescript, undated, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [La Légion d'Honneur] 281.6, HRC, UTA.

⁷⁸³ Unknown, Letter (post 1927), *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁷⁸⁴ Letter from Elise Bratiano, sometime after she had reached Jassy in late 1916, *Series I. Correspondence, 1904-1973*, Bratianu, Elisa circa 1908-1927, 54.5, HRC, UTA.

⁷⁸⁵ Unknown, Letter (post 1927), *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

was approaching and would likely sack Mogoşoaia, it was decided that she would move. She would not return for any length of time until 1919.

On the night of 25 November her lover, British Army officer Christopher Birdwood Thomson, came to collect her and accompany her to Bucharest. This moment of departure was a key point during which Marthe made clear her disillusionment with the war. Rather than framing her move as a wholly heroic exploit which would allow her to be with her patients more permanently she chose to express self-consciousness and fear that her household and the local villagers would regard her with disdain for abandoning them based on her social standing:

Je craignais ce moment où les riches s'en iraient obéissant au signal mystérieux, comme des oiseaux migrateurs qui sentent venir l'hiver laissant les pauvres atterrés à la porte de leurs huttes, les pauvres qui apparaissent comme les pierres de torrent desséché quand l'eau qui les couvre est partie, comme les arbres nus, qui restent toujours noirs et nus, quand les fleurs, les feuilles, et les fruits sont tombés.⁷⁸⁷

As well as feeling self-conscious about how her heroism might have been viewed by others, she also wrote remorsefully about the patients who were transported to alternative hospitals during the November evacuations, explaining that she had earned their trust and wished to do all she could to make them comfortable, but that she was still unable to grant them the right to stay. She painfully described the resulting mistrust in their eyes. Once she arrived in Bucharest she still felt tormented by thoughts of how her actions might have been interpreted by others, recalling that, 'j'ai fait ce que je devrais faire [...] mais qui le saura? Il n'est pas besoin que d'autres le sachent. Les femmes des villages – les femmes de la campagne, que j'ai laissées derrière moi [...] qu'est-ce qu'elles pensent de mon départ?'.⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸⁷ 'Manuscript first draft of H.H. The Princess Bibesco's 'Diary' during World War I, 2 October -25 November 1916', *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC UTA.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid.

Overall, however, Marthe was able to repudiate feelings of guilt with a certain clarity about her motivations. As such, it was also in her recollection of the night she left Mogoşoaia that she first defended her innate sense of duty to her patients which was to be the impetus for her heroic activity over the days and weeks that followed. It was her internal sense of devotion to those who were more vulnerable than her that ultimately legitimised her choice in her own mind and outweighed the impact of negative judgement. She recalled taking the hand of the school mistress who was staring at her compellingly as she was about to climb into the car to leave the palace, and saying to her,

Madame Cristesco je dois aller à l'hôpital... Ils vont prendre mon automobile... je ne pourrai pas faire mon service en demeurant ici... je dois rester là-bas, pour défendre mes blessés... nos frères [...] je reviendrai voir ce qui se passe ici dès que je le pourrai. Je reste avec vous.⁷⁸⁹

In her account she underlined the words 'je dois' as a means of emphasising, for herself and for others, that her decision was grounded in a sense of heroic duty to the wellbeing of her patients above all else.

When she arrived in Bucharest she admitted trying to conceal the truth of the invasion from the nuns and from the convalescent patients, claiming instead that she had come to meet an Allied demand for automobiles. At this point in her account she outlined, once again, the real reasons for staying at the hospital instead of fleeing to Jassy, reiterating her heroic intent: 'je devais défendre cet hôpital, le diriger, puisque je'en suis la directrice'.⁷⁹⁰

Bibesco faced numerous people at the hospital asking her if she was fearful, and whether she was sure it was a good idea to stay because she would be isolated and in danger. But it was in her response to one question about how her high society friends in Paris would react that she showed willing, once again, to assertively underline altruistic duty to others

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid.

as the key motivating factor in her courageous resolution. In a lengthy diary entry from 25 November 1916 she documented her answer:

vous leur diriez qu'il y a cent vingt hommes dans cet hôpital qui ne gardent que la position horizontale, que je dispose, pour les transporter, d'une seule automobile, la mienne, où il y a trois places de fond en se serrant un peu et cinq en comptant les deux strapontins, qu'il ne faut pas faire plusieurs voyages, à cause de l'ennemi qui s'impatient, que les trains sanitaires sont au grand complet, tous leurs wagons de troisième classe, sans compter les fourguers à bestiaux étant occupés par les blessés qui se tiennent debout et par les citoyens résolus à les accompagner, qu'il y a des jeunes filles infirmières dans cet hôpital qui n'ont aucun moyen de partir et des religieuses françaises qui consentent à rester? Deux cent personnes en tous vivent sous ma juridiction.⁷⁹¹

In fact, Marthe deemed staying behind an uncourageous thing to do, writing that she did not have the courage to leave. Finally, and with tongue in cheek, in anticipation of those Parisian friends who still would not have understood her expression of duty, she advised her colleagues to tell them, 'que je suis restée à Bucharest pour prendre le thé avec Mackensen', a reference to German general August von Mackensen, head of the invading forces.⁷⁹² Interestingly, a comment like this which she made almost identically in a letter dated eight months later to her husband's cousin and her beloved friend, Antoine Bibesco, would be highly damaging for Marthe's reputation in the months that followed.⁷⁹³

Between late November 1916 and March 1917, the Princess continued to assist with operations, enduring a wave of Typhus victims whom she housed separately to the rest of the patients, now technically prisoners of war, and whom only she and one of the nuns

⁷⁹¹ Ibid.

⁷⁹² Ibid.

⁷⁹³ Letter to Antoine Bibesco, 24 July 1917, *Series I. Correspondence, 1904-1973*, Bibesco, Antoine, 1917, 32.5-6, HRC, UTA.

treated.⁷⁹⁴ She was obliged to admit and treat German soldiers until the occupying forces had built their own hospitals, but she made efforts to keep them separate from Romanian patients. She was also forced to assert herself when the German authorities proposed to use the hospital as a casino, managing to gain the right to remain with the help of German diplomat Henry von Preussen.⁷⁹⁵ A letter from some time after Elise Bratiano had reached Jassy heroised Marthe's resilience in resisting such propositions: 'Madame la Princesse Bibesco eut les plus grandes difficultés du monde à empêcher que l'hôpital ne fut confisqué au profit d'un casino d'officiers. Elle y réussit cependant'.⁷⁹⁶

Every Sunday was spent, under German authorisation, at the Tonola prisoner of war camp outside Bucharest. Bibesco appealed to local shopkeepers to donate clothing which she distributed at the camp, along with food, supplies and medicines.⁷⁹⁷ She obtained authorisation for the release of nine unlawfully imprisoned Romanian soldiers who were either too old to serve, or had been blind since birth. She also gathered civilian clothes and the funds necessary for Captain Tatarano, the Romanian military attaché in Paris who had received treatment at Hospital 118, to escape to Paris. When news of the destruction and pillage of Mogoşoaia reached her, she went back to visit the local villagers, and shared out all that was left of the possessions and supplies from the palace.⁷⁹⁸

It was on the basis that she had a modest character, was married, upper class, and that she occupied a philanthropic and 'normative' women's role as a Red Cross nurse, that Bibesco was exempt from allegations of inappropriate sexuality. Along these lines, her heroism was more easily commended than that of a woman like Marthe Richard, who was a troublesome and sexually suspect embodiment of female espionage. But that is not to say that Bibesco was exempt from criticism altogether. Even a subject like her, who

⁷⁹⁴ Unknown, Letter (post 1927), *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, and letter from Elise Bratiano, unknown date, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6.

⁷⁹⁵ Sutherland, p. 126.

⁷⁹⁶ Letter from Elise Bratiano, unknown date, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973* Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁷⁹⁷ Unknown, Letter (post 1927), *Series II: Works, 1908-1973* Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁷⁹⁸ Sutherland, p. 123.

was not sexualised, and who did not publish self-embellishing commemorative or auto-fiction, still faced scathing judgement for the very same comportment that had earned her a heroic reputation in the first place. Virtually unreported in the limited existing scholarship on her case-study, and central to the rest of this chapter, is the fact that the princess's heroic decision to stay in Bucharest in November 1916 was met with belligerence and criticism as well as acclaim. Alongside Marthe Richard, she thus represents another important case study example of the double-edged heroisation of women's war roles.

5.3 Arrest: March 1917

On 15 March 1917, Marthe was arrested by German authorities. The official grounds for her arrest are still not entirely clear, but speculation suggests that it was a retaliatory move by the occupying forces against the Jassy government, or a vengeful act of the head of the German Red Cross in Bucharest, Dr Wolff whose plans to turn Hospital 118 into a casino she had been instrumental in denying.⁷⁹⁹ As we will see, her apparently disobedient decision to stay in Bucharest was construed as having wider implications by a small group who accused Marthe of being one of Romania's enemies.

As she left the hospital in her Red Cross uniform, she was given flowers by her patients. She gave them a five leu coin each, and reassured them that her cousin, Catherine Ghika, would treat them in place of her.⁸⁰⁰ Instead of being imprisoned, she was granted temporary internment by the Prince of German sovereign state Reuss, at her sister-in-law's unoccupied residence, Buftea. There she would stay, without contact with the outside world, for the six weeks that followed.

