



She Bought Poppies Not Bandages:  
Moïna Belle Michael's Appropriation of the  
'Flanders Fields' Poppy

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## Abstract

This new and original empirical research addresses a gap in the expansive field of First World War studies, memorialisation and the evolution of the red poppy remembrance symbol. It explores the untold story of American woman Moïna Belle Michael's response to the war through largely-unpublished, primary source material held in historical archives in Georgia, United States (US).

In 1918 Michael appropriated the red poppy flower from the well-known war poem *In Flanders Fields*. She lobbied and campaigned for the flower to become a recognised symbol of remembrance in America. She also married the poppy with the torch symbol in an attempt to establish a new, universal symbol of remembrance, the Victory Memorial Emblem.

Research reveals how Michael engaged with and responded to mediated messages and visual symbolisms of contemporary war ideology published as an illustrated version of the war poem in a popular women's magazine. Methodologies of semiotics and critical discourse analysis were used to examine the primary source material to answer the research question: *what mediated messages and visual symbolisms led Moïna Belle Michael to appropriate the red 'Flanders Fields' poppy?* Analysis then considered the broader cultural resonance of Moïna's contribution and significance in order to stimulate further research into Michael as a key figure in First World War remembrance.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

In 2014 at a cemetery near Ypres in Flanders, Belgium, American President Barack Obama delivered a speech marking the Centenary of the start of the First World War. Towards the end of his speech Obama referenced the “lesser known” event of November 9, 1918 when a school teacher from Georgia in the United States of America wrote a response poem to Colonel John Alexander McCrae’s war poem, *In Flanders Fields* (1). Moïna Belle Michael’s actions, far from the battlefields of Flanders, was fundamental to the genesis of the red poppy remembrance symbol. This “lesser known” event is the focus of this thesis.

The research explores four main themes:

**Moïna Belle Michael as a forgotten woman of war.** As discussed in the Literature Review, there is a lack of scholarly recognition of Michael’s contribution to First World War remembrance and the history of the poppy remembrance symbol. This is at odds with the wealth of primary source material discovered during data collection. Documents reveal Michael’s lifelong and influential campaigning and lobbying of local and national politicians, the US war department and the American Legion. This research brings Michael within the framework of untold narratives of women during the First World War.

**Michael’s use of cultural resources as a response to First World War Remembrance.** Chapter Four examines the pivotal moments of November 9, 1918 which prompted Michael to act. It asks the research question: *what was the significance of the mediated messages and visual symbolisms*

which inspired Moina Belle Michael to appropriate the red 'Flanders Fields' poppy? Semiotics was used to decode the messages and visual symbolism mediated through the illustrated version of McCrae's poem as it was presented in the women's magazine *The Ladies' Home Journal*, issue November 1918 (Appendix 1). A comparison study was carried out with documents and correspondence found in the historical archives. This research establishes the broader cultural resonance of these messages and considers how Michael responded in the way she did.

Findings show how mediated messages can be constructed to reinforce or perpetuate cultural myths, for example the glorification of war sacrifice through symbolisms that camouflage the true horror of war. Roland Barthes' theory: "Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society" (1972, 109) is tested by observing how Michael received and interpreted the 'Flanders Fields' poppy in line with her own sign system of beliefs, knowledge, history and values.

**The role of press and public relations in the Victory Memorial Emblem campaign.** Chapter Five uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine how Michael harnessed the power of the American press to further her campaign for the new Victory Memorial Emblem. This research discusses whether language used reinforced dominant ideologies of war sacrifice and remembrance.

**Michael in the context of memorialisation.** The untold and unexplored narrative of Michael's post-war role is considered as relevant to both the first and third "memory booms", terms used by Winter to describe collective analysis that focuses on memory and remembrance within specific generations (1999, 1). This research repositions Michael as a key figure in war memorialisation.

## Background

Michael attempted to tell her own story in her autobiography *The Miracle Flower: The Story of the Flanders Fields Memorial Poppy* by setting out the “slow accretions from experiences which stirred my soul” (Michael, 1941, 31) and which led to her poppy memorial idea. This source was treated with caution. It was written in hindsight as a reflective work by Michael in 1941, more than 20 years after the events of November 9, 1918. It did however, provide a background to Michael’s life, beginning with her birth in 1869 in the American South. Her father was a soldier in the American Civil War (1861 to 1865). Ironically, her mother’s ancestors originated in Flanders, Belgium.

Michael worked as a teacher at The State Normal School in Athens, Georgia. In 1914 when the First World War broke out she happened to be in Germany on a study visit of Europe. She was forced to return home to the US. In 1917 when America joined the war, she felt anguish at seeing her former pupils become soldiers heading off to war, some to their deaths.

Women also mobilised to help the war effort. They had achieved suffrage and had entered the workplace and political arenas. Corresponding letters provided evidence of Michael wanting to serve her country. She applied for overseas war work but was rejected because of her age (49) and lack of nursing experience.

Unperturbed, Michael enlisted as a volunteer war secretary with the Young Men’s Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.) Overseas War Secretaries (O.W.S.) at its headquarters in New York City. Some 26,000 paid men and women served with the Y.M.C.A. from 1917 to 1918 as a “massive program of welfare and morale services for the military, both overseas and at home.” (Gavin, 1997, 147).

At the Y.M.C.A. on November 9, 1918 Michael was at her desk waiting to assist members of the 25th Conference of Overseas War Secretaries. A colleague placed a copy of the November issue of *The Ladies' Home Journal* on her desk. Michael's attention fell to a full-page interpretation of McCrae's war poem *In Flanders Fields*.

Michael described the illustrated poem as a "full spiritual experience" (1941, 47). On the back of a used envelope (now lost) she wrote a response poem entitled *We Shall Keep the Faith* (Appendix 9, Michael, 1918, MFA). The poem was her intention to establish the poppy as a remembrance symbol. She visited a department store in downtown New York and bought 25 decorative silk poppies. Back at her desk, she placed a large silk poppy in a vase and pinned a small poppy to her lapel. She encouraged the conference delegates to pin a silk poppy to their lapels. Michael lobbied for the 'Flanders Fields' poppy to be adopted by the Y.M.C.A. at its next event, the 28th Conference of the Y.M.C.A. (Pamphlet, Overseas War Secretaries, December 4, 1918, GA).

Encouraged by Y.M.C.A. war secretary Otto Ferris, Michael presented her response poem, ideas and drawings to New York publicity manager Lee Keedick. Keedick's designers helped combine the poppy with the torch to create the Victory Memorial Emblem. This emblem was made into flags and pins and launched as a nationwide media campaign in March 1919 as discussed in Chapter Five.

The new Victory Memorial Emblem failed to take off, and the single poppy prevailed. However, due to the campaigning efforts of Michael (and her contemporary, French war worker Madame Anna Guérin) (3) the American Legion adopted the red poppy, minus the torch, as its official memorial symbol in 1920 (Resolution, September 27-29, 1920, GA) (2).



## Research Focus and Value

This wider, untold history of the origins of the poppy remembrance symbol and its protagonist Moïna Belle Michael provided the rationale for this research. Here is original, empirical research into a substantial historical archive of largely unexplored and unpublished primary source material. Data collection also uncovered primary source material held by Michael's descendants. As a direct result of this research, this potentially valuable material and evidence is now being catalogued and properly archived.

The value of this research opens up a wealth of possible inquiries for subsequent researchers in line with the themes of this thesis. Findings could signpost further research into:

**Michael as a forgotten women of war.** Although secondary sources recognise Michael in the birth of the poppy remembrance symbol, they do not go far enough in analysing the impact of her endeavours (4) as a new woman of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Further research could take a gendered approach beyond the scope of this thesis. For example, how the masculinity of war evoked by the poppy remembrance symbol owes its origins and longevity to feminine influences. A comparative study could look at the contemporary feminine commercialisation of the symbol as ephemera such as earrings, aprons, and dresses (5).

**Cultural resources as a response to First World War Remembrance.** The visual impact of the poem mirrored “the myth of the war experience” (Budreau, 2010, 5), a myth experienced by many in America as the nation and its leaders attempted to focus on “victory and not on death.” (Trout, 2010, 107). A comparison study of Michael's appropriation of the flower with an exploration of the poppy remembrance symbol in contemporary culture could be investigated.

**The role of press and public relations in the Victory Memorial campaign.** Further research could address the question of why the Victory Memorial Emblem failed, yet the single red poppy prevailed and was adopted as the recognised symbol of remembrance. Why, despite lobbying by Michael, did the remembrance poppy succeed in Britain and the Commonwealth and decline in popularity America, the place of its birth?

**Michael in the context of memorialisation.** Further consideration of Michael within a review of secondary sources by Winter, Budreau and Trout on the landscape of post-war European and American collective remembrance, would position Michael within the discourse surrounding appropriate ways for America to honour and mourn its war dead. This resonates with Budreau and Piehler and their understanding of the legacy of Michael's predecessors, the white women of the American South as guardians of Civil War remembrance.

This thesis is timely, as it repositions Michael as a woman at a crucial point in the narrative of First World War remembrance. It recognises Michael as a woman of agency within early 20th Century feminism, a topic worthy of further research. As part of a "lesser known" moment in history, she warrants further critical examination, beyond the scope of this thesis.

(1) President Barack Obama at Flanders Fields March 26, 2014 (retrieved YouTube March 26, 2014).

(2) On August 20/21, 1920 the Georgia Department of the American Legion adopted the 'Flanders Fields' Memorial Poppy (minus the torch). The Department then instructed the delegates to the National Convention of the American Legion to be held in Cleveland, Ohio on September 28, 1920. At this convention, French war worker Madame Anna Guérin delivered a speech. The American Legion passed a resolution to adopt the poppy minus the torch as its memorial symbol (Resolution, September 27-29, 1920, GA). In 1921 the Legion replaced the red poppy with the daisy (Letter, November 23 1921, UGA). Michael lobbied against this decision. In 1922 the American Legion re-instated the red poppy as its official memorial symbol.

(3) Madame Anna Guérin was a contemporary of Michael. In America she worked and campaigned to promote the red poppy to raise money for French war widows and their children. Guérin introduced the poppy symbol elsewhere in the Commonwealth and to Great Britain in 1921. Her achievements in the

poppy symbol's establishment across the Allied nations have been championed by amateur historian Heather Johnson.

- (4) The American Legion honoured Michael for “most distinguished and humanitarian service to our sick and disabled comrades and their dependents” (Award, May 1940, GA). In 1944 she received a military funeral with young soldiers from the University of Georgia and The American Legion standing guard, red poppies fastened to the tips of their bayonets. A blanket of 3,000 poppies designed by veterans in the shape of a cross covered her coffin. On her tomb is a carved poppy and torch entwined in recognition of her Victory Memorial Emblem. A Liberty ship SS Moina Michael was launched in 1944 and in 1948 the US Postal Service issued a commemorative three-cent stamp honouring Michael.
- (5) [www.poppysshop.org.uk](http://www.poppysshop.org.uk) Official merchandise of the Royal British Legion's Poppy Appeal.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

This review provides the historical and theoretical context for this research. It begins with a critical assessment of the main published works concerning Moïna Belle Michael and her life-long campaign to promote the ‘Flanders Fields’ poppy as a symbol of remembrance. What has been written about Michael in historical texts recognises a growing acknowledgment of her role in the First World War origins of the poppy remembrance symbol. However, there remains a lack of scholarly recognition of Michael’s role within memorialisation and First World War remembrance. Hers is a largely untold story, despite the rich source of archival material available, as demonstrated by this thesis.

First, Michael’s presence and input are shown as limited in academic secondary sources. Her activism and contribution to the poppy legacy have been largely underestimated, neglected or ignored. Identifying gaps in the literature demonstrates why this new and original research is of value to an understanding of how mediated symbolisms of war and war sacrifice can be received, interpreted and perpetuated by society. This review then considers literature concerning the cultural and symbolic landscape of American collective remembrance. It does this to help reposition Michael as an active figure within the discourse surrounding appropriate ways for America to mourn its war dead.

Finally, the review signposts areas for future research beyond the size and scope of this thesis. For example, correspondences available in the Michael archives could explore Michael as representative of new, post-war social changes experienced by women; or Michael’s competitive relationship

with her contemporary Madame Anna Guérin – both claimed to have originated the idea of the poppy remembrance symbol. Both are as key female figures in remembrance activism at the dawn of 20th Century women's suffrage.

Moïna Belle Michael

Preceding the 2014 Centenary of the First World War, a range of secondary sources including non-academic books on the history of war remembrance began to appear. Many works paid specific attention to the importance of the red poppy as a remembrance symbol, immortalised in the 1915 poem *In Flanders Fields* by Lieutenant Colonel John Alexander McCrae. This symbol is today used as a fundraising tool for the Royal British Legion.

Ferguson, who published his book a decade earlier to coincide with the 80th Anniversary of the start of the war, alluded to this growing fascination of a “poppy on nearly every newspaper masthead (as well as my own book jacket)” (1998, 1). The flower that reminds the British public each November to remember the war dead has never been more “relevant” (McNab, 2014, 11). These publications add to the growing national discourse and debate of one of Britain's “best-known brands” (Harrison, 2012, 172). Leonard (2015) predicted ongoing controversy for the poppy symbol when he chose for his book the title *Poppyganda*.

Winter referred to this contemporary remembrance as the third “memory boom”, the need for today's generation to acknowledge the victims of the First World War (1999, 1). The first “memory

boom” of the 20th Century was from the 1890s to the 1920s. The second occurred after the Second World War. The first memory boom was “an act of defiance, an attempt to keep alive at least the names and the images of the millions whose lives have been truncated or disfigured by war” (Winter, 2006, 1-279). Michael featured in this first generation of memory. She was among the “new class of historical actors” who fought in the war, saw it, or whose memories contributed to its history. (Winter, 1999, 7) and, although not identified by Winter, was among its “agents of remembrance” (Winter & Sevan, 1999, 6-36).

Many references to Michael appear in primary source material such as American newspapers and magazines during the first and second memory booms. In Georgia, Michael’s home state, an entry in *Georgia’s Bi-Centennial Memoirs and Memories* (1932) listed Michael as originating the idea of the poppy symbol and of being instrumental in the British Legion poppy sales 1921-31 of £4,500,00. In 1931 both Houses of the General Assembly of Georgia conferred upon Michael the title ‘Distinguished Citizen of Georgia’. Its resolution proclaimed “Whereas Miss Michael is lauded as (a) ‘The Poppy Princess, immortal in the realm of patriotism;’ (b) ‘Sister of the Human Heart;’ (c) ‘The lady who pinned a poppy on the world;’ (d) ‘... Moina Michael is his [Uncle Sam’s] most celebrated gardener, for she planted the Memorial Poppy in the heart of the English Speaking World.’” (Michael, 1941, 113). Despite this coverage, few people realised her efforts in trying to harness recognition for the poppy symbol (Roan, 1941, 94).

