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Nurse-Martyr-Heroine: Representations of Edith Cavell in Interwar Britain, France and Belgium

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After her 1915 execution in occupied Brussels for her role in organizing an escape network for French and British soldiers, British nurse Edith Cavell became a household name, and her fame as a 'martyr-heroine' persisted in the decades following the Armistice. This article compares and contrasts a range of sculptures, monuments and films featuring Edith Cavell that were produced during the interwar years in Britain (and what were then the Dominions), France and Belgium. Whereas existing studies of Edith Cavell have tended to focus on those produced in the Anglophone world, and to argue that she is universally made to embody female martyrdom against a 'barbarous' enemy, this article reveals that the different and evolving national and political contexts in which these cultural representations were produced resulted in important variations in the ways in Cavell was depicted.

Keywords: Edith Cavell; First World War; commemoration; films; memorials; interwar; Britain; France; Belgium

Edith Cavell remains the most well-known First World War nurse. After her execution by a German firing squad in 1915 for her role in running an escape network for Allied soldiers in Brussels, hundreds of busts, plaques and statues were erected to her memory, scores of buildings and streets were named after her, and biographies and films popularised (and fictionalised) the story of her life and death. This memorialization was not limited to Europe but took place across the world, particularly in the Dominions of the British Empire: in Canada, for example, a mountain was renamed in her honour in 1916 (Pickles, 2007). Edith Cavell is often remembered and depicted as a brave and solitary woman, standing alone against the Germans. Her gender is central to her commemoration, as Anne Marie Hughes notes: 'Cavell's gender and non-combatant status made her an exceptionally good candidate for use in propaganda because it was

more plausible to portray her as a victim and appeal to men's chivalrous urges' (2006: 438). Her nursing work is also usually highlighted, with her uniform functioning as a key ingredient of the saintly and transcendent 'martyr-heroine' into which she was transformed. An emphasis on her role as a nurse who worked for the Belgian Red Cross also protected her from accusations of espionage, and associations with the negative cultural myth of the prostitute-spy, most famously incarnated in the figure of Mata Hari (Darrow, 2000; Proctor, 2006; Fell, 2018). Yet in reality her death was not directly linked to her nursing work – tellingly she was described as an 'institutrice' (tutor) on the German proclamation of her arrest (IWM, Art.IWM PST 6318) – but to her membership of a large civilian resistance network, which included many other men and women whose names have largely been forgotten (Debruyne, 2014). Historians and cultural critics have explored to some extent how the ways in which Cavell was remembered, and the ideological positions that she was made to embody, have varied across time and space. Catherine Speck argues for example that in Britain and the Dominions there were two contrasting depictions of Cavell. First, she appeared as a young, powerless and innocent 'feminine victim' of German 'barbarism'. In this version, propagandistic images of Cavell reflect those of 'poor little Belgium', which were used for recruitment purposes. Second, in later depictions, she was presented as a more mature patriotic heroine, 'proudly facing the firing squad' (2001: 7; 12). For Hughes and Speck, Cavell's gender and profession meant that acts of remembrance had to adhere to cultural norms that associated womanhood – and nurses – with passive victimhood or maternal self-abnegation. This article, however, will focus on other versions of Cavell produced in the interwar period which complicate this picture: memorials erected in France and Belgium and her portrayal in British and Belgian films during the silent era.

The Edith Cavell Network

In 1914 Cavell was Matron of the Berkendael Medical Institute, a clinic which was attached to Belgium's first secular nurse training school (L'École belge d'infirmières diplômées). A fluent French speaker, she had been recruited by the surgeon to King Albert and future President of the Belgian Red Cross, Dr Antoine Depage, and was therefore at the heart of the development of the nursing profession in Belgium (she devised a five-year curriculum and founded a nursing journal, *L'Infirmière*). The administrative side of the Institute was undertaken by Depage's wife, Marie. In August 1914, as the Allies retreated through Belgium after the Battle of Mons, hundreds of French and British soldiers were stranded behind enemy lines in occupied Belgium. Some died of untreated wounds or were arrested; others were helped by civilian members of the local populations. This marked the beginning of several 'resistance networks' or 'escape networks' for Allied soldiers in occupied parts of France and Belgium. The first connection to Edith Cavell was through Marie Depage, who in Autumn 1914 was approached by engineer Herman Capiau to shelter two British soldiers. Shortly afterwards, Marie joined her husband at the Hôtel de l'Océan hospital in De Panne, before setting off on a three-month trip to the United States, touring cities to raise money for the Red Cross. Meanwhile, in April 1915 the Brussels network joined up with a man who was to become one of its key members, Philippe Baucq, an architect and patriotic Catholic social activist who was already involved in running an underground newspaper. He became responsible for guiding the fugitives between Brussels and the Dutch-Belgium border and together Baucq and Cavell sourced further suitable 'safe houses'. Marie Depage returned from the US after her son Lucien decided to join his brothers at the front. She sailed on the Lusitania, torpedoed on 7 May 1915, and was drowned. Antoine Depage went to Queenstown to identify her body, and she was buried in De Panne.

