Les Petites and *Die Postkarte*: The Images of Children in Great War European Postcards

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Introduction

From its appearance in the late nineteenth century as the brainchild of German postmaster general Heinrich von Stephan, the postcard experienced a vibrant golden age that included the era of the Great War. During this conflict, it became a crucial medium of social wartime communication, boosting morale at home and abroad with lighthearted imagery. For a soldier forced to sit in a trench for hours or days at a time, a postcard bearing the sweet face of a smiling baby could provide a welcome distraction. Upon further examination, one finds that World War I postcards depicting children, however kitschy or trivial they may seem, reflect shifting sentiments regarding the institution of the family, competing visions of masculinity, tensions between the battlefield and the home front, and anxiety towards the future of the nation. The symbols and messages that they employ indicate that these postcards are both expressions of national attitudes and reactions against the social upheaval associated with wartime.

This paper explores the images of children in postcards of German and French origin. By analyzing and comparing the themes apparent in a sample of German and French postcards published or mailed during World War I, the present study extracts the potential meanings conveyed through their images and posits the ways in which they may have affected those who sent, handled, and received them. The postcards of this era depict relationships between soldiers and civilians in ways that could have mitigated feelings of sadness, resentment, and uncertainty between the trenches and home front. Images of children cheerfully engaging in the war effort may have helped adults cope with the suffering inherent in total war. Many images propose an alternate or distorted reality onto which adults could project their fears and desires. Furthermore, the postcards analyzed in the present study indicate a departure from the Western European conceptualization of the child as an occupant of a separate, sacred sphere of society. German

postcards reflect these phenomena within the framework of a more conservative, masculinized, authoritarian state; postcards depicting family and children served to remind soldiers of the domestic expression of masculinity and the need for men to seek fulfillment in the home as well as in battle. As France faced both demographic decline and invasion, its postcards present messages related to the nation's precarious future and emphasize the child's role as both innocent victim and defiant participant in the war.

Postcards

Postcards, which emerged as a mode of communication in the last decades of the nineteenth century, became the social medium of the early twentieth century. Easier to send than a letter in an envelope and cheaper for transmitting current events than the daily newspaper, the postcard quickly exploded in popularity. Figures vary as to just how many postcards made their way around Europe in the years preceding and during World War I. John Fraser notes that 1,792,824,900 of them were posted in Germany in 1913 alone.[1] Allen Frantzen writes, "In Germany it is estimated that 27 billion pieces of mail were sent to and from the front during the war."[2] The sheer volume produced and circulated ensured that the content of postcard designs—be they photographs or illustrations—depicted a huge range of subject matter, from landscapes to caricatures to religious imagery. Postcards' saturation, availability, and immense popularity meant that they "reflected

1. John Fraser, "Propaganda on the Picture Postcard," *Oxford Art Journal* 3, no. 2 (1980): 42.

2. Allen Frantzen, *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the Great War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 159.

every popular emotion—patriotism, heroism, and plain boredom— more surely than any other medium."[3]

Such quantity and diversity have, however, seen uneven analyses on the part of historians. For many years they either left the topic to deltiologists (postcard collectors) or classified the postcard as a facet of popular arts useful in documenting socio-cultural studies.[4] Part of the difficulty in classifying such sources involves the split messages that postcards embody. The sender chooses the illustration to share with the addressee, but the message he or she writes is not necessarily related the picture in question. In other instances, however, the handwritten memo makes explicit reference to the images on the front. Readers of the document, lacking a direct link to the sender or addressee, must decide how to interpret these messages. This paper will focus on the illustrations and photographs rather than the individual messages inscribed by those who sent them. The messages on postcards' backs are remarkable in their own right, but their fronts are equally laden with meaning. The process of selecting a postcard likely entailed a degree of personal affinity— if not a meaningful reflection— on the subject matter it already contained. In this way, postcards' visual value raises myriad questions about the production and consumption of imagery during the Great War, as reflected in some historians' views.

Postcards' role in the dissemination of propaganda has been recognized and studied, albeit not to the extent of media like posters and radio. Fraser notes that the propaganda use of the postcard had been realized during the Boer War, as postcards so easily disseminated the images of

3. Barbara Jones and Bill Howell, *Popular Arts of the First World War* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1972), 107.

4. Christine Brocks, *Die bunte Welt des Krieges. Postkarten aus dem Ersten Weltkrieg 1914-1918* (Essen: Klartext, 2008), 14.

military parades and exhibitions, military technology, and public figures.[5] In this respect, it would be easy to frame picture postcards merely as artificial images imposed upon societies for the advancement of state goals. However, to do so would be an over-simplification. Most of these postcards were not government-produced or subsidized. Some were issued to raise funds for war-related causes,[6] but the overwhelming majority appear to originate from private publishers and vendors. More importantly, these postcards were not a medium uniformly forced upon an audience. By their very nature, postcards were consumed by individuals who selected and sent them with their own motivations and interpretations in mind. They are also a unique form of media in that they could continue to circulate for years after their initial printing, meaning that the reception and interpretation of each image could evolve over time. Therefore, while postcards may be considered vehicles of propaganda, it is important to note that any propaganda is only able to function when it when it speaks to values, ideals, and anxieties that are already present. Though postal censorship would have limited the use of postcards with lewd, deeply negative, or otherwise objectionable imagery, I argue that the ideologies expressed in postcards' artwork are largely sincere and accurate expressions of the public consciousness.

It is particularly interesting to study the postcards of the Great War era because of the vast increase in their use during this period. Fraser's analysis notes the significance of soldiers' correspondence in this process: "An almost captive market was thus created with millions of soldiers, taken away from home for the first time, gathered together for long periods at or just

5. Fraser, 40.

6. In the German series, a small number postcards was issued by associations like the *Vaterländischen Frauenvereins* (Patriotic Women's Association) or by other regional war relief agencies; in the French series studied here, no postcards are marked as such.

behind the Front."[7] These soldiers, Fraser adds, were often illiterate or only partially literate, so the brevity of the postcard, along with its affordability, visual appeal, and speed with which it passed through censorship screenings, made it the ideal medium of wartime communication.[8] Perhaps most importantly, soldiers were also exempt from paying for postage. Though postcards were subject to army censorship in both French[9] and German contexts,[10] the sheer volume of wartime correspondence prevented such measures from making any significant dent in postcard traffic.[11] In Fraser's conceptualization, the postcard's ability to be sent and enjoyed by such a broad audience and in such high density made it a defining characteristic of the Great War experience.

Not all scholars share Fraser's appreciation of the medium. In his examination of the cultural memory of the world wars, George Mosse explores the ways in which German society modified its worldview to cope with the war experience. He argues that a key element of this is through trivialization. Through this process, "the reality of the war was disguised and controlled, even if it was not transcended, and in this manner…[it] supported the myth of the war experience. Trivialization was one way of coping with war, not by exalting and glorifying it, but by making it familiar."[12] The everyday trappings of both public and private life upheld the process of

7. Frazer, 41.

8. Ibid.

9. Benjamin Gilles, "La Grande Guerre en images. Produire et diffuser. 1914-1918," in *La Grande Guerre: Une histoire Culturelle*, ed. Phillippe Poirrier (Dijon: Éditions Universitaires de Dijon, 2015), 236.

10. Roger Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany: Freiburg, 1914-1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 314.

11. Leonard V. Smith, "France" in *A Companion to World War I*, ed. John Horne (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 421.

12. George L. Mosse, *Fallen soldiers: reshaping the memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 127.

trivialization by presenting the war in a non-threatening way. Postcards, in their ubiquity, were no exception. Mosse specifically identifies postcards as instrumental in "sanitiz[ing] the war and depict[ing] its manageability."[13] However, he splits with Fraser by dismissing the vitality and emotional impact of postcards, referring to them as "bric-a-brac" and grouping them with "kitsch and trashy literature."[14]

Methodological Considerations

The sample analyzed in the present study was selected and catalogued from a personal collection of roughly 5,000 postcards based on the criteria of subject matter pertaining to children and family and evidence of use during the Great War. A textual analysis was conducted for a total of 111 postcards. 55 of these were determined to have been of German origin or used in German cultural contexts and 56 were determined to have been of French origin or used in French cultural contexts.

The present study, as previously mentioned, is concerned with the analysis and interpretation of images on the *recto*, or image side, of postcards, rather than the *verso*, which typically bears the address and sender's message. In the tradition of communications scholar Roland Barthes, meaning can be extracted from a single image by deconstructing its many parts—subjects, objects, symbols, colors, shapes, relationships, composition, media, and so forth.[15] Barthes argues that by making choices, from the framing of a photograph to the medium of a

13. Mosse, *Fallen*, 128.

14. Mosse, *Fallen*, 127.

15. Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 34.

drawing, producers of images deliberately imbue them with meaning;[16] furthermore, the "reading" of an image varies from viewer to viewer because each approaches a given image with different kinds of knowledge, including "practical, national, cultural, [and] aesthetic" understandings.[17] Because of this, the "language of the image" simultaneously includes the many meanings infused into the image by its creator and the many meanings received by those who view it.[18] The present study seeks to extract dominant meanings and potential interpretations of postcard images within the historical and cultural contexts of the Great War. Many postcards include captions, which are also considered here because of their power to "anchor" the images that they accompany. A caption anchors a given image by guiding the viewer's understanding; when this anchorage is ideological, writes Barthes, the caption directs the reader by "dispatching" a predetermined meaning to him or her.[19]

This study also follows the tradition of cultural history in the sense that it uses "cultural products" as historical evidence, "go[ing] beyond surface evaluations to consider the style, language, structure and absences and other latent meanings of the evidence."[20] Communications historian Bonnie Brennen argues that the application of the cultural history perspective to communications studies entails emphasizing the use of media technologies as social practices and

16. Barthes, 44.

17. Barthes, 46.

18. Barthes, 47.

19. Barthes, 39.

20. Bonnie Brennen, *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies (*New York: Routledge, 2013), 103.

cultural forms, and reinforces human agency in the communication process;[21] furthermore, by approaching communication technology and texts from a historical standpoint, one can "understand how changes in media influence society, as well as how changes in society impact the communication process."[22] Finally, the study takes a comparative approach to explore potential differences between French and German experiences of the Great War. According to social historian Raymond Grew, a comparative approach to has the power to uncover "interrelationships usually overlooked," as well as discourage historians from the pitfalls of determinism or cultural exceptionalism.[23]

