

SPECTATORS OF WAR:
GENDERED WITNESSING, AGE, AND RED TAPE IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR
WRITINGS OF EDITH WHARTON AND MAY SINCLAIR

BY

Hannah Lytle

A Study

Presented to the Faculty

of

Wheaton College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for

Graduation with Departmental Honors

in English

Norton, Massachusetts

May 15, 2017

ACKNOWLEDEMENTS

I am infinitely grateful to all of those who supported me throughout this project.

Thank you to my parents for their constant encouragement and for making it possible to attend Wheaton, and to my siblings, who set the bar high.

Thank you Nick Elliot, my number one fan.

Thank you Caleigh Grogan for always listening. Thank you iSpeak for giving me space to write. Thank you BAC and History Club.

Thank you to the library staff, and thank you Steve for always rooting for me. Thank you Media Services, especially Ellen Kane.

I would like to acknowledge the English Department for allowing me to pursue this project, and all the professors who helped me along the way. Thank you to the History Department, Dolita, DP, Professor Bezís-Selfa, Professor Cecil, Professor Tomasek, and Professor Bloom.

I would also like to thank Professor Byrne and Professor Tomasek for serving on my thesis committee, and for their enthusiasm and guidance.

Finally, thank you to Professor Claire Buck who made this project possible, for the inspiration and for constantly challenging me to produce my best work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
One	
“I do not call you comrades”: May Sinclair’s Impressions of the Great War	15
Two	
Gendering the War Effort: Femininity and Propaganda in Edith Wharton’s <i>Fighting France</i>	39
Three	
Young Women, Old Women: The image of the war effort’s Redundant Woman in the short fiction of Edith Wharton and May Sinclair	61
Conclusion	91
Bibliography	96
Appendix	
“Dedication” – May Sinclair	100

INTRODUCTION

The First World War officially began in July of 1914, and in the years following up until the war ended in November 1918, European men and women from fifty countries sought ways to benefit the war effort, either through the military, medical or relief aid, or fundraising. For women, the desire to participate in the war effort was limited by gendered conceptions of war as a masculinized space, affecting their access to the war front and their ability to witness and write about their experiences during the war. Even those who spent time working at the front were always positioned as bystanders or observers rather than participants. This problem of witnessing became especially relevant to women war writers, who were constrained by the conventions of the war writing genre that placed a premium on the lived experiences of male combatants over the experience of female journalists, nurses, drivers, and volunteers. Even despite such limitations, women's writing about the war, ranging from non-fiction accounts and life writings to short stories, novels, and poems, began at the outset of the war and continued into the 1920s.

In the introduction to *Women's Writing on the First World War*, an anthology of women's writings about the First World War written edited by Agnes Cardinal, Dorothy Goldman, and Judith Hattaway, the editors suggest that "The notion that war is a man's affair has been supported and reinforced by a literature of war which, traditionally, arises almost exclusively out of men's experiences.... Those who survived would, for the rest of their lives, continue to revisit, remember, reiterate, and assimilate that first raw

confrontation with the actuality of war” (4). Because men were the ones with direct access to the threat of war and battle, and because war is a masculinized space of violence, the sublime, and male combatants, the most revered literature of war has generally consisted of works by men about male experiences. Yet, in First World War literature, there is an entire body of women’s writing about the war, in which women explore a range of emotions and an expanse of experience, including their own experiences at home and on the front, as well as fictional interpretations of the work being done by both men and women. Many women did “witness” the war and its consequences despite not engaging in combat, and used writing to reveal the myriad aspects of the war effort and to portray the heroism, trauma, and at times alienation that women volunteers experienced.

For authors Edith Wharton and May Sinclair, their writings about the First World War both reflected and constituted their war work. They felt deep impulses to perform tangible service to the war effort – Wharton at home in support of refugees and Sinclair at the front in Belgium as part of an ambulance unit – while also writing about imagined war stories in their fiction and translations of their own experiences in their life writing. Wharton worked exhaustively to provide funds, housing, and shelter to refugees, while also writing as a propagandist in support of French involvement in the war. Sinclair travelled through Belgium as part of an ambulance unit from a medical-psychological clinic, and journaled the experiences of herself and her unit. Despite their intense desire to support the war effort, their experience, and the constraints and reception of their writing, was always influenced by the unique intersection of age, gender, and class. Both women were in their fifties at the outbreak of the war, which placed them in a separate

category from the young women who were shown preference in volunteer roles. The age parameters for nurses were specifically limited; the Red Cross for example only permitted women between ages 23 and 38 to join Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs) units (British Red Cross 3). Older women generally performed philanthropic and refugee aid at home instead. Because of their status as upper class women and older, established writers, both Sinclair and Wharton were able to raise significant funds and travel to the front. Yet due to their gender, regardless of how close they got to the war zone and the validity of the types of work they were doing, the status of war as a masculinized space and the ways that witnessing was portrayed as exclusive to combatants would always situate them as spectators or even tourists of the war.

The First World War writings of May Sinclair and Edith Wharton reveal that the intersection of age, gender, and class severely limited the extent to which they were allowed to participate in or witness the war. It was generally believed that women could not produce compelling firsthand accounts of the war because they were always barred from accessing the same spaces as men. For Sinclair and Wharton, this question of witnessing becomes a question of genre; their journaling of their experiences at war falls outside of the conventions of male soldier's writing and outside the conventions of the diaries of VAD nurses or conventional female participants. Both authors use writing as a way to create tangible value and purpose for themselves during the war. Sinclair openly criticizes the treatment of women volunteers like herself and uses psychoanalytic modes of analysis to distinguish her work. Wharton uses irony and wit in her short stories to reveal that women volunteers were reduced to caricatures of misguided wealthy women,

but also acted as a major propagandist in her non-fiction articles about her tours through French battlefields.

Before turning to the details of my argument, it is important to define both life writing and witnessing. Life writing, broadly, is a practice of writing about one's own or another's life experiences, memories, and perspective. Life writing crosses many different genres, including journals, personal testimonies, and articles, such as the works produced by Sinclair and Wharton. For both authors, genre is a major issue in their life writings about the war. Sinclair creates a text that she calls a journal, but specifies that it contains her "impressions" rather than strict fact, and that we can assume it is edited and to some extent fictionalized. Wharton writes what appears to be candidly about her journey through French battlefields at the beginning of the war, but her entire collection of articles, *Fighting France*, is shaped by the gendered conventions of propaganda. For both authors, their short fiction contains elements of inspiration and autobiographical material from their own lives, as they consider women, particularly older women, who deal with the same barriers that Sinclair and Wharton experienced themselves. Ultimately, in having both been active, enthusiastic supporters and participants of the war, many of their war writings seem to have absorbed the first hand experiences of Sinclair and Wharton.

This thesis deals with access and witnessing as a major question for understanding women's roles in the genre of First World War writing. For our purposes witnessing might be defined as the experience of seeing an act or acts of war firsthand, in the moment that they occurred. The simplest form of this might be a soldier, or a noncombatant with access to the front seeing combat happening next to or to him, such as

Earnest Hemingway who was wounded by mortar fire while serving as a medical orderly for the Red Cross. For women writers like Sinclair and Wharton, witnessing is complicated by the value assigned to the acts observed. Both women directly participated in and witnessed war work, such as raising funds, assisting displaced women, or gathering medical supplies, but because this work is feminized and not part of the “man’s affair” or experience, it is not considered a direct witnessing of the war. What women authors might see of men’s affairs, the “real” war work, though accurate given their closeness to it, would not be considered a firsthand account because they did not perform it themselves. As long as war work was equated with certain types of work completed by men, and the value of war writing being determined by how close the author got to the actual war, the conventions of war writing would continue to devalue the access that women had to writing about the war. In line with this method of evaluating war work and writing, there is a distinction between the spectator, women like Wharton and Sinclair who were believed to “observe” the war rather than experience it, and the witness, men whose accounts of war were more valued because they had access to masculinized spaces

Qualifying what is considered successful or unsuccessful work is highly subjective, and is difficult to name when not all types of work are valued equally. For May Sinclair, this thesis will explore the feelings of rejection, disappointment, and jealousy she felt when she attempted to join the war effort but felt that she could not contribute anything valuable while travelling through war-torn Belgium due to being an older woman without medical training. She spent a mere two weeks at the front, and discovered first that it was much less exciting and much more boring than she had anticipated and second that she could only really help her unit by writing checks and

raising funds. Though her novels about the war were well received, her journal about her work in Belgium was not, and ultimately Sinclair felt that her war work was unsuccessful. She channeled this disappointment and sense of futility into her writing, by suggesting that in general women of a certain age and position were marginalized. Edith Wharton, on the other hand, made significant contributions to the war effort by providing aid to refugees and acquiring funds and materials for the war. Despite her expansive experience in providing relief and aid to combatants, as well as travelling through France as a journalist, her war writing was not as well liked as her novels about late 19th century New York society. By sheer numbers Wharton's war work was successful, but in her writing she reveals the limitations that women had to deal with in writing about war and as propaganda, and also presents caricatures of the unlikeable women too involved in the masculinized spaces in war. This thesis explores how Sinclair and Wharton dealt with complicated and often contradictory feelings about the extent to which they contributed to the war effort and to which their war writing and war work was valued.

In order to establish both the prominence of these women in the war effort and writing, and the connection between life writing and fiction, here I will provide an account of their lives. May Sinclair, born Mary Amelia May St. Clair Sinclair in August of 1863 as the only daughter of William and Amelia Sinclair, was a modernist, psychoanalytic literary scholar, and writer of the First World War. During early childhood, she was raised in a respectable upper middle class home in Cheshire, England until her father's shipping business went under during the 1860s. Her father struggled with alcoholism, while her mother impressed what Sinclair scholar Suzanne Raitt describes as strict, "austere Northern Irish Protestantism" values upon her in a way that

Sinclair described as “inflexible” and as a “cold, bitter, narrow tyranny” (Quoted in Raitt, 19). Sinclair studied for a year at Cheltenham Ladies’ College, where she developed strong distinction in various fields of study. While at Cheltenham, Sinclair became a mentee of renowned educational reformer and suffragist Dorothea Beale, under whom Sinclair developed a passion for philosophy and academia, and displayed the early signs of what Raitt denotes as a “woman of ideas” (Raitt 26). Her success in formal education, though brief, foreshadowed her later success as a writer and her deep interest in psychoanalytic thought. Unfortunately, her father died and then shortly afterwards Sinclair served as a caretaker for four of her brothers due to a fatal heart defect they all shared who died in short succession. Despite such tragedy and being forced to cut her education short to care for her family, Sinclair continued to study philosophy and began to write, publishing philosophical poetry and later her first novel in 1897. Sinclair published throughout the early 1900s, and became popular in England and the United States from her novel *The Divine Fire*. Between 1908 and the 1920s she wrote extensively on the Brontë sisters and the uncanny, and became fascinated with psychoanalysis. During the war, in addition to her *Journal of Impressions* and her short story “Red Tape,” which this thesis deals with, she wrote four key novels about the war, *Tasker Jevons* (1916), *The Tree of Heaven* (1917), *The Romantic* (1920), and *Anne Severn and the Fieldings* (1922).

Sinclair’s involvement in the First World War is largely characterized by disappointment. At the outbreak of the war in 1914, Sinclair pursued volunteer involvement in the war effort through connection to the Medico-Psychological Clinic. She was friends with its founder, Hector Munro, and she helped establish the clinic in

1913 through a generous monetary donation, and supported its fund for shell shocked soldiers in late 1914. When Munro established an ambulance unit through the clinic he recruited Sinclair to help acquire financial backing, and she accompanied the unit to the Belgian front in 1915. Though eager to help with the war effort in any way possible, Sinclair was sent home very short after arriving in Belgium. Raitt remarks that she was “superfluous not only to the war effort, but to the unit to which she belonged as well. Only money could buy her the proximity to the war that she craved, but money could not buy her youth or expertise” (Raitt 155). Sinclair’s duties with the ambulance were unclear even to herself, and she lacked the medical background to be practically useful and the youthful vitality to be viewed as an active and apt contributor to the war effort. She recorded what experiences and observations she did acquire at this time, along with her dissatisfaction with her limitations, in one of the first wartime journals written from a female perspective, *Journal of Impressions in Belgium* (1915). Sinclair complains to Munro that she feels so helpless surrounded by injured soldiers and the excitement of war without any means of contributing or even occupying her time, and without much material for the articles she was supposed to write to gain support for the ambulance corp. Referring to women’s sense of futility at war in contrast to the men involved in its adventure, she even goes as far as to state that a woman feeling useless like herself “might as well be taken prisoner by the Germans – better, since that would, at least, give you something to write about afterwards. / What’s more, I’m bored” (89). Sinclair suggests that her feeling of futility was so severe that she would have rather been in a danger, because at least she would feel like she was part of the war effort and would have something to contribute to the discourse in the same manner as the men on the frontlines.

Edith Wharton was born in 1862 in New York City as the third child of her high society parents, George and Lucretia Jones. Wharton spent her childhood travelling between the United States, in New York City and Newport, Rhode Island, and Europe, in Italy, Spain, Germany, and Paris, France. Throughout childhood and young adulthood, Wharton wrote fiction and poetry, published as early as 1879 in periodicals, and was enthralled by her father's massive library. Wharton's most popular novels are her critiques of Victorian high society, including Pulitzer Prize winner *The Age of Innocence*. She criticizes the self-righteous morality and indulgent materialism that she personally witnessed in elite American society while coming of age. In her autobiography, *A Backward Glance*, Wharton describes in detail the indulgent life of her parents and their peers at the end of the 19th century. Wharton states: "my parents' guests ate well, and drank good wine with discernment... and in twenty minutes the whiskered gentlemen had joined the flounced ladies on the purple settees for another half hour of amiable chat... How mild and leisurely it all seems in the glare of our new century!" (*Backward Glance* 61). The autobiography was published in 1934, allowing Wharton to reflect on the stark contrast between the luxury of the world she grew up in and the gloom of the war years and through the 1930s.

At the outbreak of the First World War, Edith Wharton was living in Paris. She contributed greatly to the recruitment of American interest in aiding the war effort through pro-French propaganda, and established the American Hostels for Refugees by seeking donations from fellow elite society members and authors. Wharton produced two major propagandist works, a collection of articles titled *Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort* in 1915 about her travels through French battlefields at the onset of

the war, and a collection of works by famous authors, *The Book of the Homeless* in 1916, of which the profits were donated to the war effort. In Claire Tylee's article, "Imagining Women at War: Feminist Strategies in Edith Wharton's War Writing," she discusses the significance of Wharton's war writing as female author, and states that "She was one of the literary tourists who produced a foreigners' guide to the Western Front" (Tylee, 327-328). Wharton's collection of wartime articles originally published in Scribner's magazine and later compiled into the book *Fighting France, from Dunkerque to Belfort* (1915), as part of Scribner's propagandist "War on All Fronts" series, function as commendation of the bravery and unfaltering spirit of the French people, and serve as the "tourist's guide" that Tylee describes in that they record Wharton's experiences visiting the frontlines, including hospitals, trenches, and the remains of war-torn villages. The pointed use of a tourist's gaze as opposed to an eyewitness account speaks volumes to the nature of war reporting and its gendered affect; women like Wharton struggled to be viewed as valid contributors to the war because they were not engaged in the actual fighting of the war. So while Wharton raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for refugee aid and had "patiently driven hundreds of miles along the Western front... in order to send back eyewitness reports," her experiences were invalidated because of her gender (Tylee, 333).

Sinclair and Wharton demonstrate a problematic intersection of age, gender, and class that rendered them desperate to contribute to the war effort but unable to access masculinized spaces of war in the same way that male writers could. For Sinclair, the work she attempted to perform at the front was unsuccessful because she was an older, unskilled woman and therefore she uses her writing to critique the treatment of women as

noncombatants and thus non-contributors. For Wharton, her age and reputation as a writer allowed her access to the front. At the same time her gender forced her to write within the conventions of war writing that diminished the perspectives of women. In her post-war writings she explores sex and age based prejudice as well as the exaggerated stereotypes of women in the war effort. Ultimately, these two authors represent how women war writers and volunteers worked to gain validation for the war work they performed as non-combatants and as war writers. This investigation is divided into three parts. The first chapter, “‘I do not call you comrades’: May Sinclair’s Impressions of the Great War,” deals with Sinclair’s *Journal of Impressions in Belgium*, an account of her experiences on the war front as a volunteer with an ambulance unit. I examine how Sinclair expressed transgressive feelings of disappointment with her experience at the war front and transgressive sexual motivations behind the desire to join the effort, criticizing how her femininity, at the intersection of age and gender, limited the extent to which she could participate in the war. The second chapter, “Gendering the War Effort: Femininity and Propaganda in Edith Wharton’s *Fighting France*,” explores Wharton’s propagandist work *Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort*, and argues that the conventions of propaganda and women’s war writing forced her to shift her focus from her own successes at home to the types of work being done on the front, and aligned neatly with the segregation of women’s war work and men’s work in its appeal to French civilians. My final chapter, “Young Women, Old Women: The image of the war effort’s redundant woman in the short fiction of Edith Wharton and May Sinclair,” compares the short stories of Wharton and Sinclair, and examines their shared resentment of the

treatment of women war volunteers, and considers the differences between the two authors' approaches.

