Margaretha Zelle MacLeod, a.k.a. Mata Hari,on the day French authorities arrested her as a spy, February 13, 1917.

JULIE WHEELWRIGHT

# Poisoned Honey
## *The Myth of Women in Espionage*

**Our century's fascination with the spy has produced at least as much mythology as recorded fact, and the romanticized picture of international espionage is never complete without the alluring and dangerous femme fatale. But this misconception about the role of women in intelligence is not confined to spy novels and James Bond films; in many cases it has been nurtured at the very highest levels of the intelligence community.**

In 1947, two MI5 agents paid an unexpected visit to the Oxfordshire home of a highly successful Soviet intelligence officer. When they appeared on her doorstep, Ruth Beurton, born Ursula Kuczynski and code-named "Sonja," politely offered them tea. The agents were seeking the co-operation of Mrs Beurton, who was known in the village as a respectable German Jewish refugee with two young children and an English husband. "You were a Russian agent for a long time, until the Finnish war disillusioned you," the agents informed her. "We know that you haven't been active in England, and we haven't come to arrest you." They wanted information about her activities in Switzerland, where she had trained two Englishmen as Soviet agents, one of whom was her husband, Len. The MI5 agents left empty-handed, casually remarking on the idyllic setting of the Beurton's cottage (Werner).

Beurton, who was active until a few weeks before the agents' visit, had hidden in a cupboard the radio set she used to send information to Moscow. As she would later write, the Beurton's domesticity had

undoubtedly thrown the agents off their investigation. A mother, seemingly occupied with the demands of two small children, appeared an unlikely candidate for an active Soviet agent. Yet Beurton, writing as Ruth Werner, later revealed in her autobiography, *Sonja's Report*, an impeccable record in intelligence; Richard Sorge, an officer of Soviet military intelligence, recruited and trained her in China (when she was seven months pregnant); in 1942 she acted as courier for physicist Klaus Fuchs, who worked on the secret atomic weapons team in Birmingham; she supplied Moscow with details of British military strength and with information about the secret us Strategic Bombing Survey of Germany. Most Soviet agents lasted as radio transmitters for three years – "Sonja" served for 17 without detection and finally fled to East Germany in 1951.

However, until the English translation of her book 40 years later, there was much speculation in the West about the real source of Sonja's success. British espionage writers such as Chapman Pincher regarded Sonja's operations as more devious than just sending information to the enemy – she stood accused of exploiting motherhood. As Pincher writes:

> *Treacherous women have been equally good at counterfeiting their true nature … 'Sonja' had only the example of Sorge and the benefit of brief training in Moscow but she was so effective in* playing *the ordinary housewife and mother that neither her lodgers nor her neighbours saw much amiss.* [emphasis added]

Writing a few years earlier, Pincher was more blunt in his assessment of Sonja's techniques. He quoted "a close friend of Sir Roger Hollis," MI5's former Director-General, who claimed that, "in her younger days in the Far East, she, no doubt, obliged the comrades with some easy sex." Sonja was further immortalized in spy writer Michael Hartland's 1986 novel, *The Third Betrayal*, which fictionalized her experience as an agent but used the real names of her family and espionage colleagues. In a parallel narrative, Sonja cold-bloodedly uses her sexuality to recruit potential Soviet agents.

Reading Sonja's autobiography about her experiences working for Soviet intelligence for almost two decades, another picture emerges. Born into a middle-class Jewish family in Berlin immediately after the Great War, she was conscious of the poverty left in its wake. At age 17 she joined the Communist Party, and when Sorge recruited her in Shanghai, it was because of her loyalty, her contacts within the expatriate community, and her proven analytic skills. But she admits to agonizing over the separation from her infant son while training in Moscow, and she feared for his safety on a dangerous posting in Manchuria. As she stated in 1991, however,

"For me a spy is a person bought in to do a job. I wasn't bought. I did what I did out of conviction." Neither did Werner *pose* as a housewife and mother; she combined these roles and saw difficulties but no contradiction between them.