The Postcard in Germany

In order to properly examine the representations of children on German postcards, it is essential to understand the state of gender relations in Germany in the years preceding and during the Great War. German cultural historian George Mosse's analysis of the postcard briefly acknowledges its presentations of German masculinity. Most importantly for this study, he notes the dissonance between the way postcards depict fathers as "family men" and the glorious manhood stridently celebrated in other facets of German culture. In the years between 1870 and 1914 there emerged a renewed defense of traditional masculinity that emphasized physical health and fitness along with virtue, chastity, and self-control. He attributes this re-examination of German manhood to the anxiety caused by challenges to the status quo, such as the women's rights

21. Brennen, 96.

22. Brennen, 98.

23. Raymond Grew, "The Case for Comparing Histories," *The American Historical Review* 85, no. 4 (1980), 769.

and socialist movements, that began to accelerate at the end of the nineteenth century.[24] In most German households, fathers expressed their masculinity through an authoritarian parenting style. German sociologist Hans Munchow hypothesizes that in response to social transitions, middle-class men clung to their ability to exert power within the home, ruling the family as an "Übervater." Consequently, the *Wandervogel* youth movement that emerged during this era pushed back by emphasizing activities beyond the private sphere. The adolescents and young adults drawn to the movement emphasized liberation from the confines of the family and the expression of masculinity through physical fitness and moral integrity.[25] In this respect, German youth at the *fin de siècle* redefined masculinity in a way that rejected the traditional family unit, which had stood at the center of Western European social thought for much of the nineteenth century.

To further complicate the popular understanding of masculinity, the onset of World War I hijacked the idea of manliness as German society adjusted to function during wartime. While the associations of manliness with physical strength, honor, and bravery were by no means new to European society, World War I invited young men to explore "a fascination with manliness" en masse.[26] The war also reaffirmed the marriage of masculinity, militarism, and patriotism that had been loosely taking form during the nineteenth century. During the war, soldiers believed that one's virility was expressed through strength and valor on the battlefield. Mosse observes that masculinity also was celebrated through the camaraderie among fellow soldiers,[27] the promise of

24. George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 79.

25. Tom Taylor, "Images of Youth and the Family in Wilhelmine Germany: Toward a Reconsideration of the German Sonderweg," *German Studies Review* 15 (1992), 57.

26. Mosse, *Fallen*, 65.

27. Mosse, *Image*, 108.

which became an impetus for German youth to volunteer for service.[28] On the battlefield itself, the very nature of trench warfare opened the door for masculinity to take on a more aggressive slant, writes Mosse. Contemporaries of the Great War described the waging of trench warfare as an opportunity for men to release their animal instincts.[29] Reflecting on the war, one right-wing German author wrote that "Greatness derives from danger; ordinary life means strangulation."[30] This vision of masculinity that emerged during the conflict was suited to the fulfilment of the goals of the German military; however, it had no place off of the battlefield.

It is within this context that German masculinity came into crisis. During and immediately after the war, civilians and servicemen alike "celebrated a militarized, martial masculinity and nostalgia for comradeship... masculinity became a serious problem as both cultural elites and ordinary men struggled to define the male ideal in the face of psychological trauma."[31] The vision of German manhood that emphasized personal fulfilment through attacking the enemy and dying alongside one's friends did not bode well for the German nuclear family. Under these conditions, postcards bearing the images of children and domestic bliss could serve as reminders to soldiers at the front that their purpose lay not just in glorious battle, but in the joys of fatherhood.

Many German postcards feature images of children and family in ways that suggest the home is not a place to escape from, but rather something to escape to. In stark contrast to the resentment of the private sphere that the *Wandervogel* expressed, these cards indicate that the home

28. Mosse, *Fallen*, 24.

29. Mosse, *Image*, 108.

30. Mosse, *Image*, 114.

21. Jason Crouthamel, "Cross-dressing for the fatherland: sexual humor, masculinity and German soldiers in the First World War," *First World War Studies* 2, no. 2 (2011): 195.

is a refuge. A prime example of this is one postcard entitled *Mein Heim, Mein Alle* (plate 1). The front features a semi-colorized photograph in which a little boy embraces his uniform-clad father. The soldier gazes up at his adoring wife, who clutches her bosom with one hand and a bouquet of flowers with the other. A poem typeset in fraktur appears below, reading, "My home, my everything in the world,/ O that destiny has given me/this great earthly happiness!/ I include it in my prayers,/ My home should be my Eden,/ a little piece of paradise!" Messages like this could not be any clearer that the home should be men's priority, and the battlefield was but a temporary station of life.

Similarly, other postcards proposed a vision of masculinity that was warm, paternal, and very hands-on with children. One depicts a uniformed officer enjoying a Yuletide evening with his family (plate 2). In the glow of the "Tannenbaum," he sits behind his son and helps him learn to shoot a toy cork gun. This image depicts the father as a hands-on mentor rather than as a stern authoritarian. He is cheerful and affectionate, eager to share his military know-how with his son. This scene offers an alternative vision of manhood that involves warmth and nurturing—both typically feminine attributes. Conventional manliness is not entirely abandoned: the play that father and son engage in is essentially militaristic, and the boy's mother, holding a baby, still supervises the play from the adjacent room. Both of these postcards, among many others that depict similar themes, suggest to the male viewer that men do not have to choose between their duty to the Fatherland and their duty to the family: both can go hand-in-hand. They offer an alternative form of masculinity that can be simultaneously strong and paternal. At the same time, the images of children and infants also served as assurances of marital fidelity.

The affirmation of trust between deployed husbands and their wives is one way in which postcards could mitigate tensions between the home front and the front lines. These tensions arose

after the excitement and patriotism of 1914 had been dulled by years of warfare, which Germans widely felt ought to have taken only a few months. Soldiers at the front resented civilians for being shielded from the atrocities they were subject to in the trenches. A frontline chaplain visiting the city of Freiburg in 1918 read aloud "Seven Requests from the Front to Those at Home," urging civilians to be more grateful and selfless, to and participate in "less gossip, nitpicking, and complaining."[32] Soldiers would sometimes write to the local newspaper, as did one who urged Freiburgers to "hold out, economize, and shut up!"[33] Mark Hewitson describes a "growing political rift between the fighting front, where soldiers felt abandoned and misunderstood, and the home front, which was believed by many soldiers to be characterized by indifference, profiteering, revolution, or treason."[34] At the same time, bitterness brewed amongst civilians towards the well-fed troops. Struggling in the face of scarcity and inflated food prices, civilians were reminded that "prince army has the last word" as army contractors bought up huge quantities of food.[35] Thus, postcards, as the chief line of communication between soldiers and civilians, had the power to either worsen or alleviate these rising hostilities.

Postcards provided responses to soldiers' frustrations towards the home front through a number of themes. Common scenes feature children praying for their deployed fathers, typically with the help of their mothers. In one (plate 3), a mother and her infant son clasp their hands. Super-imposed above their heads, almost as though appearing in a thought bubble, is the image of

32. Chickering, 71.

33. Ibid.

34. Mark Hewitson, "Wilhelmine Germany," in *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, ed. James Retallak (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 55.

35. Chickering, *Freiburg*, 162.

a German sailor. He looks down at his wife and son, but still proudly holds the flag of the imperial navy. The card reads, “God Protect the Father! For the father, who stands out in the field, the child looks up to heaven and prays.” For soldiers, postcards like these served as reassurance that their families had not forgotten them and were offering up prayers for their protection.[36] For civilians, they served as a reminder that their duties on the home front included this spiritual obligation. This postcard also conveys the notion of spiritual guardianship— the family prays to God, who protects the soldier, who is protecting the homeland and his family.

Postcards also mediated soldier-civilian relations by depicting homecoming as a joyful, seamless transition. One captioned “In the homeland, in the homeland, there is a reunion!” portrays a family’s unfettered joy as three brothers return from the front (plate 4). Draped in wreaths and greenery, they greet their parents, a young woman in her late teens, and a young girl. The way the artist drew the young female figures could cast them instead as the wife and child of the eldest brother, thus ensuring a greater appeal to viewers with different family backgrounds. Two of the soldiers kneel at their mother’s feet; one kisses her hand. The other is embraced by the young woman while he raises his sword triumphantly. This postcard was produced in 1914, at which time it was widely believed that the war would be over by Christmas. Such illustrations would still have been in circulation throughout the war’s duration, during which they may have been received with different attitudes. Despite this, the optimistic scenario would have signaled to civilians and soldiers alike that after months or years of warfare, a blissful homecoming was on the horizon and all of their hardships would be over.

36. Frantzen, 183.

Postcards also served as windows into the lives of soldiers for civilians to view, and vice versa. Scenes from the front lines were always "sanitized,"[37] of course: a dying soldier would appear falling in a dignified and bloodless posture, not blown apart by a shell or draped over barbed wire. Similarly, food issues would be glossed over with humor.[38] In one postcard, children can be seen happily reading with their mother, who is calmly and successfully maintaining the home and family (plate 5). It is possible that postcards depicted traditional gender roles in an effort to assure soldiers of the survival of patriarchal norms. Postcards invariably portray women as domestic beings—no postcards in the present study allude to the migration of women to factories and other public realms. This transition was, in fact, met with a great deal of fear and anxiety by men. Despite the desperate need for women to fill thousands of jobs vacated by soldiers, women who worked in factories were sometimes called profiteers or *Totengräbers*, or gravediggers, for benefiting from men's absence.[39] Images depicting the continued adherence to gender norms may have been a subtle tactic for diffusing these and other tensions.

As for affirming the normalcy of childhood, postcards seemed to have served the opposite purpose. This may be due, in part, to the relatively recent evolution of how childhood was conceived in the European imagination. While in centuries prior, childhood was seen merely as pre-adulthood, it came to be understood as something delicate and precious during the nineteenth century. According to Angelika Schaser, "among the urban and middle class, childhood became a distinct and privileged stage of life. Children were distinguished sharply from adults and…The

37. Mosse, *Fallen*, 129.

38. Tim Grady, *A Deadly Legacy: German Jews and the Great War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 53.

39. Françoise Thébaud, "The Great War and the Triumph of Sexual Division," in *A History of Women: Toward a Cultural Identity in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Françoise Thébaud, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 37.

emotional relationship between parents and children was cultivated with particular care."[40] Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann observes that the emergence of nurseries in bourgeois homes "grew out of, and reinforced an understanding of children as vulnerable beings who needed to be protected from physical or psychological intimacy with adults."[41] With increased attachment to children came the urge to shield them from any ugliness experienced in the adult world.

