

The Great War and Scottish Nurses' Diaries

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“A World of Distant Rumbling”

By

Costel Coroban

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The author

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BAC	British Armoured Cars Division
CMO	Commanding Medical Officer
MBChM	Bachelor of Medicine, Master of Surgery
NUWWS	National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies
SFWSS	Scottish Federation of the Women's Suffrage Societies
SWH	Scottish Women's Hospitals

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to analyse the letters and diaries of the Scottish Women's Hospitals (hereafter named SWH) nurses and doctors who served during World War I through two lenses: one is New Historicism and its acceptance of marginal texts, with emphasis on revealing instances of intertextuality in the writings of the Scottish women and the way they illustrate their adventure in the Great War on the Romanian front, compared to other such war journals and letters or to World War I literature in general; the other lens is diary writing, as one of the most valuable forms of autobiographical text, with revealing importance in the recording of social and political events.

The SWH is a subject that has not been thoroughly studied, not even by Western scholars; those who have, however, taken up this topic have been generally concerned with the contribution of the SWH to the suffragist movement, from a gender perspective. Another issue that supports the need for a fresh approach lies in the importance of the subject to the monographs treating the autobiographical literature of World War I or the history of the medical organisation. This is because, on occasions, the nurses themselves would talk about their "Russian campaign" when actually referring to a very considerable amount of time spent on Romanian military camps, war hospitals, towns, villages and transportation means (the amount of time spent travelling by train at that time is legendary). Taking this into consideration, the novelty of approaching the subject of the SWH venture on the Eastern Front with a focus on their activity in Romania and an analysis of their writings is a challenging subject.

The theme of this research will involve an exploration of the history of nursing in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century, which will mainly be focused on the protagonists, namely the Scottish Women's Hospitals organisation and their energetic leader, Dr. Elsie Inglis. Given the fact that the SWH was an all-women organisation, and a member of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS, also known as the *suffragists*), the feminist lens will also be used in this endeavour. After discussing the theoretical aspects of the research, each chapter will address a separate theme, as regards the aspects most often mentioned in the journals, diaries and letters of the Scottish nurses and doctors: tragic elements in their representation of urban space, the Romantic description of

the rural environment and landscape, the Ironic and Heroic modes, according to Hayden White's view, in the description of the military and their depiction of trauma on the frontline seen in the Tragic mode.

Although the subject has been partially treated by Western scholarship, most scholarly works dealing with the Scottish Women's Hospitals rarely mention Romania, despite their greatest efforts on the front here. Perhaps this is due to a small confusion between the Romanian and Russian fronts, as indeed most material that has been published tends to elaborate on the latter where it should actually be referring to the former. For example, in the carefully edited collection by Audrey Fawcett Cahill, *Between the Lines: Letters and Diaries from Elsie Inglis's Russian Unit* (1999), which includes most of the original diaries as they are preserved in the Imperial War Museum, the vast majority of sources deal with the nurses' stay in Romania rather than in Russia. Nonetheless, for the present research, this volume provides a vast array of primary sources and it is possible, because of its slightly misleading name, to have gone unnoticed by the Romanian scholars interested in the interaction with the Allies during the Great War. The author provides an informed introduction, especially for the Western reader, into the state of affairs in South-Eastern Europe on the eve of the Great War. Then, the chapters are chronologically ordered and include the correspondence from the beginning of the war to the moment when the SWH were recalled to Britain after the start of the Russian Revolution. Therefore, scientifically, it is one of the richest sources for the purpose of the present research, as the volume includes the letters and diaries of Elsie Bowerman, F. E. Rendel, O. S. Locker Lampson, L. J. Brown, Katherine North, Mary Lee Milne, Liliac Grant, Ethel Moir, Yvonne Fitzroy and Dr. Elsie Inglis. It is worth noting that the author is a relative of one of the nurses who worked for the Scottish Women's Hospitals.

Additional primary sources that I will rely on are individual published diaries, especially Yvonne Fitzroy's *With the Scottish Nurses in Roumania* (1918), which was published immediately after the author returned home from the front and therefore represents a valuable first-hand account. Other journals, such as those of Elsie Butler (*Paper Boats*, 1959) or Ishobel Ross (*The Little Grey Partridge: First World War Diary of Ishobel Ross, Who Served with the Scottish Women's Hospitals Unit in Serbia*, 1988), were published much later and were heavily edited. Their style was changed to a more literary rather than autobiographical one. A difference in style can also easily be observed by comparing the contents of the original diaries collected by Audrey Fawcett Cahill to articles published by some of the nurses such as Mary Milne or Frances Elinor Rendel in periodicals like *Blackwoods* or *The Englishwoman*. Although the later published journals

and articles have been consulted and included in the list of primary sources, the original versions of the diaries better match the inclination of the present research towards autobiography.

A scholar who has extensively researched the history of the Scottish Women's Hospitals is Leah Leneman, the author of *Elsie Inglis: Founder of battlefield hospitals run entirely by women* (1998), and of *In the Service of Life: The Story of Elsie Inglis and the Scottish Women's Hospitals* (1994). The former is one of Leah Leneman's earlier studies, in which she focuses on the personality of Dr. Elsie Inglis, the godmother and guide of the SWH throughout their existence. The volume offers information about the doctor's life from her early childhood to her death in 1917, being especially receptive to valuable press inputs – which are mostly laudatory – about the activity of the protagonist. Two-thirds of the book are reserved for the last three years of Dr. Elsie Inglis's life, which is the period that the present research also covers. The latter book is an elaboration on the subject of the SWH which includes a very systematic chronological approach. It starts from the moment when the project of establishing the SWH took form, in December 1914, and continues up to the spring of 1920 in order to follow the actions of all the SWH nurses throughout Europe. On occasions, it goes into considerable depth, in comparison to *Elsie Inglis*, which still keeps its novel character due to the ample research it includes regarding Dr. Elsie Inglis's image in the press, especially after her death.

Moving now to the theoretical aspects of the research, Foucault states that the process of the creation of clinics and hospitals is double-sided, supported by the tradition of individual practitioners and by the newfound interest of the state in providing qualified medical attention (Foucault 1980, 166). The best-known nurse of the Victorian age was Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), credited as founder of modern nursing and celebrated as the “lady with the lamp” in the 1857 poem *Santa Filomena* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Florence Nightingale was mostly active during the Crimean War (1853-1856), but it should be noted that this practice of female nursing also spread to South-Eastern Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century. During the Romanian War of Independence (1877-1878), a war hospital under the supervision of Maria Rosetti (1819-1893) was set up at Turnu Măgurele. She was the wife of the Romanian politician, C. A. Rosetti, but her ancestry was Scottish, with her father belonging to the Grants of the Highlands. Furthermore, the Scottish Nurses were present in the Balkans during the First Balkan War, when Mabel St. Clair Stobart led a field hospital unit to Bulgaria. On their way to the frontline, the SWH nurses passed through many cities both in Western Europe and in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, which they described in their diaries: Moscow,

Odessa, Calais, Thessaloniki, Constanța, Brăila, Galați, Iași, Medgidia, Skopje, Belgrade and Sarajevo. Many Eastern cities are seen as a space of mystery and only a few of them give the impression of crowded vivacity and diversity. The present research will also take account of the perspectives of war anxiety, otherness/alterity, and trauma and of the representations of rural space(s) and landscape, which, as stated above, represent critical standpoints linked to New Historicism.

The first chapter is dedicated to the theoretical framework: New Historicism and autobiographical studies. New Historicism is a mode of literary criticism that was formulated during the 1980s within the cultural milieu of the West Coast (Harpham). Its name is opposed to (old) historicism, but New Historicism has also been identified as a reaction to deconstructivism and Marxism (Hohendahl 87). In its beginning, the main advocates of New Historicism were Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose and other scholars associated with the journal *Representations* published by the University of California. The term “New Historicism” (also referred to as “cultural poetics”), was first used by Stephen Greenblatt in an introduction to the 1982 issue of the journal *Genre* and also in the introduction to his book, *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* (1982). The aim of New Historicism is to concurrently lay emphasis on the “textual” nature of history – which is what separated it from “old” historicism – as well as on the historical nature of literary texts (Drabble 719). This two-fold aim is one of the theoretical pillars of the present research: to show what aspects of the Great War were depicted by the nurses using literary techniques and styles and to demonstrate how the war, in its turn, influenced their writing, changing its style, as an effect of the war trauma they went through.

Stephen Greenblatt coined the term “New Historicism” in his 1982 introduction to *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance*. He begins by presenting the anecdote of Queen Elizabeth’s reaction to Shakespeare’s *Richard II* being performed on the eve of the Essex rebellion. Greenblatt sees the permeability of literature and history in the Queen’s alarm at her self-identification with the deposed king in the play. In a number of articles and books, Greenblatt prefers the term “poetics of culture” over New Historicism, which makes it clear why he is more interested in the relationship between literary and historical writing. Being inspired by Foucault, Greenblatt sees a text as suspended between the overall discourse on one hand, and the cultural dialectics in which it is fashioned, on the other.

Michel Foucault finds that historical explanation is a characteristic of modernity and almost in a similar way to Althusser’s, he defines history as a discontinuous series of “epistemes” (or discursive formations), which are continuous in their regulation of knowledge (Hamilton 116). Contradiction

against power is important to Foucault as much as it was to Hegel or Nietzsche and dissent/subversion from the canon is seen as necessary for progressive politics (Bleiker 140). New Historicism has borrowed from cultural anthropology the practice of extending critical analysis to previously disregarded texts, in order to add a "touch of the real" (Selden, Widdowson and Brooker 182). War journals written by women represent a kind of marginal texts, as they became of more interest to academics only late in the 20th century, while most of them had been disregarded at the time they were written as inconsequential contributions to scholarly knowledge on the literature and history of the Great War. In the latest guide to Greenblatt, published by Mark Robson in 2008, after navigating through Greenblatt's methods of literary criticism (cultural poetics, self-fashioning, resonance and wonder, imagination and will), a chapter called *After Greenblatt* very interestingly points to more recent paths: New Materialism, New Aestheticism and Presentism. Greenblatt's theory has been appreciated as remarkably coherent over the past three decades, with a capacity for keeping the past up-to-date, engaging and thought-provoking owing to his intelligent, imaginative and even supple style (Payne 6), which intersects with postmodernism in its emphasis on "discontinuity and ruptures, eclecticism, heterogeneity, and decentralized authority" (Kaes 154).

The principle of intertextuality, seen as a critique of formalism/New Criticism and its supposed norm that "a literary work is a self-contained object" (Drabble 519), covers all the relations between texts: mimic, adaptation, derivation, allusion, and response. This, of course, may be connected to the interdisciplinarity of New Historicism and those who practise it: literary critics, historians, art historians, anthropologists and other scholars. Culture is generally considered a semiotic system, a network of signs. In their view, New Historicists are very sceptical of unified depictions of culture, as "typically such unified myths are created to serve a particular interest in the present..." (Payne 3). In the subsequent chapters we will discuss instances in which the writings of the Scottish nurses match either the Victorian canon, with many Romantic elements intertwined (especially in their descriptions of the landscape and rural locations), or a kind of military discourse, that is very realist, even tragic at times, in the descriptions of the destruction caused by the war.

Regarding the relationship between the text and the individual, Greenblatt is concerned with the self of the reader, which is formed by deference to authority (the State, Church, etc.) and in relation to the Other (different from authority and estranged, subversive, marginal). In short, to Greenblatt, "humans fashion, are fashioned, and are aware of being fashioned by discourse" (Greenblatt 1991, 182). This is important for the

analysis of the letters and diaries of the SWH because such an approach, centred on discussing the writer's relation to authority and to the Other offers an insight into the cultural background of the nurses and doctors. Easily dismissed by their own government in 1914, the brave members of the SWH are honoured for their efforts on the Eastern Front, despite the locals' and soldiers' initial surprise upon contact. In fact, how Greenblatt argues that New Historicism is rather a set of practices rather than a critical perspective is also applicable because describing the cultural shock, the strangeness that struck the first colonists of America, as he does in his study *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (1991), must have also struck the British suffragists who visited the Eastern Front during the Great War, and the locals upon seeing them as well.

Of great importance to the present research is Hayden White's theory of *tropes* and *emplotment*. In *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973), he consolidates the idea that historical writing is similar to literary writing in many ways. This kind of analysis is crucial to the current research because the Scottish Nurses who visited Romania during the Great War had been influenced by the cultural ideology of the nineteenth century and, in their writings, one can identify different foci, many of them similar to Hayden White's theory of historiographical styles. White has identified *emplotment*, *argument* (explanation) and *ideology* as the three main preferences of historians/authors. The combination of the modes of *emplotment* with the modes of *argument* and the modes of *ideology* may take place in any order, thus creating a historiographical style. *Emplotment* stands for the genre of the respective historian and ranges from romantic (where the good triumphs after overcoming great difficulties) to comedy (which seeks to preserve shared human values against corruption), tragedy (deplores the loss of good when principles collide) and satire (recklessness and luck govern human affairs so any change is meaningless). We will see in the following chapters how the nurses and doctors of the SWH use romance or comedy, depending on the events they want to describe. On one occasion, for instance, a meeting with a Russian general during the retreat from Dobruja is described very humorously by one of the nurses, while on a separate occasion another retreat is described with tones of tragedy.

White believes that these modes operate on the "surface" of history writing and expands his theory by introducing four main *tropes*: Metaphor, Metonymy, Synecdoche and Irony as well as *aporia* ("doubt"), the real or feigned disbelief of the historian/writer in his own statements (White 1973, 37). As a final point, Hayden White has the merit of producing a theory that considers history explicable in the fashion that poetry is, therefore referring

to an historian's task of writing history as a poetic act, which contradicts the view that history records only facts and draws close to Lyotard's distinction between 'grande' and 'petite histoire'.

Despite the fact that examples of New Historicist analyses may be perhaps more easily found in Early Modern studies, as shown by the New Historicist critics, other fields such as Romanticism (McGann), nineteenth-century American literature (Jane Tompkins, Cathy Davidson) and American cultural studies (Sacvan Bercovitch, Myra Jehlen, Henry Louis Gates) have adopted it. Moreover, scholars in such fields as feminist critique or postcolonial studies have used New Historicism because of its preference for marginal texts, alternative discourses and the subversive (Lennox, Dimock).

Autobiographical studies, including diaries and journals, letters, trauma narratives, travel narratives and witnessing represent important concepts that will be addressed throughout the present work. Since the current research is based on the letters and diaries of the SWH, it is important to elaborate on the value of journals, diaries and letters as autobiographical texts. Smith and Watson describe diaries as "A form of periodic life writing, the diary records dailiness in accounts and observations of emotional responses" (193). The same authors agree that the importance of diaries comes from their chronological "accretion of experience" (Roorbach 165). It is then added that since the diarist is unaware what the future holds, the diary is unique in its constructions of identity that are fixed in time and space (Smith, Watson 193). There is some dissimilarity between the diary and the journal in the opinion of some critics, who point to the fact that "the journal tends to be more a public record" (Smith, Watson 193) and therefore not as intimate as a diary. In autobiographical studies, the study of the diary in relation to other similar types of texts remains mostly uncharted, and many scholars use the terms "diary" and "journal" interchangeably (Smith, Watson 196), as we will also do in our research. Letters, on the other hand, represent a wholly different category of autobiographical writing, as "Letters become vehicles through which information is circulated, social roles enacted, relationships secured, often in a paradoxical mix of intimacy and formality" (Smith, Watson, 196). Ideologies of nationality, class, ethnic belonging or even gender can be read within letters based on their style and on the formalities observed by the authors.

Besides the clearer autobiographical categories of diary/journal and letters, the current study will strive to identify and analyse instances of trauma narrative, witnessing and travel narrative. Travel narratives involve a journey so they focus on the displacement of the author and his/her observations of "the unknown, the foreign, the uncanny" (Smith, Watson

207), which allow for his/her repositioning in relation to the ideological norms of “home”. Witnessing implies an observer testifying to an important or traumatic event and, secondly, witnessing involves bearing witness to something that cannot be seen, so that, for example, a witness can be judged by posterity for failing to take notice of aspects that are crucial for the reader. From the Greek word for “wound”, trauma involves a dislocation that is overwhelming and central in an experience (Smith, Watson 207). Trauma narrative refers to “both a person struggling to make sense of an overwhelming experience in a particular context and the unspeakability of trauma itself, its resistance to representation” (Gilmore 46). The effects of the war as instances of trauma will be brought into discussion in Chapter Five.

The last part of the first chapter will discuss the rise of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals and will touch on the first wave of feminism in Britain. The main supporter of the SWH was the National Union of the Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), and a few of its members formed the London sub-committee of the SWH. In Edinburgh, the headquarters of the SWH were provided by the Scottish Federation of the Women’s Suffrage Societies (SFWSS), of which Dr. Elsie Inglis (credited as founder of the SWH) was also a member. Elsie Maude Inglis (16 August 1864–26 November 1917) spent her early years in India with her family, until 1876 when they moved to Edinburgh. She studied in Edinburgh and Paris: in 1886 she attended the Edinburgh School of Medicine for Women, and then she gained the Triple Qualification Licentiatehip of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow in 1892. She set up medical practice in Edinburgh in 1894 together with Jessie McGregor. In 1899 Elsie Inglis went on to obtain her MBChM from the University of Edinburgh, which was now open to women. She also lectured on gynaecology in the Edinburgh Medical College for Women, and travelled to Vienna and the USA to improve her profession. Before World War I she worked mostly in medical care for women and children (Ewan, *et al.*, 177–178).

Dr. Inglis chose the Scottish Women’s Hospitals as the name of their organisation with the aim of attracting personnel as well as sponsorships from feminists, and not only. Even women who did not personally agree with female suffrage were admitted in the SWH as long as they wished to contribute to the war effort. Nevertheless, the latter category could not advance to the officer position in the organisation, whose standard was red-white-green like the suffragists’ (McDermid 2008, 135–138). Despite the initially cautious expectations, the SWH grew quite quickly. The organisation received positive feedback from within the United Kingdom and as well as from the Dominions and the United States of America. It is

estimated that approximately 50% of the SWH personnel were women from Scotland, while the rest came mainly from England with a few from Ireland, Wales and at least one from Canada, Australia and New Zealand. There were even working guests from the USA. The one credited with founding this organisation, Dr. Elsie Inglis, even proposed to change its name to "British Women's Hospitals for Foreign Service", but the Edinburgh committee vetoed this proposal, so the original name was preserved (McDermid 2008, 135-138).

Before looking at how the nurses depict the cities they visited, a short account of the history of the Scottish nurses' sojourn in Romania will be offered in order to clarify this aspect. Women joined the SWH for different reasons, among different individual purposes to prove their loyalty to the British Empire (Dr. Inglis's her father worked for the East India Company). Other reasons were the adventurous and brave spirit of some of them, while the feminists among them were determined to prove that women were useful in a war and hence deserved the right to vote. Initially, Dr. Elsie Inglis offered the services of her organisation to the British government but her offer was refused. Her initial offer to serve as a surgeon was declined by the War Office with the reply "My good lady, go home and sit still" (Ewan, *et al.*, 178). Instead, she did receive a positive answer from the allied governments of France and Serbia, which immediately accepted her generous offer. For Dr. Elsie Inglis, this was the beginning of a life-long sympathy for Serbia, which would later bring her to Romania following the relocation of the Serbian Volunteer Division to the front in Dobruja as part of the Russian military effort, after the surrender of their home country.

The main theme of the second chapter will be urban space(s). Relating to the representation of cities, one of the nurses, Yvonne Fitzroy, identifies Moscow with the cities of the One Thousand and One Nights: "It's amazing. It's like walking into the Arabian Nights, into a great big fairy tale. A fairy palace over a fairy city and a fairy river" (Fitzroy 17). This Romantic re-visitation of the beginning of the Middle Ages, an age of beginnings for Europe, is enhanced by the repeated motif of the fairy, which is itself reminiscent of infancy (Ciugureanu 2002). Under the catalyst of war, urban images intensify and become more dynamic, or at other times seem surprisingly peaceful and tranquil. In the subsequent paragraphs, I shall provide brief examples of accounts describing the towns the nurses visited and I will chronicle the reasons why they had to travel between these localities.

On the arrival of the SWH at Archangelsk, the feminist Elsie Bowerman wrote that women seemed to do "most of the heavy work on the railways" and a lot of work on the docks (McDermid 2008, 39). Thus, her feminist

preoccupations come to the surface, and the nurse is revealed to be a careful observer of the social changes brought about by the war in Russia. Later, in Medgidia, one of the nurses wrote that the locals who gathered around them particularly admired them for their good boots, which they would later trade for supplies, cloth and pans (Cahill 69-71). The general tone of her writing is humorous, the urban atmosphere described, approaching the burlesque. Despite the threat of the war and its destruction, the urban dwellers' interest does not seem to go beyond petty trade.

After they had been in Dobruja during the autumn of 1916, the SWH had to retreat, rather chaotically, as did almost the whole population and even some armed forces, to reunite soon in Brăila, Galați and Ismail. To sum up, their medical mission in Dobruja did not last more than three weeks, but this does not mean that the Scottish women would not set up other campaign hospitals. The ambulance sub-unit ended up in Brăila, and one of its members, Katherine Hodges, tells us how "Out of all that terror and anguish and chaos, we suddenly emerged into an open flower bedded garden place in the centre of the city with gay restaurants and brilliantly lit shops all around" (Leneman 1994, 81). The crowds greeted them with cheers and flowers, which was quite incomprehensible to the Scottish medical women, who were amazed how people could ignore the horrors happening just across the Danube (Leneman 1994, 81-82). This instance of witnessing is revealing of the shock caused by the act of fleeing from a supposedly cruel enemy, but the instance of tragedy outlined first as "terror and anguish" quickly gives place to satire when the nurse notices how indifferent the townsfolk are to the impending menace of war.

The group led by Dr. Elsie Inglis was reunited in Galați and offered their professionalism in a Romanian hospital, while the whole town was curious whether the Russians would deploy reinforcements to recapture Dobruja. But the wounded began pouring in by tens and hundreds in Brăila, so Dr. Inglis instructed her subordinates in the transport sub-unit which were already there to try their best in alleviating the situation. Eventually, the flow of wounded and refugees returned to a more manageable number and the situation was under control again (Leneman 1994, 81-83). Situations like these tested the nerves of the nurses to their limits, but Dr. Elsie Inglis did not yield to fatigue or despair, despite being herself seriously ill. Her short letters reveal an immaculate formal style, which is disciplined and similar to a military style.

Chapter three will focus on rural locations. In the East, what impresses most of the time is the natural scenery of the rural environment, and the nurses navigate through the Victorian aesthetics of the Beautiful, Picturesque and the Sublime in their depictions of Dobruja, Muntenia,

Bessarabia and to a lesser extent, Moldova. Yet, often, they have to abandon these styles in favour of a more realistic one. This is a clear mark of how pervasive and impending was the spectre of war. An example is the diary of Ishobel Ross, a nurse from Skye, who confessed upon her arrival in Macedonia that: "It is just like Skye but very parched and dry looking... the Serbs are singing their weird songs very like Gaelic. Even to hear the Serbs talking sounds so like Gaelic" (in Leneman 1994, 72). This romantic image allows us to assume that the parchedness and dryness of the land is also present within Ishobel, who is probably longing for her beloved Scotland. Overwhelmed by her desire for her homeland, she even hears her native tongue in the voices of the Serbs, despite obvious linguistic difference between a South Slavic and a Celtic language.

Most of the field hospitals established by the nurses were situated in a rural environment. For example, in May 1915 in Kragujevac, Serbia, the SWH had split into three hospitals: one surgical, one for typhus and one for "relapsing fever" and general diseases. The surgical hospital was headed by Dr. Lilian Chesney, and consisted of a schoolhouse which held 170 mostly full beds. Undoubtedly this was a large number, but given the conditions of the times and the hardships of war, this was not even close to the worse cases. The typhus hospital consisted of a barracks outside of the town, and it too was overcrowded, but it was clean and tidy. The third hospital was outside the town, it suffered the most regarding proper equipment and it only had a doctor and a sister as medical trained staff, but the Austrian orderlies were doing their job and at least the injured and sick were receiving their medicine and stayed in a clean and fresh environment. Despite its shortages this third hospital had no less than 570 beds (Leneman 1998, 40).

The locals were always a source of curiosity to those serving in the SWH, just as the nurses and doctors themselves became a source of curiosity for the locals. Cultural Otherness/Alterity, which "is every inch a relationship" (Taussig 130), could be discussed on at least two levels: the image of the local inhabitants as envisaged by the Scottish nurses on the one hand, and on the other hand, the image of the Scottish nurses for the residents of the places they visited, who most of the time wondered at their courage and appreciated their skills in medicine. Both of these stances of alterity are found in their diaries and will be analysed.

In a different instance, when the nurses arrived in Dobruja in Ciocârlia de Jos, initially there was no intense activity, until 14 October 1916 when bombardments reached as far as the railway near Medgidia. Ysabel Birckbeck, the driver of one of the ambulances, tells us in tragic style how, because of the bombardments, the passengers asked her to turn around, but to no avail, as the bombs were falling from all directions and enemy planes

often flew far beyond the front line. Mary Milne, the cook for the Scottish women, also complained that doing her job was hard near falling bombs and in a rain of shrapnel. She notes this with irony, implying that it is a wonder that nothing and nobody has been affected by the enemy air strikes. Still in Ciocârlia de Jos, Ethel Moir has left an almost comical record telling us that the campaign hospital must benefit from some kind of special protection, since it was untouched by the very frequent bombardments. (Leneman 1994, 78-80).

The fourth chapter offers an analysis of the image of the other (the military and the soldiers), as well as of how the nurses situated themselves in the war environment and how the Scottish women's perspective on war changed. The SWH came into contact with military men of all ranks and nationalities: British, French, and Romanian, Serbian, and Russian high-ranking officers or common soldiers, as well as Austrian, German and Bulgarian war prisoners.

The description of the soldiers ranges from empathy, when dealing with severe cases in the hospitals, or grave, for example during the retreat on the Romanian front, or when noticing cases of self-inflicted wounds. The Scottish women were very fond of the Russian soldiers, whose games and confident ad-hoc music concerts helped in raising the morale of those in the hospitals. But these amusements ended with the arrival of the Easter Lent (or other such religious occasions), to the relief of Dr. Elsie Inglis, who was a rather Victorian character and preferred the doctors and nurses to concentrate on their work. Instances when Dr. Inglis has to calm down the spirits or reprimand her subordinates for socializing too much with the soldiers are described very comically in the diaries of the nurses.

For example, the journal of Miss Yvonne Fitzroy mentions the existence in Medgidia of a unit of the Russian Red Cross. Generally, the soldiers agreed that the Scottish nurses were more professional and offered better treatment, but this does not mean, for example, that patients did not sleep on hay mattresses on the floor even in the Scottish women's hospital. And even though they were all women they still accepted the help of men, especially using the help of a Serbian soldier whom they called "Chris" for translation. Miss Fitzroy remarks in her diary that he was rather tall and that he really did not appreciate having to explain to his fellow patients "the mysteries of (forgive me) a British bedpan." He would take quite a few moments to detach from his other occupations in order to explain to other soldiers that they would sadly have to lose a limb, or that they should not eat certain thing if their stomach was injured. Of course, nobody envied Chris or his role, but he was extremely useful to the Scottish women, who

also appreciated the help of the Russians, even though it took even longer for them to offer a helping hand (Fitzroy 37-38).

The British women also encountered French and British troops on the Romanian front, so a section of the chapter shall be dedicated to the description of Western troops. In the first month of 1917, a British naval armoured car squadron formed by Commander Locker-Lampson was met in Galați. A member of the squadron, the surgeon Lt. Maitland Scott, even offered Dr. Elsie Inglis the help of his medical expertise and that of his four assistants. Together they performed operations for 38 continuous hours, despite the fact that Dr. Inglis had just finished a 24 hour "shift." The devotion and altruism of these British doctors were indeed extraordinary, even beyond heroism (Leneman 1998, 96-97).

Dr. Elsie Inglis cared a lot for the Serbian soldiers who were present on the Romanian front and feared that they had been sent to Dobruja more or less as cannon fodder by the Russians, who thus avoided sacrificing their own divisions. That is why the nurses depicted the Serbians as brave martyrs and were always careful to mention the nationality of their patients if they were Serbians, while Romanian or Russian troops did not benefit from such attention in their diaries. Dr. Elsie Inglis even intervened for the Serbian soldiers with her country's government, asking for their transfer to the Macedonian front, closer to Serbia. Dr. Inglis correctly observed the negative changes that happened to the Russian Army around the time of the Bolshevik revolution. Unfortunately, the transfer took quite a long time to be set in motion. At the end of September 1917 she received a promise that the Serbian volunteers would be allowed to travel to Archangelsk with her medical unit, but after 3 weeks they were still in Hagi-Abdul. The official note that the Serbian Division would be transferred to the Macedonian front through Archangelsk and that the Scottish Women's Hospitals unit would travel with them was received on 27 October 1917. Most scholarly opinions state that Dr. Elsie Inglis's help in persuading the Russian authorities was crucial, otherwise the Serbian volunteers might not have returned to the Balkans. It appears that the high-ranking members of the Scottish Women's Hospitals used their influence at the highest levels in order to accomplish this. Even though the answer cannot be totally revealed to this question, it is very likely that Dr. Inglis tried everything to save the 1st Serbian Volunteer Division.

Chapter Five, titled *Elated and Traumatized Self(ves)*, shall provide an analysis of the tragic description of war trauma in the SWH nurses' diaries and the ways in which this witnessing of traumatic events stimulated thoughts of self-assessment both at a personal and a general level (in regards to the war effort) in the nurses' writings. The nurses' accounts of their

strenuous experience on the front were written when a certain period of time had passed, after which they evoked their shocking experiences in their diaries or letters from the front. Analysing the responses of the nurses from all the fronts to witnessing such trauma, Christine Hallett finds that they were torn between the society's expectations that they maintain their sang froid in order to provide the best care to their patients and the drive to record/understand the suffering they witnessed" (2010, 71). As regards the changes in self-introspection elicited by traumatic experiences, Hallett (2010) proposes that the inclination of emotional shutdown when facing trauma is often found in the autobiographical writings of women who served on the front and that those who had years of nursing experience were most adept at emotionally shielding themselves from the suffering they witnessed, so that they no longer considered trauma a central point in their writings. The same author concludes that women who volunteered to go to the front and were handling medical cases for the first time dedicated their writing to the description of the intense suffering they underwent, while the more experienced nurses, who were acquainted to work on the front, actually questioned the need for war, whilst offering descriptions of the actions they took to relieve suffering.

The personal experiences of the nurses left important marks on their impression of the war. In the beginning, the nurses were eager to travel to the front and begin their work, refraining from directly glorifying war, but showing the kind of naive enthusiasm historians usually criticise as regards those who had little idea about the destruction the war would bring. Before actually arriving on the front the women manifested excitement in their writings, thinking of their own role as that of heroes in an extraordinary adventure. Even though the presence of the nurses was meant to break the social order of the time, the women were subjected to authority within their organisation almost in the same way as in the society, so there was little encouragement for the usual nurse to adopt a different point of view on the war that was raging and to dispel its "heroic pageantry". The nurses held the view that war is 'ennobling', especially winning the war and this is reflected in their description of the military personnel they encountered and their enthusiasm when meeting the British soldiers in the Armoured Car Division. Vera Brittain noted in her famous war diary, *Testament of Youth*, that the nurses longed to be heroic, but the administration only permitted them a secondary role in war (104).

The last part of Chapter Five will analyse the great suffering in the nurses' depictions of the retreat out of Dobruja caused by the unspeakable character of what the women witnessed. The presupposition of this part of my work shall be that psychological scarring associated with the harrowing

experience of going through a retreat annihilates the feelings of glory or excitement that were so prevalent in the Scottish women's diary excerpts before their arrival on the front. What indicated such a conclusion was the fact that the misery of the general population of Dobruja during the retreat in the winter of 1916 was exceptionally and dolefully recorded by the nurse of the Scottish Women's Hospitals. I shall attempt to analyse to what extent dehumanization stands out as the main feeling behind the nurses' horror at what they saw during the retreat, and whether the "heroic pageantry of war" was considerably shook by the women's experience under shell fire and faded in the face of the unspeakable horrors witnessed during the retreat out of Dobruja, generating a displacement in the nurses' representation of (them)selves in relation to the manly universe of the fighting front.

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORY, DIARY WRITING AND NEW HISTORICAL DISCOURSE

1.1. Introduction

The letters and diaries of the nurses from the Scottish Women's Hospitals will be analysed both through New Historicist lenses and from the perspective of autobiographical studies. As to the former critical view, New Historicism, what interests the present study is the inclination towards marginal texts that have been excluded from investigation as well as the specific discourse which tells the story of an event that happened in the past. In other words, this research aims at assimilating the Scottish Nurses' depiction of the Great War during their stay in Romania in 1916-1917 into the scholarly field of World War I literature, autobiography and history by revealing examples of intertextuality and analysing the way in which the nurses constructed their descriptions. In the New Historicist field, mention should be made of Hayden White's theory of "metahistory", which identifies four modes of emplotment (romantic, tragic, comic, satirical) to which he associates four tropes (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony). (White, 1978). Since New Historicism, as White describes it and as Greenblatt develops it, is focused on the interrelation between history as real facts and narrative as the subjective illustration of facts from an individual perspective, these modes of emplotment, with their respective tropes could be identified in particular stories among which we could also include the Scottish nurses' diaries and letters. Born and educated in a country which knew little about Romania, the nurses found themselves on a territory they had almost no information about. Therefore, their point of view as well as the way in which they understand and describe the war situations differ dramatically from the official discourse of the war. Not only do their diaries and letters represent a subjective, marginal view, but they cannot be read as "literary" texts outside the historical narrative.

The second point of analysis as theoretical background is the theory of autobiographical studies. This approach is supported by the fact that the sources under scrutiny in this research are journals, letters and diaries,

which form the corpus of texts under scrutiny. In the context of the war, letters and diaries, which from the literary point of view belong to the large category of autobiographical studies, will obviously interrelate with trauma narratives, travel narratives, and witness discourse. Travel narratives usually refer to visits to foreign locations that are so well recorded as to offer an account of the traveller's experiences. Trauma narratives and witnessing are more recent developments in autobiographical studies and usually refer to personal depictions of the Holocaust, racial segregation and, also, war experience. Therefore, we consider that the Scottish nurses' diaries and letters correspond to travelling experiences and to trauma narratives (the war experience which the nurses lived and witnessed to its effects).

1.2. New Historicism or Cultural Poetics

New Historicism is a mode of literary criticism that was formulated during the 1980s within the cultural milieu of the West Coast. It was intended to oppose and enrich (old) historicism, based on Marxist views, yet it came to be identified as a reaction to both Marxism and deconstruction (Hohendahl 87). In its beginning, the main advocates of New Historicism were Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose and other scholars associated with the journal *Representations* published by the University of California Press. The term "New Historicism" (also referred to as "cultural poetics"), was first used by Stephen Greenblatt in an introduction to the 1982 issue of the journal *Genre* and also in the introduction to his book, *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* (1982). The aim of New Historicism is to lay concurrent emphasis on the "textual" nature of history – which is what separated it from "old" historicism – as well as on the historical nature of literary texts (Drabble, 719).

Historicism is also indebted to Marxism, but unlike Marxism, whose interpretation is based on the economic infrastructure (class relations and material relations of production), New Historicism views power as pervasive through society. This idea derives from Michel Foucault who, in the essay *Nietzsche. Genealogy. History* (1971) demonstrates the misleading character of subject and object, both being transcended by the "will to power" (1971, 145-172). Foucault finds that historical explanation is a characteristic of modernity and, almost in the same way as Althusser, he defines history as a discontinuous series of "epistemes" (or discursive formations), which are continuous in their regulation of knowledge (Hamilton 116).

New Historicism has borrowed from cultural anthropology the practice of extending critical analysis to previously disregarded texts, in order to add a “touch of the real” (Selden, Widdowson, Brooker 182). It differs from its British counterpart, cultural materialism, in what concerns the situation, or placement, of ideology/power in society. Cultural materialism draws on Althusser’s interpretation of ideology as situated within material institutions.

During the 1980s and the 1990s, a group of New Historicists looked at Romanticism with a view of reinterpreting it, as they considered that it called for a re-reading (McGann, 1985) By confronting the literary text with other political, economic, social or religious texts of the time, the New Historicists claim to understand the literary work in a way that neither its author nor its original readers could (Levinson 1986). For this belief, New Historicists have been accused by British cultural materialists of depoliticizing literature by “locking it away in its ‘own’ past” and “effacing the interpretative (ideological) stance and role of the critic who is indeed reading in the present” (Selden, Widdowson *et al.*, 184). Yet another difference between the British and American New Historicism is the reaction to authority and power. Where American critics speak of identification and counter-identification, their British counterparts are interested in the production of new roles in the power relations by those who refuse the status of the subject. (Selden, Widdowson, Brooker 2005, 185-186)

The first three practices of New Historicism identified by Veese refer to Foucault’s concept of power/knowledge. The principle of intertextuality, seen as a critique of formalism/New Criticism and its supposed norm that “a literary work is a self-contained object” (Drabble, 519), covers all the relations between texts: mimic, adaptation, derivation, allusion, and response. This, of course, has to do with the interdisciplinarity of New Historicism and those who practice it: literary critics, historians, art historians, anthropologists. Culture is generally considered to be a semiotic system, a network of signs. Therefore, New Historicists are very sceptical of unified depictions of culture, as “typically such unified myths are created to serve a particular interest in the present” (Payne 3). In other words, New Historicism is sceptical of metanarratives, is critical of literary formalism and favours the re-examination of the relationship between literature and history from the double perspective of historical and literary narratives.

Interdisciplinarity is a major concept for New Historicism, as it is for this research, which aims at extending the critical analysis to texts that have been hitherto treated more by historians or gender studies critics, concerned with connecting the Scottish nurses’ war contribution to the feminist movement and failing to see their written texts as literary productions. At

the same time, historians have shown indifference towards reading the nurses' texts as historical proofs. From a New Historicist perspective, however, the texts gain value as marginal discourse or as attractive unedited anecdotes. Seen as a return to "historically informed literary criticism" the proponents of New Historicism have refused to call it a critical theory, yet, its practice calls for criticism as a dominant trend (Maza 249).

The term "New Historicism" was coined in 1982 by Stephen Greenblatt in his introduction to *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance*. He begins by presenting the anecdote of Queen Elizabeth's reaction to Shakespeare's *Richard II* being performed on the eve of the Essex rebellion. Greenblatt sees the permeability of literature and history in the Queen's identification with the deposed king. Nevertheless, he did not intend his method to become a critical current and presents details about it in terms of a set of practices. Based on Greenblatt's theory, Michael Payne identifies ten characteristics of New Historicism, of which we mention: the representation of culture as a semiotic system; interdisciplinarity; the narration of a set of events, which also includes the acceptance of anecdotes as a "touch of the real"; suspicion of unified depictions of culture; the interconnection between literature and history. (Payne 3)

Although Greenblatt prefers the term "cultural poetics" to New Historicism, he sees the text as suspended between the overall discourse on the one hand and the cultural dialectics in which it is fashioned on the other hand. For instance, in *Marvelous Possessions* he provides a clear example of his view of text and society when he describes the cultural gap witnessed during an Indonesian Independence Day, when in a square a violent American film was being presented across the street from traditional Balinese shadow puppet play (Veestra 176).

Regarding the relationship between the text and the individual, Greenblatt is concerned with the self of the reader, which is formed by deference to authority (the State, Church, etc.) and in relation to the Other (different from authority and estranged, subversive, marginal). In short, to Greenblatt, "humans fashion, are fashioned, and are aware of being fashioned by discourse" (Greenblatt 1991, 182). This is important to our analysis of the letters and diaries of the SWH because such an approach, centred on discussing the writer's relation to authority and to the Other, offers a considerable insight into the cultural situation of the nurses and doctors. Easily dismissed by their own government in 1914, the brave members of the SWH are honoured for their efforts on the Eastern Front, despite the locals' and soldiers' initial surprise upon contact. In fact, how Greenblatt argues that New Historicism is a set of practices rather than a critical perspective is also applicable to our analysis, because describing the

cultural shock, the strangeness that struck the first European colonists of America must have also struck the British suffragists who visited the Eastern Front during the Great War, and the locals when they met the nurses.

Overall, Greenblatt's theory has been appreciated as remarkably coherent over the past three decades. His works prove a capacity for keeping the past up-to-date, engaging and thought-provoking due to his intelligent, imaginative and supple style (Payne 6), which intersects with postmodernism in its emphasis on "discontinuity and ruptures, eclecticism, heterogeneity, and decentered authority" (Kaes 154). Hayden White's theory of metahistory will be presented in the subsequent chapter to enable a reading of the diaries as modes of *emplotment*.

1.3. The Great War between Literature and History: Metahistory

The literature of the war that engulfed Europe between 1914 and 1918 is dominated by the desire to illustrate as well as partake in history, at a time when European historiography was in a state of change owing to the debate between objective vs. subjective notions of historical knowledge (Lau 2010, 2). The way the Great War is represented in literature and history plays an important part in the discussion whether letters and diaries written by women at the time constitute primary historical sources or should remain in the category of autobiographical, literary texts. The two roles of the nurses' writings do not exclude each other and, through the consideration of historical aspects as well as modes of literary construction their scholarly value for those interested in the phenomenon of the Great War, has increased.

The historical representation of the Great War has been, for many decades, considered to belong mainly to the world of men, women being denied authenticity in this respect, as the books they wrote about their experience were either denied publication (out of concern that this did not make good business as they would not be taken seriously) or, simply, not read (de Abreu 2008, 9). Santanu Das (2006) uses the term "silent witnesses" to refer to the role of women's accounts of the Great War, in reference to the writings of Vera Brittain. Higonnet explains that:

Earlier historians' and critics' omission of women's war experiences correspond to a belief that the record of the Great War was an exclusively masculine, veteran's preserve, and that women therefore did not write about the war. We continue to encounter the thesis that women's domestic condition, their lack of education, and their education in femininity

prevented them from recording their experiences or reactions to public events, especially to “war”, understood to be a male domain. Until very recently, few women’s poems and stories were reprinted; their work was not mentioned in bibliographies devoted to the war; official archives gathered testimony almost exclusively from men (1999, xii).

This also applies to the Scottish nurses’ diaries and accounts from Romania. For example, after going through the terrible retreat from Dobruja, the nurses comment in their diaries how surprised they were when they found out that newspapers back home, in Britain, described it as an orderly retreat, probably based on reports from Allied authorities, when they could have interviewed women who were on the Romanian front. In his influential work on memory and the Great War, Fussell quotes Private J. B. Priestley remarking with relief that the war was “a wholly masculine way of life uncomplicated by Woman” (1975, 274).

The Great War subverted traditional views of the roles of women especially revealing that the “ideological line” that separates the War Front from the Home Front became blurred. By assuming roles that used to belong to men, British women emancipated their condition, and this changed the way they wrote, “marking ruptures in the way they wrote” (Higonnet 1999, xxx). In his study, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*, Hynes states about the war that “Those who survived were shocked, disillusioned and embittered by their war experiences...They rejected the values of the society that sent them to war, and in doing so separated their own generation from the past and from their cultural inheritance” (1990, x). He makes reference to the fact that those who went to war lost their heroic attitude to the “myth” of war. He believes that was possible because of the way in which the Great War was represented as marking the beginning of a new, modern, era (Lau 2010, 21). Claire M. Tylee, one of the first scholars to look systematically at women’s writings from the Great War, writes in *The Great War and Women’s Consciousness* that women who were in positions of action during the conflict and not mere witnesses were able to produce a literature that eluded the general chivalric or heroic view of war that permeated culture at the turn of the century, unlike those who had passive roles. This is visible in the war descriptions from the Scottish nurses’ diaries: whenever they are out of work the women put on paper astonishing descriptions of the rural surroundings they visited in a very Romantic style, but once they found themselves on the frontline in the midst of bombardments their discourse turns militaristic and cold.

Paul Fussell concludes in his book that the war, by setting an ironic tone to literature, led to the apparition of modernism, as “the Great War was more ironic than any before or since...It was a hideous embarrassment...It reversed the Idea of Progress” (Fussell 1975, 8). Jay Winter, an American historian, who has done research on the memory of the Great War, has elaborated on Fussell’s study of irony as a trope of remembrance and has compared it to French culture. He states that:

While irony is in no sense uniquely British in origin or nuance, it is nonetheless the dominant style of British thinking about the war, informing a set of attitudes which has been passed down to later generations. Nothing of the kind exists in France. This contrast is evident in the simple fact that the poetry of Wilfred Owen was translated into French only in the late 1990s (2006, 118-119).

Winter believes that the trope of irony has changed British culture to a large extent because:

British and French intellectuals live in a different proximity to the institutions of the state, and that this positioning might reinforce what Raymond Williams referred to as different structures of feeling, different styles of expression. One aspect of that difference is what I have called the ironic temperament, and especially its utility as a distancing device (2006, 134).

Authors such as Virginia Woolf and Vera Brittain illustrate the kind of rupture that took place in British literature. In *Mrs. Dalloway* (published in 1925, the same year as Kafka’s *The Trial*, Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*), Clarissa Dalloway is what Santanu Das calls a “silent witness” to the war. Despite belonging to the privileged class and therefore one of the few who could be expected not to be involved in the war, she is distressed by the effects of the war and ponders on its destructive nature, while, in Vera Brittain’s work, witnessing is active, like in the letters and diaries of the Scottish nurses. Margaret Higonnet, for instance claims that the purpose of this kind of witnessing is to “incorporate women into the picture and locate their suffering. Often...concealed and silent” (1999, xxxiii). Just as Woolf describes Septimus Smith as weak and helpless in *Mrs. Dalloway*, suffering from post-war trauma, the Scottish nurses who went to the front most often portrayed men as feeble victims to whom they express compassion and maternal feelings, thus taking an active role in constructing individual and collective memory of the Great War (de Abreu 2008, 16).

That this memory is subjective, is obvious. This undoubtedly raises the question of reliability. Should we, as readers and interpreters of war letters and diaries, put our trust in the accounts? How should we look at the accounts: as historical proof or as literary texts? The truth is that they are both and neither.

At this stage, Hayden White's theory on historiography may help reveal the particular connection between fiction and fiction. Unlike Stephen Greenblatt, who approached literature from history, Hayden White developed a theory of reading history through literary strategies. In his most cited work, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973), he consolidates the idea that historical writing is similar to literary writing.

White believes that all those who seek to write history are bound to produce an interpretation, subjective in its way, of various 'historical' materials, which leads to the creation of metahistory. In elaborating his theory, he draws upon the Enlightenment philosophers who speculated that man can know only what he is able to make or has already made and supports his argument by mentioning nineteenth-century philosophers such as Hegel, Nietzsche and Croce who had embraced the theory according to which history is an interpretation and its objectivity is only a myth. Historians have raised objections to White's view, arguing that the purpose of the historian is to provide explanations, not interpretations. However, to White, the interpretative and explanatory aspects of the narrative tend to overlap in a manner that leads to their becoming a representation of the past or an explanation of why past events happened as they did (White 1978, 51-52). Moreover, White does not claim that every historian has his/her own mode of interpreting history, but that there are three levels in the construction of historical narratives that can be analysed and he proposes a quaternary model for each of these levels, which he has used in his own investigation of the nineteenth-century history. He identifies three modes: *emplotment*, *argument* (explanation) and *ideology* as the three main preferences of both historians and authors, which are equal in importance, not hierarchical.

The combination of the modes of emplotment with the modes of argument and the modes of ideology may take place in any order, thus creating a historiographical style, but White believes that some are interrelated, or homologous, as described in the table below:

Emplotment	Argument or Explanation	Ideology
Romance	Formist(idiographic)	Anarchist
Comedy	Organicist	Conservative
Tragedy	Mechanistic	Radical
Satire	Contextualist	Liberal

Figure 1 (White 1973, 29)

Ideology is self-explanatory and White's consideration of Anarchism, Conservatism, Radicalism and Liberalism is not surprising given the context of the nineteenth century. The mode of argument or explanation stands for the historian's view of what history ought to be. Thus, an ideographic historian would classify and categorize events in his work, while an organicist would agree that the whole counts more compared to the parts that make it. A Mechanistic historian prefers laws that preside over human activities and determine them, while a Contextualist explains events by their relationship to similar occurrences.

It is not suggested in Hayden White's work that the associations in the table above should appear in perfect order in each historian's work, but that a tension between the historian's ideology and his modality of using emplotment and explanation arises. This tension may or may not be present in a historian's earlier or later work, following the ideological shifts that may take place through a researcher's writing career, such as in the case of Alexis de Tocqueville, Karl Marx or Benedetto Croce. Other more "doctrinaire" writers such as Friedrich Engels, Henry Thomas Buckle or Hippolyte Taine, who do not profess such changes in perspectives, may merely refine their interpretative techniques over time without allowing a tension to arise in their narrative strategy (White 1978, 71).

Emplotment stands for the genre of the respective historian and ranges from Romantic (where the good triumphs after overcoming great difficulties) to Comedy (which seeks to preserve shared human values against corruption), Tragedy (which deplores the loss of good when principles collide) and Satire (where recklessness and luck govern human affairs so any change is meaningless). White also calls emplotment the "kind" of narrative under scrutiny and claims that it is "the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind" (1973, 7). Romantic includes the classical story of the victory of light over darkness, of good over evil and of the success of the rise of man over his limits after a downfall. It is a drama of self-identification built on the hero's liberation and victory against the world.