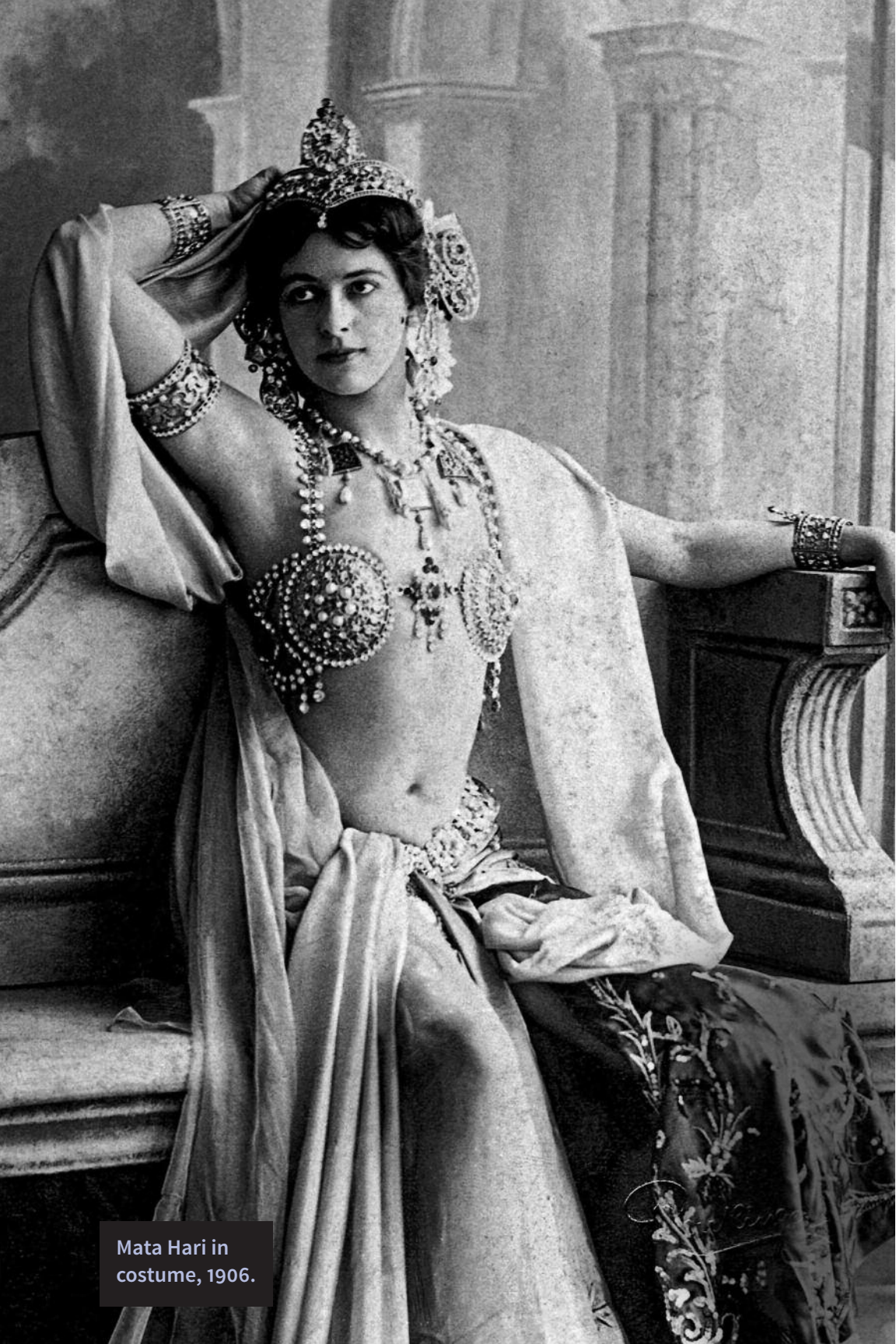
The discrepancy between Chapman Pincher's assumptions about Sonja's ability to separate her emotional life from her intelligence work and her own admission of the pain it caused her is a striking example of how intimately spy writing conforms to a male perspective. The female agent, in both espionage fiction and intelligence history, is most often sexualized, and her role confined to seducing the enemy. She is the screen onto which anxieties about female betrayal, male vulnerability, and alienation are safely projected. Unlike her male counterpart, her motives for joining the intelligence service are often perceived as stemming from a drive for material or sexual power – rarely from political conviction. As E.H. Cookridge, a retired MI6 agent, argued in 1959, the woman spy has never been just another woman doing a man's job.