Not long after this ideology had taken hold, German civilians found themselves witness to a so-called total war, which by nature affects every member of society. Children were no exception to this rule. Shortages of clothes and shoes were problematic for growing children, as were the disappearances of male authority figures as fathers and male teachers were called to the front.[42] At the outset of the war, children's schoolbooks resembled "manuals of war," and military themes infiltrated primer alphabets, songs, and games.[43] The school superintendent of Freiburg instructed teachers "to foster an understanding among children for the great and serious times in which we live" by teaching everything from the composition of the army and navy to the daily course of events at the front.[44] This civic education manifested itself through the ways in which children engaged with their communities: as Chickering poignantly observes, "…children occupied a

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40. Angelika Schaser, "Gendered Germany," in *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, ed. James Retallack (New York, Oxford University Press, 1990), 131-132.

41. Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann, "The German Family between Private Life and Politics," trans. and ed. by Mary Jo Maynes and Michele Mouton. In *A History of Private Life, Volume V: Riddles of Identity in Modern Times*, ed. Antoine Prost and Gerard Vincent (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1991), 506.

42. Chickering, *Freiburg*, 501.

43. Roger Chickering, "Militarism and Radical Nationalism," in *Imperial Germany 1871-1918*, ed. James Retallack (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 131-132.

44. Chickering, *Freiburg*, 502.

special place in the symbolic economy of sacrifice. Their innocence was uncompromised and their patriotism free of calculation. In both respects they confronted adults as precepts."[45] Popular imagery would in turn apply such precepts; in doing so, the innocence of childhood was at once co-opted and violated by wartime culture.

This principle was manifest in postcards that seemed to chastise adults for their reluctance to make sacrifices for the war effort. Some did so using humor (plate 6). Here, a naked little boy with cherubic curls and a crooked smile sits on a chamber pot. He wears a military cap at a jaunty angle and has a mallet slung over his shoulder. He holds a boot upside down between his knees as though he is repairing it. The caption, *"Zivildienst: Wird man erst uns zum Hilfsdienst holden, wollen wir die fiende schon versohlen"* translates as "Civil Service: You will be the first to help us, Let's kick the enemies' behinds! (The word *versohlen* is used as a pun here: it can mean spank or wallop, but also resole.) This postcard uses bathroom humor and boyish charm to show adult civilians that even a little boy young enough to be toilet training is still willing to do his part.

Other postcards were not so cheerful. In one entitled "The Struggle of the Ration Card," two little curly-haired children wearing nightdresses confront the issue of food rationing (plate 7). One holds a piece of paper and wears a concerned expression. Her companion comforts her with an embrace, saying, "If the ration card is not enough, since we are small, shouldn't there be enough for us?" This postcard poses a scenario to viewers in which two little children feel the pressure of wartime rationing, but still do their part to conserve resources. Even if the ration card designates only a small amount of food for the family, these children, knowing their bellies are smaller, resolve to eat less. As Chickering emphasizes, special milk rations for children point to adults'

45. Chickering, *Freiburg*, 500.

keen awareness of "the particular vulnerability of their young bodies to the ravages of war."[46] A scene like this elicits sympathy, but also suggests to adults that if children can adjust their diets, they could as well. It is important to note that few postcards could make outright social commentary on the war. While this example references civilian hardship, its message promotes the acceptance of wartime mandates; any brazen critique of the military or war effort would not have made it past postal censorship.

Furthermore, the role of the child as victim was co-opted for the purpose of international propaganda. A number of cards were published depicting German soldiers interacting gently and kindly with children of enemy nations. All followed a similar template: military men in full uniform would sit with children on their knees. An ironic caption would refer to them as "German Barbarians" and indicate the nationality of the children in question (plate 8). These posed shots were printed in direct response to allegations from Allied powers that German troops had behaved like barbarians in foreign territory.[47] Allied postcards depicted German "Huns" committing these atrocities, even going so far as to illustrate soldiers skewering babies.[48] In theory, the international circulation of such images would have given the German military some positive publicity. Though these postcards would have circulated throughout Europe, it is less likely that they worked as international advertisements of German benevolence so much as they affirmed domestic beliefs about the heroism of the soldier.

46. Chickering, *Freiburg*, 501.

47. Sophie De Schaepdrijver, "The 'German Atrocities' of 1914," *British Library World War I*, accessed March 2, 2018, www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/civilian-atrocities-german-191.

48. Danielson, 19.

The most prominent theme among the German postcards in this sample is the child at play. Playtime bears great symbolic significance as both a means of enculturation and a marker of childhood as a distinct stage of life. Toys are significant in their ability to reflect a given culture's values and preoccupations; this is particularly evident for German boys, who were introduced to the trappings of militarism at a very young age. As early as the 1920s, cultural historians observed that military toys captured the imagination of boys and men in the years preceding World War I "because of their technological exactitude, association with the nation-state, and the wide-spread belief that men could make their own history."[49] As such, the play depicted in German postcards mirrors the roles that adults perform in wartime. Little boys wear military uniforms and wield miniature weapons (plate 9). By recasting the battlefield experience as child's play, postcards turned warfare into something charming and non-threatening to adults.[50] This is not to say that children did not play war in real life—in fact, that was likely an everyday occurrence. However, the miniaturization of true-to-life uniforms and weapons is entirely a fabrication of the adult psyche: when children play at war of their own volition, they are content to use their imaginations and happily brandish sticks as swords and guns.[51]

Little girls were depicted at play in postcards as well, but in very different ways. In depictions of war play, little girls appear as accessories to miniature soldiers, sometimes under a protecting arm (plate 10) or holding a bouquet of flowers (plate 11). In other images, they perform domestic behaviors, presumably mimicking that of their mothers. One picture presents a little girl,

49. Bryan Ganaway, *Toys, Consumptions, and Middle-Class Childhood in Imperial Germany, 1871-1918* (Oxford, UK: Peter Lang, 2009), 208.

50. Brocks, 49-50.

51. Peter Lukasch, *Der muss haben, ein Gewehr: Krieg, Militarismus, und patriotische Erziehung in Kindermieden vom 18. Jhdt. bis in die Gegenwart* (Norderstedt: Sachbuch, 2012), 155.

roughly four years old, sitting in a chair with knitting in her lap. Her hands are clasped in prayer and her foot rocks a baby doll in a cradle. The inscription reads "A Future Little German Mother: Dear God, let him grow up big and strong" (plate 12). This image alludes to the universal maternal desire for babies to be healthy, but in doing so it also expresses women's role within a militarist society and their consequent vision of their sons' futures. It also reflects the expectation of young girls to display conventionally maternal behaviors at a very early age. This, too, affirms the survival of post-Industrial Revolution gender norms, though this case extends those values to the women of Germany's future rather than its present.

The stark contrast in how boys and girls appear on postcards mirrors the differences in the gendered war experience of real children. Little boys identified strongly with male relatives at the front and drew pictures that emphasized gore and violent action. Meanwhile, little girls struggled with the damage the strain that of war placed on family relationships: "While sons tried to be heroic like their fathers and brothers, daughters mirrored the worry, grief, and passivity of their mothers."[52] However, for boys and girls alike, the war had harmful psychological and developmental effects. Compared to pre-1914 statistics, German children were as much as 12% underweight; occurrences of stomach ailments, rickets, and tuberculosis all increased, as did nervous disorders.[53] The imagery of children, however, suggests no such suffering. This may indicate that German adults struggled to face children's suffering or used popular art to deny this

52. Robert Weldon Whalen, *Bitter Wounds: German Victims of the Great War, 1914-1939*, 77-80; reprinted in *World War I & European Society: A Sourcebook*, ed. Marilyn Shevin-Coetzee and Frans Coetzee (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1995), 153.

53. Ibid.

sad reality. The cartoons and staged photographs used on postcards may have been adults' attempts to create a reality in which war was a positive, exciting experience for children.

Nearly every depiction of children on German postcards supports this explanation. Postcards feature artificial scenarios created by adults for the projection of adult emotions. They aim to sanitize and trivialize the war experience by applying children's images to difficult topics. One such topic is the departure of young men from their homes to take their places at the front. One illustration shows a little boy and girl performing a farewell scene (plate 13). The little girl waves her handkerchief, smiling, as the little boy in uniform departs on foot. The spike on his helmet and barrel of his gun are adorned with flowers and sprigs of berries. His sister bids him farewell not with grief, but with pride. Below the illustration is a poem that reads, "The sister's hand decorates the rifle and helmet of the little warrior with flowers, 'Bravely fight for the fatherland and return as victor.'" The cheerful attitudes of the cartoon children and optimistic text presents the experience of parting, which for many adults would be fraught with grief and anxiety, as something charming and sentimental, redirecting their focus away from the dangers of modern warfare.

The Postcard in France

French postcards, too, depict children in a variety of contexts in order to bolster the spirits of adult senders and recipients, but do so in ways that are markedly different from their German counterparts. Many French postcards employ overt pronatalist themes—in other words, they depict the joys of parenthood to encourage couples to have children in spite of the hardships of wartime. Others depict the victimization of children during wartime to assert France's moral superiority over its German invaders, while still others centralize the innocence and generosity of children to inspire adults to remain optimistic in a bleak world. By responding both to demographic decline

and a precarious national morale, French postcards incorporated children into the mythology of republican patriotism and reminded adults of their duties to both family and country.

As in the German case, the recent history of French masculinity and femininity and the interactions thereof provides important insights into postcards' gendered iconography. In nineteenth-century France, the differences between men and women were a matter of obsession. During this time, the French "conceived conjugal heterosexuality and the familial model that it implied not just as a natural institution, but as a crucible of society...[they saw] marriage as a way to anchor male individuals in the social order."[54] Prominent French sociologist Emile Durkheim argued that men and women's differences "fueled their desire to be completed in and by each other."[55] It is within this context that the fulfilment of male and female gender roles, particularly within the contexts of romance and family, became a recurrent theme in popular art.

