

2024

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Recommended Citation

Outtrim, Megan R. (2024) "Heroes, Victims, and Future Citizens: Representations of French Children During World War I," *Swarthmore Undergraduate History Journal*: 5 (1), 219-254. 10.24968/2693-244X.5.1.7 <https://works.swarthmore.edu/suhj/vol5/iss1/7>

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Heroes, Victims, and Future Citizens: Representations of French Children During World War I

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Abstract: The effects of total war society in France during World War I (WWI) dramatically altered the daily lives of both adults and children, witnessing increasing levels of patriotic rhetoric, wartime propaganda, and anti-German sentiment. Children were often made the focal point of this propaganda, as they represented the future of the nation. As such, three specific representations of children emerge from WWI propaganda in France: the heroic child, the victimized child, and the malleable future citizen. Some of these representations were depicted in propaganda meant for children specifically, while others were depicted in propaganda meant to mobilize adults in the name of children. Regardless of whether the propaganda was made for children or simply manipulated their images to mobilize adults, these representations established the only acceptable roles that children could fit into in society during the war. By analyzing collections of photographs, posters, newspaper articles, children's literature, memoirs, and school assignments from 1914 to 1919, it is possible to examine the development of these representations of children in French media during WWI and, to an extent, judge whether or not children understood themselves as fitting into these roles.

Shortly after it began, World War One became a “total war” which seeped into all the crevices of society and dramatically changed daily life for both children and adults in France. Anti-German sentiment heightened in a nation where it already existed following the loss of Alsace-Lorraine in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871), leading to portrayals of Germans as one barbaric and sub-human entity.¹ Schools in France distanced themselves from the late nineteenth-century trend of pacifist and socialist patriotism, instead fully embracing war rhetoric and putting it at the center of education.² Patriotism spiked as French media stressed the importance of contributing to the war effort, mass-producing posters, postcards, and literature, among other things, for public consumption. Children formed a central theme of this wartime propaganda in France, having the dual position of consumer and subject, and so sat at the heart of much cultural mobilization for both civilians and combatants.³ Representations of children appeared on posters, in newspapers, on postcards, and in a host of other forms, reminding French men of why they fought—a good Frenchman would protect his country from the Germans to give his wife and children a safe, happy future. For women, French children’s representations functioned as a call to humanitarian aid—both from within France and internationally—as the number of French orphans rose throughout the war. Women mobilized as members of societies that lent aid to suffering children, especially from the decimated region of

¹ Neil Harris and T. J. Edelstein, *En Guerre: French Illustrators and World War I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Library, 2014), 27.

² Galit Haddad, “Chapitre 10. 1914-1918 : Un « défaitisme » des enseignants de l’école républicaine ? Le pacifisme des instituteurs et institutrices français face à la guerre,” in *Les Écoles dans la guerre : Acteurs et institutions éducatives dans les tourmentes guerrières (xviiie-xxe siècles)*, ed. Jean-François Condette, *Histoire et civilisations* (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2016), 233.

³ Manon Pignot, “Children,” in *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, ed. Jay Winter, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 31.

Alsace-Lorraine, who felt the effect of war stronger than anywhere else in France.⁴ In the later years of the war, the philanthropic groups started in France in response to images of victimized children would encourage American counterparts, such as the Children's Bureau of the American Red Cross.⁵ These American children's associations worked alongside their French counterparts and generated their own French children's media to send home, encouraging even more philanthropy.

French children became audiences for propaganda and patriotism, absorbing ideologies and information on war taught to them in media designed for their age groups. Often, this media had the end goal of encouraging enlistment of the oldest children upon reaching the military age requirement, or of pushing younger and/or female children to contribute in other ways than actual warfare.⁶ War discourse recycled spaces and materials used in pre-war France to define a specific place for children in society, turning schools, literature, children's magazines, and toys into "vectors of distribution" for patriotic and pro-war sentiment.⁷ The French school system remade itself during wartime, with new curriculums and lesson plans specifically designed to foster patriotism and justify the war to its young pupils.⁸ Most homefront mobilization of children occurred in the classroom, where students knitted for soldiers, created packages to send to the front, and raised money for the war.⁹

From the propaganda involving French children during WWI—as subject or as consumer—three distinct categories of children emerge: the heroic child, the victimized child,

⁴ Olivier Faron, *Les enfants du deuil: orphelins et pupilles de la nation de la Première Guerre mondiale, 1914-1941*, Textes à l'appui (Paris: Découverte, 2001).

⁵ *The Fatherless Children of France, Inc* (New York: The Fatherless Children of France, Inc., 1919).

⁶ Pignot, "Children," 34; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 2nd ed. (Paris, France: Armand Colin, 2004), 19.

⁷ Pignot, "Children," 33.

⁸ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 24.

⁹ Pignot, "Children," 34 ; Alamy Limited, "Cartoon, French Classroom Scene, with Girls Knitting Socks for Soldiers at the Front during the First World War. Date: 1915 Stock Photo - Alamy," accessed September 27, 2022; "Aux Elèves de Nos Lycées et Collèges... | Gallica," accessed September 20, 2022.

and the future citizen. The representations of these varying “types” of children targeted different audiences for different purposes, with the manipulation of children being the underlying thread connecting them all. The first representation is the “heroic child”: patriotic, desperate to fight for the Fatherland, even occasionally running away from home to enlist illegally. The heroic child encompasses the height of bravery and valor. Next, there is the victimized child—children left without family members or necessities such as food or shelter, whose suffering called for urgent intervention. The propaganda centered on this representation of the French child led to philanthropic associations who in turn created more of this media, their influence reaching as far as the United States and inspiring joint American-French children’s missions. Finally, the third representation of children comes in the form of the malleable future citizen. Not yet considered citizens in their own right, French children were considered “blank-slates,” ready to be molded through propaganda at home and at school into citizens who would respond to the needs of France.¹⁰

This three-part typology may not be applicable to every piece of child-related propaganda generated in WWI France, but it gives a general idea of how adults viewed children in a wartime context. Propaganda came in many different forms and filtered into all areas of daily life, and with children occupying a central place in society as “figures of innocence, symbols of home and future,” it only makes sense that they had an equally central place in this propaganda, both as subjects and recipients.¹¹ These three representations were also not mutually exclusive; by layering these representations on top of each other with different amounts of emphasis on one or another, the creator of a propaganda piece could achieve an effect that would not be possible when using just one. What is harder to deduce, however, is how well French children themselves

¹⁰ Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 23.

