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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Dame Photographer: Lee Miller World War II *Vogue* Correspondent

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In Art History

by

Megan Carr

Thesis Committee:
Professor James Nisbet, Chair
Professor Bridget R. Cooks
Professor Roberta Wue

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

American photographer Lee Miller may have been most famous for her work as a fashion model and Surrealist muse in the 1920s and 1930s, but she was also a photographer and artist in her own right. In 1939 Miller decided to relocate to Europe in the hope of helping with the war effort and was employed by *Vogue*, a high-end women's fashion magazine, as a staff photographer, where she documented the Blitz in London and pushed the boundaries of fashion photography to include war coverage in the pages of *Vogue*. She embedded with the U.S. Army in the unusual position of a war correspondent for a fashion magazine. While recent decades have brought increasing attention to Miller's work, and she has been included among the Surrealist canon of photographers, much of the interpretation of her photography remains biographical. This paper explores how gender, including Miller's own, is represented within her work and within the context of the publication. Through analysis of Miller's writings and correspondence as well as conceptions of the modern woman versus traditional femininity, I discuss promotions and depictions of national gender constructions through cosmetics and fashion, including British, American, French, and German, along with racism and antisemitism. This thesis examines definitions of surrealism, their intersections and oppositions to the imagery and control of fascism, and the difficulty of documenting the unimaginable as frameworks for exploring Miller's wartime work. Shocking imagery, including the holocaust, the Dachau concentration camp, SS suicides, and Miller's photo in Hitler's bathtub, are analyzed. I argue that Miller's navigation of gender through her identity and photography creates unique and often contradictory convergences of fashion, the body, and war.

INTRODUCTION

A dame that knows the ropes isn't likely to get tied up.

– attributed to Mae West

In August of 1944, while under house arrest by the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force for violating the prohibition against women entering active combat zones, Lee Miller wrote to her editor at British Vogue, Audrey Winters, to lament that she would not be able to witness the much longed for the liberation of Paris.¹ She consoled herself with the notion that while she would not be the first woman, she would be the first “dame photographer.”² Miller’s unconventionality and willingness to push boundaries helped to expand the scope of *Vogue* from an upscale fashion magazine to one of the most significant reporting sources during World War II. Miller’s writing and photographs revealed various gender, cultural, and ideological differences throughout the war and its immediate aftermath through her surrealist-influenced lens. Her wartime work explores the borders and differences of the body, fashion, and combat within an unconventional surrealist ideology. Miller illuminated the female experience while simultaneously exploring new and contradictory iconographies and ideologies surrounding women, men, and nations. Art historian Natalya Lusty described Miller’s complex approach “as a feminist and a Surrealist strategy; the hybrid produces an anxiety of difference that refuses to resolve the tensions that it inaugurates.”³

¹ Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller: A Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 228.

² *Ibid*, 231.

³ Natalya Lusty, *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007) 8.

Surrealism evokes dreams, contrasts visual elements transforming the beautiful into the horrific and vice versa, and engages in an often-dichotomous exploration of difference, signs, and signifiers through literary and mythological illusions.⁴ Miller's work contains surrealist elements, but it is not strictly Surrealist in the way that André Breton defined it in the Surrealist manifestos. Breton categorized Surrealism as freedom from conventionality and the perils of rationalism; he described Freudian influences, particularly in regard to exploring concepts from dreams and imagining death.⁵ He frequently references literature and history in his manifestos and encourages its use to explore concepts of the self as well as hidden meanings, but his writings are frequently misogynistic, categorizing women as sexual conquests and distractions.⁶ Miller had been associated with Surrealism since 1929; according to art historian Whitney Chadwick, she "was the first woman to seek an aesthetic, rather than a personal, identity through Surrealism."⁷ In her life and art, she defied surrealist categorizations of women as either the *femme enfant* or the *femme fatale*. She may have been a frequent muse and collaborator; however, her work proves she could not be merely reduced to a sign or symbol for the men around her. She "proved too headstrong and independent to fit Surrealism's developing ideal of the ethereal and childlike woman. Her photographs often reveal Surrealism's love

⁴ Rosalind E. Krauss, Jane Livingston, and Dawn Ades. *L'amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism*. (New York: Abbeville, 1985) & Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (New York: Thames & Hudson Inc, 2021).

⁵ André Breton, *Manifestos of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Searer and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1999).

⁶ Breton was also outspoken about his homophobia. Ibid.

⁷ Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, 44.

for evocative juxtapositions.”⁸ Miller’s surrealism is found in her humorous and often dark comparisons, visual plays with temporality, heightened reality, and the mix of beauty, glamour, reality, and horror. This contrast is felt strongly in her wartime work, which is one of the most productive periods of her life and also one of the easiest periods for attribution. Miller’s tendency for collaboration, lack of record keeping, and her reluctance to speak about her work later in life make clear attribution difficult for much of her life. There is a surrealist irony in covering the horrors of war for a fashion magazine, the injection of violence and destruction into a space dedicated to beauty and elegance.

As an American, Miller’s use of the moniker dame conveys a certain unconventionality, a shrewd willingness to use the means at her disposal to achieve her aims. It is hard to tell if the British Winters noted this national distinction. As in the United Kingdom, Dame is an honorific equivalent to the title of Knight, typically bestowed as an honor for services to the realm, having nearly opposite connotations from the 1940s American context that Miller was using. An American dame drank, cursed, owned her sexuality, and had ambitions; in short, she took for herself those privileges that were freely bequeathed to the male gender. As Chadwick describes them, this is common amongst female surrealists who “were in revolt against the conventional female roles assigned to them by family, class, and society.”⁹ In that vein, Miller’s choice to remain in Europe rather than return home to the privilege and safety of her family and New York can be seen as a surrealist act of rebellion in defiance of the acceptable roles proscribed upon her class and gender by society. Miller’s unconventionality is seen in her work for *Vogue*, expanding the

⁸ Ibid, 46.

⁹ Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, 9.

magazine's focus on glamorous fashion to the atrocities of war, through which she displayed and navigated her understanding of gendered nationalism.

After the war, Miller was feted in New York and London as “the only female photojournalist to see combat, the one whose dispatches gave a visceral sense of the war.”¹⁰ Just as her entrée into the art world was made possible by her refusal to accept limitations, her celebrated war work was made possible by her refusal to play by the rules. Though her interests would change, she retained a surrealist tinge in all her pursuits. Chapter one, *Vogue's War*, examines *Vogue* and Miller's relationship to it, including her depiction of American nurses in her September 15, 1944 “U.S.A. Tent Hospital in France” article. The depiction of Miller's gender within the magazine, the effect of the London Blitz, and *Vogue's* response to the war's impact on fashion. Chapter two, *Nations & Gender*, focuses on national constructions of gender, including keeping up appearances. Multiple nationalities are explored through Miller's coverage of Vienna, British servicewomen, her depictions of German women, including her June, 1945 “Believe It: Germans Are Like This” article, and Buchenwald. This chapter also features the liberation of Paris and the *femmes tondues*. Finally, chapter three, *Surrealism*, examines the surrealist aspects of her work, capturing the unimaginable through a close reading of her posing in the bathtub of Hitler's apartment and her depictions of the war in Germany, including her documenting the Dachau concentration camp and Nazi suicides. Miller's work navigates the grey areas between gender, nation, truth, seen, and unseen. Despite the increasing ubiquity of images and the time and distance which removes images from their context, her work still manages to shock and surprise.

¹⁰ Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller: A Life*, 269.

VOGUE'S WAR

[Lee Miller] brought a regular dose of reality, a commodity that had been lacking from *Vogue* until then.¹¹

– Alexander Liberman

Vogue was founded in 1892 and became one of America's most prestigious lifestyle publications. Condé Nast purchased *Vogue* in 1909 and turned it into a high-end woman's magazine focusing on couture, celebrities, and culture, featuring color illustrations and photographs from top artists and photographers. British *Vogue* began in 1916, and French *Vogue* followed in 1920, along with other nation-specific versions of the magazine. With its concern for propriety, couture, and conventions, *Vogue* was seemingly unprepared for the challenges and changes brought by the war. Previously, *Vogue*, in all of its various national publications, catered to a presumed affluent female audience; while not exclusively a fashion magazine, it also featured art and literature, much of which would later be called aspirational content. Their more political content was often included in a section titled "People Are Talking About," framing the content more as gossip or cocktail conversation than serious news.¹² The magazine's content at this time was often a curious mix of popular and elite culture. For example, the July 1, 1946 issue included recommended summer reading lists by successful romantic novelist Daphne Du Maurier and philosopher and Nobel laureate Albert Camus. As war efforts ramped up, particularly in the United States, the focus shifted from whether or not rationing would make stockings ugly to a greater emphasis on the war effort around the globe, with a particular interest in women in the

¹¹ Ibid, 294. Liberman was *Vogue's* art director (1941-1961) and editorial director of all Condé Nast publications (1962-1994)

¹² The "People are Talking About" feature first appeared in the May 15, 1939 issue.

workforce, especially those that joined women's auxiliary forces and in the medical field. In addition to her photographs, once Miller transitioned from staff photographer to war correspondent, she wrote over a dozen feature articles for *Vogue* from September 15, 1944, to May 15, 1946.¹³ The May 15, 1946 issue of American *Vogue* has an unprecedented three feature articles by Miller.

