



# Journal of European Periodical Studies

*an online journal by ESPRit, European Society for Periodical Research*

## *La Revue des marraines* (1916–17): A Journal for War Godmothers and their Godchildren

Marysa Demoor, Birgit Van Puymbroeck, and  
Marianne Van Remoortel

*Journal of European Periodical Studies*, 2.1 (Summer 2017)

ISSN 2506-6587

Content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Licence

The *Journal of European Periodical Studies* is hosted by Ghent University

Website: [ojs.ugent.be/jeps](https://ojs.ugent.be/jeps)

---

To cite this article: Marysa Demoor, Birgit Van Puymbroeck, and Marianne Van Remoortel, 'La Revue des marraines (1916–17): A Journal for War Godmothers and their Godchildren', *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, 2.1 (Summer 2017), 21–38

---

# *La Revue des marraines* (1916–17): A Journal for War Godmothers and their Godchildren

MARYSA DEMOOR, BIRGIT VAN PUYMBROECK, AND  
MARIANNE VAN REMOORTELE  
Ghent University  
[marysa.demoor@ugent.be](mailto:marysa.demoor@ugent.be)  
[birgit.vanpuymbroeck@ugent.be](mailto:birgit.vanpuymbroeck@ugent.be)  
[marianne.vanremoortel@ugent.be](mailto:marianne.vanremoortel@ugent.be)

## ABSTRACT

This article is situated at the crossroads of First World War and periodical studies. It sheds light on the phenomenon of ‘war godmothers’ [‘marraines’], women who supported soldiers at the front by sending them parcels and letters. The so-called godmothers made use of the mainstream press to advertise their services, and founded periodicals of their own. In this article, we examine the representation of war godmothers in the periodical press and uncover *La Revue des marraines*, a handwritten journal created by the M<sup>lles</sup> Picard in Paris. The analysis addresses the little-known phenomenon of the war godmothers, the relation between godmother and godson, and changing gender roles. It further explores the importance of handwritten journals during the war, when paper and other means were scarce.

## KEYWORDS

First World War, war godmother, *La Revue des marraines*, trench journals, gender

This article addresses a topic situated at the crossroads of two separate phenomena in First World War studies, that of the war godmothers and that of the popular trench journals.<sup>1</sup> While seemingly unconnected at first sight, both served the same purpose: boosting the morale of the soldiers at the front. Moreover, both coincided in a remarkable way in *La Revue des marraines*, a small journal produced in Paris in 1916–17 that is the focus of this article. Like many trench journals, *La Revue des marraines* was handwritten. It was created by two or more women who were very likely godmothers themselves and may have sent the journal to family members or acquaintances at the front. It is not surprising that these women chose the genre of the periodical. The phenomenon of the war godmothers is intrinsically linked to the periodical press: organizations of war godmothers used the press to connect ‘war godmothers’, or ‘marraines’, and ‘godchildren’ or ‘filleuls’. Periodicals reported on godmothers and provided advertising space.<sup>2</sup> They acted as matchmakers for godmothers and godchildren, who often assumed fictional identities. *La Revue des marraines*, of which three issues have been preserved, is an interesting case in point. Borrowing formal characteristics from other journals, it presents itself as a heterogeneous, collaborative, and periodical medium. It offers insight not only into the production and dissemination of handwritten journals during the First World War but also into the unfolding of the war, contemporary views on gender and diversity, as well as the wide range of initiatives aimed at supporting the soldiers.

### **Godmothers in the First World War**

The term ‘godmother’ is usually associated with the Catholic faith. When a child is baptized, it is given a second mother and often also a father who guarantee its Catholic upbringing, and commit to becoming foster parents in the event of parental death or separation. However, the concept also has a wider cultural and symbolic meaning. It is used metaphorically to refer to individuals who help newcomers settle into their new jobs or schools by giving them advice and looking after their well-being. During the First World War, women spontaneously took on the role of war godmothers, taking care of the soldiers and acting as second mothers. They wrote letters and sent gift packages to soldiers who were far away from or had lost their families.

Apart from two master’s theses, by Mieke Meul and Maxine Ferron, little systematic research has been done into the context in which and the reasons why organizations of war godmothers emerged.<sup>3</sup> The phenomenon probably originated in Belgium and France in 1915. After the failed counter offensives of 1915, soldiers and army leaders began to realize that the war would drag on longer than expected. Efforts to motivate the men in the trenches increased, including issuing leave cards and setting up correspondence agencies. As early as October 1914, the Bureau de Correspondance Belge [Belgian Correspondence Office] was founded in Sainte-Adresse, the French town that housed the Belgian government in exile. Later also operating from London, this organization coordinated the clandestine correspondence between the soldiers in occupied Belgium and their families and friends at home.

- 1 This article originally appeared in Dutch as ‘*La Revue des marraines* (1916–1917): Een tijdschrift voor oorlogsmeters en hun petekinderen’, *TS: Tijdschrift voor tijdschriftstudies*, no. 36 (2014), 119–38, and was translated by the authors. All in-text translations are also by the authors.
- 2 Susan R. Grayzel, ‘Mothers, Marraines, and Prostitutes: Morale and Morality in First World War France’, *International History Review*, 19.1 (1997), 66–82 (pp. 66–68).
- 3 Mieke Meul, ‘De oorlogsmeters van de Belgische soldaten tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog (1914–1918)’ (unpublished master’s thesis, KU Leuven, 2002); Maxine Ferron, ‘Marraines de guerre: Rôles et représentations pendant la grande guerre’ (unpublished master’s thesis, Université catholique de l’ouest d’Angers, 2008).

In addition to correspondence agencies, organizations of war godmothers were established. In France, Marguerite de Lens founded *La Famille du Soldat* [The Soldier's Family] in January 1915. This association assigned godmothers to soldiers at the latter's request. In Belgium, Queen Elisabeth played a key role in starting a similar movement among Belgian women, who would send letters and parcels with handmade scarves and hats to the front. With the support of the Bureau de Correspondance Belge, Lieutenant Joseph de Dorlodot founded the *Oeuvre des Mairaines de Guerre* [Charity of War Godmothers], affiliated with similar initiatives in Cardiff and London. There was also the Belgian Soldiers' League of Friendship, led by Mary Morris, in London and the *Verbond der Oorlogsmeters voor Belgische Soldaten* [League of War Godmothers for Belgian Soldiers] in Nottingham.<sup>4</sup>

These initiatives were a great success, offering women on the home front ways to make themselves feel useful. While the men in their immediate surroundings were away, they knitted or sewed for their godchildren and committed their maternal feelings to paper. To the soldiers, these letters and parcels were little rays of hope brightening up their (usually) monotonous existence and allowing them to dream of life after the war. Often, after an initial letter or gift packet, a more elaborate correspondence ensued, which could be of a romantic nature. Both soldiers and war godmothers were craving companionship, and found it in each other.