The network in which Cavell was involved was loose and informal, and was made up of a wide range of individuals, both men and women, from different social backgrounds, who either wanted to help for patriotic reasons, or who were well-placed to do so because of the houses they owned. It is estimated that there were around 113 men and 66 women involved either directly or indirectly in Cavell's network in total, including some Belgian inhabitants who had British or Irish roots (Debruyne, 2015). Amongst these expatriates was Ada Bodart, born in Newry (Ulster), who as well as hiding servicemen in her house probably served as a guide alongside her son Philippe on the first stage of the escape route. In July 1915, the German authorities succeeded in dismantling the escape network. German files suggest that architect Philippe Baucq was betrayed by an unknown informant, and he was arrested alongside a French schoolteacher, Louise Thuliez.[1] A list of contacts was found in Baucq's house and there followed a wave of arrests, including Edith Cavell. A trial took place early in October for thirty-five of the arrested network members. While not denying their guilt, network members attempted to minimize their involvement and guilt, hoping for more lenient sentences. During the trial, fifteen-year-old Philippe Bodart was called to give evidence and was told by the translator that if he lied, this was not only a sin, but he would be severely punished by the Germans. He admitted that his mother Ada and Philippe Baucq were involved in distributing the underground newspaper, La Libre Belgique, and that Baucq had discussed safe escape routes with her. Clearly traumatized, Bodart was permitted to go and embrace his mother in the courtroom after having finished

[1] After the war, Frenchman Gaston Quien, who had posed as a French soldier needing to escape in 1915, was convicted of collaborating and informing on the network in which Cavell was involved (TNA, KV2/844).

giving his evidence. These and other admissions were damning for the network, and especially for Baucq, who was condemned to death alongside Edith Cavell.[2] They were both executed by firing squad the next day, 12 October 1915, at the Tir rifle range in Brussels.

Commemorations of Cavell in Britain, France and Belgium

Three significant monuments to Cavell were erected in 1920: in London, Paris and Brussels. Their interpretations of Cavell's death reveal subtle variations in the different national contexts in which they were funded, designed and unveiled. In Britain, George Frampton's London statue shows a mature Cavell in nursing uniform, who has died both for her country, and for 'civilization' itself: the words 'For King and Country' and 'Humanity' inscribed on the monument offering the viewer clear guidance on how to interpret its message (Figure 1).

[2] Three other members were also initially condemned to death, but their sentences were commuted to imprisonment and hard labour.

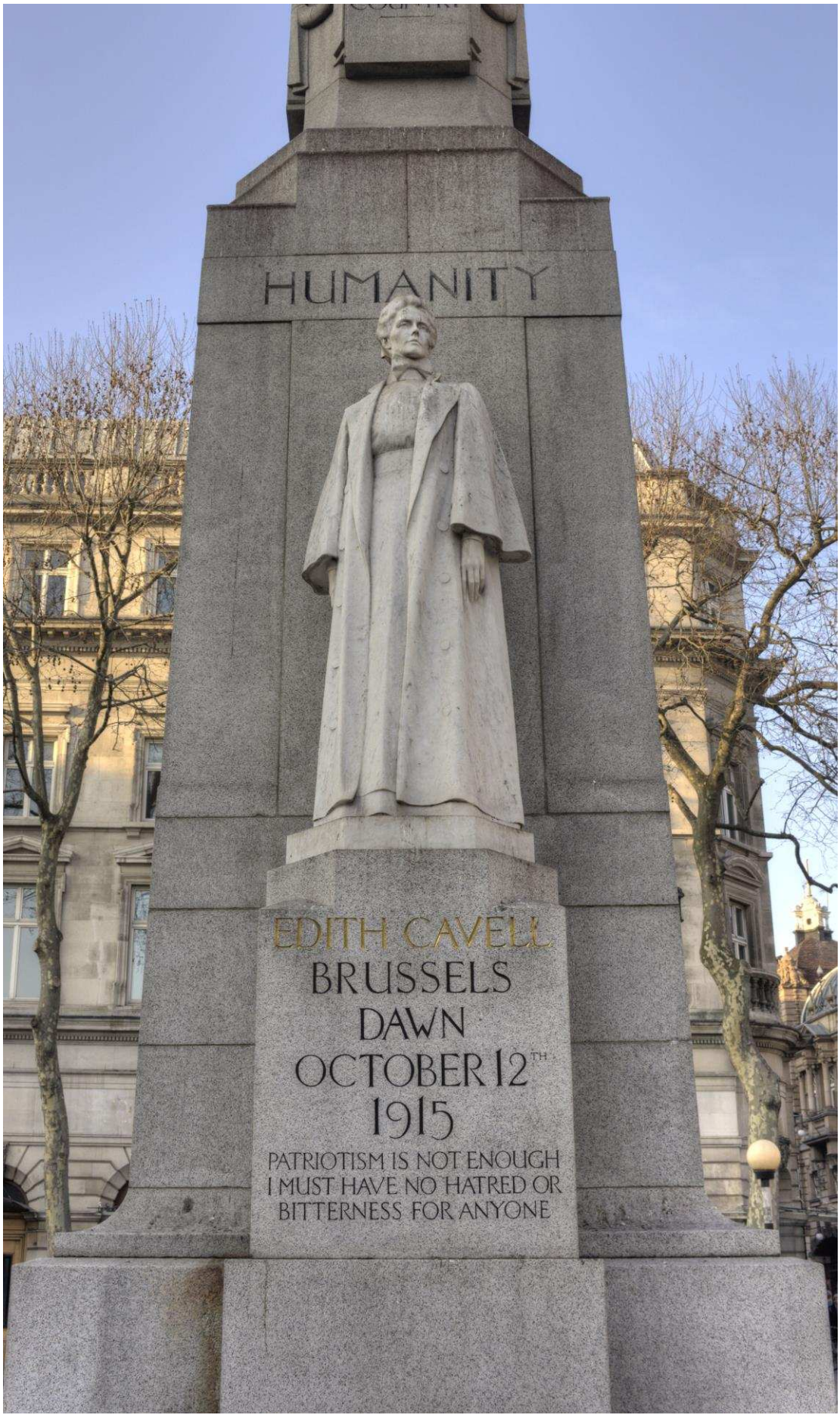
HUMANITY
EDITH CAVELL
BRUSSELS
DAWN
OCTOBER 12TH
1915
PATRIOTISM IS NOT ENOUGH
I MUST HAVE NO HATRED OR
BITTERNESS FOR ANYONE

