"Travelling through Forbidden Zones: Comparing Edith Wharton's and Mary Roberts Rinehart's Experiences in the Great War[1]"

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With the outbreak of World War I, many American journalists and writers crossed the Atlantic in an attempt to witness and report the events that were taking place in Europe. Edith Wharton and Mary Roberts Rinehart were two of the earliest writers to compose eyewitness accounts of the war. Although they did not enjoy equivalent reputations internationally, both women covered the war in a fashion that elicited much public interest. Fourteen years younger than Wharton, Rinehart was a well-known contributor to *The Saturday Evening Post* and was celebrated for her crime fiction.[2] Rinehart's *Kings, Queens and Pawns: An American Woman at the Front* appears in the same year, 1915, as Wharton's *Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort*. The two books stand as valuable and genuine examples of eyewitness accounts written by women in the "topsy turvy" years of the Great War. Yet literary criticism of the Great War has

overlooked their writings, mainly because of the androcentric perspective which has traditionally focused on the experience of veterans.

Fighting France and *Kings, Queens and Pawns* record the passage of these singular women and their observations in a world at war. Despite the cultural and literary interest of these chronicles, and the fact that one of them was written by a well-established writer, these two compilations of articles have received limited critical attention and have never been studied from a comparative point of view.[3] They chronicle two different journeys around the Western Front and evidence characteristics of travel literature. However, some of these features are subverted or modified to conform to the experience of travelling across a world at war.

The late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries--a period of great American westward expansion—witnessed a commensurate boom for travel to the European continent among Americans. Many went to the continent for "the Grand Tour," a romantic and intellectual rite of passage, as well as in search of their family origins.

Many women, initially mere travel companions, embarked on the adventure of independent travel. Consequently, they also started to write about their own experiences in foreign lands. From 1800 to 1900, "the men and women of the United States published, in the United States, more than 2,000 books of travel abroad" (Schriber *Fighting France* 139-140); and between the 1830s and the turn of the century, at least 195 books of travel literature were published by women (Schriber *Writing Home* 2). The "hybrid" character of the travel writing genre (Bird Wright 1), its lack of rigid literary conventions, and the fact that one did not need to be an expert in ethnography, history, art, or sociology to produce travel accounts turned this genre into an accessible literary arena for women of the middle and upper-classes with powers of observation.

In "*Fighting France*: Travel Writing in the Grotesque," Mary Suzanne Schriber

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states that Wharton's *Fighting France* uses "virtually all the conventions of the travel genre: attention to modes of transportation; visits to sacralised sites; construction of the people of foreign lands as the 'other'; and all these were constructed into a narrative of adventure" (140). Taking this claim as a starting point, this essay explores the manner in which *Fighting France* and *Kings, Queens and Pawns* coincide or differ in their treatment of these three conventions in travel-writing.

Attention to modes of transportation is, as Schriber points out, one of the main characteristics of travel literature. At the beginning of *Kings, Queens and Pawns*, Rinehart scrupulously details seven different modes of transport: a train takes her from Victoria Station to the English Coast (8); a steamer takes her across the English Channel to the French coast in Calais (13); a hack is hired on her arrival in Calais (19); an "open grey car with 'Belgian Red Cross' on each side of the machine" (21) drives her to La Panne; another motor-car then takes her from Dunkirk to the Belgian Army headquarters to interview the King of Belgium (33); a limousine is offered to her when she leaves "the protection of the Belgian Red Cross and places herself in the care of the ministry of war" (49), which would become her main mode of transportation for the rest of her tour. Finally, her boat, which was supposed to arrive in Calais, needs to be diverted to Boulogne, more than thirty kilometres away from her original destination, due to the presence of submarines in the route. For this reason, she needs to take another train to reach Calais (17).

The moment Rinehart is given the limousine, she points out that she would always travel in that vehicle, but she adds "always – of course, where a car could go at all" (49). Rinehart is already anticipating that certain areas will be difficult to reach, or will only be reachable on foot. The limousine will need to stop or go with its lights off on certain occasions to avoid being seen and heard by the enemy, especially in those

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areas close to the trenches. The state of the muddy and shell-battered roads, which had very slimy sides, made vehicles go very slowly because, as she explains, "a foot off the centre of the road would have made an end to the excursion" (65). The closer they get to the front, the more difficult it becomes to advance. The car "jolts on" (64) and the road is full of "shell-holes now, great ruts into which the car dropped and pulled out again with a jerk" (64). Finally, the crossing is interrupted and Rinehart needs to continue on foot, not without difficulty, as she is forced to walk through "seas of mud" (64).

