EDITH’S WONDERLAND

IN MEMORIAM OF EDITH CAVELL † 12 OCTOBER 1915

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In view of the Edith Cavell commemoration in 2015¹, the following paper seeks:

First, to contribute to the opening of new avenues for extended research about Edith Cavell, ‘the most prominent British female war casualty’ during the Great War,

Second, to offer new insights into the Cavell case, and newfound information in particular about the ‘enigmatic second Edith Cavell’, said to be the never acknowledged ‘perfect spy and clever, conniving resistance worker’, and

Third, to serve as an opening discussion for a critical review of the never-ending Cavell publications, looking to address the implied media and propaganda blunder that largely overshadows her personal fate and dignity.

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SUMMARY BIOGRAPHY

Edith Louisa Cavell (4 December 1865 – 12 October 1915) was a British nurse and patriot. She is celebrated for saving the lives of soldiers from all sides without distinction and in helping some 200 Allied soldiers escape from German-occupied Belgium during World War I, for which she was arrested. She was subsequently court-martialled, found guilty of treason and sentenced to death. Despite international pressure for mercy, she was shot by a German firing squad. Her execution received worldwide condemnation and extensive press coverage.

She is well known for her statement that "patriotism is not enough". Her strong Anglican beliefs propelled her to help all those who needed it, both German and Allied soldiers. She was quoted as saying, "I can’t stop while there are lives to be saved." October 12 is appointed for her commemoration in the Anglican church, although this is not a "saint’s feast day" in the traditional sense.

Edith Cavell, who was 49 at the time of her execution, was already notable as a pioneer of modern nursing in Belgium.

EARLY LIFE AND CAREER

Edith Cavell was born on 4 December 1865 in Swardeston, a village near Norwich, where her father, the Reverend Frederick Cavell, was vicar for 45 years. She was the eldest of four children and was taught to always share with the less fortunate, despite her family’s meagre earnings. After a period as a governess, including for a family in Brussels 1900–1905, she trained as a nurse at the London Hospital under Matron Eva Luckes. In 1907, Cavell was recruited by Dr Antoine Depage to be matron of a newly established nursing school by the name of L’École Belge d’Infirmières Diplômées on the Rue de la Culture in Brussels. By 1910, Miss Cavell felt that the profession of nursing had gained sufficient foothold in Belgium to warrant the publishing of a professional journal, and therefore launched the nursing journal, ‘L’infirmière’. A year later, she was a training nurse for three hospitals, 24 schools, and 13 kindergartens in Belgium.

When World War I broke out, she was visiting her widowed mother in Norfolk in the East of England. She returned to Brussels where her clinic and nursing school were taken over by the Red Cross.

WORLD WAR I AND EXECUTION

In November 1914, after the German occupation of Brussels, Cavell began sheltering British soldiers and funnelling them out of occupied Belgium to the neutral Holland. Wounded and derelict British and French soldiers and Belgians and French of military age were hidden from the Germans and provided with false papers by Prince Reginald de Croy at his château of Bellignie near Mons. From there, they were conducted by various guides to the houses of Cavell, Louis Séverin
and others in Brussels, and furnished by them with money to reach the Dutch frontier and with guides obtained through Phillipe Baucq. This placed Cavell in violation of German military law. German authorities became increasingly suspicious of the nurse’s actions, which were backed up by her outspokenness.

She was arrested on 3 August 1915 and charged with harbouring Allied soldiers. She had been betrayed by Gaston Quien, who was later convicted by a French court as a collaborator. She was held in St Gilles prison for 10 weeks, the last two in solitary confinement. She made three depositions to the German police, August 8, 18, and 22, admitting that she had been instrumental in conveying about 60 British and 15 French derelict soldiers and about 100 French and Belgians of military age to the frontier and had sheltered most of them in her house.

In her court-martial she was prosecuted for aiding British and French soldiers, in addition to young Belgian men, to cross the border and enter Britain. She admitted her guilt when she signed a statement the day before the trial, thus reaffirming the crime in the presence of all other prisoners and lawyers present in the court at the beginning of the trial. Cavell gave the German prosecution a much stronger case against her when she declared that the soldiers she had helped escape thanked her in writing when arriving safely in Britain. This admission proved hard to ignore because it not only confirmed that Cavell had helped the soldiers navigate the Dutch frontier, but it also established that she helped them escape to a country at war with Germany.

As the case stood, the sentence according to German military law was death. Paragraph 58 of the German Military Code says: “Will be sentenced to death for treason any person who, with the intention of helping the hostile Power, or of causing harm to the German or allied troops, is guilty of one of the crimes of paragraph 90 of the German Penal Code.” The case referred to in the above-mentioned paragraph 90 consists of “Conducting soldiers to the enemy.” Additionally, the penalties according to paragraph 160 of the German Code, in case of war, apply to foreigners as well as Germans.

Furthermore, this application of the German law was supported by the First Geneva Convention. While the Convention ordinarily guarantees protection of medical personnel, that protection is forfeit if it is used as cover for any belligerent action. This forfeiture is expressed in article 7 of the 1906 version of the Convention, which was the version in force at the time. (...).

Extracts from:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edith_Cavell,

For further details see: “Edith Cavell”, in:
www.reference.com/browse/edith+cavell

(with in each case a bibliography of relevant literature).
1. **Lake of Forgiveness**

*Mount Edith Cavell* rises majestically in the crystal-clear air of Jasper National Park in the Canadian Rocky Mountains. Like a symbol, the stretch of water at its feet is called *Lake of Forgiveness*. And the healing effect of forgiveness is needed to absolve those who betrayed Edith Cavell, are still misusing her memory and murdered her.

Edith who? We need to think long and hard to conjure up Edith Cavell, the ‘*Florence Nightingale of the Great War*’. Great empathy and ‘heart think’ may help to recall her tragedy as well as all the cruelties, all the circumstances of and background to the dreadful 1914-1918 war and their consequences.

Yet the Cavell case has fallen into oblivion. Few, perhaps, have heard of her personal suffering, of the fate of the British nurse Edith Cavell (1865-1915), director of a nursing school in Brussels, today known as the Edith Cavell Clinic, who was executed by a firing squad during the German occupation of Belgium in the First World War as a spy, traitor or for some other reason. Who wants to know the details today?

Even less well known is that the German poet Gottfried Benn (1886-1956), a one-time member of the German ‘*Literaturkolonie*’ in Brussels, was on duty as a military doctor when Edith was executed on 12th October 1915. Only later, in February 1928, did Benn give a bald account, too bald for many, under the heading “*How Miss Cavell was shot*”, of what he described as a ‘necessary and historically logical consequence of the situation at the time’. He was later criticised as a ‘schizophrenic snob who does not know the world but dissects it like a corpse’. Edith Cavell as an object of literature and its quarrels. She is not left in peace.