¹¹ Pignot, “Children,” 31.

identified with these representations. Would they view themselves, and the war, in the same way as did adults? Or did they have a different understanding of their experiences and their roles in wartime? Perhaps they would have identified with one of these three representations and rejected the others, depicting themselves in some other, as-yet-unknown category.

Most work on the experiences of French children during WWI comes from two French historians: Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Manon Pignot. The two have generated much scholarship on the roles of children in wartime, with analyses of children in combat, changing family dynamics in wartime, and nationalistic sentiment within literature and other media. One of the best comprehensive studies of the lives of French children during WWI that currently exists, Audoin-Rouzeau's book *La Guerre des enfants: 1914-1918 (The Children's War: 1914-1918)*, discusses the adult expectations of children in contributing to the war effort, as well as how they sought to encourage this at home, at school, and through child-directed content such as magazines and books.¹² His other works touch on these ideas as well, with specific focus given to the education system, child heroes, and children's overall interactions with their society. Pignot, similarly, has written a great deal on French children during wartime. Some of her works analyze the experiences of adolescent combatants on the front.¹³ Pignot, like Audoin-Rouzeau, has authored an impressive comprehensive work based on archives of children's drawings, letters, diaries, memoirs, and oral histories to examine the experiences of children as historical agents during WWI.¹⁴ This rich collection of primary sources allow her to thoroughly examine how children experienced war through their own artistic and written expressions; however,

¹² All translations are my own unless noted.

¹³ Manon Pignot, *L'appel de la guerre: des adolescents au combat, 1914-1918* (Paris: Anamosa, 2019) ; Manon Pignot, "« Les Enfants Ne Vont Pas Au Front »: Les Combattants Juvéniles de La Grande Guerre," *Le Mouvement Social*, no. 261 (2017): 31–47.

¹⁴ Manon Pignot, *Allons enfants de la patrie: génération Grande Guerre*, Univers historique (Paris: Seuil, 2012).

caution must be taken with any analyses of memoirs and oral histories documented after the war, as memories can alter over time as children grow into adults and time separates them from their past experiences. A few other historians have contributed to the field as well, such as Bérénice Zunino, who describes wartime children's literature, and Olivier Faron's writings on the status of war orphans; however, the bulk of the research on French children's daily lives during WWI comes from Audoin-Rouzeau and Pignot.

While these two historians have made notable progress in the documentation of the French child's experience during WWI, Audoin-Rouzeau and Pignot do not thoroughly analyze how propaganda categorized the experience of childhood during wartime through the creation of rigid and socially accepted roles for children. Children's lives altered quickly once the war broke out (at school, at home, and in society at large) and continued on this new, conflict-centered path through to the end of the conflict, but the varied avenues of *how* this occurred needs more study.¹⁵ This paper seeks to examine the use of propaganda by adults in WWI France to create distinct roles for children in society (the hero, the victim, the future citizen), and how children's experiences reveal their own understanding of their place in society. The categorical representations of children in propaganda give us the adult perspective of childhood in wartime, while studying children's experiences can give us insight as to whether they understood themselves in this same way, or if they had a different understanding of their roles during the war. A variety of primary sources including posters, postcards, children's books, newspapers, and photographs can be used to investigate these questions and add to the existing scholarship on the topic.

¹⁵ Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 18-22 ; Pignot, "Children," 29.

The Heroic Child

Brave, patriotic, and eager for a turn to fight, the heroic child appears often in both adult and child-focused propaganda pieces from WWI France. The heroic child essentially encompassed any child who made contributions and/or sacrifices during the war, whether on the homefront (as most cases were) or in actual conflict. For adults, child heroes functioned as symbols representing the nation fighting for survival, the small fighting for a larger whole.¹⁶ Propaganda pushed forth the idea of a war for the defense of children, an idea which resonated with soldiers who had left children behind.¹⁷ By employing imagery of children as war heroes themselves, adults seeing this propaganda remembered their cause for fighting and the influence their actions would have on nurturing the next generation. Before 1914, French adults sought to separate children from the topic of warfare, considering it “unchristian” to stir hatred among children and expose them to such brutality.¹⁸ But the total war society generated by WWI changed this, raising the stakes so high that anything and everything could be justified, including the use and heroization of children in propaganda.

Since children’s mobilization happened most often on the homefront, propaganda reflected this. For example, posters appeared in schools that called on youth to raise money and gold for the national bank. One poster, reading “Bring your gold to the Bank of France: To the students of our high schools and middle schools” demonstrates the association of children’s war contributions with heroism.¹⁹ The poster asks youth to raise gold donations from friends, family, and even their schoolteachers to give to the national bank to help fund the war. At the end of the poster’s appeal, it states “The gold that one puts into the Bank of France resembles the harvest that your arms will have brought out of our fields: it’s a strength and a weapon. You will be

¹⁶ Pignot, “Children,” 31.

¹⁷ Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants : 1914-1918*, 17.

¹⁸ Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 186.

¹⁹ Translated from original. “Aux Elèves de Nos Lycées et Collèges... | Gallica,” accessed September 20, 2022.

proud one day to have been, you too, among the workers of Victory.”²⁰ The use of war-centric language in this poster clearly ties children’s donations to the heroism of the battlefield, claiming that children who participate will take part in French victory. Another example of the heroization of children’s homefront contributions can be seen in images of children knitting or making parcels to send to soldiers. One cartoon from *La Baïonette* (The Bayonet), a magazine distributed to French soldiers, shows a classroom full of little girls knitting. One girl stands up to say that another child has accused her soldier of having big feet, due to the size of her knitting.²¹ In the bottom-left corner, one girl writes a letter to a soldier which reads, “Dear Defender of the homeland.” While this cartoon was primarily meant to amuse soldiers, one can see how ingrained heroic child rhetoric and imagery is through the chosen classroom setting, where the students work on their knitting and letter writing with looks of intense determination. Propaganda pieces like these were abundant, came in many forms, and always stressed the role of the child as a hero.

For children, propaganda about the heroic child was a more stylized form of that for adults.²² Less of an abstract symbol of heroism composed of all the sacrifices and contributions made by children, the heroic child in children’s propaganda often appeared as an actual figure doing heroic deeds; children did not mobilize by observing their own sacrifices and contributions, but by modeling themselves after an idealized figure. The most common hero figures come from children’s literature, meant as role models and patriotic emblems for children rather than examples of their actual compatriots. One of these role model heroes from children’s literature, was Bobby, the young protagonist of the book *En guerre!* by Charlotte Schaller in 1914.