Because their relationships were largely epistolary, both parties could easily manipulate their identities. Army leaders feared that female pen-names might be adopted by German spies in an attempt to gather information on the fighting spirit of the soldiers, the location of their regiments, and plans of attack. On 18 May 1915, the French Minister of War Alexandre Millerand made an appeal to the Minister of the Interior for the correspondence between 'mairaines' and 'filleuls' to be monitored and censored.<sup>5</sup> Despite the growing demand for a ban on advertisements by and for war godmothers, references to letter writing between godmothers and soldiers continued to appear in the press until the end of the war. As late as January 1918, for example, the trench journal *Le Poilu* published an advertisement for a 'godmother's kit' ['pochette de la mairaine'], a little folder with postcards and stationery that soldiers could use to write to their godmothers.<sup>6</sup>

## War Godmothers and the Press

In her article on the 'mairaines', Susan R. Grayzel points to the relationship between war godmothers and the periodical press.<sup>7</sup> Journals such as *L'Echo de Paris* and *L'Homme enchaîné* made it their business to connect war godmothers and godchildren. *L'Echo de Paris* also offered free advertising space to *La Famille du Soldat*. In addition, the trench journals played a crucial role as the medium through which soldiers announced their search for a 'mairaine'. In *Le Col bleu* for 15 February 1915, for instance, the following notice was published: 'Six sailors from La Hire had asked for six young, pretty, and preferably Parisian godmothers. Their request had appeared in *La Vie parisienne*.

4 Meul, *passim*; Ferron, *passim*. See also the reference to the Belgian Soldiers' League of Friendship in 'Editorial', *Sutton High School Magazine* (Summer Term, 1915), 3, [www.worldwar1schoolarchives.org](http://www.worldwar1schoolarchives.org) [accessed 27 April 2017].

5 'Les Mairaines de guerre', *Chemins de mémoire*, [www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr](http://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr) [accessed 27 April 2017].

6 Advertisement, *Le Poilu: Journal des tranchées de Champagne: 108<sup>e</sup> régiment d'infanterie territoriale* (1 January 1918), 55.

7 Grayzel, *passim*.

Numerous women responded to their call.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the following appeared under the title of ‘Demandes de Mairaines’ [‘Requests for Godmothers’] in *On les aura*: ‘Sergeant-major x., 17<sup>th</sup> Cie, is looking for a volunteer dry-nurse to raise, until the end of the war, a young dog he helped bring into the world in the trenches.’<sup>9</sup>

ProQuest’s database of *Trench Journals and Unit Magazines of the First World War* makes it possible to map the relationship between war godmothers and trench journals quantitatively.<sup>10</sup> Full-text searches for ‘mairaines’ or ‘mairaine’ yield 687 results for the period August 1914–November 1918. The earliest instances date back to 7 January 1915 and appeared in *Le Crapouillot*, a satirical journal founded by Jean Galtier Boissière. For the whole of 1915, the database returns only 56 hits, rising to 242 the following year and to 389 in 1917.

Most references to war godmothers are of an amusing nature. On 1 October 1915, for example, *L’Écho des gourbis* published a diploma template for godmothers to be filled in by their godchild (Fig. 1). The author of the accompanying article writes: ‘Later on this may not be the least moving memory of this war, which is not lacking in emotion. The godmothers will treasure their certificate, and put it in the place of honour that *they* deserve.’<sup>11</sup> In other words, like female ambulance drivers and nurses, war godmothers were recognized and thanked for their efforts during the war. The certificate served as a token of their patriotism and dedication, playfully attesting to the close connection between home front and frontline:

It is bold, merry, and moving. This certificate for godmothers constitutes one of those links which must not be broken between the home front and the line of fire. The godmothers, we have no doubt, will cherish the certificate that *certifies* their staunch patriotism and their profound commitment to those who are heroically doing their duty.<sup>12</sup>

This clearly indicates one way in which the war godmother was perceived, as a woman utterly devoted to the men fighting for their country.

Being a godmother was a busy job for some women. In a contribution to *Le Crapouillot* for 7 January 1915, a young woman boasts of having no less than five godchildren: a soldier from Alsace, a Belgian, a Senegalese, a Canadian, and an Indian.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, soldiers could gather a small regiment of godmothers, each unaware of the others’ existence. An article published in *Le Klaxon* in April 1917 describes the soldiers’ emotions upon receiving a letter from their godmother: ‘They are so happy when the letter from their “flirt” arrives; with a smile on their lips they read it triumphantly, and

8 ‘Six marins de la Hire avaient demandé six mairaines jeunes, jolies, parisiennes de préférence. Leur prière avait paru sur *La Vie Parisienne*. Nombreuses furent celles qui répondirent à leur appel.’ ‘Alerte aux mairaines’, *Le Col bleu: Gazette de guerre des marins* (15 February 1915), 1.

9 ‘Sergent-major x., 17<sup>e</sup> Cie, recherche une nourrice sèche et bènevole qui élèverait, jusqu’à la fin de la guerre, un jeune chien qu’il a mis au monde dans les tranchées.’ ‘Demandes de mairaines’, *On les aura: Organe du 279<sup>me</sup> régiment territorial [en campagne]* (1 October 1916), 4.

10 See [microsite.proquest.com/page/trench](https://microsite.proquest.com/page/trench). A paid institutional subscription is needed to consult the database.

11 ‘Plus tard ce ne sera peut-être pas le souvenir le moins émouvant de cette guerre où les émotions ne manquent pas. Les mairaines garderont précieusement leur certificat et le mettront à la place d’honneur qu’elles méritent.’ ‘Pour nos mairaines’, *Echo des gourbis* (1 October 1915), 1. Emphasis in original.

12 ‘C’est crâne, gai et émouvant. Ce certificat de mairaines constitue un de ces liens qu’il ne faut pas rompre entre l’arrière et la ligne de feu. Les mairaines, nous n’en doutons pas, garderont précieusement le certificat qui *certifie* leur patriotisme agissant et leur profond dévouement à ceux qui font héroïquement leur devoir.’ ‘Le Certificat de mairaines’, *Echo des gourbis* (1 November 1915), 1. Emphasis in original.