‘*How Miss Cavell was shot*’ spills no tears, speaks of necessity, a vain attempt to rectify all the perceived distortions and falsifications, an attempt to re-enact the execution itself. How can such a last moment of transfiguration be captured at all? Benn’s words, as an idiosyncratic expression of a troubled and schizophrenic period, close simultaneously with deep resignation, despair and fatalism:

> ‘No, world history is not the foundation of happiness, and the pillars of the Pantheon are streaked with the blood of those who act and then suffer as the law of life decrees.’

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3 In the following paper reference is made in particular to recent literature such as: (i) Diana Souhami, “*Edith Cavell*”, London (Quercus), 2010 and (ii) Katie Pickles, “Transnational Outrage - The Death and Commemoration of Edith Cavell” (Palgrave Macmillan), 2007.


2. CAVELL-RESEARCH

The Cavell case, the ‘Civilizing of Belgium’ as Vernon Kellogg saw it in his once famous ‘Headquarters Nights’ of 1917, however important in popular memory, is merely the background for unanswered questions. The Cavell case cries out for new and extended research about Edith Cavell herself, and, even more so, about the Cavell propaganda and the abundant Cavell literature. This Cavell propaganda and the literature around it is a case in its own right. One hundred years after the events, one individual, one brave ‘Dame Blanche’, a ‘White Lady of the Hohenzollern’, together with 10 million or more other human beings, not to forget 10 million horses and all the other animals and plants that died during the carnage of the war, the Great War as it was called, will again draw our attention during the 2014-2018 remembrance years and Edith Cavell’s 2015 commemoration.

Libraries have been written about Edith Cavell, about her youth, about in fact the ‘two Edith Cavells’: first and foremost about the ‘dutiful daughter, the reserved governess-turned-nurse, brought up in a repressive late Victorian household’ and trained in and through the horrors of an epidemic-ridden East-London, and second—and to a much lesser degree—about the ‘perfect spy and clever, conniving resistance worker’. Indeed, entire bookshelves have been written about her personality, about her case and the people involved, many trying to keep alive some of her memories in public minds. Questions are seldom raised. Everything seems evident, heard and copied hundred times, the familiar Cavell ritual, like a prayer wheel. Edith you deserve better.

The ‘Cavell Van’ has been restored, cheap movies and TV series have been produced, ugly statues have been erected, streets, squares, a bridge and a car park, gardens, restaurants and bars, even roses and animals, pottery and avenues, Edith Cavell memorabilia all around the world, schools and hospitals, even a peak in the Rocky Mountains, a formation on the planet Venus, all these relics, even Edith Piaf, have been given her name. Soldier enlistment doubled smoothing the way for conscription and for the battle at the Somme. Was that what Edith wanted? One battle, one million dead, wounded and missing soldiers. A cult was born.

But, what happened? How was all this possible? Too many questions are still waiting to be answered. Many details have emerged, pouring out one by one from archives until recently closed, forgotten and deliberately inaccessible. Many questions have been answered. Many even have yet to be addressed. Perhaps others would prefer to stay in the twilight of history, but will be brought into the light with answers to be given.

Yet another learned paper, perhaps a book, another biography of Cavell? Nearly impossible to write something that is really new. Not one more biography among so many, some good, many less so, most of them indigestible. Only humdrum banalities, a happy childhood, then the horror of Victorian hospitals, the triviality of terror, of war, of lies, of betrayal and deceit would stand out, despair in the face of the impossible, of the helplessness to avert what should not have happened, to wake up from the bad dream. These books and films are out there, many of them, often only to be enjoyed with wide eyes and revulsion. Writing a new book is no sinecure. Today we are only left with questions, many questions about the Cavell propaganda and the Cavell literature itself.

Apart from important hopeful exceptions, too many biographies or publications about Edith Cavell are incomplete or contain mistakes. Perhaps that is inevitable in the absence of any research on the Cavell case worth the name, which has yet to be launched to root out inconsistencies and to fill in the blanks.

Certainly, these mistakes and inconsistencies, insofar as they are of substance, do not relate to the moving depictions of her youth and her Spartan upbringing, less to the almost unimaginable severity

of her training lived out in the most difficult, even wretched social conditions of Victorian asylums and plague hospitals. These are the images of Charles Dickens. It is good to be reminded about Oliver Twist and all the rest, to give later generations an insight into the virtually inconceivable conditions of patient care as recently as at the end of the 19th century. These hospitals in London, including the ‘German Hospital’, were among the best in the world, they set the standard for many, a high bar which they sought to emulate. What must things have looked like elsewhere? A major value of these writings lies in such depictions. That deserves recognition and great respect.

However, it is becoming cavalier to deploy, repeatedly for our collective memory, almost ‘en passant’, in seemingly incidental and self-evident subclauses, ostensibly ‘politically correct’ historical views. Audacious untruths are set out not only via embarrassing historical situations and themes which are somewhat disputed to say the least, but, even in ‘better’ Cavell biographies, important persons are also mixed up and rumours are peddled, if this serves the story. With a bit more care and better research, many of these errors could have been avoided.

Maître Gaston de Leval, 
Legal advisor to the British and American Legations in Brussels Honorary medal of the ‘Société Royale de Numismatique de Belgique’, Brussels, 1920

Examples of embarrassing identity mistakes

First: Confusion of the notorious, one-eyed Waffen-SS Generalleutnant Karl-Gustav Sauberzweig (1899-1946) with the son, blinded in war, of the WWI military governor in Brussels, Generalleutnant Traugott Martin von Sauberzweig. Despite the assumptions and assertions, Karl-Gustav Sauberzweig was not the son of Traugott von Sauberzweig (1863-1920), but merely the son of local physician Dr Joachim Sauberzweig. One family aristocratic, as perceived in those days, while the other was not. This would have been apparent if greater care had been taken.

Second: Maître Gaston de Leval. Diana Souhami in her bestselling Cavell book10, despite a correct photo, confuses him with Gaston Leval (born Robert Pillar, 1895-1978), the famous ‘libertaire anarcho-syndicaliste’ of the Spanish civil war. Contrary to what Souhami presents and so far unnoticed by reviews, Gaston de Leval, born 1874, had in fact already died in September 1944 in Menton, in southern France on the Côte d’Azur during a German bombing strike11. A bit of research at the Brussels bar association, for example, at Menton and other places could have easily proven these identities.

But who really was this Maître Gaston de Leval, closely connected also with the ‘American Bar Association’ and the ‘Pilgrim Society’ in the US, what was his role? Edith Cavell’s defence lawyer?

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8 For example: Diana Souhami, “Edith Cavell” (Querus), London, 2010, p. 428.
11 Maître Gaston de Leval, * 2nd Juni 1874, Verviers-Hodimont, Belgium, † 27th September 1944 (‘victime de l’ennemi’), Menton, France; source: archives of the Brussels Bar Association (Cour d’Appel de Bruxelles). There are numerous publications, books and speeches by Gaston de Leval proving his outstanding professional record. Beside many other activities he also acted as ‘foreign correspondent’ of the ‘American Bar Association’/ABA for Belgium. A biography of Gaston de Leval does not yet exist.
Who said that, copied without hesitation by many? His name as ‘Edith’s defence lawyer’ was suggested in a hand-written letter of 6th September 1917, with the letterhead of the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Montreal, by a certain Dr Henry Mark Ami D.Sc.12, at that time with the trade department of the British Embassy in Washington DC, in a letter addressed to his friend, Dr Edouard Gaston Deville, then chairman of the Geographic Board of Canada, proposing to honour Gaston de Leval with the naming of a mountain. The naming of ‘Mount Leval’ was formally confirmed on 2nd February 191813.