On 1 May, with the help of the prince and another friend, former Austro-Hungarian foreign minister Otto von Czernin, Bibesco, and the three St Vincent de Paul nuns were able to secure safe passage to Austria. Marthe was reported to have refused this unless

⁷⁹⁹ Letter of Protestation, date/author unknown (1931 or 1932), *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁸⁰⁰ Diesbach, p. 251.

the nuns were permitted to go with her.⁸⁰¹ After a three week quarantine with Alexander and Marie Thurn-and-Taxis at their home in Bohemia, they returned to Vienna, before eventually reaching Geneva in late May. A statement by an unknown author declared that ‘elle n’avait pas quitté un seul jour son uniforme d’infirmière et elle le garda jusqu’au jour où elle apprit qu’elle ne pouvait pas rejoindre le front roumain’.⁸⁰²

In Geneva, the princess was reunited with her mother and her daughter. They moved back to Lausanne in the same year, and remained there until after the Armistice, Bibesco writing her novel *Isvor, pays des saules* and corresponding with her extensive contacts. According to her accounts, whilst in Switzerland, she was also preoccupied with challenging the conditions of her arrest, and she tasked herself with recruiting the help of President of the International Red Cross Gustave Ador, as well as the French Ambassador in Bern, in order to arrange the release of the three nuns who had accompanied her. Over the remaining course of the war she only visited Romania to consolidate her financial affairs and her estate. Once the conflict was over, she returned momentarily to Bucharest in mid-November 1918, but based herself for most of the rest of her life in Paris from Easter 1919 onwards.

5.4 Bibesco’s Response to Criticism: *La Nymphé Europe en guerre*

In letter dated 24 July 1917 Marthe encouraged Antoine Bibesco to ‘tuer la première personne qui dira que je suis restée à Bucharest pour recevoir le Prince d’Allemagne, dit le Kronprinz!’.⁸⁰³ In another letter from August, she referred to ‘un document écrit qui te prouvera la manière dont on envisageait mon activité et son arrêt brusque en Roumanie occupé’.⁸⁰⁴ The document to which she was referring was her unpublished self-defence

⁸⁰¹ Unknown, Letter, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁸⁰² Unknown, Letter (post 1927), *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6.

⁸⁰³ Letter to Antoine Bibesco, 24 July 1917, *Series I. Correspondence, 1904-1973*, Bibesco, Antoine, 1917, 32.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁸⁰⁴ Letter to Antoine Bibesco, 1 August 1917, *Series I. Correspondence, 1904-1973*, Bibesco, Antoine, 1917, 32.5-6 HRC, UTA.

La Nymphé Europe en guerre and is the basis for detailed analysis in this section of the chapter.⁸⁰⁵ Had it been published, *La Nymphé Europe en guerre* would eventually have made up part of Bibesco's uncompleted 1960 work *La Nymphé Europe: Mes vies antérieures* with its title featuring an autobiographical, europeanist 'effigy' of an ancient maiden.⁸⁰⁶ Set out in the form of an organised defence, the notes for *La Nymphé Europe en guerre* referred to events in 1916 and 1917, and responded to her arrest and to accusations launched against her by certain individuals or minority groups from both France and Romania.

Marthe's comments to Antoine provide us with more evidence of her awareness of the ways in which her actions in Bucharest might have been interpreted. But rather than being levelled by local villagers on the grounds of abandonment, this accusation came from observers in France who suspected her of pro-German sympathies on account of Romania's dynastic history and her public relations with German ruling class members like the Kronprinz. Jean Cocteau for example, although fond of Bibesco's work, published a poem called *Sonnet au Kronprinz* in which their intimate relationship was implied.⁸⁰⁷ And although he and his wife corresponded with her on a friendly basis, even congratulating her on her bravery in November 1916, French army General Henri Berthelot was also cited as having engineered the allegations in much of the primary source material which deals with the criticisms launched against Marthe.

Further, she was a victim of the fractious atmosphere at Jassy, of which she was also aware, calling Romania 'un royaume divisé contre lui-même' in a letter to journalist, *député* and family friend, Joseph Reinach from 10 October 1917.⁸⁰⁸ Some anti-French Romanian newspapers reflected this political division, expressing hostility towards the

⁸⁰⁵ The exact date it was written is unclear, but it is some time after 1917.

⁸⁰⁶ Monica Spiridon, 'Literature and the Symbolic Engineering of the European Self', in *Literature for Europe?* ed. by Theo d'. Haen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 417-429, p. 423.

⁸⁰⁷ Diesbach, p. 217-18.

⁸⁰⁸ Letter to Joseph Reinach, 10 October 1917 *Series I. Correspondence, 1904-1973*, Reinach, Joseph 1915-1917, 206.2, HRC, UTA.

diplomatic attempts that the Princess had made to unify the conservative factions in a bid to guide Romanian politics towards France and the Allies, for example.

This evidence of negative attitudes to her wartime conduct also reflected the wider ambivalence towards upper-class Red Cross nurses discussed in the opening section of the chapter, because she was re-cast as operating in selfish pursuit of her own collaborative or diplomatic agenda which was thought to betray Romanian and French interests.

In *La Nymphe Europe en guerre* Bibesco acknowledged specific allegations. These included suggestions that she had hosted the enemy at social functions at Hospital 118, that she had accepted favours from the enemy, and had received special treatment at various points throughout her arrest and exile. She also included accusations that she had abused her position as a high-profile figure, and had left quarantine in a royal vehicle laden with flowers that were given to her by a German officer. Finally, she recalled that she was accused of having a German visa and willingly hosting August von Mackensen and the Prince Henri of Reuss.

There was evidence in circulation to suggest that as part of this defamatory campaign Bibesco had been mistaken for another woman with the same name. An undated 'Notice confidentielle' suggested that a Mme Darvari, twice married wife of a Romanian civil servant who Marthe knew personally and who was also born 'Princess Bibesco' often hosted German officers at her Bucharest house. The Bibesco name was a Romanian dynasty and therefore the likelihood of another woman sharing Marthe's name was not unheard of. The note stated that

fille du Prince Nicolas et de la Princesse, née d'Elchingen, Madame Darvari n'a jamais caché ses sentiments germanophiles [...] Il en est né une grande confusion dans l'esprit des officiers des armées d'occupation qui ont été reçus chez elle en très grand nombre.⁸⁰⁹

⁸⁰⁹ Confidential 'note', date/author unknown, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

It went on to explain that whilst Marthe Bibesco was never seen out of her Red Cross uniform this other woman, who was Marthe's mother's age, 'continuait à mener une vie mondaine'. A further 'confidentielle' gave more detailed intelligence on Darvari's life and circumstances, explaining that she regularly hosted the enemy, further supporting the belief that she was a German sympathiser. As will become clear, this would not be the first time that another woman's unpatriotic conduct was wrongly attributed to Marthe.

In response to the allegations, which she identified one by one with the sub-heading, 'on m'a accusé de...' Bibesco began her defence, providing lengthy contestations and giving evidence to disprove the claims. She confirmed the Darvari error, claiming that she had indeed been mistaken for one of 'les femmes roumaines qui voulaient gagner une situation à la faveur de la guerre'.⁸¹⁰ In defending her professional role, Bibesco upheld that her decision represented a 'sacrifice', and that she had been treated 'en victime du devoir'.⁸¹¹ Her claim all along was that she had wished to remain in post under the regulations of the Geneva Convention, to treat the remaining soldiers, to have them safely evacuated and then she would depart for a neutral country, or for the Moldavian front where she wished to continue nursing. She did not load justifications for her choice with emotion or grandiosity, and instead provided a matter-of-fact account. Nor did she expect to be treated in any way other than with respect for her wishes as 'infirmière brevetée en fonction' and she was clear that neither her class nor her reputation should have had any bearing:

Je souhaitais très vivement que les règlements me fussent appliqués en toute correctitude [...] je ne pouvais admettre l'idée d'aucune exception faite en ma faveur, mais qu'ayant demandé à être évacuée avec ma formation sanitaire, ce qui était l'exercice d'un droit, et non pas une faveur, j'espérais l'obtenir.⁸¹²

⁸¹⁰ Undated *La Nymphé Europe*: Unpublished proposed volumes [*La Nymphé Europe en guerre*] 301.2, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, HRC, UTA.

⁸¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁸¹² *Ibid.*

Among the most convincing of her contestations were the heroic motives she offered up, once again, for staying at the hospital when all of her acquaintances, along with her husband's colleagues, had fled to Jassy. 'Pourquoi j'y suis restée', was followed by a numbered list of pragmatic motivations:

- i) Parce que j'étais directrice d'un hôpital
- ii) Parce que cet hôpital, rempli de grands blessés, était inévacuable.
- iii) Parce que les soeurs de St Vincent de Paul, qui assuraient le bon fonctionnement de l'hôpital, ne restaient qu'à condition que j'y resterais moi-même.
- iv) Parce qu'en m'enfuyant en Moldavie j'aurais eu le sentiment de désertier.⁸¹³

She then advanced the justifications of those who endorsed her decision, suggesting that they believed she was doing her duty to Romania, that the poor of Bucharest needed her leadership as a reassuring figure who was popular in the locality, and that the occupying force would be more respectful to someone of her social standing. Despite her own allegation that her well-known francophilia might have been used against her by those Romanian government members who had been against joining the war on the Allied side, Bibesco proudly added to her defence evidence the extent to which her French contacts had positively appraised her decision to stay in Bucharest:

Les lettres que je viens de recevoir de Paris, contenant l'opinion des Français dont personne ne pourra suspecter le patriotisme puisque les intérêts de la France ont été confiés à plusieurs d'entre eux, sont des témoignages évidents rendus à ma bonne foi.⁸¹⁴

The feeling was reciprocal, and in order to illustrate this, Marthe drew on her family's love for their 'patrie d'adoption', describing her father-in-law's involvement with the military campaigns of the Second Republic in Mexico, Algeria and Alsace-Lorraine.⁸¹⁵

⁸¹³ Ibid.