By the early 1940s and despite failing health, Michael felt compelled to record her involvement in the origins of the poppy remembrance symbol. Her autobiography, *The Miracle Flower: The Story of the Flanders Fields Memorial Poppy* emerged in 1941 three years before her death in 1944.

Michael drew on a personal archive which she believed proved the success of the poppy remem-

brance symbol was down to her relentless campaigning. Chambless (2004), Saunders (2013) and McNab (2014) referred to this autobiography.

This thesis also draws on Michael's autobiography, although with a certain caution. The book was written 20 years after the events of November 9, 1918 as an attempt by Michael to set the record straight. It is viewed as a reflective work written by a woman close to her death. A sense of urgency and self-validation as the true originator of the poppy remembrance symbol is apparent. As is the rivalry between Michael and Anna Guérin who refused Michael permission to name her in the book.

Given the wealth of material that exists in historical archives, there is no biography of Michael save for a children's picture book entitled *The Poppy Lady* by American children's author Barbara Walsh (Walsh, 2012, 31).

Elsewhere in secondary sources, the full untold story of Michael and her role in the history of the remembrance poppy is absent. Trout (2010) paid homage to individuals who shaped collective memory in America's First World remembrance. He recognised sculptor E.M. Viquesney who created the famous American First World War statue and Mary Lee, author of *It's a Great War!* (2010, 1-41). Iles in her essay *In remembrance: The Flanders poppy*, relegated a mis-spelt "Mona" Michael as originator of the idea only in footnotes (2018, 221).

Harrison (2012) recognised Michael as a protagonist of sorts. He wrote that the poppy symbol grew far from the trenches of Europe, in America. Saunders (2013) devoted a chapter to *The Poppy Lady*,

crediting Michael's "irrepressible zeal" in changing her own life and the lives of millions on November 9, 1918 when "a tradition was born." (2013,101). McNab (2014), writing for the British Legion to mark the 2014-18 Centenaries of the First World War, described Michael as the "passionate humanitarian" (2014, 70).

Both Trout and Piehler acknowledged The American Legion - the largest organisation of First World War veterans founded in 1919 and which considered itself "champion and protector" of America's veterans and the nation's heritage" (Piehler, 1995, 94). No mention was made of Michael's relentless lobbying of the Legion. Or how she became the second American woman to be awarded the American Legion Auxiliary's distinguished service medal. Michael was cited "for most distinguished and humanitarian service to our sick and disabled comrades and their dependants" (Resolution, May 2, 1940, GA).

Chambless remarked on how the common poppy flower became the prominent symbol of remembrance through the "actions of one woman" (2014,11). Barrett affirmed the British symbol was first created across the Atlantic Ocean by Michael and sold by Madame Anna Guérin's French widows of the American and French Children's League (2016, 23). Guérin went on to introduce the poppy symbol to Great Britain in 1921. Her achievements in the poppy symbol's establishment across the Allied nations have been championed by amateur historian Heather Johnson. (1).

Research into Michael's Victory Memorial Emblem is non-existent. Only Saunders refers to the emblem, laying the blame for its failure on public relations manager Lee Keedick who fashioned "a



montage of images and colours he thought would better command the public's attention" (2013, 102).

Those authors who acknowledged the roles of Michael and Guérin found it ironic that two women who devoted their lives to establishing the poppy as a symbol of remembrance have, themselves, been largely forgotten. Even the Royal British Legion in 2015 simplified Michael and Guérin's achievements as "a chain of events" that led to the poppy being recognised as a symbol of Remembrance (Promotional pamphlet, Royal British Legion Remembrance Day, 2015).

This thesis offers new material for secondary sources. Findings in Chapters Four and Five provide a chronological and more accurate account of Michael and the origins of the poppy remembrance symbol for future researchers, historians, academics to explore.

## America and Remembrance

America suffered a fraction of the Allied casualties of the First World War. However, once American forces entered the war in April 1917, their losses outnumbered the deaths incurred in any other conflict in American military history, except for the Civil War and the Second World War. Trout, remarking on how American remembrance is a neglected area, described the impact of this as a "sudden avalanche of death and suffering on Americans at home" (2010, 33).

Even before Armistice, discourse in America centred on how to mark the scale of loss and honour the service of the returning veterans. Although America's participation in the First World War precipitated the nation becoming an international power, the decision to go to war had divided the nation on ethnic, regional, political and moral grounds. As a consequence during and after Armistice, Americans faced the dilemma on how best to heal these divisions.

Efforts were made to shape a post-war identity that settled on agreed and appropriate ways to remember and commemorate the nation's war dead. Budreau described how a young, democratic America struggled to "find meaning in war" both culturally and collectively (Budreau, 2010, 87). Following the American Civil War (1861-65), citizens marked the loss of loved ones in ceremonies, parades and memorials. Yet unlike the Civil War, the First World War was fought on foreign soil. The graves of soldiers and the remains of unidentified bodies were scattered across the distant battlefields of Europe. How could America come together and remember collectively when "... controversy dogged every attempt by political and cultural elites to foster an official and consensual memory of the war"? (Piehler, 1995 ,4).

Federal government experimented with remembering the dead in an effort to unify the country and foster a spirit of honour through collective remembrance that "minimized or ignored the ties of class, ethnicity, region, and race" (Budreau, 2010,1). Leaders lost no time in planning great monuments and events at home and overseas. "They wanted Americans to expiate their doubts, and sometimes their guilt, about this ambiguous conflict." (Piehler, 1995, 94).

Work began on building battlefield cemeteries and grandiose monuments. America's first European land war was remembered in stone and occasion as an "idealistic struggle for liberty and democracy waged by a united people." (Piehler, 1995, 94). Historic, familiar and conventional traditions of mourning and commemoration intermingled or were overtaken by a more modern and radical approach to remembering the dead in order "to transform grief into glory." (Budreau, 2010, 2).

The First World War shifted the occasion of the death of a soldier from one of "mournful private seclusion to one of communal respect within a triumphal context." (Budreau, 2010, 87). A proliferation of large, public memorials evoked "an outpouring of pride and patriotism unparalleled in American history". The nation focused on "victory and not on death." (Trout, 2010, 107). The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, built at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington DC, rose as a grand marble monument surmounted with allegorical figures of peace, valour and victory. Such actions were a means of "mythologizing America's first European war" and obscured the divisions of class, ethnic backgrounds and faith of war (Piehler, 1995, 185).

The American War Department had already approved an official Victory Medal before many soldiers returned home. Upon discharge, each soldier was awarded a Victory Button, a lapel badge in the shape of a star. Soldiers were encouraged to wear these as badges of honour in public, at social events and job interviews as evidence of their military service (Trout, 2010, 51). As discussed in the Data Analysis, these symbols may have influenced the Victory Memorial Emblem as a new lapel pin (Appendix 10).

## Women as Agents of Remembrance

Michael lived through these events. She was a witness to her country's attempts at memorialisation. As an "agent of remembrance" (Winter & Sevan, 1999, 6-36) she became directly involved in finding ways to remember America's war dead. Women, war veterans, civic organisations together "forged a common voice that exalted their unique contribution to war's official memory." (Budreau, 2010, 8).

Michael, although a working woman and not wealthy, was representative of mostly white middle-class women who entered America's post-war public and political arenas. For example, the growing power of women's auxiliaries of veterans associations such as The American Legion Auxiliary. Budreau described how women's groups "... believed it their moral and religious duty to serve as purveyors of community memorial work and custodians of the dead. In doing so, they aided the mobilisation effort with their patriotic discourse and innovative remembrance practices by producing what has since been termed a "romanticized militarism"." (Budreau, 2010, 88).

The American Civil War of 1861 to 1865 claimed 620,000 lives (Prost, 2014, 561), six times more American lives than the estimated 114,000 of the First World War (Winter, 2010, 587). The American Civil War was viewed by Marvin and Ingle as one of the two most "ritually successful wars in American history" (1999, 87) when white women of the South became "patrons of memorials" (Piehler, 1995, 184). Southern women "donned the mantle of 'guardians of the past' to a degree without precedence in the region's history". (Budreau, 2010, 91). They initiated Memorial Day, originally known as Decoration Day, a tradition in Spring involving decorating the graves of soldiers and holding memorial services (Budreau, 2010, 88). When prominent male organisations recognised this practice, the women's ritual became a national holiday.

Michael was born into this landscape of women in war memorialisation. She was born at the end of the American Civil War. Her father was a Confederate soldier who took part in the war's major battles and survived (Roan, 1941, 96). Women of the American South were instrumental in shaping an authoritative historical memory by letter-writing campaigns (including in the press), lobbying Congress, delivering speeches and fundraising. As correspondence in the historical archives prove, Michael became a consummate letter writer, lobbyist and campaigner. She came from a long line of women's voices cultivated in Southern Civil War remembrance, emboldened by women's suffrage at the turn of the 20th Century. Michael's voice was among those voices that rose again as America entered the First World War in Summer 1917.

### Mothers of Remembrance

Women's authority in the First World War arose from the "traditional status as mourner, nurturer, and sacrificial mother - an active role they had assumed immediately after the Civil War." (Budreau, 2010, 87). Whilst the brave men and heroes fought for their country on the battlefield, women served the nation through "an extension of their maternal roles." (Christie, 2016, 32).

Budreau and Piehler compared this traditional status fostered during the Civil War to the Gold Star Mothers' pilgrimages of the First World War (Piehler, 1995, 102), named after the gold stars worn by bereaved mothers and widows. Women in America embarked on pilgrimages to the former battlefields of Europe to pay their respects to the graves of their sons (2). Mothers and widows were "accorded greater recognition for having lost a loved one to the war" (Budreau, 2008, 373). The Gold Star Mothers' campaigned for repatriation of their sons' bodies or a pilgrimage to their graves. This action came about after years of lobbying by "white, Anglo-Saxon women's organizations,

testing their budding political power in a new arena while attempting to capitalize on a unique era when mothers held the moral high ground.” (Budreau, 2010, 16). The mother who had sacrificed her son to the war used her “elevated position within society” to benefit her cause. (Budreau, 201,9).

Marvin and Ingle (1999) measured the weight and significance of sacrifice in relation to lives lost. Sacrifice is valued on how many bodies bleed and how blood relations are affected by this loss. “Enough bodies must suffer and die so many families will feel the pain of sacrifice that constitutes the stuff of social kinship.” (1999, 87). Michael lost no kin. However, she inhabited the realm of Winter’s “fictive kinship” a coming together of individuals and groups to console and commemorate; the “powerful, perhaps essential, tendency of ordinary people, of many faiths and of none, to face together the emptiness, the nothingness of loss in war.” (Winter, 1995, 53). One such group were the mothers of the fallen soldiers.

During the First World War the mother signified woman as protector and nurturer. Mothers were assured that the sacrifice of their sons had “not been in vain” (Budreau, 2010, 99). War posters had already depicted women as heroic mothers of the nation, offering their sons to “Uncle Sam” (Kitch, 2001, 113). Magazines peddled the notion that a “woman’s noblest wartime calling was that of mother” (Kitch, 2001, 117). Some mothers became active by protesting the use of their sons as fighting machines, others saw the sending of their sons to war their patriotic duty (Christie, 2016, 32).

Michael was not a mother. However, she identified herself as “mother” to the schoolboys she had taught at the State Normal School in Georgia and who become soldiers. At least one of her pupils, Frank Lee Walker, died at the front (Appendix 6). In New York as a YMCA war volunteer she over-

saw the care of embarking and returning soldiers and visited veterans hospitals. She escorted mothers and widows to a makeshift morgue beneath Pennsylvania Station. She helped as they viewed the coffins of repatriated bodies and identified their loved one in order for the body to be shipped back home. Her great nephew, Tom Michael said: “She was touched by this deeply, the loss and the sacrifice” (recorded interview, retrieved 2017).

Bereaved mothers who campaigned for their rights to remember encouraged Michael in voicing her own civilian’s grief through activism. Chapter Four explores how Michael chose for herself the role of authoritative mother; how the creation and nurturing of the poppy remembrance symbol and its ensuing campaign became for her an alternative version of motherhood.

### Symbols of Remembrance

Winter (1995) in studying grief, memory and mourning in post-First World War Europe, identified three culturally symbolic mediums of mediating war: through visual images of the death and destruction of the war, prose and poetry, and collective remembrance. He found overwhelming evidence of the attempt to interpret and imagine the war within 18th and 19th century traditional images, ideas, symbols and metaphors, such as classical, romantic and religious symbolisms and motifs.

He looked at “euphemisms about battle, ‘glory’, and the ‘hallowed dead’, in sum, the sentimentality and lies of wartime propaganda.” (Winter, 1995, 3). This “vocabulary of mourning” was a way for artists in Europe and all combatant countries immediately after the war to communicate war. Many returned to the “sacred” to address the suffering, a “backward gaze” that also helped mediate loss (1995, 117 and 223).

Central to this symbolism was the myth relying on the cult of the fallen soldier. By fostering the notions of sacrifice and glory, whilst trying to recognise the grief of its mothers, widows and families, America tried to assuage for its decisions and its dead by constructing “the myth of the war experience” (Budreau, 2010, 5). This notion of the sacred war, glory and patriotism rather than the scale of loss and horror of war was conveyed in war memorials and monuments. It was also evident in mass media, in particular the popular women’s magazines.

The role of the press is considered here. In America magazines were the “first truly mass medium”. By November 1918 the *Ladies’ Home Journal* (it carried the illustrated version of McCrae’s *In Flanders Fields* poem and focus of this thesis) had exceeded one million in circulation (Kitch, 2001, 3). Imagery of an idealistic war transferred from war posters to the front covers of these magazines, and into their editorial pages. Magazine publishers paid the artists of the day great sums to create impactful imagery that would offer a sensory experience to readers. This method was soon adopted by advertisers who hired the same illustrators to create dramatic imagery to help sell products.

By 1914 the *Ladies’ Home Journal* commanded the highest advertising rate of any other popular American magazine (Scanlon, 1995, 199). Scanlon described how the direction of the magazine was led by advertisers whose “visually appealing and ideologically sophisticated messages” became the magazine’s staple. This winning formula of emotive imagery generated an audience of readers who were, in turn, consumers (Scanlon, 1995, 13).