French masculinity was not understood as its own, distinct phenomenon, but rather as one half of the male-female dichotomy; Durkheim, for instance, defined masculinity by its lack of femininity.[56] As the *père de famille*, the Frenchman presided over his home in a manner essentially identical to that of men across Western Europe. One element unique to the French case, however, is the association of masculine personhood with citizenship, a lasting legacy of the French Revolution. Furthermore, as Dorit Geva observes, the French state perceived men not as autonomous individuals, but as citizens who had both the right and the obligation to support and

54. Judith Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity in France, 1870-1920* (London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 11.

55. Surkis, 147.

56. Surkis, 147.

represent dependents; male citizenship doubled as "familial deputation."[57] In these ways, nineteenth century French masculinity was largely defined through relationships: namely, the complementing of one's wife, the leadership of the family, and the symbolic engagement in the political process. The emphasis on what sociologists now call gender performance meant that "masculinity was explicitly cast as being more of a personal project than an anatomical guarantee."[58] Essentially, each man was responsible for behaving in ways that affirmed he was properly male— dutiful, patriotic, and virile.

This framework was rattled during the *Belle Époque*, when domestic and foreign crises called into question what it meant to be a Frenchman. Christopher Forth explores at length the most notable of these, the Dreyfus affair, which he calls an "arena for the contest of masculinities."[59] This controversy created a social rift that defined men as either Dreyfusards or anti-Dreyfusards. Anti-Dreyfusards presented their attacks on the opposition by attacking the masculinity of these so-called "feeble" intellectuals. They instead offered a male identity defined by negatives: not Jewish, not sensitive, not hysterical, not cerebral.[60] Though Dreyfus was ultimately pardoned, the anti-Dreyfusard's vision of male identity had been widely accepted, and masculinity was "painted as a virtue to be attained through physical discipline, and which stood to be emasculated not just by Jews, but by the excessive decadence of the late nineteenth century."[61]

57. Dorit Geva, *Conscription, Family, and the Modern State: A Comparative Study of France and the United States*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 28.

58. Christopher E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2004), 9.

59. Forth, 237

60. Forth, 63.

61. Geva, 65.

The impact of the military on social life in this domestic matter, combined with the rise of colonialism, militarism, and nationalism across Europe, deepened the affiliation between masculinity and the military.[62] This trend was affirmed by the resurgence of the duel during the years of the Third Republic, a practice which necessitated the display of violence and valor for the defense of one's masculine dignity.[63]

The declaration of war in August 1914 prompted the celebration of what French social historian Françoise Thébaud calls "ancient male myths" in which women remain home while men venture forth to fight and conquer.[64] Anticipating the experience of warfare glorified in French history textbooks, Frenchmen were as shocked at what they found at the front as were their German counterparts. The experience of mechanized warfare was devoid of valor or heroism, and Frenchmen found that life in the trenches was "an impotent, anonymous existence."[65] Keylor observes the irony of this emasculating experience as juxtaposed to the term "poilu," or "hairy one." This nickname, which became synonymous with the French soldier, references both physical masculinity, and by extension, virility, and thereby connotes bravery. [66] The name is attributed to

62. Forth specifically identifies sport, colonialism, and warfare as "compensatory tactics" that were "poor substitutes indeed" for the adventurous masculine lifestyle advertised by tales of knights and explorers.

63. Geva, 65.

64. Thébaud, 72.

52. William R. Keylor, "France and the First World War," in *The Transformation of Modern France*, ed. William B. Cohen (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 203.

66. Ibid.

Balzac's *Le Médecin de Campagne*, in which a select group of French soldiers are deemed *assez poilu*— hairy enough—for a particularly dangerous mission.[67]

Even as masculinity was confronted by the experience of combat, the divisions between men and women became still more pronounced. From the time of the French Revolution, cultural attitudes towards women were contradictory at best. On one hand, French culture dealt heavily in the symbols of Marianne and Joan of Arc, and the nation refers to itself as *la patrie*, a masculine term made grammatically feminine.[68] On the other, women were seen as potentially subversive and possibly predisposed to the opposition of republican values: "As a potentially corrupting force that worked through seduction rather than rational persuasion, women threatened to circulate the contagion of anti-republican thought, perhaps turning their husbands, or, worse still, their sons against it." [69] Masculine messages and attitudes reduced women to either virtuous mothers or sinister temptresses. In turn, these mutually exclusive stereotypes contributed to women's difficulty to engage successfully in the public sphere.

Just as society juggled contradictory attitudes towards women, soldiers at the front regarded them with ambivalence. To men at the front, writes Thébaud, woman symbolized "the soldier's helpmate, the mother of his children, the archangel who made it possible to conceive of a future away from the horror and chaos of the present... Yet she was also the subject of the soldier's nightmares, constantly suspected of infidelity."[70] As in Germany, female wartime

67. Walker, Julian, "Slang Terms at the Front," The British Library, January 30, 2014, www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/slang-terms-at-the-front.

68. Marie-Monique Huss, *Histoires de famille: cartes postales et culture de guerre* (Paris: Noesis, 2000), 186.

69. Forth, 145.

70. Thébaud, 39.

employment was met with frustration and, at times, ferocity. Women's work was less of a step towards liberation than historians may have previously argued, as the war gave rise to a "complex symbolic system that gave economic, social, and cultural priority to soldiers at the front."[71]

The relationship between the French state and gender is most striking as it pertains to the matter of pronatalism. In the French case, concerns regarding demographic stagnation had been raised as early as the seventeenth century.[72] During the nineteenth century, this became a veritable crisis among the elite, including politicians and academics, amounting to an obsession with promoting reproduction. This decline in population had serious implications for France's influence on the European stage. French legislators referred to the 'grave national peril' of depopulation and to France's need of babies "for its defense and maintenance."[73] Such rhetoric indicates that France's obsession with demographic decline was just as political as it was social and economic, as further evidenced by the efforts of French legislators to strike a balance between promoting defense and promoting the family.

The evolution of legislation pertaining to both military service and childbirth in the first decade of the twentieth century tells the story of a state attempting to balance two sources of intense anxiety: defense and demography. In 1905, a conscription bill symbolically affirmed a universal commitment of all men to serve their country; however, it still made some allowances for the care of families. Shortly thereafter, a 1911 policy permitted fathers with at least four children to skip their obligation to the active reserves and instead directly serve in the *armée*

71. Thébaud, 43.

72. Geva, 58.

73. Roderick Phillips, *Society, State, and Nation in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 54.

territorial, a force predominately staffed by elderly servicemen that entailed little training and rarely mobilized.[74] In 1913, shortly after the creation of legislation offering aid to large families and expectant mothers, a new law increased mandatory military service from two to three years while reducing the age of recruitment from twenty to nineteen. By ensuring that the increased service would not delay the creation of families, this decision "gave new legitimacy to the view that men's reproduction was of prime importance and should be supported by the state."[75] The relationship between military and family, combined with evolving notions of gender and the ever-present anxiety towards demographic decline, are all apparent in the postcards of the Great War era.

Mobilization in the summer of 1914 "strengthened family feelings and revived the myth of the man as the protector of the motherland and loved ones,"[76] but posed a serious problem: couples were urged to grow their families, but were separated by both time and space. While there was an initial surge of marriages at the onset of war as couples scrambled to set their affairs in order, war was very bad for marriage rates. From 1904-1913, France saw an average of approximately 320,000 marriages per year; during the war, this dropped to about 160,000. In the aggregate, this means approximately 800,000 projected marriages did not take place.[77] This, predictably, was a grave blow to demographic growth.

74. Geva, 67.

75. Geva, 71.

76. Thébaud, 26.

77. Clementine Vidal-Naquet, "La grande guerre des couples," in *La Grande Guerre: une histoire culturelle*, ed. Phillippe Poirrier, (Dijon: Universitaires de Dijon, 2015), 164.

Judging once again from pre-war statistics, approximately 1.3-1.6 million projected births did not happen during the war, an amount comparable to France's battlefield losses.[78] Birthrates remained low for the duration of the conflict with the exception of spikes nine months after the war's onset and the periods of leave before the major battles of Verdun and the Somme.[79] In addition to the obvious distance between wives and their deployed husbands, birthrates were impacted by the emotional and psychological impacts of total war. Phillips points to many couples' decision to postpone creating their family until the uncertainty of the war years had passed;[80] Thébaud proposes that women "often had neither the heart nor the strength to give birth under wartime conditions."[81] To address these dire circumstances, postcards—ubiquitous, eye-catching, and democratic—were the perfect tool for spreading pronatalist messages to the population at large.

Marie-Monique Huss has already conducted extensive research into the role of postcards within the context of pronatalism. Huss frames demographic decline through the lens of French identity, writing that "just as, at the front, the most crucial problem was felt to be one of insufficient numbers, so, on the home front, Frenchness seemed to be under attack because not enough babies were being born...It seems that in French popular culture the quality of Frenchness was almost indissociable from the idea of quantity."[82] She observes the way in which postcards bridged the

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78. Vidal-Naquet, 165.

79. Jay Winter, "The European Family and the Two World Wars," in *The History of the European Family: Volume Three,* ed. David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbagli, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 159.

80. Phillips, 100.

81. Thébaud, 52.

82. Marie-Monique Huss, "Pronatalism and the Popular Ideology of Postcards in Wartime France: the evidence of the picture postcard," in *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work, and Welfare in*

gap between the erudite world of intellectuals, sociologists, and activists and the more grounded world of the common man by circulating and celebrating pronatalist themes on a massive scale.[83] Huss' exploration of these themes, which include everything from depictions of marriage and the upbringing of future soldiers to agricultural motifs and phallic symbols, all amount to an invaluable framework for this analysis.

One defining feature of French Great War-era postcards is their frequent allusions to procreation, often achieved through somewhat suggestive illustrations. While a sender or recipient may be entertained by the risqué subject matter, these postcards all pose the idea that the physical act of love was both enjoyable and productive. In not so subtle terms, countless postcards propose that soldiers spend what little time they have at home to procreate, often with the use of vignettes that created a romantic narrative. One of many postcards entitled *Suites de Permission* follows a common template (plate 14). A soldier and his wife are depicted separately, but clearly longing for the other's company; then, the viewer catches a glimpse of the overtures to lovemaking. The timeline jumps ahead to the couple's tender farewell as our soldier dutifully returns to the front. All of these scenes are in miniature, subordinate to the central image of a baby, the prized result of this encounter, adorned with flowers. Beneath the baby, a poem reads, "Sweet little angel, born on a day of delight, albeit fleeting, your second father is love and France is your second mother." A similar postcard depicts the nearly identical sequence but differs from the former in how it presents its result (plate 15). This baby, instead of lying sweetly amongst flowers and blankets, is held aloft by his uniformed father and stands at attention. The babe wears nothing but his father's

Europe 1914-1918, eds. Richard Wall and Jay Winter (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 329.