⁸¹⁴ Ibid.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid.

In response to allegations of fraternising with the enemy, which would continue to be launched against Bibesco several years after the war, she claimed that the German authorities in Bucharest actually treated her badly on account of her support for the Allies, and her relationship with important names from the French political and diplomatic echelon such as Aristide Briand and French Ambassador in St Petersburg that Marthe had visited earlier 1916, Maurice Paléologue. In a further attempt to prove her willing to speak out against the occupying force, she emphasised her work in the prisoner of war camps, citing the ‘*misère affreuse*’ that she faced as part of this altruistic role, and describing how she was able to achieve the liberation of unlawfully-held soldiers.⁸¹⁶ She also referred to her success in carrying out an investigation and producing a report of German attempts to turn her hospital into a brothel, which led to the freeing of the women who had been held there. Finally, as part of this section of her defence, she stated that thanks to her coldness, which contrasted with the conduct of other Red Cross nurses, she was able to act on her innate desire to ‘*servir les miens*’.⁸¹⁷

Marthe expressed a strong sense of injustice at being issued with a mandate for her arrest, appearing to be well-informed about her rights as a Red Cross worker. She recalled asking if there were any concrete charges against her and being told in response that her arrest had responded to the Romanian government’s refusal to grant the release of German prisoners. According to her account, the occupying forces responsible for the arrest claimed that she was being used as a political pawn to pressurise Jassy into releasing those held by Romania. Her response stated that she was prepared to sacrifice herself for the sake of her country, provided she was allowed to remain at her post in order to finish her nursing duties:

s’il leur plaisait d’avoir mon nom sur leur liste d’internes, je ne me serais certes pas dérobée de l’honneur de servir d’otage pour mon pays, mais qu’il leur fallait attendre pour cela que mon hôpital eut fermé ses portes, et que dans les circonstances

⁸¹⁶ Ibid.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid.

présentes je ne pouvais pas m'opposer à leur volonté n'ayant pas de baïonnettes à ma disposition, mais que tôt ou tard je protesterai publiquement contre eux, auprès de la Croix Rouge Internationale de Genève.⁸¹⁸

Along these lines, she also made clear her awareness of the value of heroic precedents. When citing one accusation that she benefitted from rights only accessible to someone of her social stature, she argued that there was some truth in the allegation, but that she deliberately made use of such exceptional treatment in order to 'créer un précédent qui pourrait servir aux autres'.⁸¹⁹ Her wider aims therefore included an outcome from which she might not be the only person to benefit.

It is thanks to *La Nymphe Europe en guerre* that we are able to garner a clear sense of the ways in which the integrity of Bibesco's resolve was momentarily questioned during the war. And in drawing up the account as a means of defending herself and the decisions that she made, albeit never publicly, she carefully chose key heroic moments from her time in Bucharest, her arrest and her exile in order to build a legitimising and heroising picture of her actions, deliberately foregrounding concepts such as duty and self-abnegation. More intimate still, is evidence that can be found in Bibesco's personal letters in which she also defended herself to her close friends and family. Joseph Reinach, who was a school friend of her father, was one person to whom she explained herself in a letter from September 1917, when she wrote vituperatively about those who had made the accusations against her. She suggested that she had been merely the unfortunate target of a wartime tendency towards slander, before stating logically that 'le fait même d'avoir été enlevée de mon hôpital et traitée en ôtage aurait dû, semble-t-il, les renseigner sur mes 'pactisations''. Less calculated and formal than *La Nymphe* was her claim that 'je me moque de ce qu'on dit de moi à Jassy'.⁸²⁰

⁸¹⁸ Ibid.

⁸¹⁹ Ibid.

⁸²⁰ Letter to Joseph Reinach, 28 September 1917, *Series I. Correspondence, 1904-1973*, Reinach, Joseph 1915-1917, 206.2, HRC, UTA.

Bibesco's choice to stay and the subsequent choices that she made, about how and why she would defend that decision at various opportunities, are of particular interest in an investigation of her self-presentation as heroic. However, this was not to be the only time that she was in need of defence. Like Marthe Richard, Bibesco's wartime heroism was subject to renewed interpretation in the decades that followed the war, in response to her increased personal and professional success.

5.5 Female Heroism and the Passage of Time: the 1931 Scandal

In the late 1920s and early 1930s Bibesco's literary career was flourishing. French readers cherished her as a figure of letters, and the press gave her work rave reviews. These reviews admired her ability to assimilate herself in the literary canon as an 'honorary' French woman, who had the gift of writing about France and 'Frenchness' as if she had been born there. Journalist Paul Souday, writing for *Le Temps* in March 1927, claimed that Marthe's novel *Catherine: Paris* 'sera lu avec un extrême intérêt dans toute l'Europe et chez nous avec une émotion particulière'.⁸²¹ And Edouard Tavernier's letter from the time declared that Marthe 'a rendu aux lettres françaises les plus éminents services qu'on peut attendre même d'un Français'.⁸²²

As well as being prompted by Bibesco's impressive and unique talent for writing, those who spoke of her success, including Souday, Jean de Pierrefeu, and classicists like Saloman Reinach, also lauded Bibesco's ability to evoke the classical tradition in her writing. In it, they detected the Romanian love for France as 'the most dignified heir of the late Roman Empire, not only economically and politically, but especially culturally',⁸²³ and they compared her to Greek philosophers Plato, Virgil and Homer on the basis of her ability to transport the ancient concepts of predestination and heredity

⁸²¹ Note written by Paul Souday, of *Le Temps*, 26 March 1927, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁸²² 'Confidential letter', Edouard Tavernier to Monsieur Benac, date unknown, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁸²³ Spiridon, 'Bucharest-on-the-Seine', <http://linguaromana.byu.edu/spiridon.html> [accessed 8 June 2016].

into a modern literary context.⁸²⁴ Indeed, Marthe's wartime correspondance provides evidence of the extent to which her work was informed by the great heroic writers. She enjoyed reading Greek tragedy, regaling both Joseph Reinach and Dorothée de Castellane with her impressions of the 1915 Gilbert Murray translation of Euripides' *Trojan Women*.⁸²⁵ In another letter to Reinach, whose fondness of the classical tradition was manifest in his *Le Figaro* pen name 'Polybe', she wrote that she was able to trace 'les véritables ancêtres de Grecs modernes, bien plus que dans Homère'.⁸²⁶

At this time of great acclaim, roughly a decade after the signing of the armistice, her literary talent, and her clear awareness of the ancient foundations of heroism, was reinforced by images of her own wartime courage. For example, writer brothers Jérôme and Jean Tharaud's review of *Croisade pour l'anémone*, Bibesco's 1931 story of a trip to Syria and Palestine, attributed her literary success to her war role by referring to a recently published and complimentary photograph of the Princess. The image showed her during the war, in her Red Cross uniform, receiving a bouquet of flowers from her patients, perhaps as she was leaving Bucharest in March 1917. The review went on to refer to her 'fermeté' and to her capacity to 'protéger, prendre ses responsabilités, défendre par tous les moyens possibles le petit lot de vies qu'on a confiées à ses soins'.⁸²⁷ Finally, the Tharaud brothers deployed an ancient reference to the heroic code when they asked when 'la directrice de l'hôpital 118' would tell her readers about the 'odyssée', that she undertook 'sous l'emblème de la Croix Rouge' in First World War Bucharest, which would only further enhance *Croisade pour l'anémone* for its readers.⁸²⁸ As a result of

⁸²⁴ Undated, unidentified [Article on Princess Bibesco and her critics] (after publication of *Isvor* (1923)), 347.6, *Works, and Papers by Others, 1768-1976*, Subseries B: Works by others, 1877-1960, HRC, UTA.

⁸²⁵ Letters to Joseph Reinach, August 1917, *Series I. Correspondence, 1904-1973*, Reinach, Joseph 1915-1917, 206.2, HRC, UTA.

⁸²⁶ Letter to Joseph Reinach, 10 January 1916, *Series I. Correspondence, 1904-1973*, Reinach, Joseph 1915-1917, 206.2, HRC, UTA.

⁸²⁷ Jerome and Jean Tharaud, Review of *Croisade pour l'anémone*, date unknown (some time after its publication in 1930), *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁸²⁸ *Ibid.*

such positive appraisal, it became increasingly likely that Bibesco would be awarded the *Légion d'Honneur* for her literary talent. She had the written support of numerous prominent figures such as Roland Dorgelès, Jules Cambon, Maurice Donnay, Pierre de Nolhac, Gaston Rageot, Paul Claudel, Joseph Reinach and Robert Dreyfus, who all signed a petition drawn up with the authorisation of Marius Roustan, Minister of Education.⁸²⁹

However, despite attempts, like that of the Tharaud brothers, to embellish her literary career with stories and images of Bibesco's wartime heroism, the 1930s also represented an era when declarations of female heroism were temporarily side-lined by veteran 'disillusionment' narratives,⁸³⁰ which focused uniquely on the cruelty and futility of male suffering.⁸³¹ Reflective of this shift away from idealised depictions of the nurse-hero in commemorative culture, and in begrudging response to her growing popularity, another damaging accusation surfaced in late 1931 which sought to explain Marthe's arrest in 1917. Right-wing French newspapers *Le Carrefour* and *Gringoire* and, shortly afterwards, *Ordinea*, a Romanian *feuille de chantage*, published an article based on General Berthelot's wartime accusations that Marthe had been a German sympathiser. Along with the article was another photograph from the war, of a woman who looked like Bibesco, surrounded by German soldiers in what appeared to be a friendly and collaborative exchange.