Figure 1, Statue of Edith Cavell, London, sculped by George Frampton, 1920.

Notably, the interpretation of what constituted Cavell's legacy was not unequivocal, and in 1922 the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland proposed to have the nurse's reported words, 'PATRIOTISM IS NOT ENOUGH / I MUST HAVE NO HATRED OR BITTERNESS FOR ANYONE', added to the memorial. The respective inscription was affixed to the plinth by the Board of Works in 1924 (Malvern, 2004). The Paris memorial to Cavell sculpted by Gabriel Pech for the Jardin des Tuileries embodies an ongoing sense of revanchisme: a spirit of 'revenge' against the German invasion rooted in France's experiences of the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71. Initiated by popular national newspaper Le Matin, which launched a competition for a Cavell memorial in 1916, and with a committee dominated by male Republican politicians, the invitation to submit proposals sent to various French artists was clear about the messages the memorial was to convey: 'By means of the pure and tender effigy of the English nurse, isn't it humanity itself, a victim of barbarism and demanding revenge, that deserves to be glorified?' (Invitation, 1 February 1916). [3] In Pech's winning interpretation, Cavell is depicted after her execution, prostrate among war-torn ruins while a German helmet symbolising the brutality of the enemy lies on top of her body. In this sense, the statue is reminiscent of wartime propaganda

[3] The models of other entries show similar interpretations, although interestingly the design placed second, to be sculpted by André Vermare, has a classically-draped Cavell standing defiantly, gazing towards the horizon with a much smaller French soldier and nurse seated either side of her, a version of Cavell that resembles the London memorial. See Le Pays de France, 9 November 1916.

postcards. Placed squarely within the Catholic framework of martyrdom, a female allegorical figure floats above her, holding a martyr's palm in one hand, and scattering flowers on the victim with the other. Cavell's martyrdom was underlined in the unveiling ceremony, with André Maginot, the French Minister of Pensions, comparing Cavell, 'the nurse-martyr', to Joan of Arc in his speech (Le Figaro, 13 June 1920). The revanchisme evident in the French Cavell memorial helps to explain why it was destroyed by German soldiers on their entry into Paris in 1940 (Sniter, 2008). This memorial is therefore reminiscent to some extent of the 'innocent victim' propaganda images analysed by Speck (2001: 7). But unlike in the British and Australian images she analyses, Cavell here is not made to embody 'poor little Belgium', but the invaded regions of France, enabling Maginot somewhat paradoxically to compare the British nurse to Joan of Arc.

In Brussels, however, Cavell does not appear as a solitary embodiment of 'Humanity'. Rather, a decision was taken to erect a monument that simultaneously commemorated Marie Lepage and Edith Cavell (Figure 2). Sculpted by Paul du Bois, and situated originally at the entrance to the new site of the nursing school in Brussels (Cavell had been working hard at plans to move to these new premises before her death), male and female mythical figures resembling angels indicate to passers-by to read the inscription: 'À EDITH CAVELL À MARIE LEPAGE 1915 PASSANT, DIS-LE À TES ENFANTS ILS LES ONT TUÉES' (To Edith Cavell to Marie Lepage, 1915. Passer-by, tell your children, they killed them).