Chapter XXIII demonstrates the difficulties Rinehart comes across when touring the military zone. She has dressed up to have tea with some members of the British Army, seven miles behind the firing line, in an unspecified location to which she refers as "somewhere in France" (138). After an unexpected afternoon, in which she has the chance of meeting two of the most famous women at the front,[4] with whom she would later dine, Rinehart experiences the hardships of travelling near the trenches. Three miles away from their final destination, which is "only a mile from the German lines," they have to turn the car lights off and advance in total darkness (150). The road is pitted with shell-holes and progress is slow (150). The car eventually breaks down in the middle of a rainy night and she is forced to walk for miles through the muddy roads in her high-heeled shoes (151), not the most suitable attire for travelling in the danger zone.

It is surprising, however, that despite some of the difficulties that Rinehart experiences, she defines her time in the limousine as "soft and warm and comfortable" (49). She acknowledges that she was frequently in danger, but she also claims the following:

Except for the two carbines strapped to the speedometer, except for the soldier-

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> chauffeur and the orderly who sat together outside, except for the eternal consulting of maps and showing of passes, I might have been making a pleasure tour of Northern France and Belgium. In fact, I have toured abroad during times of peace and have been less comfortable. (49)

The reference to pleasure tours, together with the description of her time at the limousine, reveals much about her attitudes towards her trip. Rinehart was there working for the *Saturday Evening Post,* but visiting the terra incognita of the front also implied an element of adventure which pervades the fabric of *Kings, Queens and Pawns*. Rinehart claims to be in a "state of bewilderment" (19), a particular characteristic of travellers who are confronted with the challenges and thrills of visiting an unknown land.

Wharton constantly refers to vehicles in *Fighting France* as well. The volume begins with Wharton "motoring north from Poitiers" (3), already giving the motor-car an important role in the development of her narrative. It is not surprising that Wharton opens her narrative with a reference to the motor-car. As several scholars have pointed out, throughout her life Wharton displayed an intense devotion for travelling and movement (Schriber *A Motor-flight* xix) and the speed of cars always fascinated her (Schriber *A Motor-flight* xxi). In the opening lines of *A Motor-flight through France* (1908), Wharton's most famous travelogue, she asserts, "the motor-car has restored the romance for travel" (1) – an assertion that resonates throughout *Fighting France*. As Olin-Ammentorp remarks, even though her Mercedes is "carrying her towards the horrors of the war, … her enthusiasm for trips to the front equalled her enthusiasm for travel in times of peace" (34).

Wharton's travels across the Western Front cover the long line from Dunkirk to

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Belfort, and the car will be her way of locomotion throughout most of the journey. However, Wharton, just like Rinehart, will also have to abandon her vehicle in those areas where motoring becomes impossible. One such incident occurs during her visit to the first-line trenches in the Vosges. Wharton has been motoring to get to the top of an unspecified mountain and is asked whether she would like to get a view of the first-line trenches (Wharton *Fighting France* 60). She accepts this exclusive offering, but visiting the trenches implies giving up her vehicle and its conveniences. Her entrance into this unknown and dangerous territory is depicted as follows: "Down we scrambled, single file, our chins on a level with the top of the passage, the close green covert above us" (61). In passages such as this, Wharton abandons the role of the leisure traveller and is forced to adopt a position that resembles that of the combatants in the trenches: crawling to advance while making an effort to remain unseen by the enemy.

Wharton visits that area again in August 1915. While she is on her way to "one of the main positions in the Vosges" (90), Wharton needs to ride a mule to reach the top of one of the highest mountain in the region (91). During her time in the mountains, she writes: "We had not yet made the whole tour of the mountain-top" (93). The use of the word "tour" endows the narrative with a direct relation with the idea of travelling. Wharton adopts here the attitude of the leisure traveller, and not that of the journalist or the social worker. This idea is reinforced in an earlier reference to the "guide-book" (68) she had been reading while visiting Cassel. The guidebook is yet another recurrent element that links *Fighting France* with the vocabulary of the travelogue.