Ironically, given that her literary career was considered worthy of decoration, this photo indicated that it was her wartime role and perhaps the most heroic period of her life that was being pictorially subverted so as to evoke a moment of deceit and betrayal. This was demonstrative both of a concerted attempt to prevent her from being awarded the *Légion d'Honneur*, and of the wider shifts in 1930s attitudes towards women in the war. Her well-known friendship with Kronprinz Wilhelm had not helped matters, and appeals to Marius Roustan, despite demanding that she be awarded the *Légion d'Honneur*, did also

⁸²⁹ Diesbach, p. 402

⁸³⁰ Janet Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁸³¹ Fell, 'Afterword: Remembering the First World War Nurse in Britain and France', p. 185.

regretfully cite her German acquaintances and her frequent visits to Germany as one reason why she had faced accusations of collaboration both during the war and at this later stage. As a direct result of the incriminating and fraudulent photograph being published Marthe was not awarded the *Légion d'Honneur* for her literary contribution until 1962.

Separating the 1931 case of defamation against Marthe Bibesco from that of Marthe Richard's bad press in the 1940s was the public response to the allegations. An overwhelming number of people came to the princess's support, thereby contributing to a process of revived heroisation which harked back to her war role fifteen years later and which re-instated the voices of those whose lives had intersected with hers during the period 1916 to 1918. Marthe Richard, as a contrasting case, was forced to defend herself by deliberately carving out a heroic reputation for herself in her own publications, and relying on people like Georges Ladoux and Raymond Bernard to defend her. Bibesco's defence, on the other hand, was less public, less contrived and less strategic.

Unlike Richard, proof that numerous people still considered Bibesco's war role to be heroic could only be found in confidential *mémoires* and letters that were never published. The differing heroisation of the two women was a comment on the war roles that they embodied, one being upper-class virtuous, feminine, normative, and self-abnegating by definition, and the other hailing from the lower middle classes of Lorraine, being sexualised, self-interested, sinful and mercenary. But it would also seem that the extent to which others were prepared to publicly endorse, heroise or defend depended on the extent to which the heroic individual already showed a proclivity towards self-heroisation. With her brazen immodesty, commentators were more likely to shame or defame Richard, but in the absence of such grandiose self-congratulation, the Bibesco case was considered to be more in need of, and deserving of, the vocal support of others.

As little evidence of her own response from this time exists, it is the overwhelming defence of others which is of significance here. Numerous defensive reactions to the photograph were written by a variety of personalities over the course of December 1931 and in the first months of 1932. They were compiled in Romanian newspaper *Dimineatze*.

Many were also translated from Romanian to French. Some of the letters continued to recommend her for the *Légion d'Honneur* without reference to the scandal. Such sources provide us with evidence of the strong impact that her wartime heroism had on her reputation as a writer, the role that she has been remembered for in biographies and scholarly works. And other letters responded directly to the release of the photograph, considering Marthe a victim of *Le Carrefour* and *Ordinea*'s 'campagne odieuse',⁸³² which was based on 'les calomnies et les mensonges',⁸³³ and expressing their distaste at the way in which 'quelques personnes entendent récompenser le véritable patriotisme [...] d'une bonne Roumaine'.⁸³⁴

The main basis on which the princess was heroised in this defence was her devotion to others, her Franco-Romanian loyalty and patriotism, her nobility, her sense of duty, her resolution, her courage and bravery, and her self-abnegation. Among those supporting the integrity and authenticity of her war role, *général de division* and ex-military attaché in Bucharest Hippolyte Desprez promoted Marthe's dutiful application of the Red Cross statute.⁸³⁵ Senator of the *Côtes d'Armor*, Gustave de Kerguezac addressed a letter to the Princess herself in which he declared that 'les raisons de patriotisme' had inspired her generous conduct.⁸³⁶ In the same year that he was appointed president of the *Société de secours aux blessés militaires de la Croix-rouge française*, Edmond-Marie-Michel Leduc, marquis de Lillers, also wrote to Marthe, claiming to have examined the evidence against her concluding that she had acted, 'en infirmière, en patriote et, permettez-moi

⁸³² Letter from Gustave de Kerguezec, 7 Jan 1932, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA

⁸³³ Letter from a group of French veterans who had received treatment at hospital 118, *date unknown*, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁸³⁴ Letter to *Dimneatza* editor by Captain Michail B. Jacovesco 'mutilé de guerre', 27 November 1931, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁸³⁵ Letter from Hippolyte Desprez, 14 April 1932, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁸³⁶ Kerguezac letter, 7 Jan 1932.

d'ajouter, en très grande dame'.⁸³⁷ And a further letter, signed by a group of Hospital 118 patients, invoked her 'résolution patriotique' and her 'courage infatigable'.⁸³⁸ This letter also celebrated the fact that she had actually worked 'hands-on' at the hospital, rather than just being an honorary director, as would have been expected of a woman of her social status.⁸³⁹ And the patients' words assured whoever was destined to read them that it was still as a heroic icon of virtuous wartime care-giving that Marthe had been, and would be, best remembered, rather than in the way that the recent press revelations had attempted to frame her: 'L'image que nous avons gardé d'elle, dans son uniforme de la Croix-Rouge et entourée des religieuses françaises qui l'aidèrent à soulager nos maux, ne saurait être obscurcie par des calomnies dont nous nous étonnons avec douleur qu'un journal roumain se soit fait l'écho'.⁸⁴⁰

Wishing to defend her in response to all that she did for him, Edouard Tavernier, propaganda correspondent for *Le Temps* and member of the French military mission in Romania whom Marthe treated at Hospital 118 wrote a letter to her on 11 November 1931 referring to the scandal. Based on his response it is clear that Bibesco had written to him expressing deep upset, because his reply is outraged and defensive in tone, referring to the issue as 'cet abcès soigneusement entretenu' and admitting that 'je n'ai pas pensé sur le coup que ces canailles iraient jusqu'au truquage'.⁸⁴¹ He explained that he and Antoine had fought to get a copy of the photo and that he had arranged to take it to a photography expert to be examined for forgery. If it could be proved a forgery, he would himself write

⁸³⁷ Letter from Edmond-Marie-Michel Leduc, 19 Jan 1932, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁸³⁸ Letter of Protestation signed by patients of Hospital 118, date unknown, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁸³⁹ Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p. 134-135.

⁸⁴⁰ Letter of Protestation signed by patients of Hospital 118, date unknown, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁸⁴¹ Letter from Édouard Tavernier, 11 November 1931, *Series I. Correspondence, 1904-1973*, Tavernier, Édouard, 1919-1939, 224.4, HRC, UTA.

to *Carrefour*, advancing his view of the plot as ‘une abominale machination [...] à base de faux’.⁸⁴²

A further defence came from amputee, and ex-patient of the Princess, Captain Michail B. Jacovesco, who addressed a letter to the editor of *Dimneatz*. The letter, countersigned by prominent medical professionals, military ranks and war veterans, cited her ‘abnégation’, and her ‘oubli complet d’elle-même’ in her care of, and concern for, others. Jacovesco called her ‘intelligente’ and ‘infatigable’; a ‘bon prophète’, whose heroic part in the war sought to help unite Romania.⁸⁴³ Further separating Bibesco from Richard, Jacovesco’s comments exalted the princess’s modesty, suggesting that her war role had not received as much public attention as it might have done because ‘elle ne fait pas partie de ces ‘dames’ qui passent leur vie dans les théés dansants et dans les soi-disant ‘cercles mondaines’ de Bucharest’ and adding that ‘ces faits sont inconnus du grand public, parce que la Princesse Bibesco n’aime pas la réclame’.⁸⁴⁴ Christopher Birdwood Thomson had also previously declared Marthe’s modesty, which contrasted to Richard’s glory-seeking, writing in his 1926 book *Smaranda* of which Marthe was the central heroine,⁸⁴⁵ that she ‘has a horror of publicity’.⁸⁴⁶ Insisting on her modesty was another means for those who had encountered her wartime heroism to commemorate her activity as self-sacrificial and unassuming rather than self-interested in the interwar period.

Expressed in the letters was the impression that without Bibesco’s willing to complete her task in Bucharest and relieve their suffering, a significant number of the patient signatories would not have been in the position they were when they came to defend her at this later moment. Indeed, the abundance of sources which supported Bibesco also serves as proof that resistant voices were much more reluctant to come forward and

⁸⁴² Ibid.

⁸⁴³ Letter to *Dimneatza* editor by Captain Michail B. Jacovesco ‘mutilé de guerre’, 27 November 1931, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁵ *Smaranda* was the pseudonym given to Bibesco by Thomson in order to conceal her identity in the novel.