²⁰ “Aux Elèves de Nos Lycées et Collèges... | Gallica.”

²¹ Alamy Limited, “Cartoon, French Classroom Scene, with Girls Knitting Socks for Soldiers at the Front during the First World War. Date: 1915 Stock Photo - Alamy,” accessed September 27, 2022.

²² Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 12.

In the story, he, his two sisters, and the neighborhood children act out the first few months of the war, mobilize their toy soldiers, and participate in key moments from the first year of warfare such as the Battle of Liège and the Battle of the Marne. On the final page, children chant “Vivent les alliés! Vive la France! [Long live the Allies! Long live France!]”²³ This book fit into a larger trend of children’s books published during the war which showed young French children such as Bobby participating directly in the war, using toys and other objects familiar to children to successfully destroy the German threat.²⁴

Children’s publications also played into this representation by publishing comments by young readers where they expressed a desire to fight, to kill Germans, and to be like their fathers. A demand to enlist by nine-year-old Henri Lacorre received the following response from French President Raymond Poincaré, published in the children’s periodical *Mon Journal (My Newspaper)* on May 8, 1915: “The patriotic desire expressed by Henri Lacorre cannot, unfortunately, be realized, the law does not permit enlistment before the age of 17. But it is already serving France to be a well-behaved and hard-working child.”²⁵ Following children’s comments like this one with a statement that the reader was too young to fight, but praising them for their zeal, these publications made it clear that a child could be a hero simply by wanting to go to war, even if they could not actually do so. The heroic child of WWI ultimately became the newest incarnation of the mythical figure of the “child hero” which had appeared in nearly every conflict in France since the murder of child soldier Joseph Bara in the French Revolution.²⁶

²³ Neil Harris and T. J. Edelstein, *En Guerre: French Illustrators and World War I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Library, 2014), 111.

²⁴ Bérénice Zunino, “Children’s Literature” (Freie Universität Berlin, August 2014), 3-5.

²⁵ Translated from the original French. Manon Pignot, *L’appel de la guerre: des adolescents au combat, 1914-1918* (Paris: Anamosa, 2019), 83.

²⁶ Pignot, “Children,” 31; Zunino, “Children’s Literature”; Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 185.

Real child combatants were not common throughout France in WWI, but they did exist, and their legacies appeared in different types of heroic child propaganda until the end of the war. As French society developed acceptable roles for children along traditional gendered lines, boys were encouraged to think of themselves as combatants-to-be, separated from enlistment solely by how many years were left before their seventeenth birthdays. Age, however, did not stop children from requesting—or even demanding—the right to enlist. Similar to Lacorre’s case, political leaders and army commanders received numerous requests to enlist from adolescents and children from the very start of the war.²⁷ Many of these requests made their way into newspapers and magazines such as the *Ladies Home Journal*, demonstrating the heroism of youth, and reinforcing in the minds of the public a representation of heroic childhood that influenced how adults understood children’s place in wartime society.²⁸

From the many adolescents desiring to enlist in the war came a smaller group of boys who took matters into their own hands and actually attempted to join the military through illegal means. Propaganda and war culture in schools, at home, and in the public sphere had taught them that children had an obligation to recognize and participate in the sacrifices made by adults in a war meant to defend their generation, in order to be worthy of being called French.²⁹ For the adolescents who tried to, and sometimes succeeded in, illegally joining the military, their enlistment served as this recognition and participation in war sacrifices. Usually between the

²⁷ Pignot, *L'appel de la guerre*, 84.

²⁸ “Roger Lang Is Only 14 Years Old but Even so, He Wants to Fight for France, and He Wants to Avenge His Mother Who Died from Fright One Night during a Bombardment, and His Father Who Went to the Front in 1914 and Has Never Come Back. The Boy Has Been Adopted by the [...] Thanks to the Money Which They Have Sent Him He Will Go to a Trade School and Then He Will Be Able to Support His Little Brother Pierre. For the War Will Surely Be over before Roger’s Class Is Called, and There He and Pierre Can Go Back to Lorraine, Which Is Their Home Even If Their House Is Destroyed, and Even If the Father and Mother Are Both Gone. The American Red Cross Administers the Funds for the Maintenance of All the Children Adopted by the American Troops,” image, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, accessed September 27, 2022.

²⁹ Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 12 ; Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 16.

ages of fourteen and sixteen years old, child combatants mainly consisted of runaways (some with family already looking for them), most of which were spotted as soon as they tried to enlist.³⁰ The contemporary pedagogue Marie Hollebecque recorded around 127 cases of voluntary departures in Paris alone in 1916—a low number compared to the number of schoolchildren in Paris at the time, but still amounting to roughly ten attempts to run away and enlist per month, on average.³¹ The adolescents who successfully joined the military accomplished this through falsifying their names and dates of birth, as well as confusing recruiting officers by their appearances; while legally still minors, some of these young combatants no longer looked like children and were hard to distinguish from the youngest legally-enlisted soldiers.³²

Not much information exists on French child combatants from WWI, as the majority of those who successfully made their way into the armed forces needed to keep their illegal participation a secret; however, the few who society knew of became the ultimate embodiment of the Heroic Child figure and appeared in propaganda photos, articles, and books across the nation. Gustave Chatain, a fourteen-year-old boy from Fontainebleau, was one of these emblematic child soldiers, deemed even more heroic than other soldiers due to their dedication to the war at such a young age. He ran away from home in 1914 and followed French troops into battle. Chatain fought in the First Battle of the Marne and the First Battle of the Aisne, suffered gunshot wounds, and took two German soldiers prisoner.³³ Finally, a ministerial order in 1915 forced his return to his family; for his service, he received the rank of corporal and the Croix de Guerre

³⁰ Pignot, “Children,” 32.

³¹ Pignot, *L'appel de la guerre*, 88.

³² Pignot, “Children,” 32; Pignot, *L'appel de la guerre*, 96-104.

³³ Union républicaine (France) Auteur du texte, “La Dépêche de Brest : Journal Politique et Maritime [“puis” Journal de l’Union Républicaine ‘Puis’ Journal Républicain Quotidien ‘Puis’ Quotidien Républicain Du Matin]...,” Gallica, September 23, 1915.