This is not, however, the only attention that the two writers pay to modes of transportation. In *Fighting France* and *Kings, Queens and Pawns* vehicles of a certain kind – ambulances or motor-vans – become indicators of the proximity of war and thus remind the reader that the authors, quite clearly, are not travelling for leisure. Going

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eastward, Wharton "begins to feel the change … the 'civilian motor' had disappeared, and all the dust-coloured cars dashing past us were marked with the Red Cross or the number of an army division" (21). A similar observation is made by Rinehart: "From Calais to Gravelines there had been few signs of war – an occasional grey lorry laden with supplies for the front; great ambulances, also grey, and with a red cross on the top as a warning to airplanes; now and then an armored car" (21-22). These vehicles are no longer used for carrying tourists, but for transporting the wounded, the soldiers to the trenches, or the supplies that are needed at the front. In Argonne, Wharton poignantly captures the sinister spectacle of empty ambulances going to the firing line:

> First the infantry and artillery, the sappers and miners, the endless trains of guns and ammunition, then the long line of grey supply-wagons, and finally the stretcher-bearers following the Red Cross ambulances. All the story of a day's warfare was written in the spectacle of that endless silent flow to the front. (41)

Edith Wharton and Mary Roberts Rinehart did not only have to deal with the difficulties of reaching certain areas where cars could not get through, but they also had to overcome a major challenge: the limitations in the freedom of movement in a country at war. Freedom of movement is one of the characteristics of travel literature, but as Mary Suzanne Schriber points out, in this war "travel is . . . dictated and circumscribed by a war that has effectively destroyed the larger liberty associated with travel" (Schriber *Fighting France* 144).

Rinehart gives an account of these difficulties very early in her narration. When the boat that should have taken her to Calais is diverted to Boulogne due to the presence of submarines, Rinehart gets a first glimpse of how movement is limited in a world at

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war. She imagines the hardships that she would have to overcome to reach Calais: “I had visions of waiting in Boulogne, of growing old and grey waiting, or of trying to walk to Calais and being turned back, of being locked in a cow stable and bedded down on straw” (13). Immediately after her arrival in France, she finds herself in another situation that confirms her suspicions about the difficulties of movement across the war zone. When she finally reaches Calais (18), she starts looking for a car in an empty town and the only vehicle she finds is a hack. It is not until the next morning that she finds out that there was a curfew after ten o’clock (18), yet another example of the limited nature of movement in a country at war.

Both authors often reiterate that civilians were not allowed to enter certain areas. Rinehart points out, at the beginning of her journey, how towns such as Calais were “under military law” and for that reason “it is difficult to enter, almost impossible to leave in the direction in which [she] wished to go” (21). Wharton undergoes similar experiences during her trip around Argonne. She has spent the day travelling in the Champagne, and when night falls, Wharton tries to find a room in the town of Châlons, only to discover that all rooms have been booked or occupied by the army (39). Forced to leave Châlons, she tries to drive to Epernay, “about twelve miles off” (39), but getting there will not be an easy task since “no motors are allowed to circulate after night-fall in the zone of war” (39).

In order to reach their desired destinations, permits needed to be issued. During this particular episode in Argonne, Wharton explains that her “request” to go to Epernay “could not be granted” (39). This is not the only occasion on which she is refused entrance to a particular place. While travelling across *la Voie Sacrée* – as the road connecting Verdun with the rest of France during the battle of Verdun came to be known – Wharton is constantly obliged to request permits and extensions to make her

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progress along the proscribed corridor in Verdun, abandoning the "liberty associated with travel" to which Schriber refers.

The presence of obstacles that seriously jeopardize the traveller's freedom of movement also features in Rinehart's account. Rinehart is given "a pink slip" that will be her pass to the front (21). However, even with this valuable slip in her hand, she will be looked upon with hostility in certain areas in which "women were not allowed, under any circumstances" (23). She even mentions how, after a short stay in England, her Red Cross card failed as a valid permit. Rinehart arrives in Calais and needs to go to Dunkirk to start a visit to the French lines (107-108). She depicts the scene as follows: "For the first time on this journey I encountered difficulty with the sentries. My Red Cross Card had lost its potency. A new rule had gone out that even a staff car might not carry a woman. Things looked very serious for a time. But at last we got through" (108). Whereas Wharton accentuates that no civilians were allowed near the war zones, Rinehart stresses that no women were allowed in those areas, reinforcing the importance of her presence as a woman – and not as a civilian – in "the forbidden zone."