Figure 2 ‘Monument en hommage à Edith Cavell et Marie Depage’, Uccle (Brussels), sculped by Paul Du Bois, 1920.

Although the ‘they’ is not made explicit it is clear that this monument is an expression of anti-German sentiment. The deaths of Cavell and Depage were in fact often linked in post-war commemorations in Belgium. In 1919, for example, a Belgian Red Cross medal by Armand Bonnetain showing busts of both Cavell and Depage included the engraved caption: ‘1915 N’oubliez jamais!’ (‘Never forget’). In Belgium, then, the sinking of the Lusitania and death of Edith Cavell, both of which are presented as ‘war crimes’ that must not be forgotten or forgiven, continued to be used into the post-war period. In ‘official’ commemorations, Cavell was remembered alongside Depage as a passive female war victim of German brutality.

However, these memorials were not the only ways in which Cavell was remembered in France and Belgium. Nurses themselves participated in her commemoration, and often placed the emphasis more on Cavell as a pioneering woman in the development of secular nursing. As early as 1915, Anna Hamilton, pioneer of the professionalization and secularization of nursing in France, wrote an article backing the Comtesse d'Haussonville's request for nurses to send donations to an appeal for the erection of a memorial to Cavell (La Petite Gironde, 20 November 1915). At the unveiling ceremony of the Paris memorial, French nurses, wearing medals to bear witness to their war service, laid the first wreath, and bemedaled nurses and nursing organizations also attended the unveiling of the London and Brussels memorials (British Journal of Nursing, 19 June 1920). Nurses also instigated Cavell memorial projects of their own, including training hospitals in Paris and Brussels.[4] While some nurses responded to Cavell's death as individuals, writing articles about their memories of working with her, others seized the opportunity offered to them by the enormous international interest in her death to advance the public struggle for the professionalization of nursing, ongoing in both countries since the nineteenth century.[5] Suffragist and nurse leader Ethel Bedford Fenwick commented, for example, that 'The almost canonization of Edith Cavell [...] has done for the Belgian modern nursing

[4] The Hôpital-Ecole d'infirmières professionnelles françaises in Paris was inaugurated by Mme Poincaré in 1916. In 1920, the Institut Edith Cavell et Marie Depage was inaugurated in Brussels (Pickles, 2007: 139-155).

[5] For letters from nurses with personal reminiscences about Cavell see for example British Journal of Nursing, 6 November 1916.

movement what the Crimea and Florence Nightingale did for the English one' (British Journal of Nursing, 24 May 1924).

In Belgium, other examples of the commemoration of Cavell resituated her as a member of a larger escape network, thereby foregrounding her role as a member of a resistance network. Philippe Baucq was generally erased from the story in its numerous re-tellings in Britain, the Dominions and in France. However, in Belgium he was sometimes remembered alongside Cavell, as in Figure 3.