83. Huss, "Pronatalism...Wartime France," 332.

helmet as he salutes with one hand and holds a miniature French flag in the other. Scattered phrases accompany each scene: “To my sweetheart... Good news... Finally alone... sweet leave... Always for FRANCE!” In these images, lovemaking is clearly met with great anticipation, but not for its own sake; rather, the baby produced by these sequences is presented as the prize for this behavior. According to these and similar images, babies are always the happy answer to a “profound desire” for a child—unwanted pregnancies are seemingly nonexistent.[84]

Other postcards use folktales and myths regarding the origin of babies to emphasize the joy of procreation. One such story suggests that babies emerge from cabbages (plate 16.) This nod to France’s pastoral culture is reiterated by the nickname frequently used in reference to soldiers’ offspring, *Graine de Poilu* (literally, the seed of the soldier). Another favorite origin of babies are eggs, from which babies emerge fully dressed and ready to fight the Germans (plate 17). Huss also notes the significance of the stork as both the traditional bringer of babies and a symbol of the fiercely contested territory of Alsace.[85] While the adult senders and recipients of these postcards know exactly how babies are made, the use of myths that are commonly told to curious children reaffirms the charm of parenthood.

Babies are depicted as their parents’ greatest joy and simultaneously as gifts to France. For women, childbearing was cast as a public service and patriotic duty nearly comparable to serving in the military. To some pronatalist activists, it was a “blood tax” that “established a sort of rough justice between the sexes” – men served the state by fighting and dying, while women served the state by producing children.[86] Many postcards give outright instructions for couples to serve

84. Huss, *Histoires de famille*, 175.

85. Huss, “Pronatalism...Wartime France,” 348.

86. Thébaud, 52.

France in this way with captions like “Let’s do our bit for repopulation.”[87] More commonly, postcards instead surround images of the infant the infant with patriotic symbols. They often lay on or near flag, are swaddled in red, white, and blue, and wear bonnets reminiscent of the French Revolution. On one postcard captioned “A little brother for France,” a young girl wearing a calot proudly presents her infant brother. The baby lies in a cradle that, upon closer examination, is in fact a giant red, white, and blue egg. Even his sister, who would be oblivious to matters of demography and procreation, is eager to show the nation that her little brother can one day defend the nation in ways she never will (plate 18).

In persuading men and women to procreate for the sake of France, these postcards reflect the scapegoating and devaluation of women characterized during the demographic crisis and, later, the Great War. While women struggled to balance their roles as workers, providers, and mothers, their male counterparts at the front described them in their newspapers and correspondence with degrading sexual language.[88] The reduction of women to mere baby-producers by demographers and to sexual objects by men is evident in the artwork on postcards. Whether or not a given postcard alludes to sex itself or invokes a myth regarding babies’ origin, women are not revered as mothers so much as they are seen as a means to an end. The vignettes explored earlier feature women’s role in intercourse, but then babies seem to simply appear and are celebrated in their own right. The French postcards in this sample rarely depict babies being held or nurtured by their mothers; while these babies are all obviously treasured and well cared for, they frequently appear alone or are otherwise presented by their fathers.

87. Huss, “Pronatalism...Wartime France,” 340.

88. Thébaud, 50.

One explanation for this could be anxiety towards mothers' influence over their sons. According to Forth, "there was grave concern that even the few male children who were being born might not grow up to be the right kind of men." Doctors, educators, and authors complained that women instinctively heaped too much affection onto their sons, causing them to be weak, overly sensitive adults.[89] One French father, Henri Didon, wrote that mothers stifled boys' martial impulses by discouraging them from playing sports, thereby robbing them of the values and skills that would one day help defend the nation.[90] As children were increasingly viewed through the lenses of masculinity and militarism, it is possible that postcards avoided images of the doting mother and the weakness that may have implied. Ultimately, these cards nearly always attribute successful creation of children to the abilities of the father: *Bravo, Poilu!*

Aside from the demographic crisis, the images of children on postcards speak to the ways in which children and their likenesses were assumed into and manipulated by a society in total war. Both in real life and in fictitious portrayals, French children became part of what Leonard Smith refers to as "culture wars": "At first, children seem like puzzling candidates for mobilization, as ineligible either for combat or industrial labor. But who more easily appreciated the moral purity of the French cause, and who could better exemplify it?"[91] While real French children suffered from the effects of total war, their images were used in popular art to help adults understand and frame the now baffling world in which they lived.

For example, children were perfect metaphors for helping adults understand foreign affairs and alliances. The practice of using children to represent nations is significant, though not unique

89. Forth, 147.

90. Forth, 149.

91. Smith, 422.

to France. One common trope is the portrayal of allied nations as a cheerful group of children (plate 19). On this card, France, Great Britain, Italy, and Russia are personified as beaming young boys. Images such as these affirmed that the relationships that had been orchestrated by diplomats would be echoed in warm sentiments among the citizens of different nations. These cheerful, benign images saturated popular culture, perhaps helping the common Frenchman to accept the Italian or Russian as his friend.

The same practice was used to cast nations as victims and aggressors. One postcard captioned "I love you always, little Belgium" shows the allegorical figure of Marianne kissing the face of a little girl (plate 20). This representation reinforces the widespread belief that vulnerable Belgium, a relatively young country, needed the loving guardianship of France against wicked Germany. Other postcards gave Germany a similar treatment; however, rather than depicting innocence and purity, such illustrations portray Germany as a sullen child (plate 21). Entitled "Graine de Boche"— offspring of the German— this illustration suggests that the child Germany now pouts because he knows he is about to be punished. The caption reads, "We seem to be screwed." Because this image infantilizes the German, the viewer regards him as less of an imminent threat and more of a bully in need of a good scolding. Here, the humbled *graine de boche* is a foil to the victorious *graine de poilu.*

As in the German case, postcards also depict children acting out adult scenarios. During the Great War, adults were forced to face difficult and unforeseen circumstances; grief, displacement, envy, and good citizenship all took on new meanings in the context of total war. Illustrations that cast children in the roles of parents, soldiers, and sweethearts gave some levity to adult challenges and perhaps made them easier to face. One series illustrated by L. Maitrejean embodies this principle perfectly. Some are rather lighthearted. One, captioned "Le prestige de

l'uniforme" (The prestige of the uniform) shows two smartly dressed little girls on the arm of a miniature soldier while another little boy looks on, alone and dejected, presumably because his lack of patriotic service has made him undesirable to the opposite sex (plate 22). However, most point to more serious situations. One features a little girl with a doll and toy dog being told by a child-soldier, "What are you doing here, ma'am? Women are not taken to the front" (plate 23). This scene, intended to be charming, points towards France's sluggishness to employ women in military-related jobs relative to its allies.[92] Perhaps the most heartbreaking iteration of this series depicts a girl presenting a doll to a little boy in uniform. She asks the doll, "Do you remember your papa?" (plate 24). Contemporary audiences may find the use of children in these scenarios distasteful. However, in their original contexts, these images may have allowed adults to process their fears, anxieties, and hopes and see that their situations were not unique.

As is the case with German postcards, many French postcards also speak to the ways in which children served France during this conflict. From the very onset of war, children were called to action. Addressing the nation in August 1914, Prime Minister Viviani August declared, "Rise up, women and children of France, daughters and sons of the nation! Take the place in the field of labor of those who are now on the field of battle... Arise! To action! To work! Tomorrow there will be glory enough for everyone."[93] French children, like their counterparts across Europe, contributed to the national cause through the collection of scrap metal and other patriotic chores. French schoolchildren assembled packages for wounded soldiers, and girls knitted and sewed to

92. Thébaud, 33.

93. Thébaud, 27.

serve the war effort.[94] Though children's labor was undoubtedly crucial during lean times, their greater contribution to the national spirit may have been their ability to inspire.

Postcards celebrate children's optimism and willingness to aid the war effort—representations which, at least initially, were likely grounded in reality. Early efforts to mobilize French children through education were largely successful, and the internalization of patriotic values was evidenced by children's schoolyard games and acts of voluntary deprivation. In reality, the trivialization of violence ultimately led to indifference and frustration among many children, as journals and diaries can attest. [95] However, postcards continued to centralize children's initial surge of patriotic passion. One entitled "The Patriotism of Children" features a cartoon child dragging his toy car to an area designated by a sign as "Requisition of Automobiles and Horses for the War." There, a man asks him, "What are you doing?" He replies, "I'm bringing my car to the soldiers" (plate 25). The simple generosity of this little boy paints a touching picture of sacrifice during wartime. If he could voluntarily relinquish this prized possession for the war effort, adults had to be capable of making concessions in their own lives.

Other images focused on children's innocence and compassion towards their peers. In one illustration, a little girl extends a plate of fruit to another, more shabbily dressed, little girl. The following poem appears below them:

> Child, give to the little ones upon whom misfortune has befallen;
> Give them your smile and your joy: they are hungry!
> What the child gives to a bruised childhood
> Weaves the fraternal bond among all hearts.
> France is a mother, child. May the homeland

94. Manon Pignot, "Children and Childhood (France)," International Encyclopedia of the First World War, last modified October 8, 2014. https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/children_and_childhood_france.

95. Pignot.

Be made by your gifts as sweet as a mother's womb!

The poem and illustration are entitled “The Fraternal League of the Children of France” (plate 26). On both of these postcards, the inherent goodness and altruism of children is meant to be a model for adults. The frustration and exhaustion of wartime life could easily cause tempers to run high; postcards, though cheap and simple, could use images like this to remind adults of the quintessentially French principle of *fraternité.* Furthermore, this poem compares France not only to a mother, but specifically to a mother’s womb, emphasizing yet again the obsession with repopulation.

