Introduction

I do not want to think of the past because it has lost its meaning. The world has learned nothing from it—neither slaughterers nor victims nor onlookers. Our time is like a dance of death whose uncanny rhythm is understood by few. Everyone whirls confusedly without seeing the abyss.

[Lagi Countess Ballestrem-Solf, in We Survived]

Il est temps qu’on sache que la Résistance doit autant à la prise de conscience des femmes qu’à l’héroïsme des hommes.

[Clara Malraux]

The alluring female resistance agent and the daring partisane bearing a machine gun slung over her shoulder may have existed only in the public imagination—as valorous figures fleshing out the myths and legends that define the cultural landscape. Even at that, the power of these feminine images has begun to loosen its hold. The popular representations of female resisters of the Second World War have done justice neither to the depth of women’s participation in the German and French anti-Nazi movements nor to the actual shape of women’s experience as resisters. Nor have the actions of a few ‘exceptional’ heroines who gained notoriety after the war afforded a realistic view of the nature of the average woman’s opposition to Nazism. The topic of anti-Nazi activity by women has only gradually come to the attention of historians during the last several decades, and literary treatments of the topic have rarely made their way into critical discussion. Yet women’s resistance literature holds the potential to illuminate the subjects of gender in particular and of war and resistance in general. This body of writing not only leads readers to a better sense of what women actually contributed to the resistance movements in Germany and France and how their roles were defined by gender standards, but it also suggests that women authors were subject to similar standards in narrating the war and resistance.

German and French women’s literature of the resistance offers an avenue for reflecting on issues related to World War II that have stubbornly refused to remain confined to the pages of history books. Even as anniversaries are celebrated periodically in commemoration of battles and the end of World War II, reminders of the conflict still persist uneasily beneath the surface of the social consciousness in Europe and the United States. In France,

2 (It is time one realizes that the Resistance owed as much to the consciousness of women as to the heroism of men) Jérôme Garcin, ‘Clara Malraux: “La guerre m’a libéré”’, Les Nouvelles littéraires, 23 July 1981, 37.
Paul Touvier, the head of Vichy’s fascist-inspired milice (militia) in Lyons, was tried and convicted in 1994 for having ordered the execution of seven Jews, while the eighty-seven-year-old Maurice Papon, who as a senior Vichy official in Bordeaux signed orders for the deportation of some sixteen hundred Jews to death camps, was found guilty of crimes against humanity in 1998 and handed a ten-year prison sentence. That same year, Swiss banks reached a 1.2 billion-dollar settlement with Holocaust survivors and heirs who lost their assets when their money was deposited in these banks during the Nazi era. More recently, in May 2001, the German government and major firms in German banking and industry agreed to begin payments to several hundred thousand slave labourers and forced labourers from a jointly established 4.5 billion-dollar fund. A year earlier, subsidiaries of American companies based in Germany, including Exxon-Mobil, Ford, General Motors, and Kodak, promised five billion dollars as reparations to these victims.

Each revelation opens old wounds and renews old controversies. In women’s resistance narratives it is possible to read the impact of the Nazi and Vichy ideologies on the lives of ordinary people and to discern how women, customarily excluded from politics, resistance, and combat, ultimately chose to respond to the inhumanity of these dictatorships.

