

"Nought were we spared":
British Women Poets of the Great War

by

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the exclusion of British women's poetry from the literary and cultural canon of war literature. The introduction focuses on the historical omission of women writers from literary anthologies and critical works, and the construction of a masculinist vision of war experience and representation. The first chapter describes the social history of women in war time, both in terms of their war work and conditions at home. The second chapter looks at women poets' literary representation of their wartime experiences. These poems show the tension between traditional stereotypes of femininity and the new tasks women were asked to perform in war. They also reveal the guilt, shame and anger that women felt as "non-combatants", and the losses they faced through bereavement and privation. The third chapter examines the various metaphors and images women poets used to characterize war itself. British Women's Great War poetry reveals the various literary and ideological strategies these writers used to explore a femininity problematized by the experiences and rhetoric of war. It is only by looking critically at the works of women poets and the historical circumstances in which they were written that the exclusion of these writers from the cultural canon can be redressed.

Introduction

The experience and associated literature of the First World War and their impact on postwar British culture have been a popular focus of historical enquiry in recent years, as in such works as Paul Fussell's The Great War and Modern Memory and Samuel Hynes' A War Imagined. These studies have focused mainly on the masculine experience of the war and its generated myths and writings, whose cultural influence on postwar consciousness is considered definitive and unparalleled. The few studies focusing on the contribution of British women to the war, for instance Martin Pugh's Women and the Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959, have concentrated either on empirical examples of wartime employment and volunteerism, or have approached the body of women's war literature in the guise of a celebratory feminist aesthetic, as in Claire Tylee's The Great War and Women's Consciousness. By considering both the accounts of British women's experiences of war and the literature written by women published in Britain during this period, I will attempt to examine the ways in which these women defined themselves in relation to war,

and the ways the experience and rhetoric of the war defined them. The perceptions of war illustrated by women's wartime writings will be considered in light of the social, political and cultural implications of such definitions.

In this way the war's impact on, for example, female emancipation and women's literary inclusion in modernism, whether positive or negative, can be assessed.

The First World War and its attendant effects had an enormous impact on postwar British society, politics and culture. The war fundamentally changed Britain's role in global affairs as well as its situation at home. Nowhere was this more clear than in the sphere of economics. While Britain's position in the world of international finance was weakened by the war, the demands of war production stimulated the domestic economy, encouraging modernization and increased industrial output. The resulting boom in heavy industry created the need for wartime employment of women. With the end of the war, however, demand in Britain's traditional industries slackened, creating recession and unemployment.

The foremost effect of the war on British society and culture was the change in the role of the state. Whereas before 1914, the prevailing view had been one of a minimalist state spending as little money and interfering as lightly in the lives of its citizens as possible, this

changed with the outbreak of war. The war challenged the classical political economy of laissez-faire, as the government was forced by the demands of total war to intervene in the economy at virtually all levels. This not only effectively eliminated the Liberals from the prevalent political discourse, but also made credible an expanded role for the state within society, about which debate continued until 1945. To complement its additional responsibilities, the British government in 1914 created new powers for itself with the enacting of the Defense of the Realm Act (DORA), effectively suspending all civil liberties for the duration of the war. This intrusion into private life was heightened by conscription in 1916 and rationing in 1917. Trevor Wilson calls such increased control the "inspection effect" (Wilson, 800), brought about not as a direct consequence of war, but springing rather from the critical gaze occasioned by the demands of war on the economy and on society. Whatever the cause of the government's interest in all facets of the lives of its citizens, the war changed the role of the state dramatically. This was recognized by the government itself, as this 1917 Report of the War Cabinet suggests: "War has brought a transformation of the social and administrative structure of the state, much of which is bound to be permanent". (Marwick, 254)

In addition to enforcing changes in the social sphere, the state also imposed itself on the consciousness of the British populace during the war in ways that would have far-reaching effects on wartime and postwar culture. An increasingly literate population and the growth in media and communication technology had created the possibility of propanganda on a greater scale than previously imaginable. With DORA effectively prohibiting any expression of dissent, the British government was able to control and edit information through the secret Bureau of Propaganda, later the Ministry of Information. The government used endorsements of the war by prominent artists and authors along with posters, films, heavily censored newspaper accounts and the circulation of atrocity stories to generate support for the war and steadfastness among the population. To ensure that no contradictions from the official accounts emerged from the soldiers at the front, personal cameras were prohibited, mail was censored and soldiers were discouraged from keeping journals. That the distorted and jingoistic official account of the war contrasted with the soldiers' actual experiences would be a major factor both in the gap in understanding between the home and the fighting fronts, and the postwar disaffection of veterans with those at home whose apparent support of the war had sent a million young men to their deaths.