(War Cross), a French military decoration awarded for feats of bravery.³⁴ Chatain's story resonated with a population that judged individual worth by service to the state, and newspapers such as *La Dépêche de Brest* (*The Brest News*) and *La Lanterne* (*The Lantern*) printed his story for readers throughout the nation, consistently using strong language that emphasized his bravery and heroism: "In the Golden Book that France is composing at the moment, there will be pages for everyone and the children themselves will be honored," opens *La Lanterne* in its article about Chatain.³⁵ The article goes on to describe his campaign as "brilliant" and states that "we all love this brave kid" after giving Chatain's own detailed account of his war experience.³⁶ To readers of this newspaper and the others which printed his story, Chatain and his fellow youth combatants were the incarnations of the child hero and demonstrated the lengths to which all members of society were willing to go for the nation, even those of the youngest generation.

As images and written accounts of real child combatants and enlistment-hopefuls won the devotion of French adults and their continued allegiance to the concept of heroic childhood, the majority of French children had a very different experience of the war. Children likely hoped to become like the war heroes in the news, in their children's books, and on the front, but no evidence exists to suggest that they understood their own experiences during wartime as heroic, even though adults considered their smallest contributions and sacrifices to be so. In the daily lives of children, heroic childhood propaganda was eclipsed by the amount of guilt and sacrifice-based propaganda targeted at them at home and in schools. Many constituent texts by adults for children pushed the idea that childhood gave the war its meaning, an idea reinforced by schools, and created the unspoken rule that, if the war was *for* children, a lot could be asked of them

³⁴ texte, "La Dépêche de Brest."

³⁵ texte, "La Dépêche de Brest"; "La Lanterne : Journal Politique Quotidien," Gallica, October 1, 1914.

³⁶ "La Lanterne : Journal Politique Quotidien," Gallica, October 1, 1914.

without complaint.³⁷ This specific war culture trained children to interiorize guilt, mobilize through acts of goodwill, and constantly be aware of the sacrifices made in their name; ironically, the acts of sacrifice and contribution French children made in their daily lives which adults viewed as heroic, children viewed as the minimum requirements to be worthy of the sacrifices in their name.

The Victimized Child

On the opposite side of the spectrum of children's propaganda rests the representation of the victimized child, a child suffering from the terrible realities of war such as starvation, occupation, injuries, and the loss of loved ones. With the pressures of rationing, the invasions of German armies, and the disruption to family that came with the mobilization of 79 percent of French men between the ages of fifteen and 49, nearly all French children from this period could fall under this category in some way or another.³⁸ However, the bulk of this form of propaganda derived from images and written accounts of children from the occupied regions of Alsace and Lorraine, and fatherless or orphaned children throughout the nation. The representation of the victimized child in propaganda targeted adults exclusively, using children as subjects and exploiting their situations for financial gain. Victimized child imagery served a few purposes in adult mobilization, such as inspiring men to defend children suffering at the hands of the enemy, and, most importantly, raising money for philanthropic associations devoted to child-directed charity work—the efficacy of this type of propaganda depended on emotional appeal to achieve a goal.³⁹ The child victim inspired men to fight for justice and women to participate in

³⁷ Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 15-19.

³⁸ Susan Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State Britain and France, 1914-1945*, ACLS Humanities E-Book. (Cambridge ; Cambridge University Press, 1993), 79.

³⁹ Olivier Faron, "Aux côtés, avec, pour les pupilles de la nation. Les formes de mobilisation en faveur des orphelins de la Première Guerre mondiale," *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 205, no. 1 (2002): 15.

humanitarian work and volunteering, which became one of the main forms of female contribution to the war effort in France.

Prior to WWI, France did not have much of a welfare state; orphans, widows, and the poor largely depended on donations from places of worship and charitable organizations as the government did not provide for them a regulated form of financial support and protection. The devastation caused by WWI became a major catalyst towards the formation of the first government welfare systems in France, and in Europe more broadly.⁴⁰ Partially responsible for this was the mass mobilization of philanthropic organizations that rallied around propaganda of suffering children.⁴¹ Charitable associations created in the name of protecting and helping children—especially orphans—subsequently produced propaganda of their own to encourage further charitable mobilization, creating a chain reaction that led to large-scale multiplication of philanthropy groups within the four years of warfare.⁴² This representation of childhood in French propaganda has the unique and notable trait of trans-Atlantic influence as well; imagery and written descriptions of the horrors facing French children had a powerful effect on American citizens as well as French, bringing American philanthropic organizations like the Red Cross across the ocean to join in relief efforts for children. While these associations and organizations often had very different influences, all had one shared characteristic: they appealed to the generosity of the public in all possible ways in the name of rescuing French children.⁴³ An American newspaper from 1916, *The Evening World*, shows how prevalent this issue was—in it is a full-page “appeal for the orphan children of French soldiers who have died in defense of

⁴⁰ Olivier Faron, “4. Orphelin, pupille, ayant droit...,” in *Les enfants du deuil*, TAP / HIST Contemporaine (Paris: La Découverte, 2001), 125; Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State Britain and France, 1914-1945*, 80.

⁴¹ Faron, “Aux côtés, avec, pour les pupilles de la nation,” 15.

⁴² Faron, “Aux côtés, avec, pour les pupilles de la nation,” 15.

⁴³ Faron, “Aux côtés, avec, pour les pupilles de la nation,” 16.

France.”⁴⁴ The appeal claims that orphans needing aid are in excess of 400,000 and emphasizes the pledge of the American Society for the Relief of French War Orphans to help war orphans. Published around Thanksgiving, this newspaper ad states in bold that “the needs of war orphans of France peculiarly call for American sympathy and help...at this period of National Thanksgiving,” with declarations that helping French children is the least Americans could do after the help giving to them by the French in the American Revolution.⁴⁵ Appeals like this could be found in newspapers across the United States, as an entire population across the ocean sat itching to contribute to the war, their spirits unperturbed by the war fatigue, lack of resources, and devastation of territory that had fallen across the belligerent nations of Europe by 1917.

One particularly important and large philanthropic association, the American Red Cross, stationed itself in key locations across France such as Paris and Evian, founding children’s hospitals and sending nurses into warzones to find and rescue children through their Children’s Bureau.⁴⁶ Services provided by the thousands of American and French volunteers included cleaning children, delousing them, providing them with food and clothing, providing medical treatment, and searching for any living relatives for the children.⁴⁷ To share their work with an emotionally-invested public, the Red Cross published books and pamphlets such as June Richardson Lucas’s *The Children of France and the Red Cross* (1919) detailing the circumstances of the children they helped. This book was composed of Lucas’s daily journal as a Red Cross worker, and she includes numerous stories of different children who are described as

⁴⁴ The American Society for the Relief of French War Orphans, “Appeal for Orphan Children of French Soldiers Who Have Died in Defense of France,” *The Evening World*, Saturday, November 25, 1916.