Women’s resistance literature prods readers to remember what actually lies behind the dispassionate treatment of war that is a part of contemporary American culture of late. Over fifty years after the end of the Second World War, the language and images of war have become increasingly sanitized, as seen, for instance, in the first Persian Gulf war when television networks primarily broadcast images of jet radar screens and smart bombs striking non-human targets. Even when reporters were ‘embedded’ with the troops during the recent United States-Iraq conflict, there was much discussion and controversy about whether the media was actually providing a true picture of the war or, rather, a narrow perspective more suitable for general consumption. Today, more than ever, the American public fails to grasp the horror of war. The remarks of the German novelist Günter Grass encapsulate the threat of war that no individual can ever truly escape, in spite of a media-induced sense of detachment. In his 1984 essay ‘Resistance’, concerning the proliferation of nuclear weapons in Europe, Grass writes about being sent to the Eastern front as a seventeen-year-old soldier in the Second World War. He witnessed half of his company, mostly boys his age, being killed or wounded in a three-minute Soviet barrage. ‘Ever since’, he reflects, ‘I’ve known what fear is. Ever since, I’ve known that it’s only by chance that I am alive. Ever since, any war has appeared conceivable to me.’ As women’s resistance texts demonstrate, no one can avoid the effects of war as they ripple out over a society. This literature has the power to restore some of the fundamental elements—the moral uncertainties, the conflicting emotions, the value of home life and of human relationships amidst chaos and violence—that have been bleached from today’s sterile vocabulary of war.

This literary history establishes a niche for women’s writings about war and resistance and thus acknowledges women as legitimate narrators of these subjects. These texts bring to light the responses of European women who witnessed the oppression of fascism first-hand and came face-to-face with the destructiveness of war. The principal figures I discuss are Ruth Andreas-Friedrich, Irmgard Keun, Elisabeth Langgässer, and Anna Seghers in Germany; and Simone de Beauvoir, Marguerite Duras, Clara Malraux, Edith Thomas, and Elsa.

3 In February 2003, France’s highest appeals court upheld a decision to free Papon due to his age and ill health.
Triolet in France. These writers were roughly the same age in 1939: between thirty and forty-three years old (Duras was twenty-five years old). The majority of them received public recognition at some point in their careers for their literary achievements, yet critics have paid scant attention to them or to their resistance narratives, with just a few exceptions. Only Triolet, Thomas, Beauvoir, and Duras receive occasional (and brief) mention in criticism concerning war or resistance literature.

The primary sources that comprise this investigation are short stories and novels written during the war and published at that time or shortly after war’s end. I have also included a diary and a memoir, both of which skilfully blend literary elements with the narration of actual events. The texts I discuss are: Andreas-Friedrich’s diary Der Schattenmann; Keun’s novella Nach Mitternacht; Langgässer’s short stories ‘An der Nähmaschine’ and ‘Unterge­taucht’; Sengers’s novel Das siebte Kreuz; Beauvoir’s novel Le Sang des autres; Duras’s fiction-memoir La Douleur; Malraux’s short story ‘La Fausse épreuve’; Thomas’s short stories ‘FTP’ and ‘L’Arrestation’; and Triolet’s novella Les Amants d’Avignon.

As the main focus of this book is literary, I generally refer to the primary material as ‘women’s resistance literature’. I occasionally use the broader term ‘resistance narratives’ in reference to the fictional sources as well as the memoirs and journals. Additionally, I cite some relevant historical materials such as interviews, personal journals, autobiographical memoirs, oral histories, and eyewitness accounts by former resisters published since World War II in order to give perspective to and bring into sharper relief the nature of women’s activism and their ways of characterizing their participation. I contrast the narratives of women with selected examples of men’s resistance texts as a way to emphasize the distinguishing features of women’s narrative choices and strategies. (I have attempted to match the women’s writings with those of the men in terms of genre, subject matter, and background of the writer.) Unless otherwise indicated, translations from all sources are my own.

Literary critics have begun to situate women authors in the context of war as they analyze the intersections of gender and war. New biographical material about some of the lesser-known writers of this period, such as Triolet, Malraux, and Thomas, has also come to light, and critics have re-evaluated the fiction of others, including Seghers and Keun. In general, however, the voices of women writing about war and resistance have long been effectively stilled because what women have had to say about these subjects has not corresponded to the classic novels by men that constitute the canon of war literature.