13 ‘Les Conversations’, *Le Crapouillot* (7 January 1915), 1–2.

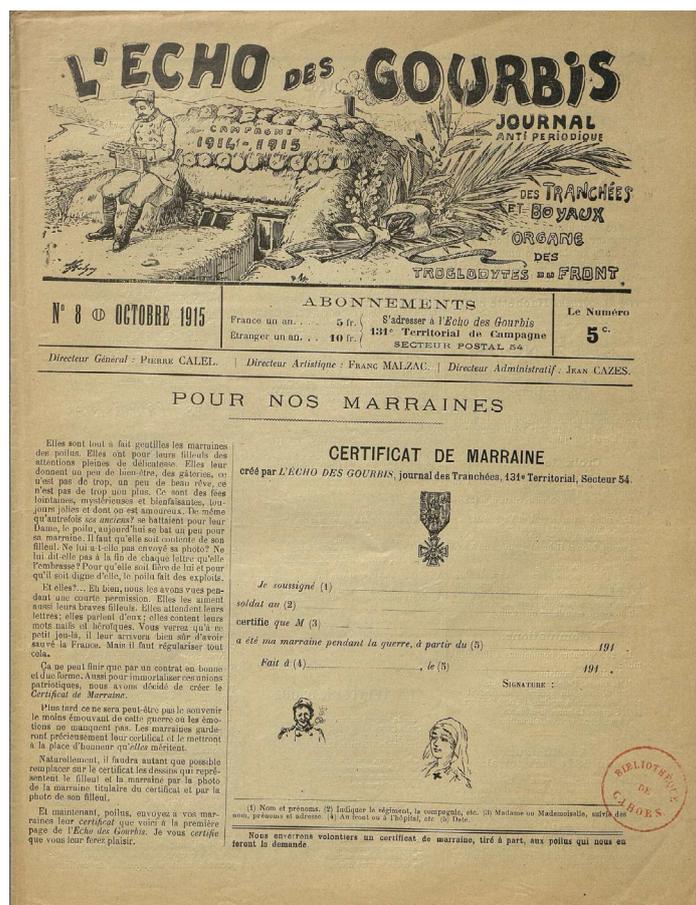


Fig. 1 Diploma template for godmothers, *L'Écho des gourbis* (1 October 1915).

feel no less pleasure in replying point by point to the letter spread out before them!<sup>14</sup> What is most striking about this passage is not so much how thrilled the soldiers are to receive news from their godmothers, but rather the provocative label ‘flirt’ given to these women. In the poem ‘La marraine du poilu’ [‘The soldier’s godmother’] by Guy-Peron, a ‘marraine’ more chastely offers her heart to her ‘filleul’ if he returns home from the war triumphant.

She is very kind, this little lady,  
Who sends me all this and whom I do not know,  
It is she who writes to me: To you my heart  
If you come back victorious!<sup>15</sup>

By the same token, the lack of a godmother evokes feelings of heartbreak and desolation in Jean Mady’s ‘Ballade du pauvre poilu qui n’a pas trouvé de marraine’ [‘Ballad of the poor soldier who has not found a godmother’], published in the trench journal *Rigolboche*:

14 ‘Ils sont si heureux quand arrive la lettre de leur “flirt”; le sourire aux lèvres, ils la lisent triomphants, et n’éprouvent pas moins de plaisir à répondre point par point à la lettre étalée devant eux!’ Reprinted in Jean-Pierre Turbergue, *Les Journaux des tranchées* (Triel-sur-Seine: Editions Italiques, 2007), p. 126.  
15 ‘Elle est très gentille, cett’ petit’ dam-là | Qui m’envoie tout ça et que j’connais pas, | C’est ell’ qui m’écrit: A vous mon coeur | Si vous rev’nez vainqueur!’ Guy-Peron, ‘La Marraine du poilu’, *Bulletin des armées de la République* (15 August 1915), 5.

I drag with melancholy  
In the maze of the trenches  
My pitiful academy  
Because I am neither cheerful nor handsome [...]  
One regret haunts my brain  
I have not found a godmother.<sup>16</sup>

The romantic undertones of these descriptions, the intimate nature of many relationships between war godmothers and godchildren, and the (sexually charged) longing of those who did not have a godmother coloured the perception of godmothers in the contemporary press, which tended to portray them as somewhat older women intent on re-entering the marriage market.

If, as Grayzel points out, war godmothers filled a void in the hearts of the soldiers, satisfying their desires at a platonic level, these interactions were also considered a real sexual threat. Godmothers were known to have multiple godchildren, whom they would receive at home during leave time. Blurring the boundaries between the traditional angel/whore dichotomy — the godmother as a source of support and comfort, and as a woman of loose morals — they fueled the contemporary debate about polygamy and venereal disease. As Grayzel puts it: ‘Women who might sustain morale, might also undermine it.’<sup>17</sup> Trench journals and war newspapers occasionally played on these sexual fears by presenting war godmothers as objects of ridicule. Cartoons would undercut the expectations of soldiers visiting their godmothers during leave time or after the war by depicting the women (or men) as too old, too young, or ‘worse’, in the context of the time, as black (Fig. 2). As such, war godmothers also posed a risk to the social hierarchy, as the opening lines of the pseudo-serious poem ‘Ma marraine’ by André Laphin illustrate:

Ah! How sweet is my godmother!  
Of an accommodating nature,  
Even-tempered and composed,  
Ah! How sweet is my godmother!  
She is the daughter of an *adjudant*.<sup>18</sup>

The poem is given a slightly subversive edge by the fact that the ‘marraine’ is the daughter of an ‘adjudant’, whereas the author is a sergeant. The speaker, in other words, is entertaining not only amorous thoughts but also ambitions of climbing the military ranks.

As these examples demonstrate, the role of the war godmother was both idealized and caricatured in the press. The war godmother was a patriotic heroine and a flirt, fulfilling the familial, romantic, and even sexual needs of the soldiers, connecting the military and the civilian world, the trenches and the home front, while also challenging the gendered boundaries between the two. On the one hand, they conformed to the traditional roles of wives and mothers; on the other, their active role also caused

16 ‘Je traîne avec mélancolie | Dans le dédale du boyau | Ma pitoyable académie | Car je ne suis ni gai, ni beau [...] | Un regret hante mon cerveau | Je n’ai pas trouvé de marraine.’ Reprinted in Turbergue, p. 126.