Even before *Vogue* expanded the scope of the magazine, Miller had focused on the war, first photographing the effects of the Blitz in a series of photographs that would become her first book, *Grim Glory: Pictures of Britain Under Fire* (1941), with accompanying text by legendary journalist Edward R. Murrow. Many of the photographs featured destruction caused by the bombings. As Miller was not permitted to photograph casualties, she transposed scenes of violence onto inanimate objects, including a nude female sculpture lying amongst the rubble with a metal bar across her neck in *Revenge on Culture* (1940) (Figure 1) and a typewriter, both of which highlight the war's impact on women as the sculpture stands in for female victims of the bombing campaign and typewriters were symbols of women's transition into office work. *Grim Glory* also included images of Londoners in bomb shelters, including a series of photographs of artist Henry Moore sketching while sheltering in an Underground station. The contrast between the threat of death, the continuation of daily life, and artistic creation are characteristic of Miller's surrealist fascination with juxtaposition. Her second book *Wrens in Camera* (1945), featured photographs that were originally commissioned by the British Admiralty and featured women in the British Navy. While she also photographed soldiers and civilian

¹³ It is difficult to determine how many photographs Miller contributed to *Vogue* as the search term "Lee Miller" returns hundreds of results on the Vogue Archive.

men, Miller was particularly focused on depicting women, particularly American women who, like her, had decided to eschew their privilege and gender conventions in favor of taking part in the war. Miller's 1944 description of the sacrifices and strength of aristocratic Hungarian women provides insight into Miller's thinking regarding women of privilege who were, in their own ways, fighting for their country:

[They] were brought up in a tough school. They learned courage and endurance and a long-term sense of values. Some set of laws makes all women propertyless, so the girls knew from the time they first cried for a toy that they'd have to fight for everything they'd ever own—for husband, property, and power. They were bullied by English nannies, who gave the hot-water bottles to the boys; they broke their bones hunting, or bore children or mourned without a whimper, and they were devoted wives and looked beautiful.¹⁴

Miller's description reads as a call to all women to throw off the yoke of patriarchy. She expresses an awareness that playing by the rules would not free women from oppression and understands that to have a position in a male-dominated society, a woman had to earn respect and approval from men. And that support was far more easily given to those women who they found attractive. At a celebration of Miller and her work after her return from the war Harry Yoxall, chairman of Condé Nast and founder of British *Vogue*, declared that she had "shown herself to be a good soldier...an encouragement to our readers to do their part...a pretty and well-dressed woman (as we see indeed in the character of today's heroine) can serve the cause better than a slovenly virago."¹⁵ Even in wartime, appearances, particularly those of women, mattered.¹⁶ Miller's awareness of fashion, how

¹⁴ Lee Miller. "Middle-Europe Album: Hungary." *Vogue*, May 15, 1946, 197.

¹⁵ Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller: A Life*, 269.

¹⁶ Yoxall's comments highlight how Miller's reputation and beauty enabled her work during the war. While an artist model going to war seems odd and ironic, these were the same factors that enabled her position with *Vogue*.

to project the image she wanted others to see, and her acute observations of national differences made the signs and iconography of allegiance apparent.

Once the United States entered the war, Miller, whom the British military had denied military credentials based on her sex, was able to embed as a journalist with the American army, making her part of a small group of female photojournalists who covered the European sphere of the war.¹⁷ Miller provided a feature article published in the August 1, 1944 issue of *Vogue* in which she photographed and profiled CBS radio journalist Edward R. Murrow—she was likely chosen because of her preexisting working relationship with Murrow on the book *Grim Glories*. Miller provided the photographs and Murrow the text, but she was credited as a staff photographer for British *Vogue*, not as their war correspondent. Miller said she tried to emulate Murrow’s honesty and wit in her own writing.¹⁸ Her first feature as a war correspondent for *Vogue* was an unusually long fifteen-page article including photographs, “U.S.A Tent Hospital in France,” which demonstrated her focus on women.¹⁹ Miller decided to write her copy and take pictures after she had been disappointed by much of the text that accompanied her first internationally acclaimed war photograph, *Revenge on Culture* (Figure 1).²⁰ Of the thirteen pictures in the “U.S.A. Tent Hospital” feature, all contain people; six have female figures—one of Miller herself, which will be discussed below—four of whom are identified by name; in contrast, the only man

¹⁷ Female photojournalists were not authorized in the Pacific and had limited access to Russia. See Judith Mackrell, *The Correspondents: Six Women Writers on the Front Lines of World War II* (Waterville, ME: Thorndike Press, a part of Gale, a Cengage Company Gale Cengage Learning, 2022)

¹⁸ Antony Penrose. *The Lives of Lee Miller*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1985.

¹⁹ Lee Miller. “U.S.A. Tent Hospital in France.” *Vogue*, September 15, 1944, 138-143, 204-211, and 219.

²⁰ Jane Livingston, *Lee Miller, Photographer*, (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1989), 58.

named in the captions is “the major general.” This is consistent with Miller’s other wartime writings where enemy personnel are rarely identified. Allied male soldiers are typically distinguished by rank or unit, and allied women who are serving the war effort in some capacity are the most frequently named, with Miller often also including where these women were from.²¹ The Major General’s name and that of the Chief Surgeon are included in the body of the article; surely a political necessity as the report notes that Miller had lunch with them and the purpose of the article was to demonstrate the high level of care wounded Americans received and praise the dedication of men and women in the medical corps.

Even more than her naming conventions, Miller’s admiration for women in the war effort is demonstrated in how she photographed them. Whether they were in profile or facing the camera, their faces are visible as in *Nurse Gertrude van Kirk (of New Jersey) helps a litter case to England* (1944) and *Captain Eva Maclin (of Florida) at a Hospital Band Concert* (1944) which is discussed later (Figures 2 and 3—which were printed side by side in *Vogue*), Miller’s attention is clearly on them, unlike the men who surround and typically outnumber them, whose faces are obscured by helmets, bandages, or injuries. In the photograph *Nurse Gertrude van Kirk (of New Jersey) helps a litter case to England* (Figure 2), she uses the plane’s open bay doors to frame nurse Van Kirk, making her the central protagonist of the image. Amidst the chaos and pain of the field hospital, it is Van Kirk who stands above the fray, ushering the wounded soldier into the safety of the craft and the promise of salvation at a British hospital. This showcases women’s importance and figures

²¹ Lee Miller. “U.S.A. Tent Hospital in France.” *Vogue*, September 15, 1944, 143.

them as the bridge between allied nations, connecting them despite the oceans between them. These images are a form of propaganda, demonstrating that American allies are supporting and saving the Americans who have traveled to the European front to fight against enemies who had not attacked America. Miller's story includes details of her assisting the nurses when incoming casualties threatened to overwhelm the medical personnel, further portraying her role as active rather than as a bystander or passive observer. It also underscores to the reader the need to do their part, to contribute to the war however they can. This message is consistent with Miller's other writings—she hated the Nazis, their crimes, and their persecutions, and she was dedicated to serving however she could. This focus on women's faces, rather than injured men, allows women to take on all of the emotions of these scenes. They embody the worry, the concern, as well as the care, allowing for a sense of vulnerability without having to depict American men as fearful or pained. Even the bandage-covered man featured in the photo essay is alert and coherent.

Despite the seriousness and often uncomfortable realities of Miller's wartime coverage, *Vogue* would occasionally include a flattering portrait of Miller, seemingly to assure the readership that even while pushing across the European front with the American Army, Miller was putting in the effort to keep up an attractive and feminine appearance, even when surrounded by casualties. There is some dispute over who authored *Lee Miller in steel helmet specially designed for using a camera, Normandy, France, 1944* (Figure 4), which depicts Miller in her uniform and is included in her "Tent Hospital" article. The *Vogue* caption described the custom helmet she wore as an accessory that

Miller had decorated “for fun.”²² While the helmet was cut into a pivoting visor style so she could use her camera while wearing it, Roland Penrose—an artist, Miller’s lover, and her second husband—added the painted slits, invoking a medieval knight’s close helm.²³ The helmet provides a sort of multileveled surrealist irony, a subversion of traditional gender roles as it was Miller’s lover who symbolically knighted and provided her with a favor as she went off to war while he remained at home.

Just as Miller’s photography simultaneously supported national gender ideals while being able to expose the contradictions of those binaries, particularly in such a turbulent time, *Vogue’s* wide variety of topics and approaches, from serious war coverage to fashion and frivolity, revealed internal conflicts. Take, for example, their December 1, 1944 issue, which featured three articles regarding the Russian war orphan crisis preceded by an article on how to groom and prepare yourself for upcoming fashions titled “Bare Arms/Bare Legs/Bare Middle...” with the tagline “beauty techniques that let you wear the bare fashions” featuring grooming and tanning tips.²⁴ Even one of Miller’s most scathing accounts of the Holocaust, her June 1945 “Believe It” article and photospread, which featured some of the most gruesome images of horrors in black and white that Miller thought *Vogue* readers could stomach, was followed by a cheery article on summer fashion.²⁵ Miller’s unflinching coverage of concentration camps, Nazi suicides, and political executions appearing in a publication like *Vogue* is such a juxtaposition that it feels almost

²² Lee Miller. “U.S.A. Tent Hospital in France.” *Vogue*, 139.