Maître Gaston de Leval (1874-1944)
Press photo of 6th September 1917, during a trip in the US,
In: The Madison Journal, Tallulah, Madison Parish, Louisiana/USA (chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88064430/1917-09-08/ed-1/seq-6/)

These brief examples, like many, simply confirm an astounding lack of serious Cavell research about Edith Cavell’s entourage and in particular the assumed second Edith Cavell, the ‘perfect spy and clever, conniving resistance worker’ (see: Anne Mary Rafferty, above footnote 7) and her Brussels and other connections. Critical Edith Cavell research still needs to be undertaken.

By contrast, it becomes sad where the quintessence of her biography is insufficiently appreciated or distorted. Edith Cavell was a patriot, certainly, a ‘British patriot’, as she was and still is called. All well and good, no question that was the tone of the age and something that also infused her life. The essence of Britishness was supposed to heal not just hospitals but the entire world. Exceptions from this general patriotism and superiority complex, encountered everywhere, were rare. However, as in a mystical apotheosis, Edith Cavell broke through this mental barrier in the face of imminent death and overcame the patriotic poison in her heart14.

But what happened to her? Her message “patriotism is not enough”, beyond the different interpretations that have been given, was reversed. In contrast with her words “I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone”, her person, her fate was and still is falsely distorted, dragged down, belittled into falsehood with precisely this so deadly drug, with patriotism and pathos, typical for any empire. The poison of patriotism.

The frightful violence, the moloch of war with terror and massacre, the ‘martial laws of the jungle’ to judicial terror, instead of the ‘laws of war’ to civil protection with a minimum of concrete humanity and goodness, also and especially in times of general treachery, all are affected, perpetrator and victim alike. This is also part of the truth and is not only the ‘white man’s burden’, Pol Pots are found everywhere, in Nanking as in Auschwitz. Warmth and the privacy of friendship are not found anywhere, in Nanking as in Auschwitz. Warmth and the privacy of friendship are not necessarily characteristics of war, were not encountered in the Opium Wars and certainly not in the concentration camps of the Boer War or Gulags anywhere else. Kind-heartedness, general humanity and justice, Confucian ‘ren’ (仁) and ‘yi’ (義) or whatever other names you give them, are found in all cultures, are indeed a central element of being human – as are devilry, light and shade. Both Good and Evil. Only civilisation keeps the beast in check that distresses us when it escapes.

12 For the Dr Ami letter, see: www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/le-publie/005-6070-e.html (Library and Archives Canada/LAC, Record Group 21, Volume 163, File 0186, letter from Henry Ami of 6th September 1917).
13 Maître Gaston de Leval had indeed, after the delayed announcement of Edith Cavell’s death sentence, campaigned with high degree of personal dedication and commitment for an appeal to save Edith Cavell from execution (Hugh Gibson, first secretary at the American Legation: ‘with superhuman efforts’). For these last minute efforts of the American and Spanish Legations see in detail: Diana Souhami, op. cit., pp. 356-366. For Gaston de Leval’s report about the failed appeal and the execution of Edith Cavell, see: ‘Report sent to the Chairman of the U.S. Legation in Belgium, Brand Whitlock, by Belgian councillor Maître G. de Leval’, 12th October 1915, in: www.firstworldwar.com/source/cavell_deleval.htm.
14 In this regard she is seen as a ‘Saint’ in the sense of St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians: “Edith Cavell is just one such Saint who belongs to this very church”, see: “A Commemoration of the life of Edith Cavell (died 12 October 1915)”, ‘The Pro-Cathedral of Holy Trinity Brussels’, 9th October 2011. www.holytrinity.be/sites/default/files/Edith%20Cavell%209%20October%202011.pdf.
Mutilated bodies on battlefields, both men and animals, who has not seen these pictures and wept with a bleeding heart? War, ‘modern total war’, what a blasphemy, is not a ballet, affects us all, soldiers in the field and behind the lines, in castles, libraries, homes and hospitals. We no longer have the protective lines of separation. Even a thin cloak of normality with tramways, markets and theatre performances does not help in this respect. All those involved, all those in positions of responsibility on each side on the trenches and graves, talked about the war for survival, for survival of their empire, their Reich, their future and the future of humanity as they clearly understood themselves to represent. Each belligerent claimed to have God on its side: ‘God is with us’. A Punic War without God against all without righteousness, without God-given rights, without protection of the individual. This is what struck Edith Cavell’s heart.

A human tragedy, a world heritage with an eternal burden for all of us. An error of history. Dreadful. Any form of self-satisfaction and self-righteousness is out of place here. We are the goodies, you are the baddies, the ‘Huns’. Only Shakespeare could have attempted a drama on this theme.

What spirit, what demon is evoked in these words about the ‘Huns’, the ‘German barbarians’?

“... as if any people that engage in organised murder wouldn’t turn themselves at the very same moment into a horde of barbarians ..., as if war wouldn’t be the atrocity of all atrocities, as if the glorification of human slaughter is extolled as heroism ... would not be savagery elevated to pure culture.”

What demon lurks behind the words ‘Germania-esse-delendam’ long before the long-planned war with this objective could finally be set up behind the scenes? Obviously not because of Belgium’s neutrality, please, not because of Greece’s neutrality, how naïve did you have to be to believe that? These words of hate, where Edith Cavell spoke of ‘no hatred towards anyone’ and gave of her love and work. Were Edith Cavell’s words lost on the futility of this world and did they not reach us: ‘I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone’? All in vain. A tragedy.

Recruiting call: ‘Revenge for Edith Cavell’, 30th October 1915

The monster of war twisted her deeds into a ‘Revenge for Cavell’, the ‘Angel of Mercy’ could do better as an ‘Angel of Vengeance’. The murders of the war were followed by character assassination. Where she saved lives and lost her own as a result, thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands or even millions followed the deceitful war propaganda, skillfully prepared and disseminated, and went willingly to the slaughter for Edith, the Angel of Revenge. Not a happy death in ‘Flanders fields’, on the high seas, in the trenches of the Somme, the coasts and killing fields around the world. Edith, you saved several hundred, perhaps even one thousand men. But, several thousands, hundreds of thousands, perhaps more, were sacrificed in your name. Is that what you wanted? Are you weeping now?