17 Grayzel, p. 716.

18 ‘Ah! qu’elle est douce ma marraine! | d’un naturel accommodant, | D’une humeur égale et sereine, | Ah! qu’elle est douce ma marraine! | C’est la fille d’un adjudant.’ André Laphin, ‘Ma marraine’, *Le Poilu: Journal des tranchées de Champagne: 108e régiment d’infanterie territoriale* (1 March 1917), 34.



Fig. 2 Title page of the earliest preserved issue of *La revue des marraines* (November 1916).

considerable anxiety, particularly with regard to the sexuality and social position of women during the war.

### *La Revue des marraines*

The few issues of *La Revue des marraines* that have survived the past hundred years, against the odds, were probably bound after the war by the then owner in a pastel-blue, mousse-like fabric, which immediately characterizes them as belonging to a female environment. The issues were written on squared paper, like that of a school notebook. Two pages have a vertical relief stamp with the inscription 'REGISTRE PH' and a small logo, presumably that of the paper manufacturer, depicting a turret with a bird with open wings on top. The sheets of the first issue show a horizontal and vertical fold, indicating that they were folded to fit into a standard envelope. Each issue is handwritten and illustrated; the drawings are at times naïvely coloured. To obtain multiple copies, a specific type of copying process was used whereby a purple ink was absorbed by a gelatin-based copying paste, leaving a faint, mauve impression. Thirty copies could be produced this way. Hand-written journals such as *L'Argonnote* (Fig. 3) and *Le Bulletin des armées de la République* used this technique:<sup>19</sup>

19 See André Charpentier, *Feuilles bleu horizon 1914–1918* (Paris: Le Livre d'or des journaux du front, 1935), pp. 43–44, 84. Charpentier includes descriptions and images of multiple handwritten front journals, such as *L'Argonnote*, *Cabots de la roulante*, *A la chiffa*, and *Le Courrier de sape*. A Belgian example is *Le Canard de Ramskapelle* (Ramskapelle Archive, with thanks to Dries Claeys). Many of these front journals have recently been digitized in Gallica.



Fig. 3 Cover page of the handwritten trench journal *L'Argonnaute* (15 January 1916).

*Le Bulletin des armées de la République* usually limits itself to giving extracts from the front journals. But to make *Le Sceau à charbon* known and appreciated outside its sector, it will be insufficient to reproduce a few lines from it. For what constitutes the principal value of our compatriot at the front is its ability to make good use of whatever comes to hand. Reproduced on copying paste, it is able to achieve artistic effects precisely through the imperfections of this primitive medium. It excels at telling local anecdotes, highlighted by a drawing in the margin, with the same naïve art as that of a schoolboy illustrating his class notebooks. This is precisely the process that suits a trench newspaper.<sup>20</sup>

*La Revue des mairaines* seems to have made use of the same process: the ink is mauve or lightly coloured for the images. The above quote attributes an artistic effect to this reproduction technique: the 'imperfections' of the 'primitive medium' ['moyen primitif'] fits the overall character of the trench journals as *faux-naïf*.

20 '*Le Bulletin des Armées de la République* se borne généralement à donner des extraits des journaux du front. Mais pour faire connaître et apprécier le *Sceau à Charbon* en dehors de son secteur, il serait insuffisant d'en reproduire quelques lignes. Car ce qui fait la valeur principale de notre confrère du front c'est le parti qu'il sait tirer de moyens de fortune. Reproduit sur pâte à copier, il arrive d'obtenir des effets artistiques par l'imperfection même de ce moyen primitif. Il excelle à narrer l'anecdote locale, soulignée par un dessin en marge, avec le même art naïf de celui qu'un écolier illustrant ses cahiers de classe. C'est bien là le procédé qui convient à une gazette des tranchées.' 'Le "Sceau à charbon"', *Bulletin des Armées de la République* (18 April 1917), 13.

The three preserved issues of *La Revue des mairaines*, dated November 1916, December [1916] and September [1917], have all the characteristics of a periodical. The masthead on the first page mentions the title of the journal in the middle. Below it is written 'only journal not to be subjected to censorship' ['seul journal n'étant pas soumis à la censure']. The publication date is in the top right. In the middle at the top there is a drawing of a globe with the text 'only journal in the world of the female voice' ['seul journal au monde de l'organe féminin']. At the far left and far right, there is a list of everything that is published in the journal: news, stories, novels, drawings, poems, novellas, fashion, and music. The masthead also mentions the name and address of the female editors and the fact that the periodical appears once a month. In the September 1917 issue, a drawing of the Statue of Liberty is added on the left and the Eiffel Tower on the right. The rest of the title page, about two thirds of the total surface, is decorated with a drawing. There is no mention of a price. It seems as if the journal is a free monthly that is sent on request to those who are interested. It is repeatedly mentioned that 'all soldiers who want to regularly receive the "Revue des mairaines" have only to ask Mademoiselle Picard 10 Rue Henri Monnier, Paris IX'.<sup>21</sup> The November 1916 issue also states that the administration of the journal sends books and magazines for free to soldiers on request.

Although *La Revue des mairaines* does not give away much about the identity of the female editors, we can deduce a number of things from the scraps of information we are given. They call themselves 'M<sup>lles</sup> Picard' ['Misses Picard'] and, therefore, seem to have been at least two in number. The presence of two different forms of longhand also points to an editorial duo. One of the women was called Andrée and was not only an editor but also an author. The report on a visit to London signed 'Andrée Pick'hard' in the second issue is by her hand. The correspondence address of the journal, 10 rue Henri Monnier, was a street in the ninth arrondissement of Paris between the Opera Garnier and the artist district of Montmartre. According to the 1913 trade guide Paris-Hachette, a certain 'Picard (P.) son carpenter' ['Picard (P.) fils menuisier'] lived at this address.<sup>22</sup> Picard was, therefore, not a pseudonym, but the name of the daughters, sisters or other female relatives of this P. Picard. *La Revue des mairaines* also lists three other addresses, all in the ninth arrondissement and within walking distance of rue Henri Monnier. The first, 7 rue Ambroise Thomas, can be found in the second issue in an advertisement for the clairvoyant M<sup>lle</sup> Maritza Ha and does not seem to be directly connected to the editors. The second address, 9 rue Clapeyron, appears twice: in an advertisement for Mme Marguerite P., who offers information on the best bargains in Les Halles, and in an advert for the luxury furniture shop of Mr. Gaston P. Here the initial of both people does suggest a relationship with the Misses Picard. Further research in Paris-Hachette and in the archives of the register office in Paris indicates that this was indeed the address of the couple Gaston (born in 1856) and Marguerite (born in 1872) Picard.<sup>23</sup> He is identified in their marriage certificate as a merchant active in Sao Paulo, and she as a singer in the Paris opera. Both Picards (they were related and had the same surname) came from Jewish families in the northeast of France.