The present study breaks new ground in exploring women’s resistance literature as a commentary on a segment of women’s history for which historical materials are scant. Scholars have gleaned fragments of information about women’s anti-Nazism mainly from memoirs and oral testimony. There are very few hard facts at hand, and even those that are available may leave unanswered questions. Margaret Collins Weitz points out some of the pitfalls of historical sources concerning this period, noting that oral testimony, which is subject to the vagaries of the interviewee’s memory, may contain inaccuracies and even errors. Written materials may be equally unreliable and have contradictions.

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5 See, for example, Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars, ed. by Margaret R. Higonnet and others (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

literary treatments of resistance fill in some of these gaps. In his book of short stories, *The Things They Carried*, the writer Tim O’Brien, whose stories and novels often deliberately erase the distinction between fact and fiction to suggest the impossibility of pinning down the elusive truth about the Vietnam War, speaks to the ways in which fiction can point the way toward fact or truth. As the character-narrator (also named Tim O’Brien) explains: ‘By telling stories, you objectify your own experience. You separate it from yourself. You pin down certain truths. You make up others. You start with an incident that truly happened [. . .] and you carry it forward by inventing incidents that did not in fact occur but that nonetheless help to clarify and explain.’  

Women’s resistance stories and novels have an eyewitness quality; they consist of more than a web of fictions or the subjective responses found in oral testimony.

The majority of these resistance narratives combine autobiographical elements with actual historical events. They convey the mood and ambience of the period and thus lead one to a clearer understanding of individuals’ reactions to the Nazi and the Vichy repression. The noted German historian Detlev Peukert, among others, acknowledges the importance of ‘convey[ing] an impression of the language and styles of thought of the time, which is essential if we are to gain a deeper understanding of as subjective a dimension of history as the quality of personal experience’. Historian Sarah Fishman, in her study of wives of French prisoners of war, likewise asserts it is possible to reconstruct ‘intangibles such as popular attitudes and social definitions’ by examining ‘popular cultural representations of prisoners’ wives such as books, movies, women’s magazines, and pamphlets’. 8 The narratives that make up this study have the power to deepen the context of women’s historical experience.

This examination of women’s resistance literature is based on the now accepted understanding of resistance that encompasses less visible dissenting actions carried out by average citizens in everyday contexts. Since the late 1970s and early ‘80s, historians investigating the social context of the Nazi and Vichy regimes have expanded the conventional definition of resistance as organized, armed sabotage waged through the military or political parties with the goal of overthrowing the state to include more varied forms of activity and a broader scope of actors. The French scholars Roger Bourderon and Germaine Willard urged that the collective actions of certain groups be taken into account as part of the French resistance: demands of the unemployed for increased allocations, women’s demonstrations, and strikes by workers. Major studies of the French resistance by the British historian H.R. Kedward and the American John F. Sweets, both of whom focused on non-military acts of opposition, also led to a more inclusive notion of resistance. 9 Research on the German resistance moved in a similar direction as historians such as Peukert, Ger Van Roon, Hans Mommsen, and Martin Broszat studied the individual citizen and analysed anti-

Nazi activity in the Third Reich as a social process. While researchers in both countries continue to investigate the links between collaboration and resistance and to debate what it means to resist, there is a willingness to consider the various gradations of resistance. By filtering the actions of French and German citizens through the lens of daily life in occupied France and the Third Reich, scholars have enlarged the range of resisters and their activities and shifted the terms of resistance from guns and bullets and bombs to a variety of other actions: giving safe quarter to Jews and political refugees, demonstrating for increased food supplies or staging strikes in factories, transmitting messages, running escape lines, performing social service work, producing false identification, refusing to support Nazi édites, Godmothers, Bicyclists, and Other Terrorists: Women in the French Resistance and under Vichy’, reported on various forms of popular resistance that developed out of French women’s everyday lives. Important collections of interviews and personal testimony by ‘ordinary’ women appeared in France in the 1970s, while some of the most notable heroines of the French resistance started publishing their autobiographies and memoirs in the late ‘70s and ‘80s. The Union des Femmes Françaises (Union of French Women) examined the motivations and forms of French women’s resistance, publishing a collection of papers from its 1975 colloquium. The situation differed in the Federal Republic of Ger-