*To these women, the political cause has been irrelevant; the prize in the eyes of most women spies has been ... the capitulation of men.... Many women agents whom I have met admitted that they have been unable to resist a life in which the main object was to subdue men whose very positions should have made them impervious to feminine charms and seductions.*

The discrepancies in Sonja's story suggest that the concept of the spy-courtesan has not lost its relevance in this relatively liberated age. Instead, criticisms based on presumptions about the spy-courtesan's sexual performance still have a powerful mythic quality, and are an essential element in the mythology of espionage.

Chapman Pincher, Michael Hartland, and E.H. Cookridge follow a long tradition of espionage writers who unconsciously frame their views on women in intelligence within a Victorian archetype of the *femme fatale*. Since male sexual desire is something that cannot be controlled, it is viewed as an inherent weakness. The spy-courtesan represents the antithesis of the maternal bond; she is sexually independent, usually childless, and is often estranged from her family – she dabbles on the dangerous periphery of the secret world. This flight from the domestic, however, also represents a deeply embedded anxiety in contemporary Western culture.

The origins of the pillow-talk scenario, which has been played out in a hundred variations on the theme since the *fin de siècle*, can be traced to the myth of Mata Hari. A Dutch hatter's daughter, born in Leeuwarden, Holland, in 1876, Margaretha Zelle MacLeod, a.k.a. Mata Hari, was convicted



Mata Hari in costume, 1906.

by the French of passing information to the Germans, and was executed in 1917. But she also stood trial and was convicted as a fallen woman; she was a divorcée, a mother who had abandoned a child to her husband's care, and an admitted courtesan. There could be no more potent symbol of France's problems than a superbly dressed former dancer announcing defiantly in court, "I have been a courtesan, yes, but never a traitor." Like Cleopatra, Carmen, or Lulu, this figure has been consistently reinvented because of the ancient message of female betrayal that her story carries. It is only in divining Mata Hari that the enduring quality of the iconic female spy can be understood.

To set the story in its historical context, it is important to remember the relationship between spy fiction and the fledgling espionage agencies that were established at the turn of the century to vanquish "enemy aliens." During the First World War, these agencies became centres for a powerful male élite whose reputations relied partly on the fascination for intelligence work that spy novels had already created. Widely-read British thrillers such as Erskine Childers' *The Riddle of the Sands* portrayed the spy as an expression of imperial heroism in periods of enormous political change. These fictional heroes could translate the growing complexities of Britain's burgeoning empire into a classic struggle between good and evil; the secrets of foreign enemies were divined, their masters punished, and national security restored. The line between fiction and reality was blurred so successfully by writers such as William Le Queux, in his fictionalized serial *The Invasion of 1910*, that British police stations around the country were flooded with sitings of German agents. During the war, MI5 received so many fantastic reports of spies that Sir Vernon Kell divided them into 15 different categories that ranged from the mysterious kidnapping of a maid to German governesses carrying trunk-loads of bombs.