ONE

“I do not call you comrades”: May Sinclair’s Impressions of the Great War

At the outbreak of the First World War, May Sinclair joined fifty-two other well-known British authors in signing the “Author’s Declaration,” a document defending England’s involvement in the war. In 1915, Sinclair published a fictionalized account of her experience working for the Medico-Psychological Clinic of London Munro ambulance corps as a secretary and journalist, titled *A Journal of Impressions in Belgium*. Though her time with the ambulance corps spanned only two and a half weeks in the first months of the war, she sets out to reveal in part her impressions of the psychological trauma induced by war and largely her disappointment with feeling ineffective as a contributor to the war effort. Sinclair’s *Journal of Impressions* reveals how the gendered dynamics of war workers resulted in women war workers feeling as though their contributions to the war effort were not appreciated or validated in the same light as male combatants. Women, particularly well off, educated women like Sinclair, sought to make meaningful contributions to the war effort, but ultimately found that the types of war work made available to women were seriously limited. Sinclair’s firsthand account portrays the degree of access that women had to the war, limited in Sinclair’s experience by her gender, age, and lack of established medical or journalistic skill. Moreover, she candidly portrays her disappointment with the limitations of femininity and the transgressive emotions that accompany war work and patriotism but which are often

unacknowledged because they contradict the traditional ideals of pure motives and heroic self-sacrifice that are associated with war workers.

The journal begins on the 25th of September in 1914, when Sinclair ventures to the front, and contains daily entries up to the 13th of October, 1914, when she leaves the front to return home. The entries are episodic in nature and according to Sinclair each entry is intended to remain contained to that day or moment, maintaining the style of a journal though she likely made edits to enhance its literary value, translating a mere two weeks of service into nearly 300 pages of vivid prose. *Impressions* portrays in great detail Sinclair's daily undertakings while serving as secretary to the Munro Ambulance Corps, during the period just prior to and during the siege of Antwerp, an event in WWI in which the German army successfully sieged and occupied the Belgian city of Antwerp. Sinclair and the ambulance corps transported wounded soldiers from Ghent, Belgium to Ostend, Belgium in Flanders. The wounded were brought to hospitals and convalescents from battlefields and temporary British Field Hospitals on the front, with Sinclair performing tasks such as gathering and distributing supplies to medics, tending to and serving dinner to refugees, and travelling with the unit in their vehicles, often times finding herself bored and without any work to do. The narrative traces the ebb and flow of the level of excitement the unit experiences; the more mundane events of planning where to go and waiting for instructions are interrupted by action and the increasing threat of German occupation. Sinclair first sees a devastated battlefield at Baerlaere on the 7th of October and joins the commandant Munro in the ambulance for the first time on the 8th, after convincing Munro that she needed to go out into the field or else she would be overcome with boredom. She encounters her first wounded man during her excursion with Munro,

and in the only two other instances she travels with the ambulance attempts to aid the wounded in Melle but is disappointed that the village is not under fire during her time there. She also served as a nurse to a wounded man in Ghent for a single evening, but records that the doctors found her too incompetent and annoying, immediately removing her. Antwerp fell to the Germans on the 10th of October and the unit was forced to retreat to Ecloo, though Sinclair tries to stay with the wounded in Ghent and is forcibly restrained by the Chaplain. Her journey and her journal end when the unit began to run out of funding. She is sent back to England to raise more money under the impression that she would return to the front with the funds, but she never returns to the front and her mission back to England was what Suzanne Raitt describes as “an elaborate trick to get rid of her” (Raitt 157). Sinclair focuses *Journal of Impressions* on her interactions with fellow volunteers, Belgians, and soldiers she meets, as well as the moments of excitement and danger the corps encounters in instances when the war advances near them.

One of the most significant themes of Sinclair’s *Impressions* is a profound sense of futility. Sinclair was motivated to join the war effort perhaps in part by a sense of national pride and desire to serve her country, and through the encouragement of her contemporaries’ valiant pledges to either go to the front or raise funds and support at home. In reality, likely due to her lack of medical training, the time Sinclair spent with the ambulance corps left her feeling helpless and unwanted. She had made significant financial contributions to the Munro Corps that helped get the organization off the ground, which is likely how she found herself travelling with the unit without experience or qualifications. In a critical biography of Sinclair, Suzanne Raitt, one of the only scholars to write on Sinclair, suggests that “only money could buy her the proximity to

the war that she craved, but money could not buy her youth or experience” (Raitt 155). The journal works to problematize the dramatic contrast between Sinclair’s sincere desire to make a difference to the war effort and the lack of meaningful work for her to complete. Because Sinclair was neither a combatant nor a nurse, her account of the war does not fit neatly into any genre of war writing. Moreover, her account is not simply a memoir of her experiences as a volunteer, but is a more complicated form of life writing that reflects her literary and psychoanalytic approach to documenting her impressions of the war. Due to her unique position as an older, educated, woman seeking a place amongst war volunteers, Sinclair articulates gender and age based experiences that she endured through her relationship to other women. She envies women who are more successful than her in the war, both experienced women who provide aid that Sinclair cannot and younger women that gain access to the adventure of war due to their youth.

Sinclair was able to travel to the front because of her involvement with the Medico-Psychological Clinic, the first psychoanalytic treatment clinic in Britain, founded in 1913 (Raitt 136). In its early years, the clinic quickly built up a client base of shell shocked soldiers, who were treated through methods such as “psychotherapy, electrical and other treatments.... handicrafts, the plastic arts, music, recitation, dancing, games, and gardening” (Raitt 136). The clinic did not charge its patients, and thus relied heavily on private contributions. Sinclair donated large sums to the clinic, and her financial assistance as well as support of expanding psychological scientific study in Britain was crucial to making services available to soldiers from early in the war. Hector Munro, a director of the clinic and the founder of the Munro Ambulance Corps, was friends with Sinclair and invited her on the excursion to the front because she was eager to get

involved in the war effort and was a major financial benefactor in the establishment of the corps. Sinclair was interested in psychoanalysis as a lens and technique from when she joined the Medico-Psychological Clinic in 1913, through the war and the rest of her career as a writer and scholar.

In order to insert her own place into writing about war, despite not having contributed to the extent that she imagined she would, Sinclair approaches her war writing unconventionally, and writes about her emotional impressions of the war while employing modernist techniques. Sigmund Freud offers a model for why the personal journal can be important in his first major work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in which he posited that dreams and one's internal thoughts have deeper meanings, and that the self can be read as a text. Essentially, recording one's own thoughts and impressions is important because certain psychological insights have a value and significance beyond the individual that experiences them. From this perspective, Sinclair's *Impressions* then is not just a record of her time at the front, but also is significant in its candid portrayal of her emotional and often transgressive reactions to the war. Moreover, writing about trauma and accessing this psychoanalytic framework in her personal impressions of the war gives her a valid reason to publish the journal, giving deeper meaning to what might otherwise be regarded as a not particularly interesting or marketable record of her unsuccessful experience at the front.

In Laurel Forster's article, "Women and War Zones: May Sinclair's Personal Negotiation with the First World War," she argues that in *Impressions*, Sinclair uniquely articulates the roles of women in the First World War by focusing on her own impressions and emotional responses to the war, thus allowing her to contribute without

participating in the predominant masculinized discourse (Forster 231). While critics have typically treated Sinclair's journal as largely self-indulgent, Forster suggests that Sinclair employs modernist rather than the realist conventions typical of First World War writing in order to express an "internal response to war" (234). Forster states that for women war writers, "finding a mode of expression or appropriate tone which could encompass a sense of being protected by the masculine war effort as well as describing the authority of female war work, which also adhered to conventions of propaganda, masculine gallantry, and the new feminism proved a challenge to many a fine female writer" (231). Women were undoubtedly impacted significantly by the war, and the women who participated in the war on the frontlines rather than from the feminine spaces of the home front struggled to communicate their specific experiences without undermining the patriarchal rhetoric of male heroism. According to Forster, because women "were not part of the physical agony, their voices on the subject of war remained unheard," meaning that they were regarded as outsiders rather than witnesses to the war because they did not physically endure combat. The front was conceptualized as a masculine space, where the "physical agony," meaning the action of battle, took place, while feminine spaces were associated with domestic jobs on the home front and were confined to within hospitals or volunteer social circles, like Wharton's network of upper class female philanthropists and volunteers. In Sinclair's *Impressions*, she aims to establish credibility as a witness of the war through emotionally driven documentation of her own firsthand experience by contrast with the traditional claim to authority through access to the frontlines and combat, access that women rarely experienced. Forster seems to conflate Sinclair's experience as an older, unskilled volunteer with the general rejection of women as

reliable witnesses of the war. In reality, Sinclair was perceived as less viable than a trained younger woman, and resented that she could not remain an active war front volunteer beyond her two week adventure. While Forster focuses on how Sinclair negotiates feminized spaces in the war, this chapter will further explore how Sinclair centered her resentment at her failure to successfully fulfill the role of a female wartime volunteer.

Genre and Witnessing

Even as an experienced writer at the midpoint of her career, genre and women's status as witnesses of the war was a problem for Sinclair. Suzanne Raitt characterizes Sinclair's journal "as unusual in dwelling on what it felt like to be a spectator of, rather than an actor in, the scenes of violence unfolding in Belgium and France" (Raitt 163). Only one other piece of life writing, by Mildred Aldrich, was published in 1915 Britain from the perspective of a female volunteer who was not a nurse (Raitt 163). Sinclair's interest in trauma and psychoanalysis combined with her hyper-awareness of her exclusion from the most propagandized spaces at war shape the form of *Impressions*. She records her experiences at war as a collection of "impressions" rather than a historically accurate documentation of fact, drawing from life writing and modernist approaches as well as the conventions of witnessing.

Some contemporary reviews, such as one by American feminist and author Florence Finch Kelly and another featured in the British periodical, the *Spectator*, recognized *Impressions* for Sinclair's innovation in psychological analysis and for its sincerity. Others criticized her divergence from traditional approaches to war writing, such as those appearing in the American journal *The Nation* and by British war novelist Rebecca West,

and found her impressions to be unusual in their spectatorial approach to the tragedy of war, and ultimately trite and self-involved. Rebecca West, a British war novelist, harshly wrote that Sinclair trivialized the role of women in the war effort. West stated that “every page of this gallant, humiliated book makes it plain that while it is glorious that England should have women who walk quietly under the rain of bullets it is glorious too that England should have women who grieve inconsolably because the face of danger has not been turned to them” (West, quoted in Raitt 164). West employs a satiric tone to criticize what she believes is inappropriate and misdirected grief on Sinclair’s part. She suggests that it is disrespectful to equate women who have performed honorable jobs with tangible results, such Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurses or ambulance drivers, with women like Sinclair, who did not return from the front with an honorable story and instead complained about not being in as much danger as others. West believes that *Impressions* is a “humiliated book” because while some women risked their lives to perform important roles, walking “quietly under the rain of bullets,” Sinclair envies the danger and the threat of death as if it was an adventure. Sinclair’s transgressive emotions portrayed war outside of the conventions of the acceptable war discourse of war and the war effort as strictly self-sacrificial, suggesting that war could be satisfying or exhilarating.

Reviews such as West’s ultimately support Sinclair’s suggestion that her work as an unskilled, middle aged war volunteer was devalued. That her perspective was openly criticized by her colleagues speaks to how innovative and unheard of it was for Sinclair to approach the war not through the lens of selfless heroism but rather from the perspective of an adventure seeking woman. The concept of competitive suffering,

meaning that the pain and trauma of some war participants is more valid than others and ought to be recognized as such, played a crucial role in how Sinclair's approach to discussing her emotional response to the war was regarded as taboo. Women were especially discouraged from appearing excited or stimulated by the war, because it translated to sexual gratification that was generally reserved for men as an expression of masculinity. By talking openly about the excitement and disappointment she experienced while in Belgium, from the self-interested perspective of a spectator on the sidelines, Sinclair was crossing significant boundaries of the limitations placed against women witnessing the war. Sinclair desperately wanted to contribute to the war effort but was unable to find a space to do so successfully, and as a result despite being a well-established author her record of the war was viewed by her peers as equally unsuccessful.

The Dedication

The dedication of the journal takes the form of a modernist poem, and is the reader's first impression of the text and the first instance in which Sinclair reveals her problem with genre and witnessing. It summarizes Sinclair's experience with disappointment and rejection while trying to get involved in the war effort. The dedication literally describes how Sinclair dreamt about going to war and heroically serving her country, but while at the front she failed to make a difference and her more successful comrades, primarily combatants, steal her dream. The reason she was excluded, despite her desperate dreams to contribute, is not made explicit in the dedication but rather explored further in the journal through the contrast between her initial eagerness to join the war effort and eventual sense of dissatisfaction. The dedication significantly foreshadows the disappointment that Sinclair experiences in her

failed journey to the front, immediately revealing to the reader Sinclair's relationship to the war effort as a spectator rather than a participant.

In the first stanza of "Dedication," the speaker remarks that she feels excluded from the action and heroism of the war. The dedication begins by stating: "I do not call you comrades, / You, / Who did what I only dreamed. / Though you have taken my dream, / And dressed yourselves in its beauty and its glory, / Your faces are turned aside as you pass by. / I am nothing to you, / For I have done no more than dream." (Lines 1-8). This stanza develops two key issues about the speaker's relationship to the war: first, her sense that she feels no mutual camaraderie between herself and other war participants, and second, that the speaker was never able to realize her "dream" of being an accomplished war volunteer. She cannot align her involvement in the war with the actions of combatants and trained nurses, and thus is disqualified from their ranks of camaraderie. Moreover, the dedication suggests that she was maliciously ignored and excluded. The body she addresses, denoted as "you" throughout the piece, literally turned their backs on her and treated her as "nothing," or without respect. She resents being excluded, stating firmly that she does not refer to them as comrades rather than that she can't or shouldn't, and suggesting that her dream has been "taken," as if she had ownership over this desire to participate in the war before she was unjustly denied glory.

As the dedication continues, the speaker personifies the war and its treatment of the speaker contrasted with its honoring of combatants. The speaker describes how she felt a calling to aid in the war effort, but once she arrived she was unable to contribute fulfill this yearning. The speaker states: "She called to me from her battle-places, / She flung me before the curved lightning of her shells / for a lure" (Lines 14-16). The speaker

did not seek out the war, but rather the war lured her in. The appeal of the glory of war, the excitement of violence, and nationalism enticed the speaker. Yet, in the following lines, the speaker states: “And when I came within sight of her / She turned aside, / And hid her face from me” (Lines 17-19). Repeating the imagery of the comrades turning away from the speaker and not validating her with eye contact, the war similarly excludes and ignores the speaker through a physical manifestation. The speaker resents the war for not fulfilling her desire to participate meaningfully as a volunteer, and also resents the combatants and nurses who were valuable. She states: “But you she loved; / You she touched with her hand” (Third stanza, lines 20-21). The image of the war touching the speaker’s comrades and combatants with her hand reflects how she envisions the direct, effective work of those she resents as opposed to her own removed, undefined role as an unskilled volunteer.

Trauma

In *Impressions*, Sinclair largely focuses on her own struggles with trauma and fear of violence while on the front, addressing her visions of the horrors of war even as someone not directly involved in combat or the medical care for victims. In “The Impotence on Sympathy: Service and Suffering in the Nurses’ Memoirs,” from his book *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, Santanu Das discusses how nurses experienced psychological trauma as active witnesses to wartime violence. Das states that “war trauma or shell-shock can result from witnessing rather than direct participation... and yet, from both accounts, the figure of the nurse is strangely left out: neither a soldier nor a civilian, she is not granted a place even in this medical ‘no man’s land.’ Entrusted with the repair of the minds and bodies the war has ravaged, she is thought to be immune

to war trauma” (Das 195). Though Das speaks exclusively about nurses, and even emphasizes at times the particular burden of being a young woman in the war, the ubiquity of trauma on the front to which he refers was very much of interest to Sinclair. In *Impressions*, she discusses reoccurring night terrors of traumatic war scenes and the destruction endured by the physical sites she travels to, revealing the far reaching impact of the war’s damage. Sinclair uses a psychoanalytic perspective in order to access the war in her writing and to give her a purpose for writing about her unsuccessful experience in the war effort. Because her femininity limited the extent to which she could witness the war and the work she performed at the front was not noteworthy, Sinclair validated her war writing by employing an unconventional, psychological approach to genre.

Sinclair describes her fear and dread regarding an impending expedition, and how the horrors of war haunted her in visions before she could sleep. In her entry from September 26th, at the start of her journey, she states “Every night before I went to sleep I saw an interminable spectacle of horrors: trunks without heads, heads without trunks, limbs tangled in intestines, corpses by every roadside, murders, mutilations, my friends shot dead before my eyes. Nothing I shall ever see will be more ghastly than the things I have seen. And yet, before a possibly-to-be-bombarded Ostend this strange visualizing process ceases, and I see nothing and feel nothing. Absolutely nothing...” (Sinclair7). The description of mutilated bodies, humans reduced to their limbs and innards and placed on roadsides rather than in peace, serves to illustrate the severity of the visions and their “spectacle.” Moreover, the relationship that Sinclair has to these visions, first the frequency and pervasiveness evidenced in the presence of death at *every* roadside, and second that she sees scenes of her friends and comrades killed in front of her, serve to

further emphasize the horror and inhumanity. She states that nothing she actually sees, especially after the war, will be worse than the visions that haunt her and the scenes she imagines. These visions haunt her before she can go to sleep, despite not being in harm's way, yet when she is about to go out on a potentially dangerous expedition the visions stop, and she becomes essentially numb to the horrors.

