

M

essalina

or Salomé?

The Life and Times of Mata Hari,

International Woman of Mystery

*Olga Pulloffski, the beautiful spy!
The gay continental rascalion!
Some say she's Russian and some say she's French
But her accent is Gin and Italian.
Shame on you! Shame on you! Oh fie fie!
Olga Pulloffski you beautiful spy!*

R.P. Weston & Bert Lee (1935)

In October 1964 the Frisian poet Douwe Tamminga held a whip-around at that year's Frisian Bookweek Ball as part of a personal campaign to raise a statue in Leeuwarden to Margaretha Geertruida Zelle, Friesland's most famous woman. But the project foundered on the municipal powers that were. The trouble, Tamminga was informed politely, was not that Ms Zelle fell short on fame, but that as long as her international press image remained *'both positive and negative in equal measure'*, such a mark of recognition from her native city would not be opportune.

This reticence in official quarters was understandable, for Mata Hari, to give Margaretha Zelle her more familiar stage name, then as now remains an icon of controversy. As Raphael Gould, the Director of the American Library Service, put it in 1954, Mata Hari was so notorious throughout the world that her name was synonymous with 'spy'. So much so, in fact, that after 1919 the CIA used to refer to certain female agents by the code-name 'Mata Hari'.

Today, in 2001, an Internet search for Mata Hari brings up some unexpected results, of which a good number lead to the webtool Mata Mari Pro v2.01: *'If you need information for research, job, fun or profit, let Mata Hari be your personal agent to unlock the Web's secrets.'* Next we hit a site selling fine French lingerie, including a Mata Hari outfit *'ideal for secret...missions'*, as exemplified by a kneeling model whose flimsy attire is clearly designed to divert attention from the pistol clutched behind her back. On yet another site we come across news about a piece of cinetrash by Curtis Har-



A portrait of Margaretha Zelle by Isaac Israëls. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

Margaretha Geertruida Zelle and Rudolph 'John' MacLeod in April 1897, just before they set sail for the Netherlands Indies. Mata Hari Collection, Fries Museum, Leeuwarden.



rington, *Mata Hari* (1985), with Sylvia 'Emmanuelle' Kristel in the protagonist's role. No great hit at the time, the film is now available on video and is promoted in terms such as '*Mata Hari weaves her spell between enemy camps and between satin sheets leaving behind her broken hearts...and lifeless bodies*'. In a similar vein we find the otherwise highly respectable A&E Biography Series commending the documentary *Mata Hari, The Seductive Spy* for its evocation of '*mystery, seduction, betrayal and duplicity*', '*deadly pillow talk*', and '*the beauty who captivated a continent*'.

Notorious, deceitful, and a voluptuary...not on the face of it precisely the kind of reputation that merits a statue. But for all that it has stood in pride of place in Leeuwarden since 1978.

'A single orchid amidst a thousand dandelions'

Margaretha was born in Leeuwarden on 7 August 1876 to Antje van der Meulen and Adam Zelle, a well-to-do dealer in hats and caps. A cherished firstborn, nothing was too good for her. She was always dressed in the pret-

tiest of clothes, and for her sixth birthday was given a miniature goat-cart in which she created quite a stir in town. As she grew up her tall, slender frame, challenging eyes, and melodious voice set her apart from her fellows. Her general bearing made most of the other girls think her brazen, yet at least one classmate betrayed a secret admiration with her inscription '*a single orchid amidst a thousand dandelions*' in Margaretha's autograph album.