It is in precisely this gap of understanding, created by the official "euphemism as rigorous and impenetrable as language and literature skillfully used could make it" (Fussell, 75) that Paul Fussell sees the ultimate importance of the war. The actual experience of trench warfare was so horrible that to men who had been raised to believe in an Edwardian historical tradition of humanity's progressive evolution and a literary ideal of chivalry, it proved both incomprehensible and incommunicable. An insurmountable split emerged between those who had experienced the front lines and those who had not. This led to a dichotomizing tendency, with oppositions created between the young men who fought the war and the old men who did not, between the British and the mostly unseen and therefore monstrous enemy, and between the male soldiers and the female civilians: "...even if those at home had wanted to know the realities of war, they couldn't have without experiencing them: its conditions were too novel, its industrialized ghastliness too unprecedented." (Fussell, 87) Thus, according to Fussell, the war created not only a divided society but an ironic, satiric and contradictory mode of thinking which has become the condition of modern consciousness, surviving up to the present in literature and daily life.

According to most cultural historians, the First World War was the most important imaginative event of the

twentieth century. Marwick calls it the "mobilisation of minds" (Marwick, 289) and Hynes claims that the effects of the war destroyed the values of Victorian and Edwardian England and had such a revolutionary effect on the minds of men and women that it made the years after the war seem discontinuous. Like Fussell, Hynes argues that the reality of war transcended ordinary ways of seeing and saying and thus created an insurmountable chasm between soldier and civilian (Hynes, 116) which, as mentioned by Fussell, imposed a variety of oppositions on society. The new reality of war undermined the traditional use of chivalric and heroic rhetoric to convey the experience of war, and caused a fundamental change in artistic tradition, giving modernism a "moral basis." (Hynes, 166) Thus Hynes echoes Fussell in claiming the First World War as the most powerful imaginative force of the twentieth century, remaining "in imaginations as a mood, as a motive, as the sense of vast absences where gifted young men had been." (Hynes, 241)

However radical the First World War was in an imaginative sense, both Wilson and Marwick argue against seeing it as a watershed for British society. Wilson argues that the wartime "inspection effect" and resulting postwar social changes were not particular to 1914-18 but common to all experiences of war (Wilson, 800). Marwick's arguments follow a similar vein, distinguishing between the reality of continuity and its

perception: "Where the world was not really... 'topsy-turvy', people tended to want to believe it was... the emotional excitement of this greatest of all wars gave a certain universality to the concept of change." (Marwick, 296) This conflict between the perception and the reality of a discontinuous postwar world is taken up by Hynes. He examines both the empirical experiences of wartime Britain and their cultural representation, and, like Marwick, is careful to distinguish between the perception and the reality of the war as a fundamental turning point in British society. He argues that the European war was not a radical departure for Britain in 1914, since the civil war in Ireland, the class war of the trade unions against the government, and the sex war being waged by the suffragettes meant that the concepts and language of war were already present in public discourse. He also notes that, contrary to conventional wisdom, idealism and notions of chivalry were not destroyed by the war, but persisted in the memory of war and the monuments erected throughout Britain to "The Glorious Dead". Thus, he sees a crucial difference between the myth of the war as the death of idealism, which was created in the 1920s, and the reality of the continuity between prewar, wartime and postwar Britain. Fussell, on the other hand, looking only at literary sources, argues that the dichotomy between the experience and rhetoric of war and the dislocation of

meaning it created caused a radical change in how reality and history were perceived: "The Great War was perhaps the last [war] to be conceived of as taking place within a seamless, purposeful 'history' involving a coherent stream of time running from past, through present to future".

(Fussell, 21) He locates his evidence for this transformation of British consciousness in literature, at first in the writings of "Those Who Had Been There", then among later writers who took up their cultural myths of the war. Focusing on literature without a historical context is problematical, however, because it takes the work of fiction to be a direct reflection of the consciousness of the writer, who might, in any case, not reflect the consciousness of society as a whole. Thus, Fussell's argument that the war was a major turning point in British consciousness, dislocating the senses of linear time and accessible meaning, is questionable when measured against the empirical evidence.

The area in which the First World War has been conventionally seen as a watershed is that of women's experience. Understanding whether the conventional wisdom of women's "liberation" during the war is accurate, and assessing women's actual experience of the war, is pivotal to evaluating its impact on society and evaluating the validity of the cultural myths surrounding the war.