²³ Antony Penrose. *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 116.

²⁴ *Vogue*. (Conde Nast Publications: December 1st, 1944).

²⁵ *Vogue*. (Conde Nast Publications: June, 1945).

surrealist. Critic and film theorist André Bazin described surrealist photography as a “hallucination that is also a fact;”²⁶ dichotomously, when the reality of the world is nightmarish, from the annihilations of war and genocide, documenting the truth of what was once thought unimaginable is surreal. Miller was also assigned celebrity and fashion work heightening the oddity of her position as a journalist covering the western front for an elite fashion magazine.

Philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman described the difficulty of envisioning the reality of the concentration camps. The Final Solution was designed to be unimaginable, to be so horrific that people would have a hard time believing it, and in making it so difficult for people to conceive of, give deniability to the Nazis; so, the documenting of these appalling crimes, the capturing of images no matter how fragmentary or insubstantial it may seem, makes the unimaginable imaginable.²⁷ The mind falters in the face of atrocities on such a deliberate and mechanized scale, wanting to deny their possibility. Still, because photography contains the referent of those horrors, they become a waking specter of brutal truths, no matter how difficult they are to conceptualize. If photography proves with certainty what has been, radiating truth even from beyond the veil of death, then documenting atrocities and exposing the darkness is an act that says this must never be again.²⁸

²⁶ André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” trans. Hugh Gray, *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1960): 9, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1210183>.

²⁷ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

²⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

Miller was one of *Vogue's* most famed beauties, first gracing the cover in March of 1927, and had contributed to the fashion and advertising photography of the publication throughout much of the 1930s. Oddly her former status as a model aided her in returning to work for *Vogue*. Art historian Jane Livingston notes the irony of Miller's wartime influence on the publication, "the woman who was one of *Vogue's* paragons of elegance and high style...[was] single-handedly responsible for [*Vogue's*] successful adaptation to the realities of war-time...a basic shift...toward values that would seem to undermine its very *raison d'être*."²⁹ Even before becoming a war correspondent, Miller had found ways to force war coverage into the pages of *Vogue*. Miller innovatively took the models out of the studio, in a "quantum leap" into the streets, and posed them against the backdrop of urban destruction.³⁰ At the time, fashion photography with professional models took place almost exclusively within the controlled environment of the studio, and each *Vogue* office had a photography studio where editors could monitor the work as it was being created. When their London offices were bombed, the editorial staff was forced to move to a more remote and secure location; Miller may have taken advantage of the opportunity that this provided. The foreground of *Model Shot with the Backdrop of bomb damage in London, 1940* (Figure 5) works on multiple levels, including that of a fashion photograph, showcasing elegant fashions that would soon be virtually impossible to obtain because of wartime rationing and the implementation Utility Clothing Schemes like "Make Do and Mend."³¹ These

²⁹ Jane Livingston, *Lee Miller, Photographer*, 63.

³⁰ Antony Penrose. *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 140.

³¹ Amanda Durfee. "Utility Futility: Why the Board of Trade's Second World War Clothing Scheme Failed to Become a Fashion Statement." *Penn History Review* 25, no. 2 (April 5, 2019): 89–124.

programs sought to reduce the number of resources utilized by the garment industry as well as reduce the consumption of British households. Notably, years before fellow *Vogue* photographer William Klein's staging of fashion models in city streets, Miller combined war and fashion photography by removing fashion photography from the confines of the studio.³²

Unlike Klein's work which relies upon the voyeuristic pleasure of observing a beautiful woman who is seemingly ignorant of the viewer's gaze, Miller's early war photographs—particularly those that evoke fashion photography—the models display an awareness of the camera often through their posing. This acknowledgment minimizes the implicit violence in the act of taking a photograph, even while simultaneously showing the violations of war. Miller's writings frequently note whether she had permission from the subjects of her pictures, this includes injured soldiers, celebrities, and the victims of the Holocaust, including asking the survivors for permission to photograph the recently deceased. The exception to this is the people she viewed as the perpetrators of the war, the Nazi criminals responsible for the atrocities she witnessed and documented.³³ The foreground supports *Vogue's* standard mode of operation, showcasing a smartly dressed woman. Within the strict context of early twentieth-century Britain, her tweed suit, or two-

³² Justin Kamp, "William Klein, Photographer Who Brought High Fashion into the Streets, Has Died Aged 96," CNN (Cable News Network, September 14, 2022), <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/william-klein-fashion-photographer-death-tan/index.html> & Katherine Knorr and International Herald Tribune, "William Klein's Street Life," *The New York Times* (The New York Times, October 26, 1996), <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/10/26/style/IHT-william-kleins-street-life.html>. Unlike Cartier-Bresson, Miller and Klein's work were not candid, they staged professional models for fashion shoots outside of studios.

³³ These inclusions reveal Miller's complicated political views on the ethics of representation, further proof of Natalya Lusty's argument that Miller was not naïve regarding the philosophy surrounding Surrealist ideals, just that she—like many other surrealist artists—did not share Breton's ideology.

piece costume, was one of the few women's outfits considered appropriate for a well-to-do woman to wear in nearly any context—evenings and formal events being the main exceptions.³⁴ The straight cut of the skirt and simple lines display her willingness to conform to slimmer wartime silhouettes, which conserved fabric, as does her small pillbox-style hat. The tall plumes and gauntlet gloves reveal that she is well off. The epitome of a British *Vogue* subscriber who could afford to spend several months' rent on a single dress.³⁵ While all versions of *Vogue* catered to affluent women, British *Vogue* was not sold on newsstands at the time; issues were mailed to a limited list of subscribers; it was "bespoke" with a waitlist for subscriptions.³⁶

The woman in *Model shot with the backdrop of bomb damage in London* is essentially in the British national costume by wearing a tweed suit, as "the tweed suit had become an icon of Britishness."³⁷ The destruction of the brick building in the background shows the aftermath of a bombing attack, revealing the conflict's harsh and often tragic impact on the civilian population. The angle of the model's body reveals her awareness of the destruction behind her. Still, she stands relatively protected from the threat of the Luftwaffe under the arch unaffected by the threat. She is transformed into a visual expression of the Blitz spirit, demonstrating the nation's determination to carry on and maintain proper British standards despite the German threat. As the war seeped into nearly every aspect of people's lives, women's magazines began to incorporate the war in some fashion,

³⁴ Julie Summers, *Fashion on the Ration: Style in the Second World War* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2016), 10.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 14.

³⁶ Antony Penrose. *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 128.

³⁷ Julie Summers, *Fashion on the Ration*, 11.

occasionally at the behest of government officials; typically, the focus remained on maintaining prewar beauty standards and homelife during wartime restrictions, or while employed as part of the war effort.³⁸

Historian Julie Summers stated that at the beginning of the war, “*Vogue* was determined that the war would not affect attitudes to outward appearances and on 20 September [1939] announced that ‘It would be an added calamity if war turned us into a nation of frights and slovens.’”³⁹ As rationing became more widespread, these standards, much to *Vogue’s* editors’ chagrin, had to change as their prior expectations became increasingly impossible. For the duration of the war, British *Vogue* halved its publication schedule, becoming a monthly magazine; French *Vogue* was shuttered during the occupation, while American *Vogue* continued to be published twice a month.⁴⁰ Women’s magazines were tasked with ensuring that women were aware of and conformed to current government standards, including dress, hairstyles, and cosmetics. Women needed to use less while maintaining beauty standards; if they did not, officials feared moral collapse. Shortly after becoming editor in 1940 Withers, wrote that:

We believe that women’s place is *Vogue’s* place...we believe that women have a special value in the public economy, for even in wartime they maintain their feminine interests and thus maintain, too, the business activity essential to the home front...So once more we raised the ‘carry on’ signal as proudly as a banner. We dedicate our pages to the support of important industries, to the encouragement of normal activities, to the pursuit of an intelligent and useful attitude to everyday affairs – and to a determined effort to bring as much cheer and charm into our life as

³⁸ Ibid, 21-23.

³⁹ Ibid 22.

⁴⁰ Except for June and July, when the magazine was only printed once a month.

possible. This, we are convinced, is the best contribution we can make to national defence.⁴¹

One of the ways this was achieved was through Miller's articles and photographs.

Throughout the war, Miller repeatedly had to transition between the serious war and news coverage she favored and the fashion and celebrity coverage assigned by *Vogue*.