⁸⁴⁶ Lord Thomson of Cardington, *Smaranda: A Compilation in three parts* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1926), p. 6.

defend her heroism against accusations of collaboration during the war itself. The number of willing defenders in 1931 and 1932 was significant compared with 1916 and 1917 and served as evidence of temporal shifts in overall willing to publicly heroise a figure, the earlier negative judgement of whom had faded somewhat with the passage of fourteen years. Further evidence of the impact of time on defence and heroisation were those people who had failed altogether to defend her in 1917 but who *were* prompted to do so when the photograph was published in 1931. For example, Captain Tatarano, the military attaché whom she had treated at Hospital 118 and had helped to escape back to France, contributed his own letter of amends, in which he expressed shame at not protesting to her arrest in Bucharest on the basis that he was an active officer at the time and it might have further compromised his role. In November 1931, however, he took the opportunity to appeal directly to Marthe: ‘Croyez, Princesse, que ceux qui vous ont approchée pendant la guerre, ne peuvent pas vous oublier. Ceux qui vivent encore de l’hôpital 118 Automobile Club - savent la manière dont vous les avez aidés, et votre attitude envers les boches’.⁸⁴⁷

This collective defence was so powerful that *Le Carrefour* adapted its line almost instantly. On 26 December 1931, the newspaper published an article which stated that it had received some of the protestations, including evidence of Marie and Ferdinand’s support of Marthe’s decision to stay behind in Bucharest in 1916. In acknowledgement of her defence, the newspaper declared that it would resist forming any final conclusions about the Princess’s conduct vis-à-vis the occupying forces in 1916 and 1917 Bucharest. Tellingly, however, it hastened to add that incriminating evidence against her still stood.

Perhaps the only real positive outcome of this trial for Marthe, however, was the July 1932 publication of a volume containing her short story *Le Destin de Lord Thomson of Cardington*, as well as a translation of Birdwood Thomson’s *Smaranda*. Though *Le Destin de Lord Thomson of Cardington* was not particularly well received in France

⁸⁴⁷ Letter from Captain Tatarano, 30th November 1931, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

because it departed so drastically from what she usually published,⁸⁴⁸ overall the publication was well-timed and succeeded in quietening some of the criticism on the basis that she featured as the true war hero, or ‘ideal’ of *Smaranda*.⁸⁴⁹ Having died two years earlier, Birdwood Thomson was able, without knowing it, to defend his lover posthumously in indirect response to those who were intent on defaming her six years after he had originally published the book. In one entry of his edited war diary recalling his thoughts from 4 April 1915, Birdwood Thomson admitted that she had been unpopular in some circles, particularly with other women, but suggested that this unpopularity had been grounded in jealousy rather than having been based on her own wrong-doing or lack of integrity: ‘she possesses too many advantages: wealth, beauty, brains and social position combined in a single person are unforgivable: any two of them together excite misgivings in the jealous’.⁸⁵⁰ Ironically, the words that followed would have been little consolation to Marthe in 1932: ‘at a time like this her position is particularly delicate, for, in addition to her other gifts, she has a European mind. In ten years this kind of mind may be Europe’s salvation; to-day it brings reproach’.⁸⁵¹

5.6 The Bibesco Case: Self-Defence or Self-Heroisation?

The way in which Marthe Bibesco approached her account of her experiences in 1916 and 1917 raises questions about distinctions between self-defence and self-heroisation. Again, these questions are all the more significant in the light of her clear repulsion for grandiose war discourse, including the ways in which some aspects of the war, such as ‘warrior’ sacrifice, were popularly heroised. In her case, it becomes clear that the way in which she responded directly and pragmatically to allegations made against her, in both *La Nympe Europe en guerre* and in her personal letters, constituted a defence. But it is also true that at other times, and by other means, Marthe also showed an awareness of the

⁸⁴⁸ Diesbach, p. 403-04,

⁸⁴⁹ ‘Lord Thomson's "Smaranda": Princess Marthe Bibesco’, *Sketch*, 2 June 1931.

⁸⁵⁰ Lord Thomson of Cardington, p. 19.

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.*

ways in which her profile might fit that of a war hero. Further, there is evidence to suggest that she made conscious efforts to posit herself as such.

Shortly after she arrived in Geneva, she defined her heroic reputation, writing to Antoine that ‘je constitue en toutes mes parties, “l’héroïsme de guerre idéale”’.⁸⁵² This statement tells us that she felt she represented a particular brand of wartime heroism that was commendable, and that was separate to the blindly elevated discourse that she railed against. Later that year she enjoyed sharing with one of her dearest friends and closest allies, the Abbé Mugnier, news of a letter that she had received from George. The contents of this letter also help us to identify exactly what was typified by this ‘héroïsme de guerre idéale’. In it her husband had congratulated her on the happy fate of three patients whom she had helped escape and who had managed to re-join the Romanian army. For Marthe, the details of this heroic act were less significant than the way George had framed them in his own words, which she reproduced for Mugnier: ‘trois de tes officiers blessés sont parvenus à rappliquer. Ils sont arrivés hier en chantant tes louanges ce qui m’a fait beaucoup de plaisir. Je sais ce que tu as fait, mais je préfère que les autres te louent, et disent à quel point tu as été digne du nom que je t’ai donné’.⁸⁵³

Marthe used the praise of her husband in order to further define the heroism that she believed herself to embody, adding that, ‘voilà un incident qui n’a d’autre importance que celle de renseigner, par la voix de ceux qui ont contrôlé mes actes, ceux qui n’ont pu le faire pendant ma période de captivité ‘chez l’ennemi’’.⁸⁵⁴ She also chose to share almost exactly the same words with Joseph Reinach when she wrote to him on the same day. To Reinach she admitted that, ‘ce satisfecit m’a fait du bien’, but was also modest and self-deprecating too: ‘c’est une autre personne qui a fait ce que j’ai fait, tandis que moi, je me

⁸⁵² Letter to Antoine Bibesco, 12 June 1917, *Series I. Correspondence, 1904-1973*, Bibesco, Antoine, 1917, 32.5-6, HRC, UTA.

⁸⁵³ Letter to Abbé Mugnier, 18 Sept 1917, *Series I. Correspondence, 1904-1973*, Mugnier, abbé (Arthur) 1916-1918, 181.5, HRC, UTA.

⁸⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

suis rendue coupable du blâme universel!’.⁸⁵⁵ Evidently, the princess regarded this example as a key building block of her heroic legend.

In another example of self-heroisation, she picked up on the significance attributed to the markers of her professional role, deliberately connecting herself with the popular icon of the Red Cross nurse. In a diary entry from the night she left Mogoşoaia, she noted the change in her dress in accordance with her heroism of her war role: ‘J’eus vite fait de changer ma robe de soir faite à Paris contre uniforme d’infirmière fait à Londres’.⁸⁵⁶ In denying herself the opulent and leisured appearance which hinted at her social class, she visually signalled her first self-sacrificial and heroic act.

She continued to wear this ‘manteau bleu à croix-rouge’ which she called ‘invulnérable’ at all times until it became clear that she would never be permitted to nurse in the war zone again.⁸⁵⁷ After she had reached Geneva, she asked Abbé Mugnier if he would only be able to recognise her in her ‘uniforme de Croix Rouge semi religieuse’, after confirming that she and the nuns, whom she called ‘des françaises vaillantes’, had indeed proudly worn ‘notre Croix Rouge sur l’épaule’ throughout the invasion.⁸⁵⁸

A more implicit means of self-heroising was Marthe’s discussion of other exemplary and great women like her. She did this as a means of reflecting on and also qualifying her own heroism. For example, she referred to Princess Marie who had also begun to dress permanently in her Red Cross uniform after Romania entered the war, as ‘mon idole’.⁸⁵⁹ When Marie visited Mogoşoaia just before the invasion, Bibesco was able to confirm this heroic metamorphosis, rather like the one she was about to undergo herself just a few

⁸⁵⁵ Letter to Joseph Reinach, 18 Sept 1917, *Series I. Correspondence, 1904-1973*, Reinach, Joseph 1915-1917, 206.2, HRC, UTA.

⁸⁵⁶ ‘Diary’ during World War I, 25 November 1916’, [World War I Diary] (1 of 3), 326.4 Bibesco/Works, HRC, UTA.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁸ Letter to Abbé Mugnier, 2 June 1917, *Series I. Correspondence, 1904-1973*, Mugnier, abbé (Arthur) 1916-1918, 181.5, HRC, UTA.

⁸⁵⁹ Manuscript first draft of H.H. The Princess Bibesco’s ‘Diary’ during World War I, 2 October – 25 November 1916, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

days later. In her war diary she wrote of Marie's simple beauty, her golden hair and her magnolia perfume. But she also described the ways in which the Queen was making her own wartime sacrifices, grieving not only for the loss of her son who had died just twenty days before, but also because it was her heroic role as a royal to 'prendre le deuil pour le dernier mort en date de cette immense parenté que le sang allemand étendit à tous les trônes de la terre'.⁸⁶⁰ Marthe was so in awe of Marie that when she stood next to the princess, her 'coeur d'enfant se glace de respect'.⁸⁶¹ Indeed, as Maria Bucur argues, Marie's heroism depended to a certain extent on how difficult it would be for other women to emulate.⁸⁶² In her choice to depict the regal heroism of Queen Marie, Bibesco also made a comment on her own untouchable and heroic beauty and femininity as well as her sense of duty and sacrifice, also drawing on the kind of dominant messages discussed in chapter two which celebrated the beauty and femininity of upper class womanhood.

Her expression of pride at being taken hostage for the sake of Romania showed that she was also conscious of the power of exemplary female heroism on an international scale. In a letter to Reinach dated 25 October 1915, the Princess wrote of 'le sacrifice individuel' as 'la seule solution des problèmes généraux qui sont vraiment trop compliqués'.⁸⁶³ She cited the recent death of Edith Cavell, and the 'haute utilité de cette figure symbolique' who, despite also not representing heroic conduct that could feasibly be realised by all women, still provided the Allies with a martyr whose treatment was seen to expose such barbarity in the enemy that it led to the absolving of captured women in the future.⁸⁶⁴

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁶¹ Ibid.

⁸⁶² Bucur, *Heroes and Victims*, p. 85.

⁸⁶³ Letter to Joseph Reinach, 25 October 1915, *Series I. Correspondence, 1904-1973*, Reinach, Joseph 1915-1917, 206.2, HRC, UTA.

⁸⁶⁴ Studies of First World War women's resistance work, such as Chantal Antier's Louise de Bettignies biography suggests that thanks to Cavell's heroism, it is widely argued that women were more likely to be captured by German authorities, but spared from execution as a direct result of global responses to her treatment. p. 145.

And she cited a further example of a heroic female predecessor, Lady Paget, about whom she wrote a lengthy passage in order to give grounds to her own request to stay in Bucharest. British woman Muriel Paget was Dame of Grace of the Order of St John, and director of the Dmitri Palace Anglo-Russian Hospital as well as several Ukrainian field hospitals. She had also spent fifteen months in a British Red Cross hospital in Serbia, treating Serbian soldiers during the 1915 typhoid epidemic, even catching the disease herself. Bibesco named her quite simply, ‘une héroïne’, and ‘une femme courageuse, intelligente’, claiming that Paget’s self-sacrificial exposure to infectious disease earned her the right to authentic respect.⁸⁶⁵ But most significant to Bibesco’s reference to ‘le rôle eminent que Lady Payet a joué’, was Paget’s conduct when her hospital was taken over by Bulgarian troops during the invasion of Serbia.⁸⁶⁶ Like the princess, Paget insisted on staying at her post, and treated both Serbians and Bulgarians. Bibesco wrote that even the enemy regarded Paget as heroic and she was granted the right to go to Switzerland via Austria, which she refused in favour of continuing to nurse her patients. Indeed, Bibesco herself followed Paget’s example almost identically in several ways.

In writing these references to other heroic women, Marthe sought indirectly to draw attention to her own courage, self-abnegation and risk-tasking without explicitly embellishing her own case. Her appreciation of the wartime heroism of reputable subjects can therefore be interpreted as a more modest and less ostentatious mode of self-heroisation than that preferred by women such as Marthe Richard, but that helped to give further context to her own bravery nevertheless. Added to this, a less conceited means of crediting female heroism also benefitted the wider reputation of women in war.

5.7 Conclusion

There is no doubt that Marthe Bibesco was considered to be a national hero of the First World War, both in Romania and in France. Whereas most commentators who have

⁸⁶⁵ Undated *La Nympe Europe*: Unpublished proposed volumes [*La Nympe Europe en guerre*] 301.2, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, HRC, UTA.

⁸⁶⁶ *Ibid.* See also Angela K. Smith, “Beacons of Britishness”: British Nurses and Female Doctors as Prisoners of War’, in Fell and Hallett, *First World War Nursing*, pp. 35-50.

written about her popularity have done so in the context of her shining literary career as a French-Romanian socialite, this discussion has attributed her heroic reputation to her understudied wartime role as a Red Cross nurse. As with the Marthe Richard case study, however, heroisations of her war role by others were inconsistent and waned at key points during the war and in the interwar period. The charge of treason against her in November 1916 that provoked vituperative accusations from the French and Romanian elite and which was also one of the allegations launched against Richard, was ironically in direct response to Bibesco's pivotal and heroic decision to remain behind at Hospital 118 instead of going to Jassy. In late 1931, it was in response to her increasing literary glory seen through the heroising lens of her wartime nursing role that the French and Romanian press vilified her retrospectively on the same grounds. This repeated vilification evidenced the perception that allowing heroic women prominence was dangerous not only if they represented an unconventional form of womanhood, but also if they were thought to, or thought of themselves to have occupied a role which could not easily be separated from the very masculine act of wartime sacrifice in battle.

These attempts to quash her heroism were valuably interrogated by Bibesco's own voice and this is why her personal correspondence has been a key focus of this chapter. She believed that the pursuit of an altruistic objective was sufficiently heroic to justify risking the negative judgements of others in Romania and France. In the light of her pronounced social and political standing, this risk was even greater. She also considered her wartime conduct to be sufficiently heroic to warrant an eloquent and formal defence which foregrounded the key aspects of her role during the period from late November 1916 to Easter 1917. And, although there is limited evidence of her response to the 1930s defamation, it is clear from her personal correspondence that she was deeply upset by the recurrent accusations of collaboration with the enemy and that this prompted her to take action such as the strategic publication of *Smaranda* and *Le Destin de Lord Thomson of Cardington*.

Further, despite Bibesco's inherent tendency to reject haughty ideals of wartime heroism derived from grand narratives, this discussion also proves that it cannot be said that she

did *not* self-heroise as well as defend her own heroic acts. In fact, her accomplished defence during the war did draw on the key tenets of the heroic code, such as duty, honour and sacrifice, albeit in a manner which succeeded in resisting overt grandiosity. And her literary preference for the Greek philosophers and the classical tradition was celebrated by critics throughout her lifetime. Being so knowledgeable about the birthplace of heroism, she was well aware of the ways in which she could deploy ancient heroic discourse in her writings about more modern, and less bellicose forms of courage and bravery, including her own.

In drawing on her husband's second-hand appraisal of her own heroic acts, or on her father's heroic allegiance to the French military, Marthe sometimes chose to defend her own heroism by defining it through the lens of the heroic Francophile men in her life. She questioned the logic of those accusing a woman who was married to the son of a French army officer and whose own father was publicly devoted to France. And others did the same; most biographical statements about her war role written during or in the decades following the war tending to begin with lengthy descriptions of the heroism already enacted by her husband and father. Edouard Tavernier, whose wife had worked at hospital 118 with the princess, chose to refer to her as 'fille et belle-fille de grands amis de la France qui portèrent les armes pour elle en 1870', as one example.⁸⁶⁷ But in her own right Bibesco had also devoted herself to France and the French language. She had a wide circle of French acquaintances as well as a residence in Paris. Further, she had already been decorated with the *Académie Française* prize of 1909, of which she was proud.

This tendency for her and others to view her heroism in relation to the men around her further reflected a well-entrenched hegemonic reluctance to embrace authentic female heroism derived from the acts of individual women alone and without the influence of heroic men. For the most-part, Bibesco made a compelling defence which was based on her own action and conviction. But on occasion this reluctance to situate her heroism too

⁸⁶⁷ 'Confidential letter', Edouard Tavernier to Monsieur Benac, date unknown, *Series II: Works, 1908-1973*, Undated [World War I diary] Handwritten manuscript and typescripts 326.4; 326.5-6, HRC, UTA.

far from that of the men in her life succeeded in minimising the extent to which she felt able to claim the heroic deeds as her own.

Further questions still remain about Bibesco's never-realised intention to publically defend her role as a nurse and exile in 1916 and 1917 by publishing her war diaries and *La Nymphe Europe en guerre*. Christine Hallett suggests that Romanian nurses' published autobiographical writings often deliberately self-heroised as a means of promoting heroism as a woman's territory as well as a man's.⁸⁶⁸ Indeed, Bibesco's intention to formally publish meant that she was not distinct from women like Princess Marie, whose autobiography also tapped into well-known nurse-hero stereotypes, proudly referencing and sharing photographs of her in her Red Cross uniform and embellishing details of her own heroic acts. But it is important to note that Marthe's modesty set her apart from Marie's preference for 'self-promoting propaganda' which,⁸⁶⁹ although coming from a more 'virtuous' position of First World War nursing, was still not unlike more suspect subjects such as Marthe Richard in that it came with its own underlying agenda.

Rather than seeking to boost her public profile or the international profile of Romania, Bibesco's attempts to posit her own war role as exemplary in her writings and personal correspondence pointed to the fact that she was committed to legitimizing her own conduct and, where necessary, to defending its integrity. But, read alongside the examples of Princess Marie and Marthe Richard, it also suggested that an inherent need to assert wartime heroism and defend accusations of untrustworthy wartime behaviour was the preoccupation of any woman who had social, political or diplomatic status during and after the conflict. That this need was manifest both publicly *and* privately goes some way to proving that the recollecting of instances of female heroisation were not just a call for popular credibility but were also examples of a personal wish, sometimes shared, to prove one's sense of duty in the same way that the male combatant proved his.

⁸⁶⁸ Christine E. Hallett, *Veiled Warriors: Allied Nurses of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.266.

⁸⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

It is widely understood nowadays, and more so across this centenary period, that the First World War changed the face of heroism in France. Original concepts of heroism and courage were placed under strain, and were either eliminated altogether or needed considerable adaptation if they were to fit the new realities of modern war. Indeed, ‘France: Heroism’, a December 2014 BBC World Service production broadcast from the *Hotel des Invalides* asked the important question: ‘with death, degradation and grief on such an unprecedented scale how did the concepts of duty, sacrifice and honour survive?’.⁸⁷⁰ The BBC programme also asked to what extent the war redefined what it meant to be a woman in France. Such enquiry raises interesting questions. Though the *culture de guerre* might have contributed to the destruction of many previous understandings of what it was to be a heroic man, this study has shown that it simultaneously aided the evolution and legitimisation of patriotic female heroism.

This study offers an original contribution to the field because it has uncovered brand new primary source material. It has also contributed to our increasing understanding of women’s contributions to the First World War and beyond. Thirdly, and more broadly, it adds to our knowledge of French women’s history, which is still an under-represented subject, particularly in France itself. Finally, it asks important questions relating to the late development of women’s rights in France compared to other European countries.