This mode of emplotment is opposed to Satire, but may be intertwined with Comedy or Tragedy (White 1973, 12). Regarding history writing, tragedy is characteristic to the writing of those authors who perceive an “eternal return of the Same in the Different” (White 1973, 11), meaning that they look behind the facts and can notice a construction of relationships that explains the described situation. Comedy brings the possibility of “at least partial liberation from the condition of the Fall and provisional release from the divided state in which men find themselves in this world” (White 1973, 9). When mentioning man’s fall, White refers to the menacing spectre of death that is haunting human existence. Comic writers often use festive occasions for such “reconciliations” of the forces that are at play in the world, including their social and natural components. Comedy brings hope for man’s victory over the hardships of the world.

Hayden White believes that the modes described above operate on the “surface” of history writing and expands his theory by introducing four main *tropes*: Metaphor, Metonymy, Synecdoche and Irony. Metaphor involves a comparison or analogy and characterizes a phenomenon as regards its similarity or dissimilarity to another one. Metonymy, means referring to a certain thing by mentioning something that is related to it, while synecdoche is a term that reveals that a part of something stands for the whole (1973, 34). Irony brings out tacitly the opposite of what is stated literally, assuming that the reader is able to realize the absurdity of the message. Its stylistic device is *aporia* (“doubt”), the real or feigned disbelief of the historian/writer in his own statements (White 1973, 37). Jay Winter claims that “irony destabilizes. It rules out certain kinds of certainty. It is a mirror in which the gaze confronts something which is not quite what it seems to be” (2006, 134), considering that in letters and journals, especially those referring to the war, the soldiers use a specific language, comparable to that specific to football, “an imagery of game and gamesmanship” (134).

White differentiates between the four tropes by considering that metaphor is representational, metonymy is reductionist, synecdoche is integrative and irony is negational, by offering as an example, the phrase “my love, a rose.” He interprets the phrase in various ways: as a metaphor, the loved one is compared to a rose, as a metonymy, the lover is reduced to a rose, and as a synecdoche, the lover is identified with the essence of a rose (White 1973, 34). On the other hand, if added the ironical aspect, love would not be seen as bliss, since roses have thorns.

White points to the similarity between his way of deconstructing historical writing to Northrop Frye’s and R. G. Collingwood’s. Frye agrees that the narrative of a historian becomes entwined with myth after a certain level of fact explanation is reached and thus the historian’s text may be

considered poetic (White 1978, 57). This is somewhat related to Greenblatt's concept of cultural poetics. According to him, White adopts a formist stance by proposing this structure of emplotment, explanation and ideology for the study of nineteenth-century historiography.

Northrop Frye introduces three types of historical myths: the romantic myth (based on a mission to a Heavenly City or towards a classless society), the comic myth of history (which emphasizes revolt and revolution as advancement events) and the tragic myth, which highlights decay and descent, relapse and unpremeditated calamity (2000, 35-37). He adds that there is clear difference between the poet and the historian, in that the historian does not work deductively, but inductively, by putting evidence head to head and building a narrative, while the poet would know beforehand what form to give to his chosen subject. Yet, Frye notes that this difference is formal and suggests that metahistory and "proper history" are hard to separate, as there is a grain of myth in any type of history considered. Hayden White agrees to these considerations of Frye's theory, despite the difference between his own four historical modes of emplotment and Northrop Frye's three types of historical myths. After discussing the latter, White concludes that "history consists of the provisions of a plot structure for a sequence of events so that their nature as a comprehensible process is revealed by their figuration as a *story of a particular kind*" (White 1978, 58).

As a final point, Hayden White has the merit of producing a theory that considers history explicable in the way that poetry is, therefore referring to a historian's task of writing history as a poetic act. His ideas are somewhat controversial among academic historians, who have criticised both his theory and his approach. White has been accused of trying to undermine traditional historiography by historians who show that narration is the most suitable way of approaching the past and the fact that it is made accessible through the use of language does not mean that language is all there is in historiography. His irritated critics maintain that the first task of the historian is that of finding the truth through archival research, while the individual historian's own style and imagination is a trait of any type of writer (Sutermeister 2005). Some express regret that White's formist approach to historiography did not extend to the twentieth century (Marwick 14). The "long nineteenth century,"¹ which lasts from the French Revolution to the First World War includes the time period of the Great War, so the project of analysing the letters and diaries of the Scottish Women's

¹ The phrase was introduced by the British historian Eric Hobsbawm in *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789–1848* (1962); *The Age of Capital: 1848–1875* (1975); and, *The Age of Empire: 1875–1914* (1987).

Hospitals using Hayden White's model falls within the boundaries set by himself for his theory of metahistory. Of course, the question arises whether these sources represent apt historical accounts, since Hayden White applied his model to works of famous historians, but this will be discussed in the sub-chapter dedicated to autobiographical studies.

1.4. Autobiographical Writing

Since the current research is based on letters and diaries, it is important to elaborate on the value of journals, diaries and letters as autobiographical texts. Autobiography denominates "an account of a person's life by him- or herself" (Cuddon 63). Smith and Watson describe diaries as "[a] form of periodic life writing, the diary records dailiness in accounts and observations of emotional responses" (193). The same authors agree that the importance of diaries comes from their chronological "accretion of experience" (Roorbach 165). It is then added that since the diarist is unknowledgeable about what the future will bring, the diary is unique in its constructions of identity that are fixed in time and space (Smith, Watson 193).

Historically, one of the pioneers of "autobiography" was Robert Southey (1774-1843), who coined the term in 1809, but autobiographies have been written since ancient times, though not too many published. Histories and autobiographies used to be the same genre in the classic period (Cuddon 63-64). The first and probably one of the most celebrated works in autobiography is the *Confessions* by St. Augustine written during the late 4th century, which prompted the beginning of the "tradition of inwardness" in Western civilization (Ricoeur 96), and includes the sentence that has become famous: "I am remembering myself, my memory, my mind" ("Ego sum qui memini, ego animus" (Augustine 222). Even in this task of recalling the past, Constantine invokes God's for his assistance. The Renaissance brought an effusion of autobiographical works, and during the following centuries autobiographical writings flourished, with major oeuvres being published, and with women joining the autobiographical literary field.

The writing of women's autobiographies flourished throughout the entire twentieth century. One must not forget however that the first autobiography in English dates back to the 1400s and was called *The Book of Margery Kempe*, which tells the story of psyche, troubled by visions and other religious experiences. Intereestingly, the manuscript was discovered in the twentieth century, when there was a renewed interest in this type of autobiographical work. Estelle Jelinek believes that women's autobiographies, unlike the other types of autobiographical works, possess three unique characteristics. First, the autobiography refers to the woman's personal life

and not to major historical issues of the time (Jelinek 21-31). Therefore, from an autobiographical text one can expect more information about the author's family, friends and domestic matters and very little information about political and social issues. Second, what is of even greater importance and supplements our theoretical standpoint as outlined in the previous subchapter, Jelinek states that women tend to employ irony, humour, understatement and a straightforward style in contrast to the idealized, self-confident, exaggerated and sometimes nostalgic style of male autobiographical writers. Last, Jelinek claims that female autobiography is rarely chronological, but fragmentary, disconnected, organized into stand-alone chapters which are often interrupted by mental associations or anecdotes, rather than being smoothly unfolding narratives (Jelinek 21-23).

In the subsequent chapters, we will refer to the three characteristics of women's autobiography as stated above, with one difference. Unlike many women's autobiography, the journals, diaries and letters by the Scottish nurses mix descriptions of their life on the front, the scenery, the customs, with references to the war as they understood it from behind the front lines, and relating the events from the perspective of the foreigner who is willing to give humanitarian help.

1.4.1. Diaries, Journals and Letters

Diaries and journals form, actually the corpus of this research, both seen as components of autobiographical studies. First of all, it should be noted that a number of critics distinguish between the diary and the journal, considering that "the journal tends to be more a public record" (Smith, Watson 193) and therefore not as intimate as the diary. In autobiographical studies, the examination of the diary in relation to other similar types of texts remains mostly uncharted, and scholars generally use the terms "diary" and "journal" interchangeably (Smith, Watson 196). Since I share this latter view, in this study there will be no distinction between the journal and the diary. Generally, the journal is viewed as "A form of life writing that records events and occurrences" (Smith, Watson 196), which could be more or less fictionalized, a classical example in this respect being Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, for instance. There is also a distinction between traditional historical monographs, which claim to depict dispassionately a specific time period, and life accounts, in journals or diaries, which archive the quirks of one's life (Wallach 446-447). This is an observation that supports the New Historical claim according to which historical anecdotal events may also be recorded in sources such as letters and diaries.

Diary writing became more common in the 17th century and women began to record their daily thoughts regularly since the next century. Referring to those times, mention should be made of Countess Mary Cowper (1685-1724), Elizabeth Byrom (1722-1801), and Fanny Burney (1752-1840), one of the ladies-in-waiting to Queen Charlotte, who sometimes put on paper more than 7,000 words to cover one single day! Some of the best diaries in the nineteenth century belong to women. For example, Dorothy Wordsworth's detailed diaries and journal allow us to find out a great deal about her brother, the famous poet William Wordsworth. One can also study the diary of Queen Victoria (*Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands*, 1862, with a further edition in 1883 entitled *More Leaves*) or George Eliot's *Journal*. Women nurses also wrote diaries, especially during spectacular events. Thus, nurses wrote diaries during the American Civil War (1860-1864), the famous Florence Nightingale disclosed a lot from her nursing activities in her notes, therefore the Scottish nurses diaries and letters during the First World War were not singular (Cuddon 220).

Literary theoreticians usually distinguish between two types of diaries and journals: intimate and anecdotal; besides these two there are also notebooks, which are less detailed and more abbreviated than diaries and journals (Cuddon 220). Intimate diaries, preferred by French writers, are concerned with the feelings of their authors rather than with recording the coordinates of more or less interesting events, which are generally regarded as anecdotal diaries. In the first category, works such as Jonathan Swift's *Journal to Stella*, or those by Mary Shelley, Benjamin Constant and Leo Tolstoy are included, while the second type might include James Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* or the diaries by Charles Greville, Thomas Creevey and Horace Walpole, who were only a few of the Regency's diarists. (Cuddon 220).

Since the journals and diaries of the nurses and doctors of the Scottish Women's Hospitals were specifically written to record their activities on the frontline, it can be assumed that they fall into the latter category, that of anecdotal diaries. Given that the nurses and doctors were embarking on quite an extraordinary endeavour it is not surprising that many of them, who also had a rich educational and cultural background, sought to keep diaries during their venture to the Eastern front. Still, not all the diaries narrate events. On some occasions, as we will see, the nurses express their emotional states in their records, just as it is customary for intimate journals, which probably some of them wrote before joining the front as medical staff and may have been inclined to continue writing this way since they were familiar with the style.

Letters represent a wholly different category of autobiographical writing. It is the quality of letters both as public documents and depositories of the inner feelings of their authors that will be ascertained in the following chapters, as letters can be considered “vehicles through which information is circulated, social roles enacted, relationships secured, often in a paradoxical mix of intimacy and formality” (Smith, Watson 196). Ideologies of nationality, class, ethnic belonging or even gender can be read within letters based on their style and on the formalities observed by the authors. Letters from the Great War first came to the attention of academics and the public with the publication of Philipp Witkop’s propagandistic collection of letters of fallen German soldiers that expounded their exhilarating nationalism and eagerness for the war, but also had a role in providing experiences of bereavement (Winter 2006, 105-106).

The letters of the nurses in the Scottish Women’s Hospitals are both personal, addressed to their friends or family, and public, letters about their duties, addressed to the Scottish Women’s Hospitals Committee in London. Their personal letters are similar to any other kind of travel letter that hold a rich tradition in Britain (e.g. the *Turkish Letters* (1763) by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu considered to be among the first travel letters to be published (Cuddon 449-451). It is interesting to note that, at that time, before the arrival of the epistolary novel, the border between reality and fiction, i.e., between literature and correspondence, was blurred. The study of women’s writings, including letters, flourished during the 20th century, with many Feminist critics (Hämmerle, Überegger and Bader-Zaar 2014) seeking to read gender in these new, fresh sources.

The letters examined in this research do not only fit the category of women’s writings, but they are also part of the immense number of “war letters” sent home during the Great War. It is estimated that about 12 million letters a week were exchanged between Britain and the Western front through the General Post Office, but the letters of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals on the Eastern Front took a different route. These were sent to Britain through the diplomatic post of the British consulates in Brăila and Galați, which presented the advantage of bypassing the war letter filter/censorship (Cornelius). Needless to say, the amount of time it took for a letter to travel from the Romanian Front to Britain was extended, usually to a few weeks.

1.4.2 Trauma, Witnessing and Traveling

Besides the autobiographical categories of diary/journal and letters, the current study will strive to identify and analyse instances of trauma

narrative, witnessing, and travel narrative. Travel narratives are quite old in European civilization and can involve multiple sub-types, such as travelogues, travel journals, quests, adventure narratives, letters home, narratives of exotic landscape or (pseudo)ethnographies (Smith, Watson 207). All of these involve a journey so they focus on the displacement of the author and his/her observations of “the unknown, the foreign, the uncanny” (Smith, Watson 207), which allow for his/her repositioning in relation to the ideological norms of “home”.

Although somewhat neglected, travel literature or travelogues have been enriched by sporadic authors such as sailors, explorers, mercenaries, missionaries, scholars, diplomats, archaeologists, and anthropologists, and also – as it is the case of the authors of the primary sources under scrutiny here – by doctors. Women seriously partook in writing travelogues from the late 18th century. For example, Emily Eden (1797-1869) and her sister, Fanny, wrote accounts of their travels to India. They travelled with members of the British colonial ruling class (of which Dr. Elsie Inglis, the founder of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals, was also part since her father had worked in the British administration in India). Yet, in doing so, they shared the discourse of imperialism, the only discourse they had been educated in (Sprong). Thus, it will be argued that the accounts left to us by the Scottish nurses on the Eastern Front are part of that Victorian tradition and, consequently, they express Victorian aesthetics in the description of landscapes in their travels. The “raw” diurnal travel narratives of the members of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals were written privately and they are different in composition from those that were later edited for publication, which bear a more public-friendly form. This difference will be discussed in the following chapters, as those writings of the nurses that were edited before publication contain more vivid descriptions of their authors’ feelings than those written “on the spot,” which are more action oriented. Bearing in mind the tradition of imperialism in the British travel narratives written by women during the 19th century, I will also present the connection between the imparted individual encounters recorded in these diaries and the more noteworthy political significances they both reflect and demand.

Related to witnessing, trauma narratives are also to be considered in our theoretical outline, since war experiences may be described as highly traumatic. From the Greek word for “wound”, trauma means a dislocation that is overwhelming and central in an experience (Smith, Watson 207). In psychology, trauma was introduced by Sigmund Freud, in his mention of “commotional trauma” in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, as a type of trauma that was due to the effects of technology and industrialization. Trauma narrative refers both to “a person struggling to make sense of an

overwhelming experience in a particular context and [to] the unspeakability of trauma itself, its resistance to representation” (Gilmore 46).

In his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud reformulates the idea of trauma by reconsidering the role of sexuality and by referring to it in the treatment of shell-shocked patients in the aftermath of the First World War. Mitchell compares shell-shock to hysteria, as it was defined before the period of the Great War as an affliction that was diagnosed in women who were subject to a sexual incident during their childhood that was then repressed. She finds that war trauma brought the need of shifting such neurotic afflictions away from the feminine gender by the invention of the new concept of shell-shock and the demise of the diagnosis of hysteria (Stewart 8). Shell-shock is explained as a neurosis based on “the desire for self-preservation and the drive to aggression” (Stewart 8), which was triggered when someone who had been to the Front would reminisce in his dreams past events that caught him off guard.

Writing specifically about the trauma narratives of the First World War, Victoria Stewart brings into discussion Paul Fussell’s argument that the war brought the ironic mode into British culture, and provided a “paradigm [which] proves adequate to any succeeding confrontation” (Fussell 86). This argument is refuted by Stewart who states that it does not take into consideration the experience of women who were also closely affected by trench warfare:

The lack of consideration of women’s responses to the war is not so surprising given that Fussell chooses to focus on the experience of trench warfare, [...] reducing the war to what happened to men on the Western Front skews the extent to which other types of experience, and therefore other ‘mythologies’, might have entered British culture (Stewart 2).

The modes of plotment that will be identified in the subsequent chapters will attempt to show whether Fussell’s argument stands up in the analysis of the sources under scrutiny in this book.

Witnessing is seen as a double-sided process: first, it implies an observer testifying to an important or traumatic event, and second, it involves bearing witness to something that cannot be seen, so that, for example, a witness can be judged at fault by posterity for failing to take notice of aspects that are crucial for the reader. One could easily think of the example of the Holocaust, which has galvanized the field of autobiographical studies in the twentieth century.

Cathy Caruth describes trauma as an experience of overwhelming witnessing, an instance when too much is experienced unexpectedly, without it being fully understood (4), thus revealing the close relationship

between trauma narratives and witnessing. Kelly Oliver notes that: “The victims of oppression, slavery, and torture are not merely seeking visibility and recognition, but they are also seeking witnesses to horrors beyond recognition. The demand for recognition manifest in testimonies from those othered by dominant culture is transformed by the accompanying demands for retribution and compassion” (Caruth 79). Trauma, witnessing, oppression and alienation lead the victim to desire that his/her own ordeal be recognized by the group that would least likely do that, namely, their own persecutor (Oliver 80).

It is no wonder that many of the members of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals published their journals or wrote to the press about the situation at the Front. They were interested in presenting to the public three situations that they had witnessed: the horrors of war in general, their own efforts and dedication to the Front and the situation experienced by their allies. This last aspect was actually a special concern of Dr. Elsie Inglis, the leader of the unit who travelled to Romania. As we shall see, during their journey in Romania what upsets them most was finding places that seemed completely out of touch from the horrors of the Front, where all seemed to live in, caring little about the desperate struggle at the Front line.

1.5. The Scottish Women’s Hospitals Organisation

Since one of the women’s occupations in the nineteenth-century Victorian England was nursing, it is not uncommon for women to volunteer for this job mainly in times of war. In this way women would become part of the medical institution and her skills were generally accepted and appreciated there.

Referring to the setting up and consolidation of medical institutions, Michel Foucault states that the process of the creation of clinics and hospitals was double-sided, supported by the tradition of individual practitioners and by the newfound interest of the state in providing qualified medical attention (Foucault 1980, 166). Ehrenreich and English find that “women have always been healers” (2010, 25) and that throughout history they were seen as wise women or healers, despite their supremacy in this role being gradually taken over by men. The same authors note that “women are inherently nurse-like and not doctor-like” (2010, 27) and that their contribution to medicine used to be dismissed on every level. Indeed, if a woman could be accepted to work as a nurse, it was unheard of for women to become doctors.

The best-known nurse of the Victorian age was Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), credited as the founder of modern nursing and celebrated as

the “lady with the lamp” in the 1857 poem *Santa Filomena* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Florence Nightingale was mostly active during the Crimean War (1853-1856), but it should be noted that this tradition of nursing also spread to Southeastern Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century. During the Romanian War of Independence (1877-1878), a war hospital under the guidance of Maria Rosetti (1819-1893) was set up at Turnu Măgurele. She was the wife of the Romanian politician C. A. Rosetti, but her ancestry was Scottish, with her father belonging to the Grant clan of the Highlands. Furthermore, the Scottish Nurses were present in the Balkans during the First Balkan War, when Mabel St. Clair Stobart led a field hospital unit to Bulgaria (Coroban 2012, 22).

Although these facts were little known during World War I among the medical staff of the Russian, Romanian, and Serbian troops, there were volunteer units of Scottish women working as nurses, doctors, and ambulance drivers at the front line. They were members of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals (SWH), an institution established during the early days of World War I as an expression of patriotism and feminism. The SWH were members of, and were backed by, the National Union of the Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). In Edinburgh, the headquarters of the SWH was provided by the Scottish Federation of the Women’s Suffrage Societies (SFWSS), of which Dr. Elsie Inglis (credited as the personality who founded the SWH) was also a member, but there was also a London sub-committee of the SWH.

The founder chose this name for their organisation hoping to attract medical staff as well as sponsorships from feminists and other categories of people. Even women who did not personally agree to the suffragettes’ movement were admitted to the SWH as long as they wished to contribute to the war effort. Still, the latter category could not be promoted to an officer position in the organisation, because it also used the red-white-green standard of the suffragists, actually revealing a very close connection to them (McDermid 2008, 135-138).

Elsie Maude Inglis (16 August 1864-26 November 1917) spent her early years in India with her family, until 1876 when they moved to Edinburgh. She studied there, then continued her studies in Paris: in 1886 she attended the Edinburgh School of Medicine for Women, and then she gained the Triple Qualification Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow in 1892. She set up medical practice in Edinburgh in 1894 together with Jessie McGregor. In 1899 Elsie Inglis went on to obtain her MBChM from the University of Edinburgh, which was now open to women. She also lectured on gynaecology in the Edinburgh Medical College for Women, and travelled to Vienna and the U.S.A. to improve her

profession. Before World War I she worked mostly in the medical care of women and children.

Women joined the SWH for different reasons, but above all to prove their loyalty to the British Empire. Dr. Inglis, for example, was born in India in 1864, where her father was working for the East India Company, and she always showed her patriotism and loyalty to Great Britain. Other reasons that volunteers shared when they joined the SWH were the spirit for adventure and bravery, while the feminists showed determination to prove that women were useful in a war and deserved the right to vote. Generally, from the journals they left behind, we can deduce that they were deeply impressed by the destructions of the war, but they treated all Prisoners of War as well as the refugees in the same manner (McDermid 2008, 135-151).

Initially, Dr. Elsie Inglis offered the services of her organisation to the British government but this offer was refused. However, she received a positive answer from the allied governments of France and Serbia, which immediately accepted her generous offer. For Dr. Elsie Inglis, this was the beginning of a life-long sympathy for Serbia. In April 1915 Dr. Elsie Inglis arrives in Serbia with her medical unit, but they are captured near Vrnjatchka Banja by Austrian troops in November 1915. Most of her unit was detained until February 1916, although they were still allowed to perform their medical tasks (McDermid 2008, 135-151). On their release, Dr. Inglis did not give up helping the Serbs and so decided to follow the Serbian Volunteer Divisions. The First Volunteer Division was ordered to the Front at Dobruja by the Russian War Minister, Alexeiev. Meanwhile, Dr. Elsie Inglis was asked by the Serbian Prime-Minister Nicola Pašić to help the Serbs in the Russian Army (Lawrence 188).

The London sub-committee of the SWH and consequently the NUWSS were also responsible for organizing this adventure of the Serbian Army (McDermid 2008, 135-151). Still, the members of the sub-committee were not really enthusiastic supporters of this effort to send abroad a new unit (probably fearing the overextension of the organisation), so they conditioned the unit's departure by making Dr. Elsie Inglis its leader. When she received the news, at first she wanted to quit the SWH as a matter of principle, expressing her sadness to hear that in London they cared more about politics than of the Serbs' need of help. On this occasion, she also reminded the sub-committee that the women in the SWH often happen to suffer deprivations because of their tardiness in taking decisions. Even more, Dr. Inglis showed that she is not conditioned by her adherence to the London committee, because she might as well join the Serbs through a different organisation (the Serbian Relief Fund). It is remarkable that from her correspondence we can see that she never thought about the effect that

her parting from the SWH would have on the public. It is possible that this could also have been the main concern of the London committee, because, in their correspondence, it is clearly stated that the press would enjoy such a fiasco, and the general public could understand that when women do not obtain what they want in the smallest detail, they threaten to quit. This attitude was common in the patriarchal society, but this would have been against the interests of the organisation, as well (Leneman 1994, 59-60).

After an internal dissension in the SWH organisation over where to open new campaign hospitals, a compromise was reached and the London Unit of Dr. Elsie Inglis (which she led as Chief Medical Officer) was to leave for Russia in order to join the Serbian Volunteers Division located in Dobruja. The London committee provided the funding for the medical equipment and its maintenance, while the headquarters in Edinburgh provided the salaries. This joint financial control meant future misunderstandings and frictions between the two institutions of the SWH, but it is important that eventually Dr. Inglis's unit could follow its mission. The unit had to travel via the Archangelsk-Odessa route because the Dardanelles were closed to the Entente ships, so the only available route to Romania was by train from Northern Russia (Leneman 1994, 73-74).

The unit consisted of 76 women, meaning generalist doctors, one radiologist, a pharmacist, 17 nurses, 16 orderlies, cooks and laundresses, plus a transport sub-unit of drivers, ambulances, cars and trucks. They all set sail together with 36 Serbian officers and soldiers on 11 September 1916 (all dates are in the Gregorian calendar, the Julian equivalent is 13 days earlier). At their arrival in Archangelsk they received messages from the Serbian Volunteers Divisions asking them to arrive in Odessa as soon as possible (McDermid 2008, 140). The news from Romania was not good as the German brought 8 divisions and almost occupied the Bucharest-Constanța railroad, while also causing heavy losses to the Entente. There were only 4,000 Serbs surviving out of 14,000 so Dr. Inglis telegraphed to London asking for more medical supplies for the wounded (Leneman 1994, 74).

The unit led by Dr. Elsie Inglis arrived in Odessa on 21 September 1916. To their surprise, the Scottish women were described in the local press as "healthy manly women, sunburnt and ready for anything" (McDermid 2008, 140). The Russian authorities and the other British subjects in Odessa received them well. Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna, the aunt of Czar Nicholas II, invited them for a gala evening at the theatre, and offered them the advice to purchase warm thick clothes in preparation for the winter (McDermid 2008, 140).

1.6. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the ways by means of which the letters and diaries by the nurses of the Scottish Women's Hospitals who participated in the war effort on the Romanian Front will be analysed. The inquiry into such sources belonging to a more or less ignored source of authorship of the Great War period matches the practices of New Historicism, which, as it has been shown, is a mode of criticism that explores the peripheral, the unexpected and the anecdotal in order to challenge or renew cultural paradigms. Drawing largely on Paul Fussell's seminal study on the literature of the First World War and seeking to explore his assertion that the war induced an ironic mode into British culture, I have identified Hayden White's approach to history writing as a useful theoretical pathway into accessing the way narratives are created in the writings of the nurses.

Of the multiple views of New Historicism, Hayden White's theory of tropes and modes of emplotment seems the most suitable for the exegetic intentions described above. Similarly, Northrop Frye's introduction of the romantic, comic and tragic myths as narrative strategies, matches Hayden White's theory on the existence of plot and story in any kind of narrative, which he determines by resorting to the modes of emplotment, tropes and ideologies. Therefore, to him, any historical text is a "literary artefact," corresponding to modes of emplotment, such as romance, tragedy, comedy and satire, each with its specific style. Looking at the Scottish nurses' letters and diaries through these lenses, we will have texts that could be read both as literary artefacts and as historical documents. The analysis of tropes (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony) will be most revealing as stylistic devices and less as historical testimony, considering their subjective value. However, what the nurses see and describe as war events and participating characters provide an insight which, as subjective as it may be, reveals new, though marginal, dimensions of the war reality.

Letters and diaries are sources that are more rarely used in the academic fields of literature and history. My intention is to use them in an interdisciplinary approach by means of which I will attempt to seek examples of history witnessing that exceeds the overwhelming experience of the nurses and their adventure on the Eastern Front.

CHAPTER TWO

URBAN CARTOGRAPHIES IN THE SCOTTISH NURSES' DIARIES

2.1. Introduction

This chapter is intended to present an outline of the SWH's sojourn to Romania before turning to its full purpose, an analysis of the instances in which Romanian towns are mentioned in the diaries and letters of the SWH during their stay on the Eastern Front. The hypothesis is that most of the nurses' representations of towns were written in a tragic tone, as envisioned and described by Hayden White. This is due, on the one hand, to the fact that the destruction of important urban centres as elements of European civilization was part of the general devastation caused by the Great War and, on the other hand, to the immediate feelings of sorrow, disappointment and hopelessness which the Scottish women felt during their stay and work in a country ravaged by war.

A premise that this chapter relies on is that cities represent "an aggregation or accumulation, not just in demographic, economic or planning terms, but also in terms of feeling and emotion" (Preston and Simpson-Housley 2002, 1). Similarly, Robert Alter, in a study of the representation of the city in 19th-century literature, shows that "...to live [...] to walk the city streets, to enter the urban crowds, to be exposed to the exponential increase of noise and bustle, to inhabit an apartment building or tenement... [changes] the perception of the fundamental categories of time and space, the boundaries of the self, and the autonomy of the individual" (Alter 2005, xi). Therefore, given the range of experiences awakened by the situation of the individual in the urban space – and more so, in times of war – our intention is to discuss aspects such as sentiments, reactions, passions, fears and thoughts awakened by the Romanian towns in the minds of their Scottish visitors, as revealed by the writings these nurses and doctors have left us, as well as to illustrate the way they describe these localities.

Another important premise for the topic of this chapter is that the importance of city space as a literary symbol cannot be overstated. In 19th-century culture, for example in the works by Wordsworth or Dickens, the

city tended to be described both as a place of confusion and crowdedness, as well as an alluring location of excitement (Preston and Simpson-Housley 2002, 4). In the nurses' descriptions this multiplicity is present: Romanian towns are sometimes described as fascinating as well as teeming with people, perhaps owing to the cultural baggage of the British nurses, yet the realities of war have an important part in this as well. Towns were attractive and busy – except when they faced enemy bombardments – for the reason that they were among the few places where food and supplies – most of the time in small quantities and for high prices – were available. The excerpts include accounts about Medgidia, Constanța, Brăila, Galați, Iași, Hârșova, Tulcea and even about Bucharest. This corresponds to the areas of the front where they were active, namely the southeast of Romania. Impressed or not, amazed at the lively boulevards, such as in the case of Brăila, appalled by the seeming indifference of the townspeople or taken aback by the traumatic effects of bombardments, the nurses and doctors of the SWH included all these localities in their accounts. This was perhaps due to the importance of space and time in Victorian culture, in which these concepts had been standardized earlier than in other European cultures (Pettitt 2012). As can be imagined, the nurses felt the need to always situate themselves in time and space owing to the long tradition of diary writing in Britain and to their being used to exact quantifications of time and distance, of which plentiful examples will be provided in this chapter, after presenting the highpoints of the Scottish nurses' adventure in Romania in 1916-1917, for the sake of a better contextualization.

2.2. Medgidia: “...about ten miles from the firing line...”

On 24 September 1916, the Scottish Women Hospitals unit left Odessa towards Medgidia, where the Russian military headquarters in Dobruja were found. The train trip to Reni, which on a normal day should have taken up to six hours, took three days and four nights. On their arrival in Reni at 6:30 in the morning, one of the nurses, Yvonne Fitzroy, describes the view as similar to the Scottish Lowlands. They finally arrived in Medgidia on 30 September 1916, in the evening (at 11:00 p.m.), where Dr. Elsie Inglis was given a barrack to turn into a campaign hospital, while 12 members of the unit plus the transport sub-unit, were sent to Bülbul Mic (which mostly appears as Bul-Bul Mic in the diaries of the Scottish medical women, today the village Ciocârlia de Jos, Constanța County) under Dr. Chesney to establish another hospital closer to the front.

Nurse Margaret Fawcett writes about their arrival in Cernavodă on 30 September 1916, where they were met by someone more familiar than most

people they met on the eastern front. The arrival occurred at three o'clock in the afternoon, when the nurses were greeted by an Irishman, whose name they recorded as Bryson. The Irishman conveyed to them, on the recommendation of the Russian military command in Dobruja, to open a hospital at Medgidia. The nurses left Cernavodă at 8:30 and arrived at Medgidia at 9:15, where Dr. Elsie Inglis discussed with the military authorities and planned what course of action was to be taken there (in Cahill, 43).

The nurses did not receive an enthusiastic welcome in Medgidia, some of them having to spend the night in the train, which was probably caused by the bureaucratic confusion in the organization of field hospitals at the time.

The first two days in Medgidia meant cleaning the barrack for proper hospital hygiene while the personnel set up tents to sleep in. The same Yvonne Fitzroy was wondering in her journal what it would be like to be near a dying man, but she soon found out that when the wounded were pouring in from the battlefield there was too much to do and little time for contemplation. When the situation returned to normal everybody took advantage of the break and accepted the proximity of death as a daily routine, as she bravely tells us in her journal. The same situation is described by Katherine Hodges, who, looking back to this extraordinary experience, tells us that the chaos of the war in Romania made the women who were unfamiliar with it quickly adapt. Hard and continuous work meant that nobody had the time to think too much about the tragedy of the situation. The bad news from the front and the increasing numbers of wounded caused a serious drop in morale, but what kept the Scottish women going was the correspondence they received from their families (Leneman 1994, 76-77).

The journal of Miss Yvonne Fitzroy also mentions the existence in Medgidia of a unit of the Russian Red Cross. Generally, the soldiers agreed that the Scottish nurses were more professional and offered better treatment, but this does not mean, for example, that patients did not sleep on hay mattresses on the floor, even in the Scottish women's hospital. And even though they were all women they still accepted the help of men, especially using a Serbian soldier whom they called "Chris" for translation. Miss Fitzroy remarks in her diary that he was rather tall and that he really did not appreciate having to explain to his fellow patients "the mysteries of (forgive me) a British bedpan" (Fitzroy 1918, 37). He would take quite a few moments to detach himself from his other occupations in order to explain to other soldiers that they would sadly have to lose a limb, or that they should not eat a certain thing if their stomach was injured. Of course, nobody envied Chris and his role, but he was extremely useful to the Scottish

women, who also appreciated the help of the Russians, even though it took even longer for them to offer a helping hand (Fitzroy 1918, 37-38).

The daily schedule of the Scottish medical women, while at Medgidia in Dobruja, is very interesting, and we are lucky that the same Yvonne Fitzroy describes it in her journal: waking up at 6:00 a.m.; breakfast at 7:00 a.m.; at 7:30 a.m. the roster was called and tents were inspected; 7:45 a.m. meant the beginning of the work day; at 11:30 a.m. a snack was served, followed by lunch at 12:30 p.m.; tea was served between 3:15-4:00 p.m. and dinner at 8:00 p.m. The women could take up to 3 hours off every day, but this of course depended on the number of patients in their care (Fitzroy 1918, 42).

The fragments in the Scottish women's diaries where Medgidia is mentioned are more numerous, but much less rich in description than those of other localities. As we know, Medgidia was the headquarters, where the main hospital of the SWH in Romania existed for almost a month. This short period of time is owing to the fact that the location was very close to the front, which meant that when the retreat began, it was among the first ones to be abandoned – but compared to other locations the stay cannot be considered a particularly short one. It is also probable that the nurses did not describe the town because it was a daily sight, although this is outside their habit to put pen to a depiction of any new place they reached.

Medgidia, named after Sultan Abdülmecid I (1823-1861), was an urban commune around the time of the First World War, like Cernavodă. It was the centre of the Medgidia district and did not have a very large population, being home to only 2,449 people. The central area of the town had well planned and paved streets, the most distinguished buildings being its six mosques and only one church dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul. The function of the locality was mostly a commercial one, as it was well situated and had access to many transportation links, including the Cernavodă-Medgidia-Constanța railway (Lahovari, Brătianu and Tocilescu 1900, 304).

The nurses established their hospital on a hill close to Medgidia and it seems that they found the location charming, in spite of the almost daily occurring bombardments. Yvonne Fitzroy tells us on 3 October 1916 that she found the site attractive, although prone to suffering enemy bombardments, and she used epithets and metaphors to describe the Constanța-Cernavodă railway neighbouring Medgidia as it “runs along the valley”, the soil was “bare, big and brow”, while the road “vanishes over the rising ground” into a “world of distant rumbling” (in Cahill, 45). The last metaphor, in which the frontline close to Medgidia is described by using the auditory effects as a world of roaring, reveals the nurse's anxious feelings when hearing the continuous noise of war on the frontline and not knowing what to expect.

This feeling is amplified by the vulnerable position of the hospital, yet slightly eased by the observations relating to the attention-grabbing landmarks such as the railway or Trajan's Wall, a fortification designed in ancient times to keep out invaders.

Ethel Moir, one of the nurses in the team at Medgidia, provides a more extensive description of the hospital site in the early days of their arrival there. She mentions that the hospital was located very close to the war zone and that all civilians had been evacuated and there were signs of bombs everywhere, which gave the town a deserted-looking aspect. Moir also mentions that the Russian war authorities were imploring them to keep the hospital at Medgidia functioning as long as possible, because there was heavy fighting on the front of Dobruja, which produced a large number of wounded, for whom the military authorities had made no arrangements. Red Cross units were in very high demand because there were no real hospitals on the front, Ethel Moir claimed.

The Scottish nurses spent the entire Sunday and Monday after their arrival unloading equipment and carrying it from the train to the building that was assigned to be their hospital. It was a huge barrack or granary situated on a hill outside Medgidia, on one side of the Cernavodă valley. The location offered the nurses a wonderful view of the surroundings, but they had much work to do to sanitize the interior of the building in order to make it suitable for a war hospital. The building had two storeys. On the first floor, there was a type of barn partitioned in the centre by a stone structure, while the second floor would be used by the nurses as their living space, one huge "apartment" for 75 of them, making Nurse Moir to conclude comically "No floor-space regulations here either, methinks!" (in Cahill, 45).

The next account is one that epitomises the lack of proper roads in Dobruja at the time of the Great War. Of course, we are not surprised by such a statement:

I've never dreamed of such roads! One was in a cold sweat all the way: mud two foot deep, and enormous holes large enough to hold the car, huge ditches full of water up to your wheel hubs right across the road, and worst of all, the road often on a slant with a big drop off it; with the skiddiness it was a hairsbreadth chance all the time whether you could keep on the road or not. There were hundreds of carts with soldiers, etc., and frightfully restive horses which pranced at you, long lines of them. All very trying and most dangerous. We got to our destination saturated, of course (in Cahill, 44).

The fact that the author puts so much emphasis on the awful condition of the road is explicable since she was Katherine Hodges, one of the ambulance

chauffeurs of the hospital unit, and was therefore directly affected by the dire state of public roads surrounding Medgidia. Nevertheless, we can safely assume that the same was true for other areas they visited on the Eastern Front.

Still on the subject of roads, we must blame their bad condition on the heavy downpours that late autumn, as Margaret Fawcett's account suggests in the following excerpt from her diary, dated 2 October 1916:

Late in the evening Miss Henderson and I started back for Medgidia – the Transport were to follow in their cars in the morning. We sat on the equipment in the luggage van. The journey which before had taken us three quarters of an hour now took us eight hours – it was the most uncomfortable night I ever had, and when we got to Medgidia it was simply pouring with rain, and a horrid raw morning. After breakfast – consisting of *chai* (very weak tea without milk), black bread, and many flies, Miss Henderson and I went back to the train to get some rest – in the meantime, the rest of the unit saw to the transport of the equipment and to the cleaning of the hospital (in Cahill, 41).

Here, we also find out about their daily menu at Medgidia, that they drink tea according to the eastern fashion (without milk), and about what their daily tasks are. It must be noted that each time the SWH arrived at a new location the first day or two would be dedicated to cleaning the place assigned to them, be it an abandoned granary, school or simply a larger house. The cook, Mary Milne, also noticed how miserable they were because of the bad weather and because they had to sleep in tents besides the hospital, until the building was sanitized (in Cahill, 130). Nevertheless, as it was confirmed in later diary entries and letters, her kitchen was indeed the most successful “department” in the unit. Moreover, towards the end of their venture to Romania she was appointed the unofficial coordinator of the nurses' return to Britain.

Action near Medgidia was quite intense, which partly explains the lack of descriptions in the diaries, which are rather more abundant in describing the situation of the nearby front and the shock of the bombardments and the wave after wave of wounded soldiers. The bombing of Medgidia on 14 October 1916, is briefly described by Elsie Bowerman, who writes down that twelve “Bulgar” and German aeroplanes are flying above the town, yet only eight people were killed and several others were injured in areas away from the hospital, so the nurses' activity could carry on “unperturbed” (in Cahill, 56). It is remarkable how the word “unperturbed” is used in this description, making the reader understand how the volume of work of the Scottish women at Medgidia left the nurses insensible to these allegedly not so serious, yet still traumatic, experiences.

Once, in Cernavodă², Yvonne Fitzroy takes time to describe the locals in a letter to her mother. She mentions that the “real Roumanians”, the urbanites, have been charming to them, and that the men and women are “pretty and delightful”, which she considers to be a pity as regards the men, as she would have preferred the Romanian soldiers to be ready to fight, much like their Cossack (Russian) allies (in Cahill, 131). Though a small locality, what captivated the visitors’ imagination in Cernavodă was the “Carol I” Bridge over the Danube, the outstanding engineering accomplishment of Anghel Saligny, built between 1890 and 1895.

All in all, we have witnessed how the nurses’ descriptions of, and comments on, Medgidia are not as rich and detailed as, for example, those relating to Constanța. Despite being the headquarters of the SWH for almost a month, Medgidia did not elicit as much interest as Constanța, owing to the fact that the was abandoned as it was too close to the front. Furthermore, the burden of continuous work allowed little time for contemplation and autobiography, although the nurses did preserve some very sensible descriptions of the surroundings of their hospital at Medgidia.

Close to Medgidia, at Ciocârlia de Jos, which hosted a second SWH unit, there was no intense activity until 14 October, when the bombardments reached as far as the railway near Medgidia. Ysabel Birkbeck, the driver of one of the ambulances, writes that, because of the bombardments, the passengers asked her to turn around, which was futile, considering that the bombs fell from all directions as the enemy aviation often flew far beyond the front line. Mary Milne, the cook of the Scottish women, also complained that doing her job was hard near falling bombs and in a rain of shrapnel. Still in Ciocârlia de Jos, Ethel Moir left a record telling us that the campaign hospital must have benefitted from some kind of special protection, since it was untouched by the frequent bombardments. Nevertheless, following the retreat of the front line northwards, Dr. Chesney’s hospital also had to follow, leaving Medgidia under bombardments that became the norm of the day (Leneman 1994, 78-80).

On 21 October, Ciocârlia de Jos was abandoned, burning, while a dire storm also saddened the day. The conditions during the retreat were even worse than those of war, as the rain was making travelling difficult, while there was lack of food and shelter to sleep. An unpleasant incident happened

² Cernavodă was an urban locality totalling 2,235 inhabitants, of which less than three-quarters were Romanian (1,532). It was a rather cosmopolitan locality, with many Muslim inhabitants (537), but there were also Roman Catholics and Jews. The most impressive architectural monument at that time was the St. Constantine and Helena Church, but there were also two mosques and a Muslim school, besides the two Romanian primary schools (Lahovari, Brătianu and Tocilescu 1900, 330).

when the truck in which Lois Turner and Margaret Fawcett travelled rolled upside down because the driver had allowed himself to indulge in too much alcohol. Because the German-Austro-Bulgarian forces were getting closer, everything was done in extreme haste. Moreover, on 26 October the Scottish women under Dr. Chesney had to wake up at 5:00 a.m. and begin retreating. The next day they reached the pontoon bridge at Isaccea and crossed the Danube into the Russian Empire. Their transport (ambulance) sub-unit, however, faced even more problems because of the total lack of adequate roads, which caused them to abandon a broken ambulance (Leneman 1994, 78-80).

In all the chaos of this retreat, Dr. Elsie Inglis sought to remain in Medgidia as long as possible. Even though the retreat order imposed a general evacuation at 5:30 a.m. she was still considering waiting even after more than six hours. At 2:00 p.m. the Scottish women attended the religious service, while more and more refugees and retreating soldiers could be seen on the roads. Eventually, in the afternoon, the sickest patients (suffering from dysentery) in Dr. Inglis's hospital were taken by train, so at least she could also leave in a military staff car, while five of the nurses used the ambulance, and another seven were taken in a Russian truck together with the hospital's medical equipment (Leneman 1994, 80).

The retreat of the Scottish medical women from Dobruja was not done in an organized fashion, but rather chaotically, just as the whole population and even some armed forces did. They would soon reunite in Brăila, Galați and Ismail. To sum up, their medical mission in Dobruja did not last more than three weeks, but it was highly important to the war support which they offered.

2.3. Constanța, “an awfully jolly town, like I imagine Monte Carlo to be...”

One of the larger and better known towns of Romania at the beginning of the 20th century, Constanța, was also among the first localities that the nurses explored. According to the Great Geographical Dictionary published at the turn of the century under the aegis of the Romanian Geographic Society, in the early 20th century Constanța was an urban town, like Medgidia and Cernavodă, with 62 streets, including a few boulevards and a few important edifices: St. Peter and Paul's Cathedral, the “Carol I” Hotel, the “Casino”, and other accommodation centres such as Gambeta, Central, Regal, “Prince Ferdinand and Princess Marie” Primary School, Azizia Mosque, the Communal Hospital, the Town Hall, the Greek Church, “Prince Sturdza” Palace and Ovid's statue. With a population of 10,419 (according

to the 1894 census), Constanta had unquestionably become larger by the outbreak of the Great War. The eight mosques in the town gave it an oriental air, even though the civilians were dressed after the European fashion. The most important function of the town was that of being a port, and the importance of commerce was highlighted by the impressive number of foreign representatives and consulates, including the British one. (Lahovari, Brătianu and Tocilescu 1900, 610-620).

In October 1916, the Scottish women travelled to Constanța, conveniently situated rather close to their hospitals in Medgidia and Ciocârlia de Jos, in order to acquire food and items needed for the daily running of their camps. Later, after 22 October 1916 when Constanța had to be abandoned to the invading German and Bulgarian troops (Kirițescu 1989, 383), the nurses made frequent references to it being occupied or suffering in the wake of occupation, which means that they understood how important the port of Constanța was for Romania's position in the war. An interesting discussion may arise here concerning the question to what extent the perceived strategic importance of the Black Sea Romanian city is reflected in the nurses' few but valuable Romantic evocations of this place. More likely, the women were charmed by the seaside glamour of Constanța, as it was the only location on the Black Sea shore they had reached. Another possible factor was that they may have heard from the locals that the Russian Imperial family visited Constanța in 1914, when Tsar Nicholas II met King Carol I of Romania in order to discuss the terms of Romania's entry into the War on the side of the Entente (Agrigoroaiei 2000, 110-111). This high diplomatic meeting made such an impression on the public that the newspapers of the time reported that as many as 100,000 people travelled to the seaside to witness the historic event (Pauleanu 2005, 40-52). Finally, Constanța's prestige was also owed to the fact that it was the summer residence of the Romanian Royal family. King Carol I was one of the strongest supporters of Dobruja's integration to the Romanian Kingdom and the proponent of vital projects for the city and the region development, such as the building of Carol I Mosque, the "Anghel Saligny" Bridge and the enlargement of the port, which the King personally inaugurated on 27 September 1909 (Pauleanu 2005, 19-39).

Lois Turner and Miss Henderson visited Constanta on 15 October 1916, but had to return to Medgidia the same day (in Cahill, 59). While in Constanta, they went to the port and commented, afterwards what they saw:

Constantza is an awfully jolly town, like what I imagine Monte Carlo to be – white houses, and the sea and the sky. We did not have much time there, as we had a good deal of serious shopping to do. Everything is ruinously expensive. We wanted a couple of little roasting tins and shelves for our

stove, and they asked twenty francs. They are absolutely sold out of cigarettes, so we are getting the Roumanian government to send us large consignments for our canteen (in Cahill, 59).

It is not surprising that Lois Turner emphasized what a glorious day they had considering that, until the Second Battle of Cobadin (19-25 October 1916) the Central Power forces, mainly consisting of the Bulgarian Third Army, were held in check at a distance of approximately 25 kilometers south of the port city (Toshev 2007, 184). Nurse Lois Tuner notes that there were few woods in that part of Romania and that the roads were crowded with Russian and Romanian troops and army logistic units, but there were also refugee Romanian peasants. Lois Turner finds them picturesque, appreciating their bright-coloured traditional clothing, which she finds more interesting than those of the Russian peasants. The nurse also notices the existence of a large Turkish community in Dobruja (in Cahill, 59).

The last visit of the nurses to Constanța, before it was occupied by the Central Powers, took place on 20 October 1916, when Nurse Mary Henderson was given a lift there by one of the ambulance drivers:

The last few days the sound of the guns got nearer and nearer, and the order to evacuate came on 19 October. We went back to a village near Medgidia, where we stayed one night. The next day I had occasion to go on business to Constantza, one of the Transport drivers, Miss Mackenzie-Edwards, driving me in the staff car. I found the city practically deserted, and the enemy took it the next day. On the return from Constantza we got into the midst of the retreating Roumanian army. The enemy must have been very near, for the soldiers were crouching low as they went along, taking what they could (Henderson 1917).

A second account of the nurses' visit to Constanța took place before 20 October 1916 and is painted in warmer hues:

I did my shopping with Bell. I like her very much. She is the first person I spoke to in Liverpool, one of the Buffs, a widow of a few months. She longs, as I do, to get away from the crowd... We did not know the way to Constantza, but she is a *beautiful* driver. We went over hills and moors – no real roads, just tracks. We had taken the wrong road, but we didn't care – we seemed so free, away from everyone. It was glorious, and so was the day – bright mid-summer weather, the first day I have really loved, just being away with a kindred spirit. Bell was in breeches, so of course they thought she was a man, with her short hair (in Cahill, 52).

One of the recurrent images in the nurses' diaries is the poor condition of the roads, which in the text above, appear to be non-existent; luckily there

was no immediate danger on that occasion. It could have been the charming air of the port town on the Black Sea coast that may have augmented Mary Milne's feelings for her colleague, whose beauty she mentioned in the journal entry. Fascinated by the day and the place, the two women did not mind taking the wrong road and spending more time together.