This passage is further complicated by the fact that it is largely imagined. Sinclair imagines these horrible scenes before even leaving for the expedition, and therefore they function as visions rather than memories. She writes trauma as she imagines it, rather than what she personally has experienced at this juncture. In Charlotte Jones' article "May Sinclair's Impressions of War," she states that for Sinclair "the 'horrors' are fixed firmly 'before [her] eyes', but this visual dimension quickly becomes a complex layering of trauma and narrative response... there is a crucial temporal displacement also operating within the passage. However true Sinclair's assertion that she imagined these horrors before leaving – and civilians did suffer battlefield nightmares, as Sinclair's friends Rebecca West and the poet H.D. have written about – this passage was written after she had been to Belgium" (Jones 1). The vision operates as a traumatic vision, representing how the war haunted participants even those in peripheral positions like Sinclair, as I have shown above, but also represents the complication of genre. As Jones states, "regardless of the fictional framework then, Sinclair's visions are all, at some level, real. The sights she is projecting into the future in the passage as unseen are actually, for Sinclair, memories: 'already seen'" (Jones 1). At the point that the journal was published, she had witnessed the war's destruction and is processing and editorializing its impact on her in this account. Sinclair transforms her war experience

into a literary work using visions and imagination to articulate emotional responses to the war, diverging from a factual account in order to reflect on how trauma operated for war participants.

Further into the journal, Sinclair returns to the traumatic visions she had in anticipation of going to war. In describing her own sense of fear as compared to Torrence's competence and apparent fearlessness, Sinclair states "I remember distinctly those five weeks of frightful anticipation when I knew that I must go out to the war; the going to bed, night after night, drugged with horror, black horror that creeps like poison through your nerves... an energetic and lucid brain that throws out a dozen war pictures to the minute like a ghastly cinema show, till horror becomes terror" (Sinclair 14). Here Sinclair describes not the gruesome scenes of war she imagined but the manner through which they come to her. Describing her fear of what she expects to see at the front as a film created by her over active imagination serves to illustrate the anticipation and fear that many war volunteers likely endured before embarking for war but may have struggled to put into words. This passage is also significant because the anticipation of the war is crucial to Sinclair's disappointment with its reality throughout the text. She represents herself as having built up an intense emotional vision of what her role in war would be, and when she discovered that had no real place in the corps and lacked the fortune to witness action as Ursula did, she is confused, disappointed, and resentful.

In later scenes where Sinclair actually deals with the violent consequences of war, her reactions are not strictly terror but rather are juxtaposed with her excitement and sense of adventure. In October, Sinclair describes an incident where she is transporting several wounded soldiers, and how she deals with the overwhelming feelings of distress,

the excitement of the journey, and the deep desire to help that she faces. She juxtaposes adrenaline filled images of driving through war torn country side with the torture of following orders that place her uncomfortably close to the wounded soldiers' agony. While driving with her unit to Ecloo after orders to retreat from Ghent due to the impending German invasion, Sinclair uses the thrill of driving in a speeding car to communicate her complicated emotions about her role in the war and their orders to retreat. She states "Your sense of safety grows intolerable. You never knew that safety could hurt like this... this speed of the motor vehicle over the flat roads, this speed that cuts the air, driving its furrow so fast that the wind rushes by you like strong water, this speed that so inspired and exalted you when it brought you into Flanders, when it took you to Antwerp and Baerbaere and Lokeren and Melle, this vehement and frightful and relentless speed is the thing beats you down and tortures you" (Sinclair 248-249). The automobile, an important early 20th century symbol of industrialism and modernism, represents the danger and excitement of a modern war as Sinclair experiences. The high speed masks the threat of danger and death associated with the war, in that something that should have been terrifying, the war, instead excited her, giving her a sense of thrill and adventure. Yet when it was time to retreat, she no longer felt "inspired and exalted" but rather felt tortured by the car ride and disappointed about leaving the front with so much work for the wounded left to be done. She knows that the wounded are being taken care of in the hospital, suggesting that for her to want to stay behind to care for them would be redundant and "sheer sentimentalism," but she still struggles with leaving everything behind. Sinclair struggled to rectify the sense of excitement that she felt on the war front and the sadness she felt for the wounded soldiers and war torn Belgium. Enjoying the war

on some level contradicted the traditional assumption that war was a space exclusively for heroism, honor, and self-sacrifice. Sinclair works through these transgressive emotions and considers the dichotomies of fear and excitement, participant and spectator.

In this context, she refers again to her haunting visions, but in this instance in the form of an actual memory of a wounded Belgian soldier. While travelling away from Ghent, Sinclair remarks that “now that there was nothing more to do, I couldn’t think of anything but that one man” (Sinclair 250). Sinclair had encountered a severely wounded man in the field earlier in the text, the first wounded man that she personally dealt with, and afterwards developed a small sense of obligation to care for him herself. The visions return, Sinclair stating “the night before came back to me in a vision, or rather an obsession, infinitely more present, more visible and palpable than this night that we were living in.... they shut me in alone with the wounded man who lay stretched before me on the bed. And the moments were measured by the rhythm of his breathing, and by the closing and opening of his eyes” (Sinclair 250-251). This vision here is not a scene of horror or terror like her imagined visions, but rather one of “obsession,” of a desperate desire to help the wounded man before leaving the front that she cannot shake. Similarly to how the visions were repeated nightly before she could fall asleep, Sinclair obsesses over helping the wounded soldier. She begins to sense his hand or arm on her body, and she feels trapped in the hospital, “shut in between the blond walls with the wounded man” (Sinclair 251). She is haunted by a sense that he is touching her, creating a disturbing physicality within Sinclair’s imagination. Sinclair suggests that psychic and material reality – her trauma in visions and actual experiences - are entwined and can't be separated. Ultimately, these two complicated versions of memory, her visions

anticipating the war and her obsessive memory of the wounded man, validate how Sinclair translates her account of her experiences into fictionalized “impressions” by revealing that there is a subconscious dimension to the emotional responses to war that can't be captured through a documentary approach. Furthermore, in writing about trauma, Sinclair justifies exploring what West referred to as "humiliating" emotions, including her transgressive dissatisfaction with her two weeks at the front and her strained and competitive relationship with other women in the Munro Corps.

Sinclair's Relationship to Other Women

The Munro Corps consisted of five men and five women at the onset of their journey, what Suzanne Raitt describes as “an unusually large number of women,” and Sinclair ended up travelling to the front despite being an “apparently useless middle-aged woman” because she fronted the capital and heavily supported the funding of the organization (Raitt 152). Though Sinclair was surrounded by other women in the Munro Ambulance corps, she was not empowered by female presence on the front but rather felt threatened by and jealous of her fellow female volunteers. When Sinclair discovers that the Commandant decided to bring four women to the front along with Sinclair, she remarks that she was “appalled,” finding the older woman, a nurse named Mrs. Torrence to be too power hungry, and the younger women, three young girls who Sinclair characterizes almost exclusively by their youth, physical beauty, and naiveté, to be unnecessary (Sinclair 27-29). As Raitt suggests, Sinclair was not as qualified as some other members in the unit and was only brought to the front because of how much money she donated, and when there was no meaningful work for her to do she felt both useless and jealous of the women who were valued (Raitt 155). Participants in the war effort

were expected to be limitlessly selfless and to portray themselves as figures of heroism, but Sinclair instead chose to explore the reality of her experience of feeling less heroic and less effective than her peers. She brings to the surface very real emotions of resentment, envy, and desire by comparing her uselessness to the successes of other women. Two central figures that bear Sinclair's envy and resentment are a qualified woman, Mrs. Torrence, and a younger, naïve woman, Ursula Dearmer, who both represent ideals of the woman war volunteer.

Sinclair describes Mrs. Torrence as an experienced nurse determined to keep the ambulance corps efficient. When the group is delayed, Mrs. Torrence is concerned about their whereabouts, Sinclair stating: "Mrs. Torrence, our trained nurse, is ready for us when we come back. We are accused bitterly of sight-seeing" (Sinclair 8). Sinclair suggests that Torrence is exhausted by the disorganization of the young ambulance unit, and states "Mrs. Torrence's beautiful eyes are blasting at the slip-sloppiness of it all. Things were very different at the Hospital, where she was trained" (9). Torrence runs a tight ship, to the extent that it gives her an obvious and necessary role in the corps: she organizes and focuses the group so that they are working as efficiently as possible. Moreover, in suggesting that Torrence's accusation that the group was sight-seeing was "bitter" reveals that Sinclair both resented the accusation and found Torrence to be more severe than other members of the party. Accusing war volunteers of sight-seeing rather than working was a fairly offensive claim, because volunteers were expected to be selflessly devoted to the war effort as well as in some sense in harm's way, not simply travelling about Europe on an adventure. Particularly for Sinclair, who became a volunteer because she was desperate to contribute to the war effort and was later very

self-conscious about feeling unhelpful, this phrasing is insulting. Sinclair therefore characterizes Torrence as bitter in order to invalidate this claim, and to ensure that rather than she seem unmotivated Torrence appears to be harsh. Ultimately, Sinclair envies the success that Torrence has as an experienced medical professional, managing the group and contributing to war effort. This jealousy manifests in the methods that Sinclair employs in characterizing Torrence in the account, portraying her as bitter and demanding rather than professional and efficient.

Later in the chapter, however, Sinclair discovers the pleasure and gratification that Torrence finds in her war work. While travelling in the ambulance and taking in the “inevitable shock and ecstasy of beauty” and the excitement of the threat of violence at virtually any turn, Sinclair deals with complicated feelings of excitement and adventure. Excited by the war and the sites surrounding her, Sinclair states aloud “‘what a fool I should have been if I hadn’t come. I wouldn’t have missed this run for the world,’” but realizes her mistake and states “I forget myself so far as to say this to Mrs. Torrence. My voice doesn’t sound at all like the stern voice of duty. It is the voice of somebody enjoying herself... and cannot possibly hope for any sympathy from Mrs. Torrence” (Sinclair 13). Sinclair is thrilled to be part of the excitement of war, but in her eagerness she fails to properly conceal any emotions aside from serious devotion, and fears criticism from the serious Mrs. Torrence. She at first assumes that an experienced, accepted war volunteer like Torrence would not get caught up in the excitement and tourism of the war. Yet, Sinclair then describes how Torrence “has unbent a little,” meaning become more relaxed in her attitude towards rules and formalities, and that there is a “softer light in her beautiful eyes,” suggesting that she is an attractive and perhaps

kind woman despite preconceptions about professional women. Sinclair is then informed that “the desire of Mrs. Torrence’s heart is to get into the greatest possible danger – and to get out of it” (Sinclair 13). She describes Torrence as fearless and in search of the challenge of the greatest possible danger, and states “I conceive an adoration for Mrs. Torrence, and a corresponding distaste for myself. For I do know what fear is” (Sinclair 14). Sinclair ultimately feels both guilty for her own sense of excitement in the war and envious of Torrence’s fearlessness in her excitement about danger. She lacks the professional skills and experience to feel “fearless” or equipped to deal with the threat of death, but also finds her own sense of eagerness about the dangerous parts of war to be misplaced.

Ursula Dearmer, on the other hand, lacks the professional skills of Mrs. Torrence and appears exceptionally naïve to Sinclair. Despite being similarly or perhaps more inexperienced than Sinclair, she gains more attention from the commandant and more access to the front because of her youth and charm. As a result, Sinclair resents the sense of obligation she feels to protect her coupled with jealousy of the “exciting” situations she ends up in. Sinclair characterizes Ursula by her youth and general sense of her temperate, naïve disposition. Sinclair almost always refers to her as “Young Ursula Dearmer,” emphasizing her age before anything else. Sinclair describes Ursula, stating: “and the youngest but one, Ursula Dearmer... She looks as if she were not yet perfectly awake, as if it would take considerably more than the siege-guns of Namur to rouse her. She moves about slowly, as if she were in no sort of hurry for the adventure” (Sinclair 28). Ursula is not yet energized about the war, and the descriptions of her as still sleeping or not fully attuned to her surroundings further contributes to her image as young and

inexperienced. Moreover, the notion that she is in “no sort of hurry for the adventure,” meaning she is not immediately excited about the war, is mentioned perhaps largely as a concern of Sinclair’s. Sinclair was very much in a hurry to join the war effort, almost immediately signing her support with fellow British Authors and heading straight to the front. Ursula, on the other hand, seems to have entered the war without much interest or motivation, suggesting she may have joined the unit out of her family’s insistence or some obligation rather than the simple desire to help. Ultimately, the language and imagery that Sinclair uses to describe Ursula portrays her as very young and inexperienced.

Sinclair further portrays Ursula as in need of her help by describing how Ursula’s mother asked Sinclair if she would keep an eye on Ursula. Sinclair reflects on Ursula’s mother’s requests, stating: “And I remembered how when it was all over Ursula Dearmer's mother implored me, if there was any danger, to see that Ursula Dearmer was sent home, and how I promised that whatever happened Ursula Dearmer would be safe, clinching it with a frightfully sacred inner vow, and saying to myself at the same time what a terrible nuisance this young girl is going to be” (Sinclair 50). Ursula’s mother likely sought out Sinclair to watch over her young daughter on the front because Sinclair was middle aged, perhaps causing her to appear responsible or even maternal. Sinclair agreed to do so, both taking the promise extremely seriously and dreading the likelihood that Ursula would be a “nuisance” in need of guidance and protection. This promise gives Sinclair a purpose, because she becomes responsible for Ursula, but not the type of responsibility she seeks, such as the commanding roles that Mrs. Torrence holds.

As events unfold, Ursula gets to experience the adventure of war by her close relationship to the commandant and what Sinclair and Mrs. Torrence assume to be good luck. At several points in the story Ursula is in very near danger from stray bullets and explosives and she discovers a wounded soldier in the field. Rather than pity Ursula or worry that she might get injured if she continues to find herself in dangerous situations, Sinclair focuses on the fact that she gets to see action and that she seemingly attracts danger and adventure, and flippantly remarks that she ought to inform Ursula's mother that she cannot keep her promise. Sinclair is jealous of the adventures that Ursula gets to experience, particularly in contrast to her seeming lack of interest earlier in the text. The Commandant brings Ursula into the field with him, working with nuns who cared for patients before they were picked up by an ambulance, and when they rejoin the remainder of the group the Commandant excitedly tells Sinclair that they had been "under fire," Sinclair comparing his excitement to childlike wonder (Sinclair 49). Later in the text, Sinclair tries to articulate her jealousy about Ursula's dangerous situation, stating: "can it be that I was jealous of Ursula Dearmer, that innocent girl, because she saw a shell burst and I didn't? I know this is what was the matter with Mrs. Torrence the other day. She even seemed to imply that there was some feminine perfidy in Ursula's power of drawing shells to her (She, poor dear, can't attract even a bullet within a mile of her)" (136). Sinclair represents a complicated emotional response to Ursula's experience in the more dangerous spaces of war. Ursula has had the firsthand interaction with the violence of war which Sinclair had craved since signing up to volunteer. Importantly, this firsthand experience also provides Ursula with a degree of authority in witnessing the war. Because the commandant often brought Ursula into the field with him, at one point they even

“crawled on their hands in knees in the trenches, under fire,” Ursula got close to combat and developed a sense of the magnitude of it, a perspective that could not be fully understood by someone who did not experience it themselves (Sinclair 139).

If Sinclair wanted to produce her accounts and fictionalizations of the war in line with the conventions of war writing, the type firsthand experience that Mrs. Torrence and Ursula access would have provided her with more authority in witnessing and writing about the war. While Ursula is “lucky” enough to frequently find herself under fire while out with the Commandant and Torrence successfully heals the wounded, Sinclair feels redundant. She struggles to locate her place in the war effort and to channel her intense desire to contribute into something meaningful, but ultimately finds the limitations of her gender, age, and inexperience to be insurmountable, and by comparing her experience to more advantaged women in the war effort she writes resentment and competitiveness into her impressions of the war and exposes the assumptions that govern women's roles and identities in wartime.

Conclusion

Sinclair's *Journal of Impressions* chronicles her two week endeavor to volunteer during the First World War, and reveals how due to her age and gender she failed to find a space or role in which she is valued. *Impressions* is saturated with Sinclair's resentment and disappointment in discovering that for her the war was not an adventure or an exercise in heroism, but in reality rather boring and discouraging. Lacking medical training or the desirable characteristics of a young woman, Sinclair finds herself excluded from much of the sights and danger that the group encounters. Sinclair ultimately uses psychoanalytical approaches in her writing and revising of the journal in order to

contribute to the war through something she is qualified for. Writing in an unconventional form, Sinclair creates a journal that appears authentic and episodic, but also contains emotional, literary description of Sinclair's experience. She reveals her disappointment with how her femininity was an obstacle to contributing to the war effort to the full extent that she desired to, and ultimately exposes transgressive emotions about both the excitement and the disillusionment she experiences in the war zone, challenging the traditional ideals of heroism and self-sacrifice typically expected of war workers.

TWO

Gendering the War Effort: Femininity and Propaganda in Edith Wharton's *Fighting France*

In Edith Wharton's collection of wartime articles, *Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort*, she writes about her engagement with the First World War and her tours of the war torn French countryside. Originally published as six serial articles in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1915, the articles were published as a collection later the same year as part of the *War on All Fronts* First World War propaganda series. The series was intended to raise funds and moral support for the war, published by Scribner's in New York and consisting of five volumes, Wharton's book being the third volume and the second in the series by a woman, following Mary Humphry Ward, a British novelist and wartime journalist. As an American citizen living in France at the outbreak of the war, rather than retreating to her home country Wharton became dedicated to serving France as a volunteer in the war effort. Her war work with refugees and French civilians was measurably successful, providing housing, food, and work for refugees, and clothing, materials, and funds for the military. Wharton produced *Fighting France* as a piece of war propaganda, and due to her age and status as an established American novelist, she was given access to the front and was able to write persuasively about the heroism of the French military and civilians in the war effort.

