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Fashion in Belgium during the First World War and the case of Norine Couture

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What happens to civil life during wartime is a favorite subject of historians and commands major interest among the learned public. Our best source on the situation in Belgium during the First World War is Sophie De Schaepdrijver's acclaimed book *De Groote Oorlog: Het Koninkrijk België tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (The Great War: The Kingdom of Belgium During the Great War).[1] However, to date, there has been no research on the Belgian wartime luxury trade, let alone fashion. For most Belgian historians, fashion during this time of hardship was the last of people's preoccupations.

Of course, fashion historians know better.[2] The contrast between perception and reality rests on the cliché that survival and subsistence become the overriding concerns during war and that aesthetic life freezes—particularly the most "frivolous" of all aesthetic endeavors, fashion. Already in 1915, Paul-Gustave Van Hecke (1887–1967), a fashion luminary and the major protagonist of this story about Belgium, protested against the alleged neglect of fashion by the Flemish cultural scene during the war: "How is it possible that in a serious scientific newspaper such as this *De Vlaamsche Post*, there has not been any talk about fashion?"[3] Indeed, this paper asks, what of fashion in "Brave Little Belgium?"[4]

The historical context

The Belgian Belle Époque was an era of unprecedented capitalist expansion.[5] The most densely populated country in the world on the eve of the First World War, Belgium ranked fifth among the

industrial powers.[6] The country's economy drew from the colony it set up in the Congo and from exports of railroads, metros, and tramways.[7] Antwerp's port (second only to New York's) thrived as the main gateway to Europe. Consequently, the *anciens* and *nouveaux riches* of Belgium enjoyed affluence and luxury. The country's economic wealth was reflected in its Art Nouveau treasures.

There were dark sides to Belgium's prosperity in this era of industrial high capitalism. That the average standard of living was lower than in neighboring countries is a measure of the degree of exploitation of the working class. But not only that. The Belgian bourgeois was affluent but indulged in luxury goods such as cars, telephones, perfumery, and haute couture much less than the well-to-do elsewhere in Europe.[8] By and large, the hard-working petty-bourgeois mentality had not been fundamentally changed by prosperity and modernity.[9] Belgium was suffused with subtle class distinctions. Apparel, for instance, did not so much denote taste or purchasing power, but rather the belonging to a "certain category" of people.[10] The *grande bourgeoisie* and the *petite bourgeoisie* ate, dressed, and leisured accordingly, and everybody made a point of staying within one's class.[11] To quote a contemporary Belgian fashion magazine: "One has to know how to choose and dress according to one's personality, according to one's rank."[12] The difference with the lower classes was enormous. The Belgian working class was among the most impoverished of Western Europe.[13]

On August 4, 1914, the German army marched into neutral Belgium. It overtook more than 90 percent of the country, pushing 200,000 Belgian soldiers to the far west. Hundreds of thousands of Belgians fled to the Netherlands, which remained neutral throughout the war, as well as to France and the United Kingdom.[14] Belgium now lived under German rule and would be locked in for fifty months. The Germans plundered Belgian industrial equipment. Due to the Allied blockade, imports of raw materials ceased and exports dwindled. Unemployment soared and reliance on charity increased. The next four years, Belgians would be dependent on the welfare of the Comité National de Secours et d'Alimentation (National Relief and Food Committee).[15] A major part of the relief effort's foodstuff came from the United States, where, after a highly mediatized campaign to support "the poor, heroic Belgians," the Commission for Relief in Belgium had been set up.[16]

The sociology of wartime life

The majority of the people relied on soup kitchens, where food would be distributed once a day. But the "better people," many of whom had become the "new poor," preferred starvation than be seen asking for support.[17] They could eat in "bourgeois food halls," behind closed curtains, or depend on organizations such as Charité Discrète (Discrete Charity), a group of young women of good breeding who delivered aid packages.[18] Most of these activities were coordinated by gentry and *bourgeoises*, who employed working-class women for the fieldwork.[19]

Unlike in the other belligerent countries, the Belgian women were not called to work in the war industry, which supplied the occupier—nor were Belgian men, for that matter.[20] A mere 20 percent of army-age men were fighting or in exile; the remainder were trapped inside the occupied country, together with the women.[21] Belgium was not like France, a "strange world wherein half of the adult male population had disappeared from daily life."[22] Belgian women were even encouraged to leave the labor market, in return for a small allowance, so as to ensure the scarce employment opportunities remaining went to men.[23] However, the Comité de la Dentelle (Lace Committee), one of the subcommittees of the Comité National (National Committee), subsidized schooling and encouraged skilled lacemakers to work from home.[24]