Although it is unclear whether Marguerite Picard was involved in the production of *La Revue des mairaines* as one of the 'M<sup>lles</sup> Picard', she probably took part in the concerts and musical evenings that the journal organized. The November 1916 issue announces the performance of 'the unique and inimitable little diva ROUMILDA del

21 'tous les soldats qui voudront recevoir régulièrement la "Revue des mairaines" n'auront qu'à en faire la demande à Mademoiselle Picard 10 Rue Henri Monnier, Paris IXème'.

22 *Paris-Hachette*, vol. 3 (Paris: Hachette, 1913), p. 249.

23 Marriage Certificate of Gaston Picard and Marguerite Picard, État civil de Paris (1860-1902), Archives de Paris, 17e Arr., 09/07/1900, V4E 10223.

BRANDA' ['l'unique et inimitable divette ROUMILDA del BRANDA'], 'in Brazilian merriments' ['aux GAITÉS BRÉSILIENNES'], who will sing the soldier's song 'The Old Soldiers' ['Les Vieux Poilus']. The stage name seems to be perfect for Marguerite Picard, who regularly embarked on concert trips to Brazil.<sup>24</sup> Another performance of Roumilda del Branda took place on 2 December 1916, with the soldier on leave Raymond Carpy as host. Carpy is the author of two eyewitness accounts in *La Revue des marraines* entitled 'Impressions de Guerre' ['War Impressions'] and probably also the poem 'L'Assaut ou Le cri de la terre' ['The Assault or the Cry of the Earth'] signed 'sous-lieutenant R... P...'. This attribution is based on the assumption that 'Carpy' is a transposition of the name Picard and that the initials belonged to a certain Raymond Picard, about whom nothing was found. Our findings suggest that several members of the Picard family were in one way or another involved with *La Revue des marraines*.

The commitment of the Picard family went beyond the journal. This is evidenced by research into the last address, linked to the Picard family through the anagram 'Dracip': 'Every evening at 5 at their residence 58 rue de la Victoire the Misses Dracip offer a literary tea, talks about the war and women's evolution'.<sup>25</sup> According to Paris-Hachette, the British insurer Gresham was established there, but a search in the Gallica database shows that in 1916 two charitable organizations were also registered at this address: L'Œuvre de secours aux artistes français et belges [Aid Society for French and Belgian Artists] and L'Alliance Franco-Belge [The French-Belgian Alliance]. The former hosted charity concerts and sought lodgings for soldier-artists who wanted to be at ease, far away from the violence of the war. The latter supported the destitute Belgian population. One of the most famous war posters by the hand of the Swiss-born French artist Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen, with an image depicting a group of emaciated citizens and the title 'En Belgique les Belges ont faim' ['In Belgium the Belgians are hungry'], was designed for an art tombola of this organization. Another poster designed by Steinlen for a charity sale with musical entertainment in support of Saint-Ay's military hospital advertises the name of Marguerite Picard (Fig. 4). The many references in *La Revue des marraines* to musical events, like the magazine itself, must be seen in the broader context of both the Parisian artistic milieu and war philanthropy and relief.

Intertextual elements hint that the M<sup>lles</sup> Picard were familiar with the periodical press and trench journals. The journal contains a section titled 'News: Latest News by Special Wire of our Correspondents' ['Actualités: Dernières Nouvelles par Fil Spécial de nos Correspondantes'], the heading of which is decorated with a drawing of telegraph poles (Fig. 5). Next to the poles, various cities are mentioned: London, St Petersburg, Rome, Bucharest, Thessaloniki, New York, Lisbon, Sao Paulo, Cairo, Buenos Aires, Beijing, and Saigon. The visual motif of the telegraph poles can be found in several newspapers, magazines, and front journals during the war, including *Le Matin*, *La Presse algérienne*, *L'Argonnaut* (Fig. 3), *La Chiffa*, *Le Petit voisognard*, *Le Tuyau*, and *Le Tas du blacurs*.<sup>26</sup> The M<sup>lles</sup> Picard probably used this visual element to give their journal a professional and worldly look. The second issue, moreover, reprints a stanza from a poem published in *Le Poilu du 37*:

A godmother, friends, but on the whole, what  
A charming child who from afar is interested

24 This is evident from newspaper reports, see, for example, 'Courrier des Théâtres', *Le Figaro* (10 December 1911), 5; 'Courrier musical', *Le Figaro* (1 March 1919), 3.

25 'Tous les soirs à 5h dans leur hôtel 58 rue de la Victoire M<sup>lles</sup> Dracip offrent un thé littéraire, causeries sur la guerre et l'évolution féminine'.

26 See, for example, *Le Matin* (19 January 1915) and *La Presse algérienne* (19 February 1913). For the other examples, see Charpentier, pp. 83, 162, 366.



Fig. 4 Poster by Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen for a charity tombola featuring Marguerite Picard. Source gallica.bnf.fr.