The articles collected in *Fighting France* document and honor the work that was being done at the front, using Wharton's status as a novelist and talent for writing vivid description as means of raising financial support for the war, and of appealing to

American sensibilities. Due to the limitations of her gender, however, Wharton is unable to document the magnitude of her own war work. Her labor was considered feminine, because she provided aid to refugees and families at home and collected donations, while the work performed by male volunteers and combatants was considered masculine because it was assumed that they had more intimate access to battle and the frontlines. As a result, in her propaganda writing, published at a crucial point at the onset of the war prior to American intervention, she distinctly separates the work performed by men, as doctors and combatants on the frontlines, from the work performed by women, such as workroom seamstresses and charity campaigners at home and in domestic professions. I will argue that because of the gendered nature of war work and war propaganda, and the ways that the conventions of war writing were shaped at the onset of the First World War, Wharton remains in the role of a spectator. In order to write the most persuasive work possible, Wharton in *Fighting France* is constrained by the gendered conventions and expectations of propaganda.

Wharton's War Work

Though *Fighting France* depicts Wharton's engagement with the war at the front, and recounting her experience on these tours was a significant part of her war work, Wharton was successful in her work at home as well. According to Elizabeth Ammons in her text *Edith Wharton's Argument with America*, Wharton's contributions to the war effort reflected her empathy for the victims of the war, her respect and commitment to France, and her disapproval of America's refusal to enter the war until April of 1917. Ammons states that "her contribution to the war-effort was prodigious: she raised funds, organized relief for refugees, founded hospitals and hostels, created jobs for war widows and

homeless women, wrote propaganda, took in orphans” (Ammons 128-129). Wharton performed varying but productive war work, including writing about the war in order to raise morale and contributions.

One of the only instances in which she wrote candidly about the work she did on the home front was an article published in November of 1915 in the *New York Times*, which she wrote in order to raise awareness about the successes of the war effort in France and to garner support from the United States, concluding with an address where donations could be sent. She notes how she opened the first paying workroom aimed towards the families of soldiers or to refugees, which would pay the women to produce goods that would be sent to the front, and discusses how she and other well connected women devoted themselves to raising funds to pay the workers and donate to the war. She states that “when the war broke out an immense number of benevolent and unoccupied women in Paris felt a violent but vague impulse to help,” and she directed this impulse effectively by putting the unemployed women to paid, charitable work and organizing upper-class women into fundraising committees (Wharton in Olin-Ammentorp 245). The article chronicles the important work that she did, and even acknowledges that it was “very difficult and very successful,” but remains measured in its tone and careful not to sound immodest (Wharton in Olin-Ammentorp 251). She uses specific figures of how much relief was provided and at what cost, such as serving over 200,000 meals and creating over 40,000 garments for the war, in order to validate her work. When she does make note of her success, she chooses not to go into detail about it, such as when she describes her children’s rescue charity by stating “this is my prettiest and showiest and altogether most appealing charity, but I am not going to say as much about it, because now that it is

on its feet it needs less help than the others” (Wharton in Olin-Ammentorp 251). An element of propaganda is at work at all times in works like *Fighting France* and this New York Times article, largely due to the fact that they were published in the early stages of the war in 1915. Her works which criticized or satirized the gendered dynamics of the war effort, including “The Refugees” (1919) and “Writing a War Story” (1919), were published after the war ended. She wrote within the constraints of war writing and propaganda during the war years, paying careful attention to gender roles and the spaces in which women could acceptably situate themselves.

Though the work that Wharton did herself at home was expansive and admirable, she orients her appeal in *Fighting France* through the lens of the work being done and the sacrifices being made at the front, with casual mentions to “uncongenial” jobs women performed at home. Nearly all of Wharton’s war writing was about men and women at the front, and her short story, “The Refugees,” which is about a woman who provides relief to refugees in London, she produces a negative, hyperbolic image of the woman volunteer as simultaneously unproductive and domineering. By contrast with her fiction, in *Fighting France* Wharton separates men into the masculinized spaces of combat and women into domestic spaces of nursing or charity work. She wants to encourage her audience to join the war effort, particularly Americans who might be sympathetic about the people who were hurt or inspired by the courageous character of France. She does not want to be self-congratulatory about the work she performed herself or deviate from the accepted conventions of war writing by writing about the value of women in war-time vocations other than nursing, philanthropy, or pointedly temporary industrial jobs. As a

result, *Fighting France* rigidly conforms to gendered categorizations of war work and modulates the value of women's war work.

At the outbreak of the war, Wharton was living in Paris but had been travelling through Europe and Northern Africa with her friend Walter Berry, an American lawyer and friend of many writers in Wharton's league, up until the formal entrance of France. While some American ex-patriots living in Europe decided to return to the United States for their own safety at the start of the war, Wharton was adamant about staying in France and doing whatever she could to aid the war effort. She was known to be a Francophile, having spent time there as a child and seeking refuge from her family's place in elite American society as an adult, and she admired the attitude, culture, and politics of French people. A key representation of her appreciation of French culture is her guide for Americans to French culture titled *French Ways and Their Meaning* (1919), which essentially compares French culture and mannerisms to the American equivalents, arguing strongly in favor of the French ways, including everything from architecture and table manners, to women's rights and intellectual prowess. She firmly backed France's entrance into the war, believing it to be the most courageous and morally right course of action.

According to biographer Hermione Lee in her book *Edith Wharton*, though Wharton continued to write books in English for and about Americans, she became "a knowledgeable inhabitant and lover of France, not a tourist" and "an American citizen in France... a European on a grand scale who left her old home and made new ones for herself" (Lee 6, 8). This admiration for France manifested as dedicated work to supporting the nation through the war, and attempting to rally support in the United

States by advocating for France's entrance into the war as a moral and intelligent decision. Lee situates Wharton's investment in the French war effort as a sudden shift in focus from her normal activities, travelling and writing about New York high society, to throwing herself completely into the war effort and using her writing for propagandistic ends. Lee argues that "the legend of Wharton in wartime is that she sacrificed her writing almost entirely to working for France. In fact, the war produced all kinds of writing: essays, stories, novels, poems, appeals, reports, a vast mass of correspondence and an edited anthology poured out of her, but not in the tone her readers were used to" (Lee 449-450). In order to persuade Americans to support France in the war, she set aside her typical style of ironic wit and adopted a distinctly propagandist tone that Lee claims was at first "thought moving by many reviewers," but was later "felt to be embarrassing and sentimental, an aberration from the sharp satire and bitter social dramas she was known for" (Lee 450). The primary purpose of *Fighting France* was to galvanize support for the war and demonstrate Wharton's respect for the heroism of French combatants and civilians, and therefore required her to shift her language and tone away from witty commentary and towards persuasion and propaganda, drawing on her unwavering obsession with French culture.

The Contemporary Reviews

Contemporary reception of Wharton's *Fighting France* was largely positive, as Lee stated, praising her work both as literature and as documentation of the war. American author and suffragist Florence Finch Kelly remarked in a 1915 review in the *Bookman* that "Mrs. Wharton's absorbing book illuminates for her countrymen the figure of France at war. It is a book to be thankful for, a book that no one can afford to miss

who wants to understand the full significance of the part that France is taking in the conflict... it is merely a simply told, realistic narrative of the things observed by a writer with the seeing eye in the daily life of the French people, both the civilians at home and the soldiers at the front” (Kelly in *Contemporary Reviews* 222). Kelly meaningfully points out the practical function of the work as appealing to American people, suggesting that the book shows an American audience the extent to which France was involved in the war and how it impacted the lives of French civilians and combatants. Because this review was published in an American literary journal it was naturally oriented towards an American audience, but Kelly’s suggestion that a text about the success and glory of France mobilizing might have been arguing in favor of the war to an American audience as yet neutral is valid and probable. Moreover, Kelly’s review is important because it shows how Wharton was received as an American speaking on behalf of the French to fellow Americans, and the review names Wharton’s value to the war effort. Kelly compliments Wharton for her honest but accessible portrayal of the war and France’s involvement, revealing its position in propaganda writing as an appeal to the American people.

Similarly, in a *New York Times* article from December of 1915, an (unnamed) reviewer applauds Wharton’s literary descriptions of France at war and her role as a “peculiarly apt interpreter of the French Temperament” (NYT in *Contemporary Reviews*). The article, titled “Mrs. Wharton and Kipling on the War” deals with both Wharton’s depiction of the war in *Fighting France* and well known British war writer and propagandist Rudyard Kipling’s book *France at War: On the Frontier of Civilization*, offering praise to both authors but ultimately revealing how Wharton’s war

work was treated differently due to her gender. Kipling was contracted by the British government to write war propaganda in 1914, and he produced countless pamphlets and short stories throughout the war that identified the British military as the pinnacle of masculine heroism (Williams, 65). In the reviewer's analysis of Kipling's book, he compares Kipling's writing about war to a photograph, vivid in its detail and honest in its recollection. The reviewer states that "with a few magic words he makes one see that awful zigzag ditch, six feet deep... with death ready every minute to drop out of the narrow strip of unconcerned sky above," and argues that his writing glorifies the sacrifices of the soldiers and inspires support of the war effort (NYT).

In regards to Wharton, the reviewer uses subtle but coded language to indicate that her writing about the war is to some extent removed, discussing the text as a literary work composed of her "impressions" and of "depictions" of war, rather than using language that suggests seeing, witnessing, or recounting, which would give her agency and place her in the space of war rather than outside of it as an observer. The reviewer assigns significant value to how Wharton deals with the character of French people and her empathy for the wounded, because this type of discussion was acceptably removed from masculinized spaces on the front. In her article "The Look of Paris," in *Fighting France*, in which she discusses the strong character of the French people as they mobilized for the war and nurtured the influx of returning wounded soldiers, Wharton describes these wounded men, stating "most of them are very young, and it is the expression of their faces which I should like to picture and interpret as being the very essence of what [she has] called the look of Paris... they are grave, these young faces... they are calm, meditative, strangely purified and matured. It is as though their great

experience had purged them of pettiness, meanness, and frivolity, burning them down to the bare bones of character” (Wharton 41). She honors the terrible experience these men have endured, and argues that this sacrifice has molded and improved their character. This connection between what the soldiers have endured and how it has ultimately reflected well on the strength of French character aligns with the reviewer’s suggestion that Wharton excels in her abstract discussion of the war’s impact on people, emotions, and character rather than her account of what she witnessed at the front.

When the reviewer does discuss Wharton’s description of her tours through battlefields, the example he uses places her in the domestic space of a ruined home, stating that a “sight that affected her most deeply was that of humble homes, still warm with the intimacies of family life, reduced to a heap of bricks and twisted stovepipe” (NYT). The reviewer assumes that women were especially concerned with how family life and the figure of the home were disturbed by war. Placing Wharton in domestic space, even a house destroyed by war, contrasts how Kipling is able to portray trenches and shell fire and thus represents how women’s access to writing about their experiences in war was perceived as limited to that of a spectator or outlier. Though Wharton did actually visit the trenches, after battle, and was close enough to artillery fire to hear it “incessantly,” and though Kipling was a noncombatant whose war work consisted of writing journalism, literature, and propaganda, the reviewer perceived Wharton’s experience in war as far more removed from masculinized spaces of battle (Wharton 150). Significantly, this reviewer, among others publishing early in the war, shaped the conventions and perceptions of women’s First World War writing and propaganda by analyzing Wharton’s text through feminine stereotypes.

“The Tone of France”

In shifting to Wharton’s treatment of war work in *Fighting France*, I will first consider how she explicitly used propagandist techniques to appeal to her American audience. The final article in *Fighting France*, titled “The Tone of France,” is the most direct call to its readers to get involved in the war effort in the collection. It diverges from the format of the previous articles, because while the previous articles depict what Wharton literally saw on specific dates at specific places in France, this article is more theoretical and functions as an analysis of the character and collective psyche of the French people. The article works to characterize the “tone” or essence of France and its people, describing how its people reacted to the outbreak of the war with courage and determination. She notes the intelligence and unity of the French “race” and the strength of the army, but acknowledges the fear that enthusiastic support of the war might wane as the war goes on, understandably, as the war becomes more of a long monotonous affair than a moment of nationalistic excitement. In categorizing the French people as a “race” rather than a nation or population, Wharton portrays them as naturally or biologically unified on a fundamental level, and argues that their courage and dedication are universally shared. She then offers what she calls “proofs,” or evidence of this ubiquitous “national tone,” citing women who took up industrial jobs while their men were at war. She concludes the article by commending the French civilians for serving France and protecting its legacy and moral values, stating “the only death that Frenchmen fear is not death in the trenches but death by the extinction of their national ideal” (Wharton 238). As the conclusion of *Fighting France*, Wharton strategically ends with a compelling and extremely flattering appeal to the French people, inviting them to engage in the war effort

by insisting that it is in their national character and honoring the masses of French people who have already committed to it. Wharton significantly genders her appeal, acknowledging the differences in the types of war work men and women were expected to perform. Though there were women on the frontlines at this time, such as nurses and volunteers like May Sinclair and her unit, Wharton interestingly confines women to roles performed at home and men to roles performed on the front, specifically as soldiers and medics. Wharton crafts *Fighting France* to be a popular, accessible work of propaganda by adhering the conventions of both women's war writing and women's war work, actively working to appeal to her audience's sensibilities and to portray the war effort as accessible to both genders in clearly defined ways.

In consideration to genre and context, Wharton's flattering description of French people might necessarily serve as an example to her American readership rather than a compliment to the French people who she admires so much. The articles were published first in Scribner's magazine, an American periodical publication, which relayed to her fellow Americans the heroic and exhilarating experiences she had in France, before the United States even entered the war. The articles were later compiled as part of the *War on all Front* series, again published in the United States by Scribner's. She perhaps worked to characterize the attitude of the French people towards the war as so honorable in order to convince her fellow Americans that the war was valid and it was worth it to contribute to the effort. Wharton states that "French courage is courage rationalized, courage thought out, and found necessary to some special end; it is, as much as any other quality of the French temperament, the result of French intelligence" (Wharton 233). She is essentially suggesting that though war is destructive and grim, and perhaps best avoided

whenever possible, it must be the right decision in this instance because it is supported by the rational, pragmatic French people. Propaganda is Wharton's primary aim in this article, though at times it takes on the tone of near obsession with France and its people. She uses her great admiration for France to establish their heroism to convince other Americans to take up roles in the French war effort that she and other expatriates adopted at this time.

Wharton describes the confidence that French people have that the country is doing the right thing by fighting in the war, and suggests that they understand their obligations to their country, using pointedly gendered language. She states "every French soldier knows why he is fighting, and why, at this moment, physical courage is the first quality demanded of him; every Frenchwoman knows why war is being waged, and why her moral courage is needed to supplement the soldier's contempt of death" (Wharton 235). Frenchmen are represented as soldiers, who must be physically courageous and defend their country through armed service. Frenchwomen, on the other hand, must be "morally" courageous and "supplement" the actions of men, meaning that while combatants are away at war women must help them evade death through raising funds and manufacturing supplies. While for men the war is an act that they are engaging in, "he is fighting," for women the war is something that is happening to them or around them, "war is being waged." This language removes any agency from women, indicating that women are passive participants in the war and have no real control over the outcome. The passivity promoted here aligns with Wharton's behavior earlier in the text; as a writer travelling through the war front in France, she views the war from a distance without physically engaging in the work being done. She employs "moral" courage in

writing about such depressing sites and using her writing to raise support for the war, holding the same “contempt for death” as the soldiers and aiming to save them from it.

Wharton further explains her concept of “moral courage” as a distinct characteristic of French women, appealing to her audience by attempting to identify simultaneously unifying and flattering qualities of Frenchwomen. She states that “the women of France are supplying this moral courage in act as well as in word. Frenchwomen, as a rule, are perhaps less instinctively "courageous," in the elementary sense, than their Anglo-Saxon sisters. They are afraid of more things, and are less ashamed of showing their fear... She must first be convinced of the necessity of heroism; after that she is fit to go bridle to bridle with Jeanne d'Arc” (Wharton 236). She suggests that though Frenchwomen are traditionally less bold and brave than British women, there is honor in the fact that they admit when they are afraid and are willing to deal with that fear. Though a Frenchwoman needs to be “convinced” to be less cautious and more courageous, once she is courageous in full force. Wharton makes the allusion to Joan of Arc, a historically important French female warrior, to emphasize French character as a long tradition of thoughtful courage and success in war, and of empowered and heroic women. Yet, Joan of Arc did demonstrate the “physical courage” on the front lines that Wharton seems to withhold from women, as a warrior during the Hundred Years War who is often portrayed as a strong-willed woman who completely discarded the gendered barriers in war. This contradiction speaks to how Wharton’s attempts to work within her propagandized genre problematized her genre, because the convention dictated strict categorization of women’s and men’s roles. While she ultimately works to praise the measured, morally refined approach to fear and courage that she argues Frenchwomen

maintained, this description of moral courage is complicated by the limitations she places on women's courage and their designated roles in war.