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In contradiction with her penetrating words, beyond patriotism and hence against nationalistic pomp and madness in the world, the words on her memorial plinth were amended only belatedly and with little fanfare once the ‘healthy patriotism’ had safely completed its destructive work. The ‘Angel of Mercy’ was deformed into the most successful ‘Angel of Vengeance’ in history: Ten million dead, perhaps a few million more. Hurray! That was useful for those who reaped the benefit. But who will give us back the lost generation of the trenches, the ‘generation of Ypres’ with everything that followed and still follows today? What did we lose with this generation? That is all part and parcel of needed Cavell research.

3. Memory, Warder of the Brain

A question often raised: Could the Cavell tragedy and even the World War itself have been prevented? This might be too difficult a debate for this short paper. However, as discussed among academics, a clear word from Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, about the ‘neutrality of Britain’ could at least have prevented the spread of the war to the West, and thus would have prevented the invasion of Belgium and, consequently, the Cavell tragedy, the whole of that disaster and everything that followed. Then why call Sir Edward Grey a ‘peace broker’, despite his “ambiguous attitude to the question of whether Britain would enter the war or not, and thus confusing Berlin over just what was the British attitude towards the question of intervention in the war”? Sir Edward Grey a ‘peace broker’? This is just one of those ‘politically correct’ statements, like many others found in the Cavell literature, but as such should not burden a biographic analysis of Edith Cavell. A biography is no substitute to settle history controversies.

The highly cynical observations of the Labour opposition leader Ramsay MacDonald about Grey’s major speech to Parliament on 3rd August 1914 and about ‘Britain’s honour in the Crimean War’, the ‘honour of British soldiers in the Boer War’ etc. did little to help. The first victim in the World War, as in any war, was the truth. When the lights went out in Europe, this was one of the darkest moments of human history. And Edith Cavell was at the heart of this darkness.

Sir Edward Grey, later ‘Viscount Grey of Fallodon’ (1862-1933)

However, the question remains, how much history does the case of Edith Cavell need, how much can it bear? How can the fate of Edith Cavell be depicted without an insight into the genesis, and the consequences of the First World War? No substitute for historical analysis, to be left for others, but a fair and balanced view, unbiased by any form of self-righteousness. Because it seems to be impossible to talk and write about the ‘Great War’ without taking account of the Edith Cavell effect and everything it implies. Without that, it can only taste empty and stale, nice titbits for subsequent generations who are after all so much better and kinder.

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18 For British pacifism at the outbreak of the war and the question of ‘British neutrality’ see for example: Edmund Dene Morel (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E._D._Morel); for Morel and the ‘Congo atrocities’, see below: p. 18 (footnote 46).
19 Diana Souhami, “Edith Cavell”, op. cit., p. 146.
20 From the literature about Sir Edward Grey see for example: Niall Ferguson’s critically acclaimed book “The Pity of War” (Basic Books, New York, 1998/1999 pp. 154–156 (“Ferguson accused the British Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey of maintaining an ambiguous attitude to the question of whether Britain would enter the war or not, and thus confusing Berlin over just what was the British attitude towards the question of intervention in the war”, in: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niall_Ferguson). About Sir Edward Grey and the British foreign policy before WWI, see: Andreas Roe ‘Zwischen Empire und Kontinent: Britische Außenpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg’, Munich, 2011 (German Historical Institute London), www.amazon.de/Zwischen-Empire-Kontinent-Britische-Aussenpolitik/dp/348670401X.
Without the ‘Great War’, this turning point in modern history, the ‘Great seminal catastrophe of the 20th century’ (George F. Kennan), the Cavell case would have never come about. And conversely, what recognisable effects did the Cavell case have on the progress and outcome of the Great War?

What causalities are at work here, as with the famous ‘butterfly effect’? Together with the sinking of the ‘RMS Lusitania’ already in May 1915 and the so-called ‘Zimmermann Note’ of January 1917, the Cavell execution of October 1915 helped to generate decisive support for the United States declaration of war on Germany in April 1917. Already earlier, the Cavell case, the propaganda blunder and the recruitment for revenge that followed successfully, smoothed the way to conscription. A little White Lady butterfly with a dramatic global effect. Without doubt, Edith Cavell had been more than just the second most important nurse in history.

This intertwining of major world events with the personal fate of one individual such as Edith Cavell and, its mirror image, the misuse, the propaganda repercussions on the course of the war repeatedly leads to the temptation to deal with the major questions of the world conflagration and world politics as side issues, as if incidental on the edge and in subclauses with popular platitudes and unquestioned but always politically correct assumptions.

Large parts of the literature on the Cavell case can be seen in this entanglement, falls into the trap from which it has not so far been able to escape whereby endlessly repeated hackneyed patriotic positions are not enough for Edith Cavell, instead of lifting itself above these generalities to the level of humanity. Edith Cavell, a world heritage with an eternal burden for us all.

Woven into the major global conflicts at the start of the 20th century, in particular the imperial contrast between the British Empire and mid-Europe, the Cavell biography unfolds in front of the mirror of still extremely conflictual individual themes of history. The dreadful word already used ‘Germany needs to be destroyed’ merely stands proxy for sensitive historical questions which feed into the Cavell case and to which this tragedy is a reaction. Cheap answers, omissions, distortions, and plain propaganda do not serve her case.

Cavell biographies cannot answer historical questions in the place of learned books. But Edith Cavell must be asked about the hypocrisy behind the scenes. The escalation of the evil, always a double game, plays both ways.

*John Heartfield (Helmut Herzfeld), 1891-1968*

‘War and Corpses: the Last Hope of the Rich’ (1932)

Conversely and despite many temptations, demonization, judicial fault and terror are unjustifiable, however much the evil is escalated or historical guilt allocated on all sides: ‘Furor Teutonicus’ and ‘Prussian atrocities’, military atrocities and massacres of every kind, in Belgium in 1914, in Dinant and Leuven, or any other ‘martyr town’ (you never know which accounts you can believe), crimes

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21 For the sinking of the ‘RMS Lusitania’ on 7th May 1915 see: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RMS_Lusitania](en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RMS_Lusitania); for the Zimmermann Telegram or Zimmermann Note of 16th January 1917 (a diplomatic proposal from the German Empire to Mexico to make war against the United States) see: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zimmermann_Telegram](en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zimmermann_Telegram).

22 See above p. 9, footnote 16.
against humanity, whenever or wherever, in Belgium by the Germans, in the Congo by the Belgians, in Armenia by the Turks, in British India or in Dutch East-India.23

Crimes of war and terror, extended into yet unimaginable proportions in modern times, can never be justified or belittled. The ‘Schlieffen Plan’ lacked a chapter on ‘Human Rights’ and the ‘Hague and Geneva Conventions’. Something like ‘soft power’ had not yet been invented. This is how also Edith Cavell experienced the war and the horrors that followed. The death and destructions that she experienced and learned about from friends also numbed her feelings. The proximity of death, the escalation of the evil so close, was her moral truth enough.

‘The law of unintended consequences’, rightly identified by Diana Souhami with respect to these evil effects of war, is reflected in the unending fabric of personal fates, in the causality of biographical interactions, mutual dependencies and influences. What fed into the fate of Edith Cavell, what parts of this fate have issued forth into the world? Edith as an epicentre of biographical tremors, as if this centre was aware of its own advent. New methods of biographical research may be needed here.