11 Marianne Monestier, Elles étaient cent et mille (They were a hundred, they were a thousand) (Paris: Fayard, 1972); Des femmes dans la résistance (On women in the resistance), ed. by Nicole Chatel (Paris: Julliard, 1972); Ania Francos, Il était des femmes dans la résistance (There were women in the resistance) (Paris: Stock, 1978). See Florence Hervé, Wir fühlten uns frei: Deutsche und französische Frauen im Widerstand (‘We felt free’: German and French women in the resistance) (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 1997), who singles out these and other studies because they give consideration to women’s motivation as resisters (pp.109-10).


many, where little attention was paid to German women’s resistance during the ‘70s and ‘80s. Two studies, one by Gerda Zorn and Gertrud Meyer and the other by Hanna Elling, essentially presented brief overviews of women’s resistance activities without investigating the impulses for their actions. Gerda Szepansky’s collection of interviews began to research the subject of women’s anti-Nazism in more depth. The first major works on German women and fascism appeared during the mid-’70s.\textsuperscript{15}

A variety of publications, ranging from scholarly to biographical to personal memoir, appeared in both countries during the 1980s and ‘90s. Noteworthy studies included Céilia Bertin’s \textit{Femmes sous l’Occupation}, which looked at the lives of everyday resisters as well as heroines in France. With the publication of Christi Wickert’s \textit{Frauen gegen die Diktatur}, the focus on women’s resistance shifted from strictly recording resisters’ experiences to analysing their anti-Nazism in light of gender relations.\textsuperscript{16}

This study of women’s resistance literature furthers the general investigation of the interconnections between gender and war and resistance by analysing the ways in which gender norms determined both women’s roles as opponents of Nazism and their approaches to narrating the resistance. Wickert, a scholar of German women’s resistance, stresses the need to consider the anti-Nazi movements in terms of gender when she comments that despite the efforts to ‘finally tak[e] into account the social context of people who were opponents of the National Socialist regime or who were seen as such […] the influence of gender on attitudes and actions continues to remain at the periphery of consideration’.\textsuperscript{17} The purpose of this study is not to establish a separate category for women’s resistance, one set apart from men’s. Rather, it is necessary to consider the anti-Nazism of women as well as that of men, for these movements in their own way replicated the gender system of peacetime.

One of the main concerns of this study is the forms of women’s resistance; therefore, I analyse the ways in which gender standards, as filtered through women’s roles and functions, the settings of their everyday lives, and their connections to other people, influenced the paths women would take to resistance. This literature mirrors the norms that prescribed a traditional identity for women and sheds light on how women perceived themselves in relation to resistance and how, accordingly, they made choices about illegal work. These


\textsuperscript{17} Wickert, ‘Women’, p.101. Hervé expresses much the same viewpoint about gender roles and the relations between women and men in both the French and the German movements (p.12).
texts also make more visible how men viewed women’s participation in these movements. Women’s resistance narratives illustrate with a surprising consistency various forms of anti-Nazi activity that were integrated with the daily routine and that could not be disentangled from the personal concerns, feelings, and relationships intrinsic to private life.

