# The Female Streetcar Conductor (1915)

## Abstract

The war years (1914-1918) upended traditional gender roles in all European nations. Before the war, women's movements in Germany were growing, but still remained on the margins of society; and women's rights activists were often a target of mockery by conservatives and in the media more broadly. After the war began, however, the insatiable demand for men at the front meant that more and more women took on traditionally male jobs. This led to a pervasive ambiguity—was this shift in gender roles to be understood as subversive or patriotic?

This poem about the new phenomenon of female tram conductors appeared in an issue of the weekly magazine *Wachtfeuer: deutsche Kunstblätter zum Krieg*, published by the Berlin Association of Visual Artists. In 1915, the magazine published an issue entitled "Unseren deutschen Frauen" [To Our German Women] with a portrait of Empress Auguste Viktoria on the cover, which consisted of articles and images describing the sacrifices and contributions of German women on the home front. This poem, however, strikes a humorous note and describes the advantages of employing women as tram conductors: the conductor is not "broad and bulky," but charming and smiling. And when she "refuses entry," her gentle voice makes one feel less offended. But if you offer her something, it should not be a cigarette, but rather a small piece of candy. Such rhetoric, which emphasizes the beauty and charm of women performing this strenuous work during wartime, reflects the ideal that women always be delicate and feminine, even when they take on "men's work."

## Source

### The Female Street Car Conductor

(An image from the war year 1915.)

Man! When you get on the tram these days
Make sure you behave yourself
And adapt to the new times!
No conductor, broad and bulky
Hands you your ticket
No, it is a charming little
Splendid female conductor

With her cap on her curls
She smiles at you kindly
And instead of a deep bass voice
You are greeted by a soprano.

Even those she refuses entry
Do not feel hurt,
For she calls down in a gentle flute-like voice:
"Oh, sorry, the car is full!"

But if she graciously
Escorts you to your seat,

Then, my friend,
Be polite.

And if at the switch she hurries
After the car in a run
And swings herself up to get on,
Help her up nicely!

“Here's some tobacco, conductor!”
That's no longer *bon ton*!
You must ask, “Would Miss Conductor
Like— a piece of candy?”

Source: *Wachtfeuer: Künstlerblätter zum Krieg,* No. 58 (1915), p.8. Available online at: https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.30347#0586

Translation: GHI staff

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