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Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Paper Bullets: Two Artists Who Risked Their Lives to Defy the Nazis*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books, 2020. 336 pp. \$27.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9-78-1616209162; \$16.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9-78-1643752051; \$21.95 (eb). ISBN 9781643751122.

Review by Paula Schwartz, Middlebury College.

Paper Bullets is a compelling narrative of resistance against the German occupation of Jersey, the largest of Britain's Channel Islands located off the coast of France. The protagonists are two French women, Lucy Schwob and Suzanne Malherbe, stepsisters, friends, lovers, and artists who left the vibrant scene of interwar Paris for a quiet country life on Jersey, a setting that was more conducive to Lucy's fragile health. From July 1940, when the islands were occupied by German troops, the couple formed a tiny resistance cell unto themselves, working in isolation from other individuals or groups and unconnected to any larger movement. From the vantage point of their lovely estate overlooking the sea, the two women spent the war years producing a raft of notes, flyers, drawings, and other propaganda aimed at demoralizing the troops who were encamped at a nearby installation. Their arrest in July 1944 brought their underground activities to a halt but their resistance continued, albeit in a different form, throughout the ten months of their detention in Gloucester Street prison. Upon their release in May 1945, Schwob and Malherbe returned to a home stripped of furnishings, personal effects, and precious artwork, all of which had been looted in their absence—not only by the occupiers but by some of their island neighbors as well.

By plumbing the diverse writings of his two protagonists, Jeffrey H. Jackson has produced a work of history that reads like a novel. Jackson has reconstructed the women's itinerary from personal notes, letters, and unfinished and unpublished memoirs to tell a seamless story. Yet there remain gaps and uncertainties that the author does not hesitate to bring to the reader's attention. On those occasions we are reminded that the work before us is not a fiction cut from full cloth, as it sometimes appears, but a carefully wrought recomposition based on a diverse corpus of primary sources.

Although Schwob's and Malherbe's work (in particular Lucy's literary and artistic compositions) is not unknown to art historians and literary critics, this is the first time anyone has drawn attention to their political activism under German occupation. One is tempted to say that the skills they deployed to pass unnoticed by the enemy also contrived to conceal them from posterity, but it was their invisibility as women and as lesbians that did it for them.

Other factors have also contributed to their relative obscurity as political actors. For one, their resistance activities defy the usual conceptual and organizational categories. Schwob and

Malherbe were French women on British soil, but they were not members of the French Resistance. They were connected neither to the resistance of the French interior, nor to the Free French in England. They worked in British territory, but the notion of a “British Resistance” has never made its way into resistance historiography, except perhaps in local histories of the Channel Islands. Finally, they did not belong to any movement, network, political party, or other group. This ambiguous positioning has made them unlikely subjects until now.

Jackson opens the book with an anecdote that introduces the reader to the tensions and risks of everyday life under German occupation. It was a banal incident that took place in July 1944: the search and identity verification of passengers traveling on a bus that was stopped by German patrols. It was a close call for Lucy Schwob, who gave false (and easily verifiable) information about her past, claiming to be an orphan whose adopted surname was Schwob in an effort to allay suspicions of her Jewish origins. Lucy was vulnerable to arrest and deportation as a Jew; both she and Suzanne were homosexuals and foreigners, which also exposed them to arrest and deportation. The compromising material at the bottom of Lucy’s bag went undetected. The women were rattled but unharmed.

The first of three main sections of the book, “Learning to Resist,” begins with the childhoods and family backgrounds of Lucy Schwob (b. 1892) and Suzanne Malherbe (b. 1894). Both were daughters of the *grande bourgeoisie* of Nantes. Lucy’s father was Jewish, although he bequeathed very little of his Jewish culture or religion to his only child. Lucy and Suzanne were already friends and lovers when Lucy’s divorced father married Suzanne’s widowed mother, making them stepsisters from the respective ages of 25 and 23.