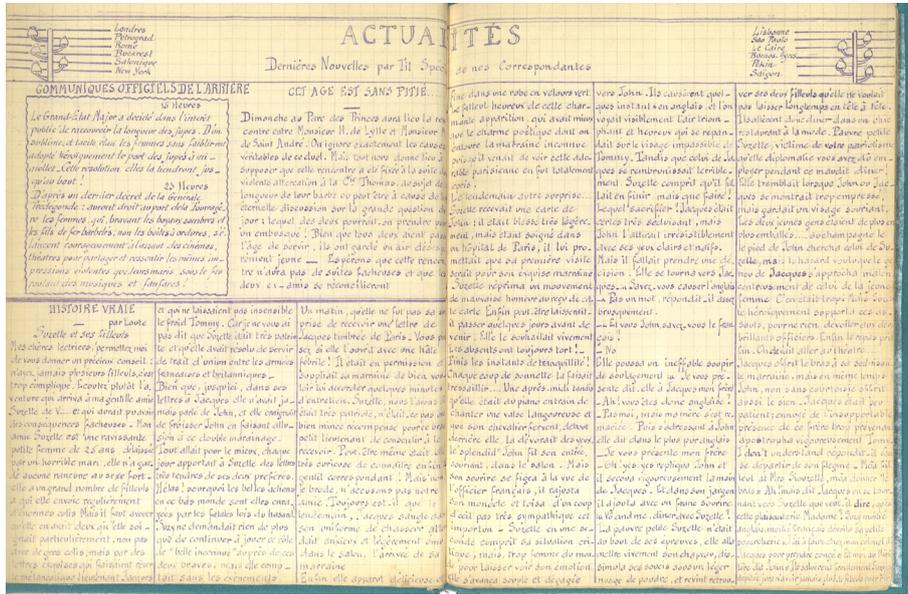


Fig. 5 The visual motif of the telegraph poles in *La Revue des mairaines* (November 1916).

In the poor and hard existence of a Soldier  
whom she embraces in her heart without ever having seen him.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, it is repeatedly mentioned that the journal is intended for the front soldiers and not for 'the shirkers' ['les embusqués'], who had been able to gain a comfortable position at a safe distance from the front.

The oldest issue of the journal, at least in the preserved set under scrutiny here, is dated November 1916. The cover illustrations depict a series of first encounters between godmothers and their godchildren (Fig. 2). Each one of those indicates an incompatibility between the two parties in real life (at the time) because in one case the godmother is much older than the soldier and in the other the situation is quite the reverse. In one case the soldier is black to the obvious surprise of the godmother. That issue contains several short stories, two of which are written from the perspective of women in the war. The first story 'La guerre et la femme' ['Woman and the War'] contains a conversation heard in a salon:

I assure you, he said fervently, this war will have disastrous results for the future of woman!

I considered the end of this speech and my feminist soul rebelled.

What do you understand by that? I ask you Sir?

Let me explain: during this war woman will have been able to judge for herself that desk work is in effect far less tiring than manual work; if she has enjoyed that kind of work it will be difficult for her to return to a financially strained situation that can be avoided if she opts for intellectual work. As a result she will slowly abandon her home to which she is consigned by tradition and move on to devote herself to male preoccupations. What will happen to the home then? [...]

Alright I see you coming, you men, with your instinctive enviousness concerning everything that touches on woman's emancipation. Yes, indeed, this war signals a milestone in women's evolution.<sup>28</sup>

This is a surprisingly feminist argumentation for a publication that is said to be only interested in marriage.<sup>29</sup> The narrator argues that the war marks a significant milestone in the evolution of women. She points at the jealousy in her interlocutor, who claims that women will find it hard to return to their place in the home now that they have tasted working life, and more specifically that of well-paid desk jobs.

A second story that especially addresses women is a piece supposedly taken from a diary of a French woman, Mme Nelly Valmont, who lives in Brussels but happens to be in Paris when the war starts. She relates her return to Brussels with a two-year-old

27 'Une marraine, amis, mais à tout prendre, qu'est-ce | Une charmante enfant qui de loin s'intéresse | A l'existence aride et dure d'un Poilu | Qu'elle adopte en son coeur sans jamais l'avoir vu.' The poem, entitled 'Aux marraines', had previously been published in *Le Poilu du 37: Journal des tranchées* (7 June 1916), 5.

28 'Je vous assure, disait-il, avec véhémence, que cette guerre aura des résultats désastreux sur l'avenir de la femme! Je présentais la fin du speech et mon âme toute féministe se révolta. Qu'entendez-vous par là? Je vous prie Monsieur? Je m'explique: pendant cette guerre la femme aura pu juger ce que sont les travaux de bureaucratie qui en somme sont moins pénibles que les travaux manuels, si elle a pris goût à ces travaux il lui sera difficile après la guerre de retourner à un médiocrité pécuniaire à laquelle elle pourrait remédier par un travail de bureau. Elle abandonnera ainsi peu à peu son foyer où ses anciennes traditions l'attachent pour s'adonner à des travaux masculins. Que deviendra alors le logis? [...] Ah! Je vous vois venir, vous autres les hommes, dans votre jalousie instinctive pour tout ce qui touche à l'indépendance et au progrès de la femme. Oui en effet cette guerre marquera un Jalon dans le chemin de l'évolution féminine.'

29 Grayzel, p. 71.

child and notices how women are separated from their sons, husbands, and fiancés. The rest of this issue is mainly entertainment. Most stories have a romantic theme. One piece is a witness account of the soldier mentioned above, Raymond Carpy, and another is presented as a chapter of a novel entitled *Les deux frères* [*The Two Brothers*], written by a certain Moune Hayte. This is followed by a somewhat bombastic poem, entitled 'À la mémoire de Paul Déroulède' ['In memory of Paul Déroulède'], the famous French poet and politician who fought in the Franco-Prussian War. It was written by corporal Guillot of the 171st:

You fell Déroulède, you old war crier  
 Too early to see your most cherished wish granted  
 By our victorious soldiers, the Germans forced  
 To flee and leave us our old border.<sup>30</sup>

There is a letter by a soldier to his son and a short contribution about fashion with a description of how to make a dress and a hat oneself. Then follow a crossword puzzle and announcements in which women introduce themselves and invite the military to write to them: 'Young female artist 20 years old, witty and elegant, seeks amusing correspondence preferably with hussar officers. Write to: Miss Huguette Arnai.'<sup>31</sup> The last page is like in many other magazines an advertisement. And as one may expect in a woman's magazine, it is an advert for wrinkle cream. Somewhat amusingly, the illustrator has drawn a face before and a face after the use of the cream (Fig. 6).

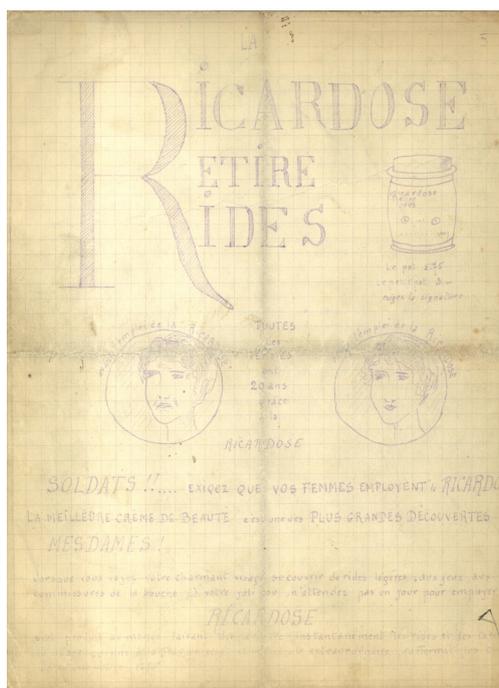


Fig. 6 Advertisement for wrinkle cream in *La Revue des mairaines* (November 1916).