Opportunities for emancipation of women in Belgium were scarce.[25] However, to do their bit in dealing with the challenges of wartime, upper-class women concentrated on the so-called female tasks such as charity and nursing. Belgium's Queen Elisabeth, the Bavarian-German born spouse of "heroic" King Albert I, was a role model for these women. During the war, the Queen worked in the hospitals of De Panne, a town to the northeast of Dunkirk, France, where she was cast in a role of supreme caregiver.

To clothe the naked in the First World War

Working-class women, working in huge sewing workshops, were put to the task of modifying and mending the secondhand clothes provided by the Commission for Relief in Belgium.[26] The eminent Flemish author Karel Van de Woestijne (1878–1929), who from 1906 to 1920 was the correspondent in Belgium for the Dutch newspaper *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* (New Rotterdam Courant), was a keen observer of life during the occupation. Upon visiting a clothing distribution hall, he wrote this thoughtful vignette: "The heat from the stove causes the hundreds and hundreds of garments, orderly stacked on long tables, to sweat: the smell of wool and cotton; the smell of the poor seamstress rooms where these clothes were made; the smell of genteel and stoic poverty."[27]

Thanks to these initiatives, the working class, or "soup-goers," were spared rags, but, obviously, never dressed in fashion. There is evidence, however, that much of the upper classes were preoccupied with fashion. The English-speaking Brussels *bourgeoise*, Constance Ellis Graeffe wrote in her 1914 diary: "The life . . . of most girls . . . here in Brussels would be this. First of all, she thinks of her dress, her hat, shoes & hair, how to look interesting & what will be the next amusement she'll be able to get to. At any rate here you see many very smart modern model fashions."[28]

In the women's press in Belgium, much as that in the warring countries, women were encouraged to dress well, if only as a civic duty. For instance, *Les Jolies Modes* (The Pretty Fashions) urged: "Say, my sisters, let's make ourselves beautiful. . . . Let us be the most attractive of springs' flowers. Let's also take

Figure 5.1 *Elvira De Baets sent photographs of herself in fashionable outfits to her fiancé, kept prisoner in Soltau, Germany, winter 1914. Courtesy Yves De Baets, Diest. Photo retouching Kaydesign bvba.*

out our pretty attires. Dress up, dress up, for we embody hope!"[29] Women of all classes did their best to look smart. An endearing example is Elvira De Baets, a young working-class woman from Ghent. Between 1914 and 1919, she sent photographs of herself in fashionable outfits to her fiancé, who was languishing as a prisoner of war in Germany (Figure 5.1).[30] Elvira would not have been the kind of woman to patronize couture houses, but she dressed in the fashionable garments that she could afford.

The example of Norine Couture

War or no war, some couture houses remained opened in occupied Belgium and, to some extent, fashion was able to thrive. Proof of this is Norine Couture, the couture house run by Paul-Gustave Van Hecke and his companion Honorine Maria "Norine" Deschryver (1887–1977). Although both were of

modest descent, they would become key figures in Belgium's avant-garde scene during the Roaring Twenties (Figure 5.2).[31]

In an interview in 1928, Van Hecke explained what led them to establish a couture business during the war:

> This was the situation: my wife was an industrious seamstress, I was a journalist, but obsessed with good taste and . . . ambition . . . We then noticed that the big couture houses in Brussels were tottering or plodding, by virtue of the fact that they were cut off from Paris and could not buy their models there anymore. The idea came to me to create models myself and to engage these powerful competitors in a handicap race . . . We took off and triumphed immediately.[32]

Turning a difficulty into an opportunity epitomized the dashing and daring Van Hecke at his best. The trenches cut Belgian off from the lifeline of Paris couture, leaving room for something new. What he did not mention in the interview above, was that Brussels could still get its models from Berlin and Vienna, despite the war.