Magazine publishing served to sell magazines and draw readers to the advertisers and their products (Kitch, 2001, 4). Kitch observed this “message-blurring” - the mix of editorial and advertising im-



agery - had consequences. Readers often could not tell the difference between an editorial and an advertising page. When readers in a survey carried out by the *Ladies' Home Journal*, were invited to select their favourite editorial illustrations the majority chose an advertisement (Kitch, 2001,160).

It is not known whether Michael was a regular reader of the *Ladies Home Journal*. The November 1918 issue was placed on Michael's desk at the Y.M.C.A. Headquarters in New York by a young soldier. Michael, unmarried and childless, only partly mirrored the magazine's target audience of "white, native-born, middle-class women" She fell short of its domestic notion of traditional womanhood. Its ideal American reader was married, cared for the home, the husband and the children, and enjoyed spending money on the family and herself in a rapidly growing consumer culture (Scanlon, 1995, 7, 2). According to Scanlon, the success of the *Ladies' Home Journal* was due to the encouragement of "inaction rather than action, conformity rather than individual expression, guided rather than self-generated change" (1995, 4-5).

In a time of tremendous actual and potential societal changes, when middle-class white women faced new opportunities and challenges in education, in the workforce ... this magazine specifically encouraged them to read rather than act, to conform to middle-class mores rather than seek out new and possibly more revolutionary alternatives.

(Scanlon, 1995, 6).

As discussed in Chapter Four, Michael's response to the illustrated poem in the *Ladies' Home Journal* was not as a consumer. Her "more revolutionary alternatives" was the decision to act on her responses to an illustrated poem. The irony of responding to a lavish illustration glorifying war by championing a little flower that has, some would argue become an official symbol to glorify war, only adds to the contradictions surrounding remembrance.

## The Red Poppy

On May 26, 1918 the New York Times published an endorsement letter from President Woodrow Wilson that stated: “American women should wear a black band on the left arm with a gilt star ... for each member of the family who has given up his life for the nation” (New York Times, ‘President Approves Bands’). His suggestion was in response to women across the nation who wrote to the White House seeking a meaningful alternative to painful mourning. (Budreau, 2010, 96). Mothers and wives of fallen soldiers were encouraged to wear a gold star on armbands or display a gold star on a service flag. Flags were hung in homes to replace more traditional mourning colours including white and purple.

Mrs Louise D. Bowen, the chairman of Chicago’s Women’s Committee of the State Council for Defence, appealed for the gold star to replace the traditional black mourning dress because the “glory of the death should be emphasized rather than its sadness”. Bowen stated “There is no better death than this and none so good and manifestation of its glory rather than of a private grief becomes the patriotic citizen.” (*Mourning is Harmful*, New York Times 14 November 1917). A gold star was public recognition of the woman’s grief, patriotism and sacrifice (Budreau, 2008, 405).

Turner, in *A Forest of Symbols*, defined ritual symbols as “stimuli of emotion”. He acknowledged how each person within a society views a symbol from their own unique point of observation. Dominant ritual symbols divide into two strands: the “ideological pole” which comprises the values that steer and control individuals as members of social groups; at the other end the “sensory pole” related to human desires, feelings and emotion (1967, 28). At the sensory pole, the emotions are stirred and values and norms become “saturated with emotion” (1967, 30). A condensation symbol has the

power to trigger underlying emotions, resulting in manifest behaviour far removed from the symbol's original meaning (1967, 29). Illes (2008) described how the red poppy has power and flexibility to symbolise, encapsulate and condense a raft of ideas, emotions and feelings related to “war, militarism, blood, grief, and suffering to remembrance, peace, heroic sacrifice, hope, veterans, freedom, patriotism, and national identity.” (2008, 206).

Fussell (1975) argues that the prevalent poppy species in America was not the “bright scarlet” of the red poppy, but the familiar orange or yellow Californian poppy. Therefore, an individual notices and recalls what they have been “coded” (1975, 246). This thesis explores to what extent Michael was “coded”. How she was influenced at both ends of the ideological and sensory poles by the poppy as a condensation symbol. How she drew on these cultural references to construct her own meaning for the war and to memorialise those who died.

Reardon (2014) studied how women writers and artists created images of flowers during wartime through their novels and artwork. In the novel *The Man Whose Heart They Could Not See* (1923) author Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu used the symbolism of a flower to allow her main character, Laura, a nurse, to distance herself mentally from the appalling injuries suffered by the soldier. The flower becomes a “marker of injury and a symbol of the grotesque, rather than one of remembrance, excitement or grief.” (Reardon, 2014, 13). Claudia Siebrecht writing in *The Aesthetics of Loss: German Women's Art of the First World War*, explained how the beauty of a flower “helps balance our emotional response to the perceived ugliness of death. Flowers help soften the raw imagery death leaves with survivors” (2013,12 cited by Reardon, 2014,7).

Reardon criticised the scant attention paid to women's use of botanical metaphor and floral symbolism as a communicative device during and after the First World War to express their horror of bloody war, grief, remembrance and heroism. She observed how the role of Michael in the poppy narrative is "often overlooked". Michael's use of the poppy as a botanical metaphor to express her own grief and remembrance, as uncovered by this study, is a prime example of this omission and shows why this study is valuable.

### Adding to the Landscape

This review addresses the the four main themes of this thesis. It looks at Michael as an untold story in the historic narrative of one of the world's most recognised symbols of war remembrance by addressing her absence in secondary sources. Existing texts do not go far enough. They do not consider Michael's response to the dominant ideological mediated messages of war, as civilian, war volunteer and woman at the turn of the 20th Century.

The review identifies literature concerned with the post-war landscape in America to position Michael within that landscape both in memorialization, the role of the press, and through her cultural responses to the war. Understanding America's involvement in its first overseas battle on foreign soil and the lengths to which some people went to in order create an understanding of the war, served as a guide to analysing the Michael texts in the following chapters. It helped navigate through the reasons why, and how, a simple red wildflower growing on the blood-soaked fields of Belgium, became a conduit for enough meaning and emotion to render it forever unrecognisable in its organic form.

(1) For Madame Anna Guérin, see Harrison (2012), Saunders (2013), Leonard (2015), Johnston (2017).

(2) For Gold Star Mothers, see Budreau (2010). Piehler (1995).

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

Methodologies were sought to extract information from primary source material held in historical archives and selected newspaper texts. The data helped understand how Michael was influenced by mediated messages, symbolism and discourse, and how she in turn used symbolism and discourse through the media to campaign for a new remembrance symbol.

Semiotics proved a workable solution for decoding the illustrated poem in the *Ladies' Home Journal* November 1918 (Appendix 1) in a meaningful way. How Michael received and interpreted the visual and linguistic signs in the text played a direct role in her appropriation of the 'Flanders Fields' poppy and the creation of a new symbol, the Victory Memorial Emblem.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used because of the need to examine selected newspaper texts (Appendix 11 and 12) which promoted the Victory Memorial Emblem campaign of 1919. A critical study of the implicit meanings, beliefs and views expressed within the newspaper texts revealed how symbolism and language were used to shape an idea to inform or persuade the public. CDA also helped establish context by positioning Michael within the discourse of First World War remembrance and memorialisation.

Close reading was used to analyse the texts with a comparative study of correspondence found in the Michael archives. This provided insight into Michael's beliefs, values, perceptions and assumptions. Brummett (2010) described close reading as the "mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understandings of its meanings" (2010, 25). An inductive approach, rather

than a need to test or disprove a theory, helped navigation through the texts to reach a considered conclusion.

### Qualitative versus Quantitative

Qualitative research techniques were used. Media content researchers, from Holsti to Neuendorf, Shoemaker and Reese debated over the need to use either qualitative or quantitative, or both, within the field of media communications. Quantitative research could collect numerical data in the texts such as instances of words, topics and themes related to “Michael” or “poppy”. This data could be coded to determine context, circulation and frequency. It could yield data to answer statistical questions as Holsti described “with precision” (1969, 9). However, merely counting numbers results in findings which are “either meaningless, trivial or both.” (Holsti, 1969, preface).

Shoemaker and Reese (1996) championed the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. They explained that extracting numerical values from a large quantity of text does not tell the full story or determine the impact on audiences. Neuman (1997) agreed that a quantitative approach is useful when studying the symbolic content within a text. However, a researcher’s interpretation and the need to develop a critical and interpretative approach is best gained through qualitative techniques. The application of semiotics was also a deciding factor, a methodology that Chandler argues is “rarely quantitative” (2002, 8).

Quantitative data relevant to Michael and her campaign revealed through online newspaper archive data searches in an expanded timeframe, could be appropriate for a longer term study. It could generate an objective, systematic observation of the data by measuring the number and frequency of newspapers carrying the Victory Memorial Emblem campaign, audience figures, the size of the con-

tent in numeral value, and peaks and troughs in coverage. It could not reveal valuable latent meanings and connotations within the mediated messages in order to address the research question, or provide a way to measure Michael's interaction and interpretation with the discourse.

Qualitative research has its drawbacks. Focusing on a small sample of content could be criticised as unscientific and unreliable because of subjective conclusions. To avoid this, Hornig Priest advised "setting aside preconceptions" so that the focus remains on what is actually being communicated (2010, 7).

## Semiotics

French linguist Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* argued that any object comes equipped with meaning: "Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society." (1972, 109). Therefore the research question looked at how culturally resonant symbols (ie the poppy and the torch) were mediated visually and linguistically through the illustrated poem in *The Ladies' Home Journal* and how they were decoded by Michael according to her system of values and beliefs. Close-reading of the primary source material offered an understanding of how she responded beyond the obvious significations of the poppy and the torch: how she appropriated those symbols to articulate a new remembrance symbol, the Victory Memorial Emblem.

Semiotics extracted mediated messages within the illustrated poem for analysis. Qualitative findings were compared with the Michael texts to consider how her sign system of inherent knowledge, ideologies and beliefs influenced her interpretation and subsequent communications.



Semiotics, the science for studying signs and first developed by semiologists Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, helped peel away the layers of the illustrated poem (2). Saussure believed that no sign makes sense on its own; a sign only has value in relation to other signs within the sign system, as opposed to having value independently. “The sign is the whole that results from the association of the signifier with the signified.” (1974, 67). Peirce later added a third dimension, that the sign “creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign” (Peirce, 1931-58, 2.228).

Later theoreticians sought both to build on the assumptions of Saussure and Peirce. Umberto Eco defined a sign “*everything* that, on the grounds of a previously established social convention, can be taken as *something standing for something else*” (1976, 7-16). Chandler (2002) said signs have no meaning until humans invest them with meaning, and as a species we actively create meanings of what we see and encounter according to a complex set of codes and conventions. He stressed the role of the interpreter of the sign as an essential component of the process of “semiosis” in order to understand how signs can be framed to operate within societies (2002, 35). Guillemette and Cossette recognised signs as always having a source: “They are produced consciously by someone, based on specific conventions, and with the aim of communicating something to someone.” (2006, 1). Bloor and Bloor agreed that “meaning is created when a sign occurs in a specific context.” (2007, 15).

This research looked at how Michael interpreted codes based on the dominant social conventions and context in which she lived. Michael, as receiver, followed codes that seemed familiar to her based on her values, attitudes and beliefs. For instance, a red poppy flower viewed within the system of signs of First World War remembrance projected a code that anyone who knew the system, ie had read McCrae’s war poem, could quickly interpret and be influenced or moved by it.

Of the theoreticians that applied semiotics to their work, this research draws on the interpretation of popular culture pioneered by Barthes. Barthes, writing in the early 1950s, believed the emergence of publicity, news and media and the developing modes of communication demanded an urgent need for semiological science (1973,112). His definition of semiology was as a “science of forms” which “studies significations apart from their content.” (1974, 111). He expanded the theories of Saussure and Peirce by suggesting that reality is built upon specific ideologies and messages contained within the meanings of signs, be they words or pictures.

Barthes’ dissected a front cover image of an issue of the magazine *Paris Match* featuring a black soldier in a French uniform saluting the national flag (1972, 116) and an advertisement for Panzani Italian groceries. His essay *Rhetoric of the Image* (1977, 33) demonstrates how layers of meanings within visual texts can be uncovered and open to many interpretations. Barthes’ theories were therefore applied through semiotics and by close-reading the illustrated poem in the *Ladies’ Home Journal*.

Barthes emphasised the limitations to Saussure’s two part-model of the sign by addressing a need for added levels that go beyond the signifier expressing the signified. He added a third level of meaning called “signification” to represent the “myth” that surrounds a particular sign. He famously wrote: “Myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse.” (1973, 109). He argued that general everyday signs - in advertisements, photographs and the media - contained multiple and specific ideologies and messages. These messages are perceived as being naturalistic and true when in fact they should be exposed as falsities, or *myth*. They have been constructed in society and viewed by the receiver as normal and natural (Barthes, 1972, 110).

Guided by Barthes' principle of myth, it was possible to deconstruct the layers of meaning in the illustrated poem to identify myths constructed in society that glorified patriotic service and sacrifice. Barthes' theories applied in this new way, demonstrate the influence of cultural and mythical connotations that stimulated Michael as receiver mentally and emotionally. It extracted the mediated significance of, for example the poppy wildflower as mediated through the illustrated poem beyond the literal and obvious meaning. It recognises the poppy as signifying blood spilled on a battlefield. Barthes' third level of myth recognised the mythical signification of sacrifice. It was necessary to uncover connotations that distinguished between the outward or visible signs of the poppy because mediated in this way "it is a major factor in manipulating opinion." (Bloor and Bloor, 2007,129).

#### Limitations of Semiotics

Signs can have multiple meanings and can change over time. With so many different sign systems and ideologies at play there was inevitably a competition of values. It was necessary to question what seemed obvious based on evidence within the primary source material.

Chandler outlined the criticisms of semiotics and lack of consensus among semioticians that the methodology is still "a relatively loosely defined critical practice rather than a unified, fully-fledged analytical method or theory" (2002, 207-209). He guarded against the tendency of the researcher to present their findings as an objective "scientific" study, because of the subjective interpretation of individual readings. Despite this, he concluded that within a socially-orientated context an individual exploration is "fundamental to semiotics" (2002, 209). Anyone with an interest in how everyday things are represented to society, must learn to be aware of the organisational and manipulative representation of signs. Semiotics can reveal worthwhile insights in the complex communications sys-

tems in which we live. “To decline the study of signs is to leave to others the control of the world of meanings which we inhabit.” (Chandler, 2002, 14-15).

### Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Berelson (1952) and Budd, Thorp & Donohew (1967), early theorists of media content analysis, focused attention on the latent inferences and manifest properties of media content to determine what is being said rather than merely quantifying themes and patterns within the language. CDA was used as a reactive research methodology to analyse the messages contained within the text and what was driving those messages in order to effect an outcome.

Linguist Norman Fairclough developed CDA as a three-dimensional framework to question the role of text within a wider socio-cultural sphere and its likely effects. Norman Fowler then used CDA to unearth ideologies within the language of the British popular press. He echoed theories put forward in the 1970s by students of media and news representation, such as Stuart Hall, that language contained within newspapers is socially constructed; it is a product that “shapes” rather than reflects the world. In examining the newspaper texts promoting the Victory Memorial Campaign, this research draws on Fowler’s premise that encoded language is used to foster ideas and beliefs about the world and our place within it: “News is not a natural phenomenon emerging straight from “reality”, but a *product*.” (1991, 222).

CDA provided the means to examine the visual and linguistic messages in the 1919 media campaign to promote Michael’s idea for a new symbol of remembrance, the Victory Memorial Emblem. It looked at how the campaign used symbolism, language and widely-held beliefs or perpetuated

existing beliefs, to shape opinion rather than reflect reality. Implicit meanings and ideologies within the newspaper texts revealed intent and how language and symbolisms were used to inform the public, represent an idea and encourage society to act. CDA helped speculate on who was attempting to control whom, and how the creators of the Victory Memorial campaign were attempting to change or persuade.

CDA was also used to position Michael within the discourse of First World War remembrance in America. As creator of the new remembrance symbol, Michael positioned herself in relation to her point of view in the hope that readers sharing a similar viewpoint would respond by adopting the new symbol.

Guided by the principles of CDA, this study broke down the newspaper texts into the following categories:

- Texts. Through analysis of the linguistic discourse within the newspaper texts including style, themes, vocabulary, syntax and tone.
- Discursive practice. A comparative study of the newspaper texts and Michael correspondence to examine themes and consider what was being conveyed in the texts and behind the texts.

CDA was found to be the most appropriate methodology to investigate how Michael, herself influenced herself by the mediated symbolism and linguistic elements of an illustrated text, harnessed the power of the press to disseminate the message of the Victory Memorial Emblem campaign.

## Limitations of CDA

No correspondence exists that clarifies whether the newspaper text studied in Chapter Five was a circulated press release or paid-for insertion. This has a bearing on the analysis. Bloor & Bloor recognised how readers and consumers are “influenced, and sometimes misled, by persuasive language in the form of advertising and persistent marketing” (2007, 3). This research discovered that the illustrated poem which influenced Michael was, in fact, an advertisement and not editorial.

In employing CDA the analyst needs to be mindful of their own stance and viewpoint, because “our beliefs and attitudes are likely to colour the way we interpret what we hear or read” (Bloor and Bloor, 2007, 34). Phillips and Jorgensen suggested distancing oneself from the material by adopting the role of an “anthropologist who is exploring a foreign universe of meaning in order to find out what makes sense there” (2002, 21). They believed this ensures the possibility of being socially critical of the material without making claims to “absolute truth”. The nature of CDA recognises the researcher’s own position within discourse and viewing the discourse from personally-held ideological positions.

## Data Collection

Research visits were made to historical public archives in Atlanta, Athens, and Morrow in Georgia, USA and to personal archives held by the descendants of Moïna Belle Michael in Atlanta, USA. These archives contain unexplored primary source material including correspondence, visuals and campaigning letters, a copy of the contract drawn up by Lee Keedick, original designs and patents

for the Victory Memorial Emblem and an original manuscript of Michael's autobiography *The Miracle Flower: The Story of the Flanders Field Poppy* (1941). With permission, selected material was photographed for presentation in the Appendix.

American national and regional newspaper texts published between November 1918 and October 1922 were searched and extracted through online databases as detailed in the Bibliography. The units of analysis for the newspaper database search were "Moïna Belle Michael" and "poppy". Two differing styles of content for the coverage of the Victory Memorial Emblem were selected for analysis: text only and text with photograph and Emblem design. The time period stretched from November 9, 1918 - the date on which Michael acted upon the idea of appropriating and promoting the single red poppy as a symbol of remembrance - to October 1922, the official adoption of the poppy by the American Legion.

(1) Chandler, D. *Semiotics for Beginners: Denotation, Connotation and Myth* (retrieved [www.visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/S4B/sem06.html](http://www.visual-memory.co.uk/daniel/Documents/S4B/sem06.html))

(2) For semiotics see Saussure, F. de (1959) *Course in General Linguistics*. London: Peter Owen; and Houser, N. and Kloesel, C. (1992) *Essential Peirce Volume I (1867-1893)*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, USA: Indiana University Press.

## Chapter Four

### “We Shall Not Sleep”

#### Data Presentation and Analysis

This chapter analyses how the red “Flanders Fields” poppy flower and the torch were mediated through the illustrated poem in *The Ladies’ Home Journal* November 1918. It then discusses how these symbols were received, interpreted and actively appropriated by Moïna Belle Michael.

Close-reading of the illustrated poem (the text) helped to deconstruct the visual and linguistic messages presented through this popular example of the American consumer press. Findings show how Michael responded in an individualistic way. Her response became her response to the war. Her significant actions, detailed here, is the untold story of Michael. How she was influenced and how she deployed cultural resources to create a new form of memorialisation are pivotal moments in history. They are integral to the understanding and evolution of war remembrance and the remembrance poppy.

The text is decoded using the variables of sacrifice, blood, victory and motherhood. These themes were identified during data collection as recurrent themes. They are also concurrent with dominant themes identified in the Literature Review.



## “We Shall Not Sleep” - The Illustrated Poem

An illustrated version of the war poem *In Flanders Fields* by Colonel John Alexander McCrae (the text) was published in *The Ladies' Home Journal* November 1918. Michael saw it on November 9, two days before the Armistice of the First World War. She referred to the page containing the poem as “vividly picturized - most strikingly illustrated in color” (1941, 46-47). Reading it was a “full spiritual experience” as if the “silent voices” of the soldiers were “vocal, whispering, in sighs of anxiety unto anguish”. She continued:

Alone ... in a high moment of resolve I pledged to keep the faith and always to wear a red poppy of Flanders Fields as a sign of remembrance and the emblem of keeping the faith with all who died. (1941, 47)

As explained in the Literature Review, her autobiography is a reflective work and needs to be treated with some caution.

What is most revealing is the copy of the page containing the poem found in her personal archive. It was either removed from the magazine - presumably by Michael - as she was a consummate clippings collector and kept scrapbooks. It is mounted onto black card (Appendix 1). At the top of the page is written: “The original article gave me my inspiration for the Memorial Poppy idea, Moïna Michael”.



## Appendix 1

(*Ladies Home Journal* November 1918, illustrated poem, GA, AC 0000-0156M)

However, Michael's copy is not the complete version of the illustrated poem as it appeared in *The Ladies' Home Journal* as shown in Appendix 2.

The original illustrated poem carried the endorsement: "Contributed towards the Winning of the War by BAUER and BLACK Makers of Surgical Dressings, etc. Chicago New York Toronto". It was not an "article" as Michael described, but a paid-for advertisement by a commercial concern.



## Appendix 2

*Ladies Home Journal*, November 1918, illustrated poem, HI, objects 43154.

This knowledge has a profound bearing on research into the construction of memorialisation and the role of the press in memorialisation. It shows how symbolisms mediated by McCrae through his war poem were first appropriated and commercialised before being appropriated by Michael. This information also adds value to current thinking and assumptions, as discussed in the Literature Review, that the poppy remembrance symbol has become commercialised only in recent years.

In her autobiography and correspondence Michael does not allude to Bauer and Black, nor surgical dressings. Michael seems to have ignored the direct marketing of the text in favour of its narrative and symbolism. Did she believe a paid-for depiction of American soldiers killed in war diluted the gravity of the message? Or, as discovered in the Literature Review, was this merely an example of the “blurring of editorial and advertising” in magazines to endorse a product (Kitch, 2001, 160)?

The text promotes surgical dressings through the romanticisation and glorification of war sacrifice. Its role is to appeal to a consumer culture of magazine readers, predominantly women. It promotes the notion of a wound healed. This device helped to position the advertisers Bauer and Black within the ideological discourse of war sacrifice in presuming readers shared similar values.

Secondary sources show how advertisements in women’s magazines served to sell a dream such as a face cream or a dress which promised to satisfy a longing. Scanlon noted how *The Ladies’ Home Journal* “continually reminded its readers that their values, different from those of men, held the family, community and nation together” (1995, 232). Michael’s longing *was* satisfied, but in an altogether different way. Her long-held wish to serve her country as an overseas war worker, denied previously because of her age and lack of experience, was re-ignited. She was not drawn in as a consumer, rather as an interpreter of imagery that glorifies war sacrifice. She responded actively by buying decorative floral poppies, not bandages. *The Ladies’ Home Journal* magazine boasted a readership of more than a million (Kitch, 2001,4). How many other readers reacted in a similar way?

Michael’s response demonstrates the argument of this thesis that mediated messages had an individualistic effect on Michael beyond the mere visual. Why was this? Signs and symbols in the text stimulated emotions and prompted a cultural response that empowered her to become an activist for

her cause. Why her? Here also is proof of the power of the press and public relations. American propagandist Edward Bernays, one of the founders of the public relations industry, wrote: “Touch a nerve at a sensitive spot and you get an automatic response from certain specific members of the organism.” (1928, 55).

### Form of the Text

Close reading of the text identifies a full-colour illustration occupying a full page within *The Ladies' Home Journal*. The illustration is unsigned, but further research attributes it to popular American artist Philip Lyford (born 1887). Brummett wrote “Form moves people more than content does” (2010, 51). The representation of a painting was a cultural pattern familiar to Michael. First World War posters and illustrations were found in her archives and are printed in the Appendix.

The painting depicts three uniformed soldiers, or doughboys, rising from the graves and flames of a burning landscape and battlefield cemetery. A ‘doughboy’ was an informal term for a member of the United States’ American Expeditionary Forces in the First World War. He was an average soldier in full battle dress standing to attention (Piehler, 1995, 111). In some representations he has one hand raised holding a grenade. In the other hand he holds a rifle. The doughboy was further immortalised in 1921 by E.M. Viquesney’s sculptor ‘Spirit of the American Doughboy’, a military statue widely copied and reproduced (Trout, 2010, 109).

The illustration shows red poppies blanketing the landscape into infinity. Two soldiers in the background wear hats: one points towards the sky, the other to the burning landscape. The soldier in the foreground stretches out his right arm, beckoning towards the reader. His left hand holds aloft a long, golden sword. All men are open mouthed, appearing to be shouting. The soldier in the fore-

ground is wounded; a blood-stained bandaged is wrapped round his head. Here is the only suggestion of an advertisement for surgical dressings.

The linguistic element of the text forms two parts: McCrae's *In Flanders Fields* war poem and an explanatory text. A review of Winter's study of grief and memory of the First World War identified poetry as culturally symbolic of mediating war (1995, 117-223). Here the poem is printed in a gothic-style typeface set within a gilt-coloured border shaped like a commemorative plaque or memorial stone. This is surmounted with two Fleur-de-Lis ('flower' and 'lily' motifs). The motif is an historic and religious symbol associated with France and appearing on European coats of arms and flags.

This grandeur and positioning serves to elevate the poem as a permanent memorial.

The poem's title has been changed from *In Flanders' Fields* to *We Shall Not Sleep*. The new title is active not passive. It draws attention to the imagery of soldiers rising from the dead. They are not at peace, nor at rest. This suggests an urgency, an appeal to the reader. The pronoun "We" is set alone at the head of the poem. It commands the first line; top position. Bloor & Bloor pointed to the use of the personal pronoun "we" in the construction of identity; how it can be used by the author to "declare his identity" and view themselves and position themselves within a certain social group with people of similar ideology. (2007, 21). "We" is also a mode of incorporation, including the reader in an assumed and agreed consensus of the messages being invoked.

Appendix 2 is valuable because it identifies Bauer and Black, makers of surgical dressings, as the voice (possibly assisted by the illustration's designers and/or the magazine's editorial staff) behind the endorsement:

In [sic] behalf of the brave men  
who have enlisted in the  
fight of right against might  
we reprint the above lines  
by Col McCrae.

As an inspiration to war  
giving and war sacrifice, it  
strikes a major note.

There is no war appeal to  
which it is not applicable.

This beautiful lyric of the  
war was written by Lieu-  
tenant Colonel Dr. John  
McCrae of Montreal,  
Canada, while the second  
battle of Ypres was in  
progress.

The author's body now  
lies buried in Flanders  
fields.

Is it conceivable that we

shall break faith with  
those who die for us?

“We” appears to show the commercial supplier of surgical dressings positioning themselves within a certain group: McCrae, the soldiers of the First World War, readers sharing a similar ideology. Interestingly, Chapter Five shows Michael adopting the pronoun “we” through the press to position herself within a certain societal group, the bereaved relatives and non-relatives. Bauer and Black presumed to speak on “behalf” of the brave men with a message that strikes “a major note”. Their authoritative voice mirrors McCrae’s voice in a dynamic, urgent and powerful way, yet McCrae’s appeal was not to sell bandages. Nor were his lines “beautiful” lyrics. They concerned death, destruction, blood and war.

The text creates a tension, calling on the reader to act. It implies that the brave soldiers who died “for us” are not at rest. It seeks an urgent resolution. Bauer & Black hoped the illustrated poem would serve as “an inspiration to war giving and war sacrifice”. In Michael it did “strike” a “major note”.

Reflecting in her autobiography she said the poppy idea grew from:

slow accretions from experiences which stirred my soul - by a consciousness of the gallantry, the valor and the sacrifices which have been built and protected all the privileges that are our inheritance.

(1941, 34)



These “accretions” are analysed further through the variables of sacrifice, blood, victory, and motherhood.

## Sacrifice

Trout wrote of postwar commemoration in America with memorials to the “... grandiloquent rhetoric of wartime”, when relatives were told their sons had willingly gone to war, died a noble death, and were heroes who had made the great sacrifice (2010, 35). Gender-specific messages portrayed men and women standing “for ideas, for larger concepts and values that made war seem noble and necessary” (Kitch, 2001, 104).