Children’s supposed propensity for service is captured on one postcard entitled “Journée du Poilu.” Two solemn children, presumably a brother and sister, stand on the street holding a collection tin. The little girl wears a miniature nurse’s uniform; her brother has pinned little mock medals to his shirt. They ask passersby for donations “for papa to come on leave, please...” At the bottom of the card, we see the reason why Papa belongs at home: “25 et 26 Décembre 1915” (plate 27). This illustration was likely not intended to speak out against the war or leave policy—censorship ensured that few images criticized the war, and soldiers’ fatigue would not lead to mutinies for two more years yet. This gesture, whether fabricated or inspired by real life, was instead intended as a touching demonstration of the bond between father and child and a reminder for adults to donate to war relief fundraising drives.

The use of children as a means to elicit sympathy is a recurrent theme in the French sample. Postcards featuring the image of the child as victim primarily served a public relations function; as a highly mobile form of media, postcards could show the world how children were suffering at the hands of Germans. Though some reports of German brutality were heightened for

propagandistic purposes,[96] life in occupied French territories was bleak for adults and children alike. Children in cities were particularly sensitive to bombing, and the occupation of Northern France caused serious coal shortages, often leaving children to shoulder the responsibility of finding firewood for their families. They were also keenly aware of their precarious position in occupied zones, often recounting acts of theft, destruction, and coercion in diaries and journals.[97] Within France, images of suffering children reaffirmed the nation's understanding of itself as a victim of a barbaric aggressor and further helped adults to frame their role in the conflict. These images fit into, and continued to fuel, the narrative of a French 'us' versus a German 'them.'

One such postcard condemns the German invasion of Belgium with a photograph of Belgian refugees (plate 28). Simply entitled "La Guerre," this French-printed card is intended to give a human face to the consequences of war. Front and center, a French soldier pushes a wheelbarrow containing two Belgian toddlers. He is surrounded by sullen children. With the exception of one refugee mother holding her baby, these children do not appear to be accompanied by their parents. This photograph conveys the desperate situation of Belgian refugees, the victims of so-called German barbarism, and casts French troops as both heroes and guardians.

In a similar vein, another postcard depicts a baby's plight to highlight German atrocities (plate 29). The caption reads, "Paris bombarded (April 1918). A shell over a nursery. A baby wounded on his left arm." The caption appears in both French and German, perhaps in the hopes of confronting Germans-speaking people with the grim realities of wartime France. The image of a vulnerable, innocent baby, whose left arm is in a tiny cast, gives viewers a glimpse of how total war has stripped childhood of its sanctity. The use of photos of real children in dire circumstances

96. Fraser, 42.

97. Pignot.

seems to have been a fairly common strategy. Sometimes, however, artists rendered their own interpretations of the tragic child. For example, one illustration depicts a little girl asking her mother, “Are they the ones who killed daddy?” as a regiment of soldiers marches behind them (plate 30). Interestingly, this postcard, entitled “Childhood Memories,” also bears the caption “The prisoners pass,” indicating that the Germans to blame for this father’s death have been captured, and therefore no longer pose a threat. While countless postcards depict bleak circumstances for children, none admit defeat. In fact, the child defiant and victorious is depicted just as frequently.

Postcard artists and publishers seized upon the image of the child as a spunky embodiment of the French spirit. Time and time again, children are a symbol of resistance against German forces. This theme took many forms, ranging from a baby clutching a bottle of milk and a French flag declaring “We have them!” (plate 31) to series of children relieving themselves into German helmets (plate 32). One postcard published in 1914 captures France’s initial optimism at the onset of the war (plate 33). A little boy tells a little girl, “We will play war, you will be the German.” She replies, “No, I do not want to be beaten.” Such postcards promote an optimistic outlook of the war’s conclusion while also suggesting derision towards Germany’s formidable military prowess.

The function of postcards depicting defiant children is illustrated perfectly by a 1915 postcard entitled “Un Taube Passe” (plate 34). A child, again sitting on a German helmet, grins and thumbs his nose at the *taube*, or German plane, flying overhead. The caption describes the encounter as “The Amusement of Children, The Tranquility of Parents.” The bravery of children, fictitious or real, in the face of danger bolsters the confidence of adults. Just like the postcards depicting children’s patriotic devotion, these postcards use children as models for how adults are supposed to act. They seem to ask, how fearsome can the war really be if these children do not fear it?

The greatest visual boost to France's fighting spirit may have been the child's symbolic significance as the future generation. In some ways, this was pragmatic—in the face of tremendous battlefield losses, children represented future reinforcements.[98] Some postcards showed hordes of nude baby boys lining up to enlist (plate 35) or enjoying their chores in a military camp (plate 36). Rather than *graine de poilus*, they are labelled *nos futurs poilus*—that is, these infants are framed not as charming bundles of joy but as active combatants in training. Of course, the demand for future soldiers became a pillar of the existing pronatalist campaign and heightened its urgency. More optimistic postcards instead cast infants as symbolic bringers of victory, perhaps in the form of winged cherubs ringing "the bells of glory" (plate 37) or descending from the heavens in a "chariot of victory" pulled by doves (plate 38). These fantastic allegories suggest that there remained a mythology, if not still a sanctity, based in the inherent goodness and boundless potential of children.

Whether a given postcard depicted children in the context of pronatalism or nationalism, the battlefield or civil service, in poverty or at playtime, the child represented the future that French adults were so desperately fighting to secure. So many cards equate individual babies and children with France itself, as does one illustration of a little girl feeding birds: "Certainly, you are hope/ Sweet child, always ready to share your bread, / Sister of the poor and the orphan. I know you: you are called France!" (plate 39). In the face of misery and anxiety, children serve as a shared symbol of a future yet to be determined. While soldiers struggled to find meaning in an existence defined by mass casualty, postcards posed scenarios that celebrated the inherent goodness in young individuals. They may have also reminded readers that the children of France could soon grow up in a world defined by peace on French terms if adults fought hard to secure that peace.

98. Huss, *Histoires de famille*, 176.

Peace mercifully arrived in 1918, and with it came a huge spike in the birthrate. This phenomenon was predicted perfectly by one postcard depicting "The Post-War Cannon," a "love artillery" that produced babies on demand: "Would you like some babies? Boom...Voila!" (plate 40). According to Thébaud, "The end of the conflict witnessed marriages in unprecedented numbers: there was a veritable rush to return to private life, to an existence centered on family and the child," which even the most ardent feminists referred to as "the Messiah, the great hope." [99] In this way, the objective of these postcards was realized. It is impossible to say how much of this phenomenon can be attributed to the influence of popular media, if any. Both the French state and private entities continued to encourage procreation. In 1918, France established Mother's Day; in 1920, mothers of five or more children were awarded the Family Medal, along with awards for prolific fathers, "those great adventurers of the modern world."[100] The initial post-war years were defined by a longing to restore some semblance of normalcy and goodness to social life. Within the home, this longing was expressed by the swift and decisive restoration of pre-war gender divisions and the creation of families as a way to begin anew.

Countless postcards still promoted the pronatalist cause during the interwar years. Pronatalist imagery remained popular in the years immediately following the armistice as the need the replace the dead became more fully understood.[101] While the campaign for procreation continued to preoccupy French adults, children's images lost much of the symbolic resonance ascribed to them during wartime. In Great War France, children were romanticized and celebrated

99. Thébaud, 67.

100. Thébaud, 69.

101. Marie-Monique Huss, "Pronatalism in the Inter-War Period France," Journal of Contemporary History 25, no. 1 (1990): 55, accessed July 9, 2017 www.jstor.org/stable/260720.

in ways that both thrust them out of the domestic sphere and incorporated them into the mythology of French identity. The images of children and infants captured adults' imaginations, serving as models of wartime citizenship and optimism. As universally beloved symbols, children and their likenesses transcended social and political tensions as well as the gloom of wartime. Children, and by extension, postcards themselves, served France's war effort in their capacity to inspire—inspiring adults to fight on, to hope for the future, to create families, and to serve their country.

Commonalities and Contrasts

Huss observes that, surprisingly, the French postcards of this era are much more similar to their German counterparts than to the postcards of British allies, writing "much of the German production could have been adapted for the French market by a simple translation and change of uniform."[102] Though it is true that postcards from both countries depict children as actors in adult scenarios, centralize their sincerity and innocence, and portray them as the next generation of combatants, this assertion oversimplifies the marked differences in French and German styles and messages. The differences in French and German postcards are largely attributable to each culture's vastly different political, social, and religious backgrounds.

One such difference is the role that masculinity plays in in family-themed postcards. Throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, French and German fatherhood was essentially authoritarian in both working and bourgeois households. Both nations saw cultural movements that called the meaning of masculinity into question towards the onset of the twentieth century—in Germany, the Wandervogel youth movement, and in France, the debate regarding the Dreyfus affair. Postcards from the Great War era seem to indicate that the German response to

102. Huss, "Pronatalism...Wartime France," 356.

these tensions was the emphasis of active fatherhood and domestic bliss. The French instead celebrated the father's virility and patriotism in creating children, but not necessarily his attention to those children after infancy. German postcards use children's images to help bridge the gap between the home front and fighting front and portray the father-child reunion as an incentive to homecoming. Few, if any, French postcards suggest such a relationship, instead positioning the homecoming as an opportunity to create a child. This disparity could be due to the urgency with which French fathers returned to the front to defend their homeland from invaders, while more German postcards upheld the myth of a speedy conclusion to the war by focusing on the family reunited.

More striking is the difference with which French and German postcards depict femininity. German images depict women as competent, active mothers who preside over the home in their husbands' absence. German mothers appear nurturing, attentive, and diligent in illustrations and photos. In contrast, French cards seem to suggest that women are useful and pleasurable during the process of procreation, but not terribly relevant elsewhere. The rising anxiety towards mothers' ability to feminize their sons[103] may account for the paucity of images that celebrate the mother-child relationship in French postcards. Both French and German postcards emphasize conventional post-industrial gender roles, possibly in an effort to suggest to men abroad that social norms could be preserved despite the war.