Adam Zelle was a vain and ambitious man, but a series of misfortunes on the stock exchange eventually bankrupted him. Rather than attempt to rebuild his business, he ran out on his family and moved to Amsterdam. In 1890 the couple were formally separated, and Antje van der Meulen died shortly after. Margaretha was placed with an uncle, who sent her off to Leiden to be trained as a kindergarten teacher. This, however, was put paid to after she was caught reclining half-naked in the lap of the headmaster, a certain Wijnbrandus Haanstra. Next she moved to another uncle in The Hague where, in 1894, she came across this interesting announcement in *Het Nieuws van de Dag*: '*Officer on leave from the Indies seeks amiable young lady with a view to marriage*'. A few months later 38 year-old Rudolph 'John' MacLeod and Margaretha had their first meeting at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Six days later they were affianced. MacLeod was much taken with the youthful beauty, while she, for her part, was not insensible to the somewhat crude admiration she evoked. In one of her letters she writes: '*Do I like being naughty? you ask. Well, Johnnie dear, ten times over rather than once. How fortunate that we both have the same fiery nature.*' After an engagement of barely four months their marriage was solemnised in the town hall of Amsterdam.

But it did not take long for the rot to set into the pair's initially passionate but never balanced relationship. In 1897 they had gone out to the Dutch Indies with their son Norman John. MacLeod was promoted to Major and posted to Malang; a daughter, Louise Jeanne, followed in 1898. Meanwhile tension between the two was mounting. Malang was a social centre where Margaretha could live out her yearnings for glamour in an endless round of balls and theatre-going. MacLeod resented his wife's expensive shopping habits and flirtatiousness, and frequented local prostitutes. When their son died in 1899 under suspicious circumstances – poisoned, rumour had it, by an Indonesian in revenge for some brutality of MacLeod's – there was a brief rapprochement. But Margaretha could not reconcile herself with her husband's stinginess, brutishness, alcoholism, and infidelity. As for him, he could not stand her free-spiritedness, and charged her with being a bad mother. Writing to his sister he calls her a '*stinking bitch*', a '*leech*', and mentions that '*I can't help laughing when I think of her remarrying one day, and how this fellow, once it's too late, will just like me discover that he's been plunged from heaven into hell.*'

In October 1900 John retired from the army and took his family to Sindanglaja, a quiet backwater. To the life-loving Margaretha it was unthinkable that she should sit out her youth in such a hole of a place. After two years of persistent arguing she won the day and in March 1902 they returned to Amsterdam to live. However, the marriage had deteriorated beyond all salvage, and at the end of August of the same year they were divorced. John moved away, taking their daughter with him. He was never to pay a penny in alimony. Margaretha, left with no means whatsoever, took off for Paris to seek her fortune.

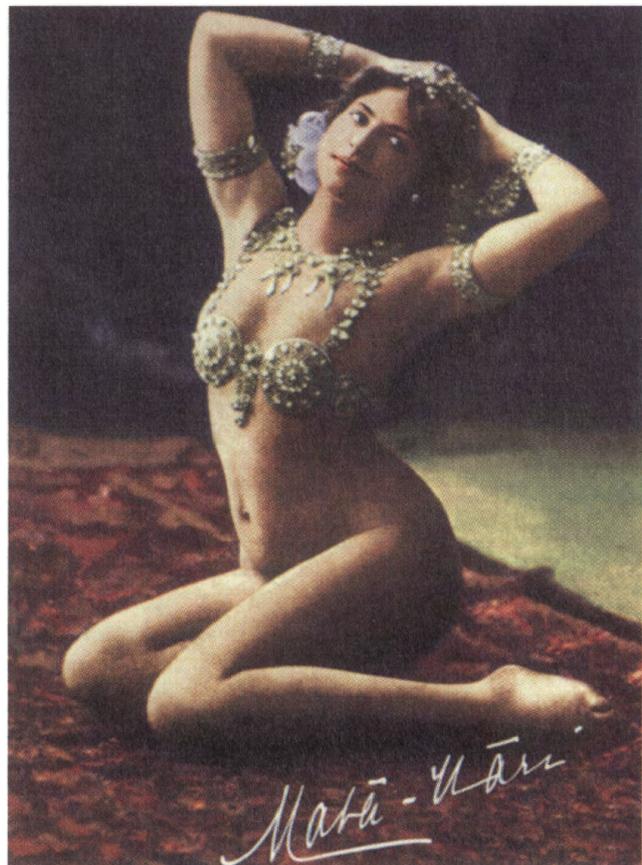
The Eastern high priestess of the Belle Epoque