British rationing was so severe that new designs, which utilized less fabric and required less manufacturing time, were "imposed by the Board of Trade - a legislative body that governed British commerce - on every stage of production in the clothing industry."⁴² Gender and literature professor Page Dougherty Delano asserts that using cosmetics and expressing oneself through fashion during times of conflict is "a sign of female agency that included sexual power and citizenship and as such was disruptive of wartime's masculine codes of power."⁴³ Images of idealized women, such as *Red Cross volunteer nurse's aide--Enroll today as a Red Cross volunteer nurse's aide--Your help can ...* (June 1943) (Figure 6) a U.S. government poster calling for female nurse volunteers for the Red Cross, were familiar figures in British and American war posters and other propaganda. Miller's photograph of Captain Eva Maclin (Figure 3) can be read as a more realistic, while still flattering, response to nursing propaganda posters. Maclin wears practical fatigues instead of a starched pinafore over her white dress. Her angled body still displays her curves below the loose masculine clothing. The image subverts prewar norms that frowned upon women wearing

⁴¹ From Audrey Wither's editor's letter in British *Vogue* September 20, 1940, reprinted in Julie Summers, *Fashion on the Ration*, 18.

⁴² Amanda Durfee. "Utility Futility: Why the Board of Trade's Second World War Clothing Scheme Failed to Become a Fashion Statement." *Penn History Review* 25, no. 2 (April 5, 2019): 89

⁴³ Page Dougherty Delano. "Making up for War: Sexuality and Citizenship in Wartime Culture." *Feminist Studies* 26, no. 1 (2000): 33.

conventionally masculine clothing like pants in public, a sight that is particularly anomalous in a publication like *Vogue*, which was previously known for its lavish spread of gowns and cocktail frocks. British *Vogue* began featuring women in slacks in 1939. Still, the November 1939 edition of *Vogue* declared that women who let their dress standards relax or wore pants outside of industries where they were required, such as manufacturing, were “letting themselves go—and other people down—slackers in slacks.”⁴⁴ Even when the magazine began encouraging some women to wear trousers in more but not all settings, they restricted it to those who were suitably young and thin—under fifty and less than 140 lbs.—offered feminizing tips to avoid being accused of “apeing men” and “deplored” women whom they felt were using the war to allow standards to slip.⁴⁵ In the United States, women in slacks were occasionally featured; Marlene Dietrich and Katherine Hepburn were often photographed in pants. This was still controversial, partly due to the queer overtones. Both women had prominent cross-dressing roles, which included scenes where they romanced another woman, and [according to some contemporary historians] their bisexuality was an open secret in Hollywood.⁴⁶

After victory in Europe was declared, Miller wanted to continue to travel and capture the aftermath of the war, including the new national divisions formed as the United States and the USSR carved up Europe, setting the stage for Cold War divisions. She was

⁴⁴ Julie Summers. *Fashion on the Ration*, 22.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 22 and 67.

⁴⁶ Susan Stamberg, “Gallery Gives Movie Star Marlene Dietrich the Big-Picture Treatment,” NPR (NPR, June 19, 2017), <https://www.npr.org/2017/06/19/533090309/gallery-gives-movie-star-marlene-dietrich-the-big-picture-treatment> & William J. Mann, *Kate: The Woman Who Was Hepburn* (New York: Picador, 2007).

repeatedly asked to go home but continued to travel across Europe and documented the early stages of Romania and Hungary's Soviet occupation.⁴⁷ *Vogue* was not interested in Miller continuing to be in the field, the publication was returning to normalcy, and Miller had more and more issues with the Russian military. In 1946, nearly a year after victory in Europe had been declared, personal concerns, her failing mental health, and *Vogue's* demands that she return, along with their refusal to pay or assist in navigating the political red tape, forced Miller to return to civilian life.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller*.

⁴⁸ Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller: A Life*, 281-289.

NATIONS & GENDER

If, as Walter Benjamin suggests, Surrealism functioned as the radical other of modernism, women were often the figurative and literal embodiment of that alterity.⁴⁹

– Natalya Lusty

How long before a grateful nation (or anyway the men of the nation) forget what women accomplished when the country needed them?⁵⁰

– Lee Miller

Miller's keen surrealist eye made various nations' competing ideologies visible, particularly regarding their different social codes of gender. Gender and women's roles were fraught subjects during the interwar period. Women had gained an increase in rights in many countries, including suffrage in the United States and the United Kingdom, while fascist ideologies sought to exert control in the wake of Weimar instability through increasing control over the citizenry; this power struggles unsurprisingly began with efforts to control women's sexuality. Ideological conflicts surrounding the positions and visibility of women would only become more fraught with the onset of World War II and the adoption of total war, necessitating women in the labor force to maintain both military efforts and industrial production. As a lifelong model and photographer, Lee Miller was well equipped to make these newly nationally defined gender roles visible. This chapter includes discussions of Miller's depiction of British, American, French, and German

⁴⁹ Natalya Lusty, *Surrealism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, 10.

⁵⁰ Lee Miller, *Vogue*, (UK) January 1945, this line does not appear in the corresponding American *Vogue* article.

conceptions of gender primarily through her depictions of women from each of those nations. Her depictions of German men is discussed in more detail in chapter three.

Miller was well aware of how perceptions of her femininity impacted others. Throughout her professional life, her gender was simultaneously revealed through depictions of her and concealed through her abbreviating her given name Elizabeth to Lee for her professional name.⁵¹ Her military identification card (Figure 7) included the name Lee Miller alongside her legal name. Her 1948 contract with Condé Nast Publications stipulated that her credit would be Lee Miller,⁵² evidencing her preference for it over her more distinctly feminine names, which included Elizabeth Miller, Madame Man Ray, Mrs. Aziz Eloui Bey, and later Lady Penrose.⁵³ Miller's use of what was perceived as a masculine moniker was noted at the time, particularly as her face and figure were well known.⁵⁴ This incongruity was commented upon, such as in a 1932 *Life* magazine article which claimed that within Parisian avant-garde art circles, "Miss Lee Miller, [was] known as "Lee-Girl" to her intimates."⁵⁵ The article further sexualizes Miller by stating that she had the most famous navel in France.⁵⁶ During the war, Miller ended up with an even less feminine

⁵¹ Miller only used Lee Miller Penrose in a professional capacity once to appease her husband.

⁵² Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller: A Life*, 308.

⁵³ Antony Penrose. *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 22.

⁵⁴ "Art: Rayograms," *Time* (Time Inc., April 18, 1932), <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,743589-1,00.html>.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

appellation from the troops, that of “Stinky Miller,” because of her astonishing tendency to be present during crucial moments and sniff out stories.⁵⁷

Maintaining beauty standards was important to *Vogue*, advertisers, and even military propaganda, which often depicted women in the services and factory jobs in full makeup; both the army and navy even encouraged “light makeup” to cater to women’s desire to wear cosmetics and also to allay public fears that women serving would be masculinized.⁵⁸ A December 1941 *New York Times* article by Kiley Taylor went so far as to encourage women to wear red lipstick as a response to the bombing of Pearl Harbor and improve morale.⁵⁹ The appearance of a made-up face in American propaganda served a dual purpose. These images appealed to men who were typically the authors and commissioners of such art, but also the type of independent women who were most likely to serve, as “Cosmetics were not only a widespread practice of American women but also of use in displaying the ‘modern’ woman internationally.”⁶⁰ Makeup and hairstyles signified a desire to appeal to men and a modern form of womanhood in opposition to the more traditional woman who stayed at home and eschewed these unnecessary frivolities that the Reich promoted. Miller revealed this hypocrisy when she photographed Eva Braun’s

⁵⁷ Antony Penrose and David E. Scherman. *Lee Miller's War: Photographer and Correspondent With the Allies in Europe 1944-45*. Boston: A. Bulfinch Pr. Book, 1992.

⁵⁸ Page Dougherty Delano, “Making Up for War: Sexuality and Citizenship in Wartime Culture,” 53.

⁵⁹ Kiley Taylor, “Beauty Aids For Evening; Make-Up Suggestions for the Hours When Bright Lights Are On,” *The New York Times* (*The New York Times*, December 21, 1941), <https://www.nytimes.com/1941/12/21/archives/beauty-aids-for-evening-makeup-suggestions-for-the-hours-when.html?url=http%3A%2F%2Ftimesmachine.nytimes.com%2Ftimesmachine%2F1941%2F12%2F21%2F105412085.html>.