Spy writers fuelled fears that England was being undermined by well-trained agents in innocent guises, who would suddenly turn on their employers and friends. As Le Queux reminded his readers, spies also took a female form, raising fears about the loyalty of German nannies, waitresses, cabaret dancers, and even language teachers. As a London journalist wrote ominously in November 1914, "the danger arising from [women spies] has not yet been adequately grasped by those whose business it is to deal with it." Robert Baden-Powell, intelligence officer and founder of the Boy Scout Movement, fuelled this fantasy in 1914 with his *Aids to Scouting for NCOs and Men*, which included a warning that "certain foreign governesses could tell you a great deal about our army." The spy fever was exported across the Atlantic where hundreds of women were interned, including

Agatha Richrath, a German instructor at Vassar College who was arrested as an enemy alien for "much pro-German talk" at a Poughkeepsie Hotel in 1918.

Foreign women also became a target of Allied propagandists who often blamed the enemy's attempts to disrupt the "moral balance" on well-bred ladies who blackmailed political and military leaders into spying. In England, rumours that aristocrats with German relations were poisoning the war effort provoked Prime Minister Lloyd George in early 1917 to "expose the odious influence of … the 'Petticoat Scandal,'" hinting at treasonable correspondence with Germans in high places. An earlier myth about German efficiency in using seductive spies was also revived. Hamil Grant, writing in 1915, described how several thousand pretty barmaids were recruited as agents during Bismarck's unification campaign. Women with a "high type of morality" were rejected because all agents were ordered to "extract information from drinking soldiers." Grant claimed that more recently the Germans had limited the number of female spies to those with well-honed seductive powers.

*In matters of love or revenge, where her deepest feelings are concerned, she is capable of a sustained effort calling for the application of whatever analytical powers she may possess, but seldom in other cases … an appeal to, say, her patriotism leaves her almost invariably cold and unenthusiastic, since love of country is a quality which depends too largely on an essentially platonic and impersonal principle to attract and hold for long her undivided interest and attention.*

Grant believed women did not possess the intellect to understand politics and joined the secret service to exploit their libidinous natures. Sir Vernon Kell, MI5's first director, seems to have endorsed this view since he recommended Grant's book to incoming agents. A British intelligence officer, Captain Ferdinand Tuohy, concurred with Grant that German "beauty specialists" were employed in secret doings and described their special training, "to emulate the dark and bestial days … in Berlin where the highest in the land consorted and were duly blackmailed for their sins." The courtesan and the foreign female spy were interchangeable, each using her statelessness to search for male prey.

While the Allies believed, however, that the enemy's female agents were everywhere in Europe, the British secret service staunchly denied it had any use for this species. Although Sir Vernon Kell willingly acknowledged MI5's head secretary, Miss Lomax, was a "paragon of efficiency," he believed women were unsuitable in the field. As he outlined in a 1934 lecture on "Security and Intelligence in War," "The difficulty with the

# THE INVASION OF 1910.

## WITH A FULL ACCOUNT OF THE SIEGE OF LONDON.

### WHAT LORD ROBERTS SAYS TO YOU:

Speaking in the House of Lords on the 10th July, 1905, I said: "It is to the people of the country I appeal to take up the question of the Army in a sensible, practical manner. For the sake of all they hold dear, let them bring home to themselves what would be the condition of Great Britain if it were to lose its wealth, its power, its position."

*The catastrophe that may happen if we still remain in our present state of unpreparedness is vividly and forcibly illustrated in Mr. Le Queux's new book, which I recommend to the perusal of everyone who has the welfare of the British Empire at heart.*—ROBERTS, F.M.

*Keep this Map for Reference.*

*It will be Valuable.*


*Keep this Map for Reference.*

*It will be Valuable.*

**This Intensely Interesting Narrative by Mr. Wm. Le Queux begins in the**

## LONDON "DAILY MAIL" TO-MORROW.

***ORDER THE "DAILY MAIL" TO-DAY.***

***ORDER THE "DAILY MAIL" TO-DAY.***

female agent is her lack of technical knowledge of naval and military matters." Then, drawing on a few foreign examples, he added "As a scout, a judge of character, or as a recruiter or trainer of agents in non-technical matters, she met with some success."