Figure 5.2 *Norine Deschryver and Paul-Gustave Van Hecke in their workshop, c. 1919. Courtesy Collection City of Antwerp, Letterenhuis.*

Fashion as defiance of wartime adversity

When the war erupted, Van Hecke was a journalist. Born and bred in the middle class of Ghent, he was a militant socialist from an early age. In the years before the war, Van Hecke had become a man of the arts. He was a leading figure of the Flemish Expressionist art movement, the editor of several liberal literary journals, the founder of a Flemish theatre association and himself a playwright and actor. To earn a living, he took up journalism.[33]

Shortly after the outbreak of the war, Van Hecke settled in Brussels, where he joined the Flemish activist movement.[34] A generation of modernists would work for a renaissance of the Dutch language and Flemish culture, which they felt had been dishonored. *De Vlaamsche Post* (The Flemish Post), where Van Hecke worked as the Brussels correspondent from February 1915 to May 1916, was the daily newspaper of Jong Vlaanderen (Young Flanders), a radical faction in the Flemish activist movement.[35]

In his first contribution, Van Hecke drew a slightly idealistic image of the relatively normal life in the capital under German occupation: "Truly, there are moments—it is actually usually so—that we can barely see that the people of Brussels are 'burdened' by the governance or suffering from war conditions. . . . After all, above anything, they prefer to walk the streets fashionably or half-fashionably dressed and spend the bulk of their time in coffee houses and cinemas."[36] This was certainly a frivolous view on wartime life. The Allied blockade of the Central Powers and their conquered territories caused major shortages in imports, such as coffee. Van Hecke's "people" were evidently the privileged class; in pubs, they were possibly served beer aplenty, but probably no coffee or cocoa.

Some of Van Hecke's subsequent contributions to *De Vlaamsche Post* throw light on the situation of fashion in occupied Belgium. One of his next articles was dedicated to changes in fashion (as well as to pickled and smoked meat): "it is not true that the new trends in women's clothing come from Paris and Paris alone, and not also from Vienna and Berlin."[37] Even in a fashion column, Van Hecke managed to metaphorically sneer at the oppression of the Flemish under the French-speakers' yoke (and not under the Germans'). Describing the change from the constricting hobble skirt to the war crinoline, perceived as liberating, he continued: "Brussels, during the European War, no longer wanted to have anything to do with the 'entraves' [fetters], but declared itself open for free legs and free hips. Please understand the symbolic meaning of the opposition between the fettered and the free . . ."[38]

In May and June 1915, Van Hecke's column assumed the name of *Modekronijk* (Fashion Chronicle) and was signed "NORINE."[39] Within the history of Norine Couture, this denotes Van Hecke's first alliance with Norine Deschryver and probably served as a subtle advertisement for the couple's newly established, or soon to be established, couture house. About the fashionable woman dressed in the new war crinoline, Van Hecke wrote this rather callous and condescending comment: "We would be wrong to declare the women who launch the new [fashions] as insensitive to the current situation. We should

forgive them for making a soup-goer step out of the way in order for her to pass with her wind-catching wide skirt."[40]

Of more interest to the fashion historian is what he wrote next:

> Where did this new fashion come from? Most would say: "Paris." The truth is that the leading "couturières" of Brussels, have their models from. . . Viennese fashion magazines, however, probably without being aware of it. Indeed, the many fashion magazines available here carry Parisian or Parisian-sounding titles: *Le Chic Parisien*, *Le Grand Tailleur de Paris*, *La Parisienne Élégante*, etc. Yet they are actually all printed in Vienna . . . The nice Parisian magazines: *Chiffons*, *Fémina*, *L'Art et la Mode* are at the moment not available at the bookstore over here. The few copies I was able to see don't show anything more than even wider skirts, almost as wide as a crinoline. However, I also saw these summer-styles in German fashion magazines such as *Die Dame*, *Elegante Welt*, etc.[41]

For Van Hecke, Vienna and Germany had nothing to envy from Paris.[42]

Karel Van de Woestijne also extolled women's ability to keep up with the current fashions and believed it attested to high spirits: "It can't be said that women take war so tragically that they would renounce showing off. . . . The woman who keeps dressing according to the demands of fashion is proof of counteracting discouragement."[43] In war, being fashionable was a defiance of adversity. Moreover, according to him, Brussels' women dressed "as ever before, in Parisian fashion."[44] He continued:

> For we still receive the Parisian fashion magazines. While it became well-nigh impossible, if not completely forbidden to get books that were published in France, the ladies have made it happen to get the special fashion literature across the borders, across the electric fences. I would not have believed it, had I not seen it with my own eyes. I myself have such an album in my hands, published by a French firm. . . . And the captions are translated in German.[45]

