

Emma Trebel

Prof. Furgol

CORE World History

10 February 2017

An Evening at Le Canard C line

Rosalie Fauchoux joins the war effort in 1916 as a nurse stationed on the Western front. She was born and raised in Jugon-les-Lacs, a small farming village in the region of C tes-du-Nord in northwestern France.¹ After her father's death from pneumonia² in the winter of 1916, her family struggles to get by on her mother's meager income as a midwife and washwoman³. Desperate to both escape the drudgery of her provincial life and keep her family afloat⁴, Rosalie volunteers as a nurse as soon as she is able, on her 21st birthday⁵ in June of 1916. She is assigned to stationary hospital No. 9 in Rouen⁶, located approximately 70 km east of Le Havre and 100-150 km west of the front.

The hospital in Rouen, opened in 1915, was the first of four major French hospitals

¹ Although its department has been renamed C tes-d'Armor, Jugon-les-Lacs was, and still is, a real, functional town in this area of France. One of its most prominent historical farms, Ferme d'Antan, remains open as an "ecomuseum" that preserves the daily life of its villagers in the earth 20th century ("Ferme D'Antan").

² According to the CDC, pneumonia and influenza were the second leading causes of American deaths in 1915 and 1916. France does not offer these types of records, but it is well-documented that these diseases were also leading causes of death in European countries prior to the discovery of penicillin (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

³ France's birth rate before the war (1901-1913) was approximately 20.6 births per 1000 inhabitants per year. During the war (1914-1918), this average plummeted to 12.5 births per 1000 inhabitants, reaching its lowest point in 1916 with only 9.6 births per 1000 inhabitant ("Demography - Rate of Birth per 1,000 Inhabitants").

⁴ Nurses were paid a starting salary of £20 per year with a maximum salary of £30 per year. In the currencies of the time, this equates to about 100 francs or \$340 in today's money ("Regulations Governing").

⁵ Nurses were required to be 21-48 years old for "home service" and 23-42 for "foreign service" ("Regulations Governing").

⁶ This hospital is noted by Mark Harrison as the "prototype VD hospital." Although opened by the British army, it seems to have been operated by and have served a mix of primarily French and British individuals (Harrison 140; Ministry of Pensions).

specifically designated for treating venereal diseases⁷. Neighboring hospitals, including Scottish General No. 58, Australian General No. 2, and Sick Sisters' General Hospital No. 9 were not VD specific⁸. Rosalie's duty, aside from general patient care, is administering daily injections of mercury⁹ to the syphilis patients in her section.

Gently flicking her last syringe with callused fingers and unmanicured nails, Rosalie watched intently as small pockets of air rose to the surface of the oily gray concoction¹⁰. Bracing herself for his inevitable flinch, she swiftly pierced her patient's back with the needle, sending the medicine into his scapular muscles¹¹. A sharp hiss escaped his teeth as the surrounding skin began to smart with pain¹² while she carefully collected her trusty vial of mercury and lanolin¹³. Wiping her brow with the back of her wrist, Rosalie left his bedside and headed towards the nurses' station for her ward. Another grueling shift, another dragging day had come to a close. She returned her equipment and briefly glanced over her patient notes left for the girls on the night shift. Tomorrow was her much-needed day of rest, a full day without patient duties or shifts. Far more rest days had been promised over her tenure at the hospital than she had received, as someone's infection always seemed to worsen the day before or of her day off.

⁷ See the above footnote; information is from (Harrison 140).

⁸ These facilities are listed by both the British Ministry of Pensions and Chris Baker of "The Long, Long Trail" site (Ministry of Pensions; Baker).

⁹ Mercurial injections, inunctions, or oral mercury were prescribed five to ten times weekly for patients infected with syphilis (McDonough).

¹⁰ A syphilis treatment manual describes "Captain Adam's formula" for injections as "the best painless Grey Oil"(McDonough).

¹¹ According to the same manual, injections could be performed in the buttocks or scapular muscles (McDonough).