I also consider how these narratives illuminate the female condition in wartime, that is, how they display a tension within the woman resister as she attempts to balance a conventional femininity with the empowering effect of resistance and its demands for ‘masculine’ qualities. Such internal conflict is not merely a fictive construct. The issue was genuine for women who lived through the war, and it emerges in the short stories and novels as well as the diaries and memoirs discussed here. Historical research in fact validates the sort of inner disparities evidenced by the women resisters in this literature. The German sociologist Annemarie Tröger, writing about German women’s memories of the bombings, and the American Fishman, investigating the problems faced by wives of French prisoners of war, both draw the same conclusion: women did what was necessary to survive and meet the demands of their situation, acting in ‘unfeminine’ ways, if necessary. Yet in relating their stories, women follow the outlines of what is socially acceptable, and thus the recognizable models of femininity remain plainly evident. According to Tröger, when German women narrate their memories of bombing attacks, they stress that they summoned their strength and resolve to cope under horrible circumstances. These same women speak simultaneously about their weaknesses and tend to revert to childlike behaviours under stress, perhaps as a way of framing their narratives within social prescriptions about what it means to be feminine. Fishman has likewise found that the wives of French prisoners of war sought to accommodate unfamiliar roles and behaviours within a conventional understanding of what a woman should be:

The increased independence these women gained from taking on new responsibilities ran counter to their own acceptance of a traditional family structure and resulted in an uncomfortable ambiguity which emerges in their writings about themselves and their new roles. They describe themselves contradictorily both as weak and emotional and as strengthened by this experience, as needing their husbands but gaining new, so-called masculine qualities. (p.143).

The literary texts that are the centrepiece of the present volume reflect a complex reality for many women who on the one hand had been socialized to be passive, weak, subordinate to men, and nurturing of family and other relationships, but who on the other hand had to demonstrate strength, fearlessness, and assertiveness as resisters.

Another focal point of this critical study is the social environment in which these authors lived and wrote as women in a male-dominated literary world. Gender norms that influenced the writers’ own lives can be linked to the choices they made in constructing their female resistance figures. I also examine the various narrative approaches and strategies the authors employ to present the female resister in socially acceptable terms, however much her illegal activity may set her apart from the conventional image of the gentle, submissive, and emotional woman. Finally, I investigate the ways in which the writers use language and literary techniques to recast the terms of resistance in ways that challenge the standard rhetoric with its familiar connotations of heroism and guns and bullets. For one, they assert the importance of the home and human connections as stabilizing forces in a chaotic, often threatening environment. The immediacy of many of these texts forces open conventional notions of resistance to plunge the reader directly into the maelstrom of emo-

18 Annemarie Tröger, ‘German Women’s Memories of World War II’, in Behind the Lines (see Higonnet and others, above), pp.285-99 (p.293).
tions and conflicts that constituted the personal and moral landscape of a resister’s inner world. Here the darker elements behind the glowing resistance legend are revealed: the pain and sorrow and fear, the overwhelming uncertainty, the shame, the lack of heroism. Women’s truth is centred in a more realistic, if less glamorous, perspective of underground movements that have been long romanticized and portrayed in black and white terms that would admit no ambiguity.

Women’s literature of the resistance cannot be separated from the political-historical context in which women opposed Nazism and in which the authors wrote; therefore, this subject lends itself to an interdisciplinary approach that draws from the fields of women’s history and feminist literary criticism. Literature and history are both subject to interpretation. The process of constructing past events is an incoherent one, as illustrated in the fiction of E.L. Doctorow, for one, whose novels consistently blur the boundaries between history and fiction as he manipulates historical materials. Doctorow observes that, ‘history shares with fiction a mode of mediating the world for the purpose of introducing meaning, and it is the cultural authority from which they both derive that illuminates those facts so that they can be perceived. Facts are the images of history, just as images are the data of fiction’. The aim of this study is to discover what the literature suggests about the history and what the history says about the literature. My approach, then, is similar to that which the literary critic Jane Marcus advocates in her essay ‘The Asylums of Antaeus: Women, War, and Madness—Is There a Feminist Fetishism?’, in which she contends that rather than one discipline supporting the other, ‘history and literature deserve equal narrative force in a cultural text’.