What Van de Woestijne probably saw—"without being aware of it"—was, as Van Hecke wrote in *De Vlaamsche Post,* a Viennese magazine, with a French title for the Belgian market.[46] *Le Goût à Paris*, instead of *Die Wienerin*, for instance, or *Le Chic Parisien* instead of *Wiener Mode Kunst*.[47] This was probably not a real tribute to Paris, but only a commercial gimmick to make use of the prestige of Paris to cater to a Belgian public. Ultimately, it was to cover for the fact that these magazines came from a German ally. One was not supposed to be seen with a magazine with things Viennese.

Belgian fashion magazines during the First World War

However, Belgium did have its own fashion magazines—all in French. There was the quite basic weekly magazine *La Mode 1915* (Fashion 1915), printed on low-quality paper, which featured a fashion column, readers' letters, and fashion sketches with captions.[48]

The fancier monthly *Les Jolies Modes* (The Pretty Fashions), was initially printed on high-quality paper, but as the war dragged on, its paper lost its gloss.[49] Besides a fashion column and sketches with descriptive captions and technical drawings, it also featured photographs of actresses. Both these magazines served as inspiration for seamstresses, both professional and amateur. They did not mention couture houses by name, nor did they feature advertisements.

The weekly *Modes Élégantes* (Elegant Fashions) seems to have been a little more upscale (Figure 5.3).[50] Aside from a fashion column, it also published handiwork patterns and advice from a *couturière*. Particularly striking in this magazine is the abundance of luxury-trade advertisements for beauty parlors, jewelers, and chocolate-makers, among others. But, then again, the magazine was short-lived. It ceased publication in 1916, as did *Élégances*.

Élégances: Grand Magazine de la femme (Elegance: Grand Magazine for Women) was the most luxurious of them all.[51] It included a society section, called "Mondanités," which reported on events

Figure 5.3 *The Belgian fashion magazine* Modes Élégantes*, October 1, 1915. Courtesy Royal Library of Belgium, Brussels.*

such as plays and musicals; the magazine also featured an abundance of fashion illustrations. It is the only magazine that mentioned a couture house by name in its captions: a certain *Maison Smeets*. These magazines must have represented a kind of Tantalus torture for most women, but were, seemingly, a normal part of life for the happy few.

The editor's column in *Élégances*' inaugural issue in December 1915 declared: "Above all, we felt that there was no need to remain dependent on foreign countries, which literally flood us with their illustrated magazines. We want to show that we can do as well, if not better . . ."[52] We find a similar statement in *Les Jolies Modes* of December 1916: "We want to show . . . that a Belgian house can publish a fashion journal that is more beautiful, richer, and cheaper than those arriving from abroad."[53] We can assume the editors had in mind the aforementioned German and Austrian publications, the only ones readily available on Belgium's newsstands. At any rate, Vienna, Berlin, let alone Paris, were never mentioned in the pages of any of these Belgian magazines. It is as if mere reference even only to the fashions of the warring powers was taboo.

The war was hardly ever mentioned, and then only allusively. This was in line with most international women's magazines of the time. *Élégances* concluded the introduction of its first issue by conveying its best wishes for the coming year to its readers: "May it be a new era of prosperity and happiness for them; it is our dearest wish."[54] The catastrophes of Verdun, the Somme, Passchendaele and two more years of war and hardships lay ahead. . .

Norine Couture: Removed from the carnage

We do not have official records of the founding of Norine Couture.[55] However, Van Hecke signed his fashion chronicles with "NORINE" as of May 1915; we can assume the house opened then or shortly thereafter. In November 1915, Van Hecke left *De Vlaamsche Post* and founded a Flemish theatre, Het Vlaamsch Toneel (The Flemish Theatre) in the Brussels venue Alhambra. Throughout the rest of the war years, he occasionally appeared in the Flemish activist movement but assumed a more moderate political stance and was more careful (writing under the pseudonym "PIK," for example).[56] In the spring of 1916, much to the displeasure of his activist friends, Van Hecke even briefly took on the directorship of the French-language theatre La Bonbonnière (The Candy Box).[57] And as befits a true *maison de couture* and its clientele, throughout its approximately thirty-seven years of existence, only French was spoken at Norine Couture.[58]