Magazine advertisements depicting the fallen hero appealed to readers’ emotions and suggested the patriotic spirit of the advertiser: “Sponsoring advertisers received a halo benefit that served branding and goodwill marketing initiatives.” (Hill, 2002, 240). This stereotyping served to glorify the masculine soldier to the predominantly female readership.

The illustrated text used 19th Century rhetorical techniques of representing war as good versus evil; the enemy defeated by our heroic soldiers. First World War propagandists, including Allied leaders, peddled the notion of the enemy: “that every war must appear to be a war of defence against a menacing, murderous aggressor. There must be no ambiguity about whom the public is to hate.” (Lasswell, 1971, 47). Michael’s autobiography shows how she aligned herself with this belief that the First World War was a battle of American good versus evil in which the:

... the very soul of Right being trampled into extermination by the mailed fist and iron shard of accumulated greed, egotism, nationalism, materialism incarnate in militaristic Might ... (1914, 26).

Michael reflected on a visit to Germany in 1914, just before war was declared. She compared the American soldier as having a “noble, heroic spirit that defied the “ruthless Hun”. The German soldier was a “messenger of ruthless hate and destruction” (1941,14). The Kaiser’s “super-soldier” troops:

... were like brutes to me - from the tips of their haughty helmets to the polished hobnails under their heavy boots, clanking with showy spurs. Instinctively I feared and disliked them. They were to me the antithesis of my ideal American soldier ... (1941, 27).

More immediate is her 1919 banner “The Victory Memorial Emblem: What I am by Moina Michael”. In bold blue ink she wrote out her fervent patriotism by identifying herself with the cause. American soldiers were “heroes who saved the World’s Liberty from Prussian Military Slavery” (Michael, Banner, SCM - Appendix 8). Dead soldiers were “our martyred heroes” (Letter, March 6 1919, UGA) and the survivors “served in defence of world liberty” (Flyer, undated, UGA). This evidence shows Michael engaging fully in the “best known myth in the world” which Henderson (1964) dates back to Greek and Roman mythology and which offers dramatic, emotional and psychological appeal. The myth of hero has meaning for a society trying to establish its collective identity (Henderson/Jung, 1964, 110). Michael was identifying with this broader cultural ideology whilst starting to construct her own meaning and memorialisation of the war.

The graves in the illustrated text are marked only with wooden crosses, a sign which supports - and appeals to - a particular religious ideology. It disregards soldiers from non-Christian religions who fought and died for their country. It takes for granted the religious ideology and beliefs of the readers and invokes a sense that what it claims to be true, is normal, the belief in resurrection. Piehler observed the representation of predominantly Christian soldiers dying on the battlefield through the presence of crosses to signify resurrection (1995, 101). In Europe, for many poets, the dead of the First World War were resurrected, rising up from their resting places to speak out.

Many sought to reach the sacred through the metaphor of resurrection. What better means of evoking feeling for the brotherhood of the living and the dead than by hearing them speak again? (Winter, 1995, 221).

Winter described the imagery of dead soldiers rising from their graves in Abel Gance's film *J'accuse* as "one of the great scenes of the early cinema". How in many parts of Europe the bereaved yearned for the return of their loved ones (1995, 15-18). The fallen soldier speaking from beyond the grave became : "... a ubiquitous device for expressing various versions of memory (Trout, 2010, 38). By depicting only Christian crosses on the battlefield the text perpetuates the belief shared by Christian readers and alienates readers belonging to other faiths. Michael could use this as a device for expressing her version of memory. She was a Baptist who became director of social and religious work at the State Normal School of the University of Georgia. She responds to this constructed meaning of the war as a Christian.

The text further constructs an ideological identity for the fallen hero soldiers. All are white. This depiction ignores the ethnic diversity of soldiers who enlisted, fought and died for America in the First World War (an estimated 380,000 African-American soldiers served in the First World War).

As discussed in the Literature Review, there was a disregard for the African-American soldier in the majority of post-war monuments which favoured the white soldier. (Piehler, 1995, 105). Advertisements in women's magazines avoided, rather than targeted, ethnic and African-American consumers despite their buying power: "The only African-American presence in the Ladies' Home Journal during the 1910s and 1920s was an occasional servant" or the character of "Aunt Jemima" who endorsed "the food she served to white people" (Scanlon, 1995, 221). The text empowers the white soldier. Through absence of a soldier of another race or colour - and by suggestion his bereaved relatives - are disempowered.

Michael's attitude to race is not clearly defined. Nor her reactions to only white, Anglo-Saxon Christian soldiers depicted in the illustrated poem. She was born into affluence and comfort. Her father owned a cotton plantation employing slaves. Roan wrote of the decline in the family's fortune post-Civil War and claimed: "None of her father's slaves had ever left him. They lived out their day with "Ol Marser" and were buried there" (Roan, 1941, 104) Michael was aware that black soldiers served in the war. She was accustomed to soldiers in uniform. Georgia University offered military training and she became a sponsor for the welfare of soldiers of Company E of the 122<sup>nd</sup> Infantry which was stationed in Athens. (1941, 35). She described each of them as "our Isaacs" who were being prepared for the "altar of sacrifice" (1941, 37). In New York she sought out Georgia soldiers in the debarkation hospitals, taking flowers. She first visited the "colored" ward and, 20 years later in her autobiography, remembered meeting Tom Lott on crutches:

Tom's right leg had been amputated as near the hip as possible. I gave him a carnation and told him I hoped the flower would tell him just how proud Georgia was of him. (1941, 64).

Did Michael intend the poppy to symbolise the deaths of all soldiers, black and white? She appealed to the US government that the flower be “adopted as the National emblem in commemoration of our soldiers who died in France” (Letter to C. Brand, Dec 10, 1918) and the Victory Memorial Emblem that “all may be entitled to wear” (Letter Dec 7, 1918). Although not addressing the glaring gaps in mediated versions of war, she did not draw attention to these absences and imbalances.

The text shows the bodies of the resurrected soldiers intact. Death has restored the wounds and mutilations of war. The only wound visible is a head wound, repaired with a partially-seen bandage bearing a trace of blood. The bandage is of course, representative of Bauer and Black’s surgical appliance products that heal. The presence of the head bandage suggests the illusion of a panacea. All will be well with a little patching up. Budreau remarked on the creation of American cemeteries on the former battlefields of the Western Front which glorified the sacrifice of soldiers by eschewing the reality of injury and death, thus maintaining the “myth of the fallen soldier” (2010, 48).

Michael described the text’s “graphic pictorialization” (1941, 47). She had seen the wounded soldiers in hospitals, and accompanied bereaved relatives to flag-draped coffins of repatriated dead bodies. She corresponds with Bauer and Black’s description of the poem as a “beautiful commemoration to the men who died bravely on the field of battle in Flanders” (Letter, December 7, 1918, UGA). She does not refer to the carnage, yet the theme of blood dominates her writings.

By comparison with imagery of war today, the text is not graphic, but aligns with Winter’s observation on imagery that reverted back to romanticism and heroism, without showing the true carnage of mangled bodies rendered unidentifiable. This idealistic notion of war was perpetuated by magazines such as *The Ladies’ Home Journal* that also advertised Palmolive shampoo, Carnation tinned milk, rugs and linen. Many readers would have been mothers and wives or sweethearts of serving sol-

diers, some of them by November 1918, in mourning. The front cover of this issue of the magazine depicted a trio of soldiers on the frontline with one soldier lovingly holding a photograph of an older woman, presumably his mother (*Ladies Home Journal*, November 1918, MAGA). This issue also contained a sheet of patriotic labels carrying the instructions to the reader: “Paste One on the Back of Your Letter to Him” (Article, February 2011, 52/53 ASDC).

One wonders about the emotional impact this illustrated poem had on bereaved mothers and wives whose loved ones perished on the battlefields and were buried in distant cemeteries.

### Blood

The poppies in the text cover the burning battlefield. They are used symbolically, not decoratively. Four streaks of red colour connect the poppies to the rising soldiers. This creates the illusion of soldiers rising from the poppies or of wounds bleeding into the soil. A streak of blood on the soldier’s head bandage is the only visible wound. The significance of the blood-stained bandage is representative of a product sold by Bauer and Black. The sign symbolises the blood spilled by the American soldier. There is no recognition of the millions who died on all sides. The text therefore is an homage only to the fallen American soldier.

One notices and remembers what one has been “coded” - usually by literature or its popular equivalent - to notice and remember. It would be a mistake to imagine that the poppies in Great War writings get there just because they are actually there in the French and Belgian fields. (Fussell, 1975, 246).

The signification of the red poppy as blood spoke to Michael historically, spiritually, conceptually and metaphorically. She attributed her awareness of the poppy symbol as predestined and inevitable. She alludes to the blood of her ancestry: the idea was “in my blood” (1941, 13). Her maternal family originated from Flanders in Belgium. In 1914 when Germany invaded Belgium she felt deeply wounded: “the blood of my inheritance cried out for defense and protection of Britain, France and FLANDERS - for their rescue!”(1941, 25). When America entered the war Michael wished to sacrifice her own blood by taking the place of the American soldiers:

I laid my all on my country's altar and offered all to God - every drop of blood, every capacity of brain, every throb of soul - and longed unto anguish for drops of blood enough to shed in their stead, and with each drop suffer all that would be required of them. (1941, 31).

Michael lost no kin. However, as school teacher to boys who became soldiers, and as a war volunteer overseeing the care of embarking and returning soldiers, she was deeply affected by their deaths and injuries. Michael did not write graphically of the ugliness of death and injury in war, though she would have seen damaged bodies in the debarkation hospitals of Staten Island, New York. She referred only to “How splendid they are! Some are seriously wounded. But they have that light in their eyes that is not on land or sea” (Michael, Letter, *The Madisonian*, January 1919). Instead she uses the symbolism of the poppy to convey the blood of war and injury. Reardon's recognition of the gendered use of flowers to “create a rhetoric of grief to communicate” the horror of war (2014,1) helps understand Michael's deference to the red poppy as the “crimson cup flower” which:

... caught the sacrificial blood of men who made the supreme sacrifice for the Right of Nations battling against the war of the Might of Greed. (Michael, 1941,33).

Michael drew upon her religious and spiritual beliefs to communicate her understanding of war and construct a meaning for memorialisation. She did this by appropriating the red poppy to communicate her own grief and horror. Convinced she was being directed by a higher power, she believed God and his “divine approval” chose the blood-stained poppy flower to serve the men of Flanders Fields (1941, 56). Ruskin described the poppy as “a scarlet cup ... like a burning coal fallen from Heaven’s altars” (1888, 28). Michael’s poppy was approved by God:

... since this blood-stained flower is fraught with meaning; since God has blessed its service to our men of “Flanders Fields,” we do believe it is begotten of God’s approval and has the same sanction and the same purpose as the Chalice known as the Holy Grail. This crimson-cup flower of the battle fronts, from the North Sea to the Mediterranean, caught the sacrificial blood of men who made the supreme sacrifice for the Right of Nations battling against the war of the Might of Greed. (Michael, 1941,33).

The red poppy signifying blood served as a summarising sign. Its presence triggered what Michael had been coded. It stirred emotions at the “sensory poles” as discussed by Turner (1967, 30). Michael was moved to act and communicate her rhetoric of grief. She was familiar with McCrae’s poem, first published in *Punch* magazine in England in 1915. By 1917 it was well-known in North America and Canada. It had inspired songs and response poems (French, 2004, 24 2004).



Michael immediately wrote a response poem on the back of a used envelope (believed lost). Here the blood of the American hero “never dies”; instead it adds a “lustre to the red”:

We Wear for Ye These Poppies Red [later changed to We Shall Keep the Faith]

Oh! You who sleep in “Flanders Fields”,

Sleep sweet - to rise anew!

We caught the torch you threw

And, holding high, we keep the Faith

With all who died.

We cherish, too, the poppy red

That grows on fields where valor led:

It seems to signal to the skies

That blood of heroes never dies,

But lends a lustre to the red

Of the flower that blooms above the dead

In Flanders Fields.

And now the Torch and Poppy red

We wear in honor of our dead.

Fear not that ye have died for naught:

We’ll teach the lesson that ye wrought

In Flanders Fields.

*(We Shall Keep the Faith, Michael, M., November 9, 1918, MFA).*

Archival evidence shows that Michael read and wrote poetry. On the sea voyage from Europe to America after war was declared, she was given a copy of Kipling's Barrack-Room Ballads published in 1892. The 1890 poem Tommy Atkins described the "contemptible inconsistency" in attitudes towards the soldier in peace-time and war-time. To Michael this hypocrisy was "unforgivable" and resonated with her (1941, 20). She had personal connection to the American fighting soldier (her father) and the boys she taught at school who became soldiers of the First World War. Throughout her campaign Michael consistency spoke for, and used the poppy symbol to speak for, the soldier and the veteran. That they would not have "died for naught", that they would be remembered. By contrast, Guerin's poppy fundraising campaign was to benefit the French widows and orphans. Michael's language and intent is clearly directed to the dead soldier. Her poem is her pledge that the soldier did not die in vain. That the blood of heroes will never die. With her poem Michael set out to lobby the government and organisations. She urged readers to:

re-dedicate yourselves on God's altar of a sweet liberty, for it has been has been re-baptised by the fresh young blood of our own boys, who have added a new lustre to our country's ideals. (Letter, The Madisonian, January 1919 retrieved [www.newspaperarchives.com](http://www.newspaperarchives.com)).

The theme of the blood-red poppy continued throughout Michael's campaigning. The poppy of Flanders Fields signified no other meaning than that of the sacrificial blood of the young American soldier (Appendix 8, Michael, handwritten paper banner, 1918, SCM). In 1920 the American Legion adopted the red poppy as its official memorial symbol (Resolution, September 27-29, 1920, GA). When, in 1921 the Legion changed its mind, dropped the poppy and adopted the daisy (Letter,

November 23 1921, UGA) Michael was outraged. She immediately lobbied for the red poppy reinstated as the only symbol worth considering:

I saw no meaning, no symbolism, no sentiment, no appeal, no appropriateness in the DAISY as a Memorial symbol for my Buddies sleeping in Flanders Fields, nor for those returning to our American hospitals, whose wounds testified that their blood crimsoned the Poppies of “Flanders Fields” with a deeper and more brilliant red ... There could be no other symbol! (Michael, 1941, 84).

### Victory

The illustrated text is dynamic. The appeal of the soldiers demands action, a resolution. Michael was persuaded to act. She was especially “transfixed” by the final verse of McCrae’s poem (1941, 47) as it appeared in *The Ladies’ Home Journal*:

To you from falling hands  
we throw the Torch -  
be yours to hold it high;

(McCrae, J.A. (1915), *Ladies’ Home Journal*, November 1918, GA).