Despite Kell's insistence that the "the beautiful vamp" had "no counterpart in real life," Edwardian adventure stories, stage plays, and dramas supported her popularity. A plot involving dastardly German agents, disguised as "bogus architects, contractors and sham waiters," was so popular that "Candida," writing in the London *Graphic* in 1914, could confidently claim that these romantic villains were familiar to the "average person." The spy's female accomplice was "the more extravagantly humorous type," with a foreign accent, "daring Parisian" wardrobe, and evil intentions. She was always unmasked, "to the huge approval of the gallery," who saw through her from the start. While adults delighted in the stage antics, children followed the adventures of characters like spy-catcher Pontifex Shrewd in the boy's comic, *Lot-O-Fun*. Captain Shrewd, chief of the Southern Command's Secret Service, and his Chinese sidekick exposed nefarious Hun plans to entrap innocent young British officers.

In "Mystia the Witch," the War Office sends Shrewd to investigate the mysterious disappearance of Lieutenant Harland, who was about to enlist with a "Blankshire Regiment." Shrewd soon discovers that the young officer has fallen for music-hall artist Miss Daisy Delant, who flaunts a "wealth of jet black hair and large commanding eyes." Also known as "Mystia the Witch," she specializes in hypnotizing her audience and has soon mesmerised the unsuspecting Harland into handing over invaluable military code books. Pontifex tracks Miss Daisy to a large country house. It's too late, however, and Daisy has bitten into a poison capsule and cries out before her death, "For the Kaiser."

The dangerously alluring foreign spy was also a staple of early cinema. The first British spy thriller was produced in 1899, and by 1911 eleven had been screened throughout the country. Female spies were featured in films with titles such as *The Submarine Plans* (1912), *An Adventuress Outwitted* (1912), *The Heart of a Woman* (1912), *OHMS* (1913), and *Huns of the North* (1913). *Two Little Britons* portrays two children of the British Secretary for Foreign Affairs in Brussels, who unmask an ideal spy – their governess. During the war, these adventure stories, whether on stage, film, or in print, drew blatantly upon already well-established myths to remind boys that "England wants every one of her sons who can go." In contrast, German women were often portrayed as such fanatic patriots that they would senselessly lay down their lives for the Kaiser.

But the female spy wasn't only a British phenomenon. In France, the story of Italian courtesan La Castiglione – sent by Cavour to seduce

Emperor Napoleon III and known as "a fine political agent" – was well known. Léonide Leblanc, mistress of French prime minister George Clemenceau, had also longed to be entrusted with state secrets and the inspiration for revolutions, but was sadly disappointed in her ambition. When France entered the war, women were also victims in the "spy-mania [that] had literally unhinged every brain," as society hostess Misia Sert observed. Aviator Marthe Richard, who later worked as a double-agent for French counterespionage, described "spy psychosis" as a "serious form of mental derangement among hot-headed patriots." Richard was accused of being a spy in a small village near Amiens and was only saved from an angry mob by the local gendarme. When the police eventually released her, a young officer jokingly commented that she looked like a spy since "they are usually rather pretty like you and they are sociable and rather enigmatical." Richard put his flirtatious accusation down to reading too many thrillers and detective stories.