When Van Hecke's prewar years' friends returned from exile, they found "Gust Van Hecke . . . who almost became a rich man: *grand couturier*!"[59] Amidst and despite the hardships of war, Norine Couture must have thrived during the first years of its existence. Even so much so that, as Van Hecke stated: "Once the war was over, all we had to do was to establish ourselves on the

Avenue Louise in order to make a career with great pride and energy and become the leading house of Brussels."[60]

There is no archival documentation of Norine Couture's creations before 1919. However, considering Van Hecke's artistic past and the later modernist trajectory of the house during its ensuing heydays in the 1920s, Van Hecke and Norine were probably drawn to the designs of the Wiener Werkstätte and Berlin houses such as Alfred-Marie. With its avant-garde views on fashion, the latter stood somewhat apart from other Austrian and German houses.[61] Much as Alfred-Marie (which was inspired by prewar Parisian Paul Poiret) relied on artist Annie Offerdinger for its graphics, Norine Couture would later (equally inspired by prewar Poiret, and on par with Parisian contemporaries like Vionnet, Chanel, and Schiaparelli) collaborate with modern artists such as Frits Van den Berghe, Gustave Desmet, E.L.T. Mesens, and, mainly, René Magritte (Figure 5.4).

From the 1920s onwards, Norine Couture played with the latest aesthetics and incorporated avant-garde artistic imagery into many of its designs. For instance, Norine Couture's signature creation of the mid-twenties was the "*robe peinte*" (painted dress), undoubtedly hand-printed by René Magritte.[62]

Figure 5.4 *René Magritte, poster design for Norine, 1926. Private collection. Courtesy © Succession René Magritte, SABAM, Belgium, 2020.*

We also know of embroideries based on works by Raoul Dufy, Max Ernst, and Man Ray. Whether this already began during the war, we cannot say. Even during the Second World War, under the occupation of Nazi Germany, Norine Couture would continue to operate. However, Van Hecke was no Nazi-sympathizer or collaborator. In fact, on the eve of the war, he was a fervent opponent of National Socialism.[63] Van Hecke's leftist politics notwithstanding, the rather occupation-collaborationist women's magazine *Anne-Marie* published a spread on his couture house.[64]

Unanswered questions

This preliminary study of Norine Couture during the First World War still leaves open some important questions. Although Norine Couture was successful, did other Belgian couture houses go bankrupt during the war? Or, because Belgium had to become self-reliant for fashion, were there more start-ups like Norine Couture? Who were the houses' clients during the First World War? Who could afford couture? In 1915 alone, prices of mere fabric had increased 300 to 400 percent.[65] And if Norine Couture was as avant-garde during the war as it would prove to be later, was there a constituency for modernism? Was there already during the First World War anything like Norine Couture's later clientele of affluent bohemians? Were Norine Couture's clients the wives of people who economically profited from the war? Did the house at first dress Flemish activists' wives? German officers' wives? Their mistresses? Actresses? Did the "better people" still have the means to buy couture despite being hit by shortages?

Was Van Hecke a political opportunist? In 1916, when the war's outcome was still far from clear, Van Hecke tempered his involvement with Flemish activism and, in his own words "the *métier* of couturier did not leave me for a moment."[66] This move eventually served him well, because Flemish nationalist activism, even if only cultural, would be considered treasonous after the war. In due course, 312 Flemish activists were sentenced, including 37 to death (no one was ultimately executed) and 15 to life sentences. Many more were prosecuted.[67]

Thus, Van Hecke's professionally ambitious character seems to be the clue to his political coat-turning, as it were. Couture-business related considerations weighed much more than political precautions for this entrepreneur. Van Hecke was described by Karel Van de Woestijne and others as quite able to talk himself into anything, and therefore presumably also out of anything. Van de Woestijne wrote in 1917: "Gustaaf Van Hecke . . . is a young man, so convinced of his own irresistibility, that even stronger minds willingly grant him plenty . . . An arriviste of sorts without acknowledging it, he effortlessly lets himself be driven by all the means that will lead him to the success he never doubts."[68] However, this ambiguous praise also suggested that his intelligence and wit were at least as important to explain his success.

Conclusion: The beginning of Belgian fashion

From the beginning to the end, Norine Couture fervently proclaimed it was the only house making its own designs rather than copying Paris. After the war, Van Hecke no longer even mentioned the Viennese or Berlin fashions he had praised. In retrospect, the history of the now much celebrated Belgian avant-garde fashion began with Norine Couture.