Among the strongest passages in Diana Souhami’s Cavell book is without doubt the reference to “a fragile elision of personal circumstances – Miss Gibson of Laurel Court, Mellish Ward, a recommendation from Marguerite François, an assassination in Bosnia – had led Edith Cavell to this room and to these men who tricked her into signing a deposition of what they said she had said ...”24, like an unbroken causal chain that leads to her death, and with its forward march epitomising thousands of other stories, human fates, the Battle of the Somme, world history, which would be inconceivable without all these biographical actions, effects, reactions. This can be read into the past as into the future. The eye of a needle, a junction through which everything must pass.

Florence Nightingale, the whole biographical milieu of the ‘German Hospital’ in London, with Eva Luckes and the ‘Royal London Hospital’, through Sir Edward Grey to Traugott von Sauberzweig and beyond, a never-ending human chain from which, time and again, a positive force springs yet from the horror of the negative. The negative as a condition for the best of the best, without which it could not emerge. Without Crimean War, no Florence Nightingale, without First World War, no Edith Cavell. Shakespeare and Goethe, this is where they find the raw material for their dramatic events.

A biographical map, like a powerful mosaic, can be outlined with all the persons and their connections, filigrees and networks, the consequences of their actions for others, for Florence Nightingale, for Edith Cavell and beyond. Where is the start, where can a beginning be found? Theodor Fliedner (1800-1864), founder of the famous diaconal welfare institution in Kaiserswerth by Düsseldorf (source point for Florence Nightingale and modern nurse training in Germany), is certainly a marker. But what would Fliedner have been without the Quaker Elisabeth Fry (1789-1845)?

And then, for the ‘German Hospital’ in London, the Jewish doctor J.C.H. Freund and the protestant pastor A. Sydow. Predominantly, the significance of the Prussian ambassador Baron von Bunsen (1791-1860), with constant support for construction of the German Hospital by a procession of well-meaning people, including kings and princes. The entire European, primarily aristocratic world seemed to want to work on creating a vessel, an environment in which Florence Nightingale and,

23 Dutch East-India, the Moluccas, in particular Ambon, deserve to be mentioned for another reason. Not only as an additional example for imperial atrocities, if there is any need, but for the Anglo-Dutch propaganda war following the so-called ‘Amboyna massacre’ of 1623. The Amboyna incident, terrible as it was, was played out for propaganda purposes over several decades and served as pretext for the Anglo-Dutch wars in the 17th and 18th centuries for control over the seas and trade routes. The effects of this propaganda war are felt, as in the Cavell case, until today and not just in popular literature: An exemplary propaganda drama and lesson for the Cavell tragedy. See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amboyna_massacre and nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambonese_Moord; for the ‘war of pamphlets’, see: Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. Van Kley, “Asia in the Making of Europe” (The Chicago University Press), vol. III, book 1 (1993): pp. 40-61 (51), and pp. 555-556, as well as: “England and the Netherlands: the ties between two nations - The Ambon murder”, A collection of the British Library and the Koninklijke Bibliothek (www.geheugenvan nederland.nl/?/en/collections/nederland_engeland/ambon).
after her, like many others, Edith Cavell could work. A culmination of German-British cooperation. This remembrance is also a warder of our memories.

4. TRAIN WATCHERS

Military and civil resistance always has many faces, against a terror regime not only in British India, against horrors and massacre not only in Belgium. In any event, with the start of the invasion of Belgium on 4th August 1914, the unarmed resistance developed rapidly and organised the first networks and underground movements, above all through ‘train watchers’ to observe German troop movements and to smuggle allied soldiers. Among the best known were the ‘Ambulants et Gendarmes’ and, from 1916, the ‘White Lady network’.

The ‘Cavell network’, including principally Louise Thuliez and Herman Capiau, was reckoned to be part, as was the group around the surgeon Dr Frère from the hospital in Brussels, who smuggled the well-known later WWII French general Henri Giraud into the Netherlands (‘The most famous of all the soldiers whom Edith Cavell helped, was General Giraud’). An immense flood of initiatives, groups, networks and organisations. Who sought to make any distinctions? A maelstrom that pulled everything into its maw.

Louise Thuliez (1881-1966), member of the ‘Edith Cavell network’

This spy network, with an expanding reach and a large number of thousands of agents towards the end of the war (including many women), was spread widely in Belgium and northern France already by the end of 1914. The German occupation troops tried and tried in vain with all means, with terror and brutality to infiltrate, to grub up and to liquidate these groupings. This was also the background for Edith Cavell. A knowledge of the effect of these ‘war-deciding networks’, so described by General Haig, supreme commander of the British troops in Flanders, is an absolute precondition for understanding the Cavell tragedy. Beyond all personal consternation about the shattering events, they give an insight into the frightening of military necessities. A logic of horror.

Of the around 2,000 captured agents, 277 were executed, including ten women, with Gabriëlle Petit, who enabled injured soldiers to escape to the Netherlands, as the best known Belgian woman and later a Belgian national heroine, like Edith Cavell.

Many assumptions, claims and suspicions have been expressed about the true role of Edith Cavell, about the supposed spying activities of the Cavell network, about Cavell as a ‘good spy’ who turned away from agent activity in order to devote herself to humanitarian tasks, about her ‘dual identity’ which she hid away. These often expressed suppositions also include references to ‘La Dame Blanche’ or the ‘White Lady of the Hohenzollern’, a ghost, a phantom in a white robe, a being who

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27 For Herman Capiau, see below, pp. 15-16.
28 For the pointer to ‘Dr Frère’, see: General Henri Giraud, “Mes evasions”, Hachette, 1946: “... réseau établi par le docteur Frère, chirurgien à l’hôpital de Bruxelles”, see: fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henri_Giraud_(militaire). The identity of this ‘Dr Frère’, his relations with Edith Cavell’s organisation and the others he worked with have not yet been determined.
stood behind the authentic ‘White Lady spy network’ or at least gave this secret organisation its name.

Who or what was this phantom in reality? Did the legendary ‘Dame Blanche’ – “the most successful spy network of the First World War” – conceal a collective memory and reverence for the ‘White Lady Nurse’ Edith Cavell?

5. FROM THE SHADOWS

Despite all impressions, at least despite the first appearances given, Edith Cavell was not just spending her evenings reading only Thomas à Kempis’ ‘The imitation of Christ’. She was socially active, an ‘ambassador for best English practice’31, a maker, not simply a taker of the events around her. She took part in international meetings (e.g. the 1909 summer congress of the ‘International Nursing Council’/ICN in the Church House conference centre at Westminster, London), gave public lectures and was on the board of the Belgian scientific journal ‘L’Infirmière’, corresponded widely, wrote countless articles and letters, including petitions, to the press and had many contacts, especially in Brussels, far beyond her nursing school, and naturally in Great Britain.