Both Wharton and Rinehart experience the hardships of moving in a world of uncertainty, in which vehicles might fail to get them to their destinations or issued permits might be rejected. But the war does not only disrupt their journey, it also presents "a crazy-mirror image of the world of travel" (Schriber *Fighting France* 144). In their journey, Rinehart and Wharton often fail in their attempts to experience the typical situations associated with the adventure of travelling. Tourist sites are turned into the "sights/sites of war, and the culture in which the traveller is immersed is jerry-built, made up of odd, impermanent architecture to house a temporary population" (Schriber *Writing Home* 205). Thus, the attention they pay to the sacralized sites mentioned by Schriber, especially in the case of Wharton, differs from the observation

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typically made by leisure travellers. Their visits to sacralized places, such as the cathedral of Rheims, now burnt by German fire, far from suggesting a pleasure trip, suggests "a journey into a nightmare" (Schriber *Fighting France* 140).

The destruction of historical landmarks inevitably features in Wharton's narrative, but she focuses most persistently on the devastated towns and villages that she finds on the way, which come to symbolize the destruction of the French way of life. The village of Auve is the first casualty that she encounters, and the sight of the "lamentable ruins" of a hitherto prosperous village scandalizes her. Contemplating the pitiful sight of homes reduced to a "mere waste of rubble and cinders" (26), she feels "haunted" by the vision "of all separate terrors, anguishes, uprootings and rendings apart involved in the destruction of the obscurest of human conditions" (26). Cynthia Griffin Wolff claims in her book *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton* (1977) that "Germany had decided to break the spirits of its adversary" and for this reason the fighting was not only against the soldiers in the fields, but it also aimed to destroy the homes of the French nation (262). It was this calculated disruption of the nation's sense of continuity that so outraged Edith Wharton; for more than many observers, she perfectly understood the Germans' real goal.

It is not a coincidence that the image of the ruined house should be so central to Wharton's account. Teresa Gómez Reus and Peter Lauber, who have explored the wide range of spatial experience captured by Wharton as she travelled around the front, have pointed out how her life-long obsession with houses and living space emerges with force in her literary rendering of that experience. Anticipating Gaston Bachelard's "poetics of space," they claim, Wharton attributes to an inhabited place a significance that transcends its pure geometrical reality:

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> Wharton's wariness in exposing human suffering completely disappears in her detailed descriptions of broken towns and shattered homes. It is for more than merely stylistic reasons that she reverts to the same anthropomorphic language she had used in connection with churches and houses in her peace-time travelogues, and whose range she now imaginatively expands to fit the novel theme of war. It is a subtle way of making houses reveal what censorship and personal reserve prevent her from treating openly. (Gómez Reus and Lauber 210-11)

Having grown up in Victorian New York, in suffocating interiors, she reacted to the ugliness of her childhood home by developing "an awareness and sensibility in the creation of harmonious houses" (Gómez Reus and Lauber 210-11). In her life and work, the creation of living space would remain one of her most deeply cherished themes, and "in her portrayal of 'fighting France' this preoccupation would assume a new and tragic dimension" (Gómez Reus and Lauber 210-11) .

In Gerbéviller, "the martyr town" (Wharton *Fighting France* 45) after the German occupation in 1914, Wharton is appalled by the sight of ravaged houses and gardens and uses Biblical images (Bird Wright 92) to convey the scene: "Her ruins seem to have been simultaneously vomited up from the depths and hurled down from the skies, as though she had perished in some monstrous clash of earthquake and tornado" (Wharton *Fighting France* 45). This language, although reminiscent of the tradition of the American sermon, has a cathartic effect for the writer (Bird Wright 93), liberating through words the horror that such shocking destruction has produced.

However, the most powerful image that she offers, the one that epitomizes the brutality of the German invasion, is her encounter with the historical town of Ypres. In