As mentioned in the beginning, the fall of Constanța (on 22 October 1916) is described by nurse Elsie Bowerman on her retreat from Medgidia to Brăila, on 23 October 1916. She writes that pandemonium reigned at Făurei as there were huge crowds of refugees for whom no provisions had been supplied by the authorities. All of them were trying to get on trains by whatever means possible, in a general panic and despair. Elsie Bowerman was wondering what became of stretcher cases. The Russian soldiers were the only ones who seemed to be in "excellent spirits", compared to the local population (in Cahill, 67). Hearsay about the occupation of Constanța pervades through those dramatic moments, when, in Făurei, the refugees lacking provisions were struggling to get away from the front, while the nurses were trying to transport the hospital equipment to Galați.

The next account, provided by Yvonne Fitzroy, is more detailed. It is also set during the retreat from Dobruja and it dates 22 October 1916. It portrays the beauty of the scenery, the ubiquitous dysfunctional roads, and provides a description of the native peasants showing how well informed the nurse was about the history of the place they had gone to and finally how the nurses arrived in Gălbiori, named by its Turkish name which was in use at the time – Saragea – much like all the other locations they visited in Dobruja:

The whole country is in retreat, and we had an extraordinarily interesting drive, Behind we could see the shells exploding, and the sky was alight with the glow of burning villages. On our right a bigger glow showed the fate of Constantza, which fell today. The road was indescribably dilapidated and crammed with refugees, troops and transport. The retreating troops seem mostly Roumanians; I gather the Russians are protecting our rear (Fitzroy 45).

The bombardment of Constanța is alluded to by the "bigger glow" the nurses witnessed to the right (east) on their retreat northwards. The harshness of war conditions was temporarily abated by the enjoyment of frugal snacks, but even these would become increasingly hard to obtain. The only joy that could be found on the front in Romania consisted of cigarettes and Turkish delight, the former provided by the government whenever possible and the latter obtainable from shops in towns and some larger villages, if available at all (Cahill 72).

The occupation of Constanța on 22 October 1916, caused a great exodus of people, who fled the city in the afternoon of that day, together with the General Staff of the 5th Army Corps. The Russian commander, Volkovitzky, had decided that petrol should be released out of the fuel tanks in the town once the troops had been evacuated (Cojoc 401). This created a huge explosion that could be seen from miles away – described by the Scottish nurses as a “bigger glow” – the moment the Central Powers began their bombardment prior to occupying the town and port. The Russians believed they could at least hold the port for a longer time, but they were proved wrong. In spite of the efforts of General Pavlov or Admiral Patton to delay the disaster, the Russian troops retreated out of Constanța in a chaotic and hasty manner, toppling refugee wagons on their way north. In order to buy time for the retreat of the civilians and other troops, a single Romanian detachment, armed with only a machine-gun and a few other firearms, opposed resistance to the invaders in the area of Țepeș Vodă Street. Needless to say, they were massacred by the invading forces, some of them even decapitated and disfigured (Cojoc 401). The following day the fall of Constanța was announced across diplomatic channels. Many understood that the entire Dobruja would soon face a similar tragic fate (Cojoc 402).

In the context of the retreat, the nurses always seem to remind themselves with great regret about the loss of Constanța: “They have got Medgidia and Constantza and our only outlet remains into Romania proper across the Danube. There is a stretch of flat marshy country between the mountain cliffs and the river itself” (in Cahill, 91). In this account belonging to Lois Turner and written on the way between Hârșova and Bessarabia, the nurse describes the landforms in Dobruja. We find out that the winds were – just like in the present day – exceptionally strong, and the Danube Delta was situated between Dobruja’s mountains and the river Danube, which is not entirely accurate.

Travelling on the same route as Lois Turner, Ethel Moir seems to have also been aware of how much it meant that Constanța had fallen, which would trigger the fall of entire Dobruja:

The news is bad, Cernavoda has been occupied by Mackensen’s troops. Constantza has fallen, and the Russo-Roumanian forces are falling back rapidly behind the line of the northern Dobrudga. The capture of Cernavoda – at the Danube end of the trans-Dobrudga railway to Constantza – seals the fate alike of the railway and of the famous ‘Carol Bridge’, and is the object which the enemy have been marking for for some days (in Cahill, 98).

It is not known whether the Scottish nurses were aware that the railroad between Constanța and Medgidia, built by a British company in 1860, was

the first railway built on the territory of Romania, but the nurses were certainly aware of its strategic importance during the war and were intentionally targeted by the Central Powers.

In conclusion, the SWH nurses' accounts of Constanța, though scarce and not as detailed as other narratives, confirm that at the beginning of the 20th century the town exercised fascination for its visitors and seemed as attractive as a Mediterranean destination, such as Monte Carlo. Following the beginning of the retreat from Dobruja, the nurses were detached from this regional centre, but seem to continue to mention it in their diaries, owing to its significance and their awareness that the Central Powers desired to take Constanța. A general feature of not only their accounts about this seaside city, but of all their writings, is the constant repetition of the scarcity of good-quality roads, but, actually, mud was one of the greatest problems medical and military personnel faced on the 'slimescapes' of the Western Front as well.

2.4. “Out of that terror and anguish...” into “Braila and Galatz”

After the retreat from Dobruja, the ambulance sub-unit of the SWH ended up in Brăila. The distinct group of Dr. Elsie Inglis was reunited in Galați and used their professionalism in a Romanian hospital, while the whole town was curious whether the Russians would deploy reinforcements to recapture Dobruja. As the wounded began pouring in by the hundreds in Brăila, Dr. Inglis instructed her subordinates from the transport sub-unit which were already there to try their best to alleviate the situation. Eventually, the flow of wounded and refugees returned to a more manageable volume, and the situation was under control again (Leneman 1994, 81-83).

Dr. Chesney's group arrived in Ismail, where a small campaign hospital was opened. They were glad to accept the help of a young Serbian doctor, whose name remains unknown unfortunately. The Scottish nurses found Ismail “a pretty deadly hole, with no decent shops, no cigarettes, and no Turkish Delight – the only things that made life worth living when we first arrived” (Leneman 1994, 83). Unfortunately, this was the place where one of the nurses, Evelina Haverfield, suffered a nervous breakdown, which came as a consequence of the hard conditions they had to endure. Because of these conditions, the other Scottish medical women suffered from mild forms of dysentery, but this was not such a big problem (Leneman 1994, 83-84).

In December 1916 Dr. Elsie Inglis decided to subordinate her unit to the Russian Red Cross as a temporary measure while the Serbs regrouped. As the Central Powers were still advancing on the Southern Romanian Front, it was decided that a campaign hospital should be set up in Ciulnița. The day they set out for Ciulnița was the day that Bucharest fell to the Germans, 6 December, so as soon as they arrived there they were told they should leave since the railway station was to be destroyed at 5:00 p.m., in order to avoid the situation where the German could use it. The Red Cross train which they took also transported eight trucks of ammunition, despite the rules of the Geneva Convention. The situation became truly dangerous when the engine of the locomotive suddenly burst into flames, an event recorded by the Scottish nurse, Elsie Bowerman, who was also impressed by the image of the burning Romanian deposits left behind in Ciulnița. After also escaping an enemy bombardment untouched, the train finally arrived in Brăila in the morning of 12 December. Nevertheless, the German were getting closer and closer, so the Scottish women continued the retreat directly to Galați. The 30-kilometers-long trip lasted as long as 56 hours because of the chaotic retreat (Leneman 1994, 95).

At least Dr. Elsie Inglis could obtain a newer building to turn into a hospital in Galați. Since Dobruja and Bucharest had already fallen to the Central Powers, the position of Galați was also unclear. It often happened that a retreat order given in the morning was cancelled in the evening. To make matters even worse, the members of the Scottish Women's Hospitals had to move to a rather derelict neighbourhood of Galați. The winter holidays cheered up their morale and the Christmas Day 1916 was remarkably tranquil and clear, which also helped to improve the morale of these heroines who travelled so far away from their country to help the Serbs, Romanians and Russians.

On 30 December the new hospital was ready and the first patients were received. In a single day all the 109 beds were occupied. The Scottish women surprisingly describe these wounded men as brave and merry. Unfortunately, injured refugees kept pouring into the city, on another day their number amounting to almost a thousand. As the Scottish medical women were especially recognized for their professionalism, they received the worst cases, while patients with lesser injuries were sent further away, to Odessa or Reni. On 1 January 1917, Elsie Bowerman recorded the entry of 147 wounded (in a hospital where, as we have seen, there was room only for a few over one hundred patients). Mary Milne, the cook, has described in her diary how the "terrible sights... the cries & groans of the poor fellows haunt one" (Leneman 1994, 95-96).

But these hard days also had brighter moments. Luckily, in Galați there was a British naval armoured car squadron formed by Commander Locker-Lampson. A member of the squadron, the surgeon Lt. Maitland Scott, offered Dr. Elsie Inglis the help of his medical expertise and that of his four assistants. Together they performed operations for 38 continuous hours, despite the fact that Dr. Inglis had just finished a 24-hours “shift”. The devotion and altruism of these British doctors were indeed extraordinary, even beyond heroism (Leneman 1994, 96-97).

Beginning 3 January 1917, the number of incoming patients returned to manageable levels as military operations also diminished. During the next day a retreat order was issued. Just as in Dobruja, Dr. Elsie Inglis insisted on remaining with her patients as long as possible despite the pleas of the British squadron commander, Officer Gregory, who wished to help them to reach a safe area very quickly. Dr. Inglis left Galați only at nightfall, “after the last patient had been transported to safety” (Leneman 1994, 96-97).

The British nurses were quite delighted to enjoy a few days of relaxation and rest in the towns they arrived at as soon as they left Dobruja: Brăila and Galați. The first that arrived in Brăila on 12 December 1916, were members of the ambulance unit, who disclose the fact that they went to find out any news and to search for baths as soon as they arrived in the city. In Brăila, the nurses met the officers of the British mission, whose task was to burn the oil fields at Ploiești in order to prevent them falling into enemy hands. Colonel Griffiths kindly offered his room to the Scottish nurses to allow them to tidy themselves. Katherine Hodges writes that later they gleaned news from the Allied officers, who told them that the enemy put strong emphasis on capturing Brăila and if the Russians could not halt the enemy then Brăila, with its tremendous stores of wheat, would have to be abandoned. The ambulance driver assumed at that time that under the circumstances, “probably the Roumanians will only be able to hold Moldavia” (in Cahill, 151).

It is remarkable how quickly the nurses adapted to Romanian urban geography. After Constanta and Medgidia, the cosmopolitan town of Brăila had a population of over 45 thousand inhabitants, most of them of Orthodox confession (30,227 Romanians, 4,238 Greeks, 978 Bulgarians and 257 Russians) to whom a number of ethnic people were added (Jews, Hungarians, Austrians, Germans, British, Armenians, Lipovans, Serbs, and French), according to the Great Dictionary of Lahovari, Brătianu and Tocilescu (1900, 615-616). The shape of the town was a crescent moon stretching along the Danube, with two boulevards. Flower gardens, which also impressed the Scottish nurses, were situated close to St. Michael square, next to the city cathedral. From a medical point of view, the hospital

in Brăila had only 60 beds and was served by a primary physician, a secondary physician, a junior surgeon and auxiliary staff. In town there were five pharmacies and different private physicians. It had good communication links with other areas, such as telegraph, and there were basic telephone lines between emergency institutions such as the police, firefighters and an ammunition depot. Easthetically, the streets were very well-kept, the pavement was made of cobbled stone and basalt, most streets had access to clean water, while the docks were reinforced with stone. Moreover, it was a city of European interest because of the fact that after the Treaty of Berlin in 1878 the headquarters of the European Commission of the Danube were set up in nearby Galați (Lahovari, Brătianu and Tocilescu, 1900, 617-622).

Almost one year after their first visit of Brăila, when the town was recaptured by the Romanian forces, they expressed the hope that maybe things would turn out the right way for the Entente: "Braila has been taken, so perhaps things may look up. The Serbs are not in action yet, so there may be time for them to leave the country before they are cut up" (in Cahill, 283).

Writing about Brăila, Elinor Rendel, describes the impact of their sudden arrival in town after a distressful retreat:

Out of all that terror and anguish and chaos, we suddenly emerged into an open flower-bedded garden in the centre of the city, with gay restaurants and brilliantly lit shops all around. We parked our cars beside the gardens. Suddenly crowds of people arrived and began to cheer us and throw flowers at us, and before we knew where we were, someone had taken us into an enormous brightly-lit restaurant filled with smartly-dressed people. We were installed at a long table in the centre of the room, and people stood on their chairs to see us. A magnificent meal was brought to us, which, needless to say, after the one we had just eaten, we could hardly swallow. We were so tired we could hardly hold up our heads. Crowds surrounded us, and people gave us more flowers, cigarettes and chocolates, literally mobbing us as we struggled through pushing, cheering masses to the place in which we were to sleep. We were taken into a huge hospital ward nearly filled with soldiers, and were given beds at one end of the room, quite unscreened. However, we were past caring in what company we undressed and slept, as long as we could, after a week of being in our clothes, get rid of them and get into bed. (in Cahill, 96-98).

Next, the cook of the SWH unit, Mary Milne, describes a visit to the British Consul in Brăila, Colonel Baldwin, providing information about his hospitality. Mary Milne and thirteen other nurses "assaulted" the consul's residence, taking baths and generally enjoying the coziness of an Englishman's house (in Cahill, 110).

Administrative problems in Brăila were keeping the nurses from working again, much like when they had first arrived in Medgidia. These problems were owing to the unclear hierarchy regarding medical aid between the SWH, the Romanian Red Cross and the Russian Red Cross. On this occasion we also find that the Consulate possessed a telegraph wire (the SWH were 'attached' to the post of the Consulate as well, meaning their post was – in theory – exempt from control and a priority).

Within a few days of their arrival, it became clear to the nurses that things were not so good in Brăila given the lack of medical care, which they were able to supplement from that moment.

When I look back on those days in Braila, it seems incredible that any place so near the fighting zone, in which such a terrible and utter collapse was taking place, should appear so ignorant, and to the outward eye, indifferent to the state of things then existent. Their hospitals preparations were ridiculously inadequate, and there was only one surgical and one medical hospital in the town. There were practically no medical supplies. We ourselves had got separated from most of our hospital unit and stores during the retreat, and had only two doctors, Dr Inglis being one of them, and a few nurses with us. Our doctors and nurses offered their services to the military at once, and as wounded were beginning to pour in the thousands, they were most thankfully accepted.

I have never seen anything so awful as that hospital, because in a day or two the beds were all full, and patients were lying on the floor, all along the corridors, down the stairs, and anywhere that there was enough room to lie them down.

We used to drive to the station, which had a huge open space in front of it, and as cattle truck after cattle truck of wounded arrived, they were taken from the train and laid on the ground in rows. We used to get our stretchers out, load up the ambulances, then drive around the town until we could find access to an empty house, get the wounded out and into the house, where we unloaded them on to the floors, go back to the station and fetch more till the house was full, and then go off to the main hospital to see who could be sent to take charge. As a rule a nurse or a VAD would be dispatched to do the best she could until such time as a doctor could get along (in Cahill, 110-111).

Katherine Hodges, one of the ambulance unit drivers, wrote a diary entry after the number of wounded began to drop. In a few days, Brăila changed from a paradise garden to a chaotic conglomerate of refugees, wounded and retreating soldiers. The medical authorities of the town did not possess the needed medical equipment for the incoming wave from Dobruja, so it is no wonder that any help offered by the SWH was immediately accepted. It is also not the first instance when Romanian hospitals are described

deplorably, yet the nurses just transported the wounded to houses where they were taken care of until doctors became available to perform operations. The nurses noticed from their arrival in Brăila that the attitude of the locals was not fit to deal with the approaching disaster. One could argue that they assimilated the image of the town to the figure of Iphigenia, who sacrificed herself for the sake of war. They were indeed right that the town had to be abandoned because of the intensity of bombardments, and their work would have to continue elsewhere.

Eventually, the nurses had to leave Brăila for Galați, which was situated further away from the front and in a safer location. In the second decade of the previous century Galați was the main import port of Romania, being situated on the left bank of the Danube in a slightly peninsular geographic situation. It was divided into two parts: the Valley (in the southeast, between the Danube and the road leading to Reni, where the old town centre was, with the great storage-houses, docks and navigation agencies), and the Hill (with public and private institutions, national authorities, and the commercial district). The town had eleven public squares, the main one being Costache-Negri Square, in the centre. The population of the city was about 60,000 inhabitants, most of them craftsmen, traders, workers and public and private clerks. There were also 26 public schools in Galați and 27 churches, 22 of which were Orthodox (Lahovari, Brătianu and Tocilescu 1900, 458-462).

A few British nurses spent the Christmas of 1916 in Galați, according to Elsie Bowerman. The nurses attended the religious service in the Catholic church in Galați, even though those of them who were Scottish were Presbyterian, while the English nurses were Anglican, but the Catholic church was the only one considered to be closer to their faith. Later, they celebrated Christmas at their own place with games and charades, their leader, Dr. Elsie Inglis, masquerading as a knight in "armour". Christmas did not mean that everyone would be concerned only with celebrating, because the battles were taking place quite close to Galați at that moment, in Dobruja, where the guns were rumbling. This is also proved by the interest in the news that a pontoon bridge had been built; it meant that new refugees would enter the town and, most probably, a lot more wounded as well (in Cahill, 166).

The same story is told by Yvonne Fitzroy in her journal, only in a slightly more comical manner at the end:

They have flung a pontoon bridge across the Danube here, and the Dobrugea guns sound nearer...

A most wonderful spread awaited us at tea, and we played games and chanted carols far into the night. I'm sure the Russkies think we worship strange gods indeed! (in Cahill, 166).

Yvonne realizes that the Russians, the Romanians and the Serbians present there, must have considered them at least strange. It is interesting how the topic of Yvonne Fitzroy's journal entry changes rapidly from the situation on the front to the celebration of the second Christmas day and then to the reaction the "Russkies" must have had when they heard the Scottish nurses' singing.

The next image of Galați, described on Boxing Day (1916), depicts the experience of being woken up by the bombings at two o'clock in the morning. The culprit was a German zeppelin which performed a night raid over the town, dropping bombs close to the nurses' hospital (Cahill 168). The fact that Tulcea had fallen was seen as an omen for even more discouraging events on the frontline and Yvonne expressed her worry regarding the whereabouts of the ambulance unit, which was on its way to Bessarabia (Fitzroy 91).

Her worries were dispelled by the chief of the Russian Red Cross, called Ilyachenko, who visited the SWH and shared grim news about other matters. His visit is recounted by the same Yvonne Fitzroy, who noted down that they were told Galați would hold against the Central Powers only if Măcin and the front line between Isaccea-Măcin and Buzău resisted. The possibility was slim, Ilyachenko stated and, if this happened, Galați would be bombed from two sides "and blown to little, little bits" (in Cahill 168). If this were to happen, the nurses should have found a way to retreat to Fălticeni, but, in reality, this route was not to be taken, because the nurses left for Bessarabia (Cahill 168).

Galați was also home to a British Armoured Cars (BAC) division at the time, a group which was better supplied and lent some logistic help to the nurses (Cahill 180). In early January 1917, the grim news of evacuation eventually came true and Galați was left by the SWH nurses who decided to travel to Bessarabia. Elsie Bowerman proves to have had good cartographic knowledge of southeast Romania when writing about their plans to go to Foltești, after Brăila had fallen into enemy hands (in Cahill, 181).

From the market town of Reni, in Bessarabia, the Scottish women hospitals remained attached to Galați, whose bombardment they deplored, as they did when they left Medgidia and continued to mention Constanța in their writings. "Heavy bombardment in the Galatz direction", wrote Elsie Bowerman on Tuesday, 16 January 1917 (in Cahill, 187). The situation did not change for the rest of winter and, on 13 March 1917, Mary Milne, the

cook of the unit in Reni, provided a more detailed account of the bombardment:

We have had a great day of guns – the enemy has been shelling poor old Galatz – and we saw clouds of smoke, so I suppose the town was in flames. I wonder when our time will come – soon, certainly; a shell whirred past today, but did not burst, and a general was killed this morning on his way to Galatz with his men. We live in stirring time – I wonder if we shall be taken prisoner? (in Cahill, 210).

The loss of the bastion in Galați meant the loss of security for the nurses, who already imagined themselves taken prisoners. This is amplified by the loss of the life of the general who was marching his troops to Galați. The same grim tone of the bombardment of the town continued in the diary of the nurse Margaret Fawcett, who on 14 March 1917, also mentions there were new trenches built along with some new gun positions, and describes the fortifications in the area of Galați, which were supposed to prevent the enemy from further advancing into Bessarabia. Nurse Fawcett also recorded that it was interesting to pass from Russia into Romania in the area around Galați because of the difference in railway gauge between the two countries, which made necessary the transfer of the wounded in hospital trains onto Russian train wagons to make possible their journey to hospitals in Odessa (in Cahill, 210).

In an account from 22 March 1917, Mary Milne tells us that the fighting around Galați continued as the town was bombarded by Bulgar 12-inch guns, after an aeroplane had passed and dropped a letter letting the civilians know of the bombing raid and warning them to leave Galați. The raid on the port city began with such a horrible noise that Mary Milne tells us that it seemed to have taken place in the garden of their hospitals, then concluding rhetorically “I wonder how much of the town is left?...” (in Cahill, 214). The evacuation warning note dropped by the aeroplane is a clue that tells us the town had not been abandoned by civilians by the middle of March 1917, despite all the violence raging on around Galați. When all seemed terrible the situation near Galați became unbearable; on 3 April 1917, the patients and nurses in the SWH establishment at Reni were awoken by a terrible bombardment that continued from 1:30 to 3:00 at night. Mary Milne tells us that even though it was not Reni that was directly bombed, the windows and doors were shaking. In the morning they discovered that the enemy had been trying to break the defence lines at Brăila, so they had launched huge shells at the area (in Cahill, 236).

To conclude, Brăila and Galați, two closely situated towns and both important ports on the Danube, were described quite differently by the

Scottish nurses, owing to the different circumstances under which they were visited. Brăila, just as Constanța, elicited the romantic imagination of the British medical women, while Medgidia and Galați are almost entirely described in relation to their military functions or to the great damage they have suffered in bombings and attacks.

2.5. Tulcea and Hârșova

As mentioned before, while the main hospital unit of the SWH moved to Brăila and then Galați, their ambulance unit was active in Dobruja, which allowed the nurses to leave us some accounts of Hârșova and Tulcea. Katherine Hodges, one of the drivers, described the building that was used by her and her colleagues in Tulcea after 14 December 1916, on whose parquet floor they slept while billeted in Tulcea. The public building the nurses were given this time did not leave so much to be desired as their other building from Medgidia. It even had a romantic “gigantic ballroom”, which must have been used by the nurses as a hospital ward. Despite the adequacy of the location and perhaps to the nurses’ regret, the nurses had to move across the Danube and eventually reached a monastery, where they even established a field hospital (Cahill 151). The location was probably the Celic-Dere nunnery, which is situated 25 km away from Tulcea and had been established in 1835.

Earlier than their arrival in Tulcea was their passing through Hârșova. Lois Turner left a revelatory account dated 25 October 1916:

Still on trek. Last night we landed near Hirsova, a most picturesque town on a hill commanding the Danube and capped by its cathedral. I wish we could have seen the city. All day we had hurried through quite beautifully hilly country. We did not start till midday. I had to go up very early and found wood and water and made tea over a real camp fire – how we enjoyed it. We then had time to cook the goose in the cream which had been looted for us, but we kept it and hung it on the back of our cart and heated it up over a camp fire in the evening. Last night we had quite a beano – wine and the Turkish delight which I had kept. Early in the morning I was up again with another camp fire heating up the remains of the stew for breakfast (in Cahill, 98).

It seems Hârșova exercised the type of fascination that Constanța and Brăila had done on the imagination of the nurses. It appears as a perfect little town, crowned by its cathedral and surrounded by picturesque hills. What is more, the day spent around Hârșova ended with a plentiful dinner. These happy moments did not last for long. As the enemy was advancing, the nurse had to leave the scenic town of Hârșova and continue towards the pontoon

bridge (Cahill 98). At the beginning of the 20th century, Hârşova was a district situated between the Constanţa and Tulcea districts and bordering the Danube in the West. The town had twelve to fourteen streets, and was at that time divided in two neighbourhoods, Varoş (in the west) and the Tatar neighbourhood (in the east). It had a population of only 2,718 souls, but the fact that it was a port town on the Danube awarded the locality a special liveliness. The architectural attractions in pre-World War I Hârşova were the St. Nicholas church, which was described and appreciated by Lois Turner in the paragraph above, as well as two mosques – reflecting its past within the Ottoman Empire, even though the number of Muslims in the town was considerably lower than the number of Christians (Lahovari, Brătianu and Tocilescu 1900, 710).

Comparatively, their initial description of Tulcea was much briefer, perhaps due to them being in a hurried retreat. Around the time of World War I, Tulcea was one of the most ethnically diverse urban communes in Romania, with different quarters and neighbourhoods for its Tatar, Turkish, Bulgarian, Lipovan, German and Jewish communities. It was a picturesque town with a special flair that could be best admired reaching the locality by taking the ship from Galaţi to Sulina. The houses were painted in various colours but all of them had white roofs, the domes of the Romanian and Lipovan churches would shine brightly from afar, while any visitor could also admire the countless windmills on Tulcea's hills. The total population of the town was some 18,880 and its most important architectural assets were St. Nicholas Cathedral (Romanian) and the Annunciation Cathedral (Russian) (Lahovari, Brătianu and Tocilescu 1900, 656-657). Nurse Birkbeck appreciated that Tulcea was one of the few places in Romania at that time that had a "stone road" (in Cahill, 165).

2.6. "A musical comedy..." in Iaşi

Much like the previous two localities, Iaşi was also one of the locations that were transited by the Scottish nurses, who needed to pass to Bessarabia through the customs point in Ungheni. The importance of the city within Romania was highlighted by the fact that it became the centre of the Romanian resistance and capital of the country after the German occupation of Bucharest (3 December 1916). In spite of some enthusiasm for resistance, the situation in Moldova and Iaşi was depreciating from day to day. In total, almost one and a half million souls were evacuated from Wallachia, to which were added almost one million Russian soldiers transferred from other fronts, raising insurmountable difficulties for the Romanian leaders. The nurses correctly noticed that the advent of winter, and the lack of food,

medicines and qualified medical staff, were terrible problems. This allowed typhus to claim over 300,000 souls in Moldova during the period from late 1916 to 1918. The mortality rate was especially frightening in Iași, with authorities reporting over 400 victims daily (Platon 2003, 435). The Count of Saint-Aulaire, the French representative in Romania, was reporting at the time that, in Moldova, out of 200,000 soldiers who were ill, over 80,000 succumbed to their suffering (Muzeul Național 2016, 164). Iorgu Iordan, distinguished philologist and linguist, would write in his memoirs that he “could almost daily see, on Lăpușneanu Street, huge lorries loaded with bodies, which, being positioned in disarray, betrayed themselves to the passers-by, even though they were covered with tarp, as there were hands or legs hanging over the edges of the lorry’s trunk” (Iordan 1976, 289 qtd. in Platon 2003, 435). Constantin Argetoianu, prominent politician, would speak of his trip to Moldova as about “a vision of Dante’s Inferno” (Argetoianu 1992 qtd. in Muzeul Național 2016, 164).

The first accounts of the nurses deal less with the desolation in Iași after the fall of Bucharest, being short travel accounts of the Scottish women who transited the town. Elsie Bowerman, one of the members of the group that was tasked with transporting the medical equipment, wrote on 27 October 1916, that they started off towards Ungheni to take the equipment to safety, but in “Jassi” – where they “had a splendid dinner” – Bowerman and her team discovered that their task was impossible to put in practice because of the different Russian railway gauge (in Cahill, 108).

After being stopped at Ungheni, near Iași, the British women had no choice but to spend the following days in town. The same Elsie Bowerman describes those days:

No news as yet from Galatz. At present we are all sitting by our respective beds in the ward lent us by the Russian Red Cross sisters, and Miss Henderson and Little (our interpreter) have gone to make enquiries and arrangements. Jassi seems a charming place, full of picturesque peasants, as well as good shops and cafes. Whole atmosphere feels like a musical comedy: officers in bright coloured uniforms going about, gay crowds, etc., just like *The Chocolate Soldier!* People don’t seem to realize the state of affairs in other parts of Roumania. This total lack of preparedness and foresight perhaps accounts for the disasters in the Dobrudga. There was no attempt at entrenching the Roumanian army – they simply sent men out into the open country where they were mown down by German artillery. Constantza, Medgidia and Cernavoda fell with scarcely any resistance. It looks as if there has been some understanding between the German and Roumanian governments, and from the appearance of many of the upper class and officers, one could imagine they would have no scruples about accepting bribes, etc. [...] We know the bridge at Cernavoda was blown up

by the Russians on Tuesday 24 October; we crossed on Sunday night, and we did not see any extraordinary preparations to defend it, though more than six weeks ago we had read in the English papers that this would be the main point of attack. It is amazing that not greater effort should have been made to defend it. It seems now as if the way to Bucharest and Galatz were quite open to the enemy, but we hope this is not really so. Our chief anxiety at present is for Dr Inglis and the three with her. The last heard of them was at Hirsova on the Danube with the Roumanian army, the place already bombarded by the Bulgars. The Russian general had washed his hands of them, as she refused to leave when he wished earlier in the day. She desired to stay on and dress the wounded (in Cahill, 108-109).

Iași is described as a charming town with respectable shops, cafés and a good atmosphere that felt like a comedy. The last simile is perhaps not too flattering for a place that, in the eyes of the nurses, was not prepared for the coming days of hardship and seemed unaware of what had happened in Dobruja, which the British women had experienced firsthand. Perhaps it is the nature of urban atmosphere that gave them this feeling, the cheerful crowds, the groups of smartly dressed officers, the perceived sleazy officials, who would not refuse “baksheesh” or were convinced to help them only when names of generals, ministers or consuls were mentioned. The urban atmosphere in Iași left its mark on the nurses who visited the town. Elsie Bowerman wrote on 29 October 1916, that they “Went to Mass at Metropole Church, Jassi; Greek Orthodox, wonderful singing – a large number of soldiers there brought various possessions to be blessed by the priest” (in Cahill, 111). An unmistakable symbol of the urban scenery in Iași, the “Three Hierarchs” Metropolitan Church, attracted the nurses, who were impressed by the Orthodox service held there as well as by the soldiers who had their items blessed, which perhaps they disapproved of, being Protestants. As soon as they had to travel away from town, the atmosphere worsened. The local officials in the railway station were late, the chef-de-gare needed to be constantly reminded of their journey to make sure everything was all right. The urban space made clear the different understanding of the concept of time between the visiting nurses, who grew up in Victorian Britain, and the locals (Cahill 111).

Meanwhile, in the south, after having to abandon Brăila and Galați, the leader, Dr Elsie Inglis, expected to be able to return to Iași (Cahill 180). Despite being the choice of the nurses because of its size and position, the SWH had to travel to Bessarabia instead for logistical reasons. We have to remember that the nurses were aware of the Romanian government having moved to Iași as well, so perhaps they thought that, being present in the new capital of Romania, they would be able to manoeuvre through the intricate

urban system of power in order to get more help going to the frontlines, which – they knew very well – were lacking medical help.

By the spring of 1917 their perception of the town had changed, given the harsh conditions in Iași, which had become the overburdened capital of the part of Romania that remained unoccupied. On 26 March Nurse Rendel wrote a letter home in which she expressed dismay at having to wait in Iași, which she called a “filthy hole”, for three days before they could find a train for Bârlad (in Cahill, 212). Although it had been snowing and there had been a spell of cold weather, Elinor Rendel and her fellow nurses had been practically living in the train that had brought them from Odessa, so it is easy to understand her disillusionment at the time when she wrote the letter. Moreover, the SWH team’s food provisions were running out in a town where bread had become a scarce, valuable commodity. Nurse Rendel reported that they tried to have a meal in one of the best restaurants in town, but there was nothing to be had. When the nurses tried a different restaurant, all that they could be offered was “cold beans, black bread, and a little vinegar they call wine” (in Cahill, 212). No milk, candles, tobacco, or sugar could be found at that time in the capital of Moldova, and Nurse Rendel further wrote that half of the shops in town were closed. Facing the food crisis in Iași, the Scottish women had to rely on their own provisions: eight-day-old hard-boiled eggs, hard dried bread, cheese, tea and a little sugar (in Cahill, 212).

Still, there is one aspect in which Nurse Rendel’s account from the last days of March 1917 that she spent in Iași contradicts other sources. The nurse admits that before arriving at Iași she and her colleagues had heard about a typhus and plague outbreak, yet when they got there, Rendel noted in her letter that the rumours had been exaggerated, because, according to her, there were only one thousand cases of typhus and no cases of plague in Iași at that time (in Cahill, 212). Indeed, historical sources do not mention the plague but, as seen above, speak very seriously about the typhus outbreak. Nurse Rendel’s letter confirms the disastrous state of the town when referring to other aspects: the general aspect of disrepair, the crowded state of the streets, the presence of an overwhelming number of soldiers who look very dirty, the existence of swamps of dirty water and mud on some streets, dead animals and heaps of dirty wound dressings all over the railway station, which was teeming with sanitary trains (in Cahill, 212). It is extraordinary to contrast this source to the first account of Iași provided in this subchapter. The images from the spring of 1917 evoked by Nurse Rendel remind one of Picasso’s *Guernica* and the theme of the description matches one of the *danse macabre*.

Unrelated to Iași, but very much connected to Moldova, there is also one mention of Bârlad, dating from 31 March 1917, when the nurses briefly visited the location but were almost arrested on suspicion of being spies. From this we can assume that Bârlad did not produce a very good impression to its visitors, and somehow places the Romanians in the position of a superstitious inferior. The policemen in Bârlad suspected the British nurses for being spies because the women's way of dressing and wearing their hair does not match their own traditional image of what clothes a woman should wear and how she should wear her hair. It is also probable that they were not used to seeing women taking walks alone during these times of war (letter of Elinor Rendel dated Saturday, 31 March 1917, qtd. in Cahill, 238).

This chapter on Iași provides the strangest contrasting image of a Romanian town so far. In the early days of the war, it was seen as a superb town with a bustling and picturesque population, while a few months later the spectre of war had changed Iași to a "filthy hole", where no good food was to be had, no sweets or cigarettes, where there were no sources of lighting, where plague and typhus were rampant and animal corpses were rotting in the streets.

2.7. Bucharest: "the Never Never Land"

The capital of Romania was occupied by the 9th German Army on 6 December 1916, in the aftermath of one of the most complex confrontations on the Eastern Front, the Battle for Bucharest (also called the Argeș-Neajlov Defensive Operation) that took place between 27 November and 6 December 1916 (Platon 2003, 434). The loss of Bucharest, although greatly deplored by public opinion in the country as a tragic disaster, including the Scottish women who were working in Romania at the time, had objective causes. The defence of the capital had been entrusted to General Constantin Prezan, who was closely supported and advised by General Henri Berthelot. The Romanian general commanded thirteen and a half divisions, while the enemy had sixteen divisions. The Romanians did not only have to face the numerical superiority of their enemies, but their technical advantage, since there were units of German artillery present on that front. Moreover, the Romanian divisions suffered from battle fatigue, as most of them had been engaging the enemy since Romania's entry into war, while the Central Powers had brought in fresh troops (Platon 2003, 435).

As stated in the previous chapter, Bucharest was not directly visited by the SWH nurses, yet talk of the tragic fall of the capital is noticeable in their diaries and letters. In the first part of their journey they are saddened by

news of the fall of Bucharest, and strange stories about the capital – some of them including the occult specific to Victorian Britain – spread among the nurses, such as the following belonging to Yvonne Fitzroy and dated 26 November 1916:

Everyone hideously depressed, and the Government has moved to Jassi. I was told of a Roumanian artist to-day who lives in Bucharest and does strange sub-conscious drawings – rather in the manner of Planchette – a power he has possessed for six years. After the war he intends coming to London (in Cahill, 69-70).

According to the next account, dated 27 November 1916, the British women understood the significance of the capital and how much would be lost if it fell to the enemy. In a letter to her father, Yvonne Fitzroy explained the situation of the country by making a connection between the recent fall of Bucharest and the tragic situation of Serbia and Belgium, which were entirely occupied. The retreat to Iași was expected, but it appears that public opinion in Romania at that time did not think it was a lasting solution. Yvonne Fitzroy gave details to her father that since Ploiești had fallen the morale of the Romanians had been very low, to which was added the blow of having to abandon Bucharest to the Central Powers. Romania was then left only with Moldova and a part of northern Dobruja, which had been handed over to the Russians for military operations. On the same tragic note, Fitzroy deplores the fact that Romania's rich grain reserves stored two years before, had fallen into enemy hands, and expressed her fear that the same might happen to the oil fields at Ploiești,³ which would give the enemy a vast advantage (in Cahill, 134).

A different account from 1 December 1916, curiously relates some good news, namely that the enemy had been pushed back twenty miles, plus the fact that the situation on the front in Dobruja was looking up (Fitzroy 71). Unfortunately, such information did not match the reality on the front around 1 December. Around that date the Romanian General Staff planned an offensive to reduce the stress laid by the enemy on Bucharest and requested help from its Russian ally, but the answer that came was that the Russians “could not operate outside superior orders” (Kirițescu 1989, 210). The nurses' account proves again that the situation of the capital was a constant preoccupation for the nurses, though, when the inevitable occupation of Bucharest took place, its consequences were correctly stated.

³ At the request of Romania's allies, a mission by the British Colonel Norton Griffiths destroyed 1,677 oil wells, 27 oil refineries, stocks of 827,000 tons of crude oil and derivatives (Muzeul Național 60).

Lilias Grant was writing on 27 November 1916 that the news reports they were receiving were very worrying, which caused quite a stir among the commanding medical officers (CMOs). They heard that the “Bulgars” had crossed the Danube and were on their way to Bucharest, while the court had fled to Iași. Nurse Grant guessed that the implication for the SWH units in Galați and Brăila meant another hurried retreat, including the burden of having to move the medical equipment (in Cahill, 132-133). Ambulance driver Elsie Bowerman related on 30 November 1916 that they had heard rumours of the fall of Bucharest and there had been much panic in the city, with people even climbing the roofs of train wagons in order to get away. The same writer mentioned that the government moved to Iași too, and that the oil fields at Ploiești had been destroyed in order to prevent their falling into enemy hands, while the authorities had tried to move away as much oil as possible (in Cahill, 134). It would take some time before the severe consequences of the fall of Romania’s capital would be felt, such as the bombardment of Brăila and Galați or the decay and degeneration witnessed in Iași.

The image which the nurses painted of Bucharest in their diaries was a tragic one. The fate of the capital provoked concern and fear in the imagination of the nurses or brought the occult to the foreground. For example, on one occasion, Yvonne Fitzroy referred to Bucharest by writing about the sad news of the death of Prince Mircea of Romania and his burial in the Royal Chapel in the capital. She reported a strange story that the infant prince would usually speak English, but after having been unconscious for a few days, he suddenly uttered “S-a terminat” and was gone (Fitzroy 83).

2.8. Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the Romanian towns as they are mentioned in the diaries and letters of the SWH nurses and doctors. The accounts of Constanța, although scarce and not as detailed as we would wish them to be, confirm that at the beginning of the 20th century the town exercised fascination on its visitors and seemed as attractive as the famous Mediterranean destination, Monte Carlo, in spite of the bad roads the nurses had to drive on. The nurses’ descriptions of Medgidia are not so rich and detailed as those relating to Constanța. Medgidia, despite being the headquarters of the SWH for almost a month, did not elicit as much interest as Constanța because the town had been abandoned for being too close to the Front. Furthermore, the burden of continuous work allowed little time for contemplation, although the nurses did preserve some very sensitive

descriptions of the surroundings of the hospital at Medgidia. The same town became a kind of synonym for dreadful location:

...Again the road was lovely, and better, the horizon all around, which was wave on wave of blue hills. We crossed the range behind the inlet, through a wood of birches, past endless little hill tops; these were all entrenched. We ran to look at some of the trenches – they were very shallow, and the dugouts about the size of a badger’s earth. They had been used and the place had *a decidedly Medgidia feel* (emphasis mine) about it; one felt nearer the front. Perhaps it was the bodies and skeletons of dead horses lying about (in Cahill, 141).

Brăila and Galați, two towns closely situated by each other, both important ports on the Danube, were described quite differently by the Scottish nurses, owing to the different circumstances under which they were visited. Brăila, just as Constanța, elicited the romantic imagination of the British medical women, while Medgidia and Galați were mostly described in relation to their military functions or to the great damage they had suffered during bombings and attacks. Brăila allowed itself initially to be represented metonymically by the crowds who cheered for the nurses when they first arrived there after their retreat from Dobruja. Crowds are important keys that allow to the understanding of the locality, be it a city or a village, and thus complement the reading of the text (Lehan 1998, 9). The naive cheering crowds which, as the nurses noticed, had no idea of the horrors of the front just over the Danube in Dobruja, gave Brăila a false sense of security since the enjoyments it offered were restricted by time.

While travelling and managing hospital work between Brăila and Galați, Dr Elsie Inglis wrote:

Late in the evening the Roumanian doctor came down and said we must go. The Russians left next morning, and Hirsova was shelled half-an-hour afterwards.

At Braila we found the river closed by the bridge of boats, and the doctor, who was stopping there, said we must go to Galatz by train. We dragged ourselves reluctantly from the boat. At the pier head we met the Russian sisters from Medgidia. They told us our Transport was here. We went to find them, and while we were at a restaurant with them a Roumanian official came in, and begged us to come and help in a hospital near at hand. We went and found that in Braila there were eleven thousand wounded and seven doctors, and here we have been since... (in Cahill, 109).

Comparatively, their initial description of Tulcea was much briefer, perhaps due to their hurrying to retreat. Yet, the magnificence of the building they were offered in Tulcea inspired one nurse to write a few

appreciative words in her diary. The section about Iași provided the strongest contrasting image so far. In the early days of the war, it was seen as a superb town with a bustling and picturesque population, while a few months later the spectre of war had changed Iași to a “filthy hole” (in the words of Nurse Elinor Rendel) where no good food was to be had, no sweets or cigarettes to indulge in, where there were no sources of lighting, where plague and typhus were rampant and animal corpses were rotting in the streets. A report of Elsie Bowerman confirms this:

All Roumanian troops have been withdrawn from Braila, which is being held by the Russians. Jassi now closed to refugees, as it cannot hold any more people. Even Dr Inglis admits that things are very complicated (in Cahill, 150-151).

Bucharest provoked worry and fear in the imagination of the nurses, or brought the occult in the foreground. On one occasion, Yvonne Fitzroy referred to Bucharest by writing about the sad news of the death of Prince Mircea of Romania and his burial in the Royal Chapel in the capital, reporting a sort of mystical anecdote relating to his last words, which perhaps denotes that in the imagination of the nurses, the capital, a place they had only heard about, represented a space of curious rumour, of the uncanny.

In the following chapter the focus shifts towards representations of the rural environment as penned by the visitors in their sojourn through Dobrogea, Muntenia, Moldova and Bessarabia. Given the fact that the greatest part of the nurses' accounts where villages and the countryside are described display a Romanticized aura, the next chapter will focus on the styles regarding the depiction of the countryside in 19th century British culture.

CHAPTER THREE

RURAL SPACE(S) AND WAR

3.1. Introduction

In literature – whether autobiographical or not, and especially in nineteenth-century Romantic literature – the depiction of rural space usually plays a symbolic role. Until the Victorian era and the growth of urban communities in Britain, the countryside was less romanticized. Most of those who had an education and enjoyed a middle-class upbringing – like most of the Scottish nurses – simply regarded the country as barbarous, favouring the comfort of urban life. In the Romantic tradition, the rural *locus* is idealized in opposition to its urban counterpart. Phillips and Williams (1984) have identified a revealing list of urban-rural dichotomies, some of which will become evident in the Scottish nurses' letter and diaries in relation to Romania: secular vs. sacred, urban vs. folk, industrial vs. military, *Gesellschaft* vs. *Gemeinschaft*, rational vs. traditional (cited in Halfacree, 1993, p. 25). Unquestionably, the medical women who worked in Romania in 1916-1917 had been born and raised in the cultural milieu of Victorian Britain. Starting with the 19th century, Romantic poets such as John Keats, William Wordsworth, William Blake, and S. T. Coleridge, began describing the countryside in terms of 'Nature', and this must have had an impact on the nurses' Romantic descriptions of the countryside. Therefore, the descriptions of the rural areas employ Romantic *epitome*, which turns Tragic when the consequences of war take hold.

In Victorian aesthetics regarding Natural scenery, clear differentiation is made between the Beautiful, the Sublime and the Picturesque. One major theorist is Edmund Burke, who in 1757 published *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, and whose work was enriched by the thoughts of William Gilpin in *Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty* (1794), in which he adapted the theory to painting, sketching and travel writing. On the one hand, the Sublime is regarded by Burke as essentially different from the Beautiful through its capacity to inspire amazement through experiences of Nature's immensity:

The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature is astonishment, and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. The mind is so entirely filled with its object that it cannot entertain any other, nor reason on that object which fills it. Astonishment is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree. [...] No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its power of acting and reasoning as terror; and whatever is terrible with regard to sight, is sublime. (Burke 1887, II.1)

On the other hand, the Beautiful, based on proportion, utility or perfection, produces more familiar pleasurable emotions of delight in the onlooker, with no awe or alarm being perceived: “By Beauty, as distinguished from the Sublime, I mean that quality or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love, or some passion analogous to it” (Burke 1887, III.1). The Picturesque, from the Italian *pittresco* (“picture-like”) defines a thing or a location – often an undiscovered part of a wilderness – whose qualities make it worthy of being rendered in a work of art, and has been characterized by aestheticians as defining a category in between the tremendous sublime and the peaceful beautiful: “Disputes about beauty might perhaps be involved in less confusion, if a distinction were established, which certainly exists, between such objects as are beautiful, and such as are picturesque—between those, which please the eye in their natural state; and those, which please from some quality, capable of being illustrated by painting” (Gilpin 1792, 4).

For the Romantic, the countryside is a life-giving source of moral and creative power and it is endowed with beauty and splendour, in opposition to the urban space, which is regarded as corruptive (Cronin, Chapman and Harrison 2002). According to Fletcher:

smooth and gentle landscapes corresponded to Edmund Burke’s category of the Beautiful; the Sublime, on the other hand, was associated with awe and characterized by vastness, power and obscurity. The Sublime degenerated over time into the Picturesque, in which genuine awe of Nature’s grandeur was replaced by stereotyped reactions to a catalogue of picturesque objects. Wind-blasted trees, rocky cliffs and ‘ruins’ became the order of the day as Brown’s idealized Arcadian pastoral gave way to a glorification of wilderness that might include a derelict hovel or hermitage. (2002, p. 493).

Consequently, a distinction within the representations of the countryside can be noticed between tamed Nature (ordered countryside typically English, representing the pastoral ideal of an ordered and harmonious society and a humanized landscape) *versus* wild Nature (mountains, waterfalls, storms, valued due to their demonstration of power and beauty), Sublime *versus*.

Picturesque. It is interesting to ascertain whether the descriptions left by the Scottish nurses fit these patterns and to what extent they reflect the Romantic tradition of representing the countryside.

In the previous chapter we have seen what Romanian towns were mentioned and how they were described in the nurses' diaries, letters and reports. The present chapter is dedicated to descriptions of the rural areas, the countryside. From the beginning it can be asserted that these are more numerous than those of the towns. The countryside is where the nurses set up their frontline hospitals, their wound-dressing stations and where the ambulance unit mostly resided. The first subchapter deals with Dobruja, the second one offers a few descriptions from Wallachia, or Muntenia, the third one, the most extensive, describes Bessarabia, where the nurses spent the spring and the summer of 1917, while in the last subchapter the few descriptions of rural Moldova are presented.

3.2. "Colourful and jolly peasants" in Dobruja

One of the first description of rural Dobruja portrays the surroundings of the secondary hospital set up by the SWH in "Bulbul Mic", the modern village Ciocârlia de Jos situated between Medgidia and Constanța:

Got up at 6.30 to get breakfast. Cleaned lamps all morning. Aeroplane duel just outside the door – glorious day, but shells didn't hit – enemy escaped. In the afternoon went on to Bulbul Mic with Henderson, Chesney, and eight others to help pitch camp for Hospital B which is to be moved on. Passed endless baggage waggons and convoys of wounded on the road. B Hospital to be encamped near the Serbian Hospital and work as a field hospital in connection with them – twenty kilos from firing line – sound of guns all the time. Weather simply divine – encamped on edge of huge plain, with motor lorry and field kitchen – village of Bulbul Mic on our right. Slept under open sky – camp fires around and soldiers singing – horses and pariah dogs wandering all around. The eight of us dined with Serbian doctors at their little hospital – very clean – good meal of soup and meat (in Cahill, 50).

Elsie Bowerman relates how the gorgeous day was not entirely ruined by enemy incursions. Rural areas, much like the urban ones, whenever situated close to the frontline, were overcrowded with refugees, who did not spoil the very rustic feeling they aroused in the nurses: they lit camp fires, slept under the stars, listened to soldier choruses, dealt with stray dogs and even horses, and enjoyed good food. Within Romantic emplotment, in this first example, typical descriptions of the Sublime – characterized by "vastness, power and obscurity" (Fletcher 2002, 493) – may be observed: the day was "glorious" (no matter the incoming enemy airplanes!), the weather was

“divine”, the nurses slept on a “huge plain” under the “open sky”, soldiers were singing and the meal was “good”. The vast, open space, favourable for camaraderie, does not allow the consummation of romantic affairs, which, in Romantic literature takes place in secluded areas, in deep forests, in hidden gardens or nooks.