A series of “codes” contributed to Michael’s interpretation of the signification of the torch in McCrae’s illustrated poem. She remembered a German propaganda poster displayed in Cologne in summer 1914. It portrayed a German soldier astride a “dashing war-horse, holding aloft a torch from which streamed angry flames, looping far back in vivid fire. It was a messenger of ruthless

haste and destruction.” (1941, 27). Michael’s response to the torch in the hands of the enemy is a negative one, whereas a torch in the hands of an American soldier represented the “eternal symbol of Love on the Sacred Altars, and the Light of man’s fullness of life, *Liberty!*” (Michael, 1941, 85).

When war was declared Michael was forced to return from Europe to America. Sailing on the *Carpathia* she arrived back in New York harbour to the sight of a woman holding up a torch, the Statue of Liberty. In December 1918 the statue dominated the scene of steamer ships returning soldiers along the Hudson River. She wrote: “majestically holding her Torch high, welcoming our boys home!” (GA, Article, ‘Invested in the Red Cross’).

The symbolism of a woman holding a torch may have been familiar to Michael. Almost 30 years earlier, a statue modelled on the Statue of Liberty was erected in Michael’s home county. Miss Freedom surmounts a golden dome atop the Georgia State Capitol Building in Atlanta (Appendix 3). The 22.5ft copper-clad statue raises a torch in her right hand and lowers a sword in her left. Erected in 1889, the statue was regarded as the Capitol’s own Statue of Liberty. A younger Michael would have known of the well-publicised erecting of Miss Freedom as she worked for four years running the Georgia Baptist Orphans’ Home in Atlanta (Roan, 1941,106).

Michael could also have been responding to society’s remembrance in New York. As discussed in the Literature Review, the Mayor’s Committee planned monuments to inspire a mood of victory and patriotism. Shops were decorated with memorials, sculptures and symbols evoking victory and patriotism. An Altar of Liberty was built at Madison Square Park, with a stage for performances of patriotic songs, dramas and music. A memorial scheme along Fifth Avenue was proposed to include an Arch of Victory, elements of which portrayed the overarching themes of “victory, remembrance and thankfulness” (Wilson, 2012, 92).

Oh, it is so wonderful to be here and see the fellows come home! ... In fact, there is so much inspiring emotion you feel like the orchestra of your own soul is playing at the sustained climax of soul exaltation. (Letter, Michael M. January, 1918, *The Madisonian*).

Michael's interpretation of the torch exemplifies Saussure's belief that a sign only has value in relation to other signs within the sign system (1974, 67) and Peirce's maxim that the sign "creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign" (Peirce, 1931-58, 2.228). Her resolve, evident in the first verse of her response poem, is to appropriate both the red poppy and the torch to achieve her aims:

And now the Torch and Poppy red  
We wear in honor of our dead.  
Fear not that ye have died for naught:  
We'll teach the lesson that ye wrought  
In Flanders Fields.

(*We Shall Keep the Faith*, Michael, M., November 9, 1918, MFA).

This response led to the creation of the Victory Memorial Emblem, incorporating a red poppy entwined with the "Torch of Liberty ... the light of Freedom and the Remembrance for those who had saved it for the world in 1914-1918." (Article, Michael, undated, GA). The torch is a cultural symbol which she uses in her response to the war. Although this emblem failed and the single poppy prevailed as the recognised symbol of remembrance, Michael believed no other symbol than the torch could better express the sentiment that "we have caught the Torch which those heroes threw to our willing hands" (Letter, Ms3137, UGA).

## Motherhood

Motherhood is a dominant signifier throughout the Michael texts. It propelled Michael's activism. First she bestowed upon the poppy the symbolism of a son. It was her "miracle child", "spirit child", a "flesh child", (1941,13) "... the God - given - child - of my heart and soul." (Letter, April 9, 1922, GA). She compared her creation of the poppy symbol to that of a mother giving birth. She is proud to see the poppy adopted by Commonwealth nations. It is how "a mother must feel when she sees her son grow into a manhood of usefulness to the world" (1941, 12).

Michael's adolescent ambition was not to be a married woman nor an old maid, but a "widow WITH A LOT OF NICE SONS!" (1941, 42). This statement is reminiscent of Jo's ambition in the best-selling novel *Little Women* (Alcott 1868) published in the year of Michael's birth. Like Michael, Jo is among sisters growing up in the shadow of the American Civil War and a daughter of a soldier. Jo dreams of building a school for wayward boys. "Oh, I should so like to be a mother to them ... I've always longed for a lot of boys" (1869, 377).

Visuals of motherhood in relation to the First World War are found within the Michael archives. A poster advertises the work of the Red Cross and depicts a "majestic" woman holding a wounded, young doughboy in her arms, and the slogan: "The Mother of all Humanity" (Poster, GA). Appendix 4 is a visual of a pensive mother and a poem that compares the serving soldier son to Christ. Many of the boys Michael taught at The Normal School in Georgia had reached enlistment age. Michael's campaigning actually began in 1917 when she argued for better conditions for the American soldiers serving in France:

My heart is so completely in this war, - I so yearn to do my part, and more if possible and I have been so closely associated with the soldier boys of my home town and surrounding country, that I see a great need for a home for them in Paris, a real American home atmosphere where everything is except mother, - and as near the comforting environments as is humanly possible to make it without her. (Letter, September 29, 1917, GA).

By ancestry she had a direct link to Flanders: her “motherland”. When war was declared she questioned how life could return to normal when: “... one part of civilisation - the mother part - was being bombed, gassed, demolished, ruined ... “(Michael, 1914, 26).

Michael makes no reference to the millions of bereaved German mothers of young sons. This absence, recognised only in hindsight, reinforces how discourse generates in society a mistrust of a certain group of people by use of language that separates humans from humans:

Fundamental to prejudice is the simple dichotomy of Us and Them, the Self and the Other. Prejudice of this kind can exist at all sorts of levels, using an enormous range of criteria in order to distinguish the Other from the Self: social class, skin colour, language, nationality, dialect, religion, gender, sexual preference, place of birth, ancestral origin, social customs. (Bloor & Bloor, 2007,128)

Winter observed how many post-war artists returned to the “sacred” to address the suffering and mediate loss (1995, 117 and 223). Michael used religious ideology to express her emotions at Armistice. She imagined how Sarah, wife of Abraham, felt when she welcomed back her young son, Isaac, after his father did not sacrifice him to God (Book of Genesis 17-22) “And they are our

Isaacs!” (1941, 38). Reflecting on the success of the poppy remembrance symbol as a fundraiser to help the rehabilitation of veterans, she wrote:

I had a full realization of the experience of the Mother of Moses as she remained unknown for the sake of the life of her beautiful babe who she instinctively knew was destined to be of great service to God and humanity.” (Michael, 194, 80).

However, only true mothers - and widows - of American soldiers during and after the First World War were accorded greater recognition for having lost a loved one (Budreau, 2008, 373/Christie, 2016, 34). The US government paid great recognition to the biological mother. Only “mothers of the blood” could be considered true bearers of America’s heroes (Budreau, 2008, 396).

Michael therefore was unable to wear the traditional symbols of a grieving blood mother. But she could construct a new and alternative version of motherhood. She could use the poppy and the torch combined as a new symbol of remembrance - the Victory Memorial Emblem that could be worn by all, relatives and non-relatives of fallen soldiers (Appendix 7). The new emblem could be:

used by all who would pay tribute to the gallant boys who went forth to die that democracy might live. Not only for the men and women who had men to give, but to those whose suffering was the greater that they had no one to sacrifice, would the symbol be an expression of the pride and gratitude of the world.

(Article/interview, New York World, February 19, 1919, UGA)



This new symbol could be worn by childless women like her. She would offer herself as sacrificial mother to her country and its soldiers. This action shows how Michael carved a role for herself within the first memory boom and post-war women's activism. It could be supposed that as a daughter of the south, she had witnessed the power of women's advocacy and agency in memorialisation after the American Civil War. This agency is evident in the letter Michael wrote to her congressman, the Hon. Charles Brand in Washington D.C. She enclosed her response poem with its original title *We Wear for These Ye Poppies Red*, and an article explaining that those who did not lose a loved one on the battlefields are not able - allowed, even - to wear a black armband or a gold star:

Many a person, who today is filled with a love and sympathy for some dear one who bravely fought on the fields of battle of this war, is not entitled to wear a black band and gold star in commemoration of the soldier's heroic death, (such as the sweetheart for her lover). This ought in itself necessitate the adoption by the government of some sentimental sort of emblem that all may be entitled to wear - sweetheart, mother, sister, etc, as a commemoration for the services performed by all men in khaki. I suggest as the emblem this flower, the Poppy - the flower of the fields of Flanders.

(Letter, December 7, 1918 UGA).

Michael's tone is authoritative and confident. She was among the new emancipated women of the early 20th Century. She states her intention to have the US war department adopt this single flower as "a tribute to those who have fought for and won the victory". Brand should make haste and put her request before the War Department ready for the signing of peace. She ends the letter by signalling her intentions for a publicity drive for her new poppy emblem project.

## Flags and Pins

A tradition in America was to display a Blue Star Service Banner, or flag, in the window of a home of a family member serving in the US Armed Forces (Brett H., front cover illustration, *The Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1918). The flag was first designed and patented in 1917 by Captain Robert L. Queisser of the 5th Ohio Infantry. It became the “unofficial symbol for parents with a child in active military service” (The American Legion [www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org)). If the serving family member died, a gold star was placed over the blue star. Appendix 4 is a poster from the Michael archives referencing the star as “God’s service flag” (Solon, H, Poster GA). Only America did this, not Britain.

Marvin and Ingle described the flag as the object of American patriotism which brings the citizens of a nation together. The flag is the ultimate ritual “... for it creates the nation from the flesh of its citizens. The flag is the sign and agent of the nation formed in blood sacrifice.” (1999, 1 and 63).

Appendix 5 shows the service star banner for Michael which was hung in the window of her office at the Winnie Davis Normal School in Athens, Georgia whilst she served the war effort in New York City (Banner, item 2001.30.0848, SCM). Appendix 6 shows the service flag Michael displayed in her office for Frank Lee Walker, a student of hers at The Normal School who died in service (Appendix 6, item 2001.30.0086, banner, SCM).

Michael was concerned that windows and doors once hung with service flags as reminders to passers-by of the contribution made by each family to the war, would be empty after Armistice. The new Victory Memorial Emblem could be reproduced onto flags that would “help maintain the

morale of the people who were the beneficiaries of the sacrifice of these homes through their sons and daughters who had brought PEACE TO THE WAR-WEARY WORLD.” (1941, 56).

*The New York Times* published an endorsement letter from President Woodrow Wilson that stated “American women should wear a black band on the left arm with a gilt star ... for each member of the family who has given up his life for the nation” (*President Approves Bands*, May 26, 1918, *New York Times*). His suggestion was derived from countless letters received from women across the nation who wrote to the White House seeking a meaningful alternative to painful mourning. (Burdreau, 2010, 96). Michael’s solution was to design a flag and a pin to wear on one’s body to signify the mourning of non-relatives too. The Victory Memorial Emblem would tell a bigger story of the war and the painful effects of loss:

The service flag met the psychological demand during the war, but now a new need has arisen. Something is needed to keep alive that thrill which we all feel now for the inspiration and the triumph of the fight for democracy. The poppy should be the victory flower, and the torch of Liberty the emblem chosen by a grateful world to memorialize the devoted sacrifice of men who, like the hero author of ‘In Flanders Fields’ gave their all to save humanity. Let us keep faith with them.

The poppy and the torch are the symbols of right and justice triumphant, can be used on flags and pins to be worn and used by all who pay tribute to the gallant boys who went forth to die that democracy might live ... Not only the men and women who had men to give, but to those whose suffering was the greater that they had no one to sacrifice, would the symbol be an expression of the pride and gratitude of the world. The flags

can be made to tell the whole war history of the house for all the passing world to see.

(Interview with Michael, *The New York World*, February 1919).

## Conclusion - The Victory Memorial Emblem

This chapter analysed how familiar signs mediated through an illustrated version of McCrae's poem in *The Ladies' Home Journal* November 1918 were received, interpreted and actively appropriated by Moïna Belle Michael. She drew on cultural symbols, myths and codes to construct her own response to the war and constructed an alternative form of memorialisation to honour the American soldier.

Michael was impacted by the signification of the 'Flanders Fields' red poppy and the torch. Mediated messages and visual symbolisms served as triggers, arousing Michael's inherent knowledge, experiences and emotions of war. It resonated with her observations of the German army massing in Europe in contrast to her perception of the American hero soldiers as righteous victors over an evil enemy. Boys she taught sacrificed their blood for the glory of God and America. They rose from the red poppy battlefields of the dead, just as Christ did. They would not rest until they were remembered and honoured by everyone, and not just mothers and wives.

These findings place Michael firmly within the first memory boom and how she was caught up in the dominant ideologies of heroism, sacrifice and victory. Promoting the single poppy and then creating the Victory Memorial Emblem gave Michael permission to contribute in a maternal form to communicate her grief and loss.

The illustrated text assumed a power over its readers, readers who shared the same network of ideas and assumptions. However, Michael is caught up in the dominant ideology of the war as the poppies are caught up in the ideology of masking the truth of the nature and carnage of war. The poppies became part of the message of healing, the covering of wounds. They become symbolic of bandages. A camouflage of the truth of war in the form of glorification and a certain romanticism. The symbolism of the poppy, at odds with itself today in the third memory boom, is shown to have been at odds with the symbolism of war since the beginning.

Michael, as a reader of the magazine, was arrested by the suggestions and persuasions within the visual and linguistic messages, as the advertisers intended. However she was not persuaded to buy bandages. She was persuaded instead to buy poppies.

Ironically, the illustrated text did achieve a purpose, a resolution. Michael was empowered. It generated in Michael a response in what Brummett describes as the adoption of a role or character known as a “third persona” (2010, 71). Michael adopted the voice of a movement. She would metaphorically give birth to an idea, her child, in the shape of the Victory Memorial Emblem and, as examined in the next chapter, would devote her energies to presenting her idea to the American nation. By initiating a nationwide movement in America to affect social change, Michael’s actions had important consequences for the evolution of war remembrance.