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June 1915, when the Second Battle of Ypres had just taken place, she visits this Belgian town, claiming that "Germany had willed that these places should die" (Wharton *Fighting France* 74); and from the depiction that she provides it seems that they have achieved much of their objective: "Ypres has been bombarded to death, and the outer walls of its houses are still standing, so that it presents the distant semblance of a living city, while near by it is seen to be a disembowelled corpse" (71). The contrast between appearance, "the living city", and reality, "the disembowelled corpse," is reminiscent of the war itself: destruction is not seen from the distance, but when one gets a closer look, one can perceive the real devastation that it has caused. Gómez Reus and Lauber have observed that in Ypres, Wharton seems to lament more the destruction of homes than that of the city's monumental architecture, whose ruins she finds aesthetically appealing: "Schooled in the aesthetic tradition of Ruskin, these medieval edifices seem to make a deeper impression on her in their state of ruin than when she saw them intact in 1908" (Gómez Reus and Lauber 214). Yet, the destruction of the Cathedral of Ypres and the medieval Cloth Market do not leave her indifferent: "The walls of the Cathedral, the long bulk of the cloth market, still lift themselves above the market place with a majesty that seems to silence compassion" (Wharton *Fighting France* 72). The historical buildings have been bombed, but their walls are still standing, presenting therefore a city that is "destroyed but not abased" (Wharton *Fighting France* 72).

Rinehart generally does not pay too much attention to historical landmarks. However, it must be pointed out that one of the few depictions she does offer of devastated towns is a description of Ypres. Contrary to Wharton, Rinehart focuses on and describes in detail the destruction of the Cloth Hall, the medieval market of Ypres, stressing its significance for the Flemish people. Rinehart explains to her American readers that Belgians have traditionally built "their art into their buildings" (94) and for

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this reason, the destruction of such a historical place has caused much grief among the population. As she points out, “the loss of their homes they had accepted stoically. But this was much more. It was the loss of their art, their history, their tradition. And it could not be replaced” (94). This stands in contrast with Wharton’s view. While Rinehart emphasizes the relevance of art for the Belgians, lamenting the loss of their artistic heritage, Wharton portrays the havoc and suffering of war through the image of the “murdered house”, which she treats as a human victim (Gómez Reus and Lauber 210).

Even more pitiful is the depiction that Rinehart offers of a cemetery near Nieuport, on the Belgian coast. She finds the cemetery crosses “flung about in every grotesque position . . . Graves were uncovered; the dust of centuries exposed” (83). One of the most hallowed places that can exist, the site of eternal rest according to Christian theology, has been brutally shelled. The image of crosses in odd positions speaks volumes about German disrespect for sacred space and suggests to the reader the feeling of reading a travel narrative in the grotesque.

Apart from recording the spaces they visited, Mary Roberts Rinehart and Edith Wharton also emphasize the people they observed. This leads us to the third characteristic of travelogues mentioned in Schriber’s essay: that of constructing people from foreign nations “as the other.” This feature appears in both works, although this process of “othering” is carried out differently from the one traditionally used in the tradition of travel literature. Edith Wharton and Mary Roberts Rinehart were two American women travelling across France and Belgium; for this reason, in keeping with the conventions of travelogues, one would expect them to contrast their own American values and traditions with the French or Belgian way of life. In other words, in conventional travelogues, the foreign land (France and Belgium in this case) would be

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constructed as the "other," perhaps inferior, or perhaps perceived as a "landscape of desire" (Benstock 19). However, their journey here is a trip around a world at war in which they are brought face to face with pain, grief and destruction, and for which someone – the German nation – has all the blame.

Edith Wharton had been living in Paris for seven years before the outbreak of the Great War – a choice of life motivated by her deep admiration for French culture, which she perceived as aesthetically coherent and intellectually nourishing, compared to the restrictive and stifling milieu of America. For this reason, although she wrote *Fighting France* for her American readers, it is written from the French perspective, casting herself as the defender of the French cause. Hence, the German nation, the enemy of her "*real patrie*" (Foster 130), the evil agent of so much grief and devastation, is the one that is "othered" in her text. The Germans are the "Hun," the merciless hordes responsible for the annihilation of a rich cultural heritage.

Wharton needs to deal with the difficulties of portraying an unseen enemy. She carries out this "othering" by focusing on the destruction that the Germans have wreaked upon the towns and villages she encounters on her way. While in Belgium, she reflects on "the evil shadow" (74) that has fallen over the different Belgian towns, and she denounces that wherever this shadow falls, "all things should wither at the root" (74). These ruined villages are left as symbols of the German evilness or, in her own words, the "German fury" (26). The Germans are not given a voice to speak for themselves; rather, they are characterized through the depiction of what they have caused.