Why has past Cavell literature essentially neglected to look at this important page of her biography with the necessary attention? Despite an almost endless number of publications, commentaries, notes, newspaper articles and notices or biographical sketches in newspapers, in book form or increasingly through the digital media – conveniently available free of charge via websites or as eBooks in time for the 2015 year of remembrance – references to her ‘private life’ are extremely rare. As if a ‘normal’ social life and engagement in society would not fit in with the desired image of Edith Cavell. Did she have no human relationships, hardly any acquaintances, hardly any romantic attachments, only her cousin Eddy Cavell and the odd individual female friends? The ‘patriot saint’ read Thomas à Kempis and loved her two dogs. That was it. Or was it?

Some exceptional personalities from her professional and other circles, contacts of her ‘Brussels connections’, can be identified relatively easily, despite the lack of details in the documents. These few examples can represent her social interaction in her nursing school and with her Anglican church.

As examples of her contacts, particular mention can be made of British and American journalists and war reporters, especially female reporters, including Miss Mary Boyle O’Reilly, war correspondent, distinguished author and said to be an ‘associate’ of Edith Cavell.

31 For Edith Cavell as ‘ambassador for best English practice’, see Diana Souhami, op. cit., p. 107.
Edith Cavell, as well as primarily allied diplomats, Belgian friends, acquaintances and agencies, and perhaps also – though this is difficult to prove, but in fact self-evident in her privileged position – performer of special tasks for the intelligence services.

The floodgates are opening. Edith Cavell’s links to the intelligence service SIS (including both MI6 and MI5) are addressed repeatedly and more intensely in the more recent literature on the Cavell case. Accepted of refuted, nobody who today researches, writes or makes films about Edith Cavell can escape from these multiple references and new findings.

On her knowledge of and her involvement in detailed intelligence activities by important collaborators, it is said in particular in the authentic report by Herman Capiau:

“... in agreement with Miss Cavell and Mademoiselle Thuliez, I sent the French government, through the intelligence agent Paul Godefroy, a request for material assistance for large-scale organisation of an evacuation service for young French recruits. ... Lastly, whenever it was possible to send interesting intelligence on military operations, this information was forwarded to the English intelligence service punctually and rapidly. ...”\(^{34}\)

Herman Capiau (1884-1957), a Belgian mining engineer, highly decorated by many allied Governments and a national hero after the war, was a key member of the Belgian resistance movement. As ‘passeur d’hommes du réseau Cavell’ he became one of the closest fellow combatants of Edith Cavell. Together with Cavell sentenced to death by German court-martial in 1915, he however was pardoned to 15 years forced labour and was liberated only after the armistice in November 1918. According to a written note by Capiau of 24th April 1921, the intelligence agent Paul Godefroy, mentioned by him in his above report, had in turn already died in 1916 at the Rheinbach penitentiary close to Cologne, the same prison where Capiau and many other members of the Belgian resistance had been imprisoned\(^{35}\).

\(^{32}\) For ‘Cavell’s associate’ Mary Boyle O’Reilly, see: James M. Beck, “The Case of Edith Cavell - A Study of the Rights of Non-Combatants - A Reply to Dr. Albert Zimmermann, Germany’s Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs”, (reprinted from The New York Times), New York, 1916, p. 18/19: “… When one of her associates, Miss Mary Boyle O’Reilly, who has recently contributed a moving account of Miss Cavell’s work, was expelled from Belgium, she begged Miss Cavell to take the opportunity, while it presented herself, to leave that land of horror, and Miss Cavell, with characteristics bravery, replied smilingly: ‘Impossible, my friend, my duty is here.’ ...”. (marked by the author).

\(^{33}\) “In some more recent British books about intelligence services, it is claimed that Cavell was a British spy. (...). It is not clear from the information when she took up her spying activity or for what purpose the nurse was active for the intelligence service.” (Quote from a Wikipedia entry of 16th September 2012, own translation: de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edith_Cavell, with more references).


\(^{35}\) Written note by Capiau of 24th April 1921, private archives Herman Capiau, Centre de documentation, Musée royal de l’Armée et d’Histoire militaire, Brussels. The death certificate and other prison files of Paul Godefroy could not yet been found, neither in the Regional Archives of NRW (Düsseldorf) nor at the Rheinbach penitentiary itself. After the 1918 armistice, the Rheinbach prison was temporarily occupied by British und Belgian military units and records had been confiscated.
Supplementing the above report, additional incriminating findings emerge from the yet unpublished private archives of Capiau that shed another light on Edith Cavell’s activities. A hitherto unknown hand-written note by Capiau, summarising the ‘Affaire Cavell’, point to an again not previously known ‘Conseil Guerre’ (War Committee). Under the heading ‘Organisation définitive’ (final organisation) the following participants of the ‘War Committee’ are named together with Capiau himself: Paul Godefroy, Dr. Tollemacher Bull36, Louise Thuliez, Edith Cavell, and Herman Capiau37.


What was the nature of Edith Cavell’s activities beyond what is said here? Did she simply, as partially upheld, “turned aside from her duty as a spy to perform a work of mercy”38? Was one train hiding another39?

Did she make her rapid and willing concessions to the war tribunal in order to conceal other more far-reaching activities? Despite many references in the literature and despite archives which are slowly opening, there has so far apparently been no comprehensive study or other scientific work to provide the necessary clarification on all these important questions.

If the Cavell literature had addressed or were to address these questions of spying suspicions and confirmed intelligence activities with even half of the same meticulousness instead of depicting her suffering always in the endless repetitions and never-weary details down to the description of her clothes during the tribunal procedure or the dimensions of her prison cell, the truth would benefit and a degree of credibility could be restored.

As Edith Cavell was indeed involved in intelligence activities, as also illustrated by her participation in the ‘War Committee’ together with Capiau and other intelligence agents, and not only knew about and approved of the activities of close collaborators, to whom and on what did she report? Did her activities have something to do with the ‘Belgian Relief’, as has variously been assumed but little

36 Concerning Dr Bull it is said in the Capiau note: “{first word unreadable} chef Dr Bull. War office”. Dr Tollemacher Bull is also mentioned by Katie Pickles, op. cit., 2007, pp. 23-24 (with reference to A. A. Hoeling, ‘Edith Cavell’, London, 1958, pp. 39-40): “...an English acquaintance, dentist Dr Tollermacher Bull, had already helped some Englishmen to escape”. The liaison and possible working relation of Dr Bull with the British ‘War Office’ (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_Office) deserves further investigation.
37 “Conseil Guerre chez Godefroy: Bull, Cavell, Thuliez, Capiau”; undated hand-written note by Capiau, private archives Herman Capiau, Centre de documentation, Musée royal de l'Armée et d’Histoire militaire, Brussels (see the extract below). The relevance of this note also for the Cavell case has not yet been investigated.
39 This supposition has been mentioned already earlier in the Cavell literature, see for example: Katie Pickles, op. cit., 2007, p. 29: “But did Cavell offer a ‘total confession’ in order to conceal greater and more serious activities including spying?”.
substantiated to date\(^{40}\). Did the American ambassador Brand Whitlock as well as the British government kept themselves covered for that reason: ‘Any representation by us will do her more harm than good’\(^{41}\)? A wide field of extended and intensive Cavell research using newly accessible archives is opening up.