## Chapter Five

### The Victory Memorial Emblem Press Campaign

#### Data Presentation and Analysis

This chapter uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) to deconstruct two examples of typical texts that appeared in American newspapers in 1919 in relation the Victory Memorial Emblem campaign. It examines how the meaning of the campaign was communicated. How the text was used to inform, represent, shape and influence public opinion and behaviour. It positions Michael and the Victory Memorial Emblem campaign within the context of First World War remembrance in America.

#### Data Presentation

A quantitative search through an online archive of American national and regional newspapers used the variables “Moina Michael” and “Poppy”. The search revealed 755 results from 1918 to 2015, with 11 hits from 1918 and 1919. Two styles of coverage from the 1919 launch of the Victory Memorial Emblem media campaign, were selected for analysis. The first used only text (Appendix 11) while the second introduced the Victory Memorial Symbol and an image of Michael (Appendix 12).

Analysis of these differing samples showed how, when introduced, visual symbolism and stimuli (the new emblem and photograph) repeated certain mediated messages as discussed in Chapter 4 in order to reinforce ideas and ideologies. Michael drew on these to promote a new remembrance symbol.

## Data Analysis

Appendix 11. The text reads as follows:

### Flanders Fields Poppy and Torch of Liberty for War Service Flags

By MISS MOINA MICHAEL, University of Georgia

Take up our quarrel with the foe;  
To you from falling hands we throw  
The torch: be yours to hold it high;  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields  
- Lieut. Col. John McCrae.

And now the torch and poppy red  
We wear in honour of our dead.  
Fear naught that ye have died for  
naught;  
We've learned the lesson that ye taught  
In Flanders fields  
- Moina Michael

Out of every great event and for every great cause has come some fitting memorial. The great American organization of mercy has its red cross; the Y.M.C.A. its red triangle. For the boys serving their country on land or sea came the service flag and pin. The service flag met the psychological demand during the war, but now a new need has arisen. Something is needed to keep alive that thrill which we all feel now for the inspiration and triumph of the fight for democracy. The poppy should be the victory flower, and the torch of liberty the emblem chosen by a grateful world to memorialize the devoted sacrifice of men who, like the hero author of "In Flanders Fields", gave their all to save humanity. Let us keep faith with them.

The number of men who served could be shown by the service star - of blue if they lived and of gold if they have died - in the upper-left hand corner: service bars in the lower left-hand corner would tell the length of time served with the colors. The insignia of the branch of the service in the upper-right hand corner, and wound stripes - if warranted - in the lower right corner would make the story complete at a glance.

(*Bloomington Weekly Courier*, Bloomington, Indiana April 16, 1919 (Pdf file no: 197511933 [www.newspaperarchives.com](http://www.newspaperarchives.com)) shown in Appendix 11.

### The Headline

The importance of a headline, moreover, is due to the fact that it evokes within the reader a definite attitude toward the article before he has read a single line.

(Doob, 1925, 345).



The headline takes the form of an announcement about “war service flags” and suggests the reader pays attention to what is being announced. The word “for” suggests this is a benevolent service by a benefactor to the readers, the public, the provision of a supply of an item to fill a request. Therefore the headline assumes a need.

The title of the new Victory Memorial Emblem is not used. The emblem design had only recently been approved by the United States Patent and Trademark Office (March 11, 1919). It was still not widely known to the public. Therefore “war service flags” is familiar. It reinforces cultural beliefs that war service is deserving of being recognised and celebrated. Flags were familiar emblems, tokens of war, especially to readers whose loved ones served and died on the battlefield. The terms “Flanders Fields Poppy” and the “Torch” entered the language of war remembrance through McCrae’s poem *In Flanders Fields* published three years earlier. The “Torch of Liberty” was a towering statue proclaiming the ideals of America, a visual signification of a promoted social ideal, familiar to many and copied (Appendix 3).

Although the true author of the text is unclear, as discussed later in this chapter, “Miss Moina Michael, University of Georgia” is introduced through a byeline. It is unlikely the majority of readers of America’s national press knew Moina Belle Michael, aside from her followers in Georgia and readers in New York City. Similar excerpts announce her as “Miss” or the Georgia “woman” (e.g. *New York Tribune*, February 16, 1919, UGA/The Banner, Athens, February 9, 1919/Cherokee Advance, [www.newspaperarchive.com](http://www.newspaperarchive.com)). This defined a gendered role for Michael, positioning her within the masculinity of war and discourse on war remembrance on a national scale.

## The Poems

A second voice, John McCrae, author of the poem *In Flanders Fields* is introduced in the text to reinforce intent. McCrae's final verse - argued by Trout, Fussell and others as either patriotism or propaganda - is positioned alongside the final verse of Michael's response poem. This appropriation of McCrae's poem is presented in the Victory Memorial Emblem campaign flyers (Appendix 9).

The verses are positioned side-by-side. Michael's response reflects the words of McCrae. It answers McCrae's immortal plea: "Take up our quarrel with the foe" with the reassurance: "Fear not that ye have died for naught". Bloor and Bloor observed how referencing of another author's work is a means of introducing "other voices" into a text to contribute information, or support or dismiss the claims made by the main author (2007, 55). McCrae's call for action pre-empts Michael's justification for action yet McCrae himself is dead and cannot sanction the use of his poem. Ironically his voice appears in this newspaper text in a similar way: the voices of the dead soldiers in the illustrated poem (Appendix 1) as discussed in Chapter 4. Again, voices of the dead have been commanded to speak in an emotional appeal to readers. This concept of credibility was referred to by Aristotle as "ethos" and the mode of persuasion and emotional appeal as "pathos" (Jowett and O'Donnell, 2006, 40).

Michael is the "participant" and takes a "role" (Bloor and Bloor, 2007, 10). Her voice is positioned alongside the voice of McCrae, a male soldier who served on the battlefield and died. The text elevates the voice of a female war volunteer on the home front by positioning Michael alongside McCrae. Interestingly, McCrae's symbolism of the red poppy growing in Flanders Fields became famous throughout the English-speaking world. Michael's interjection and lobbying for the symbol

yielded repercussions to this day yet her activism has not been studied at length in current secondary sources, as discussed in the Literature Review.

### The Main Text

Parts of the text were published in an earlier interview with Michael by the *New York World* (Newspaper clipping, February 16, 1919, UGA). The form, content and style of the text was then repeated in a number of titles nationwide. It is not clear whether the text was received by the newspaper as a paid-for editorial or press release from New York publicist Lee Keedick, or as a letter to the editor. Michael wrote: “The entire press of the country carried publicity, and letters by the thousands were sent to every possible educating group” (Michael 1941, 59). Examples of these promotional letters exist in the Michael archives.

Doob described the practice of “space-grabbing’ by publicity agents who submitted editorials and induced editors to print the material: “Once again, this is persuasion in its purest form. So the “press agent “creates” news, so that the paper will voluntarily accept his “handouts” (1925, 181-185). The material then appears in the newspaper columns as “if it had been originated by the paper itself” (Flint, 1925, 305). As demonstrated in Chapter 4 there was blurring of editorial and advertising in mass circulation publications of the early 20th Century. This “psychological advantage” over direct and blatant advertising ensured information had a greater chance of “being perceived and of being held in higher esteem” (Doob, 1925, 191).

### The Author

Bloor and Bloor asserted the importance of recognising the perceived identity of the author, where they position themselves within that discourse and where others position the author (2007, 22).

Jowett and O'Donnell noted:

Identification must take place between the persuader and the persuadee in persuasive communication. Common sensations, concepts, images, and ideas that make them feel as one are shared ... The persuader is a voice from without, speaking the language of the audience members' voices within. (2006, 37).

It was not possible to identify the true author of the text because it is unclear whether the editorial (or letter to the editor) was written by Keedick, or Keedick and Otto Ferris, or written by all three including Michael. According to Keedick, "all my records pertaining to the poppy were destroyed by fire" (Letter, December 24, 1940, GA).

Michael initially shared her response poem and idea for the poppy with Ferris, acknowledging her lack of business acumen and finance. She could "supply sentiment and ideas, but it was just blowing bubbles." (Michael, 1941, 57). Ferris urged Michael to pursue the possibility of establishing some form of new national symbol and borrowed Michael's materials to show to Keedick. Keedick requested an interview with Michael.

Bernays considered the role of the public relations agent as bringing an "idea to the consciousness of the public" and whose primary function is to advise his client at every stage of his client's ideas, products, or activities which may affect the public or in which the public may have an

interest.” (1928, 64). Keedick saw “possibilities” in the symbol of the red poppy as a national memorial emblem on a “national scale”:

Mr Keedick took full charge of perfecting the Torch and Poppy Emblem and publicity which would educate the public in its significance (Michael, 1941, 59).

Michael’s original intention was to use the “simple red, four petaled poppy” immortalised by McCrae’s poem. However, she wrote: “when I began to work with Mr. Lee Keedick and his artists he thought the Torch should have its place in the Emblem ...!”

Keedick represented famous personalities including H. G. Wells, Arthur Conan Doyle and Howard Carter. He advertised himself as “Manager, World’s Most Celebrated Lecturers” (*New York Times*, February 16, 1918, [www.newspaperarchives.com](http://www.newspaperarchives.com)). By the time he was introduced to Michael he was recognised as a “formidable” agent, about to embark on a European tour to measure post-war public sentiment (Saunders, 2013, 102). Bernays considered the personality to be “an instrument of propaganda” (1928, 166) and observed that “anyone with sufficient influence can lead sections of the public at least for a time and for a given purpose.” (1928, 54). Perhaps Keedick saw possibilities in promoting a new post-war emblem using Michael as a female figurehead of America’s new memorialisation.

The Contract confirms that Michael was paid a dollar for her ideas and designs and promised royalties on the sale of her poem and design. It entitled Ferris and Keedick to launch Michael’s Flanders Field Memorial Poppy idea on the following terms:

...Michael hereby assigns and transfers to said Ferris and Keedick all her rights and interests in and to said verses above described and said ideas and designs above designated, and the said Ferris and Keedick agree to launch the campaign for the adoption of said poppy as the official symbol of victory and to have designs made of said poppy and to obtain patents in the United States and other countries ...

... Michael agrees to turn over to said Ferris and Keedick all her verses, sketches, etc, and everything bearing on said verses or ideas or designs and to cooperate in the promotion of the efforts of the said Ferris and Keedick.

(Contract, December 13, 1918, GA).

This consideration is therefore acknowledged when attempting to analyse the author stance. The text exudes a jubilant mood felt by the author who presumes this feeling is shared by readers: they too are thrilled war has ended, the nation is victorious and wrong has been righted. “The more a concept is reinforced, the more real it seems and the more difficult it is to challenge.” (Bloor and Bloor, 2007, 88). The author is taking advantage of socially agreed conventions and opinions in line with themes demonstrated in Chapter 4 and in doing so, feels free to present their ideas “according to the conventions of the particular discourse” (Bloor and Bloor, 2007, 47).

The personal pronoun “we” in the heading is used to construct an identity but also to establish a rapport - and in the case of war dead, sympathy and empathy - with the audience. The author sees themselves in relation to others in their social sphere with similar ideas and opinions: people in the aftermath of a great war reflecting on the shock and horror of a lived experience. The author draws from existing discourses to convey how “we” should be feeling, building on existing, psychological beliefs to create new belief.

Setting out the new belief foregrounds the author's intent to affect behaviour, in this case to encourage the acceptance of a new war remembrance symbol using the role of the press: "The poppy should be the victory flower, and the torch of liberty the emblem". Furthermore it should be chosen out of gratitude, as giving thanks to the dead soldiers who died victorious, saving the world for us. This rhetoric reinforces the notion of a gloriously fought war won with patriotic endeavour. A final flourish is a rallying cry for this new cause, a call to action: "Let us keep faith with them".

The suggestion is for a new product - "something" - to answer an implied want because "a new need has arisen". The text reinforces the past, tradition and the ways in which familiar organisations have served humanity. A series of messages make up what Bloor and Bloor call the "rhetorical structure of the discourse" (2007, 38). The status quo is invoked in the first line "Out of ever great event and for every great cause has come some fitting memorial" to refer to established symbols. Foregrounding with familiar, universal symbols helps to introduce a new symbol and demonstrates intent, by ambitiously connecting the iconic Red Cross with a new symbol soon to be revealed.

In conclusion, this chapter acknowledges the role of the press and public relation in pursuing a new remembrance symbol for America in post-war memorialisation. The purpose of the text is to influence readers already familiar with the sign system of beliefs (war sacrifice, patriotism, glorification of war) by urging them to accept or perpetuate these beliefs. Readers are encouraged to engage in behaviour that corresponds with propagandistic appeals to donate money or campaign for a noble cause. There is no discourse about war's destruction or the enormous loss of life on all sides. A new symbol is used to persuade an audience in the aftermath of war to agree with the rhetoric and to respond by adopting, wearing and displaying this new symbol.

## Appendix 12

The second style of newspaper content for analysis is a single column entry with a photograph of Michael and a visual of the Victory Memorial Emblem (*Corsicana Daily Sun*, Texas, May 7, 1919, [www.newspaperarchives.com](http://www.newspaperarchives.com)).

This style was repeated by newspapers across America including in Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, Ohio and Vermont. It carried a single column text with the heading “Designs Victory Emblem” or in some cases “Miss Moina Michael”. Beneath this was a three-quarter portrait photograph of Michael imprinted with the new Victory Memorial Emblem of the poppy and torch crossed, followed by a single column of text.

### The Photograph

Bernays described how an important undertaking, from building a cathedral to electing a president, was carried out by first creating a visual picture in the minds of the population (1928, 52). So the inclusion of a portrait photograph of Michael in this text is highly significant. American writer Susan Sontag in her essays *On Photography*, recognised the “grammar” of a photograph and how one has the ability to teach us a “new visual code” of what is worth seeing and observing and to be aware of its multiple meanings. (1979, 3).

The portrait of Michael is a three-quarter view. Her face is turned away from the camera, revealing her profile. Her pose, with eyes averted from direct contact with the reader, appears at first glance



less assertive than a direct, full-face view. Hers is a demure, tentative stance. However, on closer reflection her eyes look forward purposefully. She appears like a figurehead on the mast of a ship, heading out on a journey forward. She stares to the right or across the Atlantic Ocean to the East (to Flanders in Europe and the buried American soldiers. The scarred landscape of her ancestral homeland? In some newspapers she is set at the edge of the page, looking inwards to the page. In others she is set at the far right of the page, looking outwards beyond the newspaper edge. Sontag wrote:

In the normal rhetoric of the photographic portrait, facing the camera signifies solemnity, frankness, the disclosure of the subject's essence ... (For politicians the three-quarter gaze is more common: a gaze that soars rather than confronts, suggesting instead of the relation to the viewer, to the present, the more ennobling abstract relation to the future). (1979, 39).