However, if we believe Karel Van de Woestijne (slightly facetiously), Belgian avant-garde fashion may also have started in the streets of Belgium in 1918 as a side effect of shortages. Indeed, in July of that year, Van de Woestijne observed that as a consequence of the confiscation of dress fabric, a new "gentlemen-aesthetic" had come about: "the aesthetic of the jackets turned inside out." He wrote:

> These days there is no Belgian male who doesn't walk around with his jacket turned inside out, which is not an unpleasant pastime. For the ladies, on the contrary, things are completely different. Apparently, it is very difficult to turn womenswear inside out. In contrast, it is very easy to cut dresses and suits out of bed sheets and even the covers of emptied mattresses. Immerse it in a jar with paint and you look as fresh as a rose, whilst we finally, free from Paris and even Vienna, are creating a real Belgian fashion.[69]

Reading this, contemporary fashion historians might recall the work of a more contemporary Belgian fashion house, founded in 1989: Maison Martin Margiela and its "deconstructivist" garments, turned inside out so as to reveal their construction.[70] Martin Margiela is known as one of the "first-generation" Belgian designers. Together with the so-called Antwerp Six—Walter Van Beirendonck, Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, Dirk Van Saene, Marina Yee, and Dirk Bikkembergs—Margiela put Belgian fashion, known as avant-garde, conceptual, and subversive, on the map.[71] A Fall-Winter 1999–2000 Maison Martin Margiela duvet coat is one such example of upcycling—the process of reworking unusual materials into garments. One of the house's signature techniques is to cover garments with paint. As the garments are worn, the paint cracks, slowly revealing hidden colors and taking on new textures, showing the history of the piece.

In this account of fashion in Belgium during the First World War, we have encountered three assertions as to the beginnings of Belgian fashion. Indeed, Norine Couture can be considered the first genuine Belgian fashion house. However, Norine Couture never competed with its foreign counterparts, nor did it receive international recognition. In fact, Van Hecke and Norine probably never sought an international dimension. Obviously, Van de Woestijne's statement that Belgian fashion originated in the streets of Brussels in 1918 is not to be taken too seriously. The truth is, when Norine Couture closed its doors in 1952, it left a void in Belgian avant-garde fashion. There would be some unconnected and inconsequential surges of Belgian fashion design in the seventies and eighties, but it

is the Antwerp Six and Margiela who, at the end of the 1980s are to be credited for Belgian fashion's ascent from obscurity to its persistent international prominence.

Notes

1 Sophie De Schaepdrijver, *De Groote Oorlog. Het Koninkrijk België tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog* (Antwerpen: Houtekiet, 2013).

2 As does De Schaepdrijver, who hadn't looked into the matter herself, but kindly reviewed this paper.

3 Paul-Gustave Van Hecke, "Binnenland: Brussel," *De Vlaamsche Post*, March 22, 1915.

4 This is how the initially neutral crossroads country was known worldwide after having been "raped" and overrun by the Kaiser's army in the late summer of 1914. When the Western Front stabilized for what would prove to be four years, only a tiny piece of the country behind the Yser river, with Ypres as its main town, remained Belgian.

5 De Schaepdrijver, *De Groote Oorlog*, 13.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 14.

8 Ibid., 15.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ninon, "Que sera la mode nouvelle?," *La Mode 1915* 20, 1, March 20, 1915, 5.

13 De Schaepdrijver, *De Groote Oorlog*, 19.

14 Ibid., 113.

15 Ibid., 116 and 118.

16 Ibid., 117.

17 Ibid., 124.

18 Ibid.

19 Geraldine Reymenants and Marysa Demoor, "Belgische vrouwen aangemoedigd niet te werken. Liefdadigheid: typisch vrouwelijk," in *De oorlogskranten: Een unieke collectie van oorspronkelijke dagbladen uit de Grote Oorlog 1914–1918*, Part 20 (Zellik: CEGESOMA, Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society, 2014), 3.

20 Hans Boers, "'O subliem leger der Moeders!': Vrouwen in de Belgische oorlogskranten," in *De oorlogskranten*, Part 20, 2.

21 Compared to up to 54 percent in the UK, 78 in Italy, 85 in France, and 86 in Germany. Éliane Gubin, "Bespiegelingen over sekse en oorlog in België," *Jaarboek voor Vrouwengeschiedenis* 15 (1995): 35.