For the modern Frenchwoman, Wharton claims that the kinds of physical courage that women could perform were the roles that they took up in the workplace to aid in the war effort, as opposed to the masculine ideal of physical courage as equating combat. She describes how tradeswomen continued to their jobs, happily, despite the decline in work and pay that the war has brought them, largely due to their charitable donations. She suggests that their "physical" courage was to adapt to such difficult and unpleasant jobs, sacrificing their own comfort for the sake of the greater good. She names the types of work that women were doing and that they persisted in their roles despite how the war shifted the economy, stating:

The Frenchwoman leaning in the door of her empty boutique still wears the smile with which she used to calm the impatience of crowding shoppers. The seamstress living on the meagre pay of a charity work-room gives her day's sewing as faithfully as if she were working for full wages in a fashionable atelier, and never tries, by the least hint of private difficulties, to extract additional help. The habitual cheerfulness of the Parisian workwoman rises, in moments of sorrow, to the finest fortitude... if any one who has lived for the last year among the workers and small tradesmen of Paris should begin to cite instances of endurance, self-denial and secret charity, the list would have no end. The essential of it all is the spirit in which these acts are accomplished (Wharton 228).

This passage works to illustrate how French women did not falter at the outbreak of war but rather persisted, and that tradeswomen made contributions at the expense of their own funds, in order to serve their country and honor the soldiers at war. Wharton also makes noteworthy use of positive descriptors to characterize the female employees, in order to suggest that they are happy to be working even if it was for little or no pay. She describes women workers as smiling, calm, habitually cheerful, enduring, and charitable to portray

them as the ideal support system at home to men at war. Because they did not actually fight in battle, and because women are generally expected to be unwaveringly polite and infallible, Wharton portrays the ideal French charitable woman worker as capable of setting aside her anxieties and frustration aside in the work place. This description places women in a very restrictive box, unable to enter the spaces occupied by men and unable to vocalize frustration.

The types of work described here as heroic performances of French character were jobs usually performed by working class women, but with greater stigma in the absence of war. Wharton states that the tone of France “is one of exaltation, energy, the hot resolve to dominate the disaster. In all classes the feeling is the same: every word and every act is based on the resolute ignoring of any alternative to victory” (Wharton 225). Though she suggests that the character and determination of the French are not influenced by class, in reality class cannot be ignored. As Wharton states herself, many workers, such as the seamstress described above, remained in the same roles as they had prior to the war, just making less money and creating more products. The women who would have already been employed before the war are lower class, and challenge gender roles consistently by working in the public sphere rather than the private or domestic sphere. The women, like Wharton, who stepped into the world of industrial labor and charity in order to support the war effort or aid displaced refugees would be able to return to their comfortable lives once the war ended. She admires the courageous entrance of women into what she describes as highly unpleasant jobs, such as the seamstresses in her charitable workroom and the sick-nurses to the wounded soldiers, stating that the “display of reasoned courage is visible in the hasty adaptation of the Frenchwoman to all

kinds of uncongenial jobs. Almost every kind of service she has been called to render since the war began has been fundamentally uncongenial” (Wharton *Tone of France*). She names these jobs as undesirable, which they were to her readers, but also praises the heroism of French people courageous enough to step out of their comfort zones and into the war effort.

Because Wharton is writing propaganda, she loses her ability to write ironically. Though in her short stories, “Writing a War Story” and “Refugees,” she writes coded, subtle criticism of the contradictions in the treatment of women in the war effort, *Fighting France* is primarily composed of descriptions of the destruction of the French countryside as the war spread, and unrelenting pleas for women and other civilians to join the workforce. In trying to make *Fighting France* as appealing and acceptable to a wide, traditional audience, she must remove any commentary about the perceived value of women in war work and instead depict the segregation of war work as natural and efficient.

“In Argonne”

While Wharton addresses the work that civilians were performing and what she believes to be the character of French people on the whole in “*Tone of France*,” the heart of *Fighting France* is the description of her tours through the war torn French countryside. She devotes four articles to her 1915 tours, beginning in the areas surrounding the Argonne Forest at the end of February, then travelling to the region of Lorraine and the Vosges mountains in May, and in June throughout the Northern region, including St. Omer and Dunkerque, and finally in the Alsace region in August. This chapter will focus on the article about Argonne, which details Wharton’s first tour and

therefore first experience at the front. “In Argonne” is a more subtle example of propaganda than “Tone of France,” because it is masked as observations of the work being done at the front and of the aid that is still needed. Wharton describes the conditions of field hospitals, suggesting that they need both more volunteers and more materials. She evokes sympathy from her readers by describing the poor conditions wounded men had to deal with while trying to heal. In addressing the physical landscapes she witnesses, as the *New York Times* reviewer noted, she pays careful attention to destroyed homes, which represent the families threatened and displaced by the war. As a female propagandist, she targets the women in her audience by appealing to their emotional, empathetic tendencies, while also ensuring that she adheres to the boundaries imposed on women war writers.

Wharton observes the conditions at a hospital in a small village just north of Verdun, and she effectively works to persuade her readers to provide funds or labor to the war effort by making note of the needs for materials and nurses. Wharton states: “the great need, here as everywhere, was for blankets and clean underclothing; for the wounded are brought in from the front encrusted with frozen mud, and usually without having washed or changed for weeks... Thousands of soldiers are camped in all of [the local villages], in hygienic conditions that would be bad enough for men in health” (Wharton 76). She quantifies the work that needs to be done, stating that great numbers of blankets and underclothes are needed the most and that “thousands” of soldiers are in need of hygienic living and healing places. Wharton herself worked with women in need of jobs on the home front to produce thousands of garments to send to the front, and suggests that there is always a need for this type of work. In this passage she also appeals

specifically to women in describing the lack of sufficient care, stating: “there are no women nurses in these second-line ambulances, but all the army doctors we saw seemed intelligent, and anxious to do the best they could for their men in conditions of unusual hardship” (Wharton 76). She commends the work that doctors were doing to help the wounded, and their desire to do “the best they could” despite being short staffed. Rather than outwardly stating that more supplies need to be made and delivered to the front and that more women need to take up roles as nurses, she layers these messages in her articles that are seen by a large audience and are more convincing in the form of stories rather than war posters or more frank calls to arms.

Though Wharton points out the gaps in services being provided to the wounded soldiers, she also takes care to emphasize the heroism of the volunteers who have already joined. In thinking about how she might have had to gender her appeals to her readers, it is logical that the descriptions of needs and the unsanitary conditions the wounded dealt with while waiting for care were designed to appeal to the female portion of her audience, while the proceeding description of the resourcefulness the volunteers and Wharton’s reverence for them as selfless and heroic might appeal to her male audience. She describes another hospital in Verdun, Evacuation Hospital 6, which had been established quickly out of necessity but was ultimately running efficiently. Wharton describes the hospital, stating:

each tent contains two wooden cots, scrupulously clean and raised high above the floor; and the immense ward is warmed by a row of stoves down the central passage. In the bungalows across the road are beds for the patients who are to be kept for a time before being transferred to the hospitals in the town. In one bungalow an operating-room has been installed, in another are the bathing arrangements for the newcomers from the trenches. Every possible device for the

relief of the wounded has been carefully thought out and intelligently applied by the surgeon in charge and the infirmiere major who indefatigably seconds him. Evacuation Hospital No. 6 sprang up in an hour, almost, on the dreadful August day when four thousand wounded lay on stretchers between the railway station and the gate of the little park across the way; and it has gradually grown into the model of what such a hospital may become in skilful and devoted hands (Wharton 74).

She characterizes the system of providing relief as “intelligent,” admiring the surgeon and other hospital workers for quick thinking and implying that others who volunteered to be part of the relief effort would fall into similarly intelligent and heroic categorizations. Moreover, she suggests that this hospital is the “model” of excellence for this type of emergency care. If such exceptional service could be provided by few skilled volunteers in such a short time, she wants her readers to imagine the potential of hospitals serviced by several skilled volunteers.

In addition to her portrayal of hospitals and the discomfort of the wounded soldiers, Wharton also observes how the French countryside was destroyed. As a sincere lover of France and all components of it, including its geography and architecture, Wharton was likely pained to see it destroyed. Yet her firm belief that France was doing the right thing in fighting the war likely justified the sacrifice of the physical embodiments of French culture and society that she admired so greatly. A specific lens through which Wharton recounts her observations of the war’s wreckage is of the destroyed homes in war torn villages, as depicted in the *New York Times* review I discussed earlier. Wharton uses the destroyed homes and the symbol of peaceful, harmonious family life they represented as a way of relating her position as a woman to the war. She cannot witness actual battles or know what it’s like to be in the trenches, but

she can understand the function of family and domesticity and the tragedy of those norms being disturbed by the brutality of war. Wharton states:

Half way between Chalons and Sainte Menehould we came on the first evidence of the invasion: the lamentable ruins of the village of Auve. These pleasant villages of the Aisne, with their one long street, their half-timbered houses and high-roofed granaries with espaliered gable-ends, are all much of one pattern, and one can easily picture what Auve must have been as it looked out, in the blue September weather, above the ripening pears of its gardens to the crops in the valley and the large landscape beyond. Now it is a mere waste of rubble and cinders, not one threshold distinguishable from another. We saw many other ruined villages after Auve, but this was the first, and perhaps for that reason one had there, most hauntingly, the vision of all the separate terrors, anguishes, uprootings and rendings apart involved in the destruction of the obscurest of human communities. The photographs on the walls, the twigs of withered box above the crucifixes, the old wedding-dresses in brass-clamped trunks, the bundles of letters laboriously written and as painfully deciphered, all the thousand and one bits of the past that give meaning and continuity to the present—of all that accumulated warmth nothing was left but a brick-heap and some twisted stove-pipes! (Wharton 58).

Wharton imagines that before the war, the homes in Auve were pleasantly situated amongst nice greenery and temperate September skies. The scene that she sees, after the war has passed through Auve like a storm, is much less pleasant and she describes first how the homes in the village had been physically destroyed. The structures of the homes had crumbled into waste, and you could no longer distinguish one home from another because they were uniformly destroyed into unrecognizable rubble. She then “most hauntingly” muses about how a human community had been destroyed and the physical representations of the humanity of the people who had lived in those homes had been stripped. She states that “of all that accumulated warmth,” referring to the objects people owned that reminded them of their loved ones and hobbies, and “all the thousand and one bits of the past that give meaning and continuity to the present,” the family’s mementos, could never be recovered once the war approached closer. The house is an important

symbol of how the war intruded on domesticity and family life, and how the disruption of the barrier between the two spaces would lead to the destruction of the domestic space. Most importantly, the wrecked homes, which she discusses again in other villages in the other articles in the collection, offer Wharton means of witnessing and recounting the consequences of war from her own perspective. When discussing the hospitals and wounded, Wharton speaks of the quantifiable needs for aid and the tragedy of wounded's pain that she cannot even imagine. When describing the house, Wharton is able to speculate about the mementos it may have contained and the significance it may have held for the family who was displaced by war, allowing her a certain intimacy with the war and her storytelling that she is not able to achieve in the more masculinized spaces like trenches and battlefields.

Conclusion

In the articles collected in *Fighting France*, Wharton works within the conventions of propagandist writing to appeal to her American audience, and garner financial and moral support for the French war effort. Though Wharton worked extensively as a volunteer raising funds and providing relief for refugees, this text, her most popular life writing about the war, portrays her experience travelling through French war zones and focuses heavily on the work performed by men. The conventions of First World War writing were being shaped at the time of the text's publication in 1915, as is demonstrated in the reviews of her work, and Wharton ultimately

demonstrates the distinct limitation in the extent to which women could access masculinized spaces in war. It was assumed that the most valuable aspect of war writing was engagement with the front and the experiences of combatants, ignoring the real but “domestic” work of women in factories or workrooms, and as nurses and journalists. In “Tone of France” Wharton deals with the different types of “courage” that men and women could access, placing a premium on male labor while challenging conventions to applaud women for their courage in the workplace and as nurses. Yet, in the bulk of her articles, including “In Argonne,” she focuses on the work performed at the front, primarily by male combatants and medics. Even when she is physically travelling through the masculinized spaces at the French battlegrounds, she frames her impressions through mourning for ruined domestic and familial spaces, such as the destroyed houses. While in her later fiction, such as her short stories published after the war in 1919, she was able to use her signature wit to satirize the treatment of women volunteers as less valuable than male volunteers and combatants, in *Fighting France* she draws a sharp line between women’s roles in the domestic spaces of the war effort and men’s roles as combatants and medical professionals in the war zone.

THREE

Young Women, Old Women: The image of the war effort's redundant woman in the short fiction of Edith Wharton and May Sinclair

At the onset of the First World War, both men and women were invigorated by the desire to contribute to the war effort in some meaningful way. For the class of educated writers to which Sinclair and Wharton belonged, this manifested in various volunteer efforts ranging from aiding refugees and driving ambulances, to raising charitable funds, driving up support through written propaganda, and recounting events in journalism. Male writers, like Ernest Hemingway, Erich Maria Remarque, Siegfried Sassoon, and Henri Barbusse, earned recognition by recounting their own experiences on the front lines as soldiers or medical aids and producing fictionalized account intended to represent the tragedy or glory of the war. There were two categories that this masculine war writing could be divided into: those that glorified the war for propagandistic ends, and those that criticized war. Some writers portrayed romanticized but brutally realistic scenes of war that promoted nationalism in their respective nations and drummed up the necessary support to continue funding the massive expense of the war and its casualties. Other male war writers wrote anti-war pieces about the negative impacts of war, such as the lasting psychological impacts of shell shock. Both of these types of male war writing were valued during and after the war and were perceived as authentic, because they offered eyewitness accounts.

Women's writing, however, was not valued as a contribution to the war effort because of the extent to which they were removed from actual scenes of battle. In James

Campbell's critical essay "Interpreting the War," he describes how early critics of First World War literature, when the first real critical engagement with these war works took place in the 1960s, viewed "access to the war itself" as the dominant feature of canonical works (Campbell 264). Campbell states that "the first decade of critics, including if not especially [Paul] Fussell, had assumed that war experience was identical with combat experience... the war seemed to have absolutely no significant effect on those not doing the shooting" (Campbell 270). Beginning in the 1980s and 90s, feminist scholars such as Nosheen Khan, Gilbert and Gubar, and later Lynne Hanley and Sharon Ouditt challenged the marginalization of women war writers, and argued against the "exclusion of civilian voices generally and women's voices specifically" from the literary canon (Campbell 272). These feminist scholars have condemned earlier criticism that ignored the vital works written by women writers about the war, but nonetheless authors like Wharton and Sinclair were limited by their contemporaries' conceptions of separate masculine and feminine spaces.

Women were not allowed to engage in combat, and therefore their stories of the war were regarded as secondhand accounts of the action, the view from the sidelines. The writings produced by Wharton, Sinclair, and other female writers of the war offer accounts of the experiences of women who played a major role in caring for the wounded, raising funds, and promoting nationalism, fitting into similar categories as male writers as either criticizing the war or war effort, such as Sinclair's *Journal of Impressions*, or promoting the war, such as Wharton's propagandist *Fighting France*. The struggle that Wharton and Sinclair encountered in seeking validation as contributors to the effort was also largely colored by their age. Both in their early fifties during the war,

the authors did not fit into the trope of the attractive young nurse caring for the soldiers. As upper middle class women established in their career of writing, they also did not fit into the trope of the agile young factory worker making supplies to send out to the front. Their age made them less desirable for the war effort, and thus they felt cast aside or unappreciated though they were eager to contribute to the effort in some meaningful way.



Above: This is a series of three First World War Postcards that depict the idealized image of a young, attractive nurse caring for wounded men. Postcards allowed soldiers to communicate with their families, and featured photos or illustrations that generally that reflected either the state of the home front or the consequences of war. Oftentimes the images were used to boost morale or to drum up support for the war. The above postcards, and many similar illustrations produced between 1914 and 1918, positively portray how young, feminine nurses aided the wounded. These women have fair, rosy skin and stylish hair styles, and while wearing nurses' uniforms they all appear youthful, attractive, and happy. Especially in the images on the right and left, the nurses appear to be nurturing and attentive, leaning over the patient. In the left image she makes physical contact and eye contact with the man in his wheelchair, though he appears to be in good health, and the woman on the far right offers an apple to an injured man, who looks perhaps at peace in her presence. These postcards reveal how women war volunteers were imagined, as young, positive, and caregivers, in stark contrast to older, serious volunteers like Wharton and Sinclair, and demonstrates how this idealization was perpetuated through the postcards, posters, and propaganda that supported the war effort (Allen 10).

Scholars have argued that the defining factor of the value of Wharton and Sinclair's contribution to the war effort is their gender. Because of their womanhood, their volunteer efforts were not viewed as significant as the efforts of men on the front, and their war writings were not regarded as firsthand accounts of the war. While gender based prejudice is certainly a defining factor in the limitations that Wharton and Sinclair encountered respectively, I will argue that the function of their age is inseparable from the discussion of gender. For women, their age is correlated to their function in society and their treatment by men in its relation to their ability to both produce children and meet conventional beauty standards. Because Wharton and Sinclair were in their middle years during the war, and much of their writing distinctly features older women characters inhibited by their age, they illustrate how age as well as gender played a significant role in the extent to which they were allowed to participate in the war as writers as well as workers.

As was illustrated in my first chapter on Sinclair's *Journal of Impressions*, she was at first eager to participate in the war effort but was almost immediately sent home because she was not seen as a useful asset to the Munro Ambulance Unit. Sinclair channeled this rejection into her short story, "Red Tape," a narrative about an over-the-hill couple desperate to engage in the war effort but unable to because of seemingly arbitrary age cut-offs. Sinclair uses her own experiences and disappointment to inform her war writing, thus blurring the line between fiction and life writing. Wharton was arguably more successful in her contributions to wartime aid, but in her writing she criticizes how women war volunteers were limited in the extent to which they could participate in the war and be taken seriously due to factors of age and gender. In her short

stories “Writing a War Story,” and “The Refugees,” she implicitly refers to her own experience with the limitations of women’s war writing and the separation between feminized and masculinized spaces in war, criticizing how women were treated as spectators rather than actual helping hands.