⁶⁰ Page Dougherty Delano. “Making up for War: Sexuality and Citizenship in Wartime Culture,” 33.

apartment, carefully photographing Braun's medicine cabinet, including her cosmetics.⁶¹ She also had a woman pose in front of Braun's mirror and apply her cosmetics, as seen in one of her contact sheets (1945) (Figure 8), evoking a cosmetics ad and linking Braun to the ordinary woman.⁶² The Nazi party encouraged women to leave the workforce—initially, at least in part to free up jobs during the Weimar years of high unemployment—and in an attempt to increase the pure Aryan population. German women were expected to be traditionally feminine but not frivolous; wearing makeup, short skirts, smoking, and other “vices” were said to lead to immorality and be a threat to the nation.⁶³

British propaganda went so far as to proclaim “Beauty is Your Duty,” despite limited supplies or even the complete halting of production like in the case of many French cosmetics and perfume brands, including Crème Simon and Chanel, cosmetics advertising continued even if they had no supplies. The British government limited cosmetics production to 25% of prewar levels, even though advertising pressure or the usage of cosmetics and creams as protection for many industrial jobs kept demand at or above prewar levels. Skin cream was needed to protect the hands in several industries, and women who made camouflage netting were entitled to government supplies of it. Vogue routinely sent pantyhose, tinned meat, and lipstick to employees overseas. As with all other wartime rationings, American companies, including Max Factor, whose signature Pan-Cake

⁶¹ Patricia Allmer, “Lee Miller's Revenge on Fascist Culture,” *History of Photography* 36, no. 4 (September 12, 2012): 404, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03087298.2012.703374>.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Roos, Julia. *Weimar through the Lens of Gender: Prostitution Reform, Woman's Emancipation, and German Democracy, 1919-33*. Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2010 & Page Dougherty Delano. “Making up for War: Sexuality and Citizenship in Wartime Culture.”

foundation was used by women in a variety of wartime professions to protect their skin from harsh chemicals, were less affected and more able to keep up with demand and their products were often donated by Americans to those serving abroad.⁶⁴

The contrast between feminine form and destroyed urban landscapes, safety, and violence, was one that Miller would repeatedly employ during this portion of her career, such as *Irmgard Seefried Opera singer, singing an aria from 'Madame Butterfly'* (1945) (Figure 9). Seefried is silhouetted against the ruins of the Vienna Opera House, symbolizing the Austrian people's overshadowing by German interests, their loss of identity, and national autonomy, having become just another piece of the Aryan Reich. The singer is captured mid-aria, a rebirth of Vienna, liberation bringing a return to the music the city was celebrated for, a contrast to the explosions and cries that rung out during the fighting. While the caption notes the aria is from *Madame Butterfly*, the image evokes a Wagnerian Ragnarök, the culminating *Götterdämmerung* or twilight of the gods, which at one time Wagner—a favorite of many Nazi officials—had envisioned his epic Ring Cycle as concluding with the burning of the theater, an act of unparalleled spectacle and also a form of rebirth, allowing for the creation of a new performance space. Nazi ideology had positioned themselves as new gods. They believed their myths of Aryan superiority would lead them to rule over a new world, wielding ultimate power over those they viewed as lesser beings. By 1945, reality had prevailed, and the result was not an empire that would last a thousand years but a legacy of horror and brutality; Miller's writing about this

⁶⁴ Julie Summers, *Fashion on the Ration: Style in the Second World War*.

photograph includes the detail that wood salvaged from the opera house was providing “the only fuel Vienna would have this winter.”

Behind the Sight: A Wren looks out from the gun mount (Figure 10) reverses the pattern of a woman foregrounded against the background war in the previously discussed works. The wren’s, the popular nickname for members of WRNS, Women’s Royal Naval Service, smiling face is revealed behind the sight of a massive antiaircraft gun. The wren’s friendly, open expression contrasts with the implied violence of the machinery. The technology in the foreground gives the illusion that it is her body or some form of vicious automaton. Despite the masculine associations of the British Navy and warfare, this mechanized body is indisputably feminine, complete with prominent round metal breasts topped by riveted areolas. Implements of war, including guns, are typically seen as masculine, phallic, and penetrative displays and tools of masculine power and privilege. Miller transforms them into a new form of female nude, a Venus or Susannah, who does not need to hide from or try to conceal herself from the male gaze. Instead, the female gaze, the wren looking through the sight, is to be feared. Her transfigured metallic body reveals and protects her human form. The potential danger of the female form and the danger of an emboldened female population was a concern for governments of the time. In response, they often sought to control women and women’s bodies in other ways. To this effect, the British War Office commissioned designs for longline one-piece corset undergarments that could be worn with skirt or slack options for uniforms, smooth women’s bodies, and ensure against the “dangers of spreading” even though corsetry had become far less prevalent

since the 1920s when the more androgynous flapper body type became stylish.⁶⁵ The fashionable figure for women at the time deemphasized the bust and hips in favor of flat-chested, column-like torsos and short—bobbed—hairstyles. The style of corset promoted by the British War Office was not only outdated it was also impractical. Separate bra and undergarment options would offer a wider variety of sizes from fewer materials, but they favored containing and restricting the female form for aesthetic reasons, ignoring complaints from British women regarding the massive shortage of practical and comfortable underwear.⁶⁶

Despite her occasional empathy for them, German women were not exempt from Miller's condemnation. Her "Believe It" article for *Vogue* in June 1945 opens with "The German people—audacious, servile, well-fed—have forgotten that they are Nazis and we are their enemy."⁶⁷ Miller's article describes the relative comfort and security of German women and how well-fed their children are. She pointed out the proximity between German towns and the camps, the stench, and the rail cars that only traveled one way to a dead end near the camps, implicating German women in the atrocities of the Final Solution. Her writing disputes an earlier *Vogue* article by Thomas Keernan titled "If You Were a German Woman."⁶⁸ Keernan painted a bleak picture of life for German women under Hitler's rule, with few cosmetics and other luxuries and all men occupied with war,

⁶⁵ Julie Summers, *Fashion on the Ration: Style in the Second World War*, 118.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Lee Miller, "Believe It: Germans Are Like This," *Vogue*. (Conde Nast Publications: June 1st, 1945).

⁶⁸ While mail delivery was unreliable and could take months to reach people on the front, it is possible that Miller read Keernan's article; *Vogue* sent copies of the magazine along with regular care packages from the New York offices.

alienated from their children who were perusing glory for the fatherland.⁶⁹ Keernan attempts to stir up sympathy for the tribulations of German women, absolving them of responsibility or knowledge of their nation's faults, likening them to American women who remained home while their men served. Miller believed the opposite, the American title of the article was taken from Miller's telegram to her editor, which began with "I IMPLORE YOU TO BELIEVE THIS IS TRUE" in another communication, she declares, "NO QUESTION THAT GERMAN CIVILIANS KNEW WHAT WENT ON...."⁷⁰ Alexander Liberman, *Vogue's* Russian Jewish émigré art director, ran all of the photos along with a slightly shortened version of Miller's copy in American *Vogue*.⁷¹ While British *Vogue* ran a longer version of the story but cut most of the pictures Miller wanted to be included, Winters felt that the horrors captured were too depressing and that post-VE day, the positive mood in Britain should be maintained.⁷² Later, Liberman would convince Edna Chase and British *Vogue* to run the holocaust photos cut from the "Believe It" article.⁷³

Miller was determined to do what she could to ensure that the realities of the Holocaust were understood and addressed racism, antisemitism, and the continued loyalty of many Germans to Nazi ideology in the face of defeat. Her 1945 picture, *Visitor's Tour Buchenwald, Germany* (Figure 11), depicts a group of German women led by American G.I.s on a tour of Buchenwald. The two groups remain separate in two parallel lines. General

⁶⁹ Thomas Keernan, "If You Were a German Woman," *Vogue*. (Conde Nast Publications: May 1st, 1944).

⁷⁰ Capitalization in original. Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller: A Life*, 264.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 294.

⁷² *Ibid*, 265.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 294.

Patton had ordered nearby Weimar residents to tour Buchenwald in an attempt to prove the extent of the Third Reich's cruelty.⁷⁴ Though a G.I. is in the forefront, the German women in the *Dirndl* glaring at him are the photograph's focus. The women's choice of traditional dress, braided coronets, and lack of makeup on an army-escorted visit to Buchenwald signals their allegiance to Nazi ideals and demonstrates their continued loyalty to Hitler. The skeletal trees in the background mimic the bodies of victims starved to death at the camp. That the soldier leading them and being glared at is a Black man heightens the tension of the photograph.

While Miller was one of the first writers to link the death camps to antisemitism, a prejudice still prevalent in the United States and the United Kingdom, this photograph is a rare acknowledgment of American racial politics, even though Miller was an eyewitness to the desegregation of the U.S. military.⁷⁵ Author Hilary Roberts writes that Miller's liberal ideas extended to race, an unusual opinion for an American of the time. When Miller had gone to acquire her marriage certificate with Aziz Eloui Bey—an Egyptian businessman and her first husband—the official was shocked that the blonde, blue-eyed American Miller was going to marry an Egyptian man and tried to talk her out of marrying this “black” “foreigner.”⁷⁶ Miller went off on a “tirade” because New York did not have anti-

⁷⁴ Carolyn Burke, *Lee Miller: A Life* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p 256 & Hilary Roberts and Antony Penrose. *Lee Miller: A Woman's War*. New York, NY: Thames & Hudson, in Partnership with IWM, Imperial War Museums, 2015, 161.

⁷⁵ Judith Mackrell, *The Correspondents*. It is difficult to determine if this is due to *Vogue's* racial politics, which were overwhelmingly white, or a result of Miller's focus on the position of women. While the armed forces desegregated, it was mainly implemented amongst women serving away from the front lines, including Postal Delivery Battalions, which Miller did not travel to.