Margaretha opted for the French capital because ‘*all divorced women look for refuge in Paris*’. Paris promised a world of possibilities after nine years of a stifling marriage. Initially the new life was disappointingly hard. She tried to establish herself as an artists’ model, but when this failed was forced to return to the Netherlands. In 1904 she tried again, and this time struck lucky, managing to join the Molier Circus as an ‘amazon’. On Monsieur Molier’s advice she now turned her energies to dance. Although her expertise was limited to the basic ballroom repertory, during her years in the Dutch Indies she had been exposed to traditional court and temple dance. Using this as a model she created an act of her own. At the beginning of 1905 she made her debut as an Eastern dancer at the *salon* of Madame Kiréevsky, a singer whose charity entertainment events were frequented by Parisian high society. Present that evening was Emile Guimet, industrialist, art collector and founder of the great Musée des Arts Orientales in the Place d’Iéna, who immediately determined to treat his friends to a special display of ‘genuine’ Eastern dance at the Museum. ‘Lady MacLeod’, as she called herself, agreed, and was invited to array herself for the occasion from the Museum’s costumes and jewellery collections. Guimet also suggested she pick herself an stage name more in harmony with her exotic art.



Mata Hari, Paris, 1905.
Mata Hari Collection, Fries
Museum, Leeuwarden.

Mata Hari as an icon of the
Orient, Paris, 1905. Mata
Hari Collection, Fries
Museum, Leeuwarden.



'Lady MacLeod' at the 'Steeple Militaire' in Paris, November 1911. Mata Hari Collection, Fries Museum, Leeuwarden.



The result was Mata Hari, Malay for 'Eye of the Day', in a sheer sarong and a jewel-encrusted brassiere, flanked by a quartet of black-garbed female dancers, performing the Dance of the Veil for which she became famous. She followed this with a tribute to Shiva, at the climax of which she subsided, near-naked, in ecstasy before a statue of the god. The critics went wild with joy. *La Presse*, on 18 October 1905, spoke of her as a 'sister to the nymphs', who from the burning earth of Java itself had drawn an unbelievable suppleness of body and magical dramatic power, together with a strength of upper torso for which she was indebted to her native Netherlands. *Le Journal*, one of the most influential morning papers, thought her the personification of the poetic, mystic and opulent charm of the Indies. Margaretha herself did not fail to add fuel to the fire by adopting a persona in keeping. She was, she put about, in reality a mixed-blood temple dancer from India, though she sometimes also claimed to have acquired her art in Java. Incoherent though her personal mythology was, this did not matter to her admirers, for whom she embodied – and very literally so – every dream image of the hidden, untainted sensuality of the East. Highly erotic, her act was also finely attuned to the reigning French intellectual elite's obsession with the Oriental *femme fatale* as portrayed by writers and artists ranging from Swinburne to Baudelaire, Huysmans, and Moreau.

Mata Hari was now a fixture on the Paris cultural agenda. As the Belle Epoque's acknowledged high priestess of the mysterious East she made thousands of francs per performance. Soon she was ready for a wider audience. Under the auspices of the seasoned impresario Gabriel Astruc, she played the famous Olympia Theatre as the launch-pad to a tour of Europe's most important theatres. She appeared in the Madrid Kurzaal, glittered on the Monte Carlo Opera stage in Jules Massenet's *Le Roi de Lahore*, and showed off her arts at the Wiener Secession before an exclusive audience of artists that included Gustav Klimt. The highpoint of her career came early in 1911, when she appeared at la Scala in Milan to perform the ballet interlude 'The Princess and the Magic Flower' in Gluck's opera *Aramide*. Shortly after, la Scala invited her back as 'Black Venus' in Romualdo Morencio's *Bacchus and Cambrinus*.