As women filled male roles in factories and other public settings, French and German postcards alike continued to depict women as happy occupants of the private sphere. Citizens of both nations met women's work with reluctance and fear, and both French and German men

103. Forth, 147.

speculated about the potential ramifications of blurring gender divisions. French society seemed altogether more reluctant to allow women into the workplace during the war; by the war's end, France's workforce was not feminized even to the level of pre-war Germany.[104] One French physician published an article warning against the "masculinization" of women and the "moral anarchy" that it could bring about.[105] Though more German women worked prior to and during the war, similar ideology was present toward the dangers this posed. A 1917 testimony given before the Reichstag's committee on commerce and industry expressed, "Today, when we look at women performing the most difficult tasks, we must look closely to be sure that we are looking at a woman and not a man."[106] These attitudes may account for the rigidity of conventional female roles present among the postcards examined here. Interestingly, French author Colette speculated that soldiers at the front suffered from an "orphan's complex," leading them to marry for the sake of finding a maternal proxy;[107] perhaps this idolization of female domesticity is both answered and informed by postcards and other forms of popular art.

French and German postcards handle the gender of childhood subjects differently as well. German postcards tend to portray children in much more masculine contexts than do French postcards. German postcards often feature little boys dressed as men, playing war, protecting little girls, or a combination thereof. Little German boys appear very active active, frequently moving with weapons in hand, pointing to the socialization of Imperial Germany's strident militarism.

104. François Cochet, *La Grande Guerre: fin d'un monde, début d'un siècle* (Paris: Perrin, 2018), 214.

105. Ibid.

106. Françoise Thébaud, "The Great War and the Triumph of Sexual Division," in *A History of Women: Toward a Cultural Identity in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Françoise Thébaud, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 37.

107. Thébaud, 50.

Plenty of French postcards depict infant soldiers as well, but in many iterations, children seem much more androgynous and more frequently take the form of allegories, such as cherubs. This difference may point to Germany's relatively more recent legacy of masculine, authoritarian political culture. French and German postcards both, however, centralize the male child as the nation's future defender and relegate female children to backseat roles, often as miniature girlfriends (plate 41). Many French postcards cast little girls as doting *marainnes*, or "godmothers" who served as morale boosters by corresponding with soldiers (plate 42). German postcards, however, were more likely to portray girls as future mothers while French postcards more commonly depict little girls in symbolic or allegorical ways, as in visual representations of French innocence or Belgium's vulnerability. This may be because female figures occupy important roles in France's cultural mythology. Despite the differences between French and German treatments of gender in postcards, the entire sample essentially upholds traditional Western conceptualizations of masculinity as strong and active and femininity as delicate and passive.

French postcards are also markedly different in their portrayal of sexually suggestive subject matter. Though the sexual activity portrayed in French postcards is not subversive—sex takes place within the context of marriage and for the sake of procreation—such imagery is absent from the German sample. At the beginning of the twentieth century, sex occupied vastly different roles in German and French cultures. During the Imperial era, German culture placed increasing emphasis on the purity and sexual innocence of wives and mothers in relation to their capability to raise children.[108] Meanwhile, though the French countryside remained conservative, conversations about love and sex were relatively commonplace among members of Parisian

108. Gary D. Stark, "Pornography, Society, and the Law in Imperial Germany," *Peer Reviewed Articles* 21 (2014): 202, accessed January 3, 2019. https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/hst_articles/21.

bourgeois society.[109] Furthermore, France's legal freedom of the press resulted in more permissive attitudes towards what was acceptable to publish, resulting in experimentation with boundaries of respectability among producers of printed materials. The combination of these cultural forces resulted in postcards like one entitled "Un bon coup de baionnette," which uses double entendre (A good thrust of the bayonet: Bravo, Poilu!) to celebrate male virility and its association with the military (plate 43).

German postcards more frequently displayed what Huss calls "pious sentimentality."[110] In the German context, mother and child were more likely to appear praying for the man of the house (plate 44) than to be discussing why mothers and fathers share a bed (plate 45). Though plenty of French postcards featured spiritual imagery,[111] the public secularism of French culture relative to German culture is evidenced by the absence of Christian themes in the present sample.

The postcards in this sample also evidence the difference in mentality between the civilians of an invaded nation and those of its invader. Morale-building was essential to the populations and armed forces of both nations, but more so for France as occupied nation. French children occupied wartime culture as the most tragic victims of total war. Though German children suffered from rationing and disruptions to their education, young French children experienced the effects of war more intensely, as discussed earlier. Unlike Germans, French adults came to view themselves as the defenders of children against barbaric invaders, leading to what Pignot describes as an

109. Michele Plott, "The Rules of the Game: Respectability, Sexuality, and the Femme Mondaine in Late-Nineteenth-Century Paris," *French Historical Studies 25*, vol. 3 (2002): 542, 10.1215/00161071-25-3-531.

110. Huss, "Pronatalism...Wartime France," 352.

111. William A. Christian, "Supernatural and the Absent in World War I postcards," in *Divine Presence in Spain and Western Europe 1500-1960 : Visions, Religious Images and Photographs* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2012) http://books.openedition.org/ceup/1932.

obsessive discourse of a war for the children— that is, a war in which the future generation was at stake just as much as the homeland.[112] The themes of child-as-victim and child-as-hero factor into both French and German postcards, but the former is much more prominent in the French context. This could account for the higher frequency of French postcards that centralize defenseless infants as opposed to school-aged children.

One new source of anxiety that this relationship applies to is adults' concerns towards new technologies. In both French and German contexts, aviation technology was broadly associated with children and play to infantilize its deadly potential.[113] According to De Syon, postcards captured children's fascination with flight, and in doing so, appealed to the childlike wonder of adult senders and recipients (plate 46). The practice of illustrating children as tiny pilots and airshipmen was not without consequence. Regarding postcards, De Syon writes that by portraying children as "pre-grown-ups," "adults articulated fantasies of wrath against the enemy while enjoying cheap entertainment. They also clearly weakened the 'safe sphere' of childhood."[114] Though children had come to occupy this "safe sphere" during the social reorganization that followed the Industrial Revolution, total war wrenched children back out into the ugliness of the adult world. In manipulating the images of children to soothe their own anxieties, both in relation to aviation and to the war at large, adults sacrificed childhood's untouchable nature.

112. Huss, "Pronatalism...Wartime France," 352.

113. Guillaume De Syon, "The Child in the Flying Machine: Inspiration and Hatred in the First World War," in *Children and War: A Historical Anthology*, ed. James Marten (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2002), 120.

114. De Syon, 125.

Conclusion

Postcards, in their abundance and emotional import to their senders and recipients, are incredibly useful tools for understanding how childhood has been perceived across classes and cultures. The analysis of this sample of German and French Great War-era postcards indicates that these societies conceptualized children in many different and contradictory ways. Postcards depicted children as innocents and cherubs, miniature soldiers and future mothers, victims of war and champions of civil service. Children, who had only recently come to occupy a separate, precious sphere within society, were thrust into the ugly world of total war. This resulted in a very confused collection of cultural artifacts that offers no single explanation as to how children fit into the picture of this conflict. As Huss explains, "Presented as depositaries of essentially French values, children became values in themselves."[115] The same can be said in both French and German cases; however, when children become values, either in popular art or in popular conception, they cease to be individuals. By co-opting children into the iconography and mythology of warfare, popular art may have unintentionally dehumanized them. Whether such a process bore actual consequences on French or German attitudes towards children remains to be seen.

According to Elena Danielson, "Postcard pictures are typically engaging, entertaining, out of step with reality…Great caution must be exercised in using postcards to document social trends."[116] This seeming lack of connection with reality, however, makes postcards particularly compelling. Postcard present realities that can be imagined by those who chose and wrote them

115. Huss, "Pronatalism... Wartime France" 352.

116. Elena S. Danielson, "Russian and German "Great War" Picture Postcards," *Slavic & East European Information Resources* 17, 3 (2016), 155.

and by those who received and read them. The artificiality of the scenarios they propose points to very real feelings, values, and hopes. By presenting a simultaneously broad and nuanced vision of life during World War I, postcards reflect the complexity and ambiguity of societies coming to terms with the challenges of global conflict. The study of postcards reveals the ways in which two cultures processed the upheaval of their foundations, as well as the political and social ramifications of their value systems.

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Appendix

Plate 1

Plate 2

Plate 3

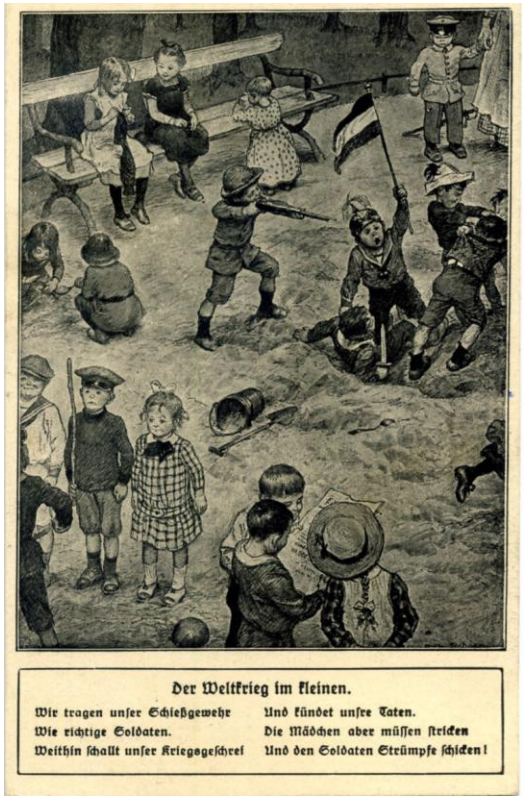
Plate 4

Plate 5

Plate 6

Plate 7

Plate 8



Der Weltkrieg im kleinen.

Wir tragen unser Schießgewehr
Wie richtige Soldaten.
Weithin schallt unser Kriegsgeschrei
Und kündet unsre Taten.
Die Mädchen aber müssen stricken
Und den Soldaten Strümpfe schicken!