Hegemonic Masculinity in Action: Representations

In mapping social and ideological shifts in representations of female heroism from the Belle-Epoque to the war, Part One has shown that the conflict redefined not only what it meant to be a French woman, but also what it meant to be a female hero. It has also established that there were complex forces governing the dissemination of images and ideals of female heroism in First World War France. In the case of Jeanne d’Arc and Marianne, this governance was politically motivated. It was also rife with the

⁸⁷⁰ BBC World Service production, ‘France: Heroism’, part of *The War that changed the World* series, 7 December 2014, BBC iplayer online, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02d2019> [accessed 9 September 2016].

undercurrents of hegemonic masculinity, threatened by the fact that both icons were female figures often depicted in heroic guises. These undercurrents were reflected in various attempts to adapt of some of the more explicit markers of their gender. Nevertheless, the dissemination of their images actually hinged less on their potential as female figures and more on their capacity to stand in for a wide range of messages about the heroism of the French nation, from the perspective of both right and left. Their allegorical potential became less partisan once the war had broken out, but they were never fully recognized as symbols of wartime female heroism. We can thus conclude that the denial of, or indeed the modification of their gender suggests that entrenched ‘forces’ of hegemonic masculinity did indeed continue to understand female heroism as an unnatural, unusual and potentially subversive phenomenon in wartime France.

The overall premise in this project has been that not all hegemonic discourses were produced by the patriarchy with a conscious desire to control women. This premise has been informed by analyses from cultural history such as Fell and Sharps’ views on the relegation of feminist goals that were potentially destabilizing as far as gender order was concerned, in the name of asserting more traditional projections of womanhood in wartime. It has also been informed by masculinity studies, which has helped with the decoding of attempts by less ‘establishment’ discourses such as feminism or pacifism to assert the more traditional markers of heroic womanhood. Contemporary gender studies specialists Leslie Irvine and Jenny Vermilya, for example, have discussed the ways in which discursive output by those in opposition to the hegemony, often women themselves, can actually perpetuate ‘the institutionalized inequality and the masculine ethic’.⁸⁷¹ Inserted into the context of First World War France, whether French feminists heroising the *femme au foyer* during the First World War, or Marthe Richard deliberately depicting herself as ‘appropriately feminine’ in order to achieve a much less traditional goal, anybody asserting prescribed gender roles for whatever reason actually ran the risk of sustaining the forces of hegemonic masculinity.

⁸⁷¹ Lesley Irvine and Jenny Vermilya, ‘Gender work in a feminized profession: The case of veterinary medicine’, *Gender and Society*, vol. 24, no. 1 (February 2010), pp. 56-82, p. 56.

It has been with an awareness of this conscious and subconscious ‘upkeep’ of discourses of hegemonic masculinity in mind that heroic exemplars of middle and working class French women were discussed in the second and third chapters. From this discussion, we have ascertained that ‘brands’ of female heroism which were safely embodied in traditional ideals of womanhood were much more widely promoted and accepted than those women’s roles which subverted normative ideas about how women should conduct themselves in support of the nation. The bourgeois home-maker or mother could be a hero because she represented centuries of separate sphere tradition and, more importantly, because she could fulfil a very specific heroic task in producing France’s future citizens. As such, the middle class woman hero provides us with the first representative example of a widespread acceptance and exaltation of women’s heroism in the circumstances of war. Forces of hegemonic masculinity happily endowed her with a heroic reputation, so long as she continued to be recognizable as consensually feminine.

Women workers, on the other hand, risked being seen to embody a potentially subversive phenomenon according to many commentators, despite the fact that their work was essential and, moreover, that they had largely been working in industry well before the war. They were believed to be turning their backs on the very role that was so coveted in the case of their middle class equivalents, and compromising their maternal duties. Perhaps more significantly in the context of war, they were also seen to be markedly less devoted to the war effort than they should have been, and as women engaged in waged rather than unwaged work were instead considered to be self-interested and mercenary. Such widely-held beliefs dramatically affected the extent to which they were universally considered to be wartime heroes. They provide us with further proof with which to conclude that wartime forces of hegemonic masculinity continued to approach heroic women’s roles with cynicism and mistrust, and struggled to endorse the heroisation of what were understood as more ‘unnatural’ roles. However, chapter three has argued that representations of the female industrial worker were not consensual, and that in context of war there were numerous dominant messages in circulation which deliberately heroised their work. This duality of representation of women workers as both unheroic and heroic has told us much about the complicated processes behind popular

constructions of national unity and compliance in war. Evidence of such split opinion has also helped us to identify the role that gender occupied in systematic, hegemonic attempts to assert social order whilst also encouraging all French people to do their duty.

Can Women really be Heroes? Drawing Conclusions

When answering questions about the extent to which newly-defined ‘brands’ of female heroism were accepted and exalted in the circumstances of war, it has become clear that the answer is yes, but that there were conditions in place during and after the First World War which needed to be satisfied if a woman was to be considered heroic. The first criterion, discussed in chapter three, was that her heroism was widely understood to have been a temporary measure. Despite Laura Lee Downs’s conclusion that the female war effort ‘constituted clear evidence that women deserved equal opportunities and equal pay’, a variety of discourses implicitly discouraged women from looking forward to a life of increased civic rights as a result of their contributions.⁸⁷² Much was made of the novelty and ‘marvel’ of their own wartime sacrifices, particularly in the workplace. In many cases, their ‘newfound’ heroism was posited as ‘mobilisable’ only in the conditions of war, which left the impression that it was predicted to recede back to the private sphere as soon as the conflict was over. It was on this basis that Léon Abensour reassured his readers that female tram workers never dreamt of usurping the place of men and that there should be no fear about ‘concurrency féminine’ after the war.⁸⁷³ It was on the same basis that Abensour was able to liberally heroise a variety of women whilst remaining himself a representative of ‘unthreatening’ suffragism. If they revealed more militant objectives and had made the claim that female heroism was worthy of longer term reward, figures like Abensour risked being rejected or demonized themselves. In conforming in this way such commentators also went some way to asserting prescribed gender roles and were thus examples of observers who contributed to the sustainment of hegemonic masculinity, despite this perhaps not being their intention. Indeed, it was likely American Gertrude Atherton’s distant physical proximity to France that enabled her to resist such conformity

⁸⁷² Downs, ‘War Work’, p. 74.

⁸⁷³ Abensour, p. 45.

and afforded her slightly more ambitious and militant heroisations which hinted at women's claim to civic rights once the war was over.

Margaret Darrow argues that in wartime, 'any argument based upon the similarity or even the equivalence of masculine and feminine was dead on arrival'.⁸⁷⁴ This study has successfully challenged Darrow's argument insofar as it has shown that similarities between male and female heroism were not excluded from the *culture de guerre* altogether and were actually a key factor in the cultural 'distillation' of wartime gender roles. In coming to this conclusion, we are now also able to clearly decipher the second key condition legitimising female heroism: in wartime women could be represented as heroes and could represent themselves as heroes in accounts of their lived experiences, but only so long as this representation was defined in relation to male heroism. Returning to the discussion that opened this study, we know from ancient definitions that the primacy of courage and bravery rested with men. Provided this attachment was well understood, comparisons could be drawn between female heroism and the heroism of the male combatant. It has been acknowledged throughout this study, however, that this is not to say women were represented, or represented themselves as emulating the behaviour of men. Arriving back at Higonnet's 'double helix' theory as a framework, we can conclude that there remained a customary distance separating projections of male and female heroism, but that these projections were interconnected nevertheless. Men's heroic civic commitment had shifted to patriotic military service on the front line, and women's to a kind of equivalent service, mostly well behind the lines.

These comparisons were deployed in dominant discourses representing women, and often reflected a political logic to foster a sense of unity and patriotic cooperation. For example, when she was not being demonized, the industrial worker was heroised precisely because she was seen to be carrying out this alternative national service. She did her duty in support of the nation's war effort just like front line soldiers did. Her suffering was

⁸⁷⁴ Darrow, *French Women and the First World War*, p. 246.

sometimes thought to be akin to but not the same as the suffering experienced by male combatants, which triggered discourses foregrounding the duality of gendered sacrifice.

Crucially, women themselves also drew this key comparison, as the case-study chapters have shown. As they described their heroism being akin to male heroism in various bids to self-heroise and self-defend, Marthe Richard and Marthe Bibesco continued to perpetuate this systematic inspiration of female heroism by male heroism. As well as being willing and able to form her own women's aviation corps, Richard's use of the language of battle, and her keen comparisons of spies and soldiers in her life writing shows that she wanted to be seen to desire her own stake in the war. And Bibesco's lexical preference for the language of duty and sacrifice in *La Nymphé Europe en guerre*, although less explicit than Richard's self-combatant comparisons, does also tell us that the princess regarded herself as occupying a similarly heroic role to those fighting at the front. It was their awareness of dominant heroisations based on how closely a woman's heroic conduct could be attributed to the example of heroism being shown by men on the front line which prompted these women to draw their own explicit and implicit comparisons as part of a process of self-portrayal. Thus, if the quality of heroism at its ancient root was thought to be exclusively male, this exploration of female heroism in the modern context of First World War France has shown that despite the existence of numerous, varied and legitimate representations and self-portrayals of women's heroism, the primacy of male heroism still stood firm in the twentieth century.