⁴⁵ The American Society for the Relief of French War Orphans. “Appeal for Orphan Children of French Soldiers Who Have Died in Defense of France.” *The Evening World*, Saturday, November 25, 1916.

⁴⁶ William Palmer Lucas, *Work of the Children’s Bureau, Department of Civil Affairs, American Red Cross, France* (Chicago: American Medical Association, 1918).

⁴⁷ June Richardson Lucas, *The Children of France and the Red Cross* (Burgess Hill, West Sussex: Diggory, 2005), 19.

“poor,” “homeless,” “orphaned,” “sad,” “injured,” “dirty,” and full of lice.⁴⁸ This book, and many of the others like it, also included posed photographs of children with captions meant to evoke sympathy. In one example from *The Children of France and the Red Cross* is a photo of an injured young boy, with his injuries clearly visible to the viewer. The caption of his photo reads “A boy at Evian who has lost his left eye and has a mutilated left hand as the result of a loaded pencil given him by a German soldier;” this photo is just one of many similarly-posed and captioned images of children meant to evoke sympathy, charity, and reinforce Germanophobia.⁴⁹ Some of these children held the title of *repatrié* (repatriated)—French citizens that the Germans forced to relocate into Germany and Switzerland, and who were sent back to France when the lack of resources in Germany became too great.⁵⁰ The Red Cross and its fellow organizations presented the stories of children like these to the American middle class in hopes of receiving donations.

A particularly successful propaganda strategy using the concept of child victims, run by the Red Cross Children’s Bureau, came in the form of a campaign allowing American soldiers serving in France to sponsor or “adopt” a child. Proposed by the *Stars and Stripes* (the newspaper for the US troops) and readily accepted by the Children’s Bureau, American military companies could write to the Red Cross asking to sponsor a child fitting whatever descriptions they desired.⁵¹ The company would pay five hundred Franks (one hundred American dollars in 1918) which the Children’s Bureau would apply to the “care, education, or useful training of any kind, for a French child.”⁵² In exchange for their donation, the soldiers would receive a

⁴⁸ Lucas, *The Children of France and the Red Cross*. No page number provided, as each of these descriptions appears numerous times throughout the entirety of the book.

⁴⁹ Lucas, *The Children of France and the Red Cross*, 48.

⁵⁰ Lucas, *The Children of France and the Red Cross*, 4.

⁵¹ Lucas, *The Children of France and the Red Cross*, 187.

⁵² Lucas, *The Children of France and the Red Cross*, 187.

photograph of their child, the child's history, and how to keep in touch with them. A popular program for American soldiers seeking to help the many children they encountered, dozens of "adoptions" occurred within its first few weeks. One such case, noted in *The Children of France and the Red Cross* is described: "Several days ago we had a letter from Company G...: "*Company G met Easter morning. We want to adopt a little boy of six with blue eyes, the son of a man who fell at Verdun.*"...We found Henri...we had him photographed at once and his picture and his history sent to the company. Miss P—...said he had two brothers and two sisters. To-day we received the answer: "*Company G takes the whole bunch.*"⁵³ Children like Henri became known as French "mascots," and their stories, along with their communications with their American "godfathers," became a key form of propaganda used by American philanthropic associations in France.⁵⁴ Works such as these provided a public desperate for good news with a redemption story they could feel proud of—the suffering child, victimized by the morally-depraved Germans, saved by the generous donations and volunteer work of the morally upright Allied powers.

American and French philanthropists ran a joint campaign to raise donations of free milk for France as well—due to most French cattle dying during the war—using emotional illustrations of hungry children waiting in line for food in both English and French. One poster from this campaign, titled "Free Milk for France," shows a benevolent American soldier spooning out milk to disheveled French children of various ages, as well as one haggard-looking French soldier waiting behind them.⁵⁵ The image of the children and the French soldier looking

⁵³ Lucas, *The Children of France and the Red Cross*, 188.

⁵⁴ "From French 'Mascots' to Their American 'Godfathers,' Letters from French War Orphans 'Adopted' by Members of the American Expeditionary Forces to Their Soldier Friends : Pamphlet 1919 | WorldCat.Org," accessed September 12, 2022.

⁵⁵ "Free Milk for France / F. Luis Mora.," image, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, accessed September 27, 2022.

worn-down and hungry contrasts with the American soldier, who looks strong and healthy. The juxtaposition of figures in this poster, and in others from the campaign, emphasized the sorry state of French children and how Americans, having suffered much less from the war, could afford to help save them. Additionally, many mothers of infants across France lost their ability to produce milk due to stress, grief, and malnourishment. Journal entries describe firsthand accounts of this: “I saw a tired woman feeding a five months’ old baby sweet chocolate... We found that in the flight, and terror of those days, her milk had stopped. In a few minutes our doctor discovered fourteen other mothers in the same condition.”⁵⁶ In order to quickly amass the necessary resources to nourish French children and return them to health, philanthropic associations leaned heavily into the emotional pull of child victims in propaganda.

The representation of victimized French children, specifically the orphan, occupies a central place in the collective memory of WWI in France and its effect on children; however, claiming this representation as the “touchstone” of children’s relations to the conflict leads to dangerous assumptions about how children actually experienced wartime.⁵⁷ As with the case of the representation of the heroic child in propaganda, the understanding of children as victims of war comes from adults, not the children themselves. The adult understanding of this representation of victimized children, encouraged and strengthened by propaganda, dictated what roles and experiences French children should have in wartime; yet as human agents in their own right, a wide variety of experiences and understandings of war existed for children just as they did for adults. Did children understand their place in society to be one of victimhood, requiring charity and international humanitarian aid? For some children, maybe so. Records of children served by the Red Cross and other philanthropic associations include descriptions of children left

⁵⁶ Lucas, *The Children of France and the Red Cross*, 181.