¹² Due to the toxicity of mercury, patients often experienced pain or abscessing at the injection site (McDonough).

¹³ Captain Adam's formula calls for 20 parts mercury, 30 parts anhydrous lanoline, 2 parts chlorbutol, and 100 parts liquid paraffin (McDonough).

Rosalie breathed in the cooling September air as she made her way back to the bell tent she shared with Irene¹⁴. Nearing the tent, she could faintly make out multiple silhouettes within by the light of the lanterns¹⁵. She ducked through the canvas flap, unnoticed by her tentmate along with their neighbors, Celeste and Delia, and Agatha from across the way. The four were huddled together conspiratorially, enveloped in a cloud of excited whispers and darting gazes. Their bubble of imagined isolation burst with a cautious “hello?” from the newcomer. Eight wide eyes and four pairs of pressed lips swiveled her way as Rosalie asked, “What’s all the fuss about?” Rising from her seat on the worn cot, Irene questioned, “Tomorrow is your off day, yes?” Upon an affirmative nod and a beat of silence, she and the three nurses behind her burst into a fit of giggles. “We’re going into town tonight,” tittered Delia, “to Le Canard Câline¹⁶!”

Rosalie blankly blinked at her friends before finally placing the name with the legacy of the establishment. “Why on Earth would you *choose* to step foot in such a vile place?” she exclaimed. “Aren’t you curious as to how all the men land themselves here?” answered Agatha with a cocked eyebrow and mischievous smirk. “Whether or not the girls are in-house tonight, the *estaminet* is bound to have some pastries and good drink,” Celeste chirped, “I’ve heard they brought in a piano, and often they sing¹⁷!” Silent, Rosalie’s mind hung on that final word. The last time she’d heard music seemed like a lifetime ago; there was little spare time or energy for

¹⁴ Round “bell tents” with boarded bottoms were used as nurses’ accommodations by many hospitals in the beginning of the war. With a pair to a tent or later, four to a Nissen hut, these living spaces were described by nurse Olive Dent of hospital No. 9 in Rouen as “absolutely delightful in summer and very cosy in winter with the aid of stoves” (Light).

¹⁵ Issued equipment lists instructed nurses to bring their own lanterns and oil stoves. Some locations provided additional sources of heat and light for the tents, but at minimum nurses were provided up to a pint of oil per day to fuel these devices from homes (Light; Korting).

¹⁶ This name is fictional, but Rouen was certainly host to several such establishments (Spirit of Remembrance; Makepeace).

¹⁷ The *estaminets*, French alcohol-serving cafés not unlike a tavern or pub, were known for their hearty food, plentiful variety of beverages, and rousing entertainers. Many were frequented by local prostitutes looking for clients (Levine 181-183).

such pleasantries here¹⁸. Gnawing on the inside of her cheek, she gave in to the overwhelming temptation of hearing music again and agreed to join them with a playful roll of her eyes. After exchanging their work uniforms for something relatively more clean and fastening stray sections of hair, the five women set off towards the center of town and Le Canard Câlène.

The brisk evening air left their cheeks flush with color by the time they arrived. Heaving the sturdy wooden door open, the nurses were immersed in the raucous environment that pervaded the warm, dimly lit space. Groups of men in dingy, weathered blue and green uniforms were scattered throughout a main seating area, while a few solo bar-goers and pairs contested for the attention of the barkeep up front. About half a dozen or so young women, many of them appearing younger than Rosalie herself, were engaged in lightheartedly flirtatious conversation with an assortment of gentlemen. Their rouged lips and gaudy, lacy dresses with pockets jingle-jangling with coins confirmed their suspicions: these were the prostitutes. Trying not to stare (with varied success), they slipped into a vacant table along the side wall and sent Agatha to fetch a round of coffee¹⁹. Although displeased with the underwhelming nature of this order, she agreed it would be better to keep their wits about them, and sauntered off to the bar in search of a pot.