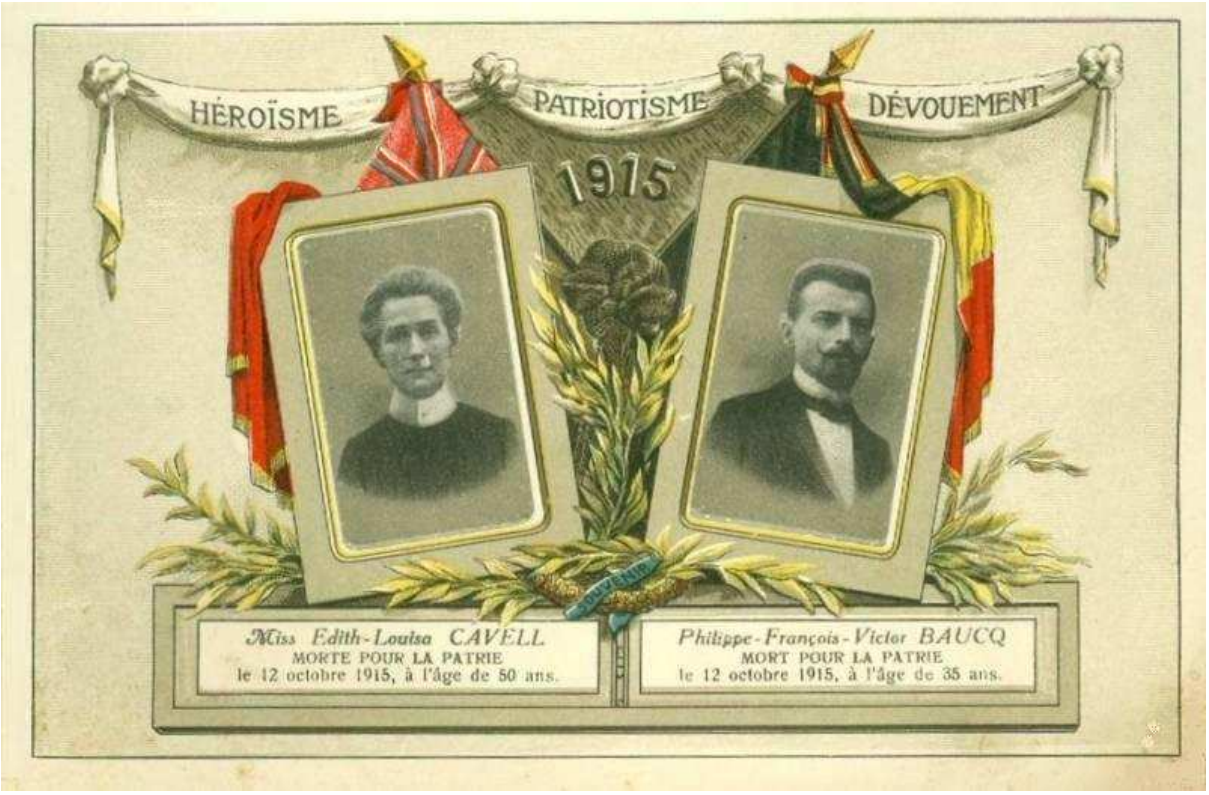

Figure 3. Commemorative Belgian postcard in which the photographs of Cavell and Baucq are placed beneath the words 'Heroism', 'Patriotism' and 'Devotion'.

This is a relatively rare example of a commemorative object in which Cavell is placed alongside another network member, and in which her nursing profession is not highlighted. In the post-war period, alongside the memory cults that developed around Edith Cavell, the executed French woman Louise de Bettignies and Belgian woman

Gabrielle Petit, other men and women were also remembered in their towns and nations in the interwar years, and medals were awarded to surviving members of networks in large ceremonies in the early 1920s (Debruyne and Fell, 2013). Statues, ceremonies and hagiographic publications sanctified members' deaths and transformed them into martyrs. This broader context is important in an analysis of the ways in which Cavell was remembered in Belgium. As Sophie de Schaepdrijver notes in her study of the memory cult of Gabrielle Petit, the deaths of resistance heroines had political, religious and emotional resonance, and their commemoration was taken up by different interest groups as a means of 'thinking through post-war issues: women's public role, paternal authority, the social order […] and the theme of post-war reconciliation with Germany' (2015: 155). These interests and issues also impacted on how the 'image' of Edith Cavell was coded and narrativized in visual culture.

Edith Cavell on British and Belgian Screens

From 1915, ample use had been made of photographs and illustrations relating to the Cavell case in postcards, stamps and posters. Imagery centred on the nurse's Englishness and care-giving femininity, the brutality of the German military authorities, the execution itself and the functional imperative of remembrance to convert outrage into action.[6] The important mass medium of film reinforced this popular visual imagination of Cavell during the war with a series of feature films, and she remained a focus of cinematic attention in the immediate postwar period.[7] Newsreel cameramen

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[6] For a selection of postcards and illustrations see the Kay Seidenberg Nursing Postcards Collection, https://digital.library.vcu.edu/digital/collection/kay.

[7] Feature films include Nurse and Martyr (UK 1915, dir. Percy Moran), The Martyrdom of Nurse Cavell (Australia 1916, dir. by John Gavin and C. Post Mason), Nurse Cavell and La

filmed the return of Cavell's remains from Belgium to Britain, the memorial service at Westminster Abbey and her re-interment at Norwich Cathedral in May 1919; they also documented the unveiling of George Frampton's memorial statue in March 1920.[8] Belgian narrative cinema made Cavell a reference point in La Belgique martyre: drame patriotique de la Grande Guerre 1914-1918 (1919, dir. Charles Tutelier). In this story of a family suffering under German occupation, the mother is executed by firing squad in an act of retaliation for the murder of a German soldier which was actually committed by a drunken comrade. In line with its title, this drame patriotique celebrates the sacrifice of ordinary Belgian people, associating its fictional character with the real-life martyres who had been executed:

Figure 4. 'Like Gabrielle Petit, Miss Cavell and so many other heroines' names will be forever engraved in the book of martyrs of the Great War'. Convergence of fact and

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Revanche (both Australia 1916, dir. W.J. Lincoln), The Woman the Germans Shot (released as The Cavell Case, USA 1918, dir. John G. Adolfi).

[8] Surviving footage can be accessed digitally at British Pathé (https://www.britishpathe.com/), East Anglian Film Archive (http://www.eafa.org.uk/) and the Imperial War Museum Collections (https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections).

fiction as well as Belgianness and Britishness in La Belgique Martyre, 1919 (Source: Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique/EFG1914).