'Serious' artistic recognition mattered greatly to Mata Hari. The more mortifying, thus, when French writer Colette bitchily observed in print: '*She hardly danced... confining herself to progressively disrobing and swaying that long swarthy body of hers, slender and proud.*' Close to the bone, no doubt, for Mata Hari herself knew only too well to what she owed her success. In an interview she gallantly admitted as much: '*With every veil I shed my success increased. On the pretext of finding my dancing highly artistic and expressive, that is praising my art, it was nudity they really came to see (...) I play on sensuality (...) But the artistic gloss with which I imbue everything I do preserves me from vulgarity.*' Nor, for the record, did Mata Hari ever go the full monty, for the trademark metal bustier always remained firmly in place. For this, too, she concocted a good story, namely that her erstwhile spouse had in a fit of rage bitten off her left nipple. However in the *Souvenirs d'un Médecin* by Dr Léon Bizard, who more than once had occasion to examine her thoroughly, we read that her breasts were perfectly intact, though extremely small and with unattractively large, colourless nipples, which she had no interest in displaying.

Margaretha Zelle as 'La Habanera', Paris, 1913. Mata Hari Collection, Fries Museum, Leeuwarden.

Margaretha Zelle, right after her very last performance in the Netherlands, March 1915. Mata Hari Collection, Fries Museum, Leeuwarden.



When in 1912 Mata Hari lamentably failed an audition for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, she did her best to boost her sense of self-respect and professional integrity by taking ballet lessons, but she never really developed into more than a moderately gifted dancer. When eventually she found herself seriously challenged by other, often more talented, 'Eastern' dancers such as Maud Allen and Ruth St. Denis, and besides began to feel the competitive threat of dozens of less artistically-concerned nude dancers on the Paris circuit, her riposte, published in an interview with the British magazine *The Era*, was that the performances of ladies of this ilk were anything but accurate or aesthetically justifiable. In the same breath she also asserted her 'birthright': by dint of having herself been born and bred in Java and having absorbed the deeper significance of this kind of dance in her earliest youth, she was in a position to know that none but the chosen few who were born and raised there, in the heart of the tropics, were able to perform these dances properly.

Partly on account of this mounting competition, but also because interest in orientalism was on the wane, Mata Hari saw her market value decline. Characteristically, her response was to reinvent herself afresh. Thus, in 1907, she travelled to Egypt to look for inspiration in the traditional dance

Margaretha Zelle as a prisoner, photographed the day after her arrest in 1917. Mata Hari Collection, Fries Museum, Leeuwarden.



Margaretha Zelle in the uniform of Lt Hallaure, one of her many lovers. This picture was taken in Normandy during World War I. Mata Hari Collection, Fries Museum, Leeuwarden.



of the Nile villages. In 1912, before a select, invited audience in the garden of her home in Neuilly, she staged a private performance accompanied by the 'Royal Hindu Musicians' led by the revered musician Inayat Khan, who had recently set up the Sufi movement in the West – a collaboration which considerably enhanced the credibility of her 'Indian' dances. A year later she was engaged to open the Folies Bergère summer season in the role of a Spanish dancer, La Habanera. But in spite of her multiple attempts to reinvent and diversify her image, Mata Hari was never to find a more successful act than the Shiva Dances.

A grande horizontale

Summer 1914 found Mata Hari ensconced in Berlin with her latest lover, Alfred Kiepert, a wealthy landowner and lieutenant in the 11th Regiment of Westphalian Hussars. She had been formally divorced from 'Johnnie'

MacLeod in 1906 and had since then conducted her artistic career in tandem with a highly public private life. As a *grande horizontale* she had had liaisons with a string of prominent men, while preserving her independence. Most of her lovers were wealthy, married, and undemanding. As the public's interest in her as a performer declined these lovers became increasingly important to the maintenance of her standard of living.