The cheerful piano across the room plinked out an unfamiliar yet comforting tune, but could not fully mask the noisy footsteps clomping up and down the concealed staircase²⁰. With her back to the wall, Rosalie silently sipped from a chipped mug and observed the whisperings of

¹⁸ At some facilities, it was not unusual for medical staff to work sixteen-hour shifts (King).

¹⁹ In addition to alcoholic beverages, *estaminets* also served tea, coffee, and the like (Glenn 181; Holmes 181).

²⁰ Many *estaminets* affiliated with prostitutes had rooms upstairs or a brothel nearby to facilitate such activity (Ashurst 182-3).

couples preceding the furtive exchange of francs²¹ and a trip up the stairs. The missing girls were shortly replenished by new ones from above, often followed by a male guest on his way out the door. Although distinct in their stylings, they seemed nauseatingly homogenous in their mannerisms: the light caresses on the arm, fluttering eyelashes, and tinkling peals of forced, but well-performed, laughter. Their leader, so to speak, seemed to be the practically Amazonian woman with vibrantly red ringlets of hair that cascaded onto a fitted, mossy green dress. The patrons called for her by name as she chatted whilst topping off their drinks, and she always kept an eye on the door, giving pointed, directive glances at her fellow workers when a new customer came inside.

Forty-five minutes or so after their entrance, the nurses had settled in enough that they didn't feel *completely* sore-thumb-ish. However, a shift in the merrymaking around them jolted them out of their element. As the jolly pianist began a lively new song, all the men whooped and hollered as they clambered to their feet in preparation. The red-headed girl was pulled into the center of their circle, and she struck a pose as one last introductory note hung in the air. She began a well-practiced little dance as the men bellowed out, "There is a tavern way down in Brittany / Where weary soldiers take their liberty / The keeper's daughter whose name is Madelon / Pours out the wine while they laugh and carry on!" (Bousquet²²). At this, she gave a little shimmy and grandly mimed pouring out the wine from her pitcher. They continued singing, "And as the wine goes to their senses / Her sparkling glance goes to their hearts!" (Bousquet) with exaggerated swoons, "Their admiration so intense is / Each one his tale of love imparts"

²¹ Prostitutes often charged between two francs, as noted by Craig Gibson in "Sex and Soldiering" and five francs, as described by Corporal George Ashurst, per client (Gibson 555; Ashurst 183).

²² This song, "Quand Madelon," was originally written in French. However, to preserve its meaning, the published English version as translated by Alfred Bryan has been used.

(Bousquet). The music climbed to a higher gear with, “She coquettes with them all / But favors none at all” and loudly punctuated each syllable of, “And here’s the way they banter ev’ry time they call!” (Bousquet).

“O Madelon,” they cried, “you are the only one / O Madelon, for you we’ll carry on/ It’s so long since we have seen a miss / Won’t you give us just a kiss?” (Bousquet). Their singing halted as the lady in the middle, their own personal ‘Madelon’ took over, called, “But Madelon, she takes it all in fun/ She laughs and says, ‘You see it can’t be done / I would like, but how can I consent--’” and they all chimed in to end the chorus, “When I’m true to the whole regiment!” (Bousquet). After another equally lively verse and reiteration of the chorus, they collapsed into fits of laughter and returned to their seats. With weary, contented sighs the mood in the *estaminet* began to mellow out again as the nurses continued to look on, perplexed yet quite amused.

Intent on keeping his customers captive and drinking for as long as possible, the barkeep shouted, “Who’s got new poetry in them, eh? Shall we do some recitations²³?” His suggestion was met with cheers as the first one, a gentleman in green, stood up. “From a British victory not twenty years ago²⁴,” he prefaced, “a sobering piece by Thomas Hardy.” He cleared his throat and began, “Had he and I but met / By some old ancient inn, / We should have sat us down to wet / Right many a nipperkin!” (Hardy). A few chuckled at the notion, but with steely eyes he went on, “I shot him dead because-- / Because he was my foe, / Just so: my foe of course he was; / That’s clear enough; although / He thought he’d ‘list, perhaps, / Off-hand like-- just as I-- / Was out of work-- had sold his traps-- / No other reason why.” (Hardy). The room was silent, heavy

²³ As described by Private William Holmes, *estaminets* were often host to bands, singing, poets, and storytellers (Holmes 181).