‘Secret files show her intelligence role’

"Historian and expert on the intelligence services, Nigel West said: ‘Having presented Cavell as an innocent victim, it must have been very difficult, even in Whitehall, to give her any recognition that she had an intelligence role and an important one at that’.

(\(http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/2342655.stm\)

6. **HELLISH HORDERS**

Whatever supporting evidence and documents may still emerge to spell out in closer detail required and yet missing specifics of Edith Cavell’s intelligence activities, this should not obscure our view and should not blind us to the fact that new and gigantic dimensions of modern propaganda warfare and agitation surfaced, through the Cavell case, from deep layers hitherto hidden. The war propaganda, applied by all warring parties, turned global and, masterfully arranged, misused, exploited and cannibalised the Cavell case by all available means of deception, lies and forgery for set political goals. The appearance of this kind of worldwide warfare in yet unseen extent and scope, this is the true political essence and kernel of the Cavell tragedy. The effects of this total war still largely overshadow Edith Cavell’s personal fate and dignity.

In this context it should be noted that there have been and still are substantial differences in opinion about the Edith Cavell agitation, including also British voices already during the war, as expressed for example in quite drastic words in the well-known Keeling letter of 11\(^{th}\) November 1915:

“... I see from the papers that the silly sentimental agitation about Nurse Cavell still goes on at home. A good many soldiers out here don’t think much of it. I have discussed it with many and found them all of my opinion - while admiring the woman immensely, I think the Germans were quite within their rights in shooting her. The agitation reveals the worst side of the English character. I hope some Suffragists who prefer to stand for the principle of women’s equal responsibility for their actions will protest against the rot that is being talked ...”\(^{42}\).

This call from the trenches was echoed by at least a few suffragists, who stayed dedicated to their cause, like Syliva Pankhurst, horrified to see other women like her own mother and sister become enthusiastic supporters of the war drive, and campaigned in favour of military conscription\(^{43}\).

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\(^{40}\) About the ‘Belgian Relief’, see below pp. 19-20.

\(^{41}\) Lord Robert Cecil, UK Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, in: M. J. Fenn, “Visiting the Edith Cavell Memorial, London, England: a legacy still too troubling to assess objectively?”, 30\(^{th}\) November 2011 (“As if referring to the undesirability of saying hypothetically to the German Governor of Brussels: ‘Don’t be too hard on her; she’s actually one of our spies’.")


\(^{43}\) See: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sylvia_Pankhurst.
Contrary to other suffragistes, Sylvia Pankhurst, the socialist women’s suffrage activist, opposed the war and commented on the Cavell propaganda that:

“The war-mongers here acclaimed her as a heroine, but spurned the truth she voiced in her last message. In the flood-tide of their lust for victory, they used her martyrdom to fan the flames of the hatred she had overcome. The pacifists praised her in a lower key; some even refused to admit her worth, hearing her so lauded by the war party ...”

The ‘dark side’ of the war mongers, expressed so eloquently by Keeling, did indeed turn itself into an unimaginable flood of worldwide propaganda and agitation against the ‘bestial baby-eating Huns’: Nurse Grace Hume, who was reputedly mutilated by German soldiers, but demonstrably never existed. The ‘good’ German soldier Rammler, who reputedly refused to take part in the shooting of Edith Cavell and was shot himself as a result, but in reality was executed and buried already on 3rd October, days before Edith Cavell. And, just one example of countless and perverse posters and cartoons: the martyred Edith Cavell thrown to the swines, lying in blood and mangled by voracious pigs with spiked helmets.

A case in itself is the horrifying atrocity propaganda about Belgian children with hands and arms chopped off by German soldiers in many depictions and even as sculptures. No limits to this and many other perversities, to mention just the best known horror stories from an almost inexhaustible propaganda repertoire.

The Cavell glorification and masterful WWI war propaganda of the secret ‘Wellington House’, the British ‘War Propaganda Bureau’ (later the ‘Crewe House’ of the Ministry of Information/Mol), which knew very well how to use proven and invented German war crimes and the Belgian horror, are felt, as with the ‘Ambron case’ (see above footnote 23), right down to today and into the future. No end to these lies, deceptions, and demonizations, this is fertile ground, they remain in our lie-infested brave new world.

The dead Cavell wrapped in the Belgian and British flags ‘inspiring’ ‘Kultur’ at the piano (Peter van Alfen, 'The Meaning of a Memory: The Case of Edith Cavell and the Lusitania in post-World War I Belgium’, American Numismatic Society, spring 2006)

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45 One of many well-known WWI cartoons by Louis Raemaekers (1869-1956), see: en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Raemaekers

46 Not meant to be an insinuation, but a call for serious research and needed clarification: The propaganda horror about ‘mutilated children in Belgium’ during the German occupation may be based on a collective memory of atrocities in the Congo during the reign of King Leopold II. And in particular the widespread practice of hacking off the hands of victims (for the ‘Casement Report’ of 1904 see: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casement_Report; for Leopold II and the colonial exploitation and atrocities, see: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leopold_II_of_Belgium; for the role by Edmund Dene Morel (above p. 10, footnote 18) see for example: www.yale.edu/gsp/colonial/belgian_congo/; for an account of worldwide propaganda pictures about ‘mutilated children in Belgium’ see the shocking picture gallery at: de.metapedia.org/wiki/Abgehackte_Kinderh%C3%A4nde.

The polarising effects of the Cavell propaganda made deep inroads in our societies and still carries it effects in our times and beyond, perhaps unnoticed for many but as effective as with the ‘Amboyna propaganda’. This came a long way. The Cavell case was never just about the dignity of ‘Saint Edith Cavell’, or about ‘a good woman doing a good work, caught up in the horrors of war’, or about different legal opinions, among which scholars may argue, or about justice or the violation of universal humanity. With devilish agitation and hate and atrocity propaganda unseen before, through a flood of almost unbearable pamphlets and postcards, through press presentations and films and equally banal trivial literature, in sentimental chatter and biographies as many, the outburst of a collective hysteria was unleashed in world opinion and popular culture, used as a pretext to achieve set goals. That is the political essence of the Cavell tragedy far beyond her personal fate and virtue.

7. RELIEF IN BELGIUM

‘Edith’s Wonderland’ comprises a continent of a special kind which still needs to be further discovered: the Hoover world of the Belgian Relief, “the greatest and probably the most efficient charitable enterprise the world has ever known”.

There are in fact many overlaps between the Cavell case and the history of the ‘Commission for Relief in Belgium’ (C.R.B.). The ‘Cavell-Relief connection’ can be detected from important events for both from spring to autumn 1916. The first, very successful year of the Relief, reckoned from 22 nd October 1914 to 31 st October 1915, was the last year of Edith Cavell’s lifecycle. What did she know about the Relief activities via her contacts, in particular at the US Legation, to what extent was she, as partially assumed, but not substantiated, perhaps actually involved, did she send letters or articles on this to inter alia the ‘Nursing Mirror’? Cavell biographies cannot be silent on these important, but hitherto airbrushed questions.