The Case Study Approach

Though it was a central component of representations of female heroism, the discussion of double-edged appraisals which often reflected the 'crisis-prone' side of hegemonic masculinity continued throughout Part One and two.⁸⁷⁵ The study of two women from distinctly different walks of life promised to add value to a comparison of others' attitudes towards their wartime heroism, and in doing so, the discussion has revealed that their heroism was also evaluated by equivocal attitudes which sometimes demonised them.

⁸⁷⁵ Donaldson, p. 645.

That Richard and Bibesco both came from such different backgrounds and were criticized to a similar extent has revealed a key conclusion that class was not necessarily a defining factor in what made a woman heroic. The dual demonizing and heroising of working class industrial workers also testifies to the same conclusion. Despite much First World War historiography focusing on the ways in which women were heroised without question, the case study chapters have shown that as well as needing to be easily comparable to the heroism of male combatants, a third factor impacting on the representing of female heroism was lifestyle and identity, including a woman's willing to adhere to normative social and gender roles.

Where social background perhaps did have a role to play was in the vastly differing numbers of people prepared to publicly defend Richard and Bibesco against defamation. Richard's lack of support was a key reflection of the nature of, and attitudes towards her war role as an embodiment of the untrustworthy spy stereotype, but it also revealed an awareness amongst some of those producing slanderous messages about her, of her early life of prostitution. Bibesco, on the other hand, came from an upstanding and exemplary world. Her social class and wide network of wealthy acquaintances, coupled with her role as devoted volunteer nurse meant that she embodied a less divisive brand of female heroism. The number of people publicly coming to their support also reflected reactions to their individual tendencies to self-heroise. Bibesco's self-representation was lowly, was prompted by her need to defend herself, and was accompanied by a very limited amount of self-promotion. Therefore, when compared with Marthe Richard's immodest self-promotion, Bibesco emerged with a more 'convincing' and less contested heroic reputation and was thus much more readily defended.

Staying with the concept of defence, and particularly the case of Marthe Richard, Dea Birkett and Julie Wheelwright's article, "'How could she?' Unpalatable Facts and Feminists' Heroines' has been a helpful tool. Birkett and Wheelwright's discussion points to the temptation for feminist historical analysis to deny the 'unpalatable' biographical facts of a heroic woman's life in order to depict female heroism as nothing but

exemplary.⁸⁷⁶ They claim that this temptation further reflects the feminist historian's aim to portray 'challenging, provocative women' without too many flaws or limitations.⁸⁷⁷ It is clear that certain episodes of Richard's life were less than exemplary, and the ways in which she carved out a heroic reputation for herself made for valuable analysis in a study of the lived experience of female heroism. But it cannot be denied that she had a tendency to produce controversial and embellished responses to her own experience and others' experience of her. It has thus been a challenge not to 'defend' Richard or to 'speak' for her in an attempt to minimize some of the less favourable facets of her character. Birkett and Wheelwright's article reminds us that in order to conduct rigorous feminist history we must avoid obscuring the truth of the past as a means of satisfying our own desire to 'reduce complexity to manageable proportions'.⁸⁷⁸ The Richard case study heeds their argument in seeking to provide a complete and un-'distilled' biographical investigation of female heroism which resists reduction, omission and authorial endorsement.⁸⁷⁹

There are enduring challenges relating to the production of a truly representative study of French women's heroism. The personal writings of working class women have, and continue to be, very difficult to come by. It is for this reason that chapter three was only able to evaluate the ways in which they were appropriated in the *imaginaire* and in official discourses. Though Marthe Richard did express some of the hardships associated with life in a *petit-bourgeois* family from Lorraine, she quickly emerged from these social and economic circumstances and found wealth. Both case-studies thus successfully gave us an impression of the responses of women from more elevated social classes and therefore create worthwhile links with much of chapter two's discussion of middle-class heroism. But they fail to interpret the documented and personal lived experience of the women described by observers like Marcelle Cappy as victim-heroes of the industrialised war.

⁸⁷⁶ Birkett and Wheelwright, p. 49.

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 56.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid.

As discussed in the introduction, the overall aim of this study was to garner a clear understanding of the ways in which female heroism in First World War France was represented and experienced. In spite of the above limitations, the two part structure has largely fulfilled this aim in enabling a comparative overview of dominant wartime discourses which filtered down from the hegemonic echelon alongside first-hand accounts of women who occupied heroic roles. This particular approach has revealed that there were a significant number of similarities between the ways in which women's wartime heroism was publicly 'prescribed' and personally experienced, particularly when it came to the interconnectivity between primary male heroism and secondary female heroism.

The two case study chapters did not present a direct 'response' to the dominant discourses outlined in chapters one to three, but instead introduced a 'bottom up' history focusing on the responses of two heroic women to broad heroic and unheroic stereotypes. And since much work has already been done on interpretations of female espionage and nursing by Tammy Proctor, Alison Fell and Margaret Darrow respectively, a brief acknowledgment of widespread interpretations of their war roles, rather than a longer discussion, was all that was required to frame Part Two. The specific roles occupied by Marthe Richard and Marthe Bibesco were only significant to a certain extent because the characteristics that they or others believed them to embody were interpreted with much more weight than the particularities of their jobs. For these reasons it would have been neither necessary nor original to mirror the roles discussed in Part One in the Part Two case studies.

There is, of course, more work to be done. On the basis that evidence presented in this study suggests that the association of womanhood with heroism remains indissolubly discordant, there would be clear scope for more work on the ways in which ideas about heroism were conveyed by women themselves in personal writings from different francophone conflicts. In the case of the Second World War, for example, this research would complement already-published women's histories such as Hanna Diamond's 1999 book *Women and the Second World War in France 1939-1948*. Diamond's book does use

oral testimony to give voice to experience, but her focus is on the extent to which their war role ended up affording French women the vote after the Liberation, rather than on ideals of heroism specifically. Equally, the Algerian War of Independence was a conflict during which both French and Algerian women heroically participated in the struggle for independence, sometimes resisting culture-defining tradition. Interesting potential research into the voices of female heroes from this colonial conflict would add to a significant body of work on women's engagement, and representations thereof, by Neil Macmaster, Juliette Danièle Djamila Amrane-Minne, Natalya Vince and Ryme Seferdjeli.

A study of first-hand accounts from heroic women in First World War Belgium, a country still vastly understudied, would also be extremely interesting. There are fascinating publications from women who went to Belgium from overseas to take on courageous and risky roles, such as American English teacher and relief worker Charlotte Kellogg. Kellogg's 1917 book *Women of Belgium: Turning Tragedy to Triumph* documented life with the *Commission for Relief in Belgium* before the United States entered the war on the Allied side. And Louise Mack, an Australian journalist also found herself in wartime Belgium working as a war correspondent for the *Evening News* and the *Daily Mail*. In 1915, Mack published her experiences in a memoir entitled *A Woman's Experiences in the Great War: An Australian Author's Clandestine Journey Through War-Torn Belgium*.

Both women would provide interesting transnational case studies of female heroism. Kellogg occupied a prominent position of devoted and heroic altruism as the only woman member of the *Commission* during the war. Further, she was a public figure who went on to be regarded for the rest of her life as a humanitarian hero of the First World War in Belgium and France. Kellogg was awarded the *Chevalier de l'Ordre de la Couronne*, the *Médaille de la Reine Elisabeth*, the *Médaille Commemorative du Comité National* and the *Médaille de la Reconnaissance Française*. Mack's heroism was attributable to her readiness to take real risks, including confrontation with the enemy during the bombardment of Antwerp in pursuit of the faithful documenting of war. A study of Mack's personal writings, along with Kellogg's personal correspondence which can be

found in the Kellogg-Dickie collection at Yale, would therefore provide a fascinating investigation into the ways in which women from overseas appraised their own heroic roles against the back-drop of the lesser-known Belgian war experience.

A final thought concerns the award of the *Légion d'honneur*. Described by *Paris Soir* in 1933 as 'le premier grade de notre grand ordre national',⁸⁸⁰ the *Légion* was in many ways considered decoration for heroic merit, and its conception evoked ancient military heroics, the award system having been structured by Napoleon in 1802 to mirror that of the Roman legion. The giving of this heroic decoration to Marthe Richard in 1933 was met with significant resistance, evident in the insistence amongst her 'ennemis' that it was not for Richard herself and was instead a posthumous honouring of Thomas Crompton's financial help in building of the *Petit Trianon* at Versailles.⁸⁸¹ The real reason remained hidden for the most part: that being Richard's 'services signalés aux intérêts français'.⁸⁸² Although Marthe Bibesco was never granted the *Légion d'Honneur* for her First World War heroism and instead received it in 1962 for her literary talent, as we have seen many of her colleagues, patients and friends campaigned for her to be awarded it around the same time as Richard received hers. And yet running alongside these supportive campaigns was a vicious rumour that she had been collaborating with the enemy all along.

Mary Louise Robert's research tells us that gender relations in France became all the more unstable in the interwar period, and there is evidence to suggest that officially decorating women as war heroes after 1918 was problematic, partly along these lines. This brings us to the conclusion that despite the attempts to heroise women evaluated in this study both in cultural representation and by female heroes themselves, lurking beneath the social and cultural processes defining the immediate post-war era and the passage of the years that followed, was a hegemonic agenda that continued to struggle with the public acknowledgement or perception of female heroism as part of the French war experience.

⁸⁸⁰ *Paris Soir*, 26 January 1933.

⁸⁸¹ Henry, p. 79.

⁸⁸² 'Memorandum', *Cabinet du préfet de police, dossier Marthe Richard*, 1 W 209-59468, APP.

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