From an early age, Lucy and Suzanne’s lives were about making things—photographs and paintings, poetry and prose, collages and montages. They did not limit themselves to any one genre any more than they limited themselves to any one gender. They experimented with blurring boundaries between male and female, reality and make-believe. In art as in life, they challenged social mores, gender roles, and prevailing notions of beauty. They brought these same tendencies and talents to bear in their fight against the German occupiers.

In 1920 the couple settled in Paris, where they became immersed in the artistic and literary scene of the capital. They traveled in surrealist circles, frequenting the likes of André Breton and Salvador Dalí. Like their contemporaries Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, or Adrienne Monnier and Sylvia Beach, Lucy Schwob and Suzanne Malherbe hosted a salon in their home. They thrived in a cosmopolitan subculture where same-sex relationships were unremarkable and unremarked upon.

Jersey is only twelve nautical miles off the coast of France, but life on the island could not have been more different from life in Paris. When Lucy and Suzanne moved to Jersey in 1937, they began their new lives by identifying themselves as stepsisters. The cover was a distraction, and like the best covers, it was entirely truthful. Perhaps it discouraged speculation about the full nature of their relationship, although one might wonder, as does the author, the extent to which the residents of Jersey bought it or really cared. By then Lucy Schwob had also adopted the gender-ambiguous *nom de plume* of Claude Cahun, while Suzanne Malherbe signed her work as Marcel Moore. (Marcel is a man’s name but when spoken, it could just as well apply to a woman.) After their move to Jersey, Suzanne sometimes used Lucy’s adopted surname, Cahun, to make their sisterly relationship more convincing.

The women's skills at dissimulation would serve them well upon taking up their resistance activity, which is the focus of part two, "Fighting the Nazis." The "paper bullets" in question were tiny slips of paper or leaflets they placed surreptitiously in soldiers' pockets and on café tables, scattered in cemeteries, and affixed to windshields and church pews. They bore messages, some of which were cleverly encrypted in jokes, puns, and double entendres, condemning the Nazi regime. The purpose was to sow fear and doubt among the troops. "Most political propaganda is designed to prevent people from thinking. Ours was designed to make them think," Suzanne explained to the military prosecutor assigned to their case.

Much of the craftsmanship was Lucy's but it was Suzanne's fluency in German that added a critical level of protection. Thanks to Suzanne, it was possible to address the soldiers in their own language and, more important, to promote the fiction that the paper bullets emanated from the soldiers themselves. Indeed, the most creative and unique aspect of this work was its signature: *Der Soldat ohne Name* (the soldier without a name). The propaganda was written in the voice of an anonymous German soldier who denounced the war, questioned its legitimacy, and urged his compatriots to defect. "He" played on the soldiers' common longing for home and hearth, and their fears for the fate of their families. It was a brilliant and artful subterfuge.

It might be tempting to see Lucy and Suzanne's resistance as a frivolous affair, a low-stakes, rule-flaunting distraction for a couple of independently wealthy, middle-aged women with live-in domestic help, whose chief preoccupations were gardening, swimming, and making "art." But Lucy and Suzanne were deeply committed to their mission and prepared to die for the cause. A bottle of the barbiturate Gardenal tucked into their bags accompanied them on every venture. In the event of capture, they planned to ingest a lethal overdose.

There was no official collaborationist government on Jersey but there were collaborators aplenty. Lucy Schwob and Suzanne Malherbe were denounced by a Jersey resident who was paid a handsome bounty in exchange for information. Part three, "Arrest and Trial," begins in July 1944 with the women's arrest. In anticipation of torture and death at the hands of their captors, Lucy and Suzanne executed their suicide plan. They managed to drug themselves into a coma that put them out of commission for nearly two weeks, but the dose was not strong enough to kill them. A couple of months later, Suzanne made another failed attempt, this time by slitting her wrists.

Schwob and Malherbe responded truthfully to their interrogators but stubbornly refused to sign the written confession drafted by their captors. In November 1944, the two women were sentenced to death by a German military tribunal. Despite the pleading of the German officers who prosecuted their case, Schwob and Malherbe adamantly refused to file a petition for clemency. Doing so, they said, would be tantamount to repudiating their "crimes" or repenting for them. They spent the rest of the war in their jail cells, anticipating the execution that never came.