This time, though, it was more than the enjoyment of Kiepert's company and purse that had brought her to Berlin. From September onwards she was booked to appear at the Metropol Theatre in the opera *Der Millionendieb*, which promised to open up a new artistic lease of life for her. All this fizzled out before her eyes after 28 June 1914, when the assassination in Sarajevo of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by the Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip set in motion the chain of events leading to the outbreak of the First World War. Mata Hari had to leave Germany pell-mell, briefly noting in her still-extant scrapbook: '*la guerre... partie de Berlin... théâtre fermé.*'

Her destination was the neutral Netherlands where, arriving without a penny in her pocket, she briefly reverted to being Margaretha Zelle. Soon, however, she tracked down Baron Eduard Willem van der Capellen, a sometime lover, with whom she proceeded to take The Hague society by storm. She even trod the boards for the first time in her native country, but after the second night's performance at the Municipal Theatre of Arnhem her compatriots lost interest. Meanwhile the local paper published an interview with MacLeod, who when queried as to his possible presence at his ex-wife's show had in characteristically coarse vein replied: '*I've seen her from every angle, and that's more than enough for me.*'

Margaretha for her part had had it with the Netherlands. She felt gradually strangled in the close-knit, petit bourgeois atmosphere of The Hague and determined to make her way back to Paris by way of England and the crossing from Dover to Dieppe. This decision turned out to be a fatal one. Mata Hari was never again to dance, nor even to live out the Great War.

A sinister Salomé

On 13 February 1917, almost two years to the day since her departure from The Hague in quest of fresh adventure, five officers of the Paris police inspectorate entered Room 131 of the Elysée Palace Hôtel where Maya Hari was then staying. In command was Commissioner André Priolet, who read out aloud to her the following notice of arrest: '*Female, Zelle, Margaretha, also known as Mata Hari, residing in the Palace Hôtel, religion Protestant, an alien national, born in the Netherlands on 7 August 1876, height 1.75 m, and able to both write and read is hereby charged with espionage and attempted collaboration with and the supply of information to the enemy with a view to aiding the latter in his activities.*' She was forthwith conducted to the office of Captain Pierre Bouchardon, where over the succeeding four months and more she was to be questioned on fourteen separate occasions. Eduard Clunet, her legal adviser, was present at no more than two of these sessions. Except for these interrogation sessions she was throughout this period unremittingly confined to a filthy cell in Saint-Lazare prison.

To this day Mata Hari's role as a spy remains a subject of controversy.

Early in 1999 M15, the British Secret Service, released archive material from which it appears that there was scant evidence of guilt. This, though, was but the umpteenth turn in a did-she-or-didn't-she see-saw debate that has dragged on for decades. In 1964 Sam Wagenaar published the Mata Hari biography *par excellence*, which he entitled *The Murder of Mata Hari* and in which he completely exculpates her from espionage for Germany. But later, after having access to a secret German file of 1940, Wagenaar began to question his earlier view, amended his book and republished it in 1976 as *Mata Hari. Not Quite so Guiltless*.

Exactly what happened before and during the trial is not entirely clear. Nor is it likely that the official French documents relating to the case, which are due for release in 2017, will provide a conclusive answer. Gerk Koopmans, head of the Resistance Museum and curator of the Mata Hari Collection of the Fries Museum in Leeuwarden, probably hit the nail on the head when he suggested that Margaretha Zelle had out of sheer naivety manoeuvred herself into a hornets' nest; she did not realise how suspicious her comings and goings might look, or indeed that a bird of passage like herself was bound to arouse intelligence interest.