Both Wharton and Sinclair’s war stories center the figure of the redundant woman. The concept of the redundant woman stems from Victorian culture in which there was a surplus of eligible woman and a shortage of eligible men due to a population imbalance, a phenomenon that has occurred periodically throughout history as men are lost to war, disease, or enslavement. Redundant, or superfluous women were viewed as a burden on society because they were unable to fulfill their roles as homemakers in the absence of a man (Simonsen 509). Wharton and Sinclair both came of age during the Victorian era, in families that espoused an ideology of religious morality and female docility. Yet by the time of the war, both were independent and unmarried, and Sinclair was even a staunch advocate for women’s rights. Though they fit into the category of the redundant woman, in their prewar writing both authors criticize society for its alienation of mature women. In their fictionalized depictions of war era femininity, Wharton’s Miss Rushworth and Sinclair’s Miss Delacheroy serve as the perfect depiction of redundant woman; both women are unmarried, desperate to help in the war effort despite being treated as unhelpful, and both confined by societal expectations – Miss Rushworth to high society standards, and Miss Delacheroy to pleasing Mr. Starkey. Ultimately, the concept of the redundant woman serves to represent and define how Wharton and Sinclair construct their criticism of societal treatment of mature women.

Constructing Gender, the Redundant Woman, and Wharton’s Psychic Splitting

In the short stories produced by Wharton and Sinclair about female participation in the First World War, this theme of redundancy manifests in resentment towards younger women. In Wharton's "The Refugees," the protagonist is a woman continuously characterized as old and frail as well as eccentric and absurd. Janet Malcom, in her review of Wharton's major novels, "The Woman Who Hated Women," remarks that Wharton's writing was "pervaded by a deep pessimism and an equally profound misogyny," and argues that she vilifies women of a certain vapid, inadequate class and equates all tragedy in the world with the "callousness and heartlessness of women" (Malcom 1). Wharton's heroines are often opposed by women deemed frivolous or immature, such as high society women interested only in marriage in her 19th century novels like *The Age of Innocence*, or the young, attractive nurses and the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps in her First World War fiction that were opposite Wharton's own middle-aged, desexualized character. Malcolm further argues that "there are no bad men in Wharton's fiction... no man ever deliberately causes harm to another person; that role is exclusively reserved for women" (Malcolm 1). According to Malcolm, for Wharton, women who fail to meet a standard of respectable morality are depicted as the root of societal failings, not the men who desire them. Claire Tylee, a scholar of women's First World War literature and author of the article "Imagining Women at War: Feminist Strategies in Edith Wharton's War Writing," implicitly disagrees with this perspective and instead argues for a feminist reading of Wharton's short fiction. Tylee argues that Wharton takes a feminist standpoint and challenges the "attempted subordination" of women by men, using irony and fiction to mask a less conservative viewpoint than she was allowed in her propaganda and journalism (Tylee 328). My focus lies between these

two arguments, suggesting instead that Wharton was working within the conventions of women's war writing in "Writing a War Story" and "The Refugees," as well as in *Fighting France*, as I have argued in the previous chapter. While in her short stories Wharton produces unlikeable caricatures of women in the war effort, she ultimately works to evaluate these social types and how age and gender functioned as obstacles for women in the war effort.

In her chapter "The Female Conscience in Edith Wharton's Shorter Fiction: Angel or Demon," author Gloria Erlich deals with the ways that Wharton polarized women using the psychological phenomenon of the "good mother – bad mother" concept in object relations theory in order to express Wharton's complex understanding of morality resultant from a bad relationship with her mother. The concept of the good and bad mother split is essentially the idea that during infancy a child perceives their mother as two polarized parts, the good mother who provides them with satisfaction, and the bad mother who when unable to give undivided attention enrages the infant. When this polarization is split between two women, such as for Wharton who had a nanny that she equated with the attentive good mother, and a biological mother who she equated with detachment and high moral expectations, the child is unable to understand the mother, and thus women, as a rounded person with both "good" and negative qualities (Erlich 98-99). Erlich thus argues that because of this imbalance perception of her mother's womanhood, in her fiction this translated to splitting good and bad qualities into separate good and bad female characters. She states that "Wharton's tendency to psychic splitting found literary expression in her polarization of female characters. On top of conventional fictional polarizations such as fair and dark women, good and bad ones, Wharton added,

among others, verbally adept versus inarticulate, sexually ignorant versus sexually sophisticated”(Erlich 101). In addition to this list I suggest that Wharton polarized young women and old women; the young women is associated with naiveté, privilege, and exaggerated sexuality, while the older women aligns closely with Wharton’s conception of herself, and thus is associated with wisdom, devaluation, and desexualized appearance and relationships to men. In Wharton’s short stories, she projects her own experiences of womanhood as either being morally good or bad onto her female characters, and as a result the characters that mirror Wharton’s own experiences, older women rejected from the foreground of the volunteer ranks, serve to criticize the underserved privilege she assigns to desired young volunteers.

Wharton’s “psychic splitting” of old and young women is developed in her short stories through hyperbole and satirical characterization. In “Writing a War Story,” Wharton’s protagonist Miss Ivy Spang is a young and self-involved nurse who is asked to write a short war story to be published in a periodical aimed at entertaining wounded soldiers in British hospitals. Ivy plagiarizes a journal entry from an older governess about her wartime experiences and passes it off as an original work of fiction, but is offended when the soldiers in her unit, including a well-known novelist, are more interested in the photo of her in her nurse’s uniform than her lack-luster story. Wharton exaggerates Ivy’s youthful foolishness and aura of sexuality in order to criticize how young women were valued and preferred over older women as sexual objects, rather than for their skills. Conversely, in Wharton’s story “The Refugees,” the central female character, Miss Rushworth, is defined by both her age and her inability to contribute meaningfully to the war effort. Her inability to realize that she had adopted an American professor rather than

a Belgian refugee is an exaggeration of the ways older women were perceived as useless to the war effort and their desperation to maintain the appearance of good, dedicated countrywomen. Moreover, the exaggeration of Rushworth's old age serves to comment on how once a woman was out of her sexual prime she might as well be elderly. Together these two female caricatures serve to represent Wharton's polarized conception of femininity; a woman can either be young and foolish, or old and redundant. Given Wharton's own experience as a middle aged volunteer, the autobiographical component of her war writing suggests that the older women are superior but mistreated by society while the younger women are highly desirable to soldiers and the war effort, but are too immature and lack the necessary skills to contribute meaningfully.

“Writing a War Story”

In Wharton's short story, “Writing a War Story,” she satirizes the objectification of female wartime volunteers, as well as the gendered treatment of war writing. Wharton shows how femininity was an obstacle to women war writers, in that their work was not given credibility as firsthand accounts of the war. Wharton's protagonist, Ivy Spang, a young American nurse caring for soldiers in a hospital in Paris, is asked to write a short war story to be published in a periodical aimed at entertaining wounded soldiers in British hospitals. Ivy struggles to find something compelling to write about, and ultimately writes a war story based on material she stole from the journal of an older woman, her governess, Mademoiselle, who had spent a year recording her experience and the stories she heard from soldiers in the hospital. Regardless of the merit of the story or the accuracy of its account of female experiences in the warzone, it is not taken seriously by the men in Ivy's unit. The soldiers completely ignore the story in favor of admiring a

photograph of her published alongside the story, objectifying her as a figure of sexual desire in contrast to the harsh climate of the war surrounding them, rather than validating or empathizing with women's war work.

Wharton deals with contradictions and the complicated relationship between women at war and witnessing. Femininity is an obstacle to Ivy's success as a war writer, and Wharton further complicates this issue by positioning Ivy, the ideal attractive young war volunteer, against Mademoiselle, an older unmarried woman and the source of the story. Ivy is unlikeable for stealing the story and for being so self-involved, but the feminist reader finds her sympathetic because she is objectified by the soldiers. Mademoiselle is a minimal character in the text, as Ivy's focalization tells us little about her other than that she's older and has served the war effort for a year. Mademoiselle's contributions to war effort are invalidated, and Ivy is objectified rather than considered a serious war writer, and thus femininity is portrayed as an obstacle. Wharton reveals how age and gender intersected in complicated ways for war volunteers, and uses the reader's own conflict about whether Ivy is sympathetic or unlikeable to explore how constructs of femininity limited the scope of women's war writing.

The differences between older women and younger women as contributors to the war effort is developed through Ivy's relationship to Mademoiselle, an older woman who was formerly Ivy's governess and from whom Ivy acquires her story. Ivy complains to Mademoiselle about the close deadline for the short story that she must meet, to which Mademoiselle responds that she has a number of accounts from her year working in the hospital documented in a journal. She states "in writing a story, one has to have a subject. Of course I know it's only the treatment that matters; but the treatment, naturally

would be yours,” suggesting that she has a subject about which Ivy could develop a story from her journal entries, describing them as “a good many stories – pathetic, thrilling, moving stories of our poor poilus; and in the evening, sometimes, I used to jot them down, just as the soldiers told them to me – oh, without any art at all” (Wharton 252).

Ivy uses Mademoiselle’s account for her story, adding flowery language and sentimental war literature tropes that Mademoiselle had left out while journaling factually.

Mademoiselle allows Ivy to take full credit for writing the story and even tells her that she has written a “beautiful” story, a statement with which Ivy “modestly” agrees. Ivy’s modesty is likely ironic – though she did not make a spectacle out of her success, her pride in the story and disregard for Mademoiselle’s deserved credit suggests deep self-interest. Mademoiselle has produced a valuable document about the war, a firsthand account of her experiences working with wounded soldiers and as a female volunteer, but allows Ivy to tell it as her own, representing both how the voices of older women were not valued in the effort and Wharton’s psychic splitting of the old woman and the young woman. Yet even when the story is voiced through Ivy, the ideal young woman war nurse, the story isn’t successful. Wharton shows how femininity, at the intersection of age and gender, worked as an obstacle for women in writing war stories.

When the story is published, it is distributed to the soldiers in Ivy’s unit. She at first believes that the soldiers are appreciating the content of the story, and is later embarrassed to find that her work was not taken seriously. Ivy learns that one of the officers in her ward is a famous novelist, Harold Harbard, and she reacts in histrionics. Wharton states that “Ivy’s head stood still with the shock of the discovery; she remembered that she had left a copy of ‘The Man-at Arms’ in Number 5, and the blood

coursed through her veins and flooded to her head at the idea that Harold Harbard might at that very moment be reading ‘His Letter Home’” (Wharton 256). Wharton uses dramatic language and the picture of Ivy’s physical reaction to the idea of a famed male novelist reading her work to illustrate how the genre of war writing had become popular and how the conventions of war writing were dictated by the famous male writers who the fictional Harbard represents.

The short story concludes with a conversation between Ivy and Harbard, in which he reveals that not only did he find her story to have “mauled” its subject and to be laughable in its composition, a comment that render’s Ivy’s spirit broken, he adds insult to injury by requesting a photograph of her. Ironically, when Ivy first receives the proofs for the photographs from which she was to select a portrait to accompany her story prior to finishing it, she is “forced onward by an inexorable fate” to finish a story so that the image will be published because “the photograph was really too charming to waste” (Wharton 253). Ivy admires the images of herself and uses them as motivation to finish the story because she wants the portrait to be publically displayed, but when the photograph becomes the only aspect of her story that the soldiers enjoy, she is upset. When Ivy reveals her great disappointment, Harbard responds: ““you were angry just now because I didn’t admire your story; now you’re angrier still because I do admire your photograph. Do you wonder that we novelists find such an inexhaustible field in Woman?”(Wharton 260). This comment essentially suggests that women’s emotions are contradictory and overwhelming, which is what has allowed novelists to muse on the nature of Woman so inexhaustibly. Wharton is critiquing men like Harbard, and popular fiction in general, by suggesting that the way women are treated is the problem, not the

way women behave. Far more interested in seeing an attractive woman than reading a story based on Mademoiselle's truth, the men in the hospital illustrate how women's war work was not valued for their genuine contributions because of the persistence of the male gaze. By thoroughly objectifying Ivy, any sort of contribution she makes as a volunteer is thus reduced to her femininity, her sexuality, or what she can provide for men, rather than any of her talents or skills. This in turn devalues the role of older women, viewed as even more redundant than the sexually viable young volunteers.

In Joanna Scutts' article "'Writing a War Story': The Female Author and the Challenge of Witnessing," she comments on how the story deals not only with Ivy's foolish behavior, but also with the nature of publishing a war story. She remarks that "the target of Wharton's irony in the story is not just naïve Ivy, but the literary culture that fosters her pretensions and encourages her to prioritize form over content... the story deals as much with the challenge of publishing as composing a war narrative, and it presents us from the start with a heroine who is vainly but not impractically concerned with the public reception of her writing" (Scutts 3). This "literary culture" and its pretensions manifest in Ivy's treatment of Harbard as a celebrity and Ivy comments on the state of Mademoiselle's writing that she uses for her text. Ivy criticizes Mademoiselle's "shabby" journal for containing "close, tremulous hand" and because it "poured on and on without a paragraph... poor Mademoiselle did not even know the rudiments of literature" (253). Because Mademoiselle's journal does not adhere to the conventions of war writing, Ivy dismisses it. Once she supplements the story with poetic language and conventional war writing imagery, Ivy views the story as acceptable for publication. As Scutts suggests, the content of the story is less important than its form. Wharton is

criticizing the rigid conventions of war fiction, which prioritized literary elements over content and masculine stories over feminine experiences. Ivy so desperately wants to be part of the culture of war writing, to the point of plagiarizing a story because she thinks it will garner higher ratings, but ultimately she fails to be taken seriously because of her youth and physicality.

Even though Ivy develops the story from the firsthand accounts of a seasoned volunteer, suggesting that it might have had some merit, the story is not taken seriously. Regardless of whether Ivy had produced a completely dull, insubstantial, and factually inaccurate story, or one reflective of the life and experiences of a woman on the war front, the point that Wharton makes is that women's war writing was not valued on the same level of professionalism and authorial credibility as that of a male author. Her story would not have been regarded by her contemporaries as a valuable document of the frontlines because her gender prevented her, or the subject of her stolen story, from engaging in combat, the heroic war effort role. Though Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses and ambulance drivers, as well as munition workers, refugee aids, and authors of journalism and propaganda all contributed vitally to the success of the war, their work was not held in the same regard as soldiers, and thus stories about their heroism or from their gendered perspective was treated unfairly. Wharton further complicates the gendering of war writing and the restrictions women war writers dealt with through the function of age, using the dichotomy of Ivy and Mademoiselle to illustrate how older war volunteers, like Wharton herself, were limited in the extent to which they could participate in the war effort due to the construction of war time femininity as the trope of the attractive young nurse. In Wharton's other short story about the First World War,

“The Refugees,” she expands on the figure of the middle aged war volunteer through her caricature of Miss Rushworth, further illustrating how older women volunteers were not perceived as valuable contributors to the war effort. While in “Writing a War Story” she focuses largely on Ivy’s experiences as a young woman and the challenge that femininity posed to war writing, in refugees she looks more closely at the types of work performed by female volunteers on the home front and the extent to which they were limited by their age and gender.

“The Refugees”

In her short story, “The Refugees,” Edith Wharton satirizes the perception of older women seeking involvement in the war effort by creating a caricature of the overzealous European society woman, revealing how society viewed their engagement with the war as entirely unhelpful. The story describes the miscommunication that occurs when an American Professor, Charles Durand, travels from Belgium to London to evade the incoming troops of the First World War, and upon arriving is greeted by an excitable woman who he thinks is a refugee. He in turn mistakes her for a refugee. The woman, Miss Rushworth, is so excited about acquiring a refugee of her own to care for against the competition of many eager-to-help upper middle class British women seeking refugees that Durand is hesitant to reveal the error. Throughout the text Rushworth is characterized by her age and defined by her futility, as perceived by Durand. For example, when Rushworth first greets Durand, the text describes her by stating: “the voice was a reedy pipe, the face that of a little elderly lady so frail and dry and diaphanous that she reminded him in her limp, dust-colored garments of a last year's moth shaken out of the curtains of an empty room” (Wharton 176). Durand’s first impression of Rushworth is

not her friendliness or accent and ethnicity, but rather a harsh critique of appearance as so old that that he aligns her with dust, moths, and empty rooms. Wharton intentionally dramatizes Rushworth's age, suggesting that once a woman is beyond her sexual prime, she might as well be regarded as elderly and drab.

As the text progresses, Durand's perception of age and Miss Rushworth's motivations shift dramatically, to the effect of undermining his credibility as a narrative focalizer while also revealing the shifting dynamics between the two central characters. While at the start of the story Durand refers to Rushworth as a tiny, frail, old woman, as the text progresses beyond his first impression it is revealed that she is in her forties, and around the same age as Durand. After their hectic first interaction the two settle down for tea, and Durand remarks that "the sparrow had emptied her cup, too, and a soft pink suffused her cheeks, effacing the wrinkles, which had perhaps been only lines of worry. He began to wonder if, after all, she were much more than forty . . . Rather absurd for a man of his age to have been calling a woman of forty an "old lady" (Wharton 180). Referring to Rushworth as a "sparrow" reinforces the picture of her petite fragility, but the color in her cheeks and lack of wrinkles suggests a youthfulness that Durand initially overlooked. Shortly after this realization, the narrator provides a more accurate description of Durand's age and average features, stating that he was "forty-five, decidedly bald, with an awkward limp, scant-lashed blue eyes blinking behind gold spectacles, a brow that he believed to be thoughtful and a chin that he knew to be weak. His height was medium, his figure sedentary, with the hollows and prominences in the wrong places" (Wharton 184). That Durand is entirely average both makes him a relatable character and complicates his position in relation to the Miss Rushworth and the

war. His focalization of her conflates the appearance of middle age with the appearance of “a little elderly lady,” revealing that he is an unreliable narrator and reflecting idea that once women were out of their fertile years, they were universally considered old and noncontributing. Because he is a man it would be assumed that inherently he would contribute more substantially to the war effort and more accurately recount his experience despite the reader knowing that he fled Belgium in fear, while Miss Rushworth sought ways to help at home, and was over the acceptable age to enlist, at about the same age as Rushworth. Durand’s focalization of Rushworth is unreliable and shifts throughout the story, and illustrates how regardless of exactly how old she was, her age and femininity impacted her perceived value as a volunteer.