30 'Tu tombas Déroulède, ô vieux crieur de guerre Trop tôt pour voir ton vœu le plus cher, exaucé Par nos soldats vainqueurs, l'allemand pourchassé S'enfuir et nous céder notre antique frontière.'

31 'Jeune artiste 20 ans fine spirituelle, élégante, demande correspondance amusante avec officiers hussard de préférence. Ecrire: M<sup>lle</sup> Huguette Arnai.'

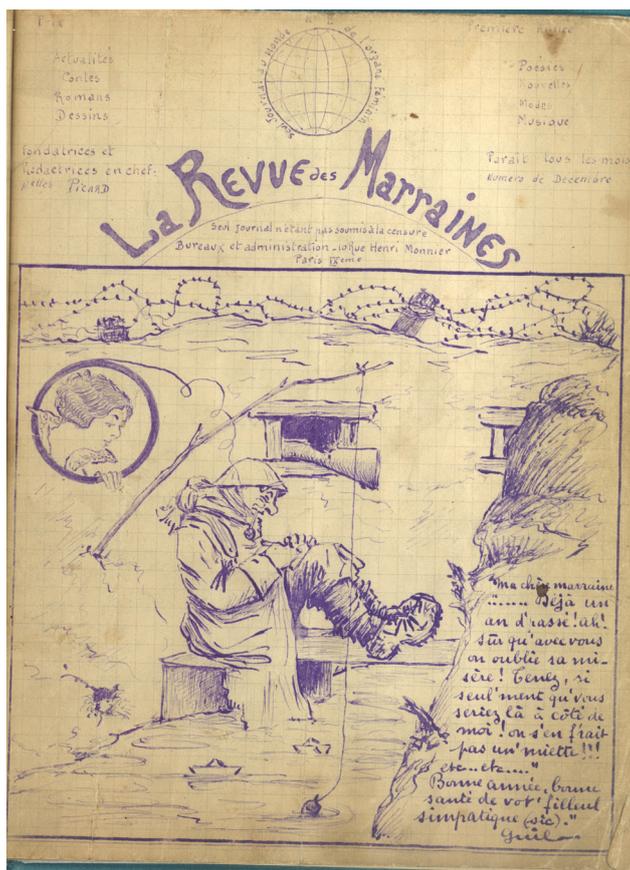


Fig. 7 Title page of the second preserved issue of *La Revue des marraines* (December 1916).

The cover of the next issue was either preserved in a much better environment or this was simply one of the first copies made using the gelatin-paste copy process (Fig. 7). The drawing is also more artistic and more refined than that opening the previous issue and it looks like a realistic war scene: we see barbed wire, shooting holes and mud, the trench is flooded, and a rat is watching. A soldier dreams about his godmother and writes a letter to her, in his dream. The drawing is probably based on the letters about life in the trenches sent in by godsons or family members. The year of publication is not mentioned on the cover but since the editors wish the readers a prosperous 1917 we may safely assume that it was published in December 1916. On top of that the issue includes the report that was announced in the previous number about a trip to London by one of the editors. We can therefore infer that this must be the subsequent issue.

The issue contains very similar contributions to the previous issues: a piece with impressions of the war by Raymond Carpy and an excerpt from the novel *Les Deux frères*. This is followed by sketches from London, among which is a detailed description of the crowdedness of the underground ('L'Heure du "Tube"' ["The Hour of the "Tube"']) and the tea break ('L'Heure du Thé' ["Tea-Time"]). Both pieces are written by the above-mentioned Andrée Pick'hard. Her knowledge of English culture seems to be very thorough. Not only does she know what the English eat at tea-time, she also quotes a refrain from a then fairly new song 'If you were the only girl in the world' and gives the French translation at the bottom of the page. There is also the tale of one of the readers in which a godmother reveals how she sent a photo of her black housekeeper to a prospective godson by way of a practical joke illustrating issues of

race. This is followed by the fictional story of the Frenchwoman Nelly Valmont who is returning to Brussels. The issue also contains a couple of pieces sent in by military men. There is an epic poem in couplets written in the trenches by R[aymond] P[icard], in November 1916:

The earth in fantastic jolts  
 As stirred by seismic tremors  
 Rises in cyclones towards the sky  
 And then falls down in deadly blocks.<sup>32</sup>

A short song-like poem entitled ‘Je resterais garçon’ [‘I would remain a boy’] is dedicated to Marcel D. and written by *sous-lieutenant* Ed. Daures. A short report of a party in the reception hall of *La Revue des mairaines* on 2 December 1916 provides some further insight into the history and social context of the magazine. In this particular issue, the advertisements are grouped on the final page, followed by an announcement of an essay competition for soldiers. Those who have a godmother are expected to write about ‘What do you expect of your godmother?’; those who do not about ‘Why did you not choose a godmother?’ Participants have one month to submit their writings. No prize is mentioned, apart from the promise that the best essays will be published in order of merit in the magazine. Unfortunately, we do not have the next issue, which makes it difficult to determine if there were any submissions, and if so, how many.

What we do have brings us to the autumn of 1917, almost a year later. The third and final issue in the volume, dated September [1917], is a lot thinner, with only nine pages as opposed to the fifteen pages of the November 1916 issue and the seventeen pages of the subsequent number. The year of publication is not mentioned, but the Statue of Liberty is on the front page and inside there is an article about the Americans in Paris, indicating that the issue must have been compiled after the United States declared war on Germany in April 1917. The cover image revisits an earlier topic: that of the young woman who has to choose between two suitors (Fig. 8). The issue opens with two short romantic stories, one in English by Boiling Polly and one written in French by Cora Bonheur, followed by another excerpt from *Les deux frères* and two short stories further elaborating on the theme of Americans in Paris. There is also a poem by Rirette dedicated to A. N., and a sonnet by L. Altasserre addressed to Mademoiselle Picard:

Thank you I have well received  
 Your journal, dear godmother  
 It is charming and well designed;  
 But I must tell you

This: when my friends found out  
 I had this gift from a queen  
 They all wanted to take a look  
 At the Regiment of the Grand Turenne!