How was the women's propaganda received by the troops and their commanders? Jeffrey Jackson--and his subjects--were able to discern a good deal about what the German authorities knew from the questions that were asked during interrogation. Yet some mysteries remain. What did the soldiers think of the material created in their name and for their benefit? Was there ever any doubt that the paper bullets emanated from a real soldier? The German authorities with jurisdiction of the Channel Islands reported to the occupation authorities based in Normandy.

Did they convey their concerns about the mysterious propaganda campaign, supposedly the treasonous work of the soldiers under their command, to their superiors?

Lucy and Suzanne were not alone in opposing the Germans; the Jersey prison was filled with other political prisoners. Yet the women appear to have been unaware of the resistance activities of other individuals and groups on the island until their incarceration. They may have been working in isolation, but not in a vacuum. Nor was targeting German soldiers in a propaganda war unique to Lucy and Suzanne. In Paris, Lyon, Grenoble, Brussels, and Antwerp, the German-speaking national sections of the underground French and Belgian communist parties organized a vast propaganda effort called TA, or *Travail allemand*, aimed at the German occupiers. Female operatives frequented German soldiers to extract intelligence and assess soldier morale. The information was then used to produce an illegal, clandestine newspaper, *Soldat im Westen* (Soldier in the West) distributed on the sly to the occupying troops. Soldiers found to be in possession of the newspaper were subject to the harshest of sanctions, including death.

Paper Bullets is both a scholarly book, complete with endnotes, and a book intended for a general readership. Inherent in such a project is the constant tension between approachability (for the general reader) and engaging historiographical issues of interest to the academic community. This is a difficult line to straddle. Jackson manages this quite well in his text and provides a fascinating discussion of his sources in a final essay, "The Story behind the Story." Readers who are looking for a traditional, fully fleshed scholarly apparatus, however, will be disappointed. There is no bibliography or index.

This brings me to a final invisibility, and one less welcome: the reference and citation format known as "blind endnotes." Presumably this was an aesthetic choice made by the publisher. If some readers may flinch at the sight of tiny superscripts marring an otherwise pristine page, others will be stunned by their absence; there are no in-text indicators to the references that appear at the end of the book. The endnotes do not display any page numbers. The identifier they provide is a word string from the part of the text they are meant to annotate, in bold, followed by the corresponding source or comment.

Anyone interested in sources will find this method frustrating at best. To be sure, many readers are unlikely to be interested in endnotes, blind or otherwise; but the scholars for whom references are primarily intended will be put off by them. The format also does a disservice to the author, who has done the painstaking work of providing sources and copious commentary. The interested reader should not have to work that hard to discover them.

This need not detract from *Paper Bullets* as a valuable, timely, and original contribution to the history of women's political participation during the Second World War. Jackson has written an eminently teachable book that will delight students and others with its lively writing and engrossing story. It is an excellent resource for use in the undergraduate or graduate history or gender studies classroom. The contextual issues the author cannot fully exploit within the confines of the story provide ample opportunities for group work. Ultimately, *Paper Bullets* lends itself to discussion of the larger, enduring questions that shape the field of resistance studies. What qualifies as "resistance"? Does propaganda matter? How do relations between occupier and occupied vary by locality? How does gender shape political work, if at all?

Jeffrey H. Jackson has given us a subtle and fascinating account of an overlooked form of grassroots resistance that merged art and politics, fantasy and activism, dissimulation and reality. It is also the extraordinary story of the remarkable lifetime partnership of two Frenchwomen in the only German-occupied territory of Great Britain. The author rightfully insists on their work as a collaboration, despite the fact that Lucy overshadowed her partner Suzanne to the point of virtual effacement. Finally, and perhaps most important, *Paper Bullets* is a significant contribution to the history of lesbian resisters—one is tempted to call them the underground of the underground—whose multilayered invisibility has presented insurmountable methodological challenges to date. We have Jeffrey H. Jackson to thank for bringing the story of these two extraordinary “soldiers without names” into the vast and growing literature on women resisters.

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