**"According to the prosecution, she had fed like a parasite on the rotting corpse of French society, and her decadent demand for luxury was in obscene contrast to wartime deprivation."**

But it was the "international women" like Mata Hari who most immediately attracted the attention of the French secret service – the *Deuxième Bureau*. Although Mata Hari came from neutral Holland, her association with the theatre, her German lovers, and her reputation as a courtesan contributed to the suspicion surrounding her. When she came to trial in 1917, the public was well prepared to believe Police Captain Jean Chatin's claim that more than 50,000 men had died because of her. Mata Hari stood accused of "collective assassination." As a courtesan she was also guilty of the more elusive crime of moral degeneracy. Throughout the trial, prosecuting attorney Lieutenant André Mornet repeatedly returned to Mata Hari's impressive number of important lovers. She was a perfect example of a war profiteer. "The lady Zelle appeared to us as one of those 'international women' – the phrase is her own – who have become so dangerous since the hostilities," Mornet stated in his summation. "The ease with which she expresses herself in several languages, especially French, her numerous relations, her subtle ways, her aplomb, her remarkable intelligence, her immorality, congenital or acquired, all contributed to make her a suspect." According to the prosecution, she had fed like a parasite on the rotting corpse of French society, and her decadent demand for luxury was in obscene contrast to wartime deprivation. Emile Massard

repeated the rumour that Mata Hari had demanded the director of St Lazare prison allow her to bathe in milk at a time when it was rationed, even for *"nos petits enfants."* Like Cleopatra, her narcissism knew no bounds.

Mata Hari's trial and execution came at a crucial moment during the war. Spies – a vague and all-encompassing category of traitors – were being blamed for the mutinies erupting along the Western Front. The war was dragging on; local prefects were reporting restless citizens talking openly of revolution, and any evidence that the individuals responsible had been brought to justice was extremely valuable. "The public mood is nervy, as if in a state of hyperaesthesia," reported the prefect of Gironde in the spring of 1917, "It is hurt at the slightest touch, the smallest shock sets it quivering" (Becker). Mata Hari's capture caused a national sensation, and placing her before the firing squad was a symbolic cleansing of the nation's ills.

The performer's meteoric rise following her 1905 debut at Monsieur Guimet's museum had made her name as a "star of dance" at the best venues in Europe. However, in the *fin de siècle*, married women rarely took to the stage, and even successful female performers usually needed a wealthy patron to help them maintain their social position. And if a woman failed to become a mistress, she might frequent those houses in Paris where couples could meet, cash was exchanged, and discretion maintained. The better *maisons de rendezvous* before the war had been the final hope of widows in financial straits or dowerless daughters who "hoped to obtain the necessary principal to make a marriage to which their rank in society would permit them" (Corbin). Many of the city's most honoured female performers supplemented their wages through this practice. Even the illustrious Sarah Bernhardt, who once declared, "I have been among the great lovers of my time," was the daughter of a *cocotte*.

War was now being waged against these "international women" who had shucked off their national identities before the war to live as courtesans in the Parisian *demi-monde*. Mata Hari's conviction in July, and execution at Vincennes three months later, fuelled fears that foreign women with ambiguous allegiances were threatening the already beleaguered Allied forces. Like the character Salome, a role Mata Hari had longed to play, these women came to incarnate what literary critic Peter Wollen has described as "the phallic woman of the Decadence, surrounded by energy, colour, and 'barbarism.' " In this case, barbarism belonged exclusively to the enemy. Emile Massard witnessed Mata Hari's trial, and commented on the entrance of the accused into the *Palais de Justice,* "she was totally without grace … she was really German in form and in heart." To betray a French officer was to betray France, and Mata Hari stood accused of a dozen such crimes.

Despina Storch in 1918, the year of her arrest.

But spy paranoia was not restricted to Europe, and although the Americans were late entering the war, amateur vigilantes routed out women spies with a vengeance. In January 1918, the American-born Baroness Iona "Nonie" von Zollner, wife of a Bavarian officer, was charged with violating the espionage act. Equally shocking was the revelation that she had seduced an officer who was exactly half her age. The case exposed "a sensational love affair," in the course of which "suspicious codes, and gangrenous wartime secrets were involved." Baroness "Nonie," whose father was New York millionaire William Pickhardt, stood accused of using her beauty to exploit the young Lieutenant Spalding, and of using her high society contacts for the German cause. Although she was suing the Baron von Zollner for divorce, and her son was enrolled at the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, she was accused of sending her husband coded messages through a Dutch intermediary.

