PART TWO

WOMEN AND CULTURE
In Britain during the First World War, members of the female auxiliary corps, who performed support jobs for the armed forces, became the focus of a propaganda battle in popular culture. Throughout the war, enthusiastic images of the auxiliaries clashed with hostile representations of them in all areas of cultural production. In the realm of live performances, rival portrayals confronted each other directly. Regular drill practices, route marches and military parades carried out by the auxiliaries displayed the virtues of martial femininity in public, generating admiration and applause but also ridicule, abuse, and malicious rumours. (Fig. 1). Conflicting images of the women also challenged each other visually. Sympathetic official and press photographs, recruiting posters, magazine and book illustrations valorised the corps members’ smart military look, efficient work, and wholesome relations with the armed forces. These images, however, were contested by satirical cartoons and comic postcards. Caricatures in *Punch* questioned the auxiliaries’ patriotic motives and usefulness, alleging that they cared only for their swanky uniforms and exciting amusements, while postcards accused them of immorality with the troops. (Figs. 2 and 3). Written representations exhibited the same polarisation of arguments and images. Supportive press reports, popular histories, and juvenile fiction celebrated the female corps, but were opposed by antagonistic letters to the press and ribald jokes in popular papers.

What united these conflicting images was their depiction of the auxiliaries through the multiple discourses of modernity. Both admiring and hostile portrayals represented servicewomen as the ultimate symbols of modern femininity and linked their modernity to their martial uniforms, training and work. Here, however, the similarity

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