When, in 1927, the trade press announced the production of a new British picture about Cavell entitled Dawn, the German Foreign Office representing the Weimar Republic was concerned about a further surge of Germanophobia which could impact negatively on recent moves towards normalisation in European and international politics. The Locarno Treaties of 1925 and their ratifications in 1926 had secured post-war borders and enabled a more integrationist approach to Germany, which had been admitted to join the League of Nations in 1926. Both the British and German foreign ministers in post in 1927, Austen Chamberlain and Gustav Stresemann, had been instrumental in achieving these political aims and received, with Charles Dawes and Aristide Briand, the Nobel Peace Prize for their endeavours. As James Robertson has related in detail (1984), the prospect of reviving the Cavell case in popular culture was regarded such a significant threat to the progress made that German diplomats and the Foreign Office approached the British government with the request for the production to be stopped. This led to the involvement of the Board of British Film Censors (BBFC), the self-regulatory body of the British film industry, whose independence was called into question after a series of semi-official conversations and behind the scenes enquiries from the British government had taken place. The possibility of political censorship of Dawn eventually became the subject of a parliamentary discussion (HC Deb, 27 February 1928, Vol. 214, cols. 13-8) and the controversy was reported in the British and

Belgian press.[9] German papers also picked up on the production of Dawn and tackled the issue more broadly. A number of new war films from Belgium, Britain and France were criticised as purposely reopening old wounds; the trade paper Lichtbild-Bühne spoke of a 'Haß-Film-Seuche' ('hate film epidemic') in its edition of 16 February 1928.[10]

The creative team behind Dawn, however, was not only temporally but also conceptually removed from the propagandistic filmmakers of the earlier decade. They responded to the sensibilities and possibilities of a pacified Europe on the one hand and the fact that 'movies, and going to the movies, were for many British women an integral part of their experience of modernity' (Stead, 2016: 1) on the other. Producer-director Herbert Wilcox and author Reginald Berkeley had both seen active war service, but were also formed by peacetime developments. As a silent cinema entrepreneur, Wilcox co-produced films with the German Erich Pommer and distributed Fritz Lang's epic Die Nibelungen (1924) (The Nibelungs) in Britain. He had begun to specialise in 'biopics' about historical female figures of prominence; he made Nell Gwyn and Madame Pompadour in the 1920s and recalls in his autobiography that Frampton's memorial inspired him to turn to Cavell as a further female protagonist (Wilcox, 1967: 72-73). The First World War oeuvre of Berkeley, who wrote the story for Dawn and a novelization of the same title, included a history of the Rifle Brigade (1927), the light comedy French Leave (first performed in 1920) and the more serious and probing The White Chateau, a radio play written for Armistice Day in 1925. But Berkeley brought

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[9] For a discussion of the press coverage in both countries see Biltereyst and Depauw, 2006: 141-48.

[10] On German press responses see Döring and Schütz, 2007: 36-46.

other qualifications to Dawn. He had worked in law in Britain and New Zealand and held a position in the Information Service at the League of Nations in Geneva before serving as a Liberal MP for Nottingham Central from November 1922 until October 1924. The British stage actress Sybil Thorndike took on the role of Cavell after the withdrawal of the American Pauline Frederick. Thorndike had played Joan of Arc on the stage in the London premiere of George Bernard Shaw's Saint Joan in 1924 and, just like the French Minister Maginot, the Irish playwright had made a connection between Joan and Cavell. In his preface to the play, Shaw stresses the agency of both women and the political nature of their trials (Shaw, 1957: 27). When Dawn was made, Thorndike identified as a feminist and a pacifist, self-ascriptions which had been engendered by her husband Lewis Casson's post-war depression, her son's evolving anti-war attitude while training at the Royal Navy College at Dartmouth in the 1920s and her exposure to the feminist pacifists Maude Royden and Sybil Morrison (Sprigge, 1971: 117-28; 231).

Dawn therefore stood in a visual tradition dating back to wartime, but was also informed by an internationalist outlook and the position of active womanhood and feminist (Christian) pacifism. These were, at least in potentia, encapsulated in the statement 'Patriotism is not enough / I must have no hatred or bitterness for anyone', which would have been visible to Wilcox as he passed by Frampton's statue and arguably orients the representational strategies at work in Dawn.[11] As his production came under pressure, Wilcox invited political stakeholders to engage more closely with the film. But arguments against Dawn were presented on the basis of principle and did

[11] Notably, however, the National Council of Women were among those who supported a ban of the film (Emmott, 1928).

not take the narrative or formal choices of a singular film work into account.[12] The attention which Dawn received nevertheless benefited Wilcox in promotional terms. Further headlines were generated when Ada Bodart, the Irish-born member of the escape network who had been cast to play herself in the film, returned her Order of the British Empire in February 1928 in protest against an impending suppression of the production (Manchester Guardian, 14 February 1928). The British Board of Film Censors under its long-standing chairman T.P. O'Connor publicised their decision to ban Dawn on 20 February 1928 and the ban carried some weight in Britain and abroad; overall, however, Wilcox was able to subvert the decision by obtaining screening permissions from local councils who could overrule the Censors' recommendation (Robertson, 1984: 22-24).