Two months later, the New York police announced that a ring of aristocratic lady conspirators had been routed. "Two women in luxury" were seized from their expensive hotel suites in Manhattan, along with their lovers. The French Count Robert de Clairmont was arrested with Madame Elizabeth Charlotte Nix, who was described as "tall, stately, even haughty, she plainly is of the aristocratic junker class of Berlin." Their accomplice, Madame Despina Davidovitch Storch, who would later be immortalized as "Turkish Delight" in spy literature, was taken in on suspicion of committing activities in the interest of an enemy country. An amateur detective, Mr Van der Poel, had befriended Madame Storch several months earlier, and his private investigation led to her arrest.

Madame Storch, who was charged with her lover, the Count de Beville, was a glamorous attraction for the press – a variation on Mata Hari's "Oriental" theme. Born in Constantinople to a German mother and a Bulgarian father, she was described as 23 years of age with an olive complexion, jet black eyes, and "the mass of heavy black hair from the Orient." Moreover, she reminded reporters of Theda Bara; "it was easy to see how men would fall under the influence of that smile and those brilliant black eyes." The Hollywood allusions were heightened in reports that Madame Storch fainted in the police station upon hearing she might be deported to France, where at least 10 women were executed on espionage charges during the war. The faithful count rushed to her side to administer reassurance. Later that day, the Theda Bara look-alike and Elizabeth Nix were transferred to Ellis Island.

By this time, the spy-courtesan had so determined the coverage of espionage trials that every report strained to conform to Mata Hari's standards. Although few women faced prosecution for espionage in the United States, and only five were convicted in Britain, these newspaper reports helped to sustain the female spy as a symbol of national betrayal long after the Armistice.

Amidst the plethora of post-war espionage novels and films that kept the spy-courtesan in the public eye, those that paid tribute to Mata Hari were the most enduring. However, there were subtle shifts in the iconography of the female spy that reflected political changes in North America and western Europe. The "Red" rapidly replaced the "Hun" as enemy, and espionage writers who succeeded the *Deuxième Bureau*'s chief Georges Ladoux and Scotland Yard's Sir Basil Thomson battled with a new generation of ideological spies. G.E.R. Gedye reminded *New York Times* readers in 1930 that contemporary espionage budgets in every Western country far exceeded those before the war. The spy business was booming. In Britain, the greatest efforts of the Secret Intelligence Service were devoted to monitoring Soviet operations.

As the nature and targets of intelligence changed, so did the espionage fantasy. According to press reports of the 1930s, the modern female spy was more likely to be a serious college graduate than a courtesan. Glittering *dames* who seduced diplomats at champagne suppers had given way to hard-bitten ladies with degrees in chemistry, bent on decoding the complicated formulations of the latest weapons technology. This new spy was a competent driver, adept at mechanical operations, and usually an efficient photographer. As Janet Flanner wrote in her *New Yorker* column, "the government that employs her is less interested in her boudoir than in her brain." Flanner noticed that the majority of female agents arrested in the previous decade were respectably married – to other spies (Flanner).

Spy fiction written in the aftermath of the Great War changed the settings and ideological slant of the woman spy, but the legendary courtesan often won out. These novels also revealed an internal contradiction: female characters were valued as representatives of domestic peace, but were deeply resented for the gains they had made, allegedly at the expense of men. The New Woman was on the move after 1918; suffrage was extended to women in Britain, America, Canada, and many European countries for the first time. Young women ventured into new occupations and exercised their burgeoning liberties by entering college, taking up sports, cropping their hair, and wearing trousers. The lingering fear that accompanied these changes between the sexes was often found in the predictable plots of the spy novel. The sexually independent adventuress,


who embodies a woman's desire for what was once regarded as male privilege, gets her comeuppance in the dark world of espionage. In a hundred variations on the theme, the Great War spy Mata Hari relives her final moments at Vincennes in October 1917, waving goodbye and falling into a heap of nothing more harmless than skirts.