⁵⁷ Pignot, “Children,” 44.

ill, injured, and/or without family members who gravitated towards volunteer nurses as a source of safety and help following bombing, conflict in occupied zones, and other scenes of violence.⁵⁸

However, children—like most other groups during wartime—likely did not actively understand their role as solely one of victimhood. Children facing extreme hardship during the war turned to the ideology of self-sacrifice and courage to find strength in the face of devastation. Lucas’s journal entries follow one family in particular, a group of five siblings who saw their mother killed by a bomb and who had not heard from their father at the front in two years.⁵⁹ Her descriptions of these children include their illnesses and hardships, but focus more on the courage, strength, and determination of these children to stay together and follow their mother’s final requests; “That is what impressed me so deeply about this family. They all seem to have just one desire—to do all the things their mother had talked to them about before she was killed over a year ago.”⁶⁰ Faced with several cases like this one, it becomes harder to equate adult understandings of children as victims through propaganda with the actual lived experiences of wartime childhood. Additionally, children often protested against the label of “orphan” and its broader connotations. One little girl cared for by the Red Cross Children’s Bureau following her parents’ deaths was found crying after a boy in the bed next to hers called her an orphan, claiming vehemently that “she *isn’t* an orphan, she has a *sister*.”⁶¹ While this girl legally *was* an orphan, her strong reaction to this term demonstrates the aversion some children had to this role and its greater implications. Children in French society in general appear to have fixated on the fate of orphans, gathering what money they had to donate to them in both a show of childhood

⁵⁸ Lucas, *The Children of France and the Red Cross*.

⁵⁹ Lucas, *The Children of France and the Red Cross*, 98.

⁶⁰ Lucas, *The Children of France and the Red Cross*, 101.

⁶¹ Lucas, *The Children of France and the Red Cross*, 113.

solidarity and recognition that the fate of an orphan could easily become their own.⁶²

Representations of the victimized child created a sense of urgency and purpose for the adults who produced them, yet, despite this, children did not necessarily let their understandings of their own wartime experiences become pigeon-holed into this one role.

The Future Citizen

The third and final representation of children in French propaganda from WWI was the malleable “blank-slate,” the future citizen. Not yet considered citizens in their own right, French children had to be shaped into a generation of exceptional, patriotic adults, raised in a way that allowed them to respond to the needs of France.⁶³ French children in media acted as the symbol of what men must fight to protect: in order to protect the innocent French child, a man had to enlist and destroy the “barbarians” who threatened their nation.⁶⁴ Children were expected both to keep their innocent nature and to follow the patriotic trend of dehumanization and violence towards the enemy. This representation of innocent and malleable childhood became an ideology of sorts, permeating school curriculums and home life through patriotic rhetoric, posters, lesson plans, children’s publications, and children’s literature. Media for children varied from very obvious pro-war themes to more subtle indoctrination, such as in fairytale illustrations where heroes and princesses had more French and Alsatian characteristics while enemies looked more “German”.⁶⁵ Studying children’s drawings of war, violence, and occupation can give valuable insight into how successful or unsuccessful patriotic rhetoric in schools and children’s media

⁶² Manon Pignot, *Allons enfants de la patrie: génération Grande Guerre*, Univers historique (Paris: Seuil, 2012), 132-133.

⁶³ Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 22-23.

⁶⁴ Pignot, “Children,” 33.

⁶⁵ Zunino, “Children’s Literature,” 4.

really was, and how well children understood themselves and their experiences within this style of propaganda.

No institution had as strong an effect on the indoctrination of French children than schools, which acted as a “privileged vector” of mobilization and experienced several adaptations during wartime in the name of molding children to fit the image of the ideal future citizen from propaganda.⁶⁶ Following the outbreak of war in 1914, the Minister of Public Instruction did not hesitate to publish new teaching objectives for republican education during wartime, first and foremost being the honoring of French soldiers who spilled their blood for liberty, justice, and human rights.⁶⁷ The ministerial instructions of the first two years of the war did not map out a general academic framework for teaching war, but they still reveal some of the orientations taken by the republican school during wartime in hopes of fostering a generation of young patriotic citizens.⁶⁸ Gone was the pre-war educational trend of pacifist and socialist “patriotism of reason”, replaced with a “reflective patriotism” that disassociated the ideas of the fatherland and war, instead claiming that France engaged in a war of defense.⁶⁹ The new war-centric ideology of schooling was possibly best summarized when the education officer of a high school in Poitiers gave out a prize to a student, saying “An exceptional time like ours cannot tolerate ordinary children... You cannot, if you have a heart, accept that one must be killed for you without wanting to be worthy of this sacrifice. Because it is for you that they are being killed.”⁷⁰ Propaganda designed to develop future French citizens appeared in classroom materials distributed within schools, and educational mobilization consistently emphasized for children the

⁶⁶ Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 24.

⁶⁷ Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 24.

⁶⁸ Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 25.

⁶⁹ Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 27-28.

⁷⁰ Translated from original French. Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 18.

sacrifice of combatants, urging children to live up to them by serving the country through their schoolwork—if the place of the soldier was the battlefield, the place of the child was at their desk, fighting the “battles of childhood.”⁷¹ This type of war-centric language aimed to convince children that they could best help the war effort by continuing their schooling. Having succeeded in gathering the majority of French children in one institution for several hours each day, the government could impose patriotic propaganda on these citizens-to-be easier than on any other demographic of the French population.

Daily interactions with propaganda for young French students included the reading of casualty lists of local soldiers and impromptu discussion of major events in the war, such as the entry of the United States in the war which the premier of the Third Republic advised teachers to spend at least an hour discussing in class.⁷² Education officers had all liberty to take teaching initiative in class, so long as it related to the conflict, but “it was the inspectors who were the real keystone of the process of developing a teacher of war; their reports, demanding, critical, show their decisive role in the pedagogical turn imposed on the teaching body.”⁷³ These educational tools forged during the war constituted another relay of propaganda that directly interacted with pupils, engulfing them in a constant flood of propaganda and rhetoric. Even as public support for the war waned in France in 1917 and 1918, schools continued to teach about the war and, alongside churches, were the first to commemorate the dead of combat.⁷⁴ Schools, as well, organized the majority of children’s homefront mobilization, through posters directly appealing to children to raise money for the national bank, classroom “adoption” of soldiers to send

⁷¹ Pignot, “Children,” 33; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, “Children and the Primary Schools of France, 1914–1918,” in *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War*, ed. John Horne, Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 26.

⁷² Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 26; Pignot, *Allons enfants de la patrie*, 132.

⁷³ Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 26.