⁷⁶ Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller* (London, UK: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 68.

miscegenation laws; they obtained the certificate.⁷⁷ Hilary Roberts supports this view of Miller, using her cast photographs from Gertrude Stein's opera *Four Saints in Three Acts*, which groundbreakingly had an all-black cast and a black choral director.⁷⁸ While those photographs were important to the success of the Manhattan studio, they are some of the least interesting and most straightforward of her studio portraits. That Miller would take a high-profile job for a member of the same Parisian art circles she ran in is hardly convincing evidence of a true lack of bigotry, let alone some form of early anti-racist work, and may be an example of her savvy branding of her New York Studio.

Miller's unsympathetic depiction of German witnesses to the concentration camps is very different from another American photojournalist, Margaret Bourke-White. Bourke-White's photograph of a similar visit (Figure 12) is strikingly different. The women captured by Miller are defiant, even angry, distancing themselves from the American soldiers just as they attempt to distance themselves from the atrocities of the camps. Bourke-White captured a crowded scene of German onlookers; men lean forward to observe the camp more closely, taking in the sights and the disturbing proof of the final solution. Two women in the center of the frame turn away in shock and disgust, seemingly unable to face these horrific truths. This crowd of onlookers is indistinguishable from any other group of the era, their clothing is conventionally modern, and there are no indications of location. Bourke-White's photograph omits any reference to American military force, making the group of people into voluntary spectators; they are packed tightly together,

⁷⁷ Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller* (London, UK: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 68.

⁷⁸ Hilary Roberts and Antony Penrose. *Lee Miller: A Woman's War*. New York, NY: Thames & Hudson in Partnership with IWM, Imperial War Museums, 2015.

part of the unified whole, unlike Miller's isolated German woman, who lags behind the military escort. They display more varied responses, including indifference and horror; some even turn away.

Miller differed from Bourke-White in her depictions of liberated Paris. Miller was delighted to return to Paris, her former home and a city she loved. She was surprised and amused to discover that, unlike the British, who supported the war through austerity measures, many French women embraced wasting resources. Bourke-White and the male reporters who flocked to Paris were scandalized by women who had "turned flamboyance and frivolity into acts of transgression. Rather than eking out the tiny allocation of fabric allowed them by Nazi regulations, they'd squander an entire year's allowance on the making of one outrageously gorgeous skirt or dress."⁷⁹ To the *Vogue* fashion editors' and publishers' delight, France's freedom meant that fashion's epicenter would show again. Miller was, of course, tasked with photographing this. Instead of delivering expected glamorous shots, Miller took pictures of the models resting in between shows. *US Service Women at Fashion Salon, Paris* (Figure 13) echoes her London Blitz work. Miller again contrasts a fashionably dressed model in a side profile in the foreground with war imagery in the background. This time though, the model is surrounded by a scene of hope, smiling American servicewomen in uniform enjoying the show. When an editor at British *Vogue* who had wanted the heady escapism of couture criticized the pictures because they lacked the elegance and well-breed women expected, Miller snapped back that that editor "should be told that there is a war on."⁸⁰ Unlike other journalists who were upset by French

⁷⁹ Judith Mackrell, *The Correspondents: Six Women Writers*, 285.

⁸⁰ Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 179.

women's disregard for wartime austerity measures, which were viewed as patriotic in Britain and America, Miller understood and appreciated French women's excess, every yard of fabric they used with their full skirts, all of the extra time they spent on elaborate hairstyles denied resources to their enemies.⁸¹ By capturing a moment where a uniformed service woman touch the draped skirt worn by the model, Miller links the symbolic resistance of French woman and culture as embodied by fashion with the overt opposition and successes of the combined Allied forces.

However, not all Frenchwomen had resisted Nazi control, and neither had all Frenchmen. In 1940, France had been split in two, and the southern Vichy portion of the country collaborated with the Nazis. Vichy officials complied with German commands to deport the French Jewish population, 77,000 of whom would die in extermination camps.⁸² German occupation did not bring Antisemitism to France, which has a long history of religious and Jewish oppression; France's only canonized monarch, Louis IX, had persecuted Jews in the 13th century; the nineteenth century had also seen a resurgence in antisemitism in the wake of social Darwinism, and the Dreyfus affair. Germany was not alone in its persecution of Jews, blaming them, women, and a lack of masculinity for military losses; France had experienced a similar cycle following the Franco-Prussian war setting the stage for collaboration.⁸³ But with the war over, France needed a scapegoat for German collaboration, and they found it in women. The *femmes tondues*, so called because

⁸¹ Judith Mackrell, *The Correspondents*.

⁸² "16 July 1942: The Vel D'hiv Round up Started," *Holocaust Memorial Day Trust*, <https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/16-july-1942-the-vel-dhiv-roundup/>.

⁸³ Bram Dijkstra, *Evil Sisters: The Threat of Female Sexuality and the Cult of Manhood* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

of the popular punishment of shaving their heads, received gender-based punishments for “national degradation.”⁸⁴ These women were typically young, impoverished, and poorly educated; their real or imagined crimes often involved working for Germans or having sexual relations, including unwillingly, for money or personal reasons, with Germans. Shaving the head of an adulterous woman is believed to date back to ancient Greece and was one of several punishments for an adulteress under medieval French law.⁸⁵ These women were punished for their perceived lack of fidelity to the French nation, despite the Vichy government’s promotion of Nazi ideology, including antisemitic rhetoric and collaborationist status from July 1940 to August 1944. Adding to the irony, their bald heads visually link *les femmes tondues* to the victims of the holocaust, which includes an estimated 77,000 French citizens. Along with the head shaving, a punishment designed to strip them of their femineity, mark them as criminals and thus make them outcasts for years until their hair grew back to an acceptable length, given that women’s hair was worn much longer than men’s this punishment was inherently disproportionately harsh on women.

They were also stripped of their recently acquired voting rights; physical and sexual assault and being publicly stripped and forced to parade around naked were also common.⁸⁶ Miller’s *Women accused of being Nazi collaborators* (Figure 14), captures three

⁸⁴ Claire Gorrara, “Fashion and the *Femmes Tondues*: Lee Miller, *Vogue* and Representing Liberation France,” *French Cultural Studies* 29, no. 4 (November 28, 2018): 330-344, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957155818791889>.

⁸⁵ Sara McDougall, “The Transformation of Adultery in France at the End of the Middle Ages,” *Law and History Review* 32, no. 3 (July 14, 2014): pp. 491-524, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0738248014000212>.

⁸⁶ Claire Gorrara, “Fashion and the *Femmes Tondues*,” 330-344. French women were granted suffrage in July 1944 by Charles de Gaulle’s government in exile

such women surrounded by a jeering crowd in the streets of Rennes.⁸⁷ Unusually for Miller, the shot is full of movement rather than carefully composed; the women's discomfort is evident through body language and the way their gaze avoids the camera and the crowd. Their clothing and jewelry display the gender they are being denied; rather than masculinizing them, their heads were shaved to other them, rendering them neither male nor female. The crowd is primarily made of men whose emotions range from anger to pleasure. Other French women in the background participate in the shaming, asserting their loyalty to their country and their acquiescence to French patriarchal authority.⁸⁸

Not all displays of androgyny were meant to disgrace or exclude women. In 1942, Miller photographed Polish immigrant Anna Leska's while she was in the cockpit of a Spitfire, *A Polish pilot [Anna Leska] who flies a Spitfire for the A.T.A.* (Figure 15). Leska was one of the women who transported Spitfires to the Royal Air Force. Leska's warm clothing conceals her gender from the viewer and protects her against freezing flight temperatures. Her androgynous appearance reveals layers of meaning; she is a stand-in for Russian servicewomen, who were necessary for success in the critical Eastern front. And who, unlike the allied women, could not only see but take part in combat, most famously as pilots, on submarines, and as snipers. Miller's choice to depict her in the cockpit evokes the dazzling RAF pilots, celebrated for their dangerous job preventing German bombings and celebrated in popular culture. Finally, it illustrates the little-acknowledged history of women in wartime aviation, including the anonymous women who went to work in

⁸⁷ This photograph was not published in *Vogue*, but another photograph of *femmes tondues* was included in the magazine's coverage of the liberation of Paris.

⁸⁸ Claire Gorrara, "Fashion and the *Femmes Tondues*," 330-344.

aviation and other factories and two British women who were vital components of the Spitfires' success. In 1931, suffragette Lady Lucy Houston realized that Britain would need planes to compete in future wars. But the depression-era government did not have the money to support aviation, so she donated £100,000, the equivalent of approximately £9 million today, to create the Spitfire engine.⁸⁹ The other woman who helped make the Spitfire a success was Hazel Hill, who, at age thirteen, helped with calculations that doubled the Spitfire's gun capacity.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Keiligh Barker, "How Suffragette's Donation Led to the Creation of the Spitfire," Daily Mail Online (Associated Newspapers, July 22, 2016), <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3703219/How-Suffragette-s-donation-led-creation-Spitfire.html>.