A comparative perspective underscores the extensive power of gender to define both the common course of German and French women’s resistance and the shared ways in which women authors would write about their subject. (Due to the relatively small number of literary works about women’s resistance, it is not possible to match similar German and French texts for comparison in every chapter; however, a basic comparative framework underlies the study and links the texts as a whole.) Historians widely acknowledge that the European resistance movements were so varied and diverse that they do not readily invite comparison. National differences admittedly left a mark on the identities of the anti-Nazi movements in Germany and France, as will be discussed in chapters 2 and 3. Although there was much to separate women along national lines, and these distinctions might at first glance seem to preclude the possibility of finding common points in their resistance, there was, in truth, more that united them. German and French women shared a great deal of common ground in terms of the social pressures that demanded a traditional femininity, the impact that war and dictatorship made on their lives, and the ways in which they responded as resisters. Women in both countries had inherited the full weight of Western patriarchal tradition. In the early twentieth century, females found their way barred to full participation in political, economic, and some areas of social life.

German and French women also encountered similar treatment at the hands of the Nazi and Vichy regimes, both of which implemented a barrage of propaganda, economic and social measures, and legislation intended to reinforce the boundaries between males and females. The lives of women in the two countries ran parallel in other ways as the hardships

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of war bore down on them in the form of bombing raids, blackouts, and ration and fuel shortages. Women faced additional problems, such as holding down jobs to make ends meet, acting as the heads of households, and finding rudimentary supplies of food and necessities to sustain their families. The war exacted a toll as well in the emotional suffering women experienced when husbands, sons, and brothers were killed or imprisoned. What is more, there were many commonalities in women’s motivations to resist and in the forms of their illegal activity as they found their way into the anti-Nazi movements in Germany and France.

This examination of women’s resistance literature finds that while the social flux generated by the war and the unorthodox activities of the resistance movements may appear to have called traditional social mores into question, accepted notions about appropriate functions and behaviours for males and females remained in place. To be sure, resisters in both countries were forced to bend customary moral and ethical standards, sometimes lying, stealing, or killing to accomplish their aims for the greater good. These were movements that, as Weitz asserts in discussing the French resistance, broke radically with convention by overcoming class distinctions to unite various social groups and by upsetting the usual moral standards.21 The current study assumes, however, that while the war may have altered women’s material circumstances by drawing them into the military, the resistance, manufacturing jobs, and new responsibilities at home, women actually achieved little in terms of gaining more equal stature because their political, economic, and social status remained subordinated to men’s.22 By the same token, female resisters did expand their horizons as they tried on new identities, assumed unfamiliar roles and responsibilities, travelled to cities they had never visited before, met new people, and tested themselves in unusual situations (Weitz, Sisters, pp.291-93). Yet they did not break free of traditional definitions of womanhood. Many of the changes in women’s lives were relatively fleeting and lasted only for the duration of the war.

One might expect the authors of this resistance literature to exercise a discerning eye as observers of the cultural landscape, to force a re-examination of social prescriptions through their portrayals of the female opponent of Nazism. Yet in the final analysis, how critical of gender could these writers actually be? Margaret R. Higonnet and others assert that while women authors lack the direct battlefield experience that would legitimate them as narrators of war, they are nevertheless willing to relate their opinions about the unequal relations between men and women during wartime because the authors themselves witnessed this first-hand.23 An investigation of women’s literature of the resistance, however, turns up only a muted criticism of the cultural norms that defined female and male roles.

Surely the authors brought their own conventional attitudes to their writing about the resistance; they could hardly have been immune to prevailing social expectations. Most of

21 Margaret Collins Weitz, Introduction, Outwitting the Gestapo (see Aubrac, above), pp.vii-xxii (p.xvii). Historians have taken note of the power of the resistance to unite diverse individuals, particularly in France. See John F. Sweets, The Politics of Resistance in France, 1940-1944 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976), p.13; Edith Thomas, Le Témoin compromis (The compromised witness) (Paris: Hamy, 1995), p.120; and Hervé, p.122. In Germany, there had historically been a split between the middle class and the working classes, and as a result less unity existed within the German resistance.