Similarly to the contrast between Ivy and Mademoiselle in “Writing a War Story,” Wharton uses a younger woman, Miss Rushworth’s niece, Clio, in “Refugees” to reveal how young and old women were treated differently in the war effort. While out having tea together, Rushworth’s sister in law, Lady Beausedge, and her daughters approach her and Durand, causing Rushworth great duress. Here it is shown that having a refugee to care for was a status symbol, something that many upper class women sought in order to prove that they were worldly and charitable. Lady Beausedge questions Rushworth’s luck in finding a refugee, and seeks to somehow use Durand to promote her own image and seeks to employ him to advance her own social motivations, reflecting the pressure that Rushworth felt to find a refugee to help on her own as a sort of emblem of persistence and good character. Durand struggles to find a moment to admit his true status, while Rushworth’s youngest niece, Clio, urges him to keep the charade alive. Clio interrupts his confession: ““I mean, n-n-not a r-r-ref — ” gasped out the desperate

Durand. / Suddenly he felt his other arm caught by Miss Clio Rushworth, who gave it a deep and eloquent pinch. At the same time their eyes met, and he read in hers entreaty, command, and the passionate injunction to follow her lead” (Wharton 192). Though Durand is “desperate” to get out of the awkward situation he has fallen into, Clio seeks to protect her aunt from embarrassment and allow her the fantasy of rescuing a refugee. Clio suggests that the adventure of picking up Durand is “literally the first thing that’s ever happened” to Rushworth, because “nothing much ever happened to the unmarried women of her time. Most of them were just put away in cottages covered with clematis and forgotten — even the Refugee Committee forgot her” (Wharton 194). Clio begs Durand to sympathize with Rushworth, and to let her “have the adventure” of caring for a refugee, even if he is not in fact a refugee. She suggests that unmarried women like Rushworth need to feel useful, and that they lack purpose without being able to fulfill a caretaker role. Clio portrays Rushworth as almost pathetic, and in need of a purpose even if it is under false pretenses. Wharton portrays Clio as down to earth and a pleasant contrast to the excitable Miss Rushworth. She is the only one to have recognized immediately that Durand was not a refugee, and Durand is relieved by her sensible understanding of the delicacy of the situation. While Rushworth is portrayed as scatter-brained and difficult to talk to, Clio is quick witted and understanding. Wharton works to reveal through a likeable portrait of Clio that older women eager to aid in the war effort, like Rushworth, were viewed as over-zealous and dispensable.

At the end of the short story, we find Durand four years into the future in April of 1918 returning to France. Durand has joined the YMCA volunteer effort, though he is not proud of being part of the organization rather than in the official military. Durand wears a

“too-tight uniform,” and muses that “he could never quite console himself for the accident of having been born a few years too soon to be wearing the real uniform of his country” (195). This is a significant shift from the start of the story, because though Durand is now contributing whereas earlier he ran away from the outbreak of war in Belgium, his age puts him in a lowly position, the same position for which he criticized Miss Rushworth. Moreover, once in France Durand encounters Clio, who reveals that Miss Rushworth has actually climbed up the ranks and become a colonel. Rushworth does not recognize Durand at all because she is too busy helping large numbers of refugees and running her organization. Clio ends the story by remarking that Rushworth has just earned another promotion and is set to marry the Bishop of the fictional Macaroon Islands.

The ending of the story is complex in its irony and the commentary it makes regarding women in the war effort. Rushworth, who was made out to be a ridiculous woman absorbed in her self-image and defined by her age and single womanhood has managed to gain status in the volunteer effort. It is Durand who is still single, aged and unappealing in his ill-fitting uniform, and no closer to the frontlines than any female volunteer would be. Claire Tylee, in “Imagining Women at War: Feminist Strategies in Edith Wharton’s War Writing,” evaluates the irony of the story’s ending from the feminist reader’s perspective, and suggests that a contemporary male would find Rushworth’s success to be “humiliating” (Tylee 338). Wharton may be suggesting that it is women who are the real back bone to the war effort, and by showing her through Durand’s perspective we see how marginalized women were by men. His male gaze he defines her by age and gender, when in reality she was perfectly capable of managing an

entire network of refugees. In comparing how Durand and Rushworth viewed the value of their wartime roles differently, Tylee states that “what for him is a somewhat demeaning acceptance of a noncombatant role in the war, for her (as for many real-life British women) is the opportunity finally to be of use. Colonel Audrey Rushworth, her uniform sporting decorations, is now competently filling a position of command... Durand is left aware of a distinct feeling of humiliation” (Tylee). The success that Rushworth has as a volunteer makes Durand feel inadequate, because not only was his involvement with the YMCA not seen as heroic as the combat younger men engaged in, he is also overshadowed by a woman.

While this reading of the conclusion of *Refugees* is quite satisfying to the feminist reader, the ironic intentions of Wharton’s story must be read with consideration to her contemporary audience and its notions of femininity. Tylee portrays Rushworth as overcoming the limitations of Durand’s male gaze and revealing the value of women to the war effort. In actuality, Wharton’s depiction of Rushworth at the conclusion of the novel would have likely be perceived as the type of a bossy woman, not as a feminist hero, by her *Scribner’s* magazine audience. In late Victorian and early 20th century, fiction and periodicals popularized the feminist ideal of “The New Woman,” which refers to modern characteristics of femininity that might include having a career, pursuing an education, and having sexual agency (Pykett 138). While for the contemporary feminists the New Woman represented a positive shift to female empowerment and independent, conservatives viewed “New Women” as self-involved, bossy, and a threat to family life and traditional social dynamics. Wharton deals with the modern shift in expectations for women and the entrance of the New Woman to the workforce. Specifically, in

“Refugees,” she works through the complicated issue of where women volunteers might fit into the war effort. The war time jobs that women held always carefully teetered between acceptable contributions of feminized labor and challenges to traditional feminine roles. As Sharon Ouditt suggests in her book *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War*, there were a variety of different wartime positions that women could hold, ranging from nurses, to munitions workers, to writers, but these jobs were always policed by patriarchal expectations that women would stay within the scope of their ordained domestic roles. Therefore, at the level that Rushworth rose to amongst the volunteer ranks she would not be viewed as an empowered, accomplished woman, but rather as a domineering, masculinized social type.

Miss Rushworth is characterized at the end of the story by her serious dedication to her work and by a stern, unyielding demeanor. After Clio and Durand meet up she brings him along to Rushworth’s office. The narrator describes the scene, stating: “at the office desk sat a lady with eye-glasses on a sharp nose. She wore a Colonel’s uniform, with several decorations, and was bending over the desk busily writing. A young girl in a nurse’s dress stood beside her, as if waiting for an order... / The colonel lifted her head quickly and glanced at her niece with a resolute and almost forbidding eye... / She bent again sternly to her writing. As she looked up her glance strayed carelessly over Professor Durand’s congested countenance, and then dropped to the desk without a sign of recognition.” (Wharton 197). The “sharpness” of her facial features as well as her “forbidding eye” starkly contrast the warmth and friendliness she was characterized with at the start of the story, in 1914. Her treatment of younger women, the nurse and her niece Clio, produces her as overly controlling – the young nurse is at her beck and call,

while Clio, a beloved family member, is given a stern rather than welcoming look. The exaggeration of the types of authoritarian characteristics attributed to women with power works to paint Rushworth as a generally unpleasant and unfeminine character. Disregard for Durand, as she does not remember him and fails to even acknowledge his presence, might resonate with her contemporary audience as what Tylee refers to as the “humiliating” way in which bossy women treat men. Moreover, even if she thought that Durand was a refugee rather than an old acquaintance, the fact that she would barely look up from her work to acknowledge another person illustrates a lack of compassion associated with the type once she is no longer within her proper confines of domesticity and maternal duty.

The crucial differentiation that needs to be made is whether this image of Rushworth is another misreading on behalf of Durand, who acts as an unreliable focalizer who fails to recognize the value of women war workers, or whether Rushworth is intended to be a caricature mocking the overzealous women volunteers who stepped out of the feminized roles women were allotted. Though Wharton’s signature style suggests that she is likely being ironic here, mocking those who might have sympathy for Durand and contempt for Rushworth, it must be acknowledged that Wharton’s audience would find their male focalizer far more likeable than Colonel Rushworth. Though Durand never achieves the heroism of more successful volunteers or combatants, Wharton works to reveal that the success of overbearing or domineering women in volunteer roles, like Rushworth, was still less desirable than his mediocrity. Wharton is able to complicate the intersection of age and gender for war volunteers through Durand’s faults; both Rushworth and Durand struggled to gain traction as volunteers do to their age, but

Durand's position as a sympathetic focalizer and Rushworth's unsettling position as first desperate and later officious problematizes the role of older women in the war effort.

“Red Tape”

While Wharton deploys satire in her criticism of the system of volunteer War work, Sinclair uses irony to evaluate the treatment of middle-aged women desperate to contribute to the war effort. Upon hearing of England's involvement at the start of the First World War, Sinclair's protagonists, Miss Delacheroy and her boss turned companion Mr. Starkey, immediately set their minds to joining the war effort. The story centrally comments on how age factors into the treatment of contributors to the war effort; though eager to serve their country, Delacheroy and Starkey are forbidden from travelling to the front because they are considered too old. While Wharton's criticism lies in the caricature of Miss Rushworth, useless in her desperate attempts to help a perfectly unharmed man who imagines her to be the one in need of aid, Sinclair exposes the treatment of older volunteers that leaves Miss Delacheroy feeling helpless and heartbroken. Moreover, while Miss Rushworth is portrayed as blissfully unaware of how useless and unhelpful she is, Miss Delacheroy is explicitly confronted with “red tape” that represents the ageism she faces. Delacheroy goes through all the expected motions in order to follow Mr. Starkey to the front, including getting vaccinated and taking a first aid class that she struggles to pass. The disappointment that Miss Delacheroy faces when she is rejected by the war office for being over 40 in many ways mirrors May Sinclair's own. As we have seen, Sinclair comments in *A Journal of Impressions in Belgium*, on how disenchanted she felt after joining the war effort by way of an Ambulance Corps in Belgium. Thus, feeling resentful and unwanted, Sinclair builds the story of Delacheroy's

dedication to the cause with an ironic twist on the last page of the story that renders her efforts useless in order to criticize how organizers failed to properly utilize volunteers genuinely interested in making a difference on the basis of age discrimination.

Though Delacheroy and Starkey are both informed of the rule that bars volunteers over 40, the construction of gender adds significance to Sinclair's commentary.

Differences in gender roles are first made apparent in Delacheroy's explicit subservience to Starkey in both their work and lifestyle choices. The story opens by suggesting that there was no question that the two would go to the front, because "it was the only way Mr. Starkey could serve his country. And it was the only way Miss Delacheroy could serve Mr. Starkey" (Sinclair 198). Mr. Starkey's loyalty lies with his country while Miss Delacheroy's loyalty lies in pleasing Mr. Starkey, and the usage of the term "serve" speaks volumes to the nature of their relationship. Starkey has the upper hand in the relationship, and Miss Delacheroy feels obligated to follow his lead faithfully. This dynamic is further cemented in how he objectifies her. For example, when Starkey first took over the office in which the two work, the omniscient narrator comments that "he took her over as an inconsiderable part of the office furniture a little machine, shoved aside into its corner, rather the worse for wear and working badly. Under his hands she became a living thing" (Sinclair 200). This passage suggests that Delacheroy has no control over her own autonomy, but rather is either a merely a fixture in her workplace or an underling of Starkey. Though Starkey may have turned Delacheroy into a "living thing," the text continues to refer to her as "a little machine," and reiterates several times that if Starkey was leaving for the war, Delacheroy must accompany him, and if they did not go together it would not be worth it for her to go at all (Sinclair 200;205). Their

relationship, as male office manager and female office secretary, creates an uneven balance of power that deludes Delacheroy into believing that she must go to the front with him, and that her position as a medically unskilled middle aged secretary would be validated by accompanying Starkey, a former medical student. Moreover, Starkey allows Delacheroy to foolishly believe that they both will be sent to the frontlines rather than being direct and honest with her, which in turn leads to her following through with the necessary processes with which she greatly struggles.

The relationship between Delacheroy and Starkey is complicated by the sexual undertones of their unbalanced power dynamic. The first component of this relationship is Delacheroy's role as a spinster, living out her desires for companionship and satisfaction by pleasing her boss in the workplace. Delacheroy fits into the categorization of the spinster woman of the early 1900s. Prior to working for Mr. Starkey, Delacheroy had been "a lady of leisure," living comfortably off of her father's, a general, income until after his death when his pension had dried up. She never married, and began working in the role that Mr. Starkey regards as the little office machine, blindly following Starkey as if he were her husband or her keeper. Delacheroy clearly enjoyed Starkey's company, the narrator stating that "she liked to be seen walking with him. He was tall, and, in spite of his deplorable lean flanks, impressive" (Sinclair 200). This comment suggests a physical compatibility between the two from Delacheroy's perspective. She satisfies the lack of a romantic relationship in her life by building a celibate relationship with Mr. Starkey. Specifically, the picture of her walking besides him, content with simply being together near constantly, reflects her acceptance of an unbalanced, sexually strained relationship with a man over a more traditional relationship.

Delacheroy seeks to please Starkey and continue their partnership by any means, including following him without doubts to join the war effort. Not only was she willing to fulfill the role as employee, but she also saw joining the war effort as means of furthering their relationship and developing a bond. The narrator describes her unwavering support of joining Starkey in the war effort despite any previous training or preparation for war, stating that “she had to confess that, satisfying as her friendship with Mr. Starkey was, it had lacked hitherto its supreme opportunity” (Sinclair 199). She had enjoyed the time she spent serving Starkey in the office, but serving him in the war effort was the ultimate chance to prove her value to him. The story suggests that after Germany declared war on England, “an extraordinary thing happened to Mr. Starkey and Miss Delacheroy... it happened to them on the morning of the ultimatum, it happened to them together. It was the beginning of still more extraordinary things. They lost all interest in the United Charities. Together, suddenly and unanimously, they lost it” (Sinclair 202). Moreover, when she gets inoculated for typhoid in preparation for their trip abroad she suggests the same to Starkey, and he realized that she was right, to which Starkey had in “his attentive face told her she had scored a point,” meaning that she was gaining more high regard from Starkey (Sinclair 205). Keeping track of points scored for the completion of chores seems arbitrary, unless the relationship is as measured as that between Delacheroy and Starkey. The two substitute a competitive power dynamic for intercourse, and Delacheroy seeks to please her partner, Starkey, by completing tasks, earning bonus points, and supporting him relentlessly.

The second core element of how Delacheroy and Starkey’s relationship is sexualized is Starkey’s emotional detachment and unwillingness to further the

relationship. Starkey feeds off of the companionship he receives from Delacheroy but never takes any steps to advance the relationship, perhaps because he feels secure in her dependence on him and the sexualized tensions in the workplace. The narrator remarks that “he was necessary to her and she was necessary to him, and they were both necessary to the United Charities... there were other things he might have done, other people he might have gone to see, younger women who he might have known, if he had cared. But Mr. Starkey did not care. He did not get on well with other people... he did not get on very well with young women, for young women made him feel not quite so young. He had not formed the habit of them; whereas he *had* formed the habit of Miss Delacheroy” (Sinclair 201). The codependence between the two characters is severe, as the text notes that Mr. Starkey is threatened by younger women and largely unable to maintain healthy relationships with women or colleagues. His “habit” of Miss Delacheroy is largely based on the satisfaction and control he gains from treating her as an inferior, without the threat of something he cannot obtain, such as the youth of young women or their attraction to him. And yet while Miss Delacheroy provides a unique satisfaction, Mr. Starkey never openly pursues a romantic relationship with her. When he notices her physically rather than pursuing her he chooses to suppress his interest. For example, the narrator describes how “every Saturday towards four o’clock, wistfully, delicately, she bloomed. He repressed his wonderings as unchivalrous” (200). Though the two formed an extremely close bond, her age and social standing, a spinster, render her an undesirable candidate for marriage as well as for the war. Mr. Starkey benefits from her loyalty without having to commit to her himself, and thus there is not a need to make a commitment to Delacheroy that would change his circumstances.

The ways that the relationship between Delacheroy and Starkey is sexualized is significant in light of how Sinclair treats repressed sexuality and transgressive expressions of emotion during the war in her life writing, *Journal of Impressions*. In her account of the war, Sinclair undermines the conventional depiction of war as an exclusively masculinized space by writing about her experiences as a woman. She further complicates this by writing negative and controversial descriptions of war as at times “boring” and at other times excitement to revel in. She records and makes public taboo responses to war in a period of heightened patriotism and support for war, which starkly contrast the adamant propaganda in Wharton’s life writing, publishing the journal in 1915 at the start of the war. The motivations for men to enter war in the highly masculinized spaces of combat could be interpreted as sexually motivated, substituting violence and the excitement of war for expressions of sexuality. In “Red Tape,” Delacheroy and Starkey see the war as a solution for the sexually repressed dynamic of their relationship.