Between March 1915 and late 1916 Margaretha had travelled extensively through the war zone. A sophisticated cosmopolitan at a time when nationalism was the order of the day, this provoked suspicion. On top of that she simply adored men in uniform, and was never too picky about what nationality went with whoever parked his boots beside her bed. During her interrogations and trial she defended this proclivity in these words: '*In my eyes officers are a race apart (...). I never paid any attention to whether they were Germans, Italians, or French.*' To this she added that she never discussed the war with them, and that they were invariably '*very happy*' when they departed her bedroom.

At this time Margaretha was also chronically short of cash. Kiepert had given her considerable sums, and in 1916 she had also accepted money from Karl Cramer, the German consul in Amsterdam. She admitted that Cramer wanted her to spy for him and that she had acceded to his proposal for the sake of the pay. But this she had regarded as a kind of compensation for the seizure of her personal belongings after her precipitate departure from Berlin at the outbreak of the war. At no time, however, had she provided him with any of the information requested. What she did concede was that she had passed on information to Arnold von Kalle, the German naval attaché in Madrid, but only to win his confidence so that she would be able to spy for her beloved France. For shortly before she had by chance made the acquaintance of Captain Georges Ladoux, the head of French counter-espionage, who had recognised the ideal agent in this *femme galante* with her extensive international contacts and exceptional mobility. He had promised her a million francs for her co-operation. Margaretha accepted, but waited in vain for further instructions. But soon after, when Scotland Yard took her off the ss *Hollandia* in Falmouth harbour for questioning at Cannon Row and she referred them to him, Ladoux sent them a telegram denying that Margaretha was in his employ. The British had suspected her of being Clara Benedix, a notorious German spy, but they quickly realised their mistake and returned this fish to the water. Subsequently, in Madrid, she had on her own initiative set about seducing and trying to get information from Von

Kalle, hoping in this way to obtain money from Ladoux. Money that she needed to marry Vladimir de Massloff, a young Russian officer with whom she had fallen passionately in love in Paris.

After Margaretha's arrest Ladoux claimed that he had always known her to be a double agent and that his proposal had been intended as a trap. He also produced a number of German telegrams which referred to an agent known as H2I. The movements of this agent displayed striking similarities with the peregrinations of Mata Hari. While Bouchardon avidly seized on this point as evidence for the prosecution, everyone conveniently ignored the fact that the Germans had transmitted these messages in a code which they well knew the French had cracked.

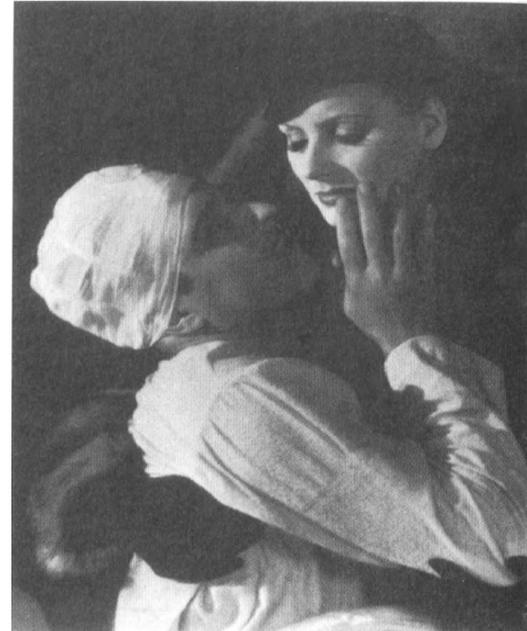
What above all finished off poor Margaretha was her self-constructed image. In the course of her interrogations she was continually making conflicting statements because she herself could scarcely distinguish any more between fact and fiction, fantasy and reality. Worse still, her interrogator also increasingly came to believe in her myth of the fatal, exotic female. Even on their first encounter he had perceived her as a *'born spy'*, and he thereafter blithely continued to let himself be guided by prejudice: *'I saw before me a tall woman with thick lips, a swarthy skin, and artificial pearls in her ears. She had something of the savage about her'*. In his memoirs he recollects the accused as a once celebrated dancer who could no longer rely on her physical charms and was hence obliged to look for an alternative source of income: she had *'a lumpy nose, cleft chin, thick lips like a Negro's, enormously large teeth, dyed hair, and the corners of her mouth reached to her ears.'*

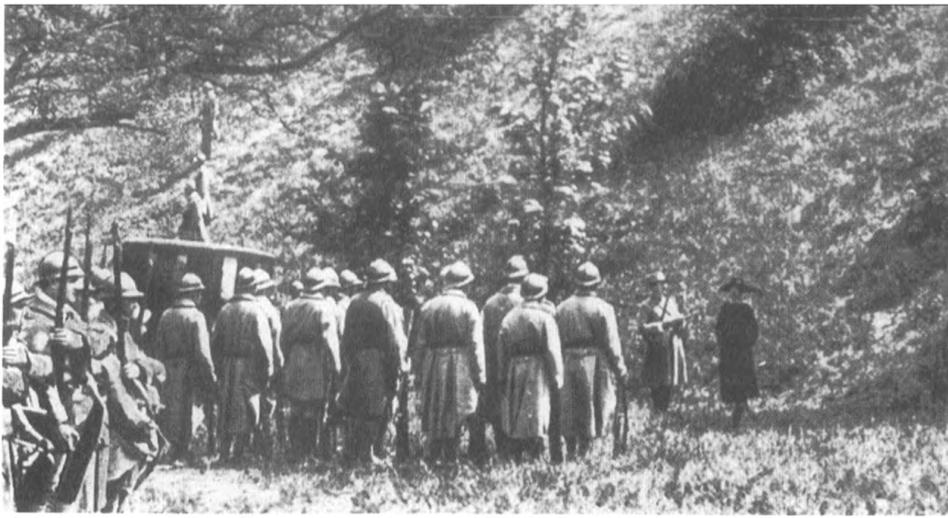
Through her performances she had redefined the accepted limits of sensuality, and trampled down the conventional contemporary perceptions of femininity. She had resolutely broken with the image of woman as a passive, nurturing mother figure, and for this she was now to do penance. What had in the Belle Epoque been seen as the exciting amorous adventures of a public idol were now magically transformed into the immoral excesses of a degenerate foreigner, a tawdry *femme internationale*. 1917 was a disaster year for the French, with major defeats, countless instances of mutiny and desertion, and spy phobia of hysterical proportions. There was an urgent need to clear the air and restore order and authority. Mata Hari was a public sore to be excised from French society.

The trial in July 1917 was conducted before a closed court and lasted barely two days. The public prosecutor, Lieutenant André Mornet, gave the 'spy' short shrift, designating her *'un redoutable adversaire de la France'*, a Messalina with the deaths of thousands of French soldiers on her conscience. Sentence was pronounced after ten minutes of deliberation. Margaretha Geertruida Zelle was found guilty on eight counts and sentenced to death for conspiracy and espionage. All legal costs were moreover to be borne by the defendant.

The allied press expressed nothing but delight at the verdict. *Le Journal* dubbed her *'a sinister Salomé who toyed with our soldiers' heads before the German Herod'*. The *Daily Sketch* featured her photograph alongside that of an angelic Canadian nurse, serving as a clear message to womanhood as to where they should look for a role model in these troubled times. In The Hague the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs attempted to intervene,

Romance galore: Ramon Navarro and Greta Garbo in *Mata Hari* (1932). Photo Metro Goldwyn Mayer.





but President Poincaré rejected all requests for clemency.

On 13 October 1917 Mata Hari was brought from the condemned cell in Saint-Lazare to Vincennes for execution. She was dressed in her best and assured one of the nuns who had attended her in prison that '*vous allez voir une belle mort*'. It was her final performance and she carried herself like a trouper, refusing to be blindfolded and handcuffed. While the firing squad made ready she blew her lawyer a jaunty kiss. Then twelve shots tore through the air. Henry G. Wales, a British witness reporting for *International News Service*, described the scene as follows: '*She did not die as stage actors or film stars do when shot down. She did not throw her hands in the air (...). Instead she appeared to collapse. Slowly, inertly, she sank to on her knees, her head still upright and without the slightest change of expression in her face (...). A subaltern drew his revolver (...). Bending forward he placed the barrel of the revolver almost – but not quite – against the spy's left temple. He pulled the trigger and the bullet went straight into the brain. Mata Hari was truly dead.*'

Re-enactment of Mata Hari's execution in 1917, probably from a French silent film of 1922. Collection Roger-Viollet, Paris.

'What's the matta, Mata?'

Henry G. Wales was in error. Margaretha Zelle may have been truly dead, but not so Mata Hari. As Julie Wheelwright so perceptively observes in her book *The Fatal Lover. Mata Hari and the Myth of Women in Espionage*, that volley of gunfire at the rear of the Château de Vincennes simultaneously signified the comeback of Mata Hari, the celebrated dancer of yesteryear. The moment she was no more the wildest rumours at once began to do the rounds. She was supposed to have parted her furs at the crucial moment and so knocked the soldiery for six with her dazzling nudity. Or, alternatively, she had been rescued at the eleventh hour by a mounted lover – upon a snow-white steed, needless to say – who spirited her away before the very eyes of her execution squad.

Mata Hari became the subject of a virtual industry in cheap spy thrillers, half-baked 'serious' studies, stage plays, and musicals. She also inspired a number of films. The best-known of these is undoubtedly George Fitzmaurice's *Mata Hari* (1932) starring Greta Garbo and Ramon Navarro, whose dreadful English we have to thank for the immortal line '*What's the*

matta, Mata?' For the rest the film is above all a vehicle for Garbo. The costumes are magnificent, the screenplay somewhat less so, and Mata Hari's guilt is established beyond a shadow of a doubt. Margaretha's brothers felt that the film went too far in violating fact – in particular the scene in which Garbo murders a Russian general – and demanded compensation, as well as making an unsuccessful bid to block the film's European distribution. In 1965 another *Mata Hari* movie was to appear with Jeanne Moreau in the title role, but this too played fast and loose with history.

Until the 1960s few people had any doubts as to Mata Hari's guilt. So strongly was this view entrenched that when during the Second World War Josephine Baker offered her services to the French resistance the head of France's counter-espionage was initially hesitant because he remembered the Mata Hari story and was not inclined to commit a similar boo-boo with yet another 'coloured' siren. Then came the Cold War, during which fear of reds under the beds and Big Brother and his ubiquitous ears and eyes was too potent for any reappraisal of the received view.

Only since the seventies has it become accepted more and more widely that the facts were never so serious as they were painted by the French judiciary at the time. As early as 1949 public prosecutor Mornet admitted in a radio interview that there was hardly enough substance to the Mata Hari case to bring a cat to book. And as recently as 1996 the French jurist Léon Schirmann petitioned the government for a reopening of the case against Margaretha Zelle, but his application was pronounced inadmissible. Since then he has joined forces with the Fries Museum-based Mata Hari Foundation to file a renewed application to this end. Finally, the end of 2000 saw the publication of *Mata Hari, la sacrifiée* by Jean-Marc Loubier, who has also been responsible for founding the Association pour la réhabilitation de Mata Hari.

The definitive story will in any event remain unwritten until the due date of release of the French archives in 2017. Hopefully these are being better cared for than Mata Hari's earthly remains. For only in July 2000 the Paris Museum of Anatomy announced that a recent inventory had revealed that the mummified head of Mata Hari which had been in its keeping had inexplicably vanished. Spirited away by a passionate admirer, a collector of the macabre, or simply mislaid? Just one more unanswered question for the file on Mata Hari.

FILIP MATTHIJS

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