⁹⁰ Mark Bridge, "How Hazel, 13, Helped Win Battle of Britain," The Times (The Times, July 10, 2020), <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/how-schoolgirl-helped-to-win-battle-of-britain-6cpb7kh75>.

SURREALISM

For photographs to accuse, and possibly to alter conduct, they must shock.⁹¹

– Susan Sontag

As Susan Sontag explains in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, photography allows us to view the pain of others at a distance.⁹² Much of Miller's wartime work, carefully composed, artfully lit, and some even stunning scenes of death and destruction, oppose Sontag's assertion that such photographs are more effective dissemination of truth when the photographer's hand, or artifice, lays low, almost as if the camera independent of the subjective eye of the photographer had taken the pictures itself. In the twentieth century, photojournalists rarely showed the faces of "our" dead. The further away from being a part of the dominant group, the more othered a group is, the more likely the faces of the deceased were shown.⁹³ The most conventionally acceptable corpses are those of men, as they are the traditional warriors and can be assumed to be combatants. For some, there is a greater shock value and an increased horror in the display of innocent victims, like women, the elderly, and children's pain.⁹⁴ While the atrocities of the concentration camps are the horrifying extreme result of the systemic othering of various groups on the basis of race, religion, sexuality, and purifying the nation from anyone considered undesirable, Miller's documenting of their victims' discarded bodies does not reinforce their othered status. At the same time, Miller captured the gruesome visages of the camps' dead, often in disturbing

⁹¹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2010) 60.

⁹² Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 64.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

close-ups, intended to document Nazi crimes and prove their evil. Even she seems to have been unable to commit to film the bodies of women and children in the camps, though her writing reveals that she did witness those horrors. Miller photographed male corpses to document the nightmarish facts of the camps. While she wrote about the bodies of women and children, she did not photograph them. The horrors of the holocaust enacted on women's and children's bodies were too disturbing, and she had to minimize it by utilizing the bodies of men, traditionally accepted sacrifices in war. Notably, Miller's taboo regarding the corpses of women did not apply to the shooting of the German dead. However, while she would photograph very young adults, including young women, she did not photograph German children; her lens judged their parents, regardless of gender, as guilty. However, she still found children innocent, irrespective of national origin.

On April 29, 1945, Miller and *Life* photographer David E. Sherman were surprised to find they were being billeted in a comfortable apartment and thrilled at the opportunity to take a real bath. To their shock and amusement, they discovered that they were going to be spending the night in Hitler's apartment, and Miller decided to document this. *Lee Miller in Hitler's Bath* (Figure 16) the resulting photograph—though it contains no actual nudity or violence—is often considered the most shocking and controversial of her wartime works. The attribution for the work is disputed; some attribute it to Sherman, and others maintain it is a collaboration, but Miller is closely associated with the photograph and the scandal.⁹⁵ The picture was taken on Miller's Rolloflex, and she retained the contact sheets (Figure 17); because of this and Miller's long history of artistic collaborations, I will discuss this

⁹⁵ Caitlin S. Davis, "Lee Miller's Revenge on Culture: Photojournalism, Surrealism, and Autobiography." *Woman's Art Journal* 27, no. 1 (2006): 8. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20358065>.

photograph as Miller's work, even if Sherman was the one holding the camera. Sherman also posed in the bath, *David Scherman in Hitler's Bath* (1945) (Figure 18), but his more outwardly mocking approach has received far less attention. He actively soaps his hair, enacting a comic scene—a contrast in masculine action to Miller's more measured and focused stillness. Art historian Melody Davis has questioned what would compel someone to mix their essence with that of Hitler's, proposing that the act serves as a form of reverse Mikveh, a ritual of pollution and blame rather than purity.⁹⁶

That day Miller and Sherman had accompanied the 45th infantry division; at the start of the day, no one knew they would witness the horrors of the Dachau concentration camp. Miller unflinchingly photographed the unimaginable cruelty, even as she and the other Americans around her had trouble accepting that what they were witnessing was real, emaciated, skeletal bodies victims of Nazi ideologies put into reality, first stripped of the culture, their communities, their hair, their humanity, and finally their lives, piled and discarded with no more consideration than cords of wood. Miller had the foresight to document these horrors, to offer proof to force others to believe what she had witnessed. The boots and dirt at the base of the tub signify both the Allied military presence and the ash from the crematoriums. Providing evidence of these atrocious crimes and the conquest of Germany into Hitler's most private sanctum, a visual reference to Miller's photograph of prisoners lined up on the churned earth of Dachau in *Prisoners in striped prison dress* (1945) (Figure 19) taken earlier that day, their starved bodies swimming in their striped prison uniforms. Earlier in the war, Miller was not allowed to photograph corpses, and in

⁹⁶ Melody Davis. "Lee Miller: Bathing with the enemy." Reprinted in *History of Photography* 21, no. 4 (2015) 314-318.

Revenge on Culture (Figure 1), Miller projected death onto a nude female statue. No such symbolic lessening would do justice to the lives lost at Dachau. So she documented the camp, including the piles of corpses, the starved prisoners, the overcrowded barracks, and the cremation ovens.

While posing in Hitler's bathtub seems like a baffling decision, Miller's desire to bathe was understandable in order to remove the "awful nightmarish cloying stench" of the camps and distance herself from the horrors she had spent the day documenting.⁹⁷ She was seemingly prescient that doubt and denial would be easier for some, than acceptance that humans when given absolute control over those they vilified were capable of that level of methodical, slow malice. Surrealism is said to be found in the dialogue between horror and beauty; in that vein, the photograph can be read as a series of parallel conversations, the death and destruction, the filth of Hitler and his policies. Contrasted against the cleansing and beauty of Miller and the nude Venus statuette, these classical sculptures and Miller's repeated use of them are often interpreted as a symbolic representation of Miller and her biography in her art; her ideally proportioned nude body, particularly her torso *Self Portrait*, (Figure 20).⁹⁸ As art historian Caitlin S. Davis has discussed, "this attractive part of her body was shaped in classical proportions, and therefore took on the appearance of a classical statue when reproduced in almost any medium, whether photography, painting, or sculpture."⁹⁹ The feminine contours of her form were so celebrated that she was

⁹⁷ Antony Penrose. *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 139.

⁹⁸ Caitlin S. Davis, "Lee Miller's *Revenge on Culture*," 5. This association between Miller and classical sculpture was also committed to film when she appeared as a statue that comes to life in Jacques Cocteau's 1930 *La sang d'un un poète (Blood of the Poet)*.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 6.

honored with a coupe-style champagne glass designed in the shape of her breast created in the 1930s.¹⁰⁰ This placed Miller among legendary figures and beauties such as Helen of Troy, Marie Antoinette, Madame du Pompadour, Empress Josephine, and, more recently, supermodel Claudia Schiffer all of whom had coupes made in the shape of their breasts.¹⁰¹ The use of the classical nude sculpture references not only Miller it also mocks the monumental classical style of the Third Reich, who saw themselves as the inheritors of Western civilization; the small size of the sculpture, a mere knickknack, also illuminates their diminished power.

Surrealism's overwhelming focus on the female nude body can be misogynistic, reducing the woman to a *poupée* (doll or mannequin), a thing to be deconstructed and desired that is less than a person. Steeped in French thought, it used women as an allegory of liberty and equality, but this freedom was too often enacted and conceptualized as male freedom. On the opposite end of the ideological spectrum, Nazi ideology exalted the male per their fatherland, blood and soil doctrines and could only conceptualize the feminine in terms of motherhood. David Bate aptly compares Miller's use of surrealist conceptions to the philosophy of Lacan, informed by surrealism utilizing its principles and vision in a personal and unique medium.¹⁰² The women were merely the means to supply the nation with sons and future fathers not unlike male surrealists' reduction of woman to muse; in both philosophies, women are simply a vessel for male desire. But in their own ways, these

¹⁰⁰ Antony Penrose. *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 28.

¹⁰¹ "Unfiltered: Dom Pérignon Pays Homage to A Top Model's Chest," *Wine Spectator* (Wine Spectator, December 4, 2008), <https://www.winespectator.com/articles/unfiltered-dom-perignon-pays-homage-to-a-top-models-chest-4486>.

¹⁰² David Bate. *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent* (I. B. Tauris, 2004).

ideologies limit women to a sign, signifying paternalistic desires. Miller's surrealist practice is different, exploring the difference between expressions of gender and nation; as Chadwick described it, "her war photographs importantly shift the focus of the surrealist gaze from the often-violated erotic female body to the fragile and ruined masculine body of war, and the monumental destruction of culture that war brought."¹⁰³ In addition to refocusing on women as more than erotic embodiments of masculine desire, Miller captured the violently violated bodies of men, expanding the borders of surrealism. Her photographs display contradictions and explore ambiguity between victim and perpetrator, anger and empathy, reflecting her contradictory and complex views and feelings.