On several occasions, Wharton allows others to speak of the horrific deeds of the "Huns." While she is visiting a Hospice in Sainte-Menehould, on her way to Verdun, she provides a detailed account of her encounter with Sister Gabrielle Rosnet, a nun

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who had witnessed much of the cruelties perpetrated by the invaders. The expression she uses to characterize them is "*ces satanés Allemands*"[5] (28), which is directly quoted and is left un-translated. She follows a similar line in her encounter with M. Liégeay, the former Mayor of Gerbéviller. Wharton reproduces the story told by the Mayor, who had "witnessed all the horrors of the invasion" (46): she reports how the Germans had set his house on fire – "a charming house, of the sober old Lorraine pattern" – and how the "incendiaries," suspecting that he and his family were hiding in the cellar, had heaped wood and straw all around the house to try "to get at them" (46).

Rinehart, too, shows clear sympathies with the Allied cause. Despite the fact that she was working as a reporter for a newspaper from a neutral country, she insists that in this war "one must take sides" (115). Treating the German enemy as the "other" is a necessary concomitant of this bias. In her process of "othering," however, she uses a different technique from Wharton's. On most occasions, when Rinehart refers to the Germans, she limits herself to their military strategies and their style of warfare. She mentions the magnesium flares they were using on the battlefield (67), their constant onslaught (10), and their terror campaigns against the civilian population (54). Yet, hardly ever does she use adjectives such as "ferocious" or "evil" that Wharton uses to refer to the German army. What she does, to a much greater extent than Wharton, is give voice to others who can speak of the havoc of war from their own experience. She interviews certain individuals, such as a Belgian captain, or the King of Belgium, and enquires about their opinions of the German invasion. It may seem that Rinehart is neutral and detached, but the introduction of these interviews indicates another narrative ploy that places the Germans in a decidedly unfavourable light.

During her encounter with Captain F. at the Third Division of the Belgian Army, he characterizes the Germans as "brave but brutal" (70). He reports on the German

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advance and explains how the soldiers protected themselves with women and children, denouncing that civilians fell first in the fighting (70). A similar denunciation appears in her interview with the King. Rinehart asks him whether it is true that men, women and children have been used as human shields. The King gives her a categorical answer: "It is quite true. It is a barbarous and inhuman system of protecting the German advance. When the Belgian soldiers fired on the enemy they killed their own people" (36). By including these references to the German abuse on civilians, Rinehart twice reinforces the idea of German brutality.

When Rinehart dines with the Heroines of Pervyse in the immediate proximity of the Belgian trenches, she mentions that a Belgian major has offered her the possibility of taking to America a German prisoner (154). Rinehart had been gathering "war relics" of her European trip (Rinehart *My Story* 192) and the major suggests giving her a "German sentry to take home as a trophy" (Rinehart *Kings, Queens and Pawns* 154). This is, perhaps, the most inhuman reference that Rinehart makes of a German individual. Her initial reaction is not one of horror, but of accepting the major's offer: "Certainly, it would be most interesting" (154). Although she finally refuses to take him home, the inclusion of this reference suggests that the enemy, in a war, is always seen as "the other": the sentry loses his human dimension and is treated as a collectible object, as an exotic element, not as a subject.

When Edith Wharton, in her trip to the first line trenches in the Vosges, finally sees a dead German combatant, she follows a similar process of objectification. She does not seem to feel any conflicting emotions at the sight of his dead body. Wharton looks through a peep-hole in the trenches and then proclaims that "one saw at last" (62), suggesting her relief at having "at last" got a glimpse of an enemy that is constantly elusive. The German soldier is merely "a grey uniform huddled in a dead heap" (62), a

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continuation of the horrifying landscape that she is observing. She does not endow him with any human attributes: the soldier is completely objectified.

Perhaps simply because she had seen more wounded Germans than her American compatriot, Rinehart seems to sympathize with the German soldiers more often than Wharton. It seems that, for Rinehart, the German empire is the evil force that is causing so much grief, but German individuals – or the traces of those individuals – she encounters are given a more humane treatment and thus become less "othered" than Wharton's Germans.

Rinehart generally offers a heroic view of the Belgian population, whom she depicts as "a courageous people, a bravely cheery people" (30). However, she also includes examples that make the reader reflect on the human suffering that the conflict provokes on both sides, making the other, the enemy, become a part of the human race. One of the first examples is provided during her interview with King Albert. The King acknowledges that, despite the fact that fearful things have been done, "it would be unfair to condemn the whole German Army" (35). He recognizes that some regiments have behaved in a humane manner, but insists that "others behaved very badly" (35).