⁷⁴ Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 36.

homemade parcels to (an interesting reversal of charitable adoptions of children by soldiers), and classroom knitting and sewing campaigns to create and/or mend socks for soldiers.⁷⁵

At home, children encountered patriotic, anti-German propaganda meant to shape them into the ideal French citizen through their literature. War literature aimed at children and youth existed prior to WWI, but with the advent of the first “modern” total war and its massive impact on European societies, the quantity and quality of this genre changed.⁷⁶ The war saw an overall decrease in the production of children’s books; however, the percentage of children’s books that fell under the category of war literature increased greatly from the first year of the war onwards. Publishing houses either stopped production during the war and fell away, or ramped up production of patriotic children’s books, one of the most prolific houses being Berger-Levrault. In France, children’s books about the war took on many signature characteristics which served to encourage the next generation of citizens to embrace patriotism from a very young age and support the war effort, even if only ideologically. This hyper patriotism trickled down into books meant for even the smallest children, unlike in other participating powers such as Great Britain, who mainly targeted teenagers approaching the age of enlistment.⁷⁷

French children’s books demonstrated a wide range of literary and propaganda techniques to mold children into ideal citizens, benefitting from the fact that children’s books were meant as a pleasurable leisure activity; hence, children would associate propaganda messages within their books with a sense of enjoyment and personal choice, as opposed to school assignments, which had regulations and were mandatory. Illustrators employed several tricks to engage children in literary propaganda and influence their opinions of the war, of the Fatherland,

⁷⁵ Pignot, “Children,” 34-35; “Aux Elèves de Nos Lycées et Collèges... | Gallica.”; Limited, “Cartoon, French Classroom Scene, with Girls Knitting Socks for Soldiers at the Front during the First World War. Date.”

⁷⁶ Zunino, “Children’s Literature,” 1.

⁷⁷ Zunino, “Children’s Literature,” 3.

and of the Germans. These included bold uses of color, emphatic militarism, and simplistic figures. *Bébés s'en vont en guerre! Une histoire et des images (Babies Are Going to War! A Story and Pictures, 1918)* by Simone Bouglé, is one example of a children's book from this period that heavily employs simplistic illustration, bold colors, and militarism to demonstrate to children a fantasy about children going to war.⁷⁸ Not only do children mimic their adult counterparts in this book through fighting in battle, escaping imprisonment, and caring for the wounded, they also are shown at the home front doing activities they would have actually partaken in such as knitting, sending parcels of necessities to soldiers, growing vegetables, forgoing new treats and toys, and contributing their pocket money to the national defense.⁷⁹ Notable as well about this volume is the inclusion of girls in the war effort, often overlooked in children's literature depicting mobilization. While their male counterparts play soldier, girls played the role of war nurse—a major female role model of the time.⁸⁰ In this book, contributing to the war seems fun due to the happy faces of the characters, the bright colorful settings, and the exciting storyline.

The theme of anti-German sentiment—ranging from disliking the enemy but hoping for a peaceful future to come, to outright demonization of Germans—runs through most French children's books from WWI as well. From a very young age, children not only felt the effect of patriotism in their literature, but also developed a strong hatred and dehumanization of their “hereditary enemy.”⁸¹ Seeing soldiers, both human and toy, kill Germans in books was perfectly fine—celebrated even—by young audiences who had learned from propaganda that Germans were evil and subhuman. Depictions of German soldiers occasionally showed just a soldier in

⁷⁸ Harris and Edelstein, *En Guerre*, 124.

⁷⁹ Harris and Edelstein, *En Guerre*, 124.

⁸⁰ Zunino, “Children's Literature,” 3.

⁸¹ Zunino, “Children's Literature,” 2.

typical German military dress, but more often the soldiers appeared with bestial features or as outright monsters, only recognizable by their *pickelhauben*: the characteristic spiked helmet used by Prussia and Germany in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The book *Spahis et tirailleurs (Spahis and Infantrymen, 1916)* by Val-Rau tells of the valor and commitment of the French colonial regiments from North Africa and West, East, and Central Africa using the representation of them as toy soldiers and incorporates this anti-German imagery in doing so.⁸² Brightly colored in traditional clothing, the colonial troops appeal to the eye and appear uniform and orderly in a way that pleases the reader. This contrasts their German enemies, who have yellow-green skin, muted colors on their clothing, bestial facial features, black *pickelhauben*, and stand in a jumbled heap. Children would have gravitated towards the heroic and visually-appealing French colonial regiments and been repelled by the Germans, whose skin color and facial features in the book resemble the monstrous ogres of fairytales. A notable thing about this book is that the colonial regiments—who normally would have been seen as inferior due to their races and ethnicities—are shown as heroic, strong, and equal to their French commanders. Through Germanophobia and service to France, they have been elevated to the level of ideal citizenship, despite their non-French origins. This must have emphasized how service to the nation and collective hatred of the common enemy united all under the French flag—citizens shared these characteristics, and they proved more important than even the contemporary colonialist rhetoric about the superiority of native French people over the imperial subjects.

Children's literature from WWI France appealed to small children by showing them a colorful, idealized world using stories and formats they would recognize and enjoy.⁸³ Fairytales published at this time had patriotic imagery and anti-German sentiments embedded in them both

⁸² Harris and Edelstein, *En Guerre*, 119.

⁸³ Zunino, "Children's Literature," 2.

subtly and overtly, retelling well-known tales in a way that would influence children to associate certain characters and themes with certain nations. *Histoire du petit chaperon rouge* (*Little Red Riding Hood*, 1917) by Charles Moreau-Vauthier, adapts the tale of Little Red Riding Hood and places Germany in the role of the Big Bad Wolf. Even while the wolf hides in Grandmother's bed wearing her nightclothes, the reader can see the point of his distinctive German helmet through his bonnet. Ironically, this book follows the German retelling the story by the Brothers Grimm, *Rotkäppchen*, where the huntsman saves Little Red and her grandmother by killing the wolf.⁸⁴ On the final page of the book, simply-drawn figures dance around the dead wolf, French flags wave, and the story closes with a message about the possible return of peace and good health one day in the future. For young children already familiar with this fairytale, this book would be easy to follow along, entertaining, and would also associate patriotic and Germanophobic propaganda with the story itself. Children familiar with Little Red Riding Hood would understand that, to be a hero, you had to kill the wolf, and with Germany playing the wolf in this version, they would now understand that in order to be a good French citizen, they should want to kill Germans.

Part of being a good French citizen during WWI was supporting the French goal of reclaiming the lost territories of Alsace and Lorraine from Germany, and so it makes sense that these territories also played into propaganda children's books. They often appeared in fairytales, as their loss and eventual "saving" fit perfectly into most fairytale storylines. L'oncle Hansi, an author, illustrator, and unabashed promoter of Alsatian culture, celebrated the return of Alsace to the French in a series of books called *L'Alsace Heureuse* (*Happy Alsace*, 1919), which contains the famous illustration "La belle au bois dormant (The Sleeping Beauty)." This depiction of the

⁸⁴ Harris and Edelstein, *En Guerre*, 120.