Plate 9

Plate 10

Plate 11

Plate 12

Plate 13

Plate 14

Plate 15

Plate 16

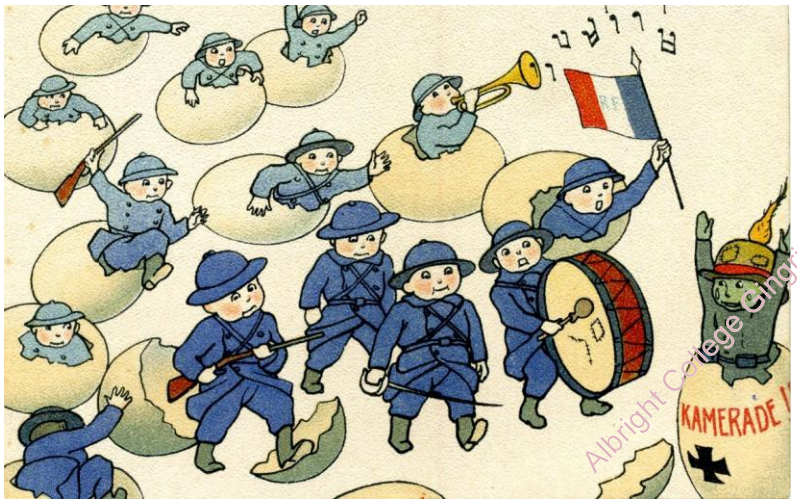


Plate 17

Plate 18

Plate 19

Plate 20

Plate 21

Plate 22

Plate 23

Plate 24

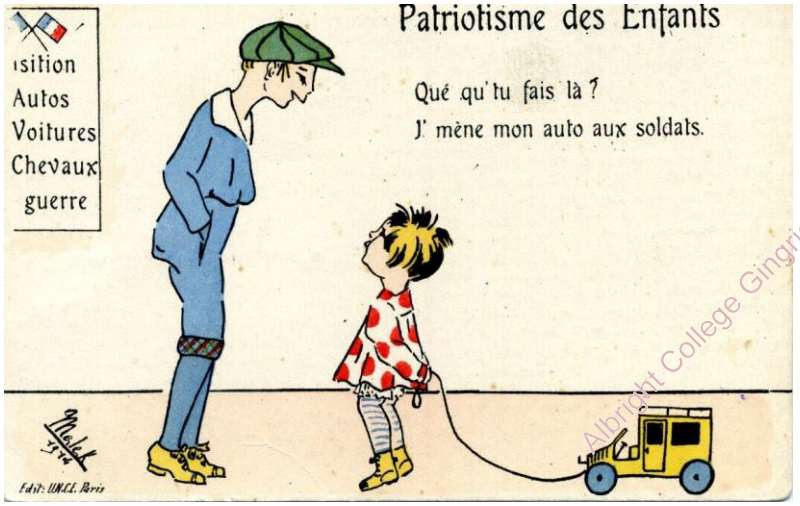


Plate 25

Plate 26

Plate 27

Plate 28

Plate 29

Plate 30

Plate 31

Plate 32

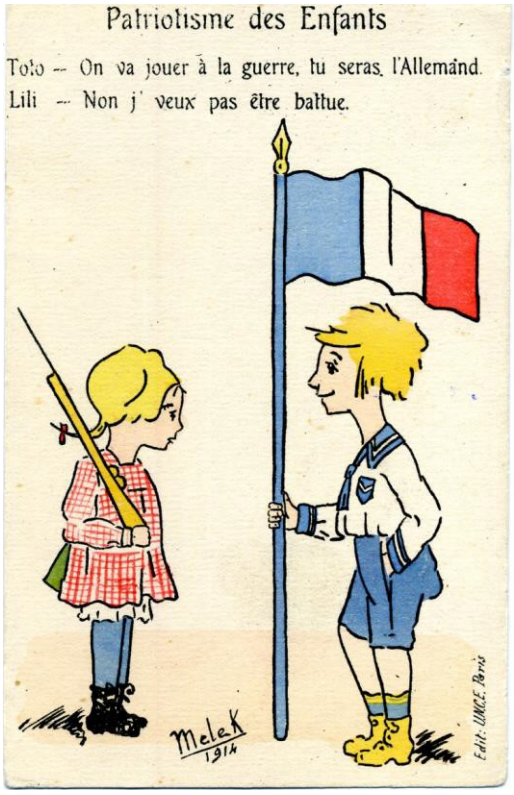


Plate 33

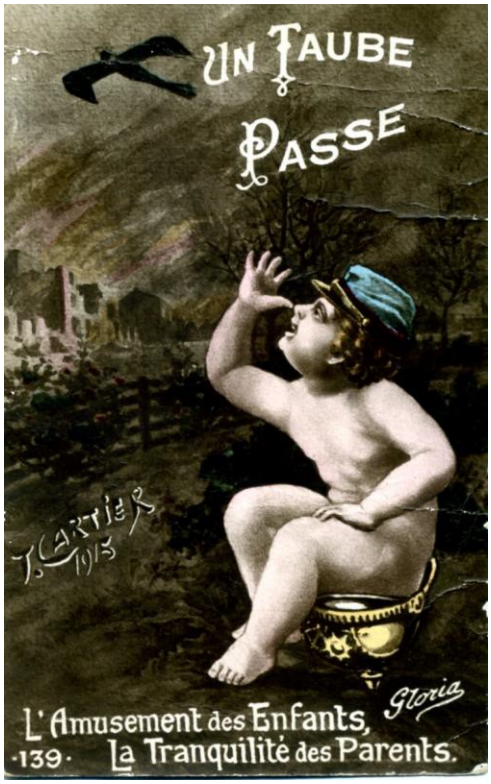


Plate 34

Plate 35

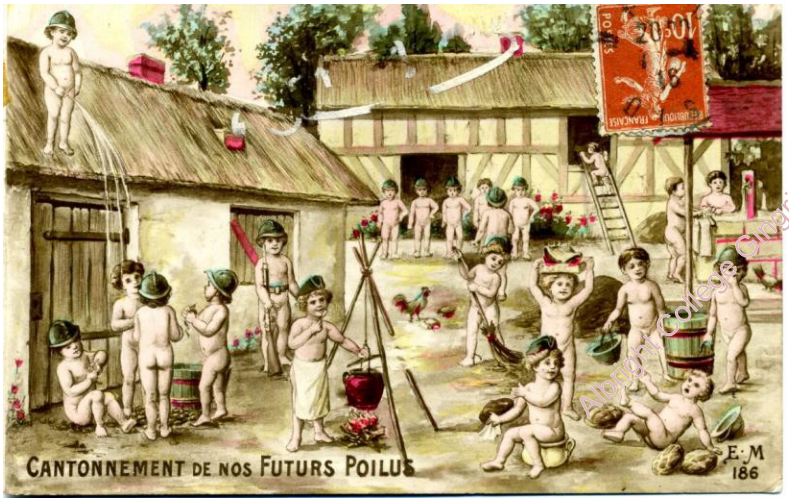


Plate 36

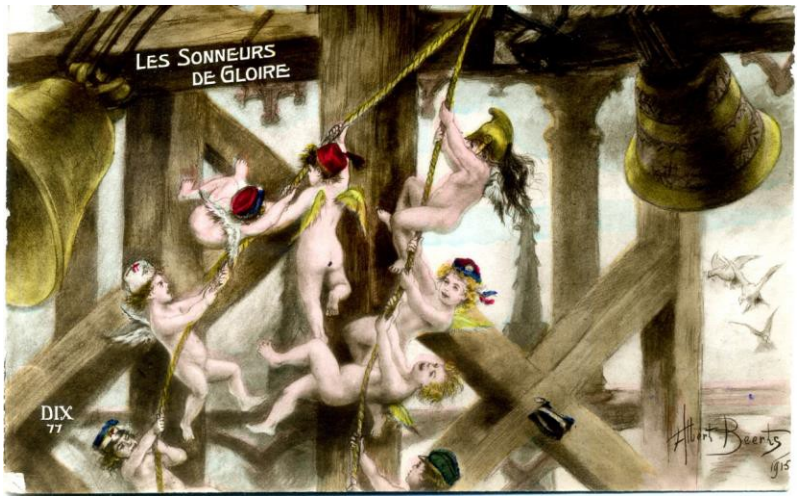


Plate 37

Plate 38

Plate 39

Plate 40

Plate 41

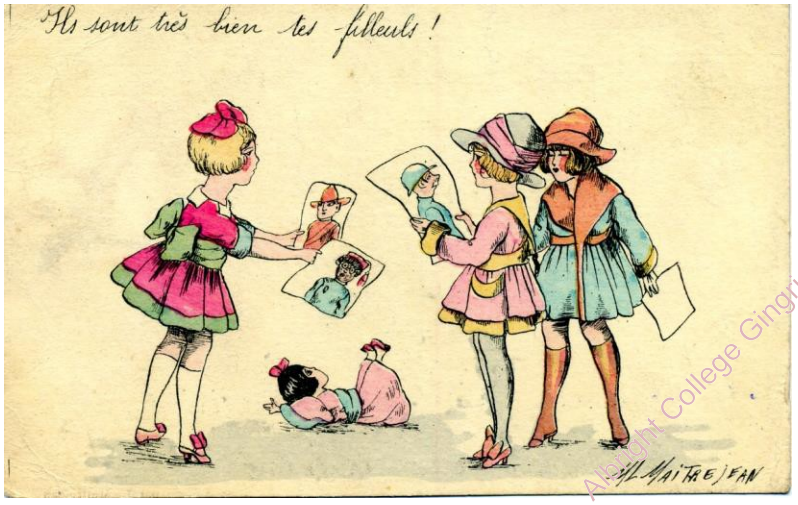


Plate 42

Plate 43

Plate 44

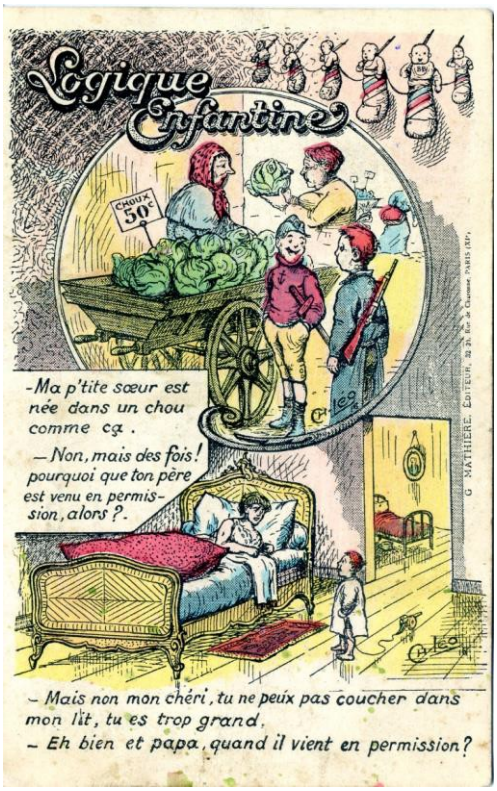


Plate 45

Plate 46