The experience the nurses had in Mircea Vodă was equally pleasant:

We spent the night in the luggage van in Medgidia station, waking at 6.30 next morning, still in Medgidia station. However, we left soon after 7 o'clock and by 10 o'clock we had arrived at Merca Voda. We congratulated ourselves, as this was half-way, thinking we should reach our destination by tea-time; but to our horror we were told that we could not possibly leave till after dark. There would be other trains during the day, but all carrying munitions to the front, and as German aeroplanes were circling round all the time trying to drop bombs on them, the authorities would not hear of our travelling by these.

The station master was very kind to us, and gave us bread and tea in his private room, and afterwards introduced us to the OC of the Roumanian Transport Column station there. We were given lunch and dinner at the Officers' Mess, and really had quite a good day. The Roumanian officers would not hear of our finishing our journey in the luggage vans, but had a special first-class carriage put on to the train for us (in Cahill, 51).

These positive impressions come from the sense of duty of the Romanian railway and military personnel. Lunch in Mircea Vodă was not at all substantial, yet it was adequate in a time of war. The dismay – “to our horror” – at being stuck in a probably unknown Romanian village was felt by the nurses, but, in the end, it turned out to be an advantageous experience. Comparing it to the previous excerpt, we can notice how bucolic or rustic aspects are left aside owing to contacts with elements of urban civilization: the writer is more concerned about time, distances, trains, authorities, officers and luggage – all elements related to the military – and does not seem to care for the rural surroundings. Yet, hospitality is an element that is often associated with the picturesque that resurfaces here and one of the recognized and proverbial attributes of traditional, rural Romania, creating an environment that is suggestive to social activity and comradeship, a kind of *humanized landscape* (Fletcher 2002, 498).

However, amidst all the hurry through the countryside, time is also found for Romantic contemplation:

We packed the cars and lorries, and then things began to happen. Hedges and I got away first, and waited for the others by the road. It was too lovely: bright blue sky and mountains partly hidden by heavy clouds - it's a lovely

country, the Dobrudga. Hedges and I waited hours in the car until the others began to turn up. Barges were being packed with soldiers and lorries, but all very quietly. The chances of our getting off seemed pretty thin. They offered to get us off without our cars. Mrs Haverfield preferred to chance it...Some time after dark, they got a deserted club for us, and we left the cars and squelched into what must have been rather a smart place once (in Cahill, 151).

Dobruja is described as a beautiful location in spite of the anxieties of the on-going war. Nature presented itself as a distraction and, perhaps, preferring to enjoy local sights, the nurses chose to remain with their cargo in the village until some solution could be found. Probably some of the nurses regarded their taking part in the war on the Eastern Front as one of the greatest adventures in their lives and, to them, the places they visited became landscapes of retreat from the hostile world. We are told that “Dobrudga” was “lovely”, that it used to be “a smart place once” (a kind of conservative, traditionalist discourse that was specific to Victorian discourse, in which impressiveness was attributed to ruins of bygone ages), a *topos* with stunning aerial features, that had “bright blue skies,” which may have induced hope and harmony to those enjoying the scenery. The sensation created is that the war had torn away the “smartness” of the countryside, and the immediate consequence was that the picturesque location had to be abandoned, before the enemy forces would take hold of it.

Later, the need to retreat, as the forces of the Central Powers were advancing, did not mean that there was any time left to enjoy the beauty of nature surrounding the village of Hârșova, by the Danube:

We passed through some beautiful country yesterday, very hilly and rugged, with deep gullies and high rocks, and far away in the distance the wide-sweeping Danube. The sunset was most gorgeous, all the sky golden, and the blue rugged hills standing out clearly against the crimson and gold. Why are we in the midst of war? The sheep and cattle – big silvery grey beasts – and the tinkle of their bells add to the irony of it all.

All through this voyage there really seems to be some special Providence taking care of us and watching over us. We are all so wonderfully fit too. Of course we’re a bit fagged out, and always hungry, but that’s hardly to be wondered at. You should see us – we’re all so weather-beaten and brown – or is it black? (in Cahill, 98-99).

The gorgeous wilderness surrounding them made Ethel Moir think of the war as a huge ironical situation. The fragment is probably the most humane in the diaries and letters. The nonsense of the war, the disruption produced

among the peaceful villagers come into contrast to the exquisite surroundings troubled by bombings, wounded and death. After spending weeks in camps and on the run, the nurses acquired a certain rustic, savage, yet romantic – in a literary way – aspect since they became “wonderfully fit” despite being “a bit fagged out and always hungry”, “weather-beaten” and “brown”, even “black”. Nurse Moir paints the local environment, as well as the collective self of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals, in the colours of untamed Nature: the country is “very hilly and rugged” (the general imagery is chthonic, symbolising, simultaneously, abundance as well as the grave), there are “deep gullies” (a mark of the unremitting force of water) and “high rocks” (chthonic elements even permeate the aerial space), the Danube is “wide-sweeping” (one more symbol of the dynamism of water, which tends to incorporate the surroundings, providing fertility for the soil and nourishing the thoughts of the onlookers). The author depicts Dobruja as a land under the dominion of Hades, master of the chthonian sphere, with elements of the celestial and river domains intertwined, resulting in a Victorian view of Nature, represented as powerful, but without being hostile, with moral connotations evinced through delicate insinuations (Knoepflmacher and Tennyson 1977, 24). The Danube is “an ambivalent symbol since it corresponds to the creative power of both nature and of time. On the one hand it signifies fertility and the progressive irrigation of the soil; and on the other hand, it stands for the irreversible passage of time and, in consequence, for a sense of loss and oblivion” (Cirlot 2001, 274). This matches the inner struggle in the minds of the nurses, between the revulsions caused by the war (the abandoned hospital camps, equipment, and the localities left behind as prey to the opposing forces) and the magnificence of the natural environs.

Thanks to Margaret Fawcett, we can also read a serene portrayal of the peasants’ houses in Dobruja at that time:

All the houses in the villages we have passed through are made of mud, beautifully whitewashed and decorated with blue, and thatched with reeds. They nearly all have verandahs in which are suspended long strings of bright red peppers (in Cahill, 100).

She paints quite an idyllic image of the farmhouses surrounding Hârșova, and considering that the nurses were in full retreat, the village must have been so impressive that they took the time to put down a few words about the dreamy countryside. This *heimlich* (canny) representation matches the domesticity of early Victorian poetry from the 1820s to the 1840s, promoted by poets such as Felicia Hemans, Walter Scott or Tennyson, in which the domestic is linked to civic virtues (Peterson 2002, 43). The homogeneousness

of the houses' apparel may symbolize unity in the face of danger and invasion, but the village was soon to be lost to the enemy.

Ethel Moir was even more mesmerized by the beautiful surroundings, in spite of the urgency of the retreat:

We started at 5 a.m. yesterday and went on all day and all night, and are still moving on, ever on. We didn't even stop for a couple of hours during the night as usual. Things seem worse, and the main thing now is to reach the pontoon bridge. We went through some magnificent scenery yesterday – gorgeous high mountains towering above us, big, blue, glorious hills that made me think of the Abriachans, and made me wish they were the Abriachans, too. Just before dark, we went through the little town of Macin, a beautiful little village nestling amongst the hills. The view from the top of the hill, before we descended into the valley, was too lovely; peak upon peak rising against the evening sky of orange and flame, at our feet Macin with its thatched houses, and stretching far, far below, the beautiful valley of the Danube and the broad beautiful river flowing peacefully on, undisturbed by war and rumours of war.

We trekked on, and spent anything but a restful night; we were all so tired and could get very little sleep huddled in those joggly, bumping carts, cramped and cold and cross, and so hungry. We do feel grubby and foggy; we've not had a wash or our clothes off now for ten days (in Cahill, 100-101).

In this account, sublime Nature is diversified by renditions of idyllic rustic houses, with a resurfacing of the motif of the river and the mentioning of the bridge, soon to be used by the nurses during their retreat. The nurses travelled down the river Danube, through rural Dobruja, as they intended to reach the bridge near Isaccea in order to escape the horror of being captured; such a journey shaping emblematic alterations in their interior universe.

The craggy mountains surrounding Măcin⁴ made Nurse Ethel Moir think of her native Scotland, which she missed. The “towering” high mountains are “gorgeous”, the hills are “big, blue, glorious”, which gives them a celestial aspect, just like her native Abriachans are (the plateaus west of Loch Ness). The village Măcin appears as a serene mountaintop location, with little thatched houses, which offers its visitor a splendid view of the dusk, bathed in “orange and flame”, and of the nearby Danube.

In the picture, the setting sun matches the psyche of the nurses, who appear to be at the end of their tether (they are “tired”, “cramped”, “cold”,

⁴ Măcin is a village situated 60km west of Tulcea, on the border with the county Brăila. At the time, it was a commune with approximately 3,360 inhabitants at that time. The only notable edifices were its two schools, a single church and a single post and telegraph office (Lahovari, Brătianu and Tocilescu 1900, 254-255).

“cross”, “grubby” and “foggy”), much like the celestial body which is preparing to disappear, but they still carry the “flame” of hope to see the sun the next day. The blue hills, which metaphorically belong to the realm of water, due to their colour, and the Danube, created a feeling of tranquillity for Ethel, making her wish there would be no more war. Unlike their reports of towns, in which the nurses associate calmness and serenity with the failure of the Romanians to take the war effort seriously, rural locations are spared this judgement; on the contrary, often the village is rendered as the victim of war, situated – in Romanian mythological tradition – in a sacred time of its own, that is permanently repeatable, reversible, recoverable and transferable (Vulcănescu 1987, 16-17), which seems to attract the British visitors with its artless pastoral charm.

Another description, Liliás Grant’s presents a heartfelt sketch of the inside of the village on a rainy day:

We left our camping ground yesterday afternoon as the rain was soaking everything and everybody. We came into the village and are in two rooms in a dear wee cottage. We were all very glad to get under cover from the torrents of rain. One room is smaller than the other, and in it is a long divan, so Rendel and Bangham are sleeping on it, and we put up our one camp bed for Dr Chesney. The other room has a mud floor. We just put our ground sheets down for our bedding; it was cold and hard, and we all slept very badly, but we were glad to get out of the wet. We have put up our baths and are enjoying plenty of hot water; we had much needed baths, and actually went to bed with our clothes off (in Cahill, 102).

For someone who has spent some time in rural Romania, the image of everything being drenched by rain is familiar, yet the English and Scottish countryside is sodden with soothing showers and downpours alike (Harris 2015). The contentment felt in the cottage, which offered the nurses protection from the downpour outside, is heart-warming, and the nurses took advantage of the privacy offered by the traditional Romanian house to take much needed baths. One aspect that stands out is that the house lacked furniture, was hollow on the inside, and had a “mud floor” which felt “cold” and “hard”. The idyllic domestic image is desynchronized by the absence of comfortable beds, which are replaced by the chthonian flooring – described almost in the same fashion as a grave: “mud”, “cold”, “hard” – yet, through the warm purifying baths which the household provides, the serenity and cosiness of the nurses’ abode is re-established.

On 9 December 1916, the Russian soldiers camped in Dobruja celebrated St. George’s day, which gave the nurses the opportunity to partake in a rustic fête:

We prepared for the ‘party’. Edwards and I felt awfully smart in the shirts we had washed the day before. We cleaned our thinnest shoes and set out in our cars for Cogecalac at 2.30. Most of the Transport went, and the sanitars. We were to bring back wounded the next day...

We arrived fearfully conscious of our comic appearance, and I came in feeling just as one does at one’s first dance. In the hall was a band, and as we changed, kicking off our gummies in a corner, we really felt on the razzle-dazzle again. In the ballroom, which was beautifully decorated with flags, were a crowd of officers in a bewildering number of uniforms, standing round the walls in rows. The old general was rather daunting; thankfully he was very nice to us, and held our hands rather tight for the first half hour (in Cahill, 142).

The celebration of St. George according to the Russian calendar, in the countryside of Dobruja, brings out the *carnavalesque* associated with fairs and festivals. There are “smart shirts”, “thinnest shoes”, “comic” appearances, a “band”, “razzle-dazzle” movements (confusing, gaudy dancing), a “ballroom”, “flags”, “bewildering uniforms” and the maître de cérémonies is a rather insistent but “daunting” old general. From a Bakhtinian perspective, such carnivalization, an up-side down turning of the world, entails and demands:

- the toppling of hierarchies (separate categories such as British nurses, Russian nurses, soldiers, officers, and locals are all present at the celebration, while, during typical work on the battlefield each of these categories has its own assigned role and generally do not mingle),
- the descent of order into chaos (ludicrous lines are exchanged between the Russian soldiers and the nurses, who eagerly and comically consent to their flirtation, something they would not usually do),
- the mixture of the sacred and the profane (in the Russian Orthodox Church, December 9 according to the Gregorian calendar marks the dedication of the Cathedral of Kiev to St. George in 1051, an event that is so remote both for the Puritan Scottish nurses and the Russian soldiers that it is not mentioned, but all are feverish about preparations for the party),
- and the juxtaposition of the magnificent with the ridiculous (the distinguished old general seeming to forget to let go of the ladies’ hands for half an hour) (Baldick 2001, 33).

For the nurses, the fun-fair atmosphere must have done wonders in relieving some of the constant worry amassed during those rainy days in the

countryside of Dobruja. The burlesque situation is completed by the quantity and quality of food, worthy of a Pantagruelian banquet:

Endless hors d'oeuvre courses, then fish, chicken, and some jelly stuff – the food was excellent. It was amusing to look round and see the Buffs all smugly gassing away in foreign tongues... For vis-à-vis I had a Caucasian who claimed to have taken me out riding at Bulbul Mic, and I remembered him well. His store of English conversation began and ended with 'kiss me quick', and my Russian was even more limited to 'khorosho' and 'nevazhno' – 'All right' and 'it's of no consequence', which I answered in turn. He sat and glared at me all through dinner, and insisted on drinking my health every five minutes..

Russian sisters came in after dinner and then the dance began. One's partners came up and clicked their heels, whirled one round into the wildest of dances, and then dropped one like a hot brick and wandered off. The polonaise and the mazurka were really an effort, but we were undefeated and capered into everything. As time went on they all got pretty drunk in a harmless way. It struck me as odd as they were not removed, but none of their friends seemed to mind... (in Cahill, 142).

This kind of "wildest" dancing – where they "clicked their heels", "whirled round", "dropped one like a hot brick", and "wandered off" – evokes an analogous and very vibrant allegory that matches the burlesque of the rural fun-fair scene. Paired or round dances are well-known occasions for courtship, as illustrated in this example. In different situations, in May 1917, celebration comes up in a village again, but this time the beholder, Yvonne Fitzroy, does not give us any further details: "I went for a ride with my chief the other night. We came in for the May-day celebrations in the village" (147-148).

With plenty of food, drink and dancing, it is not surprising that the military men and the nurses would become fond of each other. It seems curious to notice that such occurrences in the Scottish women's diaries are only found while they are in a rural space. On a different occasion, while the nurses stationed in Moldova near the Danube and were promenading along the banks of the river, they met a group of soldiers and one of them tells us in her diary that "they made love".

Dancing in the countryside is not only described in this comical manner. In March 1917, while the nurses were stationed close to Reni, in Bessarabia, Sister Fawcett came across a group of Romanian soldiers dancing the traditional *hora* in the fields and left us an account of this occasion in her diary:

Nine operations this afternoon – all quite small. We are to evacuate thirty-four tomorrow. Off duty in the evening – went for a walk alone over the steppe, finishing up by the quay. I came across some Roumanian sailors dancing – their dancing is quite different from that of the Russian soldiers. About fifteen dance in a ring – there was no elaborate step, but the rhythm was very charming. It reminded me of the Serbian National Dance – the Kola – that we once joined in at Ismail. I also met an English-speaking Roumanian officer (in Cahill, 236)

Sister Fawcett confesses that she was fascinated by the rhythm of the *hora*, taking on the role of an anthropologist by noting how many people danced and comparing it to the Serbian *kolo*. She was right to make the comparison, as both types of folk dance stem from a tradition that dates back to ancient times, the Romanian *hora* as well as the Serbian folk *kolo* being considered to descend from the Thracian *kolabrismos*, a complex ritual, including performances of music, dancing and magic, dedicated to the Sun and performed on the days of solstice and equinox (Vulcănescu 1987, 371-372).

The countryside surrounding Babadag seems idyllic: “Again the road was lovely, and better, the horizon all around, which was wave on wave of blue hills. We crossed the range behind the inlet, through a wood of birches, past endless little hilltops” (in Cahill, 141). The immensity of the scenery stands out in this description, in another representation of awe-inspiring Nature: the horizon spanned “all around”, there was “wave on wave of blue hills” and “endless little hilltops”, giving the reader a feeling of the limitlessness of the background in a classical Victorian fashion. The forest – which in Romantic tradition “is appreciated with almost religious intensity” (Ferber 2007, 80) – could not be left aside in the description. The image of the “lovely road” suggests an optimistic collaboration between the human and the natural, the path symbolizing one’s journey through life, seen as one full of hope, yet subordinated to the majesty of Nature, in the same manner as in Wordsworth’s poetry, where buildings and other human constructs are dwarfed by towering cliffs or other natural elements (Knoepflmacher and Tennyson 1977, 24). The glade the nurses passed through invites a more intimate contemplation than the adjacent hilly vastness. It could be argued that the nurses who sought to depict the surroundings in this traditional tone were those who were also describing their mission to Romania as a great adventure, as opposed to those who – in a more modern fashion – wrote about the horrors and interior conflicts they faced or pondered on their condition as women.

When the ambulance drivers had to rush from Babadag to Tulcea, with the enemy in their wake, the décor changes:

Away at two with all the wounded left in our hospital, to Babadag... We stopped at Babadag to have some hot tea and get a little warmer before driving the wounded to Tulcea. ... A thick fog stopped us on the way – it was bitterly cold, and there was some difficulty about taking our men when we did get to Tulcea. We hung about for half an hour. We drank hot coffee before returning, and would all have preferred something more bracing. It's no joke driving wounded with practically no lights along these roads packed with the retreating army, then a fog. We got back at midnight. Robinson's car with the baggage had broken down, so we had no blankets or bed bundles, and our coats were wet... All night carts had rattled by as in an ordinary methodical retreat (in Cahill, 151-152).

In the fragment above, Nurse Birkbeck becomes overwhelmed by the urgency of the retreat and describes the foggy, cold atmosphere, which gives the account a Gothic flavour. The gloom is emphasized by the repetition of the word “fog” and the mentioning of the “bitter cold” temperature at “midnight” when there were “practically no lights”. The writer suggests fear of the unknown, the landscape is all under the dominion of fog, through which the heroic nurses are trying to pass to fulfil their altruistic mission, and there exists the possibility of unknowingly crossing behind enemy lines and facing capture, the individual and everyone else facing the same threat. Fog and mist symbolise obscurity and represent a notable Gothic element which infuses the journal entry with uncertainty and mystery.

Overall, Dobruja gave the impression of splendour to the nurses. In mid-December, nurse Birkbeck wrote:

We packed the cars and lorries, and then things began to happen. Hedges and I got away first, and waited for the others by the road. It was too lovely: bright blue sky and mountains partly hidden by heavy clouds – it's a lovely country, the Dobrudga. Hedges and I waited hours in the car until the others began to turn up. Barges were being packed with soldiers and lorries, but all very quietly... (in Cahill, 152).

Dobruja's ancient mountains, sapphire sky and her loveliness inspired nurse Birkbeck to remember more of that day than the simple struggle with transportation. The solemnity of the spectacle of nature silences the retreating soldiers as well, suggesting, perhaps, that the beauty of nature had triumphed over the violence of war.

3.3. Wallachia, “horizon... in a blaze”

While in Dobruja, the nurses were able to leave us plenty of accounts, but their trip to Muntenia was rather short-lived, and they mostly wrote about it

while keeping in mind the image of the exploding army deposits near Ciulnița⁵, which they had reached around 8 December 1916 and had to abandon within hours. The burning horizon, largely described by the nurses, suggests an apocalyptic image, with which this subchapter is mostly concerned.

Our plans are once more changed. The Transport have gone to Babadagh as before arranged. Hospital B. goes back with the Serbs to some place near Odessa, and we are being sent forward to Ciulnitza on the main line between Tchernavoda⁶ and Bucharest. We move the day after to-morrow, and are frightfully pleased. The news is better, and rumour has it that the oilfields have been destroyed, which I hope is true.

There has been lots of work here, but the people are rather odious. They say our Hospital is run entirely by German Jews, so perhaps it is not surprising that we do not hit off completely. The real Roumanians have been charming to us; the women are very good-looking. (in Cahill, 71-72).

Amidst worries regarding the oil fields, an intrusion of the industrial sector into the bucolic Romanian countryside, the nurse takes time to notice an important part of Romantic receptivity in the 19th century, the picturesque: she is charmed by the “real Roumanians⁷” and the beauty of the local countryside women. This is another example where the pastoral endows moral qualities on those who inhabit the land, almost as in William Collins’s famous painting, *Cottage Hospitality*, which tells very little about the actual life of such pastoral characters, but the little that it conveys epitomizes superlative attributes (Stein 1987, 199). The journal entry of the nurse continues with an account of a tea-party at the British consulate in Brăila, which significantly contrasts with rural simplicity and shows the relief of returning to the comfort of urban life:

⁵ This Romanian village Ciulnița is spelled Ciulnitza in the Scottish nurses’ diaries. The locality held little strategic importance except for its railway station.

⁶ This spelling of Cernavodă that sometimes appears in the diaries of the nurses originates from the 1850’s, when the British became interested in building a railway between Cernavodă and Constanța. Travel logs as well as technical analyses of the engineers that visited Dobruja popularized the spelling Tchernavoda in Britain. For example, Thomas Forester wrote a *The Danube and the Black Sea: Memoir on their junction by a Railway between Tchernavoda and a Free Port at Kustendjie* (London, Edward Stanford, 1857).

⁷ In the interwar period the name of the country was spelled either Rumania or Roumania in English. This spelling was influenced by the French term *Roumanie*, which is still in use today. Beginning with the 1960’s the Romanian Government preferred to use the term Romania in English in order to emphasize the historical connection with the Roman Empire.

J. and I gave such a successful tea-party the other day in honour of the birth-days of our respective Sisters. We pinched some wood from the house, lit a fire at the Consulate, and entertained a party of seven to tea and supper. The guests come at 4.30 and stayed until 10, and we all agreed we had enjoyed nothing so much for three months. Of course we sat in the firelight, and told ghost stories. The Consul's two little Roumanian maids rose to the occasion, and when we got back from the Wards we found a beautiful English table spread with the Consul's best china and silver and nothing forgotten, not even ash-trays and a cigarette-box. It only wanted a mail to make things perfect (in Cahill, 71-72).

Although the two previous fragments are not written in a rural environment, Yvonne Fitzroy tells us in this journal entry from early December how eager they were to head towards Ciulnița, closer to the frontline. Not surprisingly, the thought of running a new hospital in the Romanian countryside fades and there emerges the account of a memorable British soiree at the estate of the British consul in Brăila. This text perfectly illustrates how the nurses, who rejoiced in being able to contemplate the astounding nature in Dobruja, pretended order and commonality in the chaotic world of the war.

Nurse Lois Grant has left us a description of the banks of the Danube, which she visited while camped in Brăila:

On Saturday last, Moir, Fawcett and Turner and I all went a lovely walk. We visited the trenches on the shores of the Danube. They have several guns, and trenches with beautiful funk holes. The men took us down and showed us everything, and then showed us a communication trench. We had to go along all crouching down because it was all covered in over their ammunition. It was all very interesting, and the men were so nice, and seemed to take such an interest in us. Their last words were that they hoped to meet us in Berlin. The Danube was really blue that day, and looked prettier that I have ever seen it (in Cahill, 132-133).

The blue Danube, an endless source of inspiration for genius and commoner alike, elicited hope in the soldiers' and the young nurse's hearts, who expected to meet in the capital of Germany in the near future.

The nurses' short descriptions of Muntenia, though a lot scarcer than those of Dobruja, whose sublime scenery they recognized and admired on many occasions, still captivated the British women, who looked forward to visiting Ciulnița, despite having to withdraw later and witnessing a gigantic explosion close to the front line. Furthermore, the tranquillity of nature offered them relief from day-to-day hassle and, when unable to identify the locations they visited with a specific name, like they did in Dobruja, the nurses simply referred to the Danube.

3.4. “Nothing to be found...” in Bessarabia

The title of the present subchapter is elusive. The nurses probably spent most of their time on the Eastern Front somewhere in Bessarabia for which they left detailed descriptions, which could be interpreted to convey elements of Tragic *emplotment* embedded in the general Romantic descriptions in the nurses’ texts. The desertedness of some rural locations, such as Ismail, which is described as the “abomination of isolation”, and the complications brought by the Russian Revolution, which were felt in Bessarabia, made the nurses describe the rural landscape differently compared to their Dobrujan depictions. The bleak picturing, especially in the harsh period of retreat and changing weather at the end of 1916 and beginning of 1917, is opposed to the accounts during the spring and summer of 1917 when they celebrate the beauty and glory of Nature.

There is a Victorian sense of isolation that is amplified by what the nurses experienced at this stage of their journey. In Victorian culture, in general, one can notice the connection between the state of mind – dominated by feelings such as uncertainty, loss and isolation following the rapid progress of industrialization and the fast development in the sciences that led to a displacement of the self during the 19th century – and the natural background, which is still looked upon as a space of retreat and self-contemplation. (Fletcher 2002, 494). The two opposing representations of isolation that usually occur in Victorian literature, one leading to despair the other to bliss, are also found in the nurses’ descriptions of Bessarabia, where their long inactivity, for a few months, in 1917, provided them with numerous occasions to express their feelings in words.

Margaret Fawcett is among the first nurses to describe the surroundings as they were heading towards Bolgrad, in the Bugeac⁸ region:

We are to travel 40 km today to Bolgrad, and tomorrow we go on to Ismail⁹.
The ride yesterday was frightfully cold; the wind today seems to have fallen,
so I hope it will be warmer.

⁸ The Bugeac, also spelled Budjak, is the region in southern Bessarabia situated between the Danube and the Dniester River, now part of the Ukraine. Bolgrad, more commonly known as Cetatea Albă in Romanian or Akkerman in Turkish, is a port of historical importance situated on the estuary of the Dniester leading to the Black Sea.

⁹ Ismail, also located in the Bugeac, is a port on the Chilia branch, situated directly north of Tulcea. Both Ismail and Bolgrad were part of Romania from 27 March 1918 until 28 June 1940, when Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia to the Soviet Union.

This is a pretty little village; the inhabitants are mostly Roumanian or Russian, and are quite friendly. In the last village they were chiefly Bulgarians, and were not at all pleased to see us. Four of us went for a walk last night and saw the most beautiful sunset – mountains in the background and a lake in the foreground. Up until the present we have seen heaps of wild geese flying overhead; now as the weather gets colder, we see very few (in Cahill, 103-104).

Like in other entries, the place appears to be serene and the landscape is humanized by picturesque and welcoming Romanian and Russian peasants, who, much like their counterparts from Dobruja and Wallachia, are given idealized portrayals. The scenery is picturesque; there is a “pretty little village” and a “most beautiful sunset” over the mountains and lake.

In March the next year, the wild geese are mentioned again, as messengers of warm weather this time, by Yvonne Fitzroy:

A very cold spell lately, but today again floods of sunshine. We have seen the wild geese heading north, and we have seen the storks beginning to nest. We have looted irises for our garden, and we have planted sunflowers. We are, in fact, happy and comfortable, and therefore expect to be forced to leave Reni before we are very much older! [...] The hospital is fast filling up again (in Cahill, 235)

The nurses feign optimism or try hard to be optimistic while the hospital is filling up and they are soon to leave closer to the front line. This would only occur a couple of months later, in 1917, due to the success of the Romanian resistance in Moldova¹⁰.

Nurse Margaret Fawcett tells us what came about during a visit to the marketplace in a village of Bugeac, when the weather was no longer so pleasing:

Yesterday we had a perfectly beastly walk – the worst we had. The wind was bitter and there was no sun at all. We finished up at about 11.30 p.m. in quite a nice house at Bolgrad. We started off again at about 2 o'clock, having explored the market. It was quite the most exciting market we have come across yet. Turner invested in a ripping sheepskin with coloured illuminations and a charming full skirt which swishes as she walks (in Cahill, 104).

¹⁰ As a result of the successful resistance against overwhelming odds in the battles of Mărăști, Mărășești and Oituz (August-September 1917), the reformed Romanian Army in Moldova dealt the strongest blow to the Central Powers on the Eastern Front in 1917 (Kirîțescu 1989, 835).

The sun was missing and the wind was “bitter”, giving a sense of seclusion that was dispelled by the picturesque rural marketplace, which usually becomes the main point of attraction in the villages the nurses have visited, including Bolgrad. Though no cigarettes, Turkish delight or coffee are to be found, as mentioned on other occasions, the “charming” clothes sold by the locals attract the nurses, who probably found bartering a form of entertainment. An example to this effect is Lois Turner, who proudly displayed her newly acquired “swishing” skirt. The rustic country market, a place where the small pleasures of life are transacted, was left deserted by the effects of the war, reinforcing the feeling of solitude induced by the description of the weather in the beginning of the journal entry.

Ethel Moir has left a more detailed account of the surroundings of Bolgrad, about her and her colleagues’ situation there:

We had such a day of it yesterday – it was so cold – a biting wind all day. We got to Bolgrad about 1.30 a.m., all very cold and weary, once more found a cottage, and just dropped. We have been here all morning, so have just been out exploring. Bolgrad is quite an important town in Bessarabia; a railway junction between Odessa and Reni. It’s an interesting old place, with some fine old churches and a fascinating market. We went up to the top of the fire-station tower, and had a topping view of the surrounding country. We move on again in half an hour.

There is talk of a dispatch-rider going through to Headquarters from here, so we may have a chance of sending letters. I’ll finish this off and send it in the hopes of your receiving it. I’ve been worrying dreadfully about not being able to let you know anything – all I hope is that Dr Inglis has cabled home to the HQ and that they have informed you that we are all right. Only the unfortunate thing is that Dr Inglis can’t have the remotest idea where we are; we seem to be ‘lost’ and cut off from the Unit, just the nine of us on our ownie-oh.

This is some life, but I wouldn’t have missed it for anything. It’s such an interesting experience, and in time we’ll forget all the nasty parts! I wonder where my next letter will be written – some unheard-of spot in the depths of Bessarabia, I’ve no doubt (in Cahill, 104).

Just like Margaret Fawcett in the previous fragment, Nurse Moir, in what we may call a Romantic manner, is impressed by the “old churches” of the “interesting place”, with its “fascinating market”, but these man-made elements are secondary in the composition of this image, in which the sublime Nature occupies the foreground. Ethel Moir recognizes that Bolgrad was not simply a village, and finds the locality fascinating, being excited that she was able to post letters home. The fact that she was disconnected from loved ones affected her greatly, since she admits it to herself that it is difficult to send anything back home from the remote part

of Europe she is in, and she characterizes future different places they would visit in Bessarabia as “unheard-of spots”.

The unheard and the unknown, the fact that they are “lost”, “cut off” and that their leader has no idea where they are, besides the gloomy weather described in the beginning, the ancient places of worship found in town and the nurse’s “worrying dreadfully”, all contribute to the feeling of exclusion from the outside world, which enthralls and creates fear at the same time in an individual who is impressed by the vastness of the surrounding region and who seeks to connect to those left in comfortable and familiar Scotland. Still, the circumstances are faced with heroic courage, as the nurse confesses she “wouldn’t have missed it for anything”, thus rejoicing in being part of a dangerous quest in the isolated idyllic countryside, as if they were protagonists of a Victorian adventure novel with a distinct Balkan-oriental flair.

The next fragment, which deals with both Dobruja and Bessarabia, highlights the difference between the two locations for the nurses:

We were all terribly bored at Ismail. We didn’t do much ambulance work as we were supposed to be resting, and we really became taxis for the various officers and doctors. Although when we first knew we were going to have a rest we were delighted, after a very short time of the taxi work we were aching to be back in the midst of things and getting on with our proper job. At last orders were received for us to return to business, and once more we got on to barges and returned to Tulcea. From there we drove over part of the road of the first retreat – and how different it seemed this time – to a village called Babadag. It was set in the midst of beautiful country, with wooded hills and lakes with masses of snipe and wild duck, and lovely sunsets over the smooth still waters... I think it was during our stay in Babadag that we heard we had all been awarded the medal of St George, and later on the order of St Stanislav (in Cahill, 135).

Written by one of the ambulance drivers, Katherine Hodges, the excerpt is representative of the nurses’ desire to perform the mission they were there for. To Katherine, resuming work by returning to the countryside surrounding Babadag and Tulcea means returning to the thrilling activity on the battlefield, while Bessarabia meant dull courier work for her. Not only is she enthused to be at Babadag, but she is also excited to describe the surroundings, which she paints in the brightest colours; a land not only beautiful but also teeming with otherwise rare wild animals: it is a “beautiful country”, with “wooded hills”, “lakes” with “smooth still waters”, “masses of snipe”, “wild duck”, and the sunsets are “lovely”. Babadag is an idyllic village that stands out through the beauty of its surrounding picturesque landscape. It is noticeable that neither roads nor dwellings are described –

the villagers had all fled in the retreat – which means the environment is not humanized in the least. To Katherine Hodges, staying in Bessarabia means remaining isolated in routine and useless tasks, while travelling to picturesque Dobruja equals accomplishing the heroic mission they had come to the war front to perform.

If the example above is one that does much honour to Dobruja, the first impression of Nurse Birkbeck of Ismail, below, describes the nadir of their experience in Bessarabia:

Edwards and I left for Ismail by the only boat, leaving at 7.30. Ismail is indeed ‘the abomination of desolation’, street after street of houses bordered by acacia trees before low one-storeyed houses all made to the same pattern. Only the high road and main street are made roads, the rest just beaten tracks, knee deep in dust and sand in summer, and knee deep in mud in winter.

The mess room was my joy when we arrived at tea time. A great ornate gramophone was trumpeting ragtime at a room full of Buffs eating a huge tea. All have lost ‘the mark of the Exodus’, and most have put on a stone in weight, I should think. After supper Hedges gave us our first lesson in ballet dancing. As we pounded into the figures of ‘the Buffet Ballet’ we must have looked pretty funny. Most had field boots on, and Suche came in, in her pyjamas, and joined in (in Cahill, 135).

The desolation they feel is embellished by the existence of exotic acacia trees, pointing to an arid setting that could turn into a very muddy portion of countryside in winter, difficult to travel through, given the condition of the roads. In spite of the feelings of desolation, the countryside at Ismail becomes the appropriate environment for entertainment, such as farcical ballet lessons, an excuse to ease the tensions and to return to the joy of dance, creating a kind of burlesque scene in which an “ornate gramophone” is “trumpeting ragtime”, the boys are having a “huge tea” while the nurses have “pounded into” ballet figures with “field boots”, one of them even wearing pyjamas. Unlike the dance that took place in Dobruja on St. George’s day, Nurse Hedge’s attempt of performing ballet in Ismail turns into ridicule, the deserted landscape echoing the nurses’ inability to perform an artistic act to the fullest. The ballet-tea scene described by the nurse reminds one of Lewis Carroll’s “Mad Tea Party” in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, where disorder and the arbitrary are nuanced during a farcical feast in the middle of the lonely forest.

The “mark of the exile” encountered in the countryside and mentioned above refers to the feelings of horror left by the retreat on those who were trying to escape the enemy. Nurse Birkbeck left a detailed description of it, amidst the devastated countryside surrounding Isaccea:

...The road was an absolute jigsaw puzzle, zig-zagging up and down the mountain, with black in front and precipices on each side for a mile. The road was fairly clear. We passed several camps with many fires round which soldiers were grouped, asleep or standing round the fires. We arrived at Isaccea at 4.

[...] We slowly bored our way through to the bridge. Oxen, sheep, carts with refugees lying across the road and camp fires in the middle of it made the last mile very trying without lights. Once at the pontoon bridge we drove straight across into Russia once again.

The place where the others were camped was one huge camp, dotted with fires. Plimsoll, Hedges, and I made a lovely fire. We bribed a Russian soldier to get wood for us, and kept it going from 4.30 til 6.20 when it got light. We ate some bread and one of the Tommies produced some bully beef for us. The ambulance crew were frozen out of their ambulances, and joined us till all the Transport were round the fire and many Russians and others too. Below us lay the Danube, purple and black, and the gently shifting long bridge over which refugees never ceased to pass. With the light we were off at 6.30. [...]

Beyond the mountains came the boom of guns – must be the battle of Babadag going on. We hear that Cogeaalac has fallen, and Isaccea and Babadag. There are rumours about Galatz and Braila (in Cahill, 154-155).

The anxiety of the retreat is amplified by the insecurity of the road cutting through the mountains, where soldiers were camped. Closer to the bridge at Isaccea, the herds and the crowds of people made the crossing dangerous, as there were no lights, which added to the harrowing experience. There were campfires on the other side as well, as if they had become the symbol of fleeing troops. The Danube itself turned “purple and black”, echoing the loss of life in the battles at Cogeaalac and Brăila and bringing with it black rumours about Galați and Brăila. The gloomy atmosphere is first depicted thanks to the road mentioned in the beginning of this journal entry, which metaphorically symbolizes the journey through life or through the mission at hand. The way is perplexing, it resembles a “jigsaw puzzle”, it chaotically “zigzags” up and down the mountain not revealing a destination or purpose (being “black in front”) and not permitting any kind of lateral detour, as there were “precipices on each side for a mile”. Not surprisingly, there were not many men who employed this disordered route of retreat (“it was fairly clear”), at a time when many should have used it to run away from the enemy. A Gothic feeling of some sort of black tranquility surfaces in the scene: the bridge, which should have been very noisy, as countless refugees were using it, is “gently shifting”; from beyond the mountains booms can be heard, moving is difficult “without lights” yet the field is “dotted with fires”, as in some sort of Pagan midsummer rite involving bonfires.

In the same Gothic manner, impressions of the mind-wrecking, desolate, “confusing” retreat through the “dark”, “cold”, and “disgustingly muddy” countryside of the Bugeac reverberated back to Britain:

We left Ismail at 8 a.m. on Sunday 17 December. It was dark and very cold and disgustingly muddy. We each sat on an ammunition cart beside the driver and we drove along about two miles an hour. Once we were clear of the town the roads were better and we walked most of the way. At 3.30 we got to the village where we spent the night.

[...] *The Spectator* says that the retreat was done in good order. As a matter of fact it was the most hopeless confusion. Everybody was lost, and the Roumanians ran like hares in absolute panic. They say the present retreat is as bad (in Cahill, 156).

The urgency of the retreat of the Second Romanian Army out of Dobrogea and into Bugeac during the mid of December 1916 was probably owed to the fact that the Romanian fortifications on the Siret river were actually facing the wrong direction as they had been designed to hold against a Russian invasion (*România în anii primului Război Mondial*, 831-850). The retreat out of Dobruja shall be discussed in greater detail in the fourth chapter. Besides the report in *The Spectator*, the nurse also notices how, even in mid-December, the countryside in Bessarabia was made impracticable during rain when it came to transportation. Nurse Ethel Moir agrees:

... It was such a desperately cold day, too, that we were thankful to walk, to help keep warm. It was very heavy walking, thanks to the mud, and by the time we reached Cismea Varuita and had secured a hut, we all felt about at the end of our tether. We made ourselves some tea, retired to the floor, and did not budge till 5 a.m. next day. This morning we were off again at 6 a.m. and we got to Bolgrad about 2 o'clock (in Cahill, 156).

Walking through the mud exhausted the British women, but here we find out about their visit to Cișmeaua Văruită, where they accommodated themselves in a traditional hut, perhaps one with a “mud floor” as they had described before. The lodging in the countryside is rarely something to write home about, yet it sufficed at that moment, after such a walk.

Another instance when they settled in a local house took place at Bolgrad. Margaret Fawcett also describes the place as pleasing: “We arrived in Bolgrad and have quite settled into a nice house. Our settling in consists of putting up our camp beds and undoing our bed bundles. We have just heard that the day we left Ismail the town was bombarded by enemy aircraft” (in Cahill, 156).

A return to Dobruja brought a feeling of déjà-vu to Nurse Katherine Hodges, including the campfires lit by the soldiers, which precluded a shadowy demonstration in the night.

Suddenly we got fresh orders that we were to go back again, and we set off over the river once more, along the main road for a bit, and then turned off into a little lane leading up to the mountains. As we turned from the main road we saw a wonderful picture: a large field full of troops camping for the night. Every little group of men had a wood fire burning; the dark background of trees threw the leaping flames into bright relief, and then figures of soldiers moving in front of the flames became sharply defined dramatic silhouettes. (in Cahill, 161-163).

Once again, during their retreat, the majestic Danube becomes the point of reference for their travels. After crossing it, the nurses take the way up the mountain and are impressed by the multitude of camp fires and the “sharply defined dramatic silhouettes” the shadows cast from the distance on the curtain created by the edge of the nearby forest. In the rural countryside of Dobruja, the nature of war is revealed in the reverie of this pastoral image that alludes to silhouettes in a puppet show, giving the impression that soldiers, much like marionettes, have no control over their destiny, which is controlled by the decisions of governments and politicians. The nurses continued their journey south and came across a picturesque, secluded nunnery on top of a hill:

We climbed up and up, getting nearer all the time to the sound of guns, until we came to a little valley in the top of the hills; here we found a quiet white convent. The nuns, their serenity apparently untouched, came out, gave us their schoolroom to sleep in, and some hot coffee. [...]. (in Cahill, 161-163).

The abbey situated close to the Danube and hence to the border between Dobruja and Bessarabia, stands out as “white” and “quiet”, symbolizing purity. It is not placed on the top of the hill, in a lofty location, but down “a little valley”, which offers it seclusion and protection from the outside world. The “untouched” serenity of the community of sisters – to whom the Scottish nurses probably must have felt somehow connected, seems unaffected by the war that was raging about it. The image of the immaculate abbey sketched here may remind one of Tintern Abbey in Monmouthshire, situated on the Wye river valley on the border between England and Wales, probably the most celebrated monastery in Romantic and Victorian poetry and painting, and similar in location to the convent described by the nurses, positioned on the Danube between Dobruja and Bessarabia. For example, in Wordsworth’s *Tintern Abbey*, a poem treating nature, time, mortality,

memory, imagination, society, the landscape, humanity, and God, almost the same contradictions surface between the serenity of the location and the disharmony between humans and nature. In the nurses' case, however, men are responsible for the horrible war that was tainting the beauty of the natural environment.

Not all nurses professed the same reverence towards the traditional religious elements they found during their stay in Romania. On a different occasion, during the week before Easter in 1917, the local priest visited the Scottish Women's hospital in Reni to bless it with holy water:

This morning the priest came to bless the hospital and four new icons that Dr Inglis has presented to the hospital. It was terrible mummy, I thought – and then he blessed us all, sprinkling us with the whisk broom that was used to brush lice off beds – *sehr gut!* – everything is really very funny, but a perfectly wonderful fascination about everything – and I don't think I shall be able to tear myself away when July comes, especially as the war must be over by the winter. I shall have to see it out (in Cahill, 214).

Mary Milne was evidently too much attached to her Protestant faith to appreciate the Orthodox traditions. She thought all of it was “mummy”, but admitted being fascinated by what had taken place and altogether expressed her dismay at having to leave the hospital when her contract would reach its full term in the summer.

The day after visiting the secluded nunnery in north Dobruja, the trip of Katherine Hodges to the front was continued with tremendous difficulty:

It was a strange night. When the big guns stopped at intervals, you could hear the rifle fire. The enemy were, we were told, just on the cred of the hills above us...

[...] At last I started off. The lane was very narrow, and by now congested to a degree that is almost indescribable. I don't think it was more than three quarters of a mile from the village to the main road, but it took me from midday to nearly five o'clock to cover the distance. I moved about afoot and then waited half an hour, and so it went on. It was hardly better when we reached the main road: we were making for the pontoon bridge again, but so was the bulk of the Russian and Roumanian armies. The confusion was awful (in Cahill, 161-163).

The confusion witnessed in the retreat is exacerbated by different elements, such as the narrowness and crowdedness of the lane, and “to a degree that is almost indescribable”, of the roads. Because of the war, the picturesque rural countryside of Dobruja had turned into an inhospitable *topos*, the “road”, i.e., mission, of the nurses became impractical and Nature's chaos

was seconded by the confusion among the troops who were trying to pass across the pontoon bridge.

Mary Milne, who was the cook of the mission, uses similar imagery when describing a walk she took with one of the doctors on a bright day, in March 1917, around Reni in inland Bugeac, when they were interrupted by an enemy airplane:

I got a half-day off, and Dr Laird and I went for a very long walk by the Danube and home by the fortresses. It was perfectly lovely, especially the sun setting over the river. The snow-clad hills across the river in Roumania were beautiful. As we went on our walk a German aeroplane was being fired at from three sides, and the noise was awful – it all reverberated across the river. I did enjoy the walk with my medal on – awfully proud of it. Some soldiers drove us home the last mile in their carts (in Cahill, 213).

The admiration of picturesque elements, such as the sunset over the river and the beautiful snow-clad hills is affected by the firing taking place, which created an “awful noise” that “reverberated across the river” (the beauty of the river is directly spoilt by the awful sounds of war). The journal entry ends on a positive note though, with the mention of the soldiers. They humanize this image in an idyllic way – replacing Victorian elements such as the shepherd or the villager – with the gentle and safe delivery of the nurses’ home in their rustic carts.

The description of attractive natural elements is especially evident in spring. The cook of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals, Mary Milne, describes the steppes surrounding Reni at the end of March 1917:

Nothing much doing. The weather is perfectly glorious. I go for walks on the steppe with Dr Laird as often as I can, and we have found heaps of lovely bulbs. The steppes will be a mass of bloom very soon – what a joy it all is. I told Dr Inglis yesterday that I would stay till the end of October, and she was very pleased. I am going to get a decent salary perhaps, also good fun (in Cahill, 236).

Conditions are “glorious”, the bulb flowers are “lovely”, announcing “a mass of bloom” and there is joy everywhere, so Mary Milne decided to prolong her contract with the hospitals up to October, pleasing their leader, Dr. Elsie Inglis, who was preoccupied by the fact that many of the nurses had to go home as their contracts were getting close to expiring.

Mary Milne resumes her description a few days later, in April 1917, painting an even brighter picture of the landscape:

I have been for marvellous walks, and last night Dr Laird and I lifted lots of grape hyacinths and Star of Bethlehem bulbs to dry and send home...I think

the steppes are the most wonderful joy I have ever met – miles and miles of rolling grass plains, quaint villages and orchards – one goes for miles without seeing a soul – and the Danube is a perfect dream (in Cahill, 236).

The Sublime scenery dwarfs all elements related to the human presence, while, at the end of this journal entry, the Danube crowns the description by taking it to the oneiric realm. One must notice that there are few mentions of the Danube in Victorian literature (an exception being Lord Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, part XIX, where the river is personified as giving the Severn its gloomy character), owing to the fact that only a few British men or women actually travelled there in the 19th century (Davis 2007, 304). The lack of literary exploration of this river in Victorian literature is a possible reason why the Scottish women often attributed dreamy or mysterious qualities to the Danube.

We have noticed how the Danube tends to be the preferred river mentioned by the nurses. In a letter sent home, on 6 May 1917, Sister Fawcett mentions the Prut, the river which borders Moldavia and Bessarabia (Moldova of today):

Yesterday Murphy, Fitzroy and I went for a picnic – our object was to get to the Pruth valley, where there is a splendid view of the Pruth and Danube valleys and of Galatz and Braila. This we did quite easily, but coming home by moonlight, walking as we thought parallel to the Danube, we got too far inland and went about six miles beyond Reni, and had to come all the way back. Altogether we must have gone about twenty miles (in Cahill, 252).

The valley of the Prut and the banks of the Danube, splendid as they were, proved to be the reason why the three nurses lost their way around Reni. Picturesque as it was, the scenery contributed to the nurses' missing the road home, leading to their becoming the protagonists of a little adventure bathed in the rays of the moon, which adds to the mystical representation which the nurses usually attribute to the great river.

Writing home in April 1917, just as Mary Milne also did, Nurse Yvonne Fitzroy offers a different, less contemplative, description of their hikes in the countryside surrounding Reni:

I do hope you got away for Easter, and that some of our constant sunshine is yours. The moon shines on our faces all night and the sun all day. I don't pretend our complexions are the better for it – but our minds and bodies most certainly are! We wonder sometimes whether your, and particularly our mamas', natural pleasure in our return will survive the beholding of our freckles? (And remember this is only April.) So this is the nature of preparation.

The front is getting very much alive, and my latest acquisition is a beautiful Russian shell-head...

The cherry blossom is out and the peach not far behind. It is very pleasant to go for a walk on the steppe and come suddenly to these most delicious valleys. Quite soon I am going to collect bulbs and growing things wherewith to adorn our water-garden – that is, if there exists anything brave enough to survive incarceration in a kit-bag.

I feel very uninteresting, and that this letter is most unsuitable – but after all the spring is new and the war – it seems – very very old! (in Cahill, 245).

At Reni, the nurses constantly find themselves under the rays of the sun and moon, which is uplifting for their morale as well as their looks. Unfortunately, just as nature is reviving after winter, so it seems the war is, yet the fighting is not yet very active and there is nothing much to mention about it. Yvonne Fitzroy feels uninterested at having any news about the military campaign, or a possible victory, to send home, so she has to be satisfied with describing the picturesque surroundings in spring: the weather is pleasant, the valleys they can now visit have “acquired” taste and she manifests the same botanist interest, like the other nurses, for the local bulb flora. In the previous text, cook Mary Milne mentioned the Bluebell (grape hyacinth) and the Star of Bethlehem – symbols of purity, reconciliation, humility and gratitude –, professing her advanced horticultural knowledge.