This unique surrealist ideology is present in the *Hitler's Bathtub* photograph, which is, in one sense, a "straight" surrealist photograph in that it does not utilize double exposure or other manipulations; its surrealist meanings are found in the doubling of elements and their contrast.¹⁰⁴ Miller's nude body is simultaneously concealed by the walls of the tub, while her gaze leads the viewer to take pleasure in the nude statuette, which metaphorically reveals her body:

The photographer has chosen to avoid the typical—he has not made the woman an object of sexual interest. Though nude, her flesh is minimally visible. Rather than a display, she seems crouched down upon herself in a protective, almost fetal-like curl, arms crossed over breasts, revealing nothing. She does not acknowledge the photographer with a come-on look, but instead looks toward a Venus statuette, which bears the displaced nudity of the bather.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, 46.

¹⁰⁴ Caitlin S. Davis, "Lee Miller's Revenge on Culture," 7 & Rosalind E. Krauss, *L'amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism*.

¹⁰⁵ Melody Davis. "Lee Miller: Bathing with the enemy," 314.

The photograph of Hitler, like her photographs of Nazi suicides, discussed later, utilizes the Führer's portrait, a quotidian and even obligatory object in party members' homes, becomes a form of psychopomp, a harbinger of death, theirs and their millions of innocent victims. The genocide that Hitler sought to distance himself from through semantics and verbal trickery has been brought past his doorstep into the intimate spaces of his home, laid symbolically at his feet.

This photo evokes and repudiates Nazi ideology; the classical statue paired with a nude woman evokes the opening of Leni Riefenstahl's propagandistic *Olympia*. The film is about the 1936 Berlin Olympics, funded by the Nazis, and is rife with Nazi ideology. The film's opening is an extended sequence of nude classical Greek and Roman statues turning into the naked bodies of German athletes.¹⁰⁶ This sequence asserts Aryan superiority through the beautiful muscled bodies acting as visual proof of their superior genetics. It also positions Germany, specifically the Nazi version of the nation, as the rightful inheritors of antiquity, linking fascism with all of the accomplishments of the ancient world, creating a temporal argument of Aryan supremacy through the past, present, and presumably the future. Miller positions herself between sculpture and the image of Hitler, denying that transformation; here, the Nazi is confined and reduced. Miller's classical beauty, her tall, fair-haired looks, so valued by the Nazis as an indicator of superiority, reveal Hitler's lack of those same qualities. The small framed photo sits to the left of and below the two female forms, emphasizing his diminished position. Miller turns away from him, further reducing his importance in the image. The gazes of the photograph and the statuette both point to

¹⁰⁶ For more associations between photographing athletes, nation, and military prowess, see the movement experiments of Étienne-Jules Marey. Marey also photographed athletes at the 1900 Paris Olympics.

Miller emphasizing her importance in the image and denying the significance of classicism and the Fuhrer in comparison.

In this photograph, Miller chose not to reveal her nude form, as she had done so many times before, showing her vulnerability and instinctive need to protect herself, to erect walls against the traumatic events she witnessed and documented.¹⁰⁷ That Scherman's nudity was concealed is expected. While "the obsessional subject" of surrealism is woman, or more accurately, the nude female form, the male nude is virtually unheard of in early twentieth-century surrealist art.¹⁰⁸ With the brief exception of some *Secessionstil* works, such as the paintings of Egon Schiele, male bodies were rarely depicted nude in European art in the first half of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁹ Miller occasionally utilized the sculpted male nude in her work, as did Max Ernst in his photomontage *Health Through Sport* (Figure 21). One of these rare instances in Miller's work is her 1945 portrait of *Sigismund de Strobl* (Figure 22) in his studio in Budapest. Strobl is framed by the spread legs of his monumental classical nude male sculpture engaged in drawing an arrowless bow. While Strobl occupies only a small portion of the lower half of the frame, the sculpture's genitals are central. This composition mocks both the fascist and the soviet trend to monumentality and machismo. Miller's writing on this encounter mentions that,

¹⁰⁷ At this point in her life, still Miller posed nude, in 1942 she posed for color photos demonstrating camouflage paint, that were used in military training and photographed herself nude in 1946. See Roberts 89 and Burke 296.

¹⁰⁸ Rosalind E. Krauss, et al. *L'Amour Fou*, 95.

¹⁰⁹ Gemma Blackshaw, "The Pathological Body: Modernist Strategising in Egon Schiele's Self-Portraiture." *Oxford Art Journal* 30, no. 3 (2007).

unlike most artists of the time, Strobl was doing well because of all the recent commissions; the Americans were ordering war memorials while the Soviets favored victory columns.¹¹⁰

Miller's former reticence to photograph bodies did not apply to the German dead, particularly those who committed suicide rather than face defeat and consequences for their crimes. While Miller once minimized the violence of shooting pictures by gaining the consent of her victims, her lens seemed to relish the depiction of dead Germans. Her photographs of German suicides, including *Suicided Volkssturm Commander; Walter Doenicke (outside the window the scales of justice can be seen)* (Figure 23), often include a portrait of Hitler. Such images were hung in virtually every German home, just one of the many ways that Hitler and the Reich infiltrated every aspect of daily life. The close proximity of the damaged portrait to the corpse connects the devotion to Hitler with destruction and cowardice. While Miller frames the corpse at a distance, it does not appear to be because she was reluctant to get close to the dead man's face but instead to include in the composition a statue of Lady Justice could be seen through the window. As with so many of the German high command, this officer couldn't face a trial, but Miller's camera attempts to balance that by lying bare both their crimes and the ignobility of their deaths. Many of these photographs are not horrific or intended to shock; instead, they are atmospheric, allowing the viewer the time to take them in.

This is exemplified in Miller's 1945 *SS Guard in Canal* (Figure 24). She carefully captured the floating body in the canal. Despite its grim subject matter, there is beauty in this photograph. The curving blades of grass draw the eye towards the partially submerged

¹¹⁰ Antony Penrose. *The Lives of Lee Miller*, 231.

body; the corpse's stillness is heightened by the gentle ripples of water that wash over his unseeing visage. The sunlight glints of the water, evoking the solarization process that Miller discovered in Man Ray's darkroom—though it is often misattributed to Ray.¹¹¹ Patricia Allmer writes that “Miller's representation of ‘defaced’ faces in these photographs furthermore destabilises and forms a critique of Nazi ideology's emphasis on the face and physiognomy as prime signifiers of superiority or alterity.”¹¹² The cause of death is not apparent, which also invites the eye, making the viewer examine the body for a possible cause of death. Maybe he is another suicide, or he could not avoid the vengeance of escaped prisoners. Works like these mock German ideologies, masculinity, and hubris. At the same time, Miller shied away from the vulnerabilities of the allied soldiers; she not only exposes it in German dead, she invites us to luxuriate in it. As Susan Sontag explains, images of death and ruin have become common and even celebrated elements of “our camera-mediated knowledge of war.”¹¹³ But rather than make these deaths horrific, Miller made them attractive, transforming these disgusting spectacles into exciting and even aesthetic sights; another unique surrealist aspect of her work, not in the juxtaposition of beauty and horror but in the combining of them.

The cropped photograph of prisoners' feet at Dachau, the picture in Hitler's bathtub, and the SS officer in the canal were taken on the same day. This temporal connection, along with their shared iconographies, makes them a type of triptych. The prisoners, whose

¹¹¹ Mario Amaya “My Man Ray: Interview with Lee Miller Penrose.” *Art in America* (1939) 63, no. 3 (1975) & Antony Penrose, *The Lives of Lee Miller* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985), 27.

¹¹² Patricia Allmer, “Lee Miller's Revenge on Fascist Culture,” 408.

¹¹³ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 16.

bodies are so shrunken by abuse and starvation, cause their clothing to hang on their bodies, visually echoing Miller's clothes discarded in a wrinkled pile on the chair. Their lined-up legs and feet point towards the tub and the army boots; their feet and their desiccated bodies could be the source of the earth on the rug. While Miller is in a bath, the element of water is missing; the transmission, the sharing of the essence with Hitler that Davis feared, is impossible without this unifying element. Instead, the water is safely contained by the banks of the canal, and the Nazi's body will remain there, becoming a part of the other, a sacrifice not to the egos of cruel fascist monsters but to the earth which the desiccated bodies of countless innocent tortured victims have defiled.

CONCLUSION

Miller's work navigates the grey areas between gender, nation, truth, seen, and unseen. Despite the increasing ubiquity of photography and images, the time and distance which removes images from their context, often stripping them of their impact, her work still manages to shock and surprise. Miller's work combines the seemingly disparate realms of fashion, conflict, celebrity, beauty, and atrocities. These incongruities are made possible in part through her unique version of surrealism, one which explores gender and othering, as well as liberty and dreams. After she died in 1977, thousands of negatives were found in the attic of her home, bringing to light a remarkable artistic legacy that was once seemingly in danger of being lost. How many more images were lost through neglect, censorship, and intentional destruction is unknown. The later photographic periods of her life, once dismissed as amateur or unimportant because Miller had seemingly moved into the domestic sphere of wife and mother, have only recently attracted the attention of exhibitions but still lack critical exploration. Miller's accounts of the transition back to civilian and domestic life as well as her depictions and writings on artists—many of whom were her friends and acquaintances—remain mostly unexplored.

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APPENDIX

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