Rinehart also includes in Chapter XIV an episode in which an official reads her a postcard taken from a dead German combatant (100). Rinehart mentions his name, Otto, and includes the whole text of the postcard in her book. By giving the German soldier's name, she turns him into a real person, a subject, instead of a mere object. She also indicates that the postcard was from the soldier's wife, who "was making clothing for the children and sending him little packages" (100). The introduction of references to the soldier's wife and family is another resource employed by Rinehart to stress Otto's humanity by providing him with a personal history. She points out that he is "dead of an ideal" (100), after having been forced to follow "the beckoning finger of

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empire” (100), a remark that indicates Rinehart’s critical view of German imperialism, but not of the men who are obliged to die for it.

A fragment of the diary of a German officer, written in October 1914 and accounting the terrible Battle of the Yser is also included (60-63). The account is incomplete; the diary entry ends with a broken sentence because the officer was killed while he was writing it (63). Rinehart claims to have read other diaries with equally unfinished sentences, and she remarks that “there is nowhere in the world a more pitiful or tragic or thought-compelling literature than these diaries of German officers thrust forward without hope and waiting for the end” (63). The Germans still remain unseen, but their accounts of battle give them a human dimension, since they are also portrayed as individuals capable of suffering and grief. This poignant episode recorded by Rinehart – the reading of a diary which ends abruptly in the middle of a sentence – is, according to Santanu Das, one of the most haunting experiences that we may come across when examining the writings from the First World War (11-14).

However, the best example of German humanization that Rinehart provides is given after a visit to the trenches, where she is shown a rabbit trap set up to capture German soldiers who try to penetrate the Allied lines (133). Rinehart thinks of the German prisoners and wounded that she has encountered and she unexpectedly thinks of Wilhelm, her German-American gardener (134). Rinehart acknowledges that “suddenly the rabbit trap and the trench grew unspeakably loathsome to me” (133); she realises that men who are serving for the German army are not to blame for the delirium of the German government and the imperialistic pretensions of the Kaiser. She thinks that “there must be many Wilhelms in the German Army, fathers, good citizens, kindly men who had not thought of a place in the sun except for the planting of a garden. Men who have followed the false gods of their country with the ardent blue eyes of supreme

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faith" (134). The Germans, too, are family men whose only sin has been that of having been born in the "wrong" side. Rinehart recognizes the humanity in the enemy and asks to be taken away from the spot.

The attitudes of both women writers toward the German enemy reflect their own personal attitudes towards the war. For Wharton, the war, far from representing loss of faith, despair, and paralysis, was "a call to arms in the face of human tragedy" (Benstock 30). She made "a profoundly vital response" (30) to the French cause, which she felt was her own. Thus, her literary treatment of the Germans is more openly negative than Rinehart's. The Germans are responsible for the destruction of French architecture and culture, and they can only be characterized as evil beasts. Rinehart, on the other hand, adopts the position of the detached observer, even of the leisure traveller, and thus is capable of seeing glimpses of humanity behind the devastation she encounters in her tours within the war zone. The Germans are dying in the trenches have families and feelings too, and suffer the war in a similar manner to the French and the Belgians. The emotional involvement of both authors shapes the fabric of their texts and results in two different treatments of the same enemy. Their travel texts formulate these responses, revealing not only the complexities of the creators' subjective positions, but also the complexities and idiosyncrasies of travel discourse in times of war.

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[2] Mary Roberts Rinehart was born on August 12, 1876. Her crime novel *The Circular Staircase* (1908) sold a million and a quarter copies (Cohn 1980, 67). In January, 1915, the editor of *The Saturday Evening Post* sent her to Europe to report on the Great War.

[3] Teresa Gómez Reus refers to some of the existing similarities between *Fighting France* and *Kings, Queens and Pawns* in her introduction to *¡Zona Prohibida! Mary Borden, una enfermera norteamericana en la Gran Guerra* (21-24), although she does not offer an in-depth comparative analysis of both texts.

[4] The Women of Pervyse, Elsie Knocker and Mairi Chisholm, were two British volunteers who became war heroines for the first aid post they established in the cellar of a ruined house at Pervyse, a destroyed village only a few yards from the Belgian trenches. They were awarded the Order of Leopold I by the King of Belgium in January 1915. The adaptation of their diaries, *The Cellar-House of Pervyse: A Tale of Uncommon Things*, was published in 1917.

[5] "These damned Germans."

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