During their stay in Bugeac the nurses became very fond of the animals they found there and even adopted an “Official Dog”, adding to the rural aspect of their military hospital there:

Sambo has received official recognition. It became necessary. Dogs and puppies abound, and the unit is developing a weakness for the adoption of any and every waif they meet. So now we have ‘The Official Dog’. Dr I[nglis] loves him, as we all do, and even poor unofficial Pushkin (the black kitten) has almost won her heart. Wards all day up to 12 midnight. No news, and the firing less violent (in Cahill, 188).

Katherine Hodges describes how the general crowding during one of their missions led to a small accident that took place in the swampy ground surrounding Isaccea, leading to a change of register in her style of journal-writing:

There was a turning to the right which led to the river and the bridge, and at last we reached this turning, and sat and waited and waited and waited. The road was not very wide, and on the left hand side there was a drop of three to four feet into marshy ground. Suddenly there was a terrific commotion behind, and beside me a fearful crash, and I was thrown forward on to my steering wheel. The next thing I knew was a huge horse crashing over my

bonnet, another by my head, and then a grinding, rending noise: my car was being dragged along rapidly, locked into a gun-carriage (in Cahill, 161-163).

She continues her sensational recall of the incident with the denouement:

Fortunately, I had enough sense left to hang on to the steering wheel. The leading horse started off to the left, plunged down the steep bank, and we were over the edge of the road and had dropped on to the marshy ground. Mercifully the leading horse was pulling madly to the right as we went over, which was the only thing that saved my car from landing on its side with the gun-carriage on top of it. As soon as I realised the drop was over and saw the horses pulling to the right, I rammed my steering wheel hard over to the left, and with a grinding rip and tear, the gun-carriage tore past me, leaving me stuck in the marsh, but thank God with no harm done other than shock to my wounded. Poor things, they were in a terrible state, and I myself was very shaken. The mudguards and a huge strip of canvas had been ripped off one side of the car, but mercifully the wounded weren't touched. Crowds of soldiers ran down, Donisthorpe appeared, and between them they got me debogged and back on the road again, where after another long wait we at least got down to the river and to a camp on the other side. There my wounded were transferred to another car, and taken to another hospital about three miles on (in Cahill, 161-163).

The incident is one among the very few tragi-comical moments in the nurses' journals. It shows how important the role of the Scottish nurses was and how, one hundred years ago the gender roles was reversed.

The countryside in north Dobruja and south Bessarabia was altered by the retreating masses of soldiers. Ysabel Birkbeck recounts her experience of the same period as the fragment above:

The Bulgars are admittedly where we supposed them last night, and on the other side of the hill at the back of the village. The guns formed an almost unbroken line all over the hills. Machine guns sounded in a staccato accompaniment to the convoy – very near.

I, Carlyon, and Gartlan had orders to take the wounded into Isaccea. We lunched at the hospital first, and ate like wolves; ships' biscuits and *sukharki* soon pall. They gave us goose – it's far the most common dish here, and one does not wonder, seeing the flocks of geese about. ... We got wounded from Nicolactso, where they were pouring in. When we got a little way on the high road we found the usual pack of retreating infantry walking in masses, carts in a single line, plodding back, wounded walking as best as they could. The carts had picked up all we had come fore, others hung on behind. We each picked up all we could. I took three extra, and kept changing the less serious cases for weaker ones I passed later. All looked absolutely expressionless and marched in silence, bone weary. The pack thickened till we could only edge through a little at a time. In the middle of Isaccea the

street was blocked with a mass of wounded outside a hospital waiting to get dressed. We then left our sitting cases there and took the others to hospital after hospital, but all either had evacuated or were evacuating. We heard it was out of the question to leave the wounded anywhere this side of the river. As we were all consulting Mrs Haverfield turned up with the touring car and lots of news. The Burford had stuck miles back with our luggage on it. The driver had come on foot. We were across the bridge to Ferra Ponta. By now it was dark, as dark as it always is when we cross that marsh. My wounded screamed the whole way... (in Cahill, 163-164).

The countryside is dominated by the war that was raging about it with an implacable determination. The serene blue hills of Dobruja to the south have now become “an almost unbroken line” of guns that “sounded in a staccato”, and the nurse, her colleagues and the soldiers are described in rather savage terms. They “lunched” at the hospital, ate like “wolves”, the meal consisted in game of geese, there was “a pack” of retreating infantry, after more wounded came in the “pack thickened”. The fact that the Central Powers were getting close to Isaccea and that there was no order in the retreat turned the experience into an ordeal. Rural space changed from its idyllic nature to a traumatic one when there was a need to retreat because, due to the precarious roads, it was an isolating environment. Under shock, the sound of machineguns turned into a black symphony with “staccato accompaniment”, announcing the approaching enemy troops and the possibility of imprisonment or even death. In this context there was not time for serene jolly feasts, lunch was taken “like wolves” by the women who were themselves symbolically changed into animals of prey. Ysabel Birkbeck repeats the phrase “my wounded” towards the end of the fragment. The use of the possessive transmits the view that she seems to be so responsible and aware of her job that she sees the soldiers as if she had harmed them, not somebody else, or as if she was endowed with the magic powers of a healing, rescuing mother. She also keeps deciding on who is more or less wounded. This action empowers her very much; she acts like a judge in an environment where the rest seem to be at the behest of the war.

The situation around the village of Niculițel was not any better, with the sea of refugees continuing their march of silence in a single line, with, we must imagine, limping and groaning wounded barely keeping the already too slow pace. The episode ended with a confusing drive across the bridge that led men to salvation, in a Gothic atmosphere that was “as dark as it always is, when we cross the marsh”. This marsh in Bugeac and north Dobruja became a *locus* loaded with negative significance, worsening the nurses’ distressed state. Marshes have long had a negative connotation in literature, they are “a symbol of the ‘decomposition of the spirit’; that is, they are the place in which this occurs because of the lack of two active

elements (air and fire) and the fusion of two passive elements (water and earth)” (Cirlot 2001).

With the coming of Christmas in 1916, the situation on the frontline improved for the Scottish Women’s Hospitals and there was time to rest and once again contemplate the surroundings:

There was a very good Sunday market. There was street after street of stalls, grouped according to their wares: fruit, vegetables, bread, boots, leather, sheepskin coats and caps, poultry and meat, live fowls, pigs, and stalls where trash and items from boot polish to pencils and beads were jumbled together. Among the stalls the most picturesque of purchasers crowded: men in white sheepskin and women in gay coloured velvet coats lined with fur. We had great fun buying our Christmas presents.

Everyone lost their heads before Christmas Day. Hedges, Cartlan, Onslow and I were sad, sleeping round the fire when the Armoured Car people came in after supper. We rolled up our beds, and really the packed earth floor made quite a good floor to dance. They came, ten of them, and formed a very cheery crew indeed. It was too funny to see khaki dancing with khaki. It all reminded one of a charming musical comedy chorus. It was everything to find English people at Christmas, and it was as it should be, that the only English units there should be together (in Cahill, 166).

The excerpt above reunites the pleasures offered by the rural space on the occasion of a Sunday market: products such as fruit, vegetables, items such as bakery, leatherwear, shoes, coats made of sheepskins, meat, live animals and, just as in any market, “trash and items from boot polish to pencils and beads”. There was dancing, of course, and singing, as suitable for Christmas Eve, when “everyone lost their heads”. The atmosphere of celebration matches the exuberance of Victorian Christmas with elements of comedy and carnival.

After Christmas, the nurses rarely returned to Dobruja, though they always wondered what was happening there. Elsie Bowerman describes their new headquarters and the village Reni in Bessarabia:

Walk with Pleister up to the village of Reni to try and do some shopping – the *most* appalling mud I have ever seen. Fortunately got a lift part of the way there in an armoured car and back in a Russian car. Nothing to be found in the village, as it is a fete day – apples the only thing to be bought. Armoured Cars kindly sent us two days’ rations – delicious English corned beef, jam, etc. – otherwise we should have been rather up a gum tree. They have two years’ supplies with them – everything of the best.

Got a chimney fixed up to our portable kitchen stove, so we are now able to cook our meals and get heaps of hot water. The water supply very bad here – very dirty Danube water. Russian bath just opposite our billet, though,

is a great boon. It consists of a very hot room with several huge boilers of water and large supply of small buckets. You pour the water over yourself with these, and it runs away through a hole in the hole – heat tremendous (in Cahill, 182).

Mud remains present but, despite it being a day of celebration, there was nothing to be found in the market except apples, and the nurses were saved from being “up a gum tree” by supplies from the nearby British Armoured Cars unit. Unfortunately, the water supply in Reni was not clean, but a little comfort was offered by a sauna, which allowed some well-deserved and difficult to obtain sanitation, since proper baths were only possible in the cities of Brăila or Galați.

In central Bessarabia, where a so-called “Trajan’s wall” exists (which historians think to have been actually built by the Ostrogoths), roads appeared as impassable as always, though we learn of the efforts to build new ones: “Arrived at Traianoval at 4 p.m. and drove into Bolgrad by *Droshki* – awful mud there, infinitely worse than last time. And the dear people are still trying to make a futile road between Bolgrad and Traianoval” (in Cahill, 185).

One of the broadest descriptions of rural Bessarabia and the nurses’ isolation in the idyllic countryside was written by Mary Milne in an article entitled *Some Months in Bessarabia*:

Spring slipped imperceptibly into summer, and the Danube was blue again. The willows across the river came into leaf; the miles of marsh-land which stretched beyond were covered with a yellow weed, which looked like gold in the sunshine; and in the background was the range of beautiful Roumanian mountains, at the foot of which the Bulgarians were camped. And so from week to week we waited for the great advance. We were told to be ready for hundreds of wounded, and always the date was changed, and still we waited, but there was no advance. It was a glorious summer. We saw the beauties of the steppe in every season: first miles and miles of dazzling spotless snow; for a short spell the dry withered grass, which after the first spring rain seemed to turn green in a single night. Carpets of sweet violets, flowering bulbs in endless variety, and the dainty scarlet windflower everywhere. Orchards of apricot and almond trees, with their dark stems and glorious pink blossoms; hillsides white with the cherry. No wonder the Russian loves his beautiful country, and the simple peasant, who has only the vaguest idea what the war is all about, longs to be back in his vineyards and his maize-fields (Milne 1918).

This text was written after Mary Milne returned to her native Scotland and the style is rather different compared to her journals and letters that had been penned when she was on the frontline. In the published text there is an

abundance of details that required time for thinking, which was not something the nurses had on the frontline, not even in the days when there was little activity as at Reni. There are very few journal entries that come close to the level of detail used here by Mary Milne. In fact, many of the journal entries were written in such a hurried and expeditious style that parts of her syntax such as the subject or the verb are missing. Some examples can be given here:

- “No attack last night.” (Nurse Fawcett, 25 February 1917, night duty),
- “Another hot day and still no sound of guns.” (Nurse Birckbeck, 13 October 1916),
- “...woken up at 5.30 a.m. 8 a.m. sent for to hospital. Two victims brought in. Both leg cases. Amputation necessary. Very bad cases. Nervous work.” (Elinor Rendel, Tecuci, May 1917),
- “Woken up by aeroplane. Fierce attack. A great many bombs fell. 7 a.m. sent for to hospital. Man brought in with a smashed legs and haemorrhage. Sent for Dr C to put on tourniquet; gave a saline. Dr C amputated at once. Busy morning” (Elinor Rendel, Tecuci, May 1917),
- or simply “Am glad” (Yvonne Fitzroy, 19 December 1916).

This brevity was not always a rule, as some of them even sent articles for publication while still being on the front, to periodicals such as *The Common Cause*. In the few examples offered above, the military mind of the battlefield is taking over the usual individualized descriptions left by the nurses, although a struggle to “humanise that profane world” (Tylee 1990, 98) of numbers, statistics, exact hours and dispassionate accounts is visible through the expression of personal feelings and observations on the suffering of the individual.

The description of Bessarabian countryside in this article by Mary Milne stands out as stylistically rich and diverse in imagery. At the beginning of the fragment, spring is personified as “slipping” into summer, bringing more colour to the scenery. The Danube is blue “again” – an allusion to how the image of the Danube shifted during the difficult times of retreat in the winter, when in other descriptions it was associated with purple or even black. Similarly, the marshlands, once a grey and dark bog that only slowed their retreat, are now ennobled by yellow weeds that look gilded in the sunshine. The abundance and luxury of these visual images captures the reader and transports him or her to an idyllic countryside. In the background there are the magnificent “Romanian mountains”, which must be a reference to the Măcin Mountains in Dobruja, as that was the place where “the Bulgarians were camped”. It is unlikely that the Dobrujan Mountains would have been visible from such a remote location as Reni in Bessarabia, yet in Mary Milne’s imagination, the highlands they left behind during their

retreat have made a remarkable impression. It is, once again, the impulse of the writer to minimize all aspects in reverence to the grandeur of the natural surroundings, creating a Sublime description of Nature. Fittingly, the summer was “glorious”, which is how the nurses described most days with charming weather in their diaries.

The idyllic perception of the peasant, a characteristic of Romanticism, once again surfaces in the countryside descriptions by the nurses. In the case of Mary Milne’s article, the strength of her rustic view of the villagers was deeper, in this example, than in what she actually witnessed at the Front, where she saw the soldiers retreating in terror, not at all ignorant of the realities of war. Another clue from the letters and diaries to prove that the peasants were not actually ignorant of war is that the villages the nurses visited always seemed to be deserted; the hospitals were often set up in abandoned houses that had to be cleared of stray animals like cats and dogs. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the nurses were quite irritated that the population in cities such as Brăila or Iași appeared not to care for the war that was drawing very close. The idyllic descriptions of the peasants, more preoccupied with their “maize-fields and vineyards,” and who had “only the vaguest idea what the war is all about”, is opposed to the puzzled depiction of the urbanites who seem to have disappeared and left without bringing their own contribution to help the wounded. The villagers’ nationality is also generalized as being Russian, while, actually, the nurses’ descriptions of Bessarabia mention mainly Romanian inhabitants, followed by Russians and Bulgarians.

One more location that the Scottish Women’s Hospitals stayed at, in September 1917, during their sojourn in Bessarabia, is the village Alexandru Ioan Cuza, called Hagi Abdul back then, whose name, the nurses notice, harkens back to its origins that date back to the time of the Ottoman Empire:

It is a little village – which clearly shows its Turkish origin in its name, doesn’t it? It lies in a wide wooded valley. The Headquarters are in the village, and we have a perfectly lovely camping ground among the trees. The Division ... are so pleased with us. They bring everybody – Russian generals and Roumanian military attaches and ministers to see it. And they are quite content because our painted canvas looks like the roofs of ordinary houses; and from the hill opposite we look like a little village among the trees, and I have no doubt the same to aeroplanes (in Cahill, 249)

The description above, left by the leader of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals, Dr. Elsie Inglis, shows how preoccupied she was with the safety of the medical establishment, fearing that if it did not look like the surrounding village houses it would be bombed. The hospital makes such an outstanding

appearance in the rural scenery that “Russian generals and Roumanian military attaches and ministers” come to see it and marvel. Busy as she must have been, and in the terminal phase of her illness as we know from her biography, Dr. Elsie Inglis remarks the beauty of the wooded valley that the village was placed in, which made for a “perfectly lovely camping ground”.

She continues her description the following day, providing more details on her surroundings in a letter she sent home:

We have had a very pleasant time in this place with its Turkish name. It shows how far north Turkey once came. We are with the Division, and were given this perfectly beautiful camping-ground, with trees, and a slope towards the east. [...] It's nice being back with these nice people. They have been most kind and friendly, and we have picnics and rides and dances and dinners; and till this turmoil of the move began we had an afternoon reception every day under the walnut tress! (in Cahill, 306).

Aware and concerned about the importance of the political, Dr. Elsie Inglis brings into discussion the history of the village once more, as well as the success of their hospital venue. The leader of the Scottish Women's Hospitals provides a brief but quite a serene account of the village of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, almost in the tradition of a promised land: the locals are friendly and the nurses' leisure time consists in “picnics and rides and dances and dinners” coupled with outdoor “afternoon receptions” on a daily basis.

To conclude, the nurses' experience in Bessarabia differs chronologically, according to their experience, but is generally based on their interpretation of the relatively isolated and vast environment. The accounts before the general retreat from Dobruja are usually optimistic and the natural environment is described in its beauty and capacity to inspire the viewer, and so are their descriptions from the spring and summer of 1917 from Bessarabia. Yet before that, during the retreat, the Bugac and its surrounding regions in north Dobruja acquire a Gothic air of darkness and solitude. When some of the nurses first crossed the Danube into Bessarabia, it is possible that they were so glad to escape the possibility of being captured that joy was added to their experience. Much as in Dobruja, during the rainy season we found out that the roads became unusable too. Whenever there was one, the rural marketplaces of Bessarabia became centres of attraction, where the nurses bought different items, not for their usefulness, but to pass their time with trifles. Eventually, as the political situation became more and more complicated, with the advent of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the nurses had to leave rural Bessarabia and head back to Moldova.

3.5. Moldova, land of decay where “the mountains are too beautiful ...to describe...”

In spite of the descriptive title of this sub-chapter, when the nurses travelled from Bessarabia to Moldova they did not receive the warmest welcome. On the contrary, Nurse Rendel tells us about their delay outside Iași and the hesitation of the Romanian authorities regarding anyone crossing over from Bessarabia:

Very cold day. Station master insolent; ordered Mr Rothe to unload at once. Refused to let us go on to Jassi. He says he has orders not to let any more trains through. Very impertinent. Red flag waving. Mr R appears to be rather nervous. He is afraid of a Terror. Very deprecating towards the officials. Miss Little and Sister Edwards send on in a sanitary train with letters to Red Cross in Jassi and to Sir George Barclay (in Cahill, 211).

While on the other side of the Siret and not yet in Moldova, it did not occur to the Scottish women how complicated the political situation was, with Allied authorities becoming suspicious of anyone in contact with the Russian Army. Moldova, the last region of Romania that was still independent, becomes a space of control and of risk, in contrast with the unrestricted vastness of Bessarabia.

Although the nurses did not travel to Moldova, they had their own expectations about the rural areas where they were supposed to set up their hospitals and expressed certain concerns about the weather, which, at the end of March, did not spare them:

...I write to inform you that our present orders are to go to Tecuci tomorrow or the next day, and start a fever hospital there for typhus, recurrent and typhoid fever, and any other medical cases which may be sent in. I hear that Tecuci is quite a small place and therefore we shall probably have the patients in tents, and possibly have to live in tents ourselves. The weather today is fine and warm, but we had a snow-storm last Friday and mud is fearful; but (if the weather keeps warm) living in tents will be quite practicable and pleasant in a week or so. When the present epidemics die down, which they will probably do with the onset of warm weather, we shall probably be formed into a field hospital and go up to the front.

We are very short of stores in the way of food (beyond bread and meat there is nothing to be had here) and invalid foods; there is no milk to be got in Roumania, and of course nothing in the way of tinned milk or foods. I hope the stores Miss Henderson was bringing out will arrive soon and if Miss Inglis lets us have any of them I will send to Odessa for them, and for further hospital supplies.

We have now been twelve days in the train, doing a journey of about four hundred miles. We are to be sent on to Tecuci today, and are to put up our tents. The difficulty is the beds; we have none and of course did not bring them, as, with an allowance of 20 waggons, it would be quite impossible to carry even stretcher beds about. Straw they say is very scarce, unless we can persuade the Russians to give us camp beds, it will be impossible to open the hospital. However, as they say the hospital is really much needed, the beds will probably be forthcoming; the Russians, though they are extremely loth to part with anything for the use of English hospitals, generally contrive to find all they want for their own hospitals, and will supply us when they really want our hospitals.

I am glad to report that the health of the unit up to now has been very good, and in spite of a long, tedious, tiring journey everyone has been very cheerful (in Cahill, 237).

Dr. Chesney, who made the description above in one of her letters, reveals her concerns regarding the organization of the hospital in Tecuci by taking into consideration the local natural features of the rural space. She and Dr. Elsie Inglis, who had received an elite education, profess a style of their own in the letters they write, much more concerned with the management of the field hospitals and a lot less descriptive than the letters and diaries of the nurses. Dr. Chesney remarks that setting up tents and living in them might be a problem because of the spell of cold weather experienced a week before, although it had been warm on that day. Then, she ponders on the lack of food and describes what must have been a shortage of cattle to produce milk in the region, since only bread and meat were to be found in Romania. The move from the urban environment to the rural spaces raises problems of transportation, since the beds and medical equipment were left in town and getting all of them to some remote location was not as easy as expected. Inaccessibility, which has been mentioned by all the nurses as affecting their mission, is again an issue. The rural space, in Dr. Chesney's letter, appears as an afflicted location: there is a typhus epidemic, the land is not bountiful in produce, as there probably were not many people working the land given the war conditions, there had been a snow storm, not even a straw could be found for the improvization of hospital wards, not to mention that no products of the civilized Western world, such as cans, could be procured. This pessimistic image of Tecuci follows the unenthusiastic tone of Nurse Rendel's account of their arrival in the environs of Iași. In spite of this, Dr. Chesney ends her letter in an optimistic way, all the logistic inconveniences of travelling in the countryside not having affected the health or the morale of the nurses, who were probably eager to return to work close to the frontline, after months of relative isolation in the remote Danube-washed Bessarabian plains.

Once in Tecuci, Nurse Elinor Rendel gives us a depiction of their hospital establishment there:

Our hospital now looks very fine. It is comparatively clean and all the most obvious dead cats and dogs have been buried or burned. I have two wards to myself and a sister. Unfortunately they are not using us for typhus at all. The typhus epidemic is almost limited to the Roumanians, and the Russians who are running us don't care a damn what happens to the Roumanians. I went over five typhus hospitals the other day – all Roumanian, and I saw patients in every stage, some at the beginning of the illness, some at the crisis, some dying, and others convalescent. Poor wretches!" They are fed on tea and soup. Many were lying on the ground. The hospitals are all dirty, smelly and crowded. Many were lying on the ground. The doctor who took us round, a Roumanian, was very kind and showed us all the best cases and let us examine them. It was very interesting but depressing. It has been a bad epidemic, but worse at Jassi than here. Here the mortality has not been so high. The doctor in charge said he thought the death rate was less here because of *les petits soins* the patients receive. But you can hardly imagine anyone receiving less attention. They have taken no steps to stop the spread of infection. The patients are brought in here from the surrounding villages and dumped down in the first house that comes handy. They are all filthy dirty and covered with lice. The chief, or possibly the only, method of infection is from lice so you can imagine the condition of things is not hopeful (in Cahill, 245).

Her perspective on the location is not bad, the hospital's premises had been sanitized, but she expresses a deep concern for the public health situation in rural Romania, describing how no measures had been taken to stop the spread of typhus among the locals, just that people were crammed into unclean and malodorous hospitals where they had to sit on the floors. The peasants' houses served as hospital buildings, there were no beds and people were lying on the bare ground, most of them filthy and ridden with lice. This appalling image mirrors the horror faced by victims of gas attacks on the Western Front, the typhus epidemic having metamorphosed the environment into an apocalyptic land, almost paralleling descriptions of the Great Plague of the 14th century. In the nineteenth century, typhus was an ever-present menace. From 1836 to 1842, for example, there were major epidemics of both cholera and typhus in Britain, which were repeated at various intervals and in different locations, so the British nurse knew very well that lice were its cause and was disappointed to notice the parasites were not kept in check. During the Great War, epidemic typhus, which was transmitted through body lice, manifested itself on the Eastern Front in particular, affecting the highest number of victims during the events of the Bolshevik Revolution, not long after this report from the Romanian countryside by Elinor Rindel.

On the not-so-distant Russian Front, typhus claimed approximately 2.5 million victims, constituting one of the greatest epidemics in modern history, and being fuelled by social disorganization. There was little room for the poetic or Romantic in such tragic circumstances. Philologists and cultural historians have outlined the transformative capacity of the landscape where death is found on every “corner”. Paul Fussell talks about “a new world of myth” (1975, 114) unleashed by the horror of war, a world where, once fear is ignored, one can feel a sort of mystic euphoria, such as in the example he gives in which 2nd Lieutenant Francis Foster visits the trenches with his captain in an extremely risky manner, smoking cigarettes in the middle of No Man’s Land, and then confessing, inspired by the carelessness of his superior, that “Because I was no longer fearful, elation filled me. But I could not understand what had caused the transformation. It was as though I had become another person altogether or, rather as though I had entered another life” (cited in Fussell 1975, 114). Nurse Elinor Rendel abandons the feeling of fear when visiting the Romanian typhus hospitals in the rural area surrounding Tecuci, where she expresses depression at the sight of the appalling conditions in which the patients were taken care of. There was little understanding of the epidemiology of the disease as no steps had been taken “to stop the spread of infection”. In this environment of rampant typhus, little importance is given to the individual, the victims are “dumped down” in the first house that can be found and used as a hospital “ward”, they are sympathized with as “poor wretches” and all of them are “filthy”, “dirty” and ridden with bugs. Mention should be made of the fact that no “victim” is given any name, as if the “victims” had been animals or objects.

One can draw a parallel between this shocking image and Wilfred Owen’s famous poem *Dulce et decorum est*, in which the victims of gas attacks are “flung” in the wagon uncaringly, and where brave soldiers appear like “old beggars”, “bent double”, “knock-kneed”, and “coughing like hags” (lines 1-2). There is no place for the brave, courageous, patriotic, hero-type soldiers such as could be seen in propagandistic recruitment posters in this landscape of decay. In Mary Borden’s sketches from her book of war stories, *The Forbidden Zone* (1929), the victims of war are similarly dehumanized, “they are pulled out of the ambulances as loaves of bread are pulled out of the oven” (118), and the author comments that just as “You send your socks and your shirts again and again to the laundry...and you sew up the tears... we send our men to the war again and again...just until they are dead, and then we throw them into the ground” (117). The proximity of death dehumanizes and excoriates the landscape in the most abject manner, leaving no room for human feelings for the beauty of the natural world nor admiration for its inhabitants. In this account, the only

positive note is that Elinor Rendel is able to observe the kindness, in spite of the absence of medical preparation, of the Romanian hospital personnel in the five typhus hospitals in the region around Tecuci. She also mentions that the Scottish Nurses' hospital "looks very fine", but that was accomplished only after dealing with the dead bodies of cats and dogs, animals that, in other conditions, were representative of the farmstead, signalling the loss of domesticity in the rustic setting in which the women found themselves.

Around the time of their arrival in Tecuci, the situation was worsened by enemy bombardments in the dead of night, and Elinor Rendel tells us that she was "woken up at 5.30 a.m. by aeroplanes (enemy) dropping bombs. 8 a.m. sent for to hospital. Two victims brought in. Both leg cases. Amputation necessary. I gave the anaesthetic for both. Very bad cases. Nervous work. Dr C's patient died soon after operation" (in Cahill, 250). The shock of the bombardments was made worse by serious wounded cases pouring in. Urgency is reflected in the diary by the use of a telegraphic style, in which the subject, the verb "to be" and any additional information is left out.

The same situation repeated itself a few days later, in May 1917 at the hospital in Tecuci: "Woken up by aeroplane. Fierce attack. A great many bombs fell. 7 a.m. sent for to hospital. Man brought in with a smashed legs and haemorrhage. Sent for Dr C to put on tourniquet; gave a saline. Dr C[hesney] amputated at once. Busy morning" (in Cahill, 250). Comparing to the nurses' past descriptions of the locations they visited in Dobruja or Bessarabia, it is clear that the Scottish women no longer think of their situation at the Front as partaking in a great "adventure", rather they have become very conscious of the destruction of the landscape and loss of human life that contribute towards the disenchantment of war.

A week and a few days later, the monotony of the SWH establishment in the countryside near Tecuci in Moldova was interrupted by a high-profile visit:

Two days ago an English general inspecting the front came along and paid us a visit. General Power or Pool[e], I'm not sure which. He came out with Lord Milner and was left behind in Petrograd. He was very pleasant and admired our funk-hole very much. He said it was quite the latest pattern, except for one omission. It ought to have a layer of stones to act as a breaker. He said it was quite right to have one as we are within range of German guns. They did shell the aerodrome the other day. He was more hopeful about the situation here than some others. Opinions vary very much... (in Cahill, 256).

Nurse Rendel probably uses the term “funk-hole” to allude to a few aspects. Before elaborating on them, we have to notice that the General was quite pleased with the location, which must have meant a lot to the nurses. The term “funk hole” is indeed specific to diaries from the Great War. It designated a small dugout usually large enough to fit only one man and it was dug in to the side of an existing trench. The expression originates from the saying “in a funk” or “in a blue funk”, meaning fear or terror-stricken, so the place was designated to be used during bombings. Ironically, the expression was employed during the war to refer to a government position, which would secure a job in safety, away from the frontline. Nurse Rendel referred to their hospital using the metaphor “funk-hole” because, just like a proper funk-hole, the place was in range of the enemy artillery and served as a refuge for the horror-struck victims as well as for the nurses.

The visit of General Poole (whose name she was not sure of) was not the only high-profile visit the nurses enjoyed while camped outside Tecuci. Their experience there was enriched by the visit of Queen Marie of Romania. The positions near Tecuci had special importance, given that the nearby frontline was where the Romanian army made its last stand at the battles of Mărăști, Mărășești and Oituz later that year, so the location was loaded with strategic significance. This meant that the nurses’ accounts changed from being very descriptive to becoming militarised, as noted before, in a similar manner with the environment they found themselves in. The same nurse Rendel, who was sick, probably with typhus or some other type of fever specific to the war, and did not personally attend, has still left us an account:

I was stretched on a bed of sickness for a week but I am now quite well again. Dr C was very kind and looked after me very well. It was just like my luck that the Queen of Roumania came to Tecuci whilst I was ill and asked to see some of the Scottish Women. She went to the Berry hospital, which is three miles from here, and Dr C[hesney], Miss Corbett, and the matron drove over there to be presented to her. They said she was very beautiful although very much made up, and she was dressed from head to foot in a flowing white draperies swathed round her face like a nun.

The Russians have given us for the use of the unit an elegant carriage drawn by two horses. In this we drive about when off duty and see the country. The other day we drove off towards the front. We went on and on till we were within a mile of the position. On our way home just as we had turned round we heard a loud explosion, looked back, and saw a column of dust and dirt in the air. It was about 200 yards away, so we couldn’t see what had happened, but we hoped that it was an enemy shell (in Cahill, 259).

The description of nurse Rendel is consistent with the images we have of Queen Marie during the war, and it is evident that the Scottish Nurses do not identify themselves with Queen Marie's image as nurse and "mother of the wounded", of which they were probably not aware, only noticing that the Queen was wearing the garment of a nun and commenting that she was "very much made up". Christine Hallett, one of the leading British scholars of nurses' writing from the Great War period, comments on the symbolic role of Queen Marie of Romania by comparing her to the more practical Queen Elisabeth of the Belgians:

Queen Marie of Romania appears to have been a much more flamboyant character. She chose to dress in a dramatic Red Cross nurse's uniform and visited hospitals throughout the small corner of her country which remained in Allied hands. Although engaging in very little – if any – caring or clinical work, she played an important role in sustaining the morale of Romania's fighting force, taking sweets, cigarettes, and other small gifts to the wounded, and appearing alongside general close to the frontlines, to cheer 'her' troops into battle. She also played a very significant role in raising funds for the Red Cross (Hallett 2014, 15).

What is notable from these descriptions of war is that, gradually, the hospital and the military establishments near Tecuci were taking on the characteristics of the urban space through their importance to the authorities during the war. The bombardments create an uneasy atmosphere and add to the danger of living at the Front, and the nurses' diaries become militaristic, in Claire M. Tylee's terms.

In these conditions, Elinor Rendel becomes very ironic when a visit by a high-ranking member of the SWH, Lady Decies, probably a sponsor too, is announced in late June:

Dr C[hesney] got a letter from Miss Inglis yesterday that Lady Decies was on her way out and was to be sent here as 'house superintendent'. We haven't got a house and the only thing here will be for her to superintend the laundry-tent in which two thieving, idle and very dirty old Roumanian women wash the clothes for us and the hospital. I suppose Lady D is hoping for some adventures at the front (in Cahill, 259).

The nurse remarks how the lady will not probably like life in the tent. She eagerly dismisses the future guest to "superintend" the launderettes, who are not portrayed in a kind manner, but there probably were very few who could see to their being well dressed in rural Romania during the war. We know that the situation was totally opposite in the towns and that, when not on the retreat, the Romanian peasants appeared distinct and picturesque to

the nurses, who made clear distinctions between the Romanian, Russian and Turkish country folk.

The bombing continues in Tecuci, this time with ‘friendly’ fire: “The very first morning we were here we were rather startled when a Russian shell lodged in our midsts. Instead of going over the hills it fell in the middle of our camp. Luckily it didn’t burst or it would have killed two or three of our Serbs who were sitting less than two feet away” (in Cahill, 264). If that time they were quite lucky, not the same could be said about the nearby military posts during the next few days:

The following day the enemy had stopped shelling, but the explosions still went on in the ammunition train. At six in the evening the two sisters and myself went down to the station to see the damage. Hundreds of soldiers were busy trying to save food and cloths from the wreck. We crossed the lines and were very busy picking up shrapnel and stray bullets, when quite suddenly we were startled by something coming over our heads. The soldiers with one accord dropped everything and ran in the direction the shell was coming. When the men began to run, we also ran, not knowing where we were running or why; quite suddenly the men lay flat down on the earth and so did we. It was really too comical for words to describe, as we caught each other peeping to see what the others were doing. After the shell burst we all ran again and in about two seconds another came over, and the same performance was gone over. When we got home arrangements were being made with the Red Cross director about sending us to the Carpathians as a field hospital dressing station; at this news we were all delighted (in Cahill, 273)

The spectacle of war is witnessed at first hand by the nurses and soldiers alike. The moment the sound of the incoming shell was heard panic ensued. The horror of war engulfs Tecuci and some of the nurses set up a dressing station in the nearby village of Varnița, where the situation was slightly better. At the beginning of this fragment we are given a glimpse of the dreariness of having to hear continuous explosions, even when there were no enemy bombings. Sister Atkinson, the author of this journal entry, who was much older than the others, provides a comical account of her war experience, leaving aside the boisterous imperial style of describing war as heroic. She disenchants War in an ironic tone, not a tragic one as Elinor Rendel did in the previous fragments about their stay in the vicinity of Tecuci. Rather than feeling terror during the alarm, Sister Mary Atkinson bravely remembers “it was too comical for words to describe”, and the fact that she appears very eager to move camp to the Carpathians where a dressing station was to be established – implicitly, even closer to the frontline than Tecuci – may be used as evidence to prove the brave character

of the author. The nurses who went to the frontline in the Great War got the image of brave heroines. Historian Christine Hallett comments that “whether the impulse was conscious or unconscious, many [nurses] seem to have wanted to portray their work as dangerous and themselves as fearless participants in warfare” (2014, 16).

Nurse Elinor Rendel imparts some details of the trip they made through Panciu, on their way towards the Carpathians:

We went through Panciu and got to Varnitza, our goal, at 9 p.m. Last part of the journey was done in storm of rain and over very bad roads. Lovely hilly and well-wooded country. Panciu 10 miles in our rear completely deserted and in ruins from shells (in Cahill, 273).

The same “very bad roads”, but the surrounding countryside consisting of wooded hills, are described as enchanting, but they went through Panciu, west of Mărășești, which was bombed and abandoned, completing the image of a desolated countryside that they began painting in their journals during their work in Moldova in the late summer of 1917. These were not the only accounts that describe the situation in what was left of Romania at that period of history in such a pessimistic manner, yet the nurses’ sensibility for the beauty of the landscape resurfaces at any chance they got to travel outside the premises of their hospitals.

Sister Atkinson painted a bright picture of Varnița in her journal:

At five we were off trekking to the Carpathians; the journey was a very beautiful one, and the wild flowers were growing in abundance. As we got near the Carpathians, we passed through villages without an inhabitant left, just the cottages, as the people had fled and left everything. Practically none of the houses had any windows left in, and a tremendous number of hungry cats abandoned. The mountains are too beautiful for me to describe; the colouring is gorgeous, and with the evening sun on they are superb (in Cahill, 274).

The sister sees the rather dangerous expedition of Varnița as a hike though the Carpathians, enjoying the hilly pastures with wild flowers. The other villages surrounding Mărășești are also described as deserted, in accordance with the situation of the whole frontline area – with broken windows and overrun by domestic cats – which must have given the visitors a feeling of uneasiness. The Eastern Carpathians impressed Sister Atkinson the most with their stunning colours and their image in the evening twilight. In this account, we see a return of the Romantic type of descriptions that the nurses accustomed us to during their stay in Dobruja and Bessarabia. This Picturesque representation crowns the nurses’ adventure into Moldova in a

charming manner through the apparently simple observations which convey to the reader the fascination of visiting new landscapes: the journey was “beautiful” (but we know from the previous fragment, by Elinor Rendel, that the journey actually took place in a storm “over very bad roads”), there was an abundance of wild flowers, the colours “gorgeous”, the beauty of the mountains was beyond description (almost reaching the Sublime) and “superb” in the sunset.

To conclude on the Scottish nurses’ depiction of rural Moldova, we know now that it included in its greatest part the areas surrounding Tecuci and to a lesser extent some descriptions of the villages Varnița and Panciu. The accounts in the British women’s diaries first deal with the requirements of organizing a new hospital and concerns regarding the weather, but all of them are in some way connected to the activities on the frontline. The rural landscape in south-western Moldova in 1917, an area the Romanians were desperately trying to defend against the Central Powers, loses its picturesque features owing to the horrors of war. The villages are all deserted, there is a typhus epidemic, and the soldiers who were victims of typhus are described in an almost dehumanized manner. Meanwhile, the hospital in Tecuci is the place where the nurses receive three important visits: General Poole of the British Army, Queen Marie of Romania and Lady Decies, a British socialite and philanthropist¹¹. There were few other people, besides the two Romanian launderettes, which Nurse Rendel thought would make worthy assistants for Lady Decies. This visit manages to take the nurses’ minds off the surrounding desolation, the abandoned houses overrun by domestic cats. In spite of disease and enemy aerial raids, at the end of their stay in Moldova, the nurses’ sensibility for the beauty of nature is rekindled during their visit to Varnița.

3.6. Conclusion

The Scottish nurses’ description of Romanian rural localities and of the countryside in Dobruja, Muntenia, Bessarabia and Moldova have been scrutinized with the special purpose of revealing its aesthetics, comparable with representations of rural landscapes in Victorian culture. The nurses’ cultural background was infused by Victorian ideals of aestheticism – namely representations of *the Beautiful*, *the Picturesque* or *the Sublime Nature* – and the examples chosen in each subchapter have confirmed the

¹¹ *The Eagle* of 11 June 1917 notes: “Lady Decies, who before her marriage to Lord Decies was Vivian Gould, daughter of George Gould, has joined the Scottish women’s hospital contingent”.

use of specific undertones or tropes in the description of the rural regions that the nurses visited, which reveals an unexpected writing talent.

In Dobruja, the nurses enjoyed the scenery and took some time to describe the villages they visited and lived in. Unlike their reports of towns, in which the nurses associate calmness and serenity with the failure of the Romanians to take the war effort seriously, rural locations are spared this judgement; on the contrary, the village is often rendered as the victim of war. Romantic emplotment is used in the nurses' accounts to create Sublime representations of the landscape in Dobruja. The surroundings are vast, here and there dotted with ancient ruins or with picturesque peasants' houses, which constitute a place of retreat in the face of the violence of war. The mountains of Dobruja, though not very high, repeatedly impress the nurses, who describe its stunning aerial features. They are also taken aback by the river Danube, which captures their imagination in awe-inspiring descriptions of its millennial flow through the country.

The nurses' short descriptions of Muntenia, though a lot scarcer than those of Dobruja, whose specific feel and picturesque scenery they recognized and admired, still captivated the British women, who looked forward to visiting Ciulnița, despite having to withdraw and witnessing a gigantic explosion close to the front line. If in Dobruja the descriptions resemble those of a travel book, in Wallachia the nurses' descriptions focuses more on the effects of destruction. The women take only a short time to describe the beauty of the bucolic countryside, their descriptions acquiring a tragic character.

The nurses' experience in Bessarabia differs according to whether the journals or letters were written during times of intense bombardment or not. The accounts before the general retreat from Dobruja are generally optimistic. The cook Mary Milne said about the village Alexandru Ioan Cuza, that it is "...a perfectly lovely spot" (in Cahill, 302). Whenever there was one, the rural marketplaces of Bessarabia become centres of attention, where the nurses bought different items to pass the time rather than because of their usefulness. The descriptions of Bessarabia are similar to those of Dobruja in that the nurses had sufficient time to put down eloquent imaginative accounts of what they saw surrounding their hospitals, yet the Scottish women award a special flair to Dobruja that they longed for while in the vaster fields of Bessarabia.

Last, in Moldova the Scottish nurses' depiction of rural areas, mainly included the areas surrounding Tecuci and to a lesser extent some descriptions of the villages Varnița and Panciu. The part of Moldova which the nurses visited was too ravaged by war to allow any serene contemplation of the natural landscape, as was possible in Dobruja or in Bessarabia, yet

the British medical women did find some time to appreciate the picturesque aspect of the Carpathians. The nurses' observations fit into the category of traumatic witnessing, and the general tragic character of the war is clearly visible in their evocations of typhus epidemics (that looks like the calamitous descriptions of the plague from the Middle Ages), enemy bombings, derelict houses, abandoned villages, masses of dead cats and dogs, and numberless nameless victims and wounded soldiers.

CHAPTER FOUR

REPRESENTATIONS OF SOLDIERS

4.1. Introduction

After navigating through the urban and rural *topoi* described or imagined by the nurses, in this chapter I will discuss the relationship between the Self and the Other referring to the nurse-soldier military dichotomy. The fact that almost wherever they were present throughout Romania, the Scottish nurses were attached to, or interacted with, the military is typical, given their mission at the front. In this part of the research, the focus shifts from the nurses to troops, soldiers, military personnel, orderlies or prisoners, seen as the Other, as depicted by the British women at the front in Romania, as well as to the Other's view on the Scottish nurses.

World War I marked the transformation of the typical image of the common soldier to that of a hero and this is reflected in the nurses' writings (although the SWH nurses who came to Romania preferred to describe in such terms the Serbians and, occasionally, the Russian soldiers). This soldier-as-a-hero view reveals a completely different attitude from, for example, the anonymous status of soldiers in the previous wars in history or of the attitude existing in the 18th century when soldier duty was considered only slightly higher than serving prison time. To offer only one example, after the Napoleonic Wars, the bones of the soldiers and horses that had fallen in such famous battles as Austerlitz, Leipzig or Waterloo were not even allowed to rest in the anonymous mass graves that were customary for unranked military men. The article "War and Commerce" of 19 November 1822, published in the *London Observer* reveals that the remains of some of the soldiers who had fallen in these battles were ground down and shipped as fertilizer to farmers. The shift towards a heroic view of the common soldier in the 19th century was gradual, and first required saving the soldier from anonymity.

In this chapter, the nurses' views on the military men they encountered as well as on each other will be analysed with a special focus on the changes the Great War produced in such exercises of perception and, by comparison, with the actual historical situation at the front. The Scottish nurses who came to Romania rarely considered the condition of the soldiers they met as

a unitary body and wrote rather politicized texts when describing the members of the military they encountered, carefully writing down the nationality of each of them. For this reason, the sections in this chapter take into account mainly the ethnic origin of the Allied soldiers, since it was very important to the nurses whether the men they met were Romanian, Serbian or Russian. The main reason for the women being so interested in the nationality of those they helped is that the declared purpose of the SWH venture on the Eastern Front was to provide relief for the Serbian soldiers and it was in their name that funds had been collected throughout the United Kingdom and even in the United States. In reality, the nurses mostly dealt with either Romanian or Russian soldiers. They also met British and, on rare occasions, French soldiers, and were extremely overjoyed and became reassured whenever they encountered English-speaking individuals. The nurses also wrote about enemy soldiers and about the war prisoners that were often assigned as orderlies in their hospitals. Interestingly, they used the term “Bulgars” to refer to the opposing army forces even at the front in the Carpathians, when it is obvious that they should have referred to them as Germans or Austro-Hungarians. Towards the end of the chapter the analysis of the nurses’ attitude towards fellow medical workers will provide insight into how women looked upon themselves and positioned themselves in the war world.

4.2. “Our gallant little ally”¹²: the Romanian Army

Ever since Romania declared its neutrality following the Crown Council on 3 August 1914, the country was pursued by both the Entente (France, Britain, Russia and Italy) and the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary) as a possible ally. It soon became apparent that the public opinion in the country favoured the Entente. In this context, the Tsar visited Constanta on 14 June 1914. Already on 1 October 1914 a secret agreement was signed with Russia, which promised to defend Romania’s territorial integrity, to acknowledge Romania’s right over Transylvania and to obtain the same promises from France and Great Britain (Campus 1980, 53). Romania entered the war on 28 August 1916, according to the military convention and political treaty signed with the Allies on 13-17 August 1916.

¹² A phrase used to refer to Britain’s allies on the continent; Belgium, Serbia, and Romania in order to commend the effort and courage of these countries, which fought against the Central Powers in spite of unfavourable odds. The phrase was possibly coined by Edgar Wallace in his *Standard History of the War* Vol. III, to refer to the resistance of the Belgians against the Germans during the second battle of Ypres (22 April – 15 May 1915).

The country had high hopes of claiming Transylvania from Austria-Hungary, and so public opinion heavily supported the political decision of Prime Minister Ion I. C. Brătianu to join the war on the side of the Allies, in spite of the German origin of the late King Carol I, of his 1883 secret treaty with Austria-Hungary (which would have compelled the country to enter the war on Austria's side in case it was invaded), or of the fact that Bessarabia – also mostly Romanian populated, just like Transylvania – was in the hands of Russia (Jukes 2003). In his appeal to the population on 15 August 1916 King Ferdinand was urging his people “to perpetually attain what Michael the Brave had achieved for only a moment: the Union of the Romanians on both sides of the Carpathians” (*Viitorul*, vol. IX, issue no. 3059, 16 August 1916). Regardless of this desiderate, the situation of the Romanian army in 1916 was not one of the most optimistic, especially in Dobruja where the Scottish nurses initially worked. The Allies were quite enthusiastic in welcoming the grain and oil-rich country into their ranks and very few expressed doubts about the strategic difficulties caused by Romania's entry into the war. Already in 1915, Lord Kitchener, the British Secretary of State for War, had sent Lord Thomson as military attaché, and later Head of Military Mission, to Bucharest. Lord Thomson asserted that Romania's position between Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and occupied Serbia, all enemy states, meant it would be very difficult to defend (with its almost 1,500km of frontline). He also reported that the Romanian army was not well prepared for war and that it lacked armaments and munitions (Masefield 1982, 15). In high political circles the majority considered that Romania's entry on the side of the Entente would considerably weaken the Central Powers, who were facing the Brusilov offensive of the Russians. At a banquet in his honour on 24 January 1915, the British historian and publicist R.W. Seton-Watson declared that “today two roads are opening for us, one of them leading to the salvation of the Romanian people” (Platon 2003, 414). Lord Thomson's reports were ignored by Prime Minister H. H. Asquith as the military convention with Romania was agreed upon on 13 August 1916.

The Romanian army numbered 650,000 military men organized in 23 divisions, but lacked the modern military equipment of the German army. Furthermore, according to the “Z” Hypothesis of the Romanian General Staff – that was drawn up at the insistence of the Russian and French military advisers – most troops were concentrated on the Transylvanian front, leaving Dobruja and the south undefended (Platon 2003, 422).

The impression that the Romanian soldiers and army made on the Scottish nurses calls for an interesting discussion about a certain type of Byzantine or Balkan image. Angelov sees both these concepts of otherness

as “imaginary constructs that the West has imposed on Southeastern Europe” (2003, 6), and, according to Todorova, they “accompany and are superimposed on each other” (qtd. in Angelov, 2003, 6). The Scottish women were startled by what they saw as the lack of military training of the Romanian soldiers, who, occasionally, were seen to care more about their looks and behaved cowardly at the front. Some of them accurately mentioned that the impression of the Romanian soldiers’ incompetence to fight was propagated by the other Allied troops present on the front after the debacle in Dobruja. The elements of Byzantinism, or to some extent, Balkanism, that match the nurses’ description of the Romanian soldiers refer to negative associations and generalizations such as: instability, cumbersomeness, lack of martial prowess on the battlefield in favour of scheming, plotting and treachery, and flamboyancy as regards rituals and ceremonies (Angelov 2003, 3-4).

To differentiate between Balkanism and Byzantinism, it is worth bringing into discussion the major characteristics of the former. In her seminal study on Balkanism, Todorova explores the different values of this signifier in past centuries and states that “The Balkans are usually reported to the outside world only in time of terror and trouble; the rest of the time they are scornfully ignored” based on “the American patrician version of the old aristocratic European paradigm garnished with nineteenth century Victorian righteousness. It manifests an evolutionary belief in the superiority of orderly civilization over barbarity, archaic predispositions, backwardness, petty squabbles, unconfirming and unpredictable behaviour, that is, ‘tribalism.’” (2009, 184). The differences between the two are now evident: Byzantinism does not carry the connotation of “lack of civilization” that Balkanism does, and, as regards the Scottish nurses, they did not on any occasion portray the Romanian soldiers or officers they met as coarse, or the behaviour of the Romanian troops as uncivilized. On the contrary, what they reproached their “gallant little ally” for was too much attention wasted on décor and pomp. The nurses were impressed by the smart uniforms of the Romanian soldiers, but were perfectly aware that details such as these were of no consequence on the battlefield. They would have preferred the more traditional model of an unsophisticated soldier/warrior type who paid little heed to details such as appearance or uniform, but was a deadly presence at the front, like the Russian soldiers. To offer one example, Yvonne Fitzroy wrote in a letter to her mother on Monday 4 December 1916 that:

The real Roumanians have been charming to us - the ladies are very pretty and delightful, but alas, so are the men, worthy only of a musical comedy chorus at the Gaiety. One - a minute one - was talking to one of the Transport

at Cernavoda. Apparently he was being more professionally charming than ever when down the street swung three magnificent Cossacks. He twirled his moustache ‘*Nos Alliés,*’ he said, ‘*nos Alliés sont bien barbares!*’ (in Cahill,, 138).

We can notice that not only does the nurse remark on the startling difference between the Romanians and the Russians; the “minute” man refers to the Cossacks – whom the women found magnificent – as being barbarous, thus providing an example of the kind of tensions that existed between the two allies¹³. In this example, Yvonne Fitzroy emasculates the object of her description by directly comparing it with womanliness, by using irony when saying that men were only good for comedies at the Gaiety, and by suggesting that it is not “barbarous”, under the circumstances, that raw, brute, masculine force was called for to defeat the enemy.

It is worth mentioning that the nurses’ disappointment probably stemmed from the high hopes they had before arriving in the country. It is interesting to notice that, for example, the SWH nurses, who had been to Serbia, did not apply the same judgement to that country, which enjoyed an aura of martyrdom after its rapid occupation by the Central Powers. The nurses’ high expectations and demands from Romania were probably due to the great Allied effort in getting this previously neutral country to join their side, an effort that created quite a positive image of Romania in the United Kingdom, that of a “gallant little ally”, but nonetheless an image that could not possibly match the reality. Despite the great effort of all the parties involved, the balance of power on the Eastern Front was still tipped in favour of the Central Powers. The expression “gallant ally” denotes a certain tone of superiority on behalf of the British that matches the economic and naval supremacy of the Empire; yet, it also conveys some attachment to this country, whose important oil reserves had to be kept out of the reach of the Central Powers.

Kathrine Hodges, one of the ambulance drivers, tells us about the confusion caused by having to consider learning Romanian in a letter dated Monday, 25 September 1916: “The language question is becoming *too* involved. I have now acquired a smattering of Russian and Serbian, I know German and a bit of French, and I converse in those four according to the person I’m addressing; *but now* we go to Roumania, and my mind cannot cope with Roumanian too. I don’t know what’s to be done” (in Cahill,, 31).

¹³ The nurses were probably unaware of the distrust the Romanians expressed for Russians when after the relatively recent Romanian War of Independence of 1877-1878, Romania was forced to cede Southern Bessarabia to its former ally at the Treaty of Berlin.

The comical and ironic tone bears some truth, namely that the nurses did not expect to be coming to Romania and so they awarded secondary importance to the country's language, as they expected to have to deal more with speakers of Slavic languages. This account begins to paint the confusing state of affairs in Romania described by the nurses, which matches the characteristics of Byzantinism.

Nurse Fawcett, for instance, takes notes about the political situation in her diary on 30 September, 1916:

We arrived [at Cernavoda] at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon of the 30th; we were met by an Irishman named Bryson who had been sent by the Russian staff at Medgidia to ask us to go along there at once and start a hospital. [...] Mr Bryson told us that the Roumanians had so far not done well; the only thing they could do properly was to run away. (Romania had only declared war since we left England, so that we knew very little about the Dobrudga – the part of Romania we were going to.) He also told us that a Russian general had now taken command of the front, and had ordered that every soldier who ran away was to be shot, and every officer to be degraded. The Serbs, he said, had been fighting splendidly, but so far suffered heavy losses (in Cahill, 42).

It seems that it was not only the Scottish nurses who were disappointed with the situation on the Romanian front and who believed that failure was due to Britain's "gallant little ally". Bryson, the Irishman, imparts the impression that things were going to improve on the front as the Russian general had taken over command and imposed draconic punishments for desertion, suggesting that the (Romanian) soldiers' cowardice was to blame for the advance of the enemy and, obviously, looking ironically at the Romanian army. Bryson also reinforces the nurses' belief in the great courage of the Serbs in spite of the great number of casualties among them.

Ethel Moir is concerned that the Romanians do not resist their enemies fiercely enough, informing us that:

From what we hear things are going very badly indeed, and the Roumanians appear to be allowing the Bulgars a little too much of their own way, and are making a very poor stand. I wonder why the Roumanians came into the thing – I suppose they think the Serbs and the Russians will do all the fighting for them... (in Cahill, 45).

In this example, Romania is accused of practising a sort of Byzantine diplomacy by hoping to get the most advantages from the war without using its own resources, but those of her allies. The nurse realizes that this

accusation of perfidy is based on what they “hear”, at least, and it is interesting to notice that she speaks of the military plans of the Romanians, while most accounts criticize more immediate faults, such as the moral traits of soldiers or the way in which the Romanian soldiers behave. It is very difficult to blame the soldiers for the situation on the Romanian front. According to the military convention signed between the Allies and Romania on 17 August 1916 the Russians had to reinforce Dobrogea with at least 50,000 troops (3 divisions), while the Allies had to open a Balkan front at Salonika and provide 300 tons of ammunition daily to their new ally. Although Russia was bound to send three divisions to the Dobruja front, according to the military convention mentioned above, the War Minister in Moscow only spared two divisions: the Serbian Volunteer Division and the 61st Russian Division (totalling 40,000 troops). This was a contributing factor to the defeat on the Dobruja front in late 1916. Moreover, the French and British abandoned the offensive plans for Salonika and “pronounced Romania solely Russia’s responsibility” (Jukes 2003, 54) thus favouring a situation in which the Romanians felt they had been abandoned by the Allies, while Russia felt frustration at having to take over an entire front section. The British historian, Sir William Robertson, confirms that Romania was betrayed with respect to the ammunition provisions of the treaty because of the track gauge difference between the Romanian and the Russian railway systems. Ammunition could only be transported through Russia, which used the gauge difference as a reason for delaying the provision based on civil orders from St. Petersburg (qtd. in Crutwell 1940, 292).

Uncertainty seemed to dominate the war news which the nurses were receiving in October 1916. Thus, Nurse Fawcett notes that:

The war news seems to be that the Roumanians and Serbs took over the part of the front held by the Russians, as they had to go to the Bukovina district to reinforce their own army. And of course the Roumanians were not so strong, and gave way. We cannot hear yet whether the Bulgars have broken right through or not – there is a rumour that they have got the bridge at Cernavoda, which I believe means that the army here has had its retreat cut off in one direction (in Cahill, 65).

Rumours were an important part of everyday life on the frontline. The Romanians are again powerless in face of the enemy’s advance, and this creates fear of what this might result in if the bridge at Cernavodă had fallen. The lack of strength of the Romanian troops could be the result of a broader cultural phenomenon in which men’s masculinity was affected by the new type of war that was being fought, a war of technology that was ending lives

much quicker than in the previous wars. We know that on the front in Dobruja the Romanians and the Russians had not sent artillery units, while the Central Powers did, with great success, and were also employing aviation for pre-bombardment reconnaissance. In his study on the American novel of the First World War, Cooperman (1967) introduces the notion of “technological rape” (pp. 182-184), when referring to the effects of the new war technology that included the loss of virility, even “castration” of soldiers in fictionalized accounts, giving as an example Hemingway’s novels (Hemingway actually participated in the Great War as an ambulance driver). By “technological rape” Cooperman means that men faced “static deaths” in the trenches because they were no longer active participants in the war, whose physical skills could make a difference in the result of the battle, but rather passive victims who could do little to avert their fate, this resulting in the elimination of manly qualities from the vital characteristics of soldiers.

Nurse Lilius Grant describes that atmosphere on 24 October 1916 when the Allied troops had to abandon their positions in Dobruja:

The Roumanians are retreating as fast as they can, and making no attempt to stand. The poor Serbs have had all the worst of the battle, and one can see there is no love lost between the two. The Serbs seem to have been dragged into this just to bear the worst of it. They tell us they are not prepared for a winter campaign at all, and have no overcoats, and a great many of them no boots, while on the other hand the Roumanians are loaded up with garments of all kinds. The soldiers we are with do a great deal of looting on the way, and it is rather pathetic to see the poor people standing at the doors of their little mud huts watching the soldiers catch their pigs, hens and geese. The men are all awfully good to us, and give us their meat and bits of bread. They say they are all so sorry for us. (in Cahill 94-95).

Almost typically now, the retreat is blamed on the Romanian army and allegedly on its lack of determination to fight. Byzantinism is revealed through the allegation that the Romanian troops were “loaded up with garments of all kinds”, whereas the brave Serbians, who were sacrificing themselves, did not own any kind of equipment for the approaching winter and were thus left at a disadvantage. Lilius Grant’s account implies that the situation of the Serbs was due to the Romanians too, but she was probably unaware of the fact that they were actually under the supervision of the Russian War Ministry and had been sent to Dobruja in order to satisfy the agreement between Romania and the Entente that stated that Russia should participate in the defence of this front.

During the retreat from Dobruja, Elinor Rendel makes a clear difference between the Romanian soldiers and the Serbian ones in her diary account on Tuesday, 24 October 1916, when passing through Hârşova:

The Roumanians had started to run away at once, and had been running hard ever since. The Serbians fought most wonderfully, and have been, owing to those miserable Roumanians, almost destroyed. Four thousand or so are all that are left of the First Division. There are no wounded for us to attend to, because they had to be left behind for the Bulgars, and the Bulgars are not taking prisoners. (in Cahill, 96).

Again there is the allegation that the Romanians were responsible for the terrible fate of the Serbs, this time without any irony, but with direct accusations of cowardice, the effect, most probably, of the challenging conditions that the nurses found themselves in, having to retreat through a region that was then in almost complete chaos. Rendel cynically mentions that the “Bulgars” (i.e. the Central Powers), are showing no mercy towards the wounded left behind. All these elements give the reader an idea of how desperate the situation was at that time. The nurses found out first-hand that the war was a combination of exhilaration and suffering, of elation and humiliation.

In a different diary of the same period, that of Elsie Bowerman, the general situation in the opinion of the nurses is described in more detail, this time with some slight sympathy for the fate of the common soldier:

People don't seem to realise the state of affairs in other parts of Roumania. This total lack of preparedness and foresight perhaps accounts for the disasters in the Dobrudga. There was no attempt at entrenching the Roumanian army - they simply sent the men out into the open country where they were mown down by German artillery. Constanza, Medgidia, and Cernavoda fell with scarcely any resistance it looks as if there had been some understanding between the German and Roumanian governments, and from the appearance of many of the upper class and officers, one could imagine they would have no scruples about accepting bribes, etc. It is to be hoped the Russians will now take over the whole front, but of course they have been very slow to arrive owing to the deficient railway system... We know the bridge at Cernavoda was blown up by the Russians on Tuesday 24 October; we crossed on Sunday night, and we did not see any extraordinary preparations to defend it, though more than six weeks ago we had read in the English papers that this would be the main point of attack. It is amazing that no greater effort should have been made to defend it. It seems now as if the way to Bucharest and Galatz were quite open to the enemy, but we hope this is not really so. (in Cahill, 108-109).

Unlike her colleagues, Elsie Bowerman realizes that the way in which the war was progressing on the Dobruja front was not actually the fault of the common Romanian soldier, but an error in the military plans of the government. She emphasizes the situation of the soldiers by pointing out that the military leaders did not even take into consideration the entrenchment of their troops, as the new developments in warfare required, and treated their men as cannon fodder for the German artillery. Bowerman is able to provide a very clear, militarized account of the situation on the front; she avoids the quite usual ironies aimed at the moral or physical qualities of the Romanian soldiers and instead criticizes the officers and politicians of the country, engaged in Byzantine diplomacy, by pursuing secret deals with the enemy in exchange for bribes. The nurse expresses the same belief, which the other medical women shared, that the situation on the front would improve provided the Russians take over, yet she admits that even they are slow to act. Elsie Bowerman's account is impressive because of its clarity, making her as informative a war correspondent or reporter as possible, in spite of her assumptions about the "Balkan" practice, in which the Romanian government officials had engaged. Like a military strategist, the nurse uses her witness experience to provide pragmatic arguments for the benefits of the defence of the Cernavodă Bridge, apparently forgetting the social constraints that would have prevented her from expressing an opinion in ordinary circumstances.

By comparison, Elinor Rendel produced a more exaggerated account than the level-headed Elsie Bowerman. In a distinctly pessimistic tone, one month later, in December 1916 after having gone through the gruesome retreat from Dobruja and having heard of the occupation of Bucharest, Rendel wrote the following:

The news is very bad and I should think it is quite a question who gets to Benderi first, ourselves or the Germans. Braila has fallen and Galatz is evacuated. The Roumanians appear to be the worst soldiers in the world and neither the Serbs nor the Russians have a good word to say for them, I see from *The Spectator* of October 28th that people in England are still chattering about 'our brave little ally Roumania', etc. I wonder how long that fiction will be kept up. *The Spectator* says that the retreat was done in good order. As a matter of fact it was the most hopeless confusion. Everybody was lost, and the Roumanians ran like hares in absolute panic. They say the present retreat is as bad. (in Cahill, 156).

The contrast with the previous source consists in the opposite approaches to the same moment in the retreat of the soldiers and the ironic tone used in the excerpt will prove to be not far from the truth one year later, after the

implementation of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty¹⁴. Rendel is well connected to the press back home in Britain and is disappointingly asking herself how long the authorities could maintain the lie that the situation in Romania was under control. At least this how she sees it from her own spot on the front line. Probably the authorities or the press did not intend to demoralize the troops or to cause panic. Furthermore all correspondence going through Russia to Britain – except the diplomatic one – was censored to exclude any talk of military affairs, so it would have been rather difficult for the British press to be up-to-date with the real situation on the Romanian front, if we consider Rendel to be right. From these politicized accounts one notices that little attention is actually paid to the soldiers as human beings. The militarized speech that Claire M. Tylee writes about in her seminal research excludes more personal consideration of the conditions of the soldiers. There is one exception though, in a letter that Nurse Fawcett sent home:

We have a good many Roumanian soldiers who come to the hospital as outpatients. Poor dears - they look quite worn out and fit for nothing but bed. They wear sort of sandal things on their feet. This morning out of twenty men who came to the hospital only one had a pair of boots. Their uniforms are of powder blue, often with red revers, and are most frightfully shabby. (in Cahill, 258).

Accounts such as these are rare, perhaps due to the fact that there was little time for emphatic descriptions when the wounded were pouring into the hospitals. Tylee refers to this by introducing the concept of an emotional *Forbidden Zone* in an analogy of No Man's Land:

the war was far from exhilarating for all women, at least after the initial thrill had worn off. War constructed anonymous, dehumanised Every Woman too. If the men's literature created a new symbol for the modern competitive state, the waste-land of No Man's Land, the women's literature gave us a new myth for the emotionless support system for that state, where human care and concern are outlawed: the Forbidden Zone...personal emotion was forbidden, both to men and to women. (Tylee 1988, 202).

¹⁴ Signed on 3 March 1918, the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was the separate peace signed between the Bolshevik government in Russia, which saw large portions of Russian territory in Eastern Europe (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, parts of Poland and Ukraine) ceded to Germany, totalling about one quarter of the population of Russia at that time.

This absence of personal implication did not only apply to the nurses' descriptions of the Romanian soldiers, but it is also a generalized occurrence in the medical women's letters and diaries.

In contrast to the previous account by Rendel that deplores the poverty of the Romanian soldiers, many of the nurses complain of the fact that the Romanian officers are too effeminate and give too much importance to their apparel. Standing out through excessive pomp and recourse to unnecessary ceremony is an element of Byzantinism that is emphasized by Angelov, who shows that the Byzantines were often described by their Western counterparts as "servile, effeminate, and unwarlike" (2003, p. 7). Nurse Birkbeck offers such a description in October 1916:

We have none of us a thing other than what we stand up in, and find the manicured nails of the Roumanian officers very irritating – but it's difficult to look one's best after a retreat. The Russians cannot contain themselves on the subject of the Roumanians. Their wish is now that the Roumanians had joined in the fight against them; that surely would have stopped them hampering them, and us. The Russians have little but contempt for them, and indeed, after the panic along the roads during the retreat one could hate them. (in Cahill, 82).

She places the guilt on the strenuousness of the retreat at least, yet it is intriguing how many of the nurses made the same complaint as regards the Romanian military men. One of the nurses tells us that:

The Roumanian officers are extremely smart in their powder blue uniforms with black or white pipings and brass buttons, but they are frightfully hot tempered. We have just passed two having a scrap, and last night when we got mixed up with them they swore like anything. (in Cahill, 100).

The remark about the licentious language of the soldiers and the fact that no make-up is mentioned restores the masculinity of the Romanians to some extent. On the other hand, if the nurse could not speak Romanian and the soldiers could not speak English how did she now they were "swore like anything"? Nurse Ethel Moir is decidedly more critical of the soldiers after receiving news of the imminent fall of Bucharest¹⁵ in December 1916:

The news seems very bad, and Bucharest may fall any moment now. 'Our gallant little ally Roumania' is making a brave show! Why did she ever

¹⁵ As seen in subchapter II.7, Bucharest was occupied by the Central Powers on 6 December 1916, leading to the retreat of the Romanian government and administration to Iași.

interfere in this war? The whole country is pro-German. The men mightn't be so bad if they were properly officered - but their officers are impossible, conceited, dressed-up fops, powdered and painted and dressed up to the nines. All they think about is their personal appearance. When fighting is the order of the day, they run away - they are experts at that game. Oh, yes, we've got a brave and noble ally, we have! (in Cahill, 137).

Obviously annoyed with the British idiomatic phrase “gallant little ally”, Nurse Moir launches the harshest tirade of insults at the effeminacy of the Romanian officers, comparable to the similar accusations launched by the Crusaders against the Byzantine troops in the Middle Ages. Although the critique and derogatory views of Byzantinism were constructed during the Enlightenment, they were based on these earlier cultural encounters. For example, the accounts of Odo of Deuil during the Second Crusade are almost hysterical denunciations of Greek effeminacy, while also accusing the Emperor and his commanding officers of using duplicitous flattery and secretly collaborating with the enemy to the detriment of the Crusaders (Harris 2014, 106-107). This denotes the same cultural differences between the two armies in alliance as between the Entente troops and medical personnel on the Romanian front, or simply the anxiety of depending on an ally who does not live up to expectations.

Elsie Bowerman records some suspicious conversation of a possible occupation by Germany when talking to a certain Romanian lieutenant, Radu Codreanu, on her way to Slobozia. She remembers quite frankly that although they had a good time together having supper and joking, he was useless as a soldier and blamed the Russians for the situation in Dobruja,¹⁶ while at the same time admitting to some lack of organization and preparation by Romania. He interestingly mentioned that there were several Germanophile ministers in power, which was reason enough to leave his family in Bucharest in case of occupation, as those ministers would prevent any harm from being done to the city and thus his family's belonging would be safe. Lt. Codreanu also told the Scottish nurse that General Averescu was the only capable superior officer in the leadership of the Romanian Army, but he could achieve very little as the country lacked the infrastructure to move around troops, her Allies or supplies, and that unfortunately the arsenal and stores in Bucharest would fall into enemy hands in case of occupation. In his *"Germanofilii". Elita intelectuală românească în anii Primului Război Mondial* ["*Germanophiles*". *The Romanian Intellectual Elite in the Years of the First World War*], 2010, Lucian Boia explores to

¹⁶ The Lieutenant was referring to the failure of the Romanian and Russian troops to withstand the attack of the German and Bulgarian forces in the autumn of 1916.

what extent Romanian intellectuals opposed fighting the Central Powers in the First World War, but it would have been very unlikely for Romania to have pro-German ministers before the partial surrender¹⁷ that came with the signing of the Treaty of Bucharest on 7 May 1918.

Regarding the emasculation of the Romanian officers mentioned in the nurses' diaries, the question that arises is to what extent this was owing to the Scottish Women's perception of them as militarily useless and how much of it was actually true. Audrey Fawcett Cahill mentions that in a French military textbook of the time only officers above the rank of major were permitted to use make-up (Cahill 137). In *The Eastern Front 1914-1917*, the scholar Norman Stone claims that indeed, unlike the other armies, the Romanians lagged behind regarding military fashion (1998, 277). In an article on the evolution of fashion during WW 1 reviewing Nina Edward's *Dressed For War: Uniform, Civilian Clothing and Trappings, 1914 to 1918* (2014), it is asserted that, in Romania, one of the first orders issued at the beginning of the war was that only senior officers were permitted to use eye liner, "sky blue or lilac lids worn with a monocle, perhaps", opting to remain "smartly turned out, powdered and painted" (Mason 2014). This, of course, was counterproductive on the battlefield, but not to such extent as to be responsible for the debacle in Dobruja or to turn the country "pro-German". Norman Stone then concludes that there were a multitude of factors involved, including the weak strategic position of Romania and Russia's reluctance to reinforce the front given the weak transport links between the two countries (1998, 270-271).

Not all accounts of Romanian soldiers or officers are negative. The nurses appreciated one of the proverbial qualities of the country they were in, namely hospitality, which was very important, given the fact that there was so much difficulty in finding food, as the cook Mary Milne reminds us almost on a daily basis in her diary. At the beginning of their stay in Romania, Ethel Moir was noting in her journal that "...We had some appalling cases, nearly all stretcher. Most of our patients are Russian, a few Serbs but *no* Romanians..." (in Cahill, 49), which means that it must have

¹⁷ The treaty did not include any kind of political subordination of Romania to Germany or Austria-Hungary. Furthermore, Romania's territory actually increased due to the Central Powers recognizing its union with Bessarabia (27 March 1918), in spite of territorial losses in Dobruja (to Bulgaria) and along the border with Austria-Hungary. The treaty was signed by Prime Minister Alexandru Marghiloman and ratified by the Chamber of Deputies (but not by King Ferdinand, as required by the 1866 Constitution). The same Prime Minister denounced the treaty in October 1918. It was eventually nullified by the terms of Germany's surrender to the Allies on 11 November 1918.

taken a while for the nurses to meet actual Romanian soldiers and to form a more realistic image of them, suggesting once again that their tirades against the Romanian army were misconceptions fuelled by Romania's allies, who resented the strategic challenge of having to help to defend its vast borders.

Nurse Fawcett mentions that in October 1916, when transiting Mircea Vodă, the station master was very kind to the Scottish guests and offered them tea and bread, then introduced them to the Romanian officers, who invited them for lunch and dinner and even arranged that the nurses' train got a special first-class wagon which they could use on their journey. Fawcett concludes that all this had made for "quite a good day" (in Cahill, 51). Katherine Hodges gladly recalls their experience with a Romanian mechanic from Constanța who attached himself to their ambulance unit and proved to be "very useful and helpful" (in Cahill, 57) even though some of the women ambulance drivers had been trained as mechanics. Hodges writes about this Romanian mechanic in a very positive manner, breaking the usual militaristic style, present in most diaries. She does not seem reluctant to admit the assistance given by this man even though the ambulance unit took pride in being run entirely by women. The nurse even mentions that, on one occasion during a retreat, "he really saved the unit from being either taken prisoner or shelled to pieces" (in Cahill, 57).

Turner, one of the drivers, completes the positive image of the Romanians, during the retreat by stating that: "The road ran just in front of our camping ground, and an endless stream of traffic passed along it last night. The carts were constantly in trouble, and the women implored the men to help them out. I must say they were awfully good about it. These men are awfully decent to each other, too; they share things out charmingly. Our driver this morning pressed us so much that we positively had to drink a little wine out of his cup" (in Cahill, 93). Being offered a drink carries a symbolic message, as this was usually done between men in Eastern Europe. This episode of gender blurring means that the soldiers fraternized with the nurses and accepted them as 'male', highly respecting the courage the nurses displayed on the front and their contribution to the war effort.

When on a trip to Ciulnița in search of lost equipment, Elsie Bowerman praises the "...Greatness kindness from all officials – managed to seize a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine – had not eaten since morning. Wired to Dr Inglis that equipment found – went on train with two Roumanian officers as far as Ciulnitza. They gave us food – chicken, eggs and bread, and – a greater boon than this – some water. They bade us farewell at 2 a.m., and, satisfied that our precious wagons were safe, we sat in the waiting room to wait till morning" (in Cahill, 70). Such commendation contradicts the general impression of the Byzantine (pompous yet treacherous, false and

cowardly) character of the Romanian officers. In a separate account by Yvonne Fitzroy, where she describes a party of high-ranking Romanian militaries, the nurse realizes that perhaps their judgment had been too harsh. She still notices that the officers are “very ‘well dressed’” and that the Romanian sisters from the Red Cross were too beautiful to be worked too hard. She equally admits that they were charming and “They were optimistic as to eventual success, but spoke very bitterly of the slaughter and suffering the retreat had entailed. But of course, one must not forget that the Roumanians had a very stiff time of it for any army, let alone an untried one, and no artillery to speak of” (in Cahill, 80-81). The nurse acknowledged some of the factors explaining Romania’s failure to live up to her allies’ expectations on the front, which are confirmed by other commentators of the time. The historian Norman Stone considers that conditions like strategic position, lack of efficient transportation links for ammunition and reserves as well as the lack of promised support from her Allies, were among the elements that contributed to Romania’s poor performance on the Eastern Front (1998, 278-279).

4.3. Serbian Comrades and Heroes

The Serbian Division was formed after the fall of Serbia in late 1915 and it included Austro-Hungarian Serbs who had been taken prisoner by the Russians, as well as Serbs who had escaped before the occupation of their country. After intricate political developments, by March 1916 about 19,000 of them could be found in Odessa due to the initiative and efforts of the Serbian consul, Marko Cemović. More than 600 Serbian officers under the leadership of “the Iron General”, Mihailo Jivković¹⁸, were brought from Corfu, where their government was in exile, in order to lead the Division (Lawrence 1971, 186). Once in Dobruja, the Serbs were encouraged by the thought that if the campaign were successful they would be able to cross the Danube and reach their homeland, so they fought with magnificent courage, but suffered heavy casualties. The number of victims among the Serbs was worsened by the fact that both their Romanian and Russian allies had collapsed or withdrawn, so by October 1916 there were only 3,000 men left in the Serbian Division (Lawrence 1971, 187).

¹⁸ He earned this name after commanding the defence of Belgrade against overwhelming odds in early October 1915. Much of the city was destroyed during the siege, but Gen. Jivković offered a heroic resistance. German General von Mackensen, commander of the invading forces, was so impressed by the self-sacrifice of the Serbians that he allowed a monument to be built in order to honour the fallen Serbian heroes.

The clear purpose of the Scottish Nurses' Hospitals was to accompany the Serbian Division – which had no medical support – to Russia. So, from the very beginning, the nurses expected to treat Serbian soldiers and developed a fondness for them that probably stemmed from the Serbs' having lost their homeland to the Central Powers. Thus, in 1915, the SWH generously declared:

The work to which our Scottish women have set themselves in relieving distress in Serbia is worthy of the highest traditions throughout the country. ... To the Scottish people in particular Serbia makes a strong appeal. Its mountains and glens resemble our own Scottish Highlands, its people have made a similar fight for freedom against tyranny and oppression. It has been rightly termed the 'Scotland of the East' and the Scottish people will not fail this brave little nation in her hour of trial. (McDermid 2008, 137)

Most of the time the nurses had to care for Romanian and Russian soldiers, yet in their literary imagination they assigned certain features to both categories. The Serbians appear as martyrs and heroes of war, as knights who are willing to sacrifice their lives on the battlefield for their allies, unlike the Romanians, who are not even considered to be brave or battle-worthy.

Lilias Grant describes the kindness of the Serbian orderlies who helped the day-to-day running of the hospitals in the following way:

We hear that things are not going well on the front, so I hope we won't have to evacuate before we get to work here. We are really under the Serbian Division now, not as at Medgidia where we had Russians, Roumanians, and only a few Serbs in hospital. We have Serbian orderlies here, and they are such nice willing creatures (in Cahill, 55).

From her account we understand the kind of satisfaction the nurses felt at getting to work with and for the Serbians, which is what they were told to do before they left Britain. Not only recruitment, but also fundraising had been done in the name of Serbia in Britain and the United States.

In a different account from Dobruja, dated October 1916, the same nurse ponders on what might happen to the Serbs if the war continued as unsuccessfully as it was doing. Lilias Grant acknowledges that the Serbian soldiers were pleasant and that most of them could speak German so they could communicate to those nurses who knew that language. She describes how Hodges was conversing to two Serbian soldiers who were "just mere boys with such sad faces, and such utterly worn-out expressions. We hear on all sides how brilliantly and marvellously the Serbs are fighting, but they are worn out, and can't stand it much longer" (in Cahill, 62). The fact that

these Serbs came from that part of Serbia that belonged to Austria-Hungary helps explain their knowledge of German. Similarly, Lilia Grant, one of the most romantic of the nurses, paints an angelic image of the two Serbian soldiers with whom Nurse Hodges was engaged in conversation, using only superlatives to describe them and emphasizing the misery of these displaced troops. The usual emotional void – the *Forbidden Zone* described by M. Tylee (i.e., the lack of compassion for the patients often encountered in the nurses' war diaries from the Western front) is not felt in the descriptions of the Serbian soldiers.

Yvonne Fitzroy joins the laudatory discourse, informing the reader how at one moment the nurses camped "...by the camp fires of a new Serbian Division which had just arrived. Picked troops these, and magnificent men" (in Cahill, 63). The similarity between the two descriptions is striking. The same nurse recounts a different moment when they were reunited with one of their Serbian orderlies during the retreat from Dobruja, when they were stationed in Hârşova:

...As we sat at our little iron tables outside the restaurant, with our lovely glasses of deep amber *chai* and heaps and heaps of sugar, down the road came the weary, muddy figure of a soldier. With a cry of 'David', we all simultaneously leaped to our feet. It was our laundry orderly from Medgidia. The poor fellow had lost the others, had walked all the way, and had quite, quite given up hope of seeing us again. He was too touchingly happy for words at finding us... (in Cahill, 80).

There were exceptions in what the nurses thought about the Serbians too, such as the case of this quite comical account relating to the difficulties of setting up tents at the hospital in Medgidia:

The Serbian Sergeant, who speaks English and had to see to the tent, is a most objectionable person in a fur hat. He thinks he knows more about tents than we do, and will insist on having the pegs hammered in before he sees where the guy lines come - with the natural result. (in Cahill, 90).

Another exception in the nurses' representation of the Serbian soldiers is the slight suspicion they had as regards those Serbians who lived in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Margaret Fawcett describes one of the Serbian orderlies attached to the SWH as "frightfully smart in a Romanian officer's coat" (in Cahill, 103), who took great care of them by always having hot water ready and other niceties. The nurse admits that given the fluency the Serbian orderly had in German, he must have been a deserter from the other side. The suspicion was probably confirmed later, as the orderly suddenly disappeared when the hospitals were stationed in Ismail.

Most of the time, however, the Scottish Women depicted the unfortunate situation the Serbians found themselves in, of fighting in foreign places for allies who did not care much for them. Towards the end of the Dobruja retreat, the same Margaret Fawcett tells us that, upon arriving in Isaccea, they found a long queue of soldiers waiting to cross the bridge. While waiting to cross the women saw what was left of the Serbian division that had fought in Dobruja: "Poor fellows - they looked half-starved and had evidently walked miles that day - they could hardly crawl along. When they were greeted by our Serbs, who looked fat and well fed besides them, they hardly had spirit enough to respond" (in Cahill, 103-104). Examples like these abound in the Scottish Nurses' diaries with the women emphasizing that fighting men were rather rare; yet the accounts carry strong emotional language, proving that despite the burden of everyday work, or as in this case, despite the inconvenience of being in retreat, there were valuable moments of external reflection. Historian Margot Lawrence confirms the dire situation that the Serbs were in during the winter of 1916-1917 as they depended on Russia, whose railway system was disorganized, for their supplies. In consequence the Serbians suffered from malnutrition and lacked even the simplest equipment such as boots, which caused disillusion among the troops (1971, 188).

Elsie Bowerman offers a good example of the kind of camaraderie that was formed between the nurses and the Serbian orderlies, which was unlike their relationship to any other group of soldiers. The nurse praises one of the Serbian orderlies, whom they called Chris, who had joined them in Medgidia, describing the way in which he was helpful all around in the hospital camp, but also letting the reader in on Chris's personal drama, how he had worked in the United States before the war, but, upon his return, he was conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian army. Like many of his Serbian fellows, he deserted to join the Russian forces against the Central Powers on the Eastern Front, but only about 800 out of 1200 of those who deserted survived. The Serbian soldier reveals his groups' feeling of displacement when he tells Elsie Bowerman that "nothing would ever induce him to go back to Austria" (in Cahill, 114). He was also in a difficult situation because some of the allies thought the Serbs were spies owing to their knowledge of German. Chris continues his confession by sorrowfully declaring that he no longer knew anything about his family, consisting of his wife and four children, and that "he has no one now but the sisters, as he calls us. Odd the way he marches in and out of our bedroom and waits on us, regardless of the state of dress or undress we may be in" (in Cahill, 114). Was his behaviour due to his feelings of displacement or to his being a spy? He might have acted out of caution. Before the Serbian Division was sent to the

front, in Odessa, there was a clash between those who considered themselves “ardently Serb”, usually the chauvinistic officers, and the Austro-Hungarian Serbs, that resulted in 13 dead and 18 wounded (Lawrence 1971, 186). Some of the “Austrian Serbs” were indeed infiltrators who used the opportunity offered by the Revolution in Russia to promote disorganization within the Russian army using the newly-formed soldiers’ committees¹⁹. One more factor that may account for the Serbs leaving the Volunteer Division was the remuneration they received as soldiers, of only three roubles a month, compared to the prospect of earning four roubles a day in civilian life (Lawrence 1971, 189).

After the retreat out of Dobruja, Elinor Rendel notes, upon arriving in Ismail that they would not be returning to the front very soon, since the Serbian division needed “a rest badly. Everyone says they fought magnificently. The news is now much better. The Russians have sent a large army to the Dobrudga...” (in Cahill, 118). The same complimentary description of the way the Serbians fought reinforces their general image as heroes. Just as in the case of the Romanians and Russians, the nurses were very curious about the Serbs’ national traditions. Some of them, including the SWH leader, Dr. Elsie Inglis, had travelled to Serbia before its occupation and were quite well acquainted with it. On a lighter note, Margaret Fawcett describes a religious celebration of St. Archangels Michael and Gabriel that the nurses were invited to participate in. The Puritan Scottish nurse sees nothing mystical in the Orthodox religious ceremony of the Serbs and depicts it quite comically giving it a burlesque air: the priest is “fat” and “old”, does not chant, but prays “loudly”, the altar is “rigged up”, and the ceremony of the consecration of bread and wine by singing the *Requiem* is seen by Margaret Fawcett as the “twiddling” of some “rich cakes”. All in all, it seems that at least one of the nurses maintains her Puritan critical spirit in her journal, even when writing about the soldiers who were dearest to them.

4.4. The Russian Army, merrymakers and revolutionaries

The Russians were very unwilling to meet the terms of the military convention with Romania regarding the defence of Dobrogea. Instead of supplying the three divisions (50,000 men) specified in the treaty, the Russian War minister dispatched the Serbian Volunteer Division and the

¹⁹ Bodies of “democratic” control of the army – actually hotbeds of anarchy – encouraged by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in preparation for the November Revolution in Russia.

Russian 61st Division under the command of General Andrei Medardovich Zayonchkovski, totalling 41,000 men. The general impression was that the Dobruja front ought to have been better manned by both the Romanians and the Russians, who were hoping that a rapid victory on the Transylvanian front would allow them to take care of the southern front later, and were also hoping that the Bulgarians would not invade, when, in reality, the Germans dispatched General August von Mackensen to lead the Central Powers forces on that front. General Brusilov, who was in charge of the offensive in the Ukraine and Poland, opined that his country ought to have sent there an entire Army corps, not just two divisions, in order to ensure victory against the Central Powers (Brousilov 1929, 223).

Of the three main army corps present in Dobruja, the Russian troops seem to elicit the most complex representation(s) in the letters and diaries of the nurses. While the Romanians typically appear to be feeble, but hospitable, and the Serbians look like heroic knights-errant willing to sacrifice themselves, the Russian soldiers evoke admiration for their manliness and war-worthiness, and amazement for their playful character and debauchery. Unlike the Romanians, the Russians are thought to be more masculine by the nurses. In her study of war writings by women and the construction of masculinity, Prugl argues that:

Creating male warriors also takes the effort of women... Women symbolize this place, and their status as placeholders of the normal is institutionalized in their protected status during war. In their various roles, women reinforce this gender order and facilitate militarized masculinity. As witnesses they spur on and sing of male bravery; as mothers they raise boys to excel as men; as sweethearts they cheer soldiers and heal them when they return; as nurses they put men back together and serve as substitute mothers. Women are thus complicit in the reproduction of militarized masculinity. (2003, 336)

In the case of the soldiers present at the front in Romania, the Scottish women have assumed the roles of witnesses and, of course, nurses, thus praising the soldiers for their bravery and acting as “substitute mothers” for them. But Coker reminds us that “War can make a man, but it can also unmake him” (2014, 4), so it must not be assumed that the role of women was just one of innocently recording the “brave deeds” of the strong sex.

In the beginning, the nurses express confusion at having to deal with the Russian language, but perceive the men as approachable, as Margaret Fawcett tells us: “The Russians are very friendly and we have great fun trying to understand them – they are a great deal quicker at grasping what we mean than we are what they mean” (in Cahill, 22). “Very quickly,” their discourse becomes very appreciative of the Russians. In Medgidia, Evelina

Haverfield tells us that "...the equipment and motor cars [were] unloaded [at Cernavoda] by Russian soldiers, sixteen of whom lifted the two-ton lorries as if they were made of paper..." (in Cahill, 43), assigning Herculean strength to the troops.

Nurse Lilius Grant is quick to befriend one of the Russian doctors on the front in Dobruja, and she confesses in her diary that, while in Medgidia, "Moir and I have struck up a friendship with such a dear Russian officer who is with us. He is a doctor, and he always comes and asks us how we are getting on, and rides alongside of us, giving us all the news. In fact we have both fallen in love with him. I share my rations with him; he so often has nothing but a chunk of black bread to eat" (in Cahill, 94). Qualities such as strength and courtesy are praised in these moments of relief when the nurses can afford the luxury of socializing with the soldiers and sympathizing with them, on this particular occasion, Grant noticing the unsuitable rations the Russian soldiers were receiving even if they had the superior status of officers.

Later, in November 1916, Ethel Moir again refers to her fondness for the Russian soldiers, this time confessing that they had a love affair:

This afternoon when Grant and I were off duty, we went for a lovely walk along the Danube. We came home by the trenches and Danube fortifications. We made love to some Russian soldiers, and quite got round them, and they took us all over the trenches, on the condition that we would keep it dark where we had been. (in Cahill, 132)

Lilius Grant also wrote an entry in her diary for that particular day, which matches the one above perfectly in all aspects regarding the nurses' visiting of the Danube entrenchments except one: the love scene is missing. Was it that Ethel Moir's sentimentalism obliged her to add more details about her stroll along the Danube than was actually the case? More likely it was Lilius Grant's Victorian morality that made her reluctant to provide such an intimate detail. Vera Brittain tells of a case when a "sex-incident" occurred in a tent at one of the hospitals on the Western front, but the couple ran way before it could be revealed who they were, else the nurse could have faced "being sent home under a cloud certain to eclipse the chances of further war-work" (qtd in MacNamara 1998, 105).

In the examples above, it seems that the Russian troops got acquainted rapidly with the Scottish nurses and sought their companionship, yet it was not always the case that the Russians were so used to seeing them on the battlefield. Ambulance driver Katherine Hodges noted a rather quaint rendezvous that her unit experienced during the chaotic retreat from Dobruja:

Once out of the gloom a car pulled up, going in the opposite direction to us, and someone hailed us. We went forward, and in it was a Russian general and some of his staff. He first of all warned us on no account to try and take that particular road, as he had found it quite impassable, and had had to return. Then he said suddenly, 'What are you women doing here?' 'Driving Red Cross ambulances,' we replied. Whereupon he bowed to us, and said, 'Mesdemoiselles, I salute you. You have great courage, and I thank you for your services.' With which he saluted, and departed, leaving us all 'took aback'! (in Cahill, 95).

The shock on both sides is evident. On the one hand, in these circumstances, the Russian general would not probably have expected to meet women driving ambulances, let alone Scottish ones, in one of the most dangerous regions of the Dobruja front during a retreat. On the other hand, the nurses were astonished at the courteous treatment received from the general and at his encouraging words.

On many occasions, the songs of the Russians and, at times, of the Serbian soldiers captured the imagination of the nurses. Lilia Grant was highly impressed by the solemnity of a military parade that the nurses had participated in while in Moscow, before they headed to Romania: "The Russian troops were formed up in two lines of two deep, and we marched through them, and how they cheered us... Fawcett and I stayed there and watched everything, and I don't think I'll ever forget that sight: a gorgeous moonlight night, clear and frosty, and all the Russian troops now singing. Hundred of voices all together..." (in Cahill, 24). Moments like these combine to bestow on the Russian troops a sense of strength and determination that is not found in the portrayal of the soldiers from other nationalities. Similarly, Ysabel Birkbeck describes the Russian soldiers singing at Isaccea in December 1916, during the retreat as follows:

It was bitterly cold beyond the ring of warmth of our fire. After a bit we sang 'The Long Trail' and all the songs that keep us going, and then we started the Russians off. One would begin and sing a little, and then all would join in with a chorus. We sang too the songs we have learned. They sang the song they never ever miss, 'The Song of the Volga', of the man who loved the Volga so much he wished to give it his most precious gift: he threw in his lady love as an offering. (in Cahill, 164)

Birkbeck is deeply moved by the Song of the Volga, and the nearby waters of the Danube must have helped create an atmosphere of contemplation and melancholy.

Very often, the solemnity of dealing with the Russians takes on comical aspects in the writings of the nurses. From Margaret Fawcett's description

of the military parade in Moscow we find out that the Russians not only cheered for their allies present there, but after each cheer caught one of the officers of the Allied troops and tossed him or her five times into the air. Dr. Elsie Inglis, the leader of the SWH, was not spared this ritual, even though she fled to the British consul for protection, but he only laughed at her (in Cahill, 24). Accounts such as these have created the image of the formidable Russian soldier with a specific playful flair, here and there amplified in passages describing Pantagruelian feasts at which vast amounts of alcohol were consumed.

In his seminal work, *Homo ludens*, Johan Huizinga assigns an entire chapter to the relationship between war and play in culture. He observes that there is an intimate connection between the two worlds: that of war and that of game, since “We can only speak of war as a cultural function so long as it is waged within a sphere whose members regard each other as equals or antagonists with equal rights; in other words its cultural function depends on its play quality” (1980, 89). Lara Kriegel links Huizinga’s theory to Victorian Imperialism and shows that in that age “As vehicles for cultivating ‘manliness’, sport and war, it seemed, had the potential not just to promote ‘physical and moral strength’, but even to stave off ‘the sinking of self’...together, sport and war might curb the excesses of the current era...” (2016, 272). If one accepts Huizinga’s postulate on the intrinsic relationship between war and play as cultural functions, then one can argue that the ludic elements found in the depiction of the Russian soldiers in the nurses’ letters and diaries actually create the image of the modern warrior. Dr. Elsie Inglis herself, the nurses’ leader, admits in a letter from March 1917 that she “had no idea the Russian soldier had so much fun in him. So the slackness of the work hasn’t bored us; we have got to like our patients immensely” (in Cahill, 207).

Lilias Grant recounts an occasion in Ismail in November 1916, when the nurses were invited to a party where there were thirty to forty Russian and Serbian officers “all more or less drunk” (in Cahill, 126). The tables in the room where the celebration took place were covered with cakes and the richest cake was offered to the Scottish nurses, along with huge glasses of wine which none of the women could manage to drink up, except Lois Turner. Grant sums up her account as follows: “It was beastly stuff. At intervals the men got up and danced the Kola, just in and out amongst the tables; as the evening wore on they got more and more uproarious, and we were all wishing Dr Chesney would come away. The tables were covered with spilt wine, it was on the floor, and on the men’s uniforms, and altogether the whole scene was disgusting” (in Cahill, 126). Alcohol has a

long tradition in both Scotland and Russia, yet it seems that the nurses were startled by the kind of excesses they witnessed.

Possibly, one of the most emblematic accounts of merrymaking on the Eastern Front belongs to Katherine Hodges, who on 9 December 1916 witnessed the celebration of St. George's Day:

The general commanding in that area had his headquarters at the village where the rest of our unit had been sent. On St George's Day he gave a party to which he invited all of us. It was a mad party, just behind the lines in the village schoolhouse, with a marvellous supper sent from Moscow, and lashings of wine; after the meal Cossacks came in and sang and danced too wonderfully for us. There was a terrific offensive going on - in fact our lines broke two days after, and it was a strange, crazy feeling - this amazing party, and the wild songs of the Cossacks combining with the angry thunder of the heavy artillery. A photograph was taken at the end of the evening, and I think I am right when I say that the Russian general, who had obviously looked well on the wine that was red, sat on the floor with his head resting heavily on Mrs Haverfield's lap - much to her horror! He was fast asleep when, after much manoeuvring of the group, the picture was finally taken. (in Cahill, 142-143)

This comic, burlesque situation is mixed with the fearful elements of daily life on the front, such as bombings, and creates one of the most interesting and complex descriptions that could be found in the accounts from the battlefield, entirely revealing the *geist* of what it meant to be part of the Allied army on the Eastern Front in the nurses' imagination.

On an autumn day in Medgidia in 1916, Elsie Bowerman recounts the difficulties of attempting to train one of the Russian orderlies into accepting work discipline: "Another very busy day, trying to teach a Russian soldier to be a mess orderly. Very good man, but impossible to hurry a Russian, and a big handicap not knowing the language - have to show him by signs. Large reserves of Russian troops continually going up to the front - big attack expected. Glorious weather continues - not many fresh wounded arriving" (in Cahill, 53). The comical aspects do not affect the nurses' overall good disposition towards the Russians, which they "take as they are", acknowledging their unchangeable character, and the journal entry even ends in an optimistic tone with the satisfactory remark that many Russian troops would go to the front and that there were relatively few wounded coming into the hospitals, while the weather was lovely.

The nurses' role in constructing the more or less masculine image of the soldiers has been researched by many scholars in the field. What stands out in the case of the SWH nurses and the Russian soldiers on the Eastern Front is that the discourse of the women changes with the onset of the Russian

revolution and its effects on the front, yet this only slightly modifies their attitude about the Russian soldiers, even when they disobey orders or present themselves to the hospitals injured in their left arm (i.e., with self-inflicted wounds which rendered themselves useless at the front). Already in June 1917 Margaret Fawcett expresses her disappointment with the situation in Russia:

Russian news seems awfully black, and things seem as bad as they did before the revolution. The first days after the revolution were the brightest at the front - then they put the best men into power, and things flourished for a bit. Now the real leaders are just throwing up their position because they can do nothing with their men. The whole army now is being run by the soldiers' committees, and if they decide that they don't want to fight, they just go home. As far as we can see, there is nothing to stop them deserting. (in Cahill, 257-258)

The nurse is right to notice the kind of disorganization that would affect the Russian army given the conditions of political instability and she lets us in into the apparent enthusiasm the "revolution" generated at the front in its first days. The cook of the hospital unit, Mary Milne, reports all kinds of strange rumours in a letter she was sending home, noting especially the tremendous excitement of living during the making of history:

The brother of the Tsar, Michael Aleksandrovich, says if he is properly elected he will be Tsar, and Nicholas Nikolaievich is to be head of the army; so we are expecting a great push on all the fronts. The Tsarina has been shot at by a prince from the country - he is to be hanged. The Tsar ordered out the military and they refused to fight - so it must be very exciting in Petrograd. The Tsar is said to be taken prisoner and shut up in Tsarskoe Seloe. What will happen now? Shall we have an advance? I do hope so - perhaps it will bring the war nearer an end. I shan't want to go home if we are really in the midst of interesting times. (in Cahill, 210-211)

Her account does not accurately reflect the historical events that took place in the March revolution, but it brilliantly reveals the nurses' emotional state at hearing about that historical moment, how they wished and hoped this important political change would influence the end of the war in favour of the Russians. The events in Russia in March 1917 did not contribute in any way to an improvement on the Eastern front; on the contrary, the fact that Tsar Nicholas II was forced to abdicate (which meant the end of the Romanov dynasty), and that power was shared between a Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet led to indiscipline in the army. Regardless of such negative consequences of the Revolution for the war, it is easy to imagine how any change in the political situation in Russia was

regarded with some hope, given the desperate situation on some sections of the front. It is also possible that such positive rumours were spread by the new authorities in order to avoid further chaos and to gather popular support.

Yvonne Fitzroy describes in a sad tone how the Revolution has changed the soldiers. On May Day 1917 she took a trip to Reni where she heard the Marseillaise sung by the Russian soldiers and considered it as inappropriate, “their own national anthem having for the moment been dropped as it contains some reference to the tsar. And it’s funny how they miss the rhythms thereof – it’s wholly unsuitable, besides they have other things as fine of their own” (in Cahill, 250). This description contrasts with earlier depictions, in which the singing of the Russian soldiers is much appreciated. An example to the point is to be found in Ethel Moir’s account of October 1916:

In the distance the Serbs and Russians are playing the same game. I love listening to their singing, it is so weird and sad... When soldiers on the march sing, there is always a combination of solo and chorus, and in the chorus there is a kind of part-singing, which seems to be based on free improvisation, with twists and twirls and a racing above and below the melody. Some of the Russian melodies are quaint and stirring, some are simply dull and colourless, and others are depressing – but all are sad. (in Cahill, 54)

The sentimental Ethel Moir is infused with sorrow at hearing the soldiers sing, describing the moment with words that belong to flight vocabulary.

The nurses proved to be eager to accuse the Romanian officers of lack of courage, but were reluctant to do the same in the case of their Russian allies. One reason could be that they feared censorship or even feared being arrested as spies given the more and more insecure situation at the front. Another reason could be that they believed the Russian soldier was doing what was right by rising against the Tsarist regime, in a kind of ideological camaraderie with the Leftist ideals of the men, which could be considered as revolutionary as those held by the nurses themselves. This argument is refuted by McDermid (2008), who finds that the Scottish nurses who travelled to Russia and witnessed the Revolution unfold had their sympathies for the rising masses, but, surprisingly, commiserated with the upper-class refugees who fled Russia and who expressed anti-communist and anti-Jewish views. A third reason may be connected to the construction of the Russian identity in the Scottish nurses’ imagination: they were the militaries of the greatest allied force on the Eastern Front, unsophisticated, but efficient soldiers whose decisions and wisdom could not be disregarded

and whose portrayal could be compared to the already established image of the “war hero”. The Russian soldiers appeared to be ingenuous or naïve, but able to fight as expected of a soldier belonging to a great empire. They are tough and used to hardships of all kinds, and do not fear death on the battlefield, unlike the Romanian allies, who have given in to decadence and softness.

In July 1917, Rendel was referring to the situation on the front as follows:

We expect every hour to be sent forward again but there is some hitch and grave fears that the Russians won't advance. The news from Galicia is bad too. A very large percentage of our wounded were wounded in the left hand! (in Cahill, 276)

The same situation is also described by Sister Atkinson:

...Our patients came to us straight from the trenches, and generally reached us about three in the morning, continuing to come in batches for the rest of the day. Some of the cases were very serious ones, but the majority were hand cases. The Russian soldier is very patient, and bears pain well. His food, however, is very poor compared to that of our own boys, and comforts in hospital are very scarce... (in Cahill, 276)

Neither woman offers details about the reason why the Russian soldiers were injured in the hand, but remark how bravely the soldiers were facing pain, which adds to the masculinization of the troops. Self-inflicted wounds (SIWs) constituted a real phenomenon in the Great War, but are scarcely documented on the Eastern Front. In Britain, wounds that allowed the soldiers to receive treatment at home were termed “blighty ones”, usually caused with “home grown” bullets (fired with one’s own rifle). Sometimes, the soldiers who could no longer bear the hardships on the front shot themselves or committed suicide by going over the top of the trenches and thus becoming easy targets for the enemy snipers. There were some 3,894 cases of SIWs in the British army, and even though the official punishment was execution by firing squad, in all cases the courts gave prison sentences (Cecil and Liddle 1996, 425-433). From the accounts of the nurses on the Eastern Front it seems that the phenomenon was quite widespread, as war weariness was mixed with revolutionary enthusiasm to disobey the officers. Quite importantly, the 1st order of the Petrograd Soviet of 14 March 1917 weakened the officers’ authority and dissolved the traditional discipline in the army. Under the circumstances, it becomes clear why such examples of indiscipline (SIWs) among the Russian soldiers were not criticized by the Scottish nurses.

4.5. “Bulgars”, Germans and Austrians

Besides the Russians and the Serbians, who formed the allied troops, on the Romanian front there were enemy forces, too, representing the Central Powers. Before looking at our sources, it is worthwhile to consider the way Allied propaganda depicted the enemy, in order to be able to discern whether the nurses were influenced by cultural depictions of the enemy or not, when at home in Britain.

In *British Culture and the First World War: Experience, Representation and Memory*, Thacker argues that

for most of the First World War, the dreaded enemy – imagined as ‘the Hun’, the ‘Boche’ or known to the front-line troops as ‘him’, was largely unseen. There are remarkably few images of the Germans in British artistic representations of the war. A woman serving close to the front, as Brittain did in 1917 and 1918, might actually see more German soldiers than a man serving in the trenches. Vera Brittain’s²⁰ reaction was typically humane and sympathetic. She confessed to her uncle that whatever hostility she felt theoretically towards the wounded Germans, it was ‘hardly possible to feel antipathy to one’s patient in practice. (2014, 189)

Brittain’s description is a far cry from the usual demonization of the Germans in British propaganda, which included, as we have seen, clichés like “The Hun is at the gate” aimed at Kaiser Wilhelm II and then spread to every German soldier. In the Allied propaganda, events like the sinking of the *Lusitania*, the execution of Nurse Edith Cavell, the submarine war or the destruction of neutral Belgium were repeatedly used in order to reduce the enemy to the stereotype of a barbarous, uncivilized and inhumane monster (Koch-Hillebrecht 2008).

The Russians – whose views and behaviour towards the Central Powers might have influenced the Scottish nurses (who actually believed the Romanians were treacherously supporting the Germans) – held similar views to those of the British. Russia has often been accused, together with their Romanian allies, of mistreating the German prisoners of war (Jones 2011, 350), like those who served as orderlies in the Scottish nurses’ hospitals.

The cultural view of the enemy as a violent brute was not unanimous, though there were few who looked beyond the dehumanizing propaganda

²⁰ Vera Brittain (1893-1970) is perhaps the most celebrated nurse writer of the Great War. Her published memoir, *Testament of Youth* (1933), tell the story of her life from 1900 to 1925 and is acclaimed as a classic work describing the impact of the war on the life of British women.

of the governments, like nurses such as Vera Brittain did. Most of the nurses professed a similar humane view at least when it came to the prisoners of war and when they considered the enemy less frightening than the allies did (e.g., the retreat out of Dobruja in the Scottish nurses' letters and diaries) For example, the ambulance driver, Katherine Hodges, who almost went behind enemy lines in her missions in northern Dobruja, was writing in a letter sent home in October 1916 that

You will probably hear rumours of our being taken prisoner and things, as the Bulgars are doing rather well and are expected to break our defences, but I hope we shan't be. Don't worry whatever you hear; I'll try to get a wire through if anything serious does occur. (in Cahill, 58)

Her words of caution to those at home about possible rumours of their being captured signals that there was great fear for the fate of those falling into the hands of the enemy. One noticeable linguistic aspect is the nurse's usage of the ethnonym "Bulgar", an antiquated form of "Bulgarian" that harkens back to the barbaric period of the Great Migrations and links the use of "Bulgar" to the use of the word "Hun" in similar contexts. The Scottish nurses may have used this term because the bulk of the enemy forces on the Dobruja front were Bulgarian, but there is considerable evidence to suggest that they did not actually refer to the Bulgarians specifically by using it, but mainly to the German and Austrian troops of Field Marshal von Mackensen, who possessed the artillery and planes responsible for the bombardments which were often described as perturbing the activity of the nurses' hospitals.

The Scottish women who worked in Romania encountered mostly Bulgarians, Turks and Germans or Austrians directly as prisoners of war. Elsie Bowerman tells us that their first encounter took place on 17 September 1916 when the nurses were on their way to Dobruja: "We passed a great many hospital trains full of wounded – one with Turkish, Bulgarian, and German prisoners – some seemed cheerful, others very miserable – the very slightly wounded in horse boxes – the others lying on stretchers slung to the ceilings of the trucks" (in Cahill, 27). This is a conventional description by the women because it shows some pity towards the prisoners. On a later occasion, Elsie Bowerman expressed outright her admiration towards the prisoners who were attached to the hospitals as orderlies:

Everyone very busy in hospital all day. About eighty patients admitted altogether, most of them pretty bad. Fifteen Austrian prisoners attached as orderlies - perfect godsend, so clean, quick, and intelligent. I have two to assist me in the kitchen - after my one old Russki it seems too blissful for

anything. They are quite pleased to be with us - a real case of loving our enemies. (in Cahill, 187)

The nurse is very clear in her appreciation of the “clean, quick and intelligent” Austrian prisoners in contrast to her “one old Russki”. The prisoners were probably glad too to have the opportunity to do hospital work, which was the best type of labour to be found at the front. One day later, Elsie Bowerman added: “Rest of the day goes smoothly - kitchen uncommonly clean owing to the efforts of Bender and Luschke, our two ‘enemies’, at present my best friends” (in Cahill, 188). The nurses might have enjoyed the help provided by the Austrian orderlies because, unlike the Russians, the prisoners were actually motivated to do their work responsibly for the sake of their own survival. Nurse Mary Milne was also impressed with the Austrian orderlies. She even writes that she had received some gifts from them, which she held very dear: “four Artillery buttons, which I shall make into studs - Luschke gave these to me - also two abzeichen - 1st Franz Joseph, the Austrian hat badge, and Franz Joseph 1st, the Hungarian badge” (in Cahill, 240). Milne notes that these were unique gifts that probably would not be produced at other times.

The examples above reveal that the nurses were able to see the human face of the enemy, but this does not exclude the other face, of the cruel, ruthless and barbarous conqueror, whom they often called “the Bulgar”. Mary Milne quickly sums up the view of “the Bulgar” that the nurses were exposed to in the service of their Serbian allies: “At dawn our Serbian officer came to say goodbye. ‘You understand,’ he said, ‘the Bulgar make no prisoners of us; if caught, we are shot.’ He left us repeating what everyone had said: ‘Get off early in the morning; the enemy is very near’” (in Cahill, 73). The nurses were thus instilled with fear of “the Bulgar”, who behaved barbarously by not giving quarter to captured soldiers, a kind of behaviour that was contrary to the rules of “civilized” war at the time.

Henderson, who was part of the ambulance unit, left an account in her journal about how frightful it was to know the “Bulgar cavalry” was operating in the vicinity:

I struck across the country with Miss Ford and two of the Transport drivers, Miss Mackenzie-Edwards and Miss Glubb, and all that afternoon we scoured the country, and eventually came upon a detachment of the Serbian army. They were very good to us, and the officers found us a little peasants’ cottage in which we passed the night, being, as a matter of fact, left behind by the army, which went on, having orders to proceed, as there was a rumour that Bulgar cavalry was in the neighbourhood. That night was one of the most anxious I have ever spent in my life, as I felt considerable trepidation

and responsibility for the three girls who were with me - the prospect of their being caught by the Bulgars was not a pleasant one. (in Cahill, 93)

After finally getting out of Dobruja during the retreat, Nurse Ethel Moir was writing that since they have reached the pontoon bridge at Isaccea, they had nothing to fear any more from “the Bulgars”, whom she believes nearly “nabbed” them as “it’s been touch and go on several occasions”, while the Serbian doctor who was accompanying them “never for a moment thought we would get away” (in Cahill, 101). But the nurses’ terror at hearing about “the Bulgars” getting close to their positions did not end with the crossing of the Danube. At Galați, in November 1916, Nurse Liliac Grant was fearfully recording rumours of the enemy having crossed the Danube as well and being on their way to Bucharest, which had prompted the court to flee to Jassi. Around the same time, Ysabel Birkbeck, who was serving in the ambulance unit and was also in Galați, took more time to report the stories that were circulating about the enemy:

Orders at last. They are, in brief, ‘Back to the Bulgars’. News from the front is very bad. The enemy are across the Danube, and advancing on Bucharest. All wounded from there are being evacuated here; hundreds are expected. All the churches and synagogues are being prepared to receive them. We leave now, to be attached to the Russian cavalry near Constanza. We might have guessed it, for Constanza is the headquarters of the Bulgarian cavalry - I did hope we would be given to the Bulgars after Xmas, not before! (in Cahill, 135)

The nurse sums up the instructions to assist the Russian troops back in Dobruja as synonymous to going “Back to the Bulgars”. The Scottish women’s anxiety towards the enemy they met in Dobruja induced in them the thought that “the Bulgars” were advancing on Bucharest, when, in fact, the Germans were those who commanded the offensive. Birkbeck equates the enemy’s advance to a huge number of wounded who would flood the hospitals, but still has the spirit to end her account in a comical manner. After arriving in Isaccea, the same Ysabel Birkbeck continues her journal with more details of her unit’s predicament:

Up at 7. The Bulgars are admittedly where we supposed them last night, on the other side of the hill at the back of the village. The guns formed an almost unbroken line all over the hills. Machine guns sounded in a staccato accompaniment to the convoy - very near. (in Cahill, 163)

The reader is provided with a feeling of being caught in a trap by the enemy guns, whose continuous fire sounded like a deadly symphony. Back in

Galați, Mary Milne wrote in her diary about the town being bombed by “Bulgar” 12-inch guns, but she also mentioned that the enemy had dropped a letter to say all the civil population had to leave before the bombardment. Towards the end of her depiction, she describes the awful roar of the exploding bombs and how it all sounded like it took place in the garden of the hospital. Later that year, in Varnița, the same Mary Milne recorded that “This morning the Bulgars have been shelling us, and more damage has been done at a little distance. There is a big battle raging - the Bulgars and the Russians are both trying to take Braila” (in Cahill, 275).

All in all, from these accounts providing representations of the enemy in the nurses’ diaries it is evident that the nurses defy the usual governmental propaganda that dehumanized the enemy, portrayed as the barbaric “Hun”, yet they used a similar term to refer to the forces of the Central Powers they met in Dobruja: “the Bulgar”. It is surprising that when the nurses write about Austrian war prisoners, they do so in a very humane manner, similarly to other nurses who tended prisoners of war and recorded their feelings.

4.6. “Our boys”: British and French Troops

Although less extensive than their accounts of Romanian, Serbian or Russian troops, there are some significant mentions of troops originating from Western Europe, either British or French, in the Scottish nurses’ war diaries. These representations generally amount to heroic or rather angelic types of image that the nurses constructed of their fellow countrymen or close allies to whom they felt a deeply personal connection. It was not the case that the nurses saw the British or French troops in the traditional kind of way promoted by the propaganda, as perfect fighting machines ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their country. Rather, the women expressed in writing their reassurance of meeting their co-nationals on the remote Eastern Front in Romania, such encounters filling them with hope and reassuring them that their own government was actively working in these far-away locations in which the nurses found themselves.

The following account describes the similarity between the English, French and Romanian soldiers that the nurses encountered while on their way to Dobruja, in Tiraspol, during the autumn of 1916:

At Tiraspol we heard that there were *Anglichane*, so we hastily bundled out to find a whole crowd of Armoured Car men. They seem to be living in trucks, and all look rather grubby. We had met most of the officers before, so we sprinted up and asked for news of Dr Inglis. At Tiraspol also our train picked up a whole crowd of French Armoured Car men just arrived in Russia. As we got out of the train we were greeted with shouts of ‘English

girls,' and '*Vive l'Angleterre*', to which we replied, '*Vive la France, Vive l'Entente*'. They look awfully jolly – their uniforms are ripping. They are only distinguishable from the Roumanians by their Sam Brownes, and their faces, which are *not* powdered. They have just gone off to Jassi. (Cahill 185)

The nurses were rather intrigued when they heard the locals talk about “Anglichane” [Anglicans], so they hurried to meet these troops, but despite the women’s enthusiasm they did not hide the fact that the British men seemed rather “grubby”. In contrast, the Scottish ladies seemed much more intrigued by their encounter with the French troops, whom they cheered and were equally responded to. The French troops appear a lot livelier than their British counterparts and more masculine than the Romanian officers, with whom they share the style of their uniforms, but not the make-up fashion. Again, we notice the tendency to highlight the effeminacy of the Romanian officers, the negation (“not”) being highlighted in the nurse’s diary.

On many occasions the nurses recorded in their diaries the ways in which they found comfort and help from the British troops which they encountered, portraying them as saviours. Elsie Bowerman recounts that, in Cernavodă, on their way south of the Romanian front, on 11 September 1916, they were able to continue their voyage because “Owing to the efforts of the British naval men, all the hospital stores, motor cars, etc., were unloaded and entrained. We were ready to start for our journey south by evening” (in Cahill, 23). In this example the use of contrasting description can be noticed again. The nurse does not mention it explicitly, but she implies that if they had been back in Russia, the unloading would have taken more time and they would have been slowed down. The same Elsie Bowerman expresses her appreciation of meeting French and Englishmen from the Naval Air Service while in Ciulnița on a Friday in early December 1916. Interestingly, her joy was expressed only towards the end of her journal entry, perhaps owing to the urgency of the operations taking place in that busy part of the front in Muntenia:

Breakfast at station restaurant - afterwards walked about till lunch time. Met French aviators quartered in chef-de-gare’s house - four English ones living at a farm a few kilos away. Saw machines - five small biplanes belonging to French - three large ones, English, had flown over from Imros. Such a joy to have a talk with French and Englishmen -Naval Air Service. They tell us they have orders to evacuate by lunch time, so are very busy preparing to go. (in Cahill, 138)

The beginning of her journal fragment is an example of how the women took up a manly and brief militaristic style on occasions when time did not allow for more vivid descriptions. Elsie Bowerman’s emotions at meeting

the soldiers from France and Britain hardly surface in what Claire M. Tylee calls a kind of revelation “of the poverty of the Victorian and Edwardian models” (1990, 103), which do not allow for much questioning or contemplation of the war. Ysabel Birkbeck, an ambulance driver who met the British Armoured Car division in Dobruja, provides a slightly more detailed sketch of these troops: “It is too nice to have them [the Armoured Car men] here, and hear English at street comers. They look so clean, so friendly, and we are fearfully interested in each other. They congregate round our cars to hear our adventures and tell of their own” (in Cahill, 154). This excerpt shows how easy camaraderie was formed between the soldiers and the nurses in the hostile environment both parties found themselves in, while, under other circumstances, such bonds between the women and the Russian, Romanian or Serbian troops were limited to special occasions such as get-togethers on important feast days.

While away from the front and hospital work in the relatively safer Galați, the same Elsie Bowerman takes time to offer a more detailed rendering of the nurses’ contacts with the British men who had been operating in Romania, giving her account the form of a travel narrative:

Brilliant moonlight, splendid night such a relief to get away from the atmosphere of the hospital, and to be with jovial Englishmen whom we can depend on, after coping with foreigners and not able to speak their language. As we reached the barge we heard several explosions and saw brilliant flares in the sky - this was the destruction parties at work destroying stores, etc., to prevent them falling into the hands of the enemy. Our quarters are in the hold of the barge, so we were able to get out our beds and lie down - really comfortable. Tommies had lighted a lamp and stove for us - brought us porridge for breakfast and were most awfully good to us (in Cahill, 181).

The nurse embellishes this fragment with references to the beauty of the respective evening, adding up to her feelings of admirations towards the “Tommies”. The soldiers and officers are still not called out by name, which they should be given the attachment between the nurses and the soldiers that is alluded to in the journals. Why would Elsie Bowerman still use the generic slang “Tommy” for a British soldier on the Romanian front where there were so very few of them? She was not writing in a situation of urgency, as she says in the beginning of her fragment, which would require a quick appellative for the soldiers. The nurse seems unable to trespass the status difference between the soldiers and her own condition. We have seen how the women also spoke fondly of their Austrian orderlies, but they called them by their names, in contrast to how they refer to their own countrymen. This could be taken as an example of the effect of the hierarchy existent on the front. Imaginably, the nurses’ position as superior to the prisoner

orderlies but inferior to the soldiers exerts a type of cultural suppression in their own writing that prevents them from escaping a militaristic, disconnected view of the common soldier.

To provide a different example of how the nurses viewed the few British troops they met on the Romanian front it is worthwhile to consider Margaret Fawcett's account from Varnița from the summer of 1917. After noting that there had been constant shooting on the front during the previous three days, especially visible at night when the bursting shells glimmered brightly, the nurse announced with regret: "Our two Armoured Car men will be leaving us soon - we shall be awfully sorry to lose them, as they are both very nice boys. We hear that their people have had a good many casualties lately" (in Cahill, 275). Fawcett's writing conveys a certain blurring of the (gender-)relations between the Scottish women and the men from the Armoured Car division. They are called "very nice boys", suggesting a maternal fondness for them that puts the nurse in the position of a dedicated *Mater Dolorosa*, then immediately the nurse distances herself by speaking about the losses of "their people". In the second part of the sentence the "boys" have not "grown up" to be men, but rather "people", suggesting more detachment, as if the "boys" had already turned into nameless victims forever lost in the giant machinery of war.

What adds to the nurses' fondness for the British men they met on the front in Romania was the fact that the men appreciated them as much as the nurses adored being around their own soldiers. Margaret Fawcett recounts:

These are two stories of the SWH. An Armoured Car man and a British Red Cross orderly were discussing the merits of the SWH and the BRC sisters respectively. 'Oh,' said the orderly, 'you should see our theatre sister. She is ever so quick - why, she has the man on the table within five minutes of hearing of him.'

'That is nothing,' said the Armoured Car man. 'Why, in the SWH the theatre sister has the next man on the table before the last one is off.'

This is one of Mrs Milne's, and is supposed to come from one of the Armoured Cars' officers: one of his men said to him one night, 'But you don't expect us to sit on the quay all night, sir; you know we aren't Scottish Women.' (in Cahill, 215).

Whether these were anecdotes or not, it is of consequence to notice how the Scottish women cared a lot about how they were seen by the soldiers. In different journal fragments they refer to Russian soldiers who similarly appreciate the skill and dedication of the Scottish "sisters", in the superlative: "I heard some of them telling some Russian officers at the

Evacuation Hospital that the Shotlandsky Lazaret was a khoroshy lazaret²¹” (in Cahill, 239).

The contrast between Eastern and Western troops is most evident in an account from Bessarabia by Lilius Grant, who met a British officer on board one of the ships docked in Reni. The nurses had found out about him from Dr. Chesney, their Commanding Medical Officer; this triggered so much eagerness that they all “toddled back there” to meet him. Nurse Grant adds: “I could have hugged him, he looked so nice and clean and English. He was a Captain Edwards, who is acting as interpreter to the British Armoured Cars that are fighting on the Roumanian front” (in Cahill, 150). In *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, Santanu Das (2006) ascribes to the phenomenology of touch and the tactile senses capital importance in the brutal, industrial and depersonalized state of violence which Europe was experiencing, arguing that the sensory feelings were central to the way in which nurses and soldiers expressed themselves at the front. In Lilius Grant’s journal fragment the enthusiasm of meeting a fellow Englishman is summed up in the nurse’s desire to embrace him, which is never expressed, for example, towards any of the other troops on the front. Still, the nurse quickly falls back into an appropriate stance by refusing to acknowledge to the officer a unique identity through the use of the indefinite article, he is “a” Captain Edwards, not nameless like the wounded victims in the hospitals but neither a “full individual”, just another man in the British officer corps. Grant then recounts the news from the front in Muntenia that the officer brought them:

He arranged everything for us, got dinner for us, and told us all the latest news. He told us that the Roumanians put off and put off setting fire to the oil fields, till finally our troops took the law into their own hands, and fired every blessed oil field in the place; meanwhile, the Roumanians fired on our troops - brutes! That is what our English papers are calling ‘our gallant little allies’! (in Cahill, 150).

The nurse is very appreciative of the officer’s treatment of them and this is not the only account in which the women admit that many things relating to different aspects of their activity were done a lot faster with the help of male officers. Then, one more example of contrastive description is used to antagonize the Romanian allies in contrast to the people they met from the British and French troops.

The subject of the oil fields comes up again in a very lengthy observation by Elsie Bowerman on the situation of the Western troops on the Romanian

²¹ Russian for “the Scottish hospital was a good hospital”.

front. She tells us that upon arriving in Brăila in the early morning they went around town to hear whatever news there was from the front and to look for water, of which none was to be found. In one of the hotels in town they discovered that the British pilots who had been burning the oil fields were stationed there. As the nurses looked rather fatigued and not in the very best shape, Colonel Griffiths, the commander of the English mission, generously offered his room to Elsie Bowerman and Yvonne Fitzroy to rest and the two women spent the rest of the afternoon listening to various news reports brought by various French and English officers, summed up in the journal as:

They tell us that there is a big battle being fought at Buzei - if the Russians cannot manage to hold this it means that Braila must go... The oil fields have all been successfully scrapped but the Germans have captured very large quantities of wheat. If the English had only been able to get here a month sooner, this might also have been prevented. The whole situation looks extremely black at present - probably the Roumanians will only be able to hold Moldavia. We are told that they have betrayed the Russians right and left, and they don't seem to make any attempt to withstand the enemy. We also hear that before coming into the war they gave the Allies false figures with regard to their supplies, troops, etc. The extreme difficulty of transport has also been a great handicap to the Allies. (in Cahill, 140-141).

This type of news reinforced the nurses' mistrust of the Romanians and amplified their Byzantine image of Romania's intervention in the war. By making these remarks about their own story during the war, the nurses believed that they were making a contribution to its general history. According to Claire M. Tylee's views, the nurses are perpetuating the view of war as an "Imperial Christian Adventure" (1990, 102), a kind of crusade, and they looked upon the French and British soldiers as righteous crusaders sabotaged by their Janus-faced Eastern allies, the Romanians.

4.7. Conclusion

This chapter has been dedicated to analysing the way troops were represented and how the nurses thought about themselves in the war diaries and letters. In *War and the Cultural Construction of Identities in Britain*, Korte and Schneider assert that "wars have continued to be considered specifically for their importance in the construction and reconstruction of identities", as "Our postmodern awareness of the problems involved in the concepts of identity seems to have directed attention to the intriguing fact that wars paradoxically highlight two aspects of identity at the same time, as well as the friction that exists between them: communal (including

national) identities on the one hand and personal, individual ones in the other” (2002, 2-3). We can identify one such example of friction between national and personal identity if we remember the passage about the Romanian officer, Radu Codreanu, whom one of the nurses found very entertaining and a true gentleman who could speak French, but when writing the diary entry she added that he would be useless on the battlefield.

Regarding the representation of the Romanian troops by the nurses, these were generally a tribute to the dissonance between the women’s great expectations of their “gallant little ally” and the cruel reality of the difficult strategic position of the country which contributed to negative outcomes on the battlefield. The result was that the Scottish women attributed elements of Byzantinism to the Romanian troops, thinking of the officers as inefficient, cowardly and treacherous, and depicting them as effeminate. The nurses differentiated between soldiers and officers, considering the former to be simple victims of the incompetence of the latter. Their portrayals and narratives of their dealings with Romanian officials actually reveal hospitality as a main trait, which alleviates their generally negative perception of Britain’s “gallant little ally”. Indeed, some of the women admit that what they knew about the situation of the front was conveyed by other Allied troops, therefore possibly reflecting the tension between those present at the front and not the actual reality.

When describing the Serbians and the Russians, the nurses expressed themselves in more positive terms. They already had an idea of what the suffering Serbia had gone through before joining the front and their mission was to alleviate some of it, but to their disappointment they saw themselves mostly caring for Romanian or Russian soldiers. Generally, they regarded the Serbians as heroic and brave soldiers, who endured the most sacrifices during the fighting on the Dobruja front. This view bears some similarity to the fictional construction of the image of the ideal soldier after the image of Christ who sacrificed himself to save humanity. The Scottish women even accepted the Serbian soldiers as their comrades, while keeping their distance from the Russian military men. Their view of the Russians was complex: they were reliable and battle-worthy soldiers but easily fell into disorder. Theoreticians like Prugl (2003) support the view that women hold an important role in the construction of the masculine image of the soldiers, which applies to the nurses’ representation(s) of the Russian troops, an image that was mixed with a – sometimes more than moderate – ludic character. Another aspect worth considering is that the women’s view of the Russian military was so strongly embedded in their imagination that events such as the March Revolution – during which the soldiers became notoriously undisciplined – had little effect on the nurses’ impressions.

An important part of how the Scottish women looked at the Other was the image they projected in their journals of the enemy troops. Nurses and women encountered enemy soldiers in the military hospital wards while men came across them on the battlefield, therefore the first tended to look upon them with more sympathy and to ignore the ever-present demonization of the enemy in the government propaganda and high-strung patriotic war poetry. The Scottish women were really happy with the work performed by the Austrian prisoners who worked in their hospitals as orderlies, but being able to show the human face of the enemy in their accounts does not exclude the opposite. Often, while in Dobruja, the nurses referred to the military opponents by using the old form “the Bulgar”, which matches the preference for the term “the Hun” back in Britain, both being ethnonyms that hark back to the age of the barbarian invasions.

The few British or French troops that the Scottish women encountered on the Western front enjoyed the most appreciation in their letters and diaries. A maternal, feminine language is used to portray them, showing attachment to these men who reminded them of home so much. On occasions, descriptions of the British troops on the Eastern Front are created by contrasting them to the Russian or Romanian troops. Even though the nurses held their own countrymen very dear, they do not name the soldiers in their diaries, but continue to employ the militaristic model by referring to the soldiers as Tommies, which to some extent levels the military grades and turns the human beings into war machines.

CHAPTER FIVE

ELATED AND TRAUMATIZED SELF/VES

5.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the passages from the nurses' journals in which they look at themselves, in a strict relation to psychological effects of the battles they witnessed. Introspection played an important role in their journals, especially when the nurses tried to describe their personal relation to the war and to the destruction caused by it.

The hypothesis is that self-examination in the Scottish women's diaries was prompted by the tragedy and trauma of the violent conflict ravaging the country, and that this self-analysis resulted in the nurses changing their attitude towards the war, which they no longer saw as glorious or as an "adventure", but were able to perceive in its full horror. The failure of the Romanians and Russians on the Dobruja front – considered of secondary significance – disillusioned not only the Scottish nurses, but the entire Romanian army and the already sceptical representatives of the Russian imperial army. It is certain that the Central Powers assigned greater importance to this section of the Eastern Front. The three Romanian divisions defending Dobruja (stationed at Turtucaia, Silistra and Bazargic²²) plus the two Russian divisions were facing the 3rd Bulgarian Army supplied with modern German equipment and technical personnel. The order of the General Staff of Field Marshal von Mackensen stated clearly: "The mission of this group or armies is foremost that of entering Dobruja while assuring the line of the Danube..." (qtd. in Moise 2002, 78).

Concerning the general image of the war for those at home and those on the front, Victoria Stewart observes that "Abstract ideas about war took prevalence over actual knowledge, and the clash between ideals and practicality was a difficult one to reconcile" (2003, 36). In the seminal study *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I*, Eric J. Leed marks the difference between "the military way" and "militarism" (1979, 56-57). The former notion refers to a discourse about war in which practical aspects

²² Now called Dobrich.

are brought to the foreground, while the latter means a “system of images, symbols, and rituals designed to express the character of the ‘warrior’ and the character of the community in which he is at home” (1979, 57 qtd. in Stewart 2003, 36). As we shall see, the accounts of the Scottish nurses on the Eastern Front are a mix of the two, with ‘the military way’ probably holding the upper ground. The nurses held the view that war is ‘ennobling’, especially winning the war and this is reflected in their description of the military personnel they encountered and their enthusiasm when meeting the British soldiers in the Armoured Car Division. Yet, they were more concerned with the more practical aspects relating to the army and to their own activity. To them, the generals are those who decide where the hospitals shall function, and quite often, when they should quickly pack everything and retreat in case of enemy advance.

The nurses who came to the front found themselves in an unprecedented situation. Laurie Kaplen shows that these ladies belonged to “The new generation of young women, some of whom had never seen a naked man, much less a suppurating wound or mangled body...” (2016, 69). Many questions arise: how would these women cope with the new setting they found themselves in? What did the nurses make of this male universe, the war theatre – coupled with the operation theatre – they were suddenly admitted to? To what extent did they allow their prejudice of military affairs and war to take over in their description of the soldiers they met? Did this cultural encounter change their perspectives of themselves? Such queries will mark the present chapter of this research. To give a short example, Ethel Moir, one of the orderlies and, as previously seen, a writer inclined towards highly romanticized descriptions, made the following note after experiencing military instruction on the ship that transported the SWH to Europe in 1916: “I’m writing this ‘standing at attention’ at my bunk, waiting for ‘cabin inspection’. We have to undergo such a lot of nonsense in the way of drills, saluting, etc. – talk about soldiers!” (in Cahill, 18). It is a clear example of the shock we might expect of those unacquainted with military discipline, and whose military inexperience allowed a self-ironical attitude. To Ethel Moir, the condition of the soldier is equated to that of an individual whose freedom and identity becomes lost in “drills, saluting, etc”.

The perplexity of the unprecedented situation in which the nurses found themselves is also noted by Elinor Rendel in a letter:

We are learning Russian industriously from one of the Russian doctors attached to our lazaret. He is very kind and takes a lot of trouble, but unfortunately he has no idea of teaching. His only notion is to make us read aloud from a Russian reading book meant for small children. The words are mostly quite useless to us. There are little sentences such as ‘Scythe, mow

the grass while there is dew.’ In return we teach him English. The lessons are rather difficult because he knows very little English, and he always speaks and teaches us in German with occasionally a French word thrown in. It is most confusing. Another difficulty is that all our patients are Serbs, and we have to learn and use a good many Serbian words. The result is that our brains are whirling and the confusion is great. (in Cahill, 124-125)

The situation of the Scottish Women was complicated by the linguistic barrier. On some occasions this barrier led to soldiers simply staring at them in amazement and silent admiration when appreciating the bravery of the nurses’ presence on the war front, perhaps thinking that what these women were doing was typical of their own countries and not knowing that the SWH’s presence on the Eastern Front in Romania was, in fact, the result of the British government’s refusal to accept the medical services graciously offered to them by the revolutionary Dr. Elsie Inglis in 1914 when she received the perplexing and patronizing reply “My dear lady, go home and sit still”.

Vera Brittain noted in her famous war diary, *Testament of Youth*, that the nurses longed to be heroic, but the administration only permitted them a secondary role in war and concluded: “Women get all the dreariness of war, and none of its exhilaration” (104). The assumption that, for men, war is ‘exhilarating’ imparts the traditionalistic/imperialistic perception of war propagated by the government(s). One of the most important pieces of literature when discussing the way women saw their relationship with the men on the front is Claire M. Tylee’s *The Great War and Women’s Consciousness. Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women’s Writings 1914-1964*, which has become one of the fundamental works on women’s war writings. While Fussell, whom we have mentioned in the previous chapters, was concerned with what men wrote during the Great War, Tylee did the same but focused on women. She highlights how nurses or other women present on the front fail to see behind their government’s propaganda and were ‘easy victims’ of it, not because of the legislation that prohibited any anti-war texts (*Defence of the Realm Act*, 1914), but because they lacked the intellectual flexibility required to adopt a different perspective on war, even after dealing with the horrible suffering of their patients. Christine E. Hallett calls this “the mental straitjacket of their upbringing within a patriarchal and imperialistic society” (Hallett 2014, 4).

5.2. The War as Adventure

Claire M. Tylee uses the phrase “the heroic pageantry of war” to refer to the spirit of adventure which captivated many young men and women – who

had no idea about the horror and trauma they would witness and suffer – on the eve of the First World War. The same scholar shows that women had trouble in finding a language that was adequate to describe their experiences during the war because “The idea of war was intimately connected with many other values of Western culture. To challenge its heroic image was to undermine ideas fundamental to their world and to their conception of history” (Tylee 1990, 20).

It was not surprising that women, who up to that moment lived relatively domestic lives, would see their sojourn on the Eastern Front as an extraordinary adventure. This was coupled with the government’s propaganda that aimed to persuade as many young men as possible to join the front by turning war into a righteous crusade against barbarous enemies. As a result, many of the nurses took up this rhetoric in their journals and consequently expressed their eagerness to become part of the glorified war effort. Katherine Hodges, one of the ambulance drivers, almost feels the need to justify her presence at the front, in the world of men. While on the ship that was transporting them eastwards, she recounts her joining the Scottish Women’s Hospitals in the fashion of an unexpected escapade. Hodges’ adhesion to the ambulance unit of the SWH as a driver is clearly outside the boundaries set by the British government that regulated the “home front”. The language used in the diary expresses her astonishment at succeeding in this feat in spite of hostile odds: the driver accidentally found out about the possibility of work at the front, while performing a chore in the garage. As she had been trying to find work at the front for a long time, Hodges wasted no time. She took a cab to the SWH headquarters, where she was straightaway welcomed to join the “round table” of the Transport Unit by its leader, the “Honourable” Evelina Haverfield (an honorific form of address reserved at the beginning of the 20th century to venerable men). This fragment is one of the very few in which Mrs Haverfield is depicted in a positive light. Most of the drivers who wrote accounts of her at the front found her very difficult to deal with, which probably led her to suffer a nervous breakdown and to her returning home earlier. Katherine Hodges’s enthusiasm to join the front and her being “delighted” at the prospect does not uniquely mark her excitement on that specific day. Her confession is a common description of how the rest of the drivers and the nurses saw themselves in relation to their roles within the war system and reflects the view of the general public on such matters (Cahill 15-16).

In *Memoirs of First World War Nurses: Making Meaning of Traumatic Experiences*, Maxine Alterio shows that, at the beginning of the Great War there were few who foresaw the horrors and destruction caused by war and who actually envisaged the series of actions that had led to its outbreak.

There were many who thought that military victory would contribute to more equality and prosperity, and who were blinded by political propaganda, by the general spirit of optimism at the time and by the comfort brought by recent industrial developments (Alterio 8).

While on her way to Romania in September 1916, Elinor Rendel was writing home the following in a letter, anticipating her “adventure”:

It reminds me in some ways of the WS and WCC and our camp life at Studland. So many of the women here have belonged to semi-military organisations such as the Women’s Reserve Corps, etc., in which they do a lot of saluting, that the military spirit has crept in – much to the annoyance of the sisters, who have already begun to rebel [...]

Some of the criticism is true, I think. Some of our leaders have been bitten with the military craze and they love saluting, giving orders, etc. without having grappled with the essentials. They rather like making us salute them for example without dreaming of returning the salute. However I think it’s all been rather a game to pass the time and make us forget submarines. (in Cahill, 21)

The famous World War I poster that reads “Are YOU in this?” displays, in a chain of work, what each social category should be doing to support the soldiers at the front: men and women on the “home front” are depicted working in the production of ammunition, while on the real front soldiers are first assisted by boy scouts who are passing them bullets, and only then by women nurses (*sic!*), who are described as “dispensing care rather than treatment” (MacNamara 1998, 81), and certainly not driving ambulance cars or using X-ray devices. For the government’s and the military authorities’ spatial understanding of the front, the nurse is situated behind the Boy Scout, therefore closer to the “home front”, so adult women were considered less fit for military experience than very young boys even. A moment of similar revelation was the decoration of the nurses in March 1917 in Bessarabia, which was recorded by Margaret Fawcett. First, the nurses were decorated after the wounded soldiers had been given their medals, the same soldiers that they regarded with pity and who were the nameless victims of the war. Second, even the nurse who described the moment admitted that they did not expect to receive the same decorations as the militaries did. This example shows how challenging it was for women to “write themselves back” (Cixous 1976) into the memory of the Great War. Worthiness on the front as well as access to the vault of war memory were awarded by proximity to trauma.

Elinor Rendel further marks a clear difference between herself and the other women who seem to have had previous semi-military experience. Rendel expresses a similar dislike for the masculine code of military

saluting and the rest of the war panoplies that displace the nurses into the masculine universe of war. Mary Milne, the cook of the SWH unit, wrote about another step in the masculinization of the female body while the women were on the ship on their journey to the front: their hair had to be cut by the ship's barber (Cahill 22). This physical change complements the behavioural transformations required to enter the masculinized world of the front. Mary Milne is obviously not thrilled with the abolition of her womanliness, but she accepts it as an expected requirement to join the front troops.

Passages like the two above suggest that the medical women experienced certain difficulties in adopting militarism and expressed their limited revolt to have to take up a masculine attitude to war in the diaries they wrote. Dr. Elsie Inglis, the leader of the Scottish nurses remarked with certain satisfaction that, on one occasion, one of the women in the Ambulance unit had gone to the engine room of the ship they were sailing in with a greaser and when she returned covered in grease, one of the officers stopped her and said 'Now where are you going to, my lad?'"(in Cahill, 21). On a different occasion, Dr. Elsie Inglis disciplines the ambulance drivers for acting too much like men, as Ysabel Birkbeck recounts on November 30, 1916: "Dr Inglis harangued the Transport after breakfast. The first part was against the nasty habits of the Transport; somebody's been swearing, it seems, as if there's not plenty to swear about" (in Cahill, 136). Besides the comical aspect, the Commanding Officer's observation is in line with the organisation's intention to destroy the barrier between genders and prove that women could be just as useful as men on the front (McDermid 2007), but the nurses and ambulance drivers felt on occasions great psychological pressure at the difficulty of fitting to the role of men while having to behave like ladies.

In June 1916, while making preparations for their sojourn in Romania, Dr. Elsie Inglis had to accept the resignation of Miss Marx, who was then in charge of the ambulances and refused to go with men drivers. The leader of the nurses explained in a letter that "It would be absurd after the extraordinary success the Transport has made, to climb down and fall back on men" (in Cahill, 257). For Dr. Elsie Inglis, giving the job of ambulance driver to men meant regress for her organization, as

...our first object was to care for the wounded - but our second to do it through a women's organisation. That is the case, isn't it? And now that the Transport is to be closely attached to the hospital, there is no reason whatsoever for changing. Miss Marx seems to have got very panicky about the condition of things in Russia - but if she were right (which she isn't) it

would be a reason for giving up the hospitals, not for having men drivers for the cars! (in Cahill, 257)

It seems that the status of the Ambulance unit was central in establishing the collective identity of the SWH organization. The position of nurse fitted perfectly into the traditional roles reserved for women, but not the same could be said for the position of driver. At the beginning of the 20th century, being a chauffeur was an entirely new occupation in the world of men as well, therefore the reticence of accepting women in this role that belonged to the world of men may be easily explained. Dr. Elsie Inglis's ideals were more important than what she saw as unnecessary caution. The ambulance drivers were an important part of the Scottish nurses' identity and giving it up was comparable to her to giving up the hospitals.

Before embarking on the ship that would take them to the East, Nurse Liliias Grant described the Ambulance or Transport unit of their hospital in very kind words, looking quite envious of the fascination they exercised on the public while marching, as quaint remarks came from the public, such as "Now I shouldn't mind joining that lot", or "They are not going into danger at all" (in Cahill, 16). The disjunction between the way one of the nurses saw the Ambulance unit and the way in which the prejudiced public reacted opens the topic of the masculinized female body. In her *Masculinity and the Wounds of the First World War: A Centenary Reflection*, Ana Carden-Coyne asserts that "masculinity underpinned imperialism and militarism, fundamentally shaping the experience of modern war as social, embodied and psychological experiences" (2015, 2). The women desired to be seen as men in order to be able to claim the same rights, yet the Scottish nurses did not accept this masculinization without protest. The public comment, "They are not going into danger at all" excludes women from the "honour" of becoming a victim of the war, which is part of the world of men. It is also possible that Liliias Grant may not have been entirely honest in her journal and actually expressed her own doubt at the thought that the ambulance drivers – the "stars" of the SWH unit – would be more exposed to danger than the usual nurses or orderlies.

In a different account, this time from the early days of the Scottish nurses' hospital in Medgidia, Nurse Yvonne Fitzroy wrote down what an honour it was to dine with the drivers, whom she called "the ultra-exclusive Transport" (in Cahill, 28). The account is revelatory in establishing the identity of the SWH unit because Fitzroy marks a clear difference between her status as a nurse and the esteemed positions of the ambulance drivers and commanding officer. Even though the presence of the nurses was meant to break the social order of the time, the women were subjected to authority within their organization almost in the same way as in the society, so there

was little encouragement for the usual nurse to adopt a different point of view on the war that was raging and to dispel its “heroic pageantry”. Almost a week before arrival at the front in Dobruja in 1916 ambulance driver Katherine Hodge expressed her eagerness by remarking they were “not within fifty miles of the fun!” (in Cahill, 33).

Maintaining the same high spirits, Ethel Moir was writing in November 1916, after the harrowing experience of the retreat from Dobruja, that she would not have missed it for anything in the world (Cahill 104). The image Moir is describing herself in is that of an adventurous hero, and it is surprising that the other nurses were so marked by the horrors of retreat they had just been through. Some wrote in their journals that they would never forget the faces of the refugees. Ethel Moir maintains the Romantic image of the “young, wide eyed, innocent nurses and domesticated representations of the nursing space” (MacNamara 1998, 71) by ascribing to an image of herself as a fearless adventurer. Elinor Rendel similarly remarks how overjoyed she was to be part of the war experience: “I am now having the time of my life and enjoying myself more than I have for years. It is really great fun here” (in Cahill, 55). It is interesting how merely doing her job means, to the nurse, having great fun. It is also obvious that the nurse was both adventurous and passionate in doing her job.

Ambulance driver Katherine Hodges continued to express anticipation as well as wonder as the nurses were getting close to the front. She appears very excited, even “jolly glad” at the thought of getting into “the thick of fighting”, at the same time expecting to face the fear successfully (Cahill 32). This defies traditional gender roles in which women are expected to adopt a passive attitude to war, and this aspect leads to what has been called “gender blurring”. Such high spirits were maintained in the descriptions of Lois Grant after their retreat from Ciocârlia de Jos in October 1916. She confesses that she believed she and her friend, Ethel Moir, had been in the care of a greater power “than any earthly one” (in Cahill, 89). She made her statement in spite of the poor state of the car in which they were making their escape, which they expected to come to bits at any moment, and in spite of the burning line on the horizon. The bravado of Grant is inspiring and worthy of being used as an example to teach others how to behave in similar situations. The Christian ideology of the two nurses – who express faith in being protected by Providence – is included in the “Christian mythology of chivalry” regarding the war, developed by Claire M. Tylee in her book, where she argues that such descriptions of the nurses reinforce traditional nationalist discourse about war (1990, 26) because they do not challenge the legitimacy of the war or those who started it and caused so much destruction and suffering. This proposition can be complemented by

Santanu Das's theory of the "silent witnessing" attribute to women in the Great War (2006).

Elsie Bowerman displays similar unbridled enthusiasm for the adventure the nurses were on in Romania, almost mirroring the religious fervour of a crusading army:

"...There's much to tell you about the people, much too long to write, but they are a ripping lot. It is so nice to get with a set of people who are all keen, all see the funny side of things, all prepared to face anything" (in Cahill, 20)

In spite of this eagerness, the nurses hesitated to situate themselves in the male-only universe of war, as their lamentation against having to observe military regulations or to having to have their hair cut. In the excerpts above it is clear how eager the nurses were to travel to the front and begin their work, refraining from directly glorifying war, but showing the kind of naïve enthusiasm historians usually criticize as regards those who had little idea about the destruction the war would bring. By the end of September 1916, which was the time when the Scottish nurses arrived at the front in Dobruja, the position of the Allies on the Dobruja front had been seriously weakened by the defeat at Turtucaia following the battle between 2 and 6 September 1916. Turtucaia was defended by approximately 39,000 Romanian troops (of which 34,000 became casualties while the rest were able to flee across the Danube to Silistra). The Russian troops in Dobruja were concentrated in a more eastern position at Cobadin (Kirițescu 1989, 398). In the meantime, on 3 September 1916 Brigade General Nicolae Arghirescu, the commander of the 19th Infantry Division, had decided on the evacuation of Bazargic and began retreating north of the city (Platon 2003, 423). The lack of communication between the Russian and Romanian commands, the halting of the Salonika offensive by General Sarrail²³, the reduced sized and strength of the Russian divisions sent to help Romania, coupled with the intensification of the offensive of the Central Powers' forces under Marshal von Mackensen on the Rasova – Cobadin – Topraisar – Tuzla line (repelled but with heavy casualties suffered by the defenders), were the factors that contributed towards the difficult situation found by the Scottish nurses on their arrival in Romania (Platon 2003, 424).

²³ General Maurice Sarrail was a French general who commanded the multinational Allied force during the Salonika campaign (December 1915-December 1917), intending, but failing to prevent the Central Powers' conquest of Serbia, Wallachia and Dobruja.

5.3. Writing the Front

Already by the end of September 1916 the Dobruja front was presenting great challenges for the Romanian and Russian armies. On 9 September 1916 the General Staff in Bucharest issued order no. 451 regarding the reinforcement of the Southern front. This represented the “birth” of the “Dobruja Army” out of the 47th Russian Army Corps, the 9th and 10th infantry Divisions and the 5th Călărași Brigade, under the command of General Zaiionchkovsky (Scurtu 2008, 100). On 12 September 1916 new troops were brought from Transylvania and the front line was established on the positions Cobadin – Topraisar – Cocargea – Tuzla, while on 20 September 1916 General Averescu was in Constanța to witness the disembarkment of the Russian troops. On the other side of the front, there were the Varna Brigade, the 15th Turkish Division completing the 6th Turkish Army Corps, and the 217th German Division was expected to arrive.

The Romanians under General Alexandru Averescu attempted the Flămânda Maneuver between 29 September and 5 October 1916, which was a stratagem designed to take Marshal von Mackensen by surprise with a rear attack and cut him off from the rest of the Bulgarian forces, while the Russo-Romanian forces in northern Dobruja were supposed to attack towards Cobadin and Kurtbunar (Tucker and Roberts 2005, 418). This resulted in a failure because of the intervention of the Austro-Hungarian Danube flotilla and the fact that the situation on the Transylvanian front was worsening, so General Averescu transferred his troops to the front north of the Carpathians (Barrett 2013, 142).

On 30 September 1916 the nurses were getting closer to Medgidia, a moment when both the Russo-Serbian-Romanian army and the Central Powers were preparing for an offensive. Margaret Fawcett recorded their first encounter with death: “...We have passed several barges full of troops going to the front. I saw a corpse floating downstream this morning...” (in Cahill, 33). The corpse is an important omen that marked a change in the nurses’ discourse about their work on the Romanian front. Hynes reminds us that producing photographs of bodies or scenes of battle was forbidden at the front (1990, 80). Such an unexpected event produced a bitter aftertaste, which made the nurses interrogate the usefulness of violence in the war.

Ethel Moir follows shortly with a description of the frontline at Cernavodă in the last days of September 1916 in which there is little enthusiasm left: “It is very desolate – houses shattered and bombed, and not a civilian to be seen anywhere; they have all evacuated, thanks to the Bulgarian aeroplanes. [...] Don’t worry if you won’t hear often – *all’s well*”

(in Cahill, 34). The Romantic tone that previously translated itself into confessions of eagerness and enthusiasm for reaching the front is silenced by the desolation of the fighting front, yet the nurse's letter is as optimistic as it can be, considering that she did not want to worry her family too much. Marshal von Mackensen had brought to Dobruja the Big Bertha gun that had wreaked havoc at the battle of the Marne. The Romanian soldiers called it "purceaua [the sow]" in their diaries (qtd. in Scurtu 2008, 99).

In the previous paragraphs we have noticed how a certain masculinization of the Scottish women was expected and induced even before they joined the front. Claire M. Tylee shows that:

Men themselves found it difficult to articulate the effect of war on their lives. This was partly due to the social and linguistic conventions that governed expression, particularly literary expression; but it was also because war-events had frequently been traumas so shocking that they were repressed, and resulted in neurotic reactions. Since these responses conflicted with the cultural stereotypes of manliness that soldiers were expected to live up to, and because the whole front-line experience was so remote from the standards of 'normal' civilised life, it was hard for either men or women to conceptualise them. Moreover, the effects of propaganda and censorship made it especially difficult for women to deal with such emotional responses to the war, by disguising what had given rise to them and might have made sense of them. (Tylee 1990, 52)

This helps us understand why the nurses always tended to minimize the trauma they were going through, resulting in a sort of mechanism of self defence against the surrounding desolation they witnessed on the active front. If, before arriving in the East, the women were required to have their hair cut soldier-like, the physical transformation caused a change in their sensibility, which can be decoded in fragments of their writing in which patients are described as dehumanized or reduced to mere statistics. This militarization of speech was imposed tacitly on the fighting front, via censorship, but violently on the home front. Those who did not conform to the government's view on what should be revealed about the war and what should remain hidden from the masses were demonized in the eyes of public opinion, threatened with execution squads or heavy prison sentences (anti-war philosopher Bertrand Russell served 6 months in prison). Those on the home front were supposed to see only pre-approved and staged images or documentaries of the war hospitals or trenches (Tylee 1990, 53).

As in many cases on the front, the first meeting with death remains memorable. Ambulance driver Ysabel Birkbeck tells us of her first-hand experience in Dobruja on 4 October 1916: "My car was first to be loaded – two stretchers as well as one head case, delirious, and another with a

fractured thigh. The memory of it will always be there till I die...So we spent our first day at our work” (in Cahill, 48). The tragic component in the account stands in direct contrast with the nurses’ earlier attitudes in writing. Margaret Fawcett described the situation in the hospital the very next day as not being very different: “Quite into hospital with the ground floor cram jam with wounded. Already we have had three men die...We are really getting quite straight. It is too awful to go into the wards and hear the men groaning” (in Cahill, 48). There was a huge difference between the reality of hospital work and the nurses’ civilian ideas of it. Fawcett brilliantly describes the women’s waking up from their glorification of the front by things “getting quite straight”, suggesting that their impressions up to that moment had been wrong.

The cook of the SWH, Mary Milne, describes her difficult adaptation to life at the front upon the nurses’ arrival there in early October 1916: “We have pitched our tents in an open space just beyond the village, besides vast stretches of flat land – no country for war – there is simply no cover anywhere. Everywhere there are guns, camps, trenches, and other signs of war...” (in Cahill, 54). The hitherto domestic space the cook was used to was monopolized by elements of war she obviously had no liking for and her complaint is similar to her earlier comments on the military haircut that had been imposed on the women. The perspective of the cook is a detached but at the same time concerned one, as procuring food on the front was not an easy task. Besides the initial shock of working in the realm of warfare, the same Mary Milne tells us: “I have ripping good girls in the kitchen, and I don’t think any of us sat down all day...The Transport girls were wonderful – they made endless journeys in the dark, bringing in sad shattered men” (in Cahill, 48). This fragment is interesting because it shows the cook’s tendency to employ the feminine language of domesticity when referring to the women (all of whom are “girls”, no matter if they are helping in the kitchen or driving ambulances) or to the injured, who are “sad” so they retain their humanity, but are “shattered,” the effect of the war atrocities.

After experiencing bombardments and the violence of war for a more extended period, the language of trauma reduces in intensity, as destruction and suffering had slowly crept into becoming the reality of the day. Hallett (2010) similarly proposes that the tendency towards emotional shutdown when facing trauma is often found in the autobiographical writings of women who served on the front and that those who had years of nursing experience were more prone to emotionally shielding themselves from the suffering they witnessed, so that they no longer considered trauma a central point in their writings. For example, Sister Atkinson, who was one of the

older and more experienced nurse who travelled to the Romanian front in the First World War, described the bombing of Varnița in August 1917, adding that it was impossible for anyone to understand from a description what it was like to act under daily shell fire, in constant danger of shrapnel, which was falling all around the hospital camp. It became a kind of routine and the nurses became very interested in watching the shells burst in the air after hearing them flying through the air, and then burst again when they reached their targets (Cahill 278-279). Sister Atkinson opens the letter to those at home by expressing the dreariness of daily bombardments, almost as if the experience was one that could be so straightforwardly categorized as boring. Then, the medical sister accepts the unique character of the trauma of being shelled, but rather than insisting on the shocking experience she engages in the description of the nurses' quasi-scientific interest in observing the bursting of shells mid-air.

Conversely, the nurses who lacked experience and were not acquainted with life at the front were mostly inclined to describe and comment on what they witnessed (Hallett 2010, 71). For example, Mary Milne, who worked as a cook and had little experience in dealing with suffering, describes a bombardment from the time they were in Dobruja in the autumn of 1916. The intensity of her description stands in direct contrast with the previous one by Sister Atkinson. By using the adjective "diabolical" Mary Milne emphasized the infernal character of living on the front so the reader is (dis)placed into the hellish war from its commencement (Cahill 63). If, previously, the domestic space of her kitchen had been invaded by elements of warfare, during the bombardment the atmosphere itself is engulfed by shock. The image is apocalyptic, injured soldiers "came pouring" into the hospital like a deluge "as if the end of the world had come". All the elements take their part in the violence of the barrage, the earth and rubble are lifted aloft blocking the light, which is a symbol of desolate hope, and auditory imagery is employed to intensify the ordeal: shells are "whistling" while machine guns are "rattling", both sounds highlighting the unending menace of gunfire. Mary Milne's final observation on life at the front being "wonderful" (in Cahill, 63) is surprising, when considering the fiendish image of war that she had just painted, hence it could hardly evince the positive connotation of the adjective.

Instances similar to Mary Milne's description, in which the witness is overwhelmed by the experience of going through a shower of shells are not only found in the autobiographical literature of the First World War. The great external shock, or war neurosis, suffered by the observer, at first glance defies Freud's postulate in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that trauma is internally generated, but his assertion remains valid given that "the

symptoms of traumatic neurosis emerge only after a period of latency” (Stewart 2003, 9). The nurses’ accounts of their strenuous experience on the front were written when a certain period of time had passed, after which they evoked their shocking experiences in their diaries or letters from the front. Drawing on Freud’s dismissal of the fact that a traumatic experience assails the subject externally, Ruth Leys shows that trauma is not a simple consequence of a physiological event and is to a great extent influenced by each individual’s susceptibility, so similar traumatic events can result in different experiences of suffering (qtd. in Stewart 2003, 9-10).

The various manifestations of trauma found their way into the culture of the First World War. In Romanian culture, a similar description in which the individual is rendered powerless in face of the destructive nature of war is found in Camil Petrescu’s psychological novel, *The Last Night of Love, The First Night of War*. In one of the chapters in the second part that is suggestively entitled “God’s ground has covered us”, the author concludes, “There is nothing human left in us” (p. 200). One example that is similar in intensity to Mary Milne’s account of the bombing of the nurses’ hospital in Medgidia is Siegfried Sassoon’s description of the horror of witnessing military conflict in the poem *Attack* (1918). Unlike the nurses’ diary entries, which are written in the past tense, Sassoon’s poem describes the terror of assault in the present tense to give the reader the sense that he/she is also on the battlefield: “tanks creep”, “the barrage roars”, “men jostle” and “leave their trenches”. In Milne’s diary entry daylight turned into darkness with the onset of the artillery barrage. Similarly, in *Attack* the light of the rising sun is blocked, resulting in a vile daybreak, that is of a “wild purple” (line 2), whereas the sun appears “glowering”. The entire landscape reflects the terror felt by the soldiers, and smoke “shrouds” like a funeral vestment the “menacing scarred slope” (line 4). The same feeling of inescapability is induced in the autobiographical description, where devastation pervades the chthonian and aerial spheres and the wounded come “pouring” in a flood. All sense of hope is lost as the soldiers, “masked with fear” (line 9), are only advancing to meet their unquestionable death and become unwilling martyrs: “And hope, with furtive eyes and grappling fists,/ Flounders in the mud...” (lines 11-12). In the final verse, Sassoon underpins the confronting theme of his poem by directly addressing the Son of God, who himself was martyred: “...O Jesus, make it stop!”.

The similarity between Sassoon’s poetry and documentary sources has been noticed by Harold Bloom in *Poets of World War I*, where he asserts that Sassoon had the persistent determination to shape an unembellished, almost documentary, account of his experience at the front, allowing the inexperienced reader to comprehend what the poet had gone through on the

fighting front. The literary critic then adds that, in doing so, Sassoon “sacrificed the complexity of his feelings about the war in a single-minded campaign to valorize the common soldier as he attacked the noncombatant population” (Bloom 2003, 66). The value of Siegfried Sassoon’s poetry consisted in providing imageries that represent descriptions of actual battles, as realistically as possible, thus managing to convey singular feelings of living the horror of war. The nurses’ diaries, carefully dated, similarly represent inimitable descriptions of trauma that together coalesce into forming the tragic (his)story of the First World War. Passing through Medgidia, in early October 1916, ambulance driver Ysabel Birkbeck wrote how “the town was bombarded by nine aeroplanes and the streets were littered with dead and dying...” and how after waiting out the bombardment in the open streets as she could not bear the thought of being buried, “When I got up to crank the car, I found I had stopped her in a pool of blood” (in Cahill, 57). Around the same date, Yvonne Fitzroy described how “...the roar and flash of guns was incessant” (in Cahill, 63). Mary Milne adds a description of a shell-shocked patient – which are extremely rare on the Eastern Front – the nurses encountered while going through a retreat after the occupation of Medgidia:

...One man in the truck was evidently suffering from shell-shock. He moved restlessly around the crowded truck in delirium. Every now and then he screamed, and then shouted all the time...He got worse, and we soon saw he was quite raving mad. The difficulty was to keep him from stumbling over the bodies of other men on the floor. One man with a fractured thigh suffered terribly, and at any jolt he screamed. A man shot through the face cried quietly all night...The candle burned lower and lower – Little and I began to talk rather feverishly about other things, when the shell-shocked man jumped up, and as the candle gave its last flicker, he crumpled up, dead. (in Cahill, 79).

Shell-shock represents the most infamous type of trauma associated with the “Great War” and the one which elicited the greatest range of responses in the literature and memory of the First World War. Signs of shell shock included a plethora of neurological symptoms defined as “neurasthenia”, fits, jerking, gait, muscle rigidity, muteness and fugue. The term itself began to be widely used in 1915 following the publication of an article on it by Dr. Charles Samuel Myers in the *Lancet* medical journal, but the British public was already acquainted with it and other examples of “hysteria” or “weak nerves” conditions such as “railway spine”, a term that had been employed to denote the post traumatic suffering of victims of railroad accidents.

Recognizing the impact that this traumatic phenomenon had at the beginning of the 20th century, Fiona Reid states that “It was the shell-

shocked soldier who first began to dismantle the Victorian ‘stiff upper lip’...” (2010, 1), which supports the hypothesis in this subchapter that witnessing such horrific episodes altered, to some extent, the nurses’ consciousness and their vision of the war. Because the disorder was not well understood, military authorities were initially reluctant to accept shell shock as a medical condition and there were cases when soldiers who suffered from it were court-martialled for “cowardice” (Wessely 2006). War poets such as Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, who also spent time in the Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh being treated for “war neurosis”, were the first to depict the tragedy of this psychological affliction and are credited as the creators of the “poetry of shell shock” (see Hipp 2005), in which there is no place for heroism in representing the suffering of the shattered victims. Other important artists and writers that used shell shock to represent the war as grotesque or mad were Virginia Woolf, H. G. Wells, and D. H. Lawrence. It could be argued to a great extent that in the cultural impact of the Great War, shell shock probably stands as one of the most significant elements (Reid 2010, 72).

Analysing the responses of the nurses from all the fronts to witnessing such trauma, Christine Hallett finds that they were torn between the “society’s expectations that they maintain their *sang froid* in order to provide the best care to their patients and the drive to record/understand the suffering they witnessed” (2010, 71). The author concludes that women who volunteered to go to the front and were handling medical cases for the first time “conveyed the intensity of their own personal responses to suffering”, while the more experienced “Nurses appear more likely to have limited themselves to comments about their fatigue or rhetorical statements implicitly questioning the need for war, whilst offering descriptions of the actions they took to relieve suffering. Many of them go further, and attach meaning to suffering, offering what I refer to as ‘philosophies of trauma’” (Hallett, 2010, 81). The description of Mary Milne from the front in Dobruja matches the first category as the author met such trauma for the first time. Also, in a similar manner to the verses of the War Poets, the Serbian or Russian soldier who succumbed to shell shock does not appear as a fallen hero or a martyr, even though the nurses otherwise praised these soldiers’ courage and spirit of sacrifice, as presented in the previous subchapters. In Mary Milne’s account, shell shock dehumanizes the sufferer, expunging any chance of recovery. The victim “moved restlessly”, was in “delirium”, “screamed”, “shouted” continuously, was behaving in a “raving mad” manner, and was “stumbling” while other disfigured and injured patients screamed and cried. Ultimately, the shell shocked soldier passed away with

the last flicker of the candle: life, like light, was symbolically and concurrently extinguished.

5.4. The Trauma of the Retreat

Perhaps the most tragic part of their involvement on the front in Romania was the harrowing retreat out of Dobruja in the late autumn of 1916. By the middle of October 1916 Dobruja was practically lost. The Romanian politician, I.G. Duca, who was at the time the Minister of Education, noted in his memoirs that “the Russians did not care for Constanța, nor for Dobruja, their minds were set on the Alexeyev plan – the Siret river and the Danube, thus to shorten the general front” (Duca 1992, 27). The Russians and Serbians retreated towards Tulcea, whereas the Romanian troops headed to Hârșova and then Brăila, where they probably expected to receive reinforcements. Bulgarian and German units advanced quickly, while at the same time building fortifications in the already conquered localities. Nevertheless, only in January 1917 was all Dobruja occupied (Scurtu 2008, 111). On 29 October 1916 General Zayonchkovsky was removed from command and replaced by General Vladimir Victorovich Zakharov, who also held command of the troops on the left bank of the Danube, but whose inactivity allowed von Mackensen to deploy his troops on other sections of the front. He managed to withdraw most Russian and Serbian troops out of Dobruja by 5 January 1917, without significant casualties. During this infamous retreat the Romanians, Russians and Serbians lost 513 officers, 37,600 soldiers, 170 pieces of artillery, and huge amounts of war materials and ammunition (Scurtu 2008, 111).

The most intriguing part about the nurses’ descriptions of the retreat is that they were extremely affected by the suffering of the civil population and have engaged in what the historian Christine E. Hallett calls “philosophies of trauma”. The misery of the general population of Dobruja during the retreat in the winter of 1916 was exceptionally and dolefully recorded by the nurses of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals. This episode of collective traumatic neurosis they witnessed and participated in left ample emotional marks on the women. Bell, one of the ambulance drivers, was so affected by the harshness of the conditions that she lost her reason. Mary Milne was noticing on 9 November 1916: “Bell turned up while we were at lunch - poor girl, she certainly isn’t accountable for her actions. I wonder what will be done for her...” (in Cahill, 120). Ysabel Birkbeck provides details on her and the other nurses’ reaction to their experiences during the retreat: “When we all met later one saw on every face what we have since called ‘the mark of the Exodus’. We have all agreed not to talk about it. It’s

no use soaking one's mind in horror, especially if it's real, and we have all seen things we are trying to forget. No, we never, never shall" (in Cahill, 82). This confession is emblematic of the nadir of the Scottish women's worst moments on the Romanian front. The misery of going through the chaotic retreat affected all of them who were present there and, in order to suppress the psychological trauma, the nurses entered a pact of silence that excluded, it seems, references to it in their diaries. The expression "mark of the Exodus" carries important symbols: it refers to a huge displacement of population but by association with the Biblical exodus it also transmits a certain fatidic character, that the retreat had been decided by a higher force and would, after immeasurable suffering, bring about deliverance.

During the same retreat, Margaret Fawcett observes that "The worst part of the war is the lot of the women and children. All the villages we are passing through have had orders to evacuate within 25 hours" (in Cahill, 92). It seems that the urgency of the retreat was responsible for the ensuing chaos, but what exactly elicited such feelings of aversion towards the women's memory of what they had witnessed? More details were recorded by Ysabel Birkbeck in late October, 1916:

... The Transport brought stories that hardly bear repetition, of the wholesale loot and plunder of the retreating army, and of individual cases of brutality as they took their cars through the fleeing crowds. They were besieged by people who hung on to the already overloaded ambulances and implored to be taken up. One man seeing a car threw away a little baby and jumped on. They took the baby and its mother. Another worse case was of an officer who pulled a woman and her child off a peasant cart and kicked the man till he was forced to drive on. Another of their stories was of an old, old woman whom they found with a bundle and her dog, a refugee from Constanza, crying by the roadside, having given up all hope. Her horse had broken down. She offered her dog, a black demon, when Edwards landed her safely at Braila... (in Cahill, 82).

Dehumanization stands out as the main feeling behind the nurses' horror at what they saw during the retreat: the retreating soldiers abandon their role as protectors and become, instead, brutal plunderers, desperate civilians clinging on any means of transportation out of terror at the thought of being captured by the enemy, and family bonds are dissolved by the great wave of panic which takes hold of every human being. The great suffering in the nurses' depictions of the retreat out of Dobruja is caused by the unspeakable character of what the women witnessed. Elaborating on the relationship between such descriptions and criticism in the 20th century, in *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*, Michelle Balaev shows that "The unspeakable void became the dominant concept in criticism for imagining

trauma's function in literature. This classic model of trauma appealed to a range of critics working outside of poststructuralism as well due to the notion of trauma's irreversible damage to the psyche" (2014, 1). Therefore, accounts such as those of the nurses in which they recorded such terrifying dissociative experiences represent pioneering subjects for analysis.

The psychological scarring associated with the harrowing experience of going through the retreat obliterates the feelings of glory or excitement that were so prevalent in the Scottish women's diary excerpts before their arrival on the front. Mary Milne stoically observed on 22 October 1916 that "... We shall certainly be caught, but nobody cares what happens to us – it will look well in print, and I dare say that is one of the chief things..." (in Cahill, 64). This attitude towards one's fate reveals the nurses' atonement with their self, offering a different perspective on the war compared to their expectations and eagerness that they displayed at their entrance the war world. Their eagerness turned into worry and anxiety when the ambulance drivers were later than expected. Katherine Hodges recorded the anxious waiting for the ambulance drivers to return from one of their missions: "It was dark, pouring rain, the guns like incessant thunder all the time, the sky a red flare from horizon to horizon, and in the direction of the village where the cars had gone, flames. They were ages away, and it was awful wondering if they were all right...half an hour after they had left the village the enemy had shelled it to pieces..." (in Cahill, 64). The scenery is apocalyptic and the tumult of the war makes saving lives even harder.

In a journal entry on 20 October 1916, Nurse Ethel Moir describes the retreat as "a world of dust and flies" (in Cahill, 65). Apocalyptic imagery is again employed to describe the chaos encapsulated in the metaphor "the world of dust and flies" which suggests barrenness, desolation, hopelessness, decomposition. Around the same time Ethel Moir used the phrase above, Elsie Bowerman stated that, in Făurei, the "pandemonium reigned" (in Cahill, 70). On 23 October 1916 Yvonne Fitzroy offers a similar apocalyptic description of the retreat in Dobruja (between Gălbiori and Hârșova): "Behind we could see the shells exploding, and the sky was alight with the glow of burning villages. On our right a bigger glow showed the fate of Constantza, which fell today. The road was indescribably dilapidated, and crammed with refugees, troops, and transport...The peasants trudge along, going – one wonders where?..." (in Cahill, 72). After putting down these first details of the gruesome experience, Fitzroy states: "I wish that certain people living securely in a certain island could see a country in retreat – not an army only, but a whole country, women and children and beasts – it's not a pretty sight, but it's a very fine lesson" (in Cahill, 73). The nurses' final lesson for those at home is a unique occurrence in the Scottish

women's diaries on the Romanian front. Christine Hallett includes these types of discussions in the "philosophies of trauma" which appear in the writings of inexperienced, yet idealistic, nurses, who were working at the front as well as in the hospital ward for the first time in their lives.

Indeed, the experience of the occupation of Dobruja by the Central Powers was so terrifying for the local population that there was a real wave of terror that included assassinations and the plundering of the resources by German and Bulgarian troops (Scurtu 2008, 109). The Serbians were especially horrified at the thought of being captured by the Bulgarians, because of the hatred that existed between the two armies, dating back to the moment Bulgaria entered the war in 1915 (Barrett 2013, 80). The Bulgarians also treated the Romanian population harshly. There were rumours of atrocities committed by Bulgarian and Turkish troops as the civilians were treated cruelly with no regard for any established conventions of war (Kirişescu 1989, 383). Romanian property was arbitrarily divided among local Bulgarians living in Dobrudja, Romanian schools were closed down, Bulgarian became the official language of the region and names of localities were changed to highlight their Bulgarian origin, Romanian churches were robbed, a few civilians were murdered, children were ill-treated, women were raped, and Ovid's statue was symbolically removed, being reinstated only at the insistence of the German officers (Kirişescu 1989, 389).

Extreme crowding and the tragic loss of reason are the most representative themes in the nurses' terrified reports of the retreat out of Dobruja. In Evelina Haverfield's diary dated October 1916 there is mention of "Streams of troops, refugees, wagons, guns and animals of all sorts [that] were trailing along all day, and as darkness fell all converged on Caramurat; the streets or rather muddy lanes between houses soon became one mass of terrified humanity screaming, crying and cursing, cars and scared animals adding to the noise: scenes of terror and despair never to be forgotten" (in Cahill, 88).

In one of her letters, Katherine Hodges completes her colleague's horrific narrative with a follow up of what happened early the next day. The apocalyptic imagery hitherto employed turns into an infernal one: "it was Hell", "every conceivable thing" was converging on the same road, a whole nation was in retreat with the "Bulgarian Cavalry" at the back, wagon-drivers were feverishly whipping up the horses and "drove furiously" while all were screaming and running for their lives. Lois Turner offers a less emotional description of the retreat, insisting on the lack of discipline in the army during the evacuation, on how the Romanian army was in a state of panic and pushing in front all the time, which resulted in a continuous

exchange of profanities between them and the Russians (Cahill 90-91). For the more experienced Turner, it was shocking to see the soldiers “looting and getting drunk as lords” (in Cahill, 99), while the refugees could hardly advance anywhere with their slow ox-pulled wagons. Rather than augmenting the disaster to an apocalyptic or infernal scale, the more experienced nurse comments on the lawless depravity in the behaviour of the soldiers. Both types of representation of the retreat are very different from the nurses’ expectations before they arrived on the front. The “heroic pageantry of war” was considerably shaken by the women’s experience under shell fire and faded in the face of the unspeakable horrors witnessed during the retreat out of Dobruja, generating a displacement in the nurses’ representation of (them)selves in relation to the manly universe of the fighting front.

5.5. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to analyse the emotional changes that the nurses felt and the relation between their feelings and their view on the war. The hypothesis this chapter started with has been that the traumatic experiences of the women allowed them to see beyond the idealization of war into its tragic dimension, into the horror and the suffering that it caused.

Before arriving at the front, the Scottish women had expressed their eagerness to work, but at the same time they manifested reluctance in adopting the manly rules of military behaviour specific to the world of war. At first, the nurses seemed eager to adopt a type of discourse that Eric J. Leed calls “militaristic” and that he attributed to enthusiastic civilians who considered the Front “an arena of action and a process rather than a place or position...an authoritatively structured community rather than a society in which status was a matter of property in stark contrast to the plenum of meaningless objects that ‘saturated the air’ at home” (1979, 57). The stated intentions of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals organization were based on the reality that, in Britain, the nurses were ‘disenfranchised’ from the great affair of the War, therefore the young women’s enthusiasm for the front as a space where they could affirm their usefulness may be considered a factor for the traditionalistic/imperialistic discourse on war in their own voice. In this voice the protagonists minimalized and parodied elements of military pageantry to such an extent that in some of the early diaries the journey to the front appeared as an “adventure”, an exotic trip that was perilous enough to exert fascination, yet apparently devoid of real dangers.

Before long, the nurses realized that the reality of the front bore no resemblance to its propagandistic representation. The nurses who had little

experience in the hospital ward or at the front produced the most shocking descriptions of the ongoing bombardments and portrayals of men dying in the wards. Similarities can be found between such descriptions from the women's diaries and the "anti-war" verses written by the "War Poets", which shows that, apparently fictional, the descriptions actually reveal a great deal of reality. The more experienced nurses appeared more immune to suffering, but even so, they were overwhelmed by the harrowing embodiments of trauma, such as shell-shock or the general despair of the civil population during the retreat out of Dobruja. By abandoning the official and propagandistic view according to which the fighting front may be seen as glorious, they start questioning the monstrous and tragic face of warfare, a process of inquiry that the historian Christine E. Hallett calls "philosophies of suffering" (2010, 65).

CONCLUSION

The aim of this book has been to analyse the representation(s) of the different instances of war in the letters and diaries of the nurses and doctors of the Scottish Women's Hospitals who worked in Romania during WWI. During my research, I have followed five objectives: to provide a theoretical background for the analysis of nurses' journals and letters as sources of historical and literary importance, to analyse the manner in which the nurses referred to the realities they faced in the south-eastern Romanian towns they lived in for a while, to analyse the descriptions of the Romanian countryside they provided against the ideals of their Victorian and Edwardian cultural background, to investigate their representation of the soldiers of different nationalities, and finally, to explain the way trauma influenced the nurses' thoughts during their experiencing the front line.

The Scottish nurses detailed their experiences into journals through literary *diegesis* that included minute observations on their work, surroundings, different developments of the front as well as their own interpretations of, and impressions on, their work and the War's destructive character. Generally, the approaches to the Great War by women who witnessed and/or lived it have either been gender oriented or, simply, seen as *petit histoire(s)*. This research represents a complementary addition to such materials, through its contribution to reunite the experience of the women on the fighting front and to look at it from the double perspective of autobiographical writing and war testimony.

In *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), Paul Fussell advances the idea that the devastating conflagration of WW I has modified the aesthetic sensitivity of individuals. Those who witnessed the war were marked by its vainness and irrationality to such an extent that they lost any predisposition towards romanticism and idealisation and started perceiving the world in harsher terms. This was evident in the front-participants' diaries and in the letters they sent home, but also in the poems soldiers wrote and in their novels and essays. In a 1996 interview the American cultural and literary historian, Paul Fussell, stated that the Great War "was the initial twentieth-century shock to European culture. By the time we got to the Second World War, everybody was more or less used to Europe being badly treated and people being killed in multitudes. The Great War introduced those themes to Western culture, and therefore it was an immense

intellectual and cultural and social shock” (Fussell 1996). While Paul Fussell’s book has proved ground-breaking in changing the way cultural historians were treating the Great War, his work completely ignores the voices of women.

The primary sources I have used in my research include a collection of diaries and letters of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals personnel from the Imperial War Museum edited by Audrey Fawcett Cahill (*Between the Lines: Letters and Diaries from Elsie Inglis’s Russian Unit*, 1999), who is a descendant of one of the Scottish Nurses, as well as the individually published diary of Yvonne Fitzroy (*With the Scottish Nurses in Romania*, 1918), and the autobiographical work of Ishobel Ross (*The little grey partridge: First World War diary of Ishobel Ross*, 1988). Besides, I have used the articles written by Mary Milne, Elsie Inglis and Mary Henderson about their experience on the front at the time in Blackwoods, The English Woman and The Common Sense. The major of my research has been Audrey Fawcett Cahill’s collection of diaries and letters. Although it includes the most detailed accounts of the Romanian front during Great War written by British witnesses, it has been totally ignored by Romanian historians up to now.

The secondary sources which have been essential for this book include Leah Leneman’s monographs, *In the Service of Life: The Story of Elsie Inglis and the Scottish Women’s Hospitals* (1994) and *Elsie Inglis: Founder of battlefield hospitals run entirely by women* (1998). These two books contain essential details from the life and activity of Dr. Elsie Inglis and the charitable medical organization she established, including information on the decision-making process that brought a SWH unit and its leader to Romania in the autumn of 1916. Other important sources in this respect are articles by Jane McDermid (2007, 2008) and Lawrence Margot’s volume, *Shadow of Swords: A Biography of Elsie Inglis* (1971). Christine Hallett’s pioneering work, *Veiled Warriors: Allied Nurses of the First World War* (2014), has been very useful in opening the possibility of identifying relationality or contradictions between the Scottish Nurses’ accounts from the Romanian front and their colleagues’ from all over Europe. Similarly, Margaret R. Higonnet’s *Lines of Fire: Women War Writers of World War I* (1999) served as a model for my analysis. These sources give very little importance to the nurses’ experiences on the Eastern front (if they mention the Romanian front at all). Therefore, for details on the situation in Romania during the SWH’s activity I have resorted to historians of the Romanian front such as Constantin Kirilăscu, with his well-known *Istoria Razboiului pentru întregirea României: 1916-1919* [The History of the War for the Reunification of Romania: 1916-1919], published in 1989 and Michael B.

Barrett with his challenging perspectives in *Prelude to Blitzkrieg: The 1916 Austro-German Campaign in Romania* (2013).

As to the theoretical background, in order to outline the features of New Historicism I have started from Stephen Greenblatt's *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* (1982). Essential theoretical sources included Hayden White's *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973) and *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism* (1978), where the author's theory that writing history is a process that is similar to literary writing is presented and explained. For the field of autobiographical studies, I have referred to scholars such as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (*Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2001), Bill Roorbach (*Writing Life Narratives*, 1999) and Estelle Jelinek (*Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, 1980).

In Chapter One, entitled *History, Diary Writing and New Historical Discourse*, I have proposed a New Historicist approach as outlined by its founders as a mode of doing literary criticism that relies on multi-disciplinarity and inter-textuality. Most importantly, New Historicist critics have aimed to re-read and re-settle excluded texts, such as war diaries and letters in the category of historical documents. As war diaries as autobiographical sources had been placed at the border between literature and history, Hayden White's theory of *metahistory* allows the consideration of these texts as historical sources. In the theoretical part of the book, the proposition has been advanced that the dialogical character of women's war diaries as both literary and historical sources does not exclude but augment their value as emblematical sources on the Great War. Hayden White's and Northrop Frye's theories, mainly the introduction and description of the four modes of *emplotment* (Romance, Comedy, Tragedy and Satire) have helped me in distinguishing between the Romantic (traditional) and Tragic (subversive) ways of depicting the Great War in the nurses' diaries and letters from the Romanian front.

The second theoretical line on which the research has been grounded on follows the specific categories of journals, diaries and letters, texts generally considered to be at the border between history and literary discourses. Within the category of journals, the theoretical analysis undertaken has identified a few types such as witnessing, trauma narratives, and travel narratives (Smith and Watson, 193). I have considered the first two types of journals (witnessing and trauma narratives) to be of special interest in my research, given the overwhelming experiences the nurses have undergone in their venture on the Eastern Front and the traumatic events they lived during the war.

In Chapter Two, entitled *Urban Cartographies in the Scottish Nurses' Diaries*, I have looked at how Romanian cities and towns were evoked and represented in the diaries and letters of the SWH nurses and doctors and how the tragedy of their fate was illustrated by the nurses. The working hypothesis has been modelled after assumptions of scholars such as Robert Alter, who recognizes in urban spaces the ability to exert changes on an individual's self and his perception of time and space as well as of the individual's autonomy (2005, xi). Another important feature of the way urban spaces were constructed at the turn of the century lies in the multiplicity of the city's role in the life on its people because it may appear as a place of confusion and damnation, or, conversely, as a place of redemption and excitement (Preston and Simpson-Housley 2002, 4). These multiple layers have been highlighted in the Scottish nurses' descriptions of Romanian urban localities.

The accounts about Constanța, for example, have confirmed that at the beginning of the 20th century the town exercised fascination with its visitors and seemed as attractive as a Mediterranean destination such as Monte Carlo. Brăila, like Constanța, elicited the romantic imagination of the British medical women, who were charmed by this Danube port town; however, they were also shocked by the urbanites' complete ignorance of the suffering and horror in the neighbouring Dobruja. Medgidia, where the nurses established their first hospital, became a kind of metaphor for dreadful location that was bound to face the tragic fate of occupation by enemy troops. To exemplify, when the nurses encountered the desolate plateaus of Northern Dobrogea they thought the location had a "Medgidia feel" about it, therefore associating the name of the town with imminent disaster. The descriptions of Iași provided the most startling example of multiplicity. In the early days of the war, it is seen as a superb town with a bustling and picturesque population, while a few months later the spectre of war changed Iași to a town where plague and typhus were rampant and animal corpses were rotting in the streets, creating a general atmosphere of decay and degeneration. Another interesting detail concerning the significance of the cities with the nurses has been the frequent reference they made to the towns Constanța, Tulcea, Galați and Brăila, no matter where they were, whether in Bessarabia or South Moldova. In their perception, the militaristic context they were part of did not mean fortresses or trenches (which, in Dobruja at least, were so shallow that they were of no use), but when speaking of developments on the frontline the nurses often wondered whether Romania still held the towns they had visited and had grown attached to.

In the third chapter, *Rural Space(s) and War*, the work hypothesis has been that the aesthetic representation of the nurses' depiction of the Romanian countryside is highly comparable with the 19th century Romantic and Victorian tradition, which featured the Sublime, the Picturesque and the Beautiful. I have also distinguished between representations of *tamed* Nature and *wild* Nature, and employed the concept of *humanized landscape* (introduced by Fletcher 2002, 498) in regard to nature portraiture. Passing through Dobruja, Wallachia, Bessarabia and Moldova, the nurses created romanticized descriptions of the vast surroundings that were dotted with ancient ruins or picturesque village houses. Rural locations were often depicted as plagued by war. This is seen in the nurses' short descriptions of Muntenia, which tragically describe the destruction of the bucolic countryside, the nurses witnessing the war's caustic side. Unlike their reports of towns, in which the nurses associated calmness and serenity with the failure of the Romanians to take the war effort seriously, rural locations were spared this judgement; on the contrary, the villages were often rendered as victims of war. Feelings of isolation are evinced in descriptions of the vast fields of Bessarabia, which accommodated the Scottish women for more than half a year. The Bugeac region sometimes appeared as gloomy and dark, a dehumanized landscape. In Moldova, one of the worst bombardments they witnessed took place in Varnița, which produced a change in the nurses' descriptions from the Romantic to the Tragic register. The landscape lost its picturesque character in favour of the elements highlighting the horror of war: typhus epidemics, hosts of deceased domestic critters and dehumanized victims. Since many villagers' houses were abandoned, the Scottish women frequently made use of them to settle in. As it was difficult for the nurses to identify specific countryside locations, in their descriptions they simply referred to them in relation to the Danube, which became an emblematic referential *topos*.

Chapter Four, entitled *Representations of Soldiers*, has drawn on the idea that war and trauma have a special role in the shaping of identities, whether we consider national identities or individual ones, and that the hardships of war tend to highlight the friction between different groups. According to Hayden White, the writer who engages himself/herself in the tragic tone positions himself as a mediator at the border between two abysses, two types of culture or types of order, one that is ascending, the other one descending, believing that (s)he is working in the service of good as (s)he sees it (White 1973, 220-228). In constructing their representation(s) of Romanian troops, the Scottish women were influenced by the disaster on the Dobruja front, resulting in a rather negative image in which they mixed elements of Byzantinism with Balkanism, in contrast to the official position

of the government that greatly valued the “gallant little ally” for choosing to fight on the side of the Entente. On the other hand, Serbian soldiers and officers appeared heroic and brave owing to their great sacrifice on the front, which to them was more honourable than the way the Romanian soldiers fought. Actually they had the opportunity to meet Romanian soldiers on the eastern front, in Dobruja, where they were caught in chaotic retreat.

The Scottish women held strong positive views on the Russian troops, whom they described as efficient and whose masculinity they praised besides other allegedly typical, Russian features such as stoicism, hardiness, simplicity as well as inclination towards singing and merrymaking. Initially sent to the Eastern Front to aid the Serbian Division that had been dispatched to Dobruja by Russian War Minister Alekseyev, the nurses’ opinion of the Romanian troops copied the Serbians’ and Russians’. Still, the women sympathised with the simplicity of the Romanian soldiers, actually blaming the Romanian officers and politicians, their lassitude, for the defeat on the front they witnessed. They labelled some of the Romanian officers as “Boscophile” (German-loving). By far the most positive image in the Scottish nurses’ war diaries was that of the Western troops (British and French) whom they encountered on the Romanian front, who appeared to be saviours or even “crusaders” on a front where, apparently, there was little strategic perspective and order. Claire M. Tylee (1990) reveals that this view which the Scottish nurses shared and described may indicate their Victorian roots or the Edwardian model of military affairs they were more familiar with. Whether friend or foe, the wounded were treated equally by the nurses, which reveals their humane attitude to people in general and contrasts with the official propaganda that dehumanized the enemy and represented him as barbarous “Hun”. In their reference to the enemy, the nurses use the word “Bulgar”, once again misrepresenting and stereotyping the other.

In Chapter Five, *Elated and Traumatized Self(ves)*, the focus has been on the horrific images witnessed by which the nurses changed their initially optimistic discourse on war. In his study on the memory of the Great War, Paul Fussell identifies recurring elements such as miracles and perils, ritual, magic numbers, a magical, otherworldly landscape, social arrangements that culminate in pompous ceremonies, the constant training of the protagonist to prove himself against danger, and the fact that the protagonist and his allies often constitute a group of solidarity or “community of the elect” (Fussell 1975, 135). Looking for these elements in the nurses’ narratives, I have identified them in their attitude towards the war before they reached the front. The situations of shock they faced caused them to abandon the “heroic pageantry of war” (in Claire M. Tylee terms) and to replace it with a language of trauma that desisted in intensity after

witnessing bombardments and after patients with horrible injuries became ordinary events in their lives. The younger nurses, less acquainted with the hardships of their role, wrote very expressive accounts of bombardments and other traumatic situations. Those who were more experienced shielded the emotion that rose from such experiences and maintained their *sang froid*, performing their duties exemplarily. Instead, they seemed to have engaged in what historian Christine E. Hallett calls “philosophies of trauma”, meaning questioning the necessity of all the destruction they were witnessing and asking themselves whether the war was really necessary. The examples of journal entries where the destruction caused by the war raised questions regarding the pointlessness of warfare were mostly found in the accounts from the retreat out of Dobruja in late October 1916. The chaos and suffering witnessed on that occasion by the Scottish women left ample marks in their writing. One of the nurses, Yvonne Fitzroy, rhetorically expressed her desire that it would be an excellent lesson if some people on a certain island witnessed the horror of an entire country’s retreat (Fitzroy, 51). The analysis undertaken has drawn to the conclusion that that the traumatic existence on the fighting front has shifted the nurses’ imaginary representation of war to a great extent from the romantic and heroic image of the conflict to the more realistic, tragic image of the war’s irreconcilably destructive character.

The different levels of analysis – the representations of the urban space(s), the descriptions of the countryside and rural space, the minute observation of soldiers and of the war disarray have led to the conclusion that in their war narratives (in journals diaries and letters), the nurses’ discourse changed from an initial Romantic literary impetus into the tragic contemplation of utter destruction. Through my research I have reached the deeper significance of the autobiographical literature left by the Scottish who travelled to the Romanian front by comparing their perception of the war (mostly based on their nineteenth-century cultural background and understanding of the necessity of war from the perspective of large empire) to the reality and effects of the people who fight in it by observing orders they do not fully understand. If the Victorian background laid the mark on the women’s writings of what they called a “world of distant rumbling,” the actual facts disclosed its tragic effects.

My research contributes to the enrichment of the cultural history of the Great War through the analysis of the autobiographical sources that have been ignored for a long time because they were written by women and because the events on the Romanian front that the Scottish women recorded were given less importance within the cultural memory of the Great War by comparison with, for example, the battle of the Verdun or Ypres on the

Western front, or the Bolshevik Revolution on the Eastern front. The importance and innovative character of this research lies in the fact that I have included diaries and letters from one of the least studied fronts of the First World War with a view to re-integrating women's voices into its memory (an approach to the war supported by Claire M. Tylee since the 1970s). This is significant especially as the front on which most women were active during the Great War was the Eastern one. The historiographical myth of the naïve but dedicated, nurturing and motherly nurses standing by the bedside of injured soldiers, commiserating with their fate but otherwise being locked in "silent witnessing" may have been reinforced as a side effect of the desire of second- and third-wave feminists to write women back into the history of the Great War on the Western front. The anecdote of the reply received by Dr. Elsie Inglis at the War Ministry, "My dear lady, go home and sit still", is revelatory in this case, and it may even be possible that, by repeating it, gender studies scholars have only contributed to the perpetuation of the stereotype that that answer carried. During the 1970s, Claire M. Tylee and other enthusiasts of women's writing from the First World War were eager to employ the model introduced by Paul Fussell in order to reveal the – hidden by prejudice – feminine role in writing about the cultural image of the conflagration. Though Fussell, who fought in the Second World War in 1944 in France as a 20-year-old lieutenant with the 45th Infantry Division and was wounded in the battle, was highly praised for his study on the importance of the cultural representation(s) of the war in poetry, journals or novels, he was criticized for limiting his analysis to the literature written by men. Fussell's single reference to literature written by men in his *The Great War and Modern Memory*, may have been caused by the fact that women were largely absent on the Western front the focus of his work.

On the Eastern front during the First World War (Romania, Serbia and Austria) women are known to have fought actively, as, for example, Ecaterina Teodoroiu²⁴, Sergeant Milunka Savić²⁵ or Viktoria Savs²⁶.

²⁴ Ecaterina Teodoroiu (15 January 1894 – 3 September 1917) first worked as a nurse in the Great War but decided to become a soldier after witnessing the death of her brother, a sergeant in the Romanian Army. She died during a counterattack, hit by machine-gun fire on 3 September 1917 in the Muncelu-Varnița area.

²⁵ Milunka Savić (10 August 1895 – 5 October 1973), Serbian World War I heroine, remains in the memory of the Serbs as possibly the most decorated female in the history of military confrontations.

²⁶ Viktoria Savs (1899-1979) entered the Austro-Hungarian Army pretending to be a man but had to accept demobilization and retreat to the Red Cross when her gender was revealed during surgery on the front.

Moreover, in Finland, more than 2,000 women were sent to the front as soldiers in the organization known at the time as the *Female Red Guards*²⁷. A British newspaper wrote that among the combatants in the battle for the Dardanelles there was a Turkish girl sniper who acquired as trophies from her victims thirty identification discs and a substantial sum in pounds sterling²⁸. In Russia, the *Women's Battalions* (who included a Naval Detachment!) were formed during the spring of 1917 and performed remarkably well in the Civil War between the Bolsheviks and the Whites (Imperial loyalists), just like the other women who fought in the Bolshevik faction (Reese 2000, 17).

The diffusion of the cultural model of the Western emancipated and independent woman at present obstructs the reality of the fact that, during the cataclysm that shook Europe exactly one century ago, women's abilities were more valued and actually used in Eastern Europe, while in Western Europe women were confined to passive roles such as factory workers, reporters or nurses in home hospitals where orderlies and nurses had the simple role of providing comfort, but not treatment. Although my book does not rely on sources written by the women who actually fought on the Eastern front, it is a small step in the direction of restoring the Eastern front to its deserved higher standing in the field of cultural representations of the Great War in women's writings. Scholars who do not have a political agenda related to feminism, such as Christine Hallett, author of *Nurse Writers of the Great War*, have acknowledged the efforts of the SWH in Romania by making reference to articles published as part of this research.

For furthering my research, looking deeper into the biographies of the women who visited Romania in 1916-1917 as part of the SWH mission provides a stimulating work hypothesis given the scarcity of such inquiries in relation to nurse writers of the Eastern Front (one notable exception is represented by Jane McDermid's study dealing with the attitude of the Scottish women in Russia towards the Revolution). Sidonie Smith, in *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, shows that defining identities such as social class, nation, religious community, and ethnic group of the subject of an autobiography interfere with the written text because representations

²⁷ This paramilitary organization was active during the 1918 Civil War in Finland as allies of the Russian Bolsheviks. However, they Red Guards quickly lost ground in Finland and about one third of these women were subject to execution and imprisonment.

²⁸ *Dominion*, Volume 8, Issue 2569, 17 September 1915, reads: "A territorial from the Dardanelles says that a Turkish girl was discovered sniping. She had round her neck thirty identification discs of the men she had shot and fifty pounds in English money".

of subjectivity are always in dialogue with emerging cultural formations (2001, 83). Thus, future research dealing with the letters and diaries of the Scottish nurses who visited Romania during the Great War could lay greater emphasis on the background of the writers with a view to establishing a connection between their stories and their life experiences. Given the influx of recent studies dealing with feminism/gender studies, there exist several biographical studies of well-known women war writers such as Vera Brittain or even of Dr. Elsie Inglis, the commanding medical officer of the SWH mission in Romania, but scholars have largely ignored the lives of more casual writers, who though have not achieved fame and public recognition, may make suitable subjects worth of discussing and writing about.

As for the rest of the story of the SWH, although the nurses' leader, Dr. Elsie Inglis, wished her medical unit to continue caring for the soldiers in Romania, this was impossible because of her poor health. Having arrived in Newcastle upon Tyne on 25 November 1917, Dr. Elsie Inglis passed away the next day, not before putting on her uniform, decorations, and having said goodbye to her protégés, the Serbian soldiers. Dr. Elsie Inglis had been suffering from cancer in a very advanced stage. Although she never named this disease in her correspondence (at the beginning of the 20th century it was a taboo subject), her staff noticed the dramatic changes in her state of health beginning with the spring of 1917. It is remarkable how, considering her terrible medical condition, she was able to further her organization's goals until the final moments of her life. At the memorial service held in Westminster Dr. Elsie Inglis was honoured by members of the cabinet, diplomats of the Foreign Office, leaders of the Red Cross and from the Army Medical Services, representatives of the embassies of France, Italy, Russia, delegates of Serbia, Belgium and Romania, alongside high clergy and officers and other distinguished personalities.

Her work and the SWH's efforts were also commemorated in Romania, by the local interwar press in Constanța, for example, which often remembered the efforts of the Scottish Women's Hospitals organization when paying homage to the Serbian Volunteer Division, a unit that suffered immense casualties on the front in Dobruja, honoured as martyrs by both the Romanians and the Russian allies. Such examples include their mention by I. Rudici, "In jurul solemnității de la Medgidia [Regarding the solemn events of Medgidia]", published in *Marea Neagră* [The Black Sea] September 27, 1926, as well as in articles from *Dacia*, September 4, 1926, September 9, 1926) and *Dobrogea Jună* [Young Dobruja], September 4, 1926. Similar articles were usually published at the beginning of September because they were written in remembrance of the disaster of the Battle of

Turtucaia (2–6 September 1916); in 1926 they had commemorated a decade since that tragic Romanian defeat during the Great War happened.

The Romanian interwar press emphasized the necessity of glorifying the efforts of the Scottish Women's Hospitals together with the sacrifice of the Serbian Volunteer Division. In their honour a monument was erected in Medgidia which reminds the passers-by of the "heroic acts of these noble daughters of Albion" whose devotion saved from "certain death" the lives of thousands of young Serbians, Romanians and Russians (*Marea Neagra*, September 27, 1926,1). Efforts by the official authorities to recognize the SWH's dedication to saving lives during the Great War have been very slow, almost non-existent until recently. Following the turmoil of the Second World War and the painful transformation Romania went through during the Communist period (1947-1989), the memory of the Scottish women's mission during the Great War seemed to have been lost. After 1989, the reorientation of Romania's culture towards the West as well as the re-establishment of friendly relations with Serbia which included annual memorial events at the Serbian Heroes' Monument in Medgidia have slowly led to the re-emergence of the forgotten story about the Scottish Women as part of the commemoration of the Great War in Dobruja. The Romanian National History Museum in Bucharest, for example, has included the efforts of the Scottish nurses in the celebratory volume *Romania in the Great War* (2016) and in the series of exhibitions it organized in 2016 to mark the centenary of Romania's entry in the First World War. The recognition of Dr. Elsie Inglis's and the SWH's work has materialized in the solemn presentation and installation of a memorial plaque in honour of Dr. Elsie Inglis and her unit at the Serbian Heroes' Monument in Medgidia, highlighting the crucial role of these women in making possible the fashioning of a common memory of international collaboration during the Great War between Romania, Great Britain, Serbia and Russia on the Eastern Front.

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