22 See Joan W. Scott, ‘Rewriting History’, in Behind the Lines (see Higonnet and others, above), pp.19-30 (pp.23-25).

23 Margaret R. Higonnet and others, Introduction, Behind the Lines (see Higonnet and others, above), pp.1-17 (p.15).
these women came from prosperous middle-class or upper-middle-class families in which bourgeois values of proper conduct and materialism prevailed. Very much a product of their conservative social class and its values, these were traditional women, not feminists, although a few of them, most notably Beauvoir, would later come to support the cause of feminism in the late 1960s. Several women were mothers who were raising their children during the period 1933-1945. While some of the women personally faced the challenge of combining family and career, even those who did not lived and worked within the fine mesh of social and cultural mores that identified woman with motherhood and domesticity.

In other respects, the lives of these writers bore little resemblance to that of the average female. A number of them received university degrees, still a relatively rare phenomenon for women in the early twentieth century and in itself indicative of their privileged status. These women's intellectual and cultural opportunities, freedom to travel and to pursue careers (many supported themselves as writers), and associations with male colleagues permitted them to test the limits of social standards. Many of the authors demonstrated an independent spirit that led them in unconventional directions as artists, as intellectuals, as political activists. They were fortunate enough to embark on literary careers, sometimes with the support and encouragement of well-established male mentors or companions. Most of them came of age during the political and intellectual tumult of the interwar years, and thus a number of them, notably Thomas, Duras, Triolet, Malraux, and Seghers, became politically active and embraced Communism to varying degrees. Involvement in the resistance became another way in which some of these women defied convention. Duras, Malraux, Thomas, Triolet, and Andreas-Friedrich all participated extensively in the anti-Nazi underground in their respective countries. Others, specifically Keun and Seghers, went into exile, while Langgässer and Beauvoir chose not to take any action (though for quite different reasons). Despite some obvious differences in religion (Malraux, Triolet, Seghers, and Langgässer were Jewish), politics, and commitment to the resistance, these writers portray the identity of the woman resister in strikingly similar ways in their resistance narratives. Ironically, their own personal autonomy does not translate into a similar independence in their female resistance figures.

An obvious cultural rationale for why this literature conforms so closely to gender prescriptions may well be that consideration of their readership influenced the authors' choices in depicting women's anti-Nazi work. For all of the risks the female resisters take, the authors never permit them to push too far beyond the boundaries of a socially prescribed identity. Radically transforming the feminine role would have alienated readers. It is unlikely that in wartime the public would have accepted females as figures of heroic action who wielded political authority and pulled the trigger in a battle against the enemy. Analysing French men's and women's resistance memoirs, Dominique Veillon, historian at the Institut de l'Histoire du Temps Présent, lends credence to the idea that women writing about the resistance worked within a given set of assumptions about proper behaviour and appropriate spheres of activity for women and men. Citing a passage in the memoir of Lucie Aubrac, one of the rare female leaders in the French resistance, in which Aubrac describes her careful preparations, including choosing a particular dress, for a meeting with the famed resistance chief Jean Moulin, Veillon points out that it would be difficult to imagine a male resister revealing to the reader that he had fretted over the colour of his tie.24 By the same

token, the public’s acceptance of taboos associated with women and violence would have made it equally difficult for readers to come to terms with the image of a female wielding a gun or leading a terrorist raid. Such mental pictures would run counter to the customary ideal of the gentle, nurturing woman.

As much as these writers in their own lives might have challenged expectations of what a woman should be, they nevertheless would have been isolated within what was still largely a man’s literary world. These authors no doubt strived for professional validation from their male colleagues. Thus, their resistance narratives do not overturn customary understandings of what it meant to be a woman. A resister’s activism might lead to broader experience; however, her new role does not in and of itself result in a new understanding of who she is. Women authors did not move to overturn social convention in their writing, even when the opportunity to redraw markedly the feminine identity so obviously presented itself in the subject matter of the resistance.