The story ends by revealing that the hard work Miss Delacheroy had invested in preparing for war was all for naught, because due to her age she cannot join the war effort at the front. In the last section of the story, Delacheroy is visibly upset when she sees Mr. Starkey, because she has just discovered that despite furiously preparing for challenging exams, and worrying about being prepared in time to leave for the front at the same time as Mr. Starkey, she would still be rejected for being over 40 years old. Sinclair describes the tense conversation where Delacheroy reveals the dilemma to Starkey, stating:

it came from her with the brevity of a supreme confession: ‘They won’t have me. I’m too old.’ / He lowered his eyes before it, as if to the very last he spared her. / ‘It all goes through the War Office, and they won’t look at you if you’re over forty....’ / ‘I didn’t know,’ she said. ‘until this morning.’ / ‘I,’ said Mr. Starkey,

‘have known it all the time.’ And he added something about ‘the system’ and ‘red tape’ (Sinclair 209).

For Delacheroy, the rejection is a confession. She had discovered something that she needed to share with Mr. Starkey, considering they would both be impacted by the stipulation, and the function of this as a ‘confession’ suggests that it is something she feels shameful about. Delacheroy is devastated by the restriction, but is also ashamed about being too old and undesirable, and about having to disappoint Starkey. Starkey, on the other hand, knew about the parameters but chose not to tell Delacheroy and allowed her to discover it on her own. This choice could be construed as deceitful or malicious, allowing Delacheroy to get her hopes up and to go through rigorous but pointless training. More likely, however, Starkey sought to preserve their relationship and avoid disappointing her. His remarks about “the system” and “red tape” reveal that he sees the age restrictions as bureaucratic nonsense, but that Sinclair describes the remarks as “something about” the subject rather than writing out a full comment suggests that he may have simply been trying to make Delacheroy feel better about the situation and not at fault. What this conclusion ultimately does is to reveal that the work performed by women over 40 was undervalued, because Delacheroy spends most of the story working hard and preparing to advance the war effort only to have her efforts invalidated by a seemingly arbitrary age restriction. Sinclair felt that her own work was unappreciated, as is demonstrated in *Journal of Impressions* when she is sent home after two short weeks at the front. She exaggerates this prejudice and lack of appreciation by having Delacheroy rejected before she even gets to the front. Sinclair works to prove that women in the war effort faced both gender and age based prejudice, and in the conclusion of “Red Tape” she uses Delacheroy’s disappointment and shame to reflect her own feelings of rejection.

Conclusion

In the short stories of Edith Wharton and May Sinclair, their own experiences as middle aged war volunteers inform their criticism of the sexist, ageist treatment of women volunteers during the First World War. While in her propaganda writing Wharton worked within the gendered conventions of war writing, in “Writing a War Story” and “The Refugees” she criticizes the extent to which women war writers and workers were limited by their femininity, and how middle aged women were marginalized while young women nurses were idealized. In “Red Tape,” May Sinclair explores how prejudice against older women prevented them from fully participating in the war effort, mirroring her own unsatisfying experience at the front and confronting the transgressive emotions introduced in *Impressions* through the Starkey and Delacheroy’s determination to get to the front and through their sexually repressed relationship. Ultimately, the authors employ satire and irony to encode harsh critique of the treatment of women who were desperate to contribute to the war effort.

CONCLUSION

For both May Sinclair and Edith Wharton, the intersection of their age and gender significantly impacted the extent to which they could participate in the war effort, positioning them as spectators rather than witnesses in their life writings and short fiction about the First World War. Both women were at first eager to contribute to the war effort, but came to feel that as middle aged women both their war writing and volunteer work was undervalued. As we have seen, there is a tendency in First World War literature and scholarship to view women war workers according to a specific ideal, exemplified by the young nurse soothing a wounded soldier, without acknowledging the wide range of women's war work, jobs which included nurses, munitions workers, philanthropists, and writers, as well as the substitute labor they performed while men were at war, performing a wide array of male jobs such as locomotive dispatchers, chauffeurs, bank clerks, elevator operators, mill workers, and farmers (Kim, 2). While other scholars have explored how femininity limited both Wharton and Sinclair in the war effort, evaluating the separation of war into masculine and feminine spaces, my argument considers the factor of age as a further obstacle. Critics who have studied works of Wharton and Sinclair in light of biographical information about their experiences at war, including Hermione Lee and Suzanne Raitt respectively, have not sufficiently articulated how age was central to their inability to fit into the conventional ideal of the woman war worker. I argue that because their experiences contrasted both the masculinized conventions of war writing and the idealization of the young woman volunteer, Wharton and Sinclair found themselves in a disappointingly unappreciated position in the war effort.

Inevitably, an honors thesis, like any project, is limited by time. Given more time, I would have also explored two avenues, the relationship between age and femininity through a feminist theory perspective, and the novels by Sinclair and Wharton written during the post-war period. Because both writers, particularly in their short fiction, suggest aging women were not viewed as valuable contributors to feminine spaces in the war effort and create caricatures of the unhelpful middle aged spinster, my thesis grounds its understanding of relationship between age and gender in primary textual analysis. If I were to further this project, I would look to theory about ageism and how it is gendered, such as Laurie Russell Hatch, author of “Gender and Ageism,” and Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard, author of “‘Women of a certain age’ - life styles, the female body and ageism,” to specifically consider how women are marginalized once they are no longer in their childbearing years. My research on the spinster and New Woman social types prepared me to discuss contemporary impressions of Miss Rushworth’s dominant role as a colonel and how she would have been viewed as a bossy spinster, providing me with insight on social conditions of the period and the vocabulary with which to make sense of this caricature. With the support of critical secondary scholarship on gendered ageism, I would hope to similarly uncover more about the context of the period and how women were treated based on social constructs of age and gender. Unfortunately, little scholarship focuses specifically on ageism in the 1910s and 20s, and instead focuses on late 20th and early 21st century women, primarily through the relationship between age, gender, and the media.

Many of Wharton and Sinclair’s post war novels deal with the First World War but take a less autobiographical approach than their life writings, *Fighting France* and

Impressions, and their short stories, “Writing a War Story,” “The Refugees,” and “Red Tape.” Wharton published two novels about the war, *The Marne* (1918) and *A Son at the Front* (1919) and in 1920 she published one of her most popular novels, *The Age of Innocence*, about 19th century elite northeast American society. Interestingly, Wharton began writing *Son at the Front* in the summer of 1918 before the war ended in November, but did not finish and publish it until September of 1923. During this time, she published *Age of Innocence*, which can arguably be seen as an escape, reliving the less troubled prewar period of the Gilded Age in New York high society that was interrupted by a long, grueling war. Wharton won the Pulitzer Prize in 1921 for *Age of Innocence*, but had little popular success with *Son at the Front*, which critics found out of touch and insufficiently critical of the war, and as one reviewer in the *Tribune* stated “one would almost fancy that Mrs. Wharton is under the impression that the war is still going on and that she wrote her little book to the end that America might help France and Britain see it through” (Rascoe 330). In a continued study of Wharton’s war writing, this complicated relationship between critical reception, war writing, and the chronology of Wharton’s publication merits further attention to how *Son at the Front* and *Age of Innocence* compare. The main reason that I chose not to delve into these novels for this project is that they all center the narrative on men in wartime, whereas Wharton’s life writing and the two short stories I’ve studied are about women and gender in war. Even “Refugees,” which has a male focalizer, is centrally about women in the war effort and Durand’s perception of Rushworth and her femininity. Because a crucial aspect of my argument is to draw parallels between Wharton’s experience at war as a woman and criticism of the treatment of women in the war effort in her writing, including sources

such as *The Marne* or *Son at the Front* about the experiences of men at war would require several more layers of analysis about gender, masculinity, and war. May Sinclair's novels about the war, *Tasker Jevons* (1916), *The Romantic* (1920) and *Anne Severn and the Fieldings* (1922) are more autobiographical, in that they all center around both male and female war volunteers, noncombatants who travel to the Belgian front, and her fourth war novel, *The Tree of Heaven* (1917), which follows about an upper class British family, the Harrisons, between the Boer War and through World War One, including Dorothea Harrison, a woman war volunteer in London. Sinclair also makes use of romance plots in these novels, which was a common practice for female novelists to market their writing, primarily novels on subjects like war that were masculinized and considered inappropriate for female conversation. While it would be easier to work these novels into my argument than Wharton's, particularly *Anne Severn*, which describes the experience of its protagonist, Anne, as an ambulance driver during the First World War, the centrality of the romance plot would again require deviation from my main focus on the treatment of middle aged women in the war effort. I ultimately chose to narrow my study to Wharton and Sinclair's life writing and short fiction in order to simplify the conversation and focus specifically on the intersection of gender and femininity as it pertained to their specific wartime experiences. However, Sinclair's interest in the relationship of repressed sexuality, the unmarried woman, and the "excitement" of war, have potential for further study of the relationship of age and gender in women's war writing.

In this thesis, I have worked to demonstrate how the First World War writings of May Sinclair and Edith Wharton, positioned at the intersection of age, gender, and class,

reveal the limited extent to which women, specifically those in their middle years, were allowed to participate in or witness the war. Wharton and Sinclair were both excluded from the genre of witnessing, and within the conventions of First World War writing could not “witness” the masculinized spaces in the war zone, despite having travelled to the front and worked directly with the wounded and refugees. Their life writing does not conform to the conventions of the majority of First World War life writing, such as soldiers’ memoirs or VAD nurses’ diaries, and instead Sinclair challenges the conventions with a transgressive, psychoanalytic response while Wharton manipulates the restrictive genre of war propaganda by both adhering to and challenging expectations. In my final chapter, I compared Wharton and Sinclair’s short stories, examining how they employed irony and satire in order to criticize the marginalization of older women in the war effort. Despite starting out eager to help and excited by the prospect of engaging with the war effort in 1914, both Wharton and Sinclair ultimately found that the extent to which they could witness the war and produce valued war writing was hindered by their femininity, at the intersection of gender and age. These two women exemplify the simultaneously difficult, exciting, and disappointing experiences of women war writers and women war volunteers during the First World War, and reveal the extent to which the gendered spaces in the war zone and the gendered conventions of war writing placed women in the role of spectators rather than participants.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Tony. "Real Photographic Postcards from WW1: Voluntary Aid Detachments." *Picture Postcards from the Great War (1914-1914)*. 2014. Web.
- Ammons, Elizabeth. "The War." *Edith Wharton's Argument with America*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980. 125-156. Print.
- Benert, Annette Larson. "Edith Wharton at War: Civilized Space in Troubled Times." *Twentieth Century Literature* 42.3 (1996): 322-43. Print.
- The Book of the Homeless (Le Livre Des Sans-Foyer)*. Ed. Edith Wharton. 1st ed. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916. Print.
- British Red Cross. "Nursing During the First World War." *British Red Cross: History and Origin - The First World War*. 2017. Web.
- Buck, Claire. "British Women's Writing of the Great War." *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*. Ed. Vincent Sherry. Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 85. Print.
- Buck, Claire. "Gods Or Goods: H.D. and Freud." *H.D. and Freud: Bisexuality and a Feminine Discourse*. Herfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991. 103-137. Print.
- Caldas-Coulthard, Carmen Rosa. "'Women of a Certain Age' - Lifestyles, the Female Body and Ageism." *Femininity, Feminism and Gendered Discourse: A Selected and Edited Collection of Papers from the Fifth International Language and Gender Association Conference*. Ed. Holmes, Janet and Meredith Marra. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010. Print.
- Campbell, James. "Interpreting the War." *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*. Ed. Vincent Sherry. Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 261. Print.
- Culleton, Claire A. *Working-Class Culture, Women, and Britain, 1914-1921*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1999. Print.
- Das, Santanu. *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. Print.
- Eakin, Paul John. *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985. Print.

- Erlich, Gloria C. "The Female Conscience in Wharton's Shorter Fiction: Angel Or Demon." *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton*. Ed. Millicent Bell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 98-116. Print.
- . *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992. Print.
- Gallagher, Jean. "Edith Wharton and the Iconography of War Propoganda." *The World Wars through the Female Gaze*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998. 11-28. Print.
- . *The World Wars through the Female Gaze*. Carbondale and Edwardsville, USA: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998. Print.
- Goodman, Susan. *Edith Wharton's Women: Friends and Rivals*. Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1990. Print.
- Hall, Donald E. "The New Historicism and Pluralistic Cultural Analysis." *Luterary and Cultural Theory: From Basic Principles to Advanced Applications*. Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001. 299-332. Print.
- Hatch, Laurie Russell. "Gender and Ageism." *Generations* 29.3 (2005)Print.
- Hines, Samuel. *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*. New York: Atheneum, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991. Print.
- Kim, Tae H. "Where Women Worked During World War I." *Seattle General Strike Project*. 2003. Web.
- Lee, Hermione. *Edith Wharton*. New York: Alred A. Knopf, 2007. Print.
- Malcom, Janet. "The Woman Who Hated Women." *The New York Times Book Review* 11 (1986)Print.
- Matthews, James T. "American Writing of the Great War." *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the FIrst World War*. Ed. Vincent Sherry. Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 217. Print.
- New York Times Book Review. "Mrs. Wharton and Kipling on the War: Famous Writers Tell of their Experiences at the Front - Recent Books on the European Conflict." *Edith Wharton: The Contemporary Reviews*. Ed. Tuttleton, James, Lauer, Kristin, Murray, Margaret. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 221-222. Print.
- Ouditt, Sharon. *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War*. New York, New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

- Pykett, Lyn. *The "Improper" Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing*. New York: Routledge, 1992. Print.
- Raitt, Suzanne. *May Sinclair: A Modern Victorian*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.
- Rascoe, Burton. "A Son at the Front." *Edith Wharton: The Contemporary Reviews*. Ed. Tuttleton, James, Lauer, Kristin, Murray, Margaret. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 329-331. Print.
- Scutts, Joanna. "'Writing a War Story': The Female Author and the Challenge of Witnessing." *Journal of the Short Story in English* 58 (2012): 109-23. Print.
- Simonsen, Pauline. "Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Redundant Women." *Victorian Poetry* 35.4 (1997): 509-32. Print.
- Sinclair, May. *Anne Severn and the Fieldings*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923. Print.
- . "Red Tape." *Women, Men, and the Great War*. Ed. Trudi Tate. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995. 199-209. Print.
- . *The Romantic*. London: Macmillan, 1920. Print.
- . *The Tree of Heaven*. London: Macmillan, 1917. Print.
- . *Tasker Jevons*. London: Hutchinson, 1916. Print.
- Smith, Sidonie, Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. Print.
- Tate, Trudi, ed. *Women, Men and the Great War: An Anthology of Stories*. Manchester, UK; New York, NY: Manchester University Press, 1995. Print.
- Tylee, Claire. "Imagining Women at War: Feminist Strategies in Edith Wharton's War Writing." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 16.2 (1997): 327-43. Print.
- Wharton, Edith. *The Age of Innocence*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986. Print.
- . *A Backward Glance*. New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1934. Print.
- . *Fighting France: From Dunkerque to Belfort*. New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1919. Print.

- . "My Work among the Women Workers of Paris." *Edith Wharton's Writings from the Great War*. Ed. Julie Olin-Ammentorp. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1915. 245-252. Print.
- . "The Refugees." *Women, Men, and the Great War*. Ed. Trudi Tate. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995. 174-198. Print.
- . "Writing a War Story." *Edith Wharton: Collected Stories, 1911-1937*. New York: Penguin Books, 2001. Print.
- Williams, Gordon. "Rudyard Kipling and His Critics." *The Australian Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 30, 1936, pp. 65-70., www.jstor.org/stable/20629328.
- Women's Fiction and the Great War*. Ed. Tate Suzanne Raitt Trudi. Oxford, United Kingdom: Clarendon Press, 1997. Print.
- Women's Writing on the First World War*. Ed. Cardinal, Agnes, Dorothy Goldman, and Judith Hattaway. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Print.

APPENDIX

“Dedication”

From *A Journal of Impressions in Belgium* by May Sinclair

8 March 1915

(To a Field Ambulance in Flanders)

I do not call you comrades,
You,
Who did what I only dreamed.
Though you have taken my dream,
And dressed yourselves in its beauty and its glory,
Your faces are turned aside as you pass by.
I am nothing to you,
For I have done no more than dream.

Your faces are like the face of her whom you follow,
Danger,
The Beloved who looks backward as she runs, calling to her lovers,
The Huntress who flies before her quarry, trailing her lure.
She called to me from her battle-places,
She flung before me the curved lightning of her shells for a lure;
And when I came within sight of her,
She turned aside,
And hid her face from me.

But you she loved;
You she touched with her hand;
For you the white flames of her feet stayed in their running;
She kept you with her in her fields of Flanders,
Where you go,
Gathering your wounded from among her dead.
Grey night falls on your going and black night on your returning.
You go
Under the thunder of the guns, the shrapnel's rain and the curved lightning of the shells,
And where the high towers are broken,
And houses crack like the staves of a thin crate filled with fire;
Into the mixing smoke and dust of roof and walls torn asunder
You go;
And only my dream follows you.

That is why I do not speak of you,
Calling you by your names.
Your names are strung with the names of ruined and immortal cities,
Termonde and Antwerp, Dixmude and Ypres and Furnes,
Like jewels on one chain—

Thus,
In the high places of Heaven,
They shall tell all your names.