22 Françoise Thébaud, *La Femme au temps de la guerre de 14* (Paris: Stock, 1986), quoted by Gubin in ibid.

23 Reymenants and Demoor, "Belgische vrouwen aangemoedigd niet te werken," 3.

24 Gubin, "Bespiegelingen over sekse en oorlog in België," 37. See more on the so-called "war lace" in Marguerite Coppens' contribution to this book, Chapter 8.

25 It took even a second World War before Belgian women got the right to vote. Ibid.

26 Larry Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium: The Untold History of World War I* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 142.

27 Karel Van de Woestijne, December 9, 1914, in ibid., *Verzameld journalistiek werk. Deel 7. Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant november 1913—maart 1915*, Ada Deprez, ed. (Gent: Cultureel Documentatiecentrum, 1991), 623.

28 Constance Graeffe, April 26, 1915, in *"We who are so cosmopolitan": The War Diary of Constance Graeffe, 1914–1915*, Sophie De Schaepdrijver, ed., Studies on World War One (Brussels: State Archives, 2014), 154.

29 "Chronique de la mode," *Les Jolies Modes,* no. 18, April 1916, 3.

30 From the genealogy website of the De Baets family, Waarschoot, see: http://www.debaets.be/yves/11-2.htm (accessed March 10, 2016).

31 For more on Norine Couture, see, e.g., Bernheim Nele, "Norine: Pioneer of the Belgian avant-garde (1915–1952)," in *The Belgians: An Unexpected Fashion Story*, Didier Vervaeren, ed. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2015), 33–42.

32 Paul-Gustave Van Hecke quoted in Paul Kenis, "Paul Gustave Van Hecke of Van Letterkundige tot Couturier à la Mode," in *Den Gulden Winckel*, 12, December 20, 1928, 361.

33 Manu Van der Aa, "De activistische en andere avonturen van P.-G. Van Hecke tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog," in *Paul-Gustave Van Hecke (1887–1967)*, Manu van der Aa, Sjoerd van Faassen, Hans Renders, and Marc Somers, eds. (Antwerp: Garant, 2012), 35–41.

34 This branch of the Flemish Movement sprang from the occupation regime's *Flamenpolitik*, a policy designed to attract Flemings by favoring linguistic laws and creating Flemish institutions and Flemish media outlets. In short, the Flamenpolitik pretended to advance the cause of Flanders. But, in reality, the ultimate objective of this policy was the "independence" of Flanders as a German puppet state, preferably in a union with the Netherlands. An intermediary goal of this Flamenpolitik was to overturn the preeminence of French-speakers in Flanders, because French was the dominant language of the Belgian government and the upper classes of society, also in Flanders. Flanders is the northern Dutch-language half of Belgium. Brussels then was a genuine bilingual city, whereas today, Dutch-speakers are in minority.

35 Van der Aa, "De activistische," 41–8; Lodewijk Wils, *Onverfranst, Onverduitst? Flamenpolitik, activisme, frontbeweging* (Tielt: Pelckmans, Tielt), 80, 83–90, and 319–29.

36 Paul-Gustave Van Hecke, "Binnenland: Brussel," *De Vlaamsche Post*, February 16, 1915.

37 Ibid.

38 The fetters, or *entraves*, referred to the hobble skirt, which was fashionable from 1910–15.

39 Norine [Paul-Gustave Van Hecke], "Modekronijk: Inleiding tot het nieuwe," *De Vlaamsche Post*, May 22–3, 1915; "Modekronkijk: Weener- en Parijzermodellen," *De Vlaamsche Post*, June 22, 1915.

40 Norine, May 22–3, 1915.

41 Note the choice for the feminine denomination of *couturières*, which was undoubtedly an allusion to Norine Couture.

42 For more on the subject of contemporary German and Austrian fashion, see Rasche, ed., *Wardrobes in Wartime: Fashion and Fashion Images during the First World War* (Leipzig: Seeman, 2014).

43 Karel Van de Woestijne, "XXVII," March 29, 1916, in ibid., *Verzameld journalistiek werk. Deel 9. Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant maart 1916—september 1919*, Ada Deprez, ed. (Gent: Cultureel Documentatiecentrum, 1992), 46.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Norine, May 23–24, 1915; Norine [Paul-Gustave Van Hecke], "Modekronkijk," June 22, 1915.