In terms of Dawn's reception, critics tended to agree that it offered a balanced narrative and displayed considerable restraint (see for example Collier, 1928). Plausibly drawn characters respond to circumstances and conditions imposed by war rather than embody national stereotypes. With regard to Cavell, Wilcox and Robert Cullen's scenario developed from Berkeley's story paid attention and thus allocated more screen time to her motivation and actions as well as the interplay of the (female) members of the network. Thorndike's acting produces a mature screen character who weighs risks and uses her authority to exert or withstand pressure. Despite presupposing a residual 'Psychologie des Weltkriegs' ('psychology of the World War') among international audiences, German critic Hans Meyer nevertheless concedes that 'The film is […], in

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[12] Chamberlain, for example, stated in Parliament: 'I hold it is an outrage on a noble woman's memory to turn into melodrama, for the purposes of commercial gain, so heroic a story' (HC, 27 February 1928, vol. 214, col. 15).

attitude and form, a decent and dignified work. At no point does it appear hateful or defamatory, never does it leave a sphere which would be unworthy of Sybil Thorndike's distinguished and serene performance.' (1928: n.p.)


Figures 5 and 6. Female agency and risk taking in Dawn, 1928 (Source: British Film Institute/BFI Player).

The relative absence of exalted martyrdom in Dawn, effected by measured acting and intertitles that abstract war from national character, was further strengthened by Wilcox's concession about the execution scene. The film's ending had originally been scripted and filmed according to the enduring fabrications of the insubordination and ad-hoc execution of a member of the German firing squad and the final shooting of an unconscious Cavell by an officer. For Dawn's British release, the final sequence was curtailed so as not show these ahistorical irregularities, even though some ambiguity remains due to a paucity of alternative shots for the re-edit.

The misrepresentation of Cavell's death had been a central factor in the political debate about Dawn, but another significant falsification – the complete erasure of Philippe Baucq who was executed alongside Cavell – went unchallenged. This was even the case in Belgium, where the gendered narrative of the martyres continued to hold strong in the late 1920s. Notably, Belgian screenings of Dawn retained the original cut

of the film's ending. The Belgian position showed less concern with questions of historical truth than with taking a stand against the spectre of censorship. Unlike Britain and the Anglophone world, Belgium had not been able to freely express propagandistic messages during wartime; media production had fallen under restrictive German law soon after the invasion of 1914 (Engelen, 2014). Showing an unedited (i.e. uncensored) version of Dawn therefore affirmed control over film culture in Belgium and acted as a critique of (culturally) supporting German political interests.

By 1928, however, Belgian politics and the memory of the First World War had also seen shifts towards recalibrating international relations and addressing internal differences. Changes had been made to Belgian language policy and history books under Education Minister Camille Huysmans and wartime myths of national unity had come under scrutiny. But, as Leen Engelen (2014) argues,

> [t]he cultural demobilization – in the scope of which the war experience and the sacrifices made had to basically be redefined – took great effort. The gap between the political demobilization on the (inter)national level and the shared popular memories of the war proved difficult to bridge. As of 1924-1925, the government moved away from the image of Germany as the prime enemy and subsequently also relativized its take on Belgium's heroic status, a shift that resulted in a sense of collective confusion among the Belgian people.

Unlike Dawn, which ten years after the Armistice moved away, at least to some extent, from a friend-foe dichotomy, the Belgian biopic Femme Belge/Belgische Vrouw (1928, dir. Francis Martin) retained clear binaries. It places the determined and defiant martyr Gabrielle Petit, whose (fictionalized) trajectory from nurse to resistance worker is

represented, vis-à-vis the brutal occupiers.[13] While parallels between Cavell and Petit in Femme Belge are only subtextual, Cavell (and once again not Baucq) features explicitly in another Belgian war film of 1928, La guerre est une erreur/Oorlog is een dwaling (dir. uncredited), which an opening title card dedicates to 'la Gloire de MISS CAVELL'. Presenting a grand narrative of the First World War in an instructional format, this production combines enacted scenes, intertitles and archival footage from the war and post-war years. La guerre est une erreur narrates the Belgian case, but starts with the births of Wilhelm II and Woodrow Wilson in the 1850s and continues to juxtapose the militaristic and irascible Kaiser with the civilian and level-headed Wilson over the course of war history. A strong relationship between Belgium and the United States is suggested throughout and motivates Wilson's final commitment to joining the war in light of German transgressions. Among these is the Cavell case which is embedded between the sinking of the Lusitania and a further sequence in which lecherous German officers and soldiers force Belgian women of all classes into submission. Cavell is shown as patriotic and defiant and in direct confrontation with Governor-General of occupied Belgium, Moritz von Bissing, which structurally replicates the film's pairing of Wilson and Wilhelm II.

[13] Another female-centred war film of 1928 is Petite Martyre Belge/Het Belgisch martelaresje, also directed by Martin, which is about Yvonne Vieslet, a Belgian child who was shot by a German soldier in 1918.

Figures 7 and 8: A scheming Moritz von Bissing slaps the nurse in the face and engineers her execution which draws on wartime myths in La guerre est une erreur, 1928 (Source: Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique/EFG1914).

In the execution scene, Cavell refuses to be blindfolded and the shots of the firing squad do not kill her. As she attempts to rise from the ground, an angered officer shoots her repeatedly with his pistol. The request to return Cavell's body to England is rejected, but the film departs from its chronological structure and inserts post-war footage of the military honours that accompanied the transport of Cavell's coffin to the Gare du Nord in Brussels in May 1919 and the departure of the HMS Rowena that carried her remains from Ostend to Dover. These scenes are mirrored in the last section of the film which shows, again at length, the ceremonies and burial of the Unknown Soldier at the foot of the Congress Column in the Belgium capital on 11 November 1922. The final seconds are filled with shots of the twisted bodies of dead soldiers in the field, followed by a final title card: 'La Guerre est une Erreur!/Is Oorlog een Dwaling!' This ending comes as a surprise after the antagonistic enactments and long documentation of the formalization and ritualization of national memory. Concerning Cavell, a further visual resonance is nevertheless afforded by the realism of the medium and the seamless mixture of fact and fiction that characterizes the compilation film genre:

Figures 9 and 10. The fallen in La guerre est une erreur: Cavell's enacted death and footage of First World War casualties (Source: Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique/EFG1914).

This equalising coda notwithstanding, the overall framing of Cavell in the Belgian cinematic narrative aligned La guerre est une erreur with the official discourses outlined above in the context of the memory of Cavell, Petit and Marie Depage. But not only national but also gendered boundaries were transcended through the corresponding scenes of the English nurse and the Belgian Unknown Soldier.

By contrast, the stronger focus on psychological realism and the muted (or 'censored') ending of Dawn had pre-empted, at least within British film history, a shift in the cinematic representations of the First World War that would culminate in the canonical sound films of 1930s about the experience and futile death of male soldiers on the Western Front. When Herbert Wilcox returned to the subject matter in his American auto-remake Nurse Edith Cavell in 1939, with a screenplay by Michael Hogan based on Berkeley's material, he restored an earlier image of a beautified and youthful nurse and the trope of a meaningful death. Cavell's words about the limits of patriotism are still included, but the film's final scene takes the spectator to the memorial service at Westminster Abbey in 1919. In Nurse Edith Cavell, Cavell's radius of activity is

extended with her not only treating and helping soldiers to escape, but also physically retrieving them from the battlefield. Further subplots are added to highlight the contributions of women from the Belgian nobility and the interventions of Cavell's team of nurses after her arrest. The film's pressbook singles out nurses as a target audience, proposing promotional activities ranging from direct mail campaigns and dedicated nurses' nights at the cinema to nurse-costumed employees and even ballyhoo girls (1939: 22). In the different climate of the late 1930s, ambivalence made way for a more conventional retreatment of the Cavell case and the British release of Nurse Edith Cavell was overtaken by the beginning of another world war (Robertson, 1984: 26; 28, note 53).

In conclusion, these examples of visual culture remind us that in France and Belgium, the political and ideological contexts differed to those that prevailed in Britain and the Dominions, and this is reflected in the positioning of Cavell in the interwar commemorative landscape. Although all of the cultural representations of Cavell's life and death share some central traits, and construct a highly gendered version of First World War heroism, the variations evident both within and beyond national borders reveal Cavell to have been a particularly malleable symbol who could be made to embody, for example, German 'barbarity' and allied martyrdom; national resistance to wartime occupation; the bravery, stoicism and professionalism of nurses; or the futility of war and importance of international cooperation for peace. They show us that the story of the woman who remains the most well-known of the First World War 'martyr-heroines' was re-framed in different national contexts and historical moments in order to suit different ideological or aesthetic purposes. Whereas British and French examples tended to emphasize Cavell as a solitary figure bravely facing German aggression, some (although not all) Belgian examples commemorated her alongside other figures: Marie

Depage and Gabrielle Petit, also positioned as victims of German 'war crimes', and her fellow network member Philippe Baucq, who is absent from the Anglophone examples. Moreover, while some films echoed the wartime propaganda images that presented her as a passive war victim of a German 'war crime', others such as Dawn used her life and death to communicate an anti-war message to their interwar audiences. Taken together, the interwar depictions of Cavell that we have analysed here offer us new insights into the reasons why the First World War was constantly remembered and culturally revivified during the interwar period.

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