Nothing but a piece, some scrap  
 of your writings, signed Picard  
 I said write to her  
 Who loves soldiers and art.

32 ‘La terre dans des secousses fantastiques | Comme remué par des tremblements sismiques | S’élève en cyclones vers le ciel | Et puis retombe en blocs mortels.’



Fig. 8 Title page of the third preserved issue of *La Revue des marraines* (September [1917]).

Perhaps you will have as gifts  
Both the 'Revue' and the 'Godmothers'.<sup>33</sup>

Again addressing the relationship between godmothers and soldiers, the poem suggests that the journal was sent to the frontline and read by several soldiers of the same regiment. As usual, the final page of the issue is taken up by advertisements, indicating that quite a number of soldiers were still looking for grandmothers towards the end of 1917. Two of the advertisements are in English, one again mentioning Boiling Polly, the other sent in by a 'French girl who simply loves Khaki and who has no godson'. Finally, there is a correspondence section with beauty tips, love advice, and offers to exchange books, for which messages are received up until ten days before publication of the journal.

33 'Merci beaucoup j'ai bien reçu | Votre journal, chère marraine | Il est charmant et bien conçu; | Mais il faut que je vous apprenne | Ceci: quand les copains ont su | Que j'avais ce cadeau de reine | Tous en voulaient un aperçu | Au Régiment du Grand Turenne! | Rien qu'un morceau, quelque parcelle | De vos écrits, signés Picard | Moi j'ai dit écrivez à celle | Qui aime les poilus et l'art. | Peut-être aurez-vous pour étrennes | Et la "Revue" et les "Marraines".'

## Conclusion

*La Revue des mairaines* was the dedicated work of two or more French women named Picard who wanted to support the soldiers at the front. They wanted to put war godmothers and front soldiers in touch via their journal. The few issues discussed here reveal the views of the M<sup>lles</sup> Picard. The first issue contains a number of feminist pieces and tips for making one's own clothes. Later issues show a more romantic view of the phenomenon of the war godmothers. In this way, the editors tried to respond to the needs of their implicit readership: the 'mairaines' and the 'filleuls'. The women who managed this journal, moreover, demonstrated a lot of creativity. They not only presented themselves in multiple guises and wrote under various pseudonyms but also showcased their talents as artists, writers, and singers.

Although *La Revue des mairaines* — as presumably the creation of a few women belonging to one and the same family — shows a number of affinities with the long tradition of family journals, it should be seen first and foremost among the trench journals. War godmothers formed a link between the front and the home front. They were in contact with the soldiers and founded periodicals to distribute advertisements, stories, and poems. Copying paste allowed for handwritten trench journals to be reproduced in a limited edition. This technique was probably also used for the reproduction of *La Revue des mairaines*, which further shares a number of formal features with the trench journals.

This case study is relevant for research on trench journals and the role of women during the war. It demonstrates that women also founded trench journals with a clear connection to the home front. In addition, *La Revue des mairaines* comments on the role of women during the war. It focuses on the phenomenon of the war godmothers and reflects on gender relations, race, and sexuality. Many questions, however, are left unanswered. There are no references to this handwritten journal and the listed authors cannot be traced in biographical dictionaries and databases. Still, there was a Picard family at the indicated address and the other locations mentioned in the journal are also real. Moreover, the time indications, such as the American entry into the First World War and the references to contemporary music and fashion, make this into an authentic and unique document that provides insight into the phenomenon of the 'mairaines'.

**Marysa Demoor** is Professor of English Literature at Ghent University and a life member of Clare Hall, Cambridge. In 2011, she was also the holder of the Van Dyck Chair at UCLA. She is the author of *Their Fair Share: Women, Power, and Criticism in the Athenaeum, from Millicent Garrett Fawcett to Katherine Mansfield, 1870–1920* (Ashgate, 2000) and the editor of *Marketing the Author: Authorial Personae, Narrative Selves, and Self-Fashioning, 1880–1930* (Palgrave, 2004). With Laurel Brake, she edited *The Lure of Illustration in the Nineteenth Century: Picture and Press* (Palgrave, 2009) and the *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism* (British Library and Academia Press, 2009). Her current research focuses on the cross-fertilization between Northern Belgium and Britain during the long nineteenth century.

**Birgit Van Puymbroeck** is Postdoctoral Fellow of the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) at Ghent University. Her research interests include modernism, networks, periodicals, and sound/radio. She has published on modernist authors, 'little' magazines, and Anglo-French relations in *PMLA*; *Modern Language Review*; *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920*; and *Neophilologus*. She is the editor-in-chief of the *Journal*

of *Diversity and Gender Studies*, and is currently working on a book, provisionally titled *Networking Modernism*.

**Marianne Van Remoortel** is Assistant Professor at the Department of Literary Studies, Ghent University. She is the author of *Lives of the Sonnet, 1787–1895: Genre, Gender, and Criticism* (Ashgate, 2011) and *Women, Work, and the Victorian Periodical: Living by the Press* (Palgrave, 2015; runner-up 2015 Robert and Vineta Colby Scholarly Book Prize). Her ERC Starting Grant project 'Agents of Change: Women Editors and Socio-Cultural Transformation in Europe, 1710–1920' takes her research on the periodical press in a new transnational, collaborative direction.

### Bibliography

- Charpentier, André, *Feuilles bleu horizon 1914–1918* (Paris: Le Livre d'or des journaux du front, 1935)
- Ferron, Maxine, 'Marraines de guerre: Rôles et représentations pendant la grande guerre' (unpublished master's thesis, Université catholique de l'ouest d'Angers, 2008)
- Grayzel, Susan R., 'Mothers, Marraines, and Prostitutes: Morale and Morality in First World War France', *International History Review*, 19.1 (1997), 66–82
- 'Les Marraines de guerre', *Chemins de mémoire*, [www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr](http://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr) [accessed 27 April 2017]
- Meul, Mieke, 'De oorlogsmeters van de Belgische soldaten tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog (1914–1918)' (unpublished master's thesis, KU Leuven, 2002)
- Turbergue, Jean-Pierre, *Les Journaux des tranchées* (Triel-sur-Seine: Editions Italiques, 2007)