Sleeping Beauty tale shows the eponymous character awakening in her bed while wearing a traditional Alsatian headdress. The French cock adorns her bed, and Sainte Odile (the patron saint of Alsace) guards her from above during her long sleep. Above her as well is a depiction of Saint Georges slaying the dragon, a mythical tale brought back from the Middle East by crusaders in the twelfth century—in this case a possible allegory of the French slaying the German foe, bringing a distinct religious justification. A brave French soldier is her prince, coming to save her and return her to France.⁸⁵ Alsatian and French imagery saturate this image, associating the tale of Sleeping Beauty being rescued and living happily-ever-after with the history of Alsace-Lorraine's loss, occupation, and hopeful eventual return.

For the youngest children, alphabet books about war became the best vehicle for patriotic, pro-war rhetoric. Many countries published ABC's with war themes, and France produced a number of these over the course of the conflict. These books transferred hostilities to the world of children to explain the causes and goals of war to children.⁸⁶ The most popular ABC book in France was André Hellé's *Alphabet de la Grande Guerre 1914-1916* (*Alphabet of the Great War 1914-1918*). This book took the conflict out of the playroom and conveyed its message with power and strength, making sure to do so in a way simple enough for tiny minds to grasp.⁸⁷ Using combination of letters and words such as "Batterie" and "Charge," Hellé made the war vivid and appealing to children. Copies of this book found with notes inscribed inside show that it was a popular gift for adult relatives to give young children. Alphabet books and picture books such as this ensured that patriotism and citizenship truly was learned by even the youngest of children.

⁸⁵ Harris and Edelstein *En Guerre*, 121.

⁸⁶ Zunino, "Children's Literature," 3.

⁸⁷ Harris and Edelstein, *En Guerre*, 114.

One final theme of French children's literature from WWI was the call to tradition, especially religious tradition. By putting important events and locations of the war in historical context, authors and illustrators passed along a message of cultural superiority, longevity, strength, and spiritual protection. Following the September 14th bombing of Reims Cathedral in 1914, this location became one of the emblems of tradition-centric children's literature. The cathedral has a long and illustrious history as the place where Clovis was baptized, founding the Frankish empire, and of hosting the coronation of all French kings; its severe damage from the German bombing came as a personal affront to all French citizens. Louise-Andrée Roze's *Josette et Jehan de Reims* tells the story of the Reims Cathedral from the work of stonemasons carving the famous Smiling Angel, to the church's use for coronating kings. Bright, unmodulated colors and simplified forms in this book are reminiscent of the stained glass within the actual structure.⁸⁸ Blue-helmeted soldiers accompanying Charles VII foreshadow the *poilus*—French infantry soldiers from WWI—retaking the city from the Germans.⁸⁹ On one page of the book, the Smiling Angel statue is shown bleeding after the German destruction, but the final message of the book is that the soul of the cathedral remains no matter what, acting as living testimony to the triumph of faith over brutality.⁹⁰ *Reims: La cathédrale* (1918) by Robert Burnand follows a similar ideological narrative of tradition and religion using the cathedral. The Smiling Angel became a symbol of hope in the story of a young soldier who sees an image of the angel. Although the cathedral burns during the story, the triumphant soldier waves an olive branch to herald the ultimate French victory.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Harris and Edelstein, *En Guerre*, 122.

⁸⁹ Harris and Edelstein, *En Guerre*, 122.

⁹⁰ Harris and Edelstein, *En Guerre*, 122.

⁹¹ Harris and Edelstein, *En Guerre*, 123.

The representation of children as innocent-yet-patriotic future citizens in propaganda seems to have had the largest impact on French children's actual wartime experiences out of the three representations of children in propaganda. Exposed to this type of propaganda daily, both in the home and at school, and with content designed specifically to vehicle war ideologies to them rather than adults, children appear to have identified with this depiction of themselves the closest. They internalized the republican messianism that placed France in the position of the beacon of humanity, as well as societal dehumanization and violence towards Germans that had been brewing since the loss of Alsace-Lorraine in 1871.⁹² Like always, however, it is impossible to create an all-encompassing generalization of how children understood their place in this representation of themselves. The trauma of war and the progressive emergence of lassitude, indifference, and outright rejection of the conflict among French children in the later years of WWI can demonstrate how their experiences fluctuated in and out of the roles assigned to them by propaganda.⁹³ One example of how some children did not overwhelmingly support the war as they were taught to comes from a school assignment of a young girl in February 1916; having seen a train of wounded soldiers passing by, she wrote "I feel pity for this poor disabled soldier," which her teacher then corrected by crossing out the word "pity" in red ink and replacing it with the word "admiration."⁹⁴ Children also went against this representation in their reactions to the Armistice. While some children celebrated alongside adults that the terrible war had ended, many others who were children at this moment shared personal accounts of the event that were painful and ambiguous. Children who reacted to the Armistice with tears due to the enormity of

⁹² Audoin-Rouzeau, *La Guerre Des Enfants: 1914-1918*, 185.

⁹³ Pignot, "Children," 36.

⁹⁴ Pignot, "Children," 36.

their own personal losses during the conflict received punishments by the adults in their lives for not joining in with the collective joy and relief in French society.⁹⁵

Conclusion

No matter what type of representation was used in propaganda—hero, victim, or future citizen—the relationship between French children and the media was an exploitative one. Children’s images appeared in propaganda to evoke emotional responses in the target audiences and inspire them to act. Even propaganda meant to help children—like propaganda for children’s charities—exploited the image of children to reach their goal. These three forms of representation of children in society were used to gain public support for war and encourage enlistment. But they also manipulated schools, homes, literature, and other parts of children’s daily lives to shape children into unquestioning patriotic vessels who would enlist when old enough and do anything to protect and serve France. To truly understand the success of these representations of children in propaganda, it is necessary to look at accounts from children themselves during the war to see how they understood themselves as part of the war effort. While some analysis of this was done in this paper, there is still much to be done on this matter. Future historians may want to investigate the rich collections of wartime drawings from schools in Paris, Alsace, and other regions of France to see how children may have reproduced the propaganda about them—or deviated from it entirely.

⁹⁵ Pignot, “Children,” 44.

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