An intriguing example of how former agents turned their wartime experiences into spy fiction came from the first head of America's cryptographic bureau. Herbert O. Yardley published a novel in 1934, and dramatically altered the facts surrounding the case of Madame Marie de Victorica. She was arrested in New York in 1917 for disseminating pro-German propaganda, and hardly fit the Mata Hari model; extremely intellectual, she was also overweight, middle-aged, and addicted to morphine. However, she was immortalized as "the beautiful blonde woman of Antwerp" after MI5 had sent Yardley a cable describing her in these terms. In *The Blonde Countess*, the former cryptographer fleshed out his espionage fantasies and transformed Victorica into a cold-blooded Mata Hari. The novel's plot revolved around the search for the enemy spy J37, "a woman more to be feared than half a dozen military attachés." The story shifted back into familiar territory with Nathaniel Greenleaf, chief of the Black Chamber, heading an investigation that eventually leads to his former lover, the Countess Thorlund. They become locked in an intellectual but deadly struggle, and when Nathaniel finally confronts the countess, he realizes how deeply she hates him. Yet he still finds this witch-like figure preferable to any other woman; the fascination is "two parts fear and detestation" while her power is an "evil spell." Yardley's novel was so successful it was made into an MGM film entitled *Rendezvous* (1935) starring William Powell and Rosalind Russell, and later remade as *Pacific Rendezvous* in 1942.

But by the outbreak of the Second World War, Mata Hari's legacy still haunted prospective female agents. In France, African-American performer Josephine Baker first had to overcome this prejudice before she could join General de Gaulle's Free French forces. Jacques Abtey, head of military counter-intelligence in Paris, worried that she might prove to be another Mata Hari. Baker had to convince Abtey that the similarities were merely superficial; "whereas Mata Hari had been an adventuress drifting around the world without a home, interested above all in her own comfort, [Baker] was fiercely and to the point of self-sacrifice, devoted to France" (Rose). Colonel Paillole, who directed counter-intelligence operations in Marseilles, also believed the Mata Hari myth and had, at first, shared Abtey's concerns. However, Baker convinced both men of her commitment and became de Gaulle's "propaganda arm in North Africa."

After the war, however, the biographies of women who had worked in Allied intelligence began to change the public perception of the female agent. Biographies of such women as Noor Inyat Khan, Violet Szabo, and Nancy Wake described the courageous work of female agents in France for the Special Operations Executive. They belonged to a new generation of intelligence operations that now openly included women, and it wasn't until after the Berlin blockade that the spy-courtesan resurfaced – this time as a handmaiden to the godless communists. In Hollywood, Sally Eilers played an innocent corrupted in *They Made Her a Spy*, while Fay Wray graced the screen as *Madame Spy*. But the blonde, patriotic girl next door was also found fighting on the right side of the secret war. Ann Dvorak starred as "America's Mata Hari of the South Pacific" in the 1951 epic *I Was an American Spy*. The consistency of the spy-courtesan's story had begun to blur, however, and true-hearted patriots were shown vamping the enemy in the cause of truth and justice.

Although there is not space in this essay to chronicle the way in which the myth of Mata Hari has evolved since the Cold War, there is evidence that, as a cultural icon, the spy-courtesan still has great resonance. Even in the 1990s, whether it's a news report about a Colombian "Mata Hari" spying for the Medellin cocaine cartels, or the British tabloid newspapers' allegations that MI5's new head, Stella Rimington, had extra-marital affairs, popular representations of women in intelligence are inevitably sexualized. The Mata Hari myth serves as a reminder that male sexual fantasy is a persistent thread in the constructed world of the secret war. One can only speculate that when the veil of secrecy has been lifted from its annals, the spy-courtesan will finally fade from the scene.

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