The myth of the impact of the war on women's paid employment suggests that the war allowed women to escape their domestic role and participate for the first time in the realm of industrial labour. However, already in the Edwardian period, 55% of single women and 14% of married women were in paid employment (Pugh, 1). The number of women in the workforce was maintained at relatively the same level in 1911, 1921 and 1931, only dipping slightly in 1921. (Pugh,92) Another exaggerated belief was that the war created a massive movement of women workers from traditional domestic service to the industrial trades. While this change did occur, it was not on any massive scale, with the number of women in domestic service decreasing from 1,658,000 to 1,258,000 during the course of the war, and the number of women in industry increasing from 2,179,000 to 2,971,000 in 1918 (Marwick, 92). What had changed were the tasks these women performed within the factories. The Munitions of War Act in 1915 allowed for the dilution of skilled and semi-skilled jobs, so that these positions could be filled by "unskilled" women. The trade unions agreed to this dilution only on condition that it be limited to the duration of the war. So while women were enjoying higher wages and, for the most part, better working conditions, it was always understood that these changes were a temporary aberration. The perception of the radical influx of women into the public world was

created by anxiety: "Society, like a pub full of bachelors, was from the start very conscious of the female intrusion, and contemporary accounts tended greatly to exaggerate it...." (Marwick, 90) The volume of propanganda aimed at promoting and encouraging women's war work added to this perception of radical change.

The group of women whose lives were most radically changed by the war were middle class women. While working class women had always been employed, middle class women in the late nineteenth century had been increasingly relegated to the home. The war offered middle class women a chance to participate again in the public sphere. Their eagerness to do so can be seen in the strong response to a register for war-work for women in 1915, and the July 17th, 1915 march on Parliament of 50,000 women declaring their "right to serve", organized by Emmeline Pankhurst and the Women's Social and Political Union (W.S.P.U.) (Marwick, 89). The fact that the government was both unprepared for and unwilling to accept these offers to serve can be seen in how few women were actually placed in jobs through the 1915 register, and in the infamous advice given to Dr. Elsie Inglis by the War Office in response to her offer to form an ambulance unit: "My good lady, go home and sit still." (Marwick, 89)

The area that offered the greatest change for middle class women was the creation of women's auxiliaries and

volunteer divisions. By 1917 the Voluntary Aid Detachments, under the direction of Katherine Furse, consisted of over 45,000 women members, mostly from the middle and upper classes, who worked as aides, maids and nurses. In addition to these were a number of smaller ambulance units and nursing stations, like the Scottish Women's Hospitals set up by Dr. Inglis in France. By 1917, various para-military organizations were consolidated into the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), quickly followed by Women's Royal Navy Service (WRNS) and Women's Royal Air Force Service (WRAFS). These organizations, which by 1917 counted over 100,000 women members, provided adventurous middle or upper class young women with an opportunity for travel, the experience of physically challenging labour, and unprecedented freedom from the constraints of family and home. Though these auxiliaries only lasted the duration of war, they offered some women a public role as well as the chance to serve in para-military organizations and experience the front, if not actual battle, for themselves.

Despite the opportunity the war offered for a departure from the domestic identity ideologically associated with women, it ultimately only reinforced their traditional roles. The industrial work performed by women in wartime paradoxically emphasized woman's role as homemaker, surrounded as it was with the rhetoric of women

stoking the home-fires while the fighting men were away. As the war grew nearer to a close, the munitions workers who had once been celebrated in the media and in the popular imagination began to be reviled as foolish women who spent their money on fur coats and fancy dresses. Women were expected to "demobilise" from industry as soon as the men returned, despite the fact that many women had lost a breadwinner in the war.

The war also placed great emphasis on women's role as mothers. Conscription and Britain's weakened military potential compounded the existing fears of a debilitated British race, first occasioned by the Boer War and increasing concern over an urbanized population. By 1914 childrearing had become a matter of duty and patriotism, and a National Baby Week was held in 1917. This was augmented by the Maternity and Child Welfare Act of 1918. Thus the war, while seeming to offer radical change, only reinforced women's domestic roles.

The rhetoric of war, according to Susan Kingsley Kent, was also instrumental in neutralizing any empirical gains, however temporary, that women had achieved during the war. Wartime rhetoric and propaganda used metaphors of women as terrain, for instance the image of Belgium as a virgin maiden ravaged by the brutal Hun. Women were also defined as creatures who must be protected, and Britain itself was characterized as the motherland whom her sons

must defend. Widely, and officially, circulated atrocity stories described Belgian and French women as