Barthes compared the three-quarter photograph with the "realistic outlook" of the person shown in the full-face photograph. The full-face photograph "expresses penetration, gravity, frankness; the future deputy is looking squarely at the enemy, the obstacle, the 'problem'." By contrast, he said, the three-quarter face photograph:

... suggests the tyranny of an ideal: the gaze is lost nobly in the future, it does not confront, it soars, and fertilizes some other domain, which is chastily left undefined. Almost all three-quarter face photos are ascensional, the face is lifted towards a supernatural light which draws it up and elevates it to the realm of a higher humanity ... where all the world's problems are solved ...

(Barthes, 1972, 92/93).

Doob argued that once a picture's placing and caption had been determined by an editor then "it is bound to emerge as a piece of propaganda" (1925, 351). It is not known whether the position of the pose was directed by Michael, the studio photographer, or indeed Lee Keedick. Was this Michael's best side? Or is she symbolically looking eastwards? Certainly, her aims for the Victory Memorial Emblem were universally ambitious. Ironically, although the Emblem failed, the single poppy prevailed in Britain, far more strongly than in its American birthplace.

The origins of Michael's portrait are unknown and it does not carry a photographer's credit. It appeared first in a newspaper interview with Michael in the *New York World* (Clipping, February 16, 1919, UGA). She was referred to as "director of the State Normal School of the University of Georgia" and so the pose and style of the photograph accentuated an authority and served to validate Michael.

The purpose of the photograph is to endorse the information that follows, the new Victory Memorial Emblem. It introduces Michael as a new voice in the remembrance and aftermath of war or, if directed by Keedick, as a personality as explored earlier in this chapter.

Was the intention to persuade public opinion or attract certain groups to Michael and what is being proposed? This is nowhere more suggestive than when the text and Michael's portrait appear as the lead on the Women's Page of the *Biloxi Daily Herald* in Mississippi (Cutting, March 26, 1991 [www.newspaperarchives.com](http://www.newspaperarchives.com)). This positioning aligns with early 20th Century women's suffrage and emancipation, and how war brought forth women's voices into the political and collective remembrance arenas.

Doob explained: “Pictures offer a splendid opportunity to study both intentional and unintentional propaganda.” It is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse the imagery within the whole page of the newspaper in which this insert appears. However, as shown in Appendix 12, the context is one that adheres to the ideology of a just war and the gendered roles of masculinity and femininity. (1925, 347). Michael looks directly across the page to the Allied flags arranged like a memorial atop an advertisement for the ‘Victory Liberty Loan’ which reads:

Peace is Worth the Price

Worth ANY price we have to pay for it!

Some of this price we have paid. Many of our boys have paid their all. The rest is up to us - to us who have benefitted by their sacrifices - to us whose peace has been secured.

Back the Victory Liberty Loan to your limit!

(*Corsicana Daily Sun*, Texas, May 7, 1919, [www.newspaperarchives.com](http://www.newspaperarchives.com)).

Michael’s gaze then looks beyond this advertisement to face the full-front view of Lieutenant Colonel W. C. Harillee who is given credit for his marksmanship of the United States marines. It praises Harillee’s intuitive plan to construct rifle ranges before America’s entrance into the First World War and reports that Harillee advocates a permanent government policy to ensure all citizens be taught how to shoot a rifle.

In *Mythologies*, Barthes referred to the power of a photographic portrait having the “power to convert”. For example, what is being signified by a portrait printed in a Parliamentary candidates electoral prospectus is an “effigy” of a candidate. Their likeness offers a personal link between them and the voting public, transmitting through the photograph: “... not his plans, but his deep motives,

all his family, mental even erotic circumstances, all his style of life of which he is at once the product, the example and the bait ... in short, what we call an ideology” (1972, 91).

Michael’s determination to remember the sacrifices of the hero soldiers of a just war against an evil enemy, through the signification of their blood spilled on the battlefield with the red poppy is summed up through the power of her portrait.

### The Emblem

The design of the Victory Memorial Emblem was patented on March 11, 1919 for three and a half years (US States Patent Office 53,018, March 11, 1919). It incorporated a single red flower and a lit, flaming torch (Appendix 7 and 10). The two are arranged diagonally in a cross-over design. This is similar to the circular service pin of WWI bearing the US flag crossed with a blue-star service flag, and the words “over there” (Source: ebay collectors WWI memorabilia). The design is a derivative of Art Nouveau and Symbolism. Art Nouveau was a style of design which emerged from the 1890s until the end of the First World War, and is characterised by “sinuous linearity and flowing organic shapes based on plant forms” (Tate, 2008, 25). Art Nouveau was used in graphic design and poster art, sharing an affinity with the bold colours and abstract lines on a flat space of Symbolism (Duncan, Alastair, 1994, 79).

Unless the reader was familiar with a common cornflower poppy (*Papaver Rhoeas*) it is not apparent that the flower is anything other than a flower of some species. The word ‘poppy’ is not included in the actual emblem. The poppy points towards to the top, left-hand corner. It is open, in full

bloom, its four petals are new, healthy and fresh and not wilting. The flower is positioned behind the torch. The torch is of a similar size to the poppy flower. It points to the right-hand corner of the cloth. It is a lit torch, with gently flowing flames. The head of the torch is of a similar width to the poppy flower head.

The emblem is positioned on the portrait of Michael on the top of her arm. This could provide another explanation of why a three-quarter view of Michael was engineered rather than a full-front view. This signifies the wearing of the emblem on her sleeve and corresponds with knowledge gained from the Literature Review, of bereaved mothers and wives wearing a gold star on armbands to remember their fallen soldier. This superimposing of the emblem onto Michael demonstrates how her idea could be worn, or that Michael herself has become the symbol, a theory amplified by the following words found written on a cloth banner in the Michael archives (Appendix 8):

What I Am

By Moina Michael

I am a symbol.

I pay silent tribute to our heroes who  
saved the World's Liberty from Prussian Military Slavery.

I remind you to "keep Faith" with  
all who died to save our "Torch" of Freedom.

The Poppy of Flanders Fields memori-  
alizes the Sacrificial blood of our men.

Am I giving my message from your window?

Will you pin me on your breast that  
you may take my message with you?

The Victory is won. We must “keep Faith”.

What I Am

(Item 2001.30.0230, Moina Michael Collection, Georgia Capitol Museum).

The Text

Inspired by the beautiful lines of Colonel McRae’s poem, “In Flanders Fields,” Miss Moina Michael, who is a war worker in service in the Y.M.C.A. overseas conference headquarters, located at Columbia university, has designed an emblem entwining the Flanders poppy with the torch of liberty, which she offers for adoption as a national victory memorial to be displayed throughout the country.

(Appendix 11)

The text is in the style of a reported wartime announcement. It acknowledges Michael as a “war worker” rather than as “director of the State Normal School of the University of Georgia” as described earlier. Positioning her in the context of war service fits the overall newspaper page which is predominantly concerned with recognising peace and also the idea that learning to shoot a rifle helped win the war.

Despite nationwide publicity to promote the Victory Memorial Emblem as discovered in the newspaper online archive, the emblem failed to attract a following. Michael returned to her teaching post in Georgia leaving Keedick and Ferris to manage the campaign. She maintained her enthusiasm for

the campaign and the emblem. Keedick “abandoned his efforts” because “he found so little public interest, seemingly, in this enterprise” (1941, 74). Otto Ferris disappears from correspondence.

In conclusion, a critical close-reading of the two examples of newspaper texts in relation the Victory Memorial Emblem campaign demonstrates the role of the press and public relations. It shows how the campaign was communicated to readers, and how text and symbolisms were used to inform, represent, shape and influence public opinion and behaviour. The introduction of a photograph of Michael served her role not just in championing the Victory Memorial Emblem and as a key figure in First World War remembrance and memorialisation in America.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion

This chapter re-affirms the objectives of this research, to analyse largely-unpublished primary source material to discover more about the “lesser-known” event of Michael’s role in the origins of the red poppy remembrance symbol (President Barack Obama, 2014). It demonstrates how original empirical research contributes to existing knowledge and fills a gap in the history of First World War remembrance. It summarises the four themes as outlined in the introduction: Moïna Belle Michael as a forgotten woman of war; her use of cultural resources as a response to First World War remembrance; the role of press and public relation in her Victory Memorial Campaign; and Michael as a key figure in memorialisation.

Finally, this chapter signposts opportunities for further research and analysis of the historical archives in Georgia, USA.

### Research Objectives

Empirical analysis of largely unpublished primary research material found in the Michael archives was necessary in order to answer the research question: *what mediated messages and visual symbolisms led Moïna Belle Michael to appropriate the red ‘Flanders Fields’ poppy?*

As demonstrated in the Literature Review, Michael features in relatively few historical and academic texts. When she is acknowledged it is to recognise only her role in the evolution of John Alexander McCrae’s ‘Flanders Field’ poppy as a symbol of war remembrance. This research shows how secondary sources do not fully address the genesis of the poppy symbol in relation to Michael’s his-



tory, background and agency; how these factors contributed to her need to mediate her own grief through a new movement and remembrance symbol. Here actions and endeavours remain a largely-untold story.

The extent of Michael's lobbying and campaigning for the symbol and the emergence of the Victory Memorial Emblem have been omitted or ignored. This is in stark contrast to the wealth of studies on commemoration and memorialisation. As highlighted by this research into the wealth of visual and linguistic material available in the Michael historical archives, this information and the resulting data analysis, are of value.

This research provides an opportunity to understand underlying and contemporary cultural influences that inspired and empowered Michael. Her need to recognise and reflect on a war that impacted on non-relative civilians and bystanders alike resulted in her actions. It reveals Michael as hugely significant in both the first memory boom of collective remembrance and in the third memory boom. As a key figure in First World War studies, her actions impacted citizens and veterans a century ago as they do today. Her endeavours strengthened and affected war remembrance history and are worthy of further analysis and discussion.

### Research Aims and Findings

By applying the methodologies of semiotics, information extracted from the primary source material analysed how Michael received and responded to the dominant messages of war within post-war America. It showed how she attempted to transmit these ideas using the power of the national press. Close-reading of the selected texts showed how the red poppy flower and the torch symbols were received, interpreted and actively appropriated by Michael by triggering cultural signifiers of sacri-

fice, blood, victory and motherhood. Findings emphasise a core argument of this thesis in line with Barthes' theory of myth as a system of communication where mediated signs are open to interpretation by readers who share the same network of ideas and assumptions: "Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message" (1972, 109).

By deconstructing the illustrated poem, and conducting a comparative study with archived correspondence, findings conclude that denoted and connotative symbolisms led Michael to interpret the signification of the poppy and the torch in line with her own sign system of beliefs and conditioning. Doing so enabled her to channel a way to assuage her own grief about the war and loss by bestowing on the poppy a new identity as a symbol for all to grieve and remember. She inadvertently created a new identity and role for herself, as an advocate for change and a wider inclusion in conventional war remembrance.

Critical discourse analysis of the newspaper texts promoting the new Victory Memorial Emblem, positions this campaign in the context of American remembrance. America was struggling to find appropriate ways to grieve and honour and remember its war dead. Michael was well-positioned to respond to these messages. She received these messages from her own ideological position. Data shows how she appropriated these messages and then mediated them using the press and public relations. Michael was a woman in a man's world of war, creating her own language of remembrance to affect social change by persuading others of the need for something new.

A discovery of this research has merely added to the complex, and ongoing furore surrounding the appropriation - some would say exploitation - of the poppy flower, and accusations that as a symbol it is still used to glorify war. That the illustrated poem in the *The Ladies' Home Journal* November 1918 was an advertisement for surgical dressings is an early example of the commercialisation of

the poppy. Used in this way, the poppy becomes a bandage of war - a panacea to heal the grief - yet disguises the true horror and carnage of war.

This research recognises and acknowledges contradictions. Michael was caught up in the dominant ideology of war sacrifice, just as the poppies were caught up in the myth of war and became a symbol to camouflage the truth of war. The symbolism of the poppy, at odds with itself today, is shown to have been at odds with the symbolism of war sacrifice since its inception.

### Recommendations

This new research offers tantalising new leads of inquiry by offering scope for further research.

The time frame of analysis was the inception of Michael's idea on November 9, 1918 to Spring 1919 to coincide with the launch of the Victory Memorial Emblem. Primary source material exists right up until Michael's death in 1944. There is scope to warrant a longer study with an increased time frame in order to position Michael's lifelong campaigning within the context of First World War remembrance today. A study could also focus on the decline of the poppy symbol in America. The American Legion adopted the poppy as its official symbol due in part to Michael's lobbying, and yet Americans today do not revere the poppy as many Britons do.

Further research could be conducted into Michael's actions within a gendered context, in particular her uncomfortable relationship with contemporary French volunteer war worker Madame Anna Guérin who introduced the poppy symbol to the Commonwealth and Great Britain. Michael and Guérin met briefly, corresponded little, and each believed the poppy remembrance symbol to be

their idea. Nevertheless, they worked as female agents of collective remembrance at the dawn of 20th Century women's suffrage in the immediate aftermath of the First World War.

Further research could also use these findings as a wider, comparative analysis of how floral symbolism is used to make sense of loss in historic and contemporary wars. As identified, signs often conceal some interest whether political or commercial, and the proliferation of signs today - including the red poppy - makes it imperative to decode the interests behind them.

Finally, further research could look at why the Victory Memorial Emblem failed to ignite the attention of the public and why the single red poppy prevailed. Was its failure down to Keedick's inaction, Michael's return to her post as a school teacher, or a public becoming disillusioned with the notion of victory?

### Contributions to Knowledge

This thesis contributes original empirical research of largely-unpublished material, including texts and visuals held in storage by the Michael family. At the time of writing, this material was still being archived. It is probable more material exists in undiscovered collections. Correspondence of letters and articles by Michael and her contemporaries including US government war department officials and The American Legion, provide new insight. Findings show Michael's role in the poppy symbol narrative as an interesting case study of symbolism in First World War remembrance and of how botanical metaphor can be used to mediate grief.

Finally, this research has contributed to the delivery of papers at the RememberMe Conference at the Hull University, at the University of Georgia in Michael's birthplace near Athens, Georgia to coincide with the Michael centenary in 2018.

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(Note: at the time of writing this thesis, certain items in the Michael family archives were being donated to the Georgia archives. These items were set to be catalogued accordingly.)

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