47 Between 1915 and 1918, the Viennese copies of the magazine *Le Chic Parisien* (1898–1942) adopted the title *Wiener Modekunst,* while in Belgium, the magazine kept its original French-language title. The magazine's full quotation in Germany's *Zeitschriftendatenbank* (magazine database) is: *Le Chic parisien: Journal spécial pour modèles des Paris et Vienne* (1898–1942)—*Wiener Modekunst* (1915–1918) (Paris/Wien: Bachwitz).

48 *La Mode 1915*, Brussels, March 20, 1915–June 1915.

49 *Les Jolies Modes*, February 1912, no. 305, 1940. Initially entitled *Les Jolies Modes de Paris,* the magazine eventually, probably quite significantly, dropped "de Paris" from its title. Unfortunately, there is a lacuna between 1912 and 1915 in the Royal Library of Belgium's holdings which doesn't allow us to know when this occurred. We can however confirm that, from no. 66, March 1920 onwards, its original title was reinstated.

50 *Modes Élégantes*, Brussels, May 27, 1915–May 1, 1916.

51 *Élégances*, December 1915–April 1916.

52 Ibid., December 1915, 3.

53 *Les Jolies Modes*, December, 1916, 25. This concludes the notice—exceptionally also in Dutch—on the magazine's paper-quality decrease and subscription fee increase.

54 *Élégances*, Ibid.

55 The two sources that could have provided information revealed none. The first, the *Annuaire du commerce et de l'industrie de Belgique: Bruxelles et sa banlieue* (Annuary of Belgian Commerce and Industry: Brussels and its Suburbs), ceased publication during the war. As for the second, the official *Moniteur belge* (Belgian Monitor), published by the government in exile, did not contain any information about Belgium's trade at the time.

56 Used for his contributions in *Vlaamsch Leven* from August 25 to September 29, 1918.

57 Van der Aa, "De activistische," 53.

58 Information from testimony of Aline Goossens, seamstress at Norine Couture from *c*. 1941 to 1944, interviewed by the author, Brussels, April 10, 2011. Throughout the rest of his career, Van Hecke's writings would be both in Dutch and French.

59 Antwerp, Letterenhuis, Letter from André De Ridder to Paul Kenis, March 7, 1919.

60 Paul-Gustave Van Hecke quoted in Kenis, Ibid. The Avenue Louise was the most elegant avenue in Brussels at the time, radiating out from the inner city to the park of the Bois de La Cambre.

61 See Rasche, "The Berlin Alfred-Marie Fashion House: Otto Haas-Heye and Annie Offterdinger," in ibid. 118–37. Birgit Haase, chapter 4, p. 63.

62 "Norine crée des robes peintes," *Psyché*: *Le Miroir des belles choses*, May 1925, n.p.

63 This can be tracked through his articles in the social-democratic Flemish daily newspaper *Vooruit*, which he directed as editor-in-chief from 1938 to 1940.

64 "J'ai vu une grande maison de couture: Norine couture S.A.," *Anne-Marie*, May 24, 1942, 12–13.

65 Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium*, 165.

66 Kenis, "Paul-Gustave Van Hecke of Van Letterkundige tot Couturier à la Mode," 362.

67 Michel Deckers, "De strafrechtelijk vervolging van het activisme. Deel III: De Omvang. Besluiten," *Wetenschappelijke Tijdingen* 62, 1 (January 2003): 22.

68 Karel Van de Woestijne and Herman Teirlinck, "De Leemen Torens: Vooroorlogse kroniek van twee steden," in *Verzameld werk van Karel van de Woestijne*, vol. 7 (Brussels: A. Manteau N.V., 1948), 560.

69 Karel Van de Woestijne, "Over het roest van stalen pennen," in Karel Van de Woestijne, *Verzameld journalistiek werk: Deel 9. Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant maart 1916–1919*, 317.

70 It was Bill Cunningham who first applied the term to fashion, after having seen Maison Martin Margiela's fashion show in March 1990. See Bill Cunningham, "The Collections," *Details*, March, 1990, 80.

71 See Karen Van Godtsenhoven, "The birth of Belgian avant-garde fashion: Breakthrough and careers of the Antwerp Six+1," in *The Belgians. An Unexpected Fashion Story*, 55–72.

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