In this regard, there is often talk about suspicions and conspiracies concerning in particular one of her letters which was supposed to be published in the ‘Nursing Mirror’ on 15 th April 1915. What is this all about, had this letter ever been found and what was the content of that infamous letter?

Research at the ‘Nursing Mirror’ archives shows that a letter from Edith Cavell to the ‘Mirror’ dated 29 th March 1915 was actually not published but received on 15 th April, and finally published in the magazine on 24 th April 1915. Before this, the letter was opened and resealed by an unauthorised body. Was MI9, British Military Intelligence or Postal Censorship Branch, German or any other intelligence service or government agency involved? Who was interested in what Edith wrote? The envelope, received on 15 th April 1915, had been (according to the Mirror) ‘burst open’ on both sides and resealed with ‘no outward mark of the Censor’s inspection’. This may suggest that it had been intercepted and any ‘dangerous’ parts removed. However, the Cavell letter or article then published on 24 th April 1915 (from our ‘Nurse in Belgium’) describes only the general living conditions in occupied Belgium yet, despite many conspiracy theories, contains no references to ‘feeding the enemy’ supplies from the American ‘Belgian Relief Committee’ or other onward deliveries.

However, with or without this letter, the ‘Cavell-Relief interactions’ can be confirmed in many details and the effects of the Edith Cavell propaganda war were felt strongly in important moments of the history and bitter crisis of the Relief Commission.

First, there was a close personal relationship between the German Government agencies and civil as well as military officials responsible for both the Cavell case and the transactions of the Relief deliveries on the one side, and on the other, the American and Spanish Governments representatives as well as ‘Relief-Patron Ministers’, in particular the US Ambassador Brand Whitlock, and their staff, all involved in one or the other way, and in continuous contact with the British Government, in the proceedings of the Edith Cavell judicial case and the propaganda that followed. Second, the Cavell case and its propaganda fall-out for Germany had major implications for the Relief’s activities. After having been personally confronted with the Cavell debacle by Herbert Hoover (C.R.B. Chairman and subsequently US President), the above-mentioned Military Governor Traugott von Sauberzweig, who had signed off on Edith Cavell’s execution, ‘felt his arm twisted’ and, under personal pressure, recognised the need to avoid an even greater disaster in public opinion (as well as personal blame) by reconfirming German guarantees and thus on-going support for the Relief’s deliveries.

Committee for Relief in Belgium/C.R.B.,
London, 24th August 1916

Seated from left to right: E. Sengier, Millard K. Shaler, Edgar Rickard, W. L. Honnold, Herbert Hoover, J. Beaver White, W. B. Poland, Hugh S. Gibson

Tracy Kittredge does not mention in his detailed report about the ‘History of the Relief Commission’ either v. Sauberzweig or Edith Cavell by name. Yet, Kittredge speaks in sibylline tones about a meeting between Hoover and Kellogg with ‘General Z, the acting quartermaster-general of the German army’. This mysterious ‘General Z’, chairing a crucial Government conference in Berlin at the beginning of August 1916 about the continuation of the C.R.B., is none other than Traugott von Sauberzweig himself who served exactly at that time as acting quartermaster-general of the German army. A simple cross-comparison with other sources, inter alia the war memoirs, the ‘Journal’ of Brand Whitlock, US Ambassador and one of the two ‘Relief-Patron Ministers’, confirms the assumption that ‘General Z’ is indeed Quartermaster-general Traugott von Sauberzweig. Why this secrecy, why this ‘cat-and-mouse’ game? A puzzle that needs to be aired. Cavell biographies cannot be silent on this.

49 See above, p. 5. As the responsible German military governor, Traugott von Sauberzweig (1863-1920) wanted to ‘set a dissuasive example’ to suppress the growth of underground movements in occupied Belgium and, therefore, had rejected the last-minute mercy request from the US and Spanish Legations to halt the execution of Edith Cavell. Possible interventions at higher level directly in Berlin by the British Government, by the Pope, and any other third country, failed to materialise. Following the propaganda blunder, v. Sauberzweig was primarily blamed for the fall-out and Allied propaganda triumph, and after the war committed suicide in 1920.
50 For the ‘Hoover threat’, see: ‘...Hoover succeeded to convince the General that a decision against the Belgian Relief could bring death to millions of people, and the damage for his reputation would be substantially greater than after the Cavell Case.’ (‘...Hoover schaffte es, den General davon zu überzeugen, eine Entscheidung gegen das Belgische Hilfswerk könnte für Millionen Menschen den Tod bringen und der Schaden für sein Ansehen wäre beträchtlich größer als nach dem Fall Cavell.’), in: de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kommission_%E2%80%93%20Patron_Ministers das Belgische Hilfswerk (marked by the author).
52 For v. Sauberzweig’s military career see in detail: http://home.comcast.net/~jcviser/akb/sauberzweig.htm.
8. **Words of Need**

Edith Cavell continues to move us, concerns us, strikes a chord in our human feelings and views, stuns us with all the misery like a moralistic drug. We no longer look for context and explanations. Can we just keep quiet?

An urgently needed new and extended Cavell research has to prove the case, has to tell us if we have to stay silent despite all the questions that remain, beyond all the endless and irrelevant Cavell chatter offered for free.

But Freddy Derwahl, a German-speaking Belgian poet, does not look away, is not silent, ‘he will bear the heat of his questions out into the suburbs as if they are the golden fleece’. For him, Benn’s ‘Words of need’ are poet’s words on the tragic events of a world experienced as absurd. For the poet, reason enough to set down his feelings in the form of a poem:

“Look at his large hands
so cold and masterful
his shadow the high walls
a healer and stranger among
women walking the streets
black on winter days are
the branches on avenue louise
he will bear the heat of his questions
out into the suburbs
as if they are the golden fleece
shots are heard in the morning
his witness given with steady velvet-

sheathed poet’s claws
and the death knell tolls
blood trickles into the sand
freight on Flemish trains
the cries, the last, a glance
two brandies to deceive himself
should madame cheat on him
will he never return
streets, squares, life
in a sunset worthy of bruegel
treasures are still to be had
and soothing angels hang in the air
above the magical distress."

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**Project “Edith Cavell Park”, Brussels 2012**

*The place where Edith Cavell was executed on 12th October 1915*

*Cemetery of honour - Former National shooting range*

*Part of the RTBF/VRT (Belgian radio and TV) site in Brussels (Schaerbeek/Schaarbeek) -*

*A new VRT building will be constructed on the current site next to the cemetery.*

(www.lem.a.ulg.ac.be/urba/Cours/Cas/1112/Cas%20concret_1_20E40_Clerinx_Fabris.pdf)

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For Freddy Derwahl and the original of his 2007 Benn poem, see: www.belgieninfo.net/artikel/view/article/benn-in-brussel.