²⁴ Hardy’s poem, written in 1902 and published in 1909, is regarding the Second Boer War between Great Britain and two Boer nations in South Africa (“Thomas Hardy”).

with the weight of his words, finishing, “Yes; quaint and curious war is! / You shoot a fellow down / You’d treat if met where any bar is, / Or help to half-a-crown.” (Hardy). He sat down amidst appreciative murmurs and scattered applause as the crowd glanced around for whoever chose to go next.

To Rosalie’s dismay, it was Agatha that launched up out of her chair. Yes, she was the boldest of her peers, but even this-- singling herself out in this foreign environment amongst strange men-- was far-fetched even for her. “Might I recite one?” she inquired, although her tone and demeanor indicated that she wouldn’t listen to anyone who told her she could not. The working girls of Le Canard Câlène examined her peculiarly, trying to discern if she was unprecedentedly outspoken or perhaps maliciously trying to detract from the attention being paid to them. “This was passed along to me by another nurse from the hospital,” she started, “and it is entitled ‘Train.’²⁵”

Confidently clearing her throat, she opened, “Will the train never start? / God, make the train start. / She cannot bear it, keeping up so long;/ and he, he no more tries to laugh at her. / He is going” (Mackay). Rosalie and the other nurses watched curiously; she’d received word that her beau had gone missing at the Somme²⁶, but she had not spoke of him or their separation otherwise. Her voice subtly cracked and wavered as she continued, “She holds his two hands now. / Now, she has touch of him and sight of him. / And then he will be gone. / He will be gone” (Mackay), she took a breath to steady herself and went on, “They are so young. / She stands under the window of his carriage, / and he stands in the window. / They hold each other’s

²⁵ This poem was written by Helen Mackay, an American living in France who volunteered as a nurse during the war. She did not work in on near Rouen’s hospital No. 9, but in a hospital in Paris (“Will the Real Helen Mackay Please Step Forward?”).

²⁶ Over 72,000 unidentified men went missing in action over the duration of the Battle of the Somme (“Thiepval Memorial to the Missing”).

hands / across the window ledge. / And look and look, / and know that they may never look again” (Mackay). Up close, they could just barely make out the tears pooling in her eyes, threatening to spill over at any moment. “She stands under the window of his carriage, / and he stands in the window. / God, make the train start! / Before they cannot bear it, / make the train start²⁷!” (Mackay). With one final, exhausted breath she weakly forced out the last line, “God, make the train start!” (Mackay). One lonely tear escaped and slowly rolled down her cheek. Shaken, an *estaminet* girl rushed over to comfort her, likely sharing a similar story. In that moment neither was nurse nor prostitute, rich nor poor, only heartbroken and suffering through the isolation of a war they didn’t understand. She escorted Agatha out the back to calm down in the night air. The men inside were also struck with an air of quiet somberness, remembering the loved ones they left behind from the other side of the train.

Nervously, the barkeep peeped up, “Perhaps recitations weren’t the best choice for tonight... would anyone care to share something happier?” A Frenchman off in the corner laughed, replying, “Sir, what happy poetry is there in wartime?” His peers grumbled their unfortunate agreement and he raised his voice again. “I’ve got one though, if you’d care to hear it.” Seeing not reason to go on, he explained, “I met a man in a shell-hole²⁸ a while back, British, and while we were waiting for the all-clear he jotted me out this copy. ‘Perhaps you’ll see it published,’ he said, if he makes it out of the war²⁹.” Removing a battered scrap of paper from his interior jacket pocket, he smoothed the wrinkles and began to read:

The darkness crumbles away.
It is the same old druid Time as ever.

²⁷ Three stanzas in the middle of this poem and a second half with a different storyline have been omitted for relevance and brevity.

²⁸ This situation is meant to be similar to Paul’s encounter with the French soldier in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, although both men are Allied soldiers so no one gets stabbed (Remarque 103).

²⁹ The poet, Isaac Rosenberg, did indeed survive the war and publish several of his poems.

Only a live thing leaps my hand,
 A queer sardonic rat,
 As I pull the parapet's poppy
 To stick behind my ear.
 Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew
 Your cosmopolitan sympathies.
 Now you have touched this English hand
 You will do the same to a German
 Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure
 To cross the sleeping green between.
 It seems, odd thing, you grin as you pass
 Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes,
 Less chanced than you for life,
 Bonds to the whims of murder,
 Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,
 The torn fields of France.
 What do you see in our eyes
 At the shrieking iron and flame
 Hurlled through still heavens?
 What quaver—what heart aghast?
 Poppies whose roots are in man's veins
 Drop, and are ever dropping,
 But mine in my ear is safe –
 Just a little white with the dust (Rosenberg).

Upon completion, he tucked the paper back into his jacket and raised his glass of spirits.

“To the war,” he toasted, “to those fighting it, and to the end of it!” A mighty cheer echoed throughout the *estaminet* as the men lifted their glasses with him, the ladies their hands or pitchers, and the group of nurses their long-empty coffee mugs. Yes, that was something they could all drink to.

The same man was asked how, exactly, he ended up in the shell-hole with this poetic soldier. He began to spin the tale, likely somewhat exaggerated but rightly so, as the casual festivities resumed and the liquor continued to flow. Seeing a timely opportunity to make their exit, the quintet of nurses left the appropriate coinage on their table, bid the barkeep *adieu*, and

stepped out into the darkness. Certainly a novel experience, they concurred, but excellent coffee and not unpleasant company. They hurried through the chill back to the hospital grounds and into the shelter of their tents. Weary from the excitement of the day, they soon donned their nightclothes and slipped into their respective cots. As she drifted off to sleep, Rosalie wondered which of the men were on their way home and who was being sent back off to the front, who would survive the war and who would perish in a trench or piled into a heap, and most curiously, how many of them she'd soon be meeting at the other end of a syringe³⁰.

³⁰ This implies that many of the men Rosalie encountered have now contracted or will soon contract syphilis, and perhaps be sent to her hospital for treatment.

Works Cited* and Consulted

- *Ashurst, George. *Forgotten Voices of the Somme: the Most Devastating Battle of the Great War in the Words of Those Who Survived*, compiled by Joshua Levine. London: Ebury Press, 2009. pp.182-3. Print.
- *Baker, Chris. "The Base Hospitals in France." *The Long, Long Trail*. Web. 13 February 2017.
- Baldwin, Fred D. "The Invisible Armor." *American Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1964, pp. 432-444. *JSTOR*.
- "Brothels for the Army." *Freedom: A Journal of Anarchist Communism*[London]. March 1918: 1. Print.
- *Bousquet, Louis and Camille Roberts. "Madelon: English Version of the Celebrated French Soldier's Song 'Quand Madelon.'" Translated by Alfred Bryan. Jerome H. Remick & Co.: 1918. *Brown University Library Digital Repository*.
- *Center for Disease Control and Prevention. "Leading Causes of Death, 1900-1998." *Department of Health and Human Services*. Web. 13 February 2017.
- *"Demography - Rate of Birth per 1,000 Inhabitants." *National Institute of Statistics and Economics Studies*. 1 January 2017. Web. 13 February 2017.
- Duiker, William J. and Jackson J. Spielvogel. "Chapter 23-- The Beginning of the Twentieth-Century Crisis: War and Revolution." *World History, Vol. II: Since 1500*. 2.7 (2013). 667-677. Print.
- *"Ferme D'Antan." *Jugon-les-Lacs Tourist Board*. 2016. Web. 13 February 2017.
- *Gibson, K. Craig. "Sex and Soldiering in France and Flanders: The British Expeditionary Force along the Western Front, 1914-1919." *The International History Review*, vol. 23, no. 3,

2001, pp. 535–579. *JSTOR*.

*Glenn, Reginald. *Forgotten Voices of the Somme: the Most Devastating Battle of the Great War in the Words of Those Who Survived*, compiled by Joshua Levine. London: Ebury Press, 2009. p.181. Print.

Grayzel, Susan R. “Mothers, Mairaines, and Prostitutes: Morale and Morality in First World War France.” *The International History Review*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1997, pp. 66–82. *JSTOR*.

Hall, Lesley A. “Impotent Ghosts from No Man's Land, Flappers' Boyfriends, or Cryptopatriarchs? Men, Sex and Social Change in 1920s Britain.” *Social History*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1996, pp. 54–70. *JSTOR*.

*Hardy, Thomas. "The Man He Killed." *Modern British Poetry* (1920): 8. *Poetry & Short Story Reference Center*.

*Harrison, Mark. “The British Army and the Problem of Venereal Disease in France and Egypt during the First World War.” *Medical History*, vol 39, no. 2, 1995, pp. 133–158. *PubMed Central*.

*Holmes, William. *Forgotten Voices of the Somme: the Most Devastating Battle of the Great War in the Words of Those Who Survived*, compiled by Joshua Levine. London: Ebury Press, 2009. p.181. Print.

*King, Jennifer. “Diaries and Letters of WWI Nurses Tell of the Horrors and Bravery of Women Who Volunteered.” *ABC News Australia*. 19 August 2014. Web. 13 February 2017.

*Korting, D. “Uniform & Equipment of the German Red Cross Nurse, WWI.” *The Medical Front WWI*. 16 December 2016. Web. 13 February 2017.

- *Levine, Joshua. *Forgotten Voices of the Somme: the Most Devastating Battle of the Great War in the Words of Those Who Survived*, compiled by Joshua Levine. London: Ebury Press, 2009. p.181. Print.
- *Light, Susan. "Accommodations." *The Fairest Force*. Web. 13 February 2017.
- *Mackay, Helen. "Train." *Minds at War: Essential Poetry of the First World War in Context*. Saxon Books: 1996.
- *Makepeace, Clare. "WW1 Brothels: Why Troops Ignored Calls to Resist 'Temptation.'" *BBC*. 27 February 2014. Web. 13 February 2017.
- *McDonough, J.E.R. "The Treatment of Syphilis in 1915." *The Medical Front WWI*. 16 December 2016. Web. 13 February 2017.
- *Ministry of Pensions. "Location of Hospitals and Casualty Clearing Stations in the Great War." *The Medical Front WWI*. 16 December 2016. Web. 13 February 2017.
- "Prevention Of Venereal Disease." *The British Medical Journal*, vol. 2, no. 4150, 1940, pp. 96–96. *JSTOR*.
- *"Regulations Governing the Employment of Nursing V.A.D. Members in Military Hospitals." *The Medical Front WWI*. 16 December 2016. Web. 13 February 2017.
- *Remarques, Erich Maria. *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Fawcett Crest: 1958. Web.
- *Rosenberg, Isaac. "Break Of Day In The Trenches." *Collected Classic Poems, Pope To Sterling* (2012): 1. *Poetry & Short Story Reference Center*.
- *Spirit of Remembrance. "WWI Rouen and Its Base Hospitals." *The Great War 1914-1918*. Web. 13 February 2017.

*“Thiepval Memorial to the Missing.” *The Great War 1914-1918*. Web. 13 February 2017.

*“Thomas Hardy.” *Poetry Foundation*. 2017. Web. 13 February 2017.

*“Will the Real Helen Mackay Please Step Forward?” *Poetry By Heart*. 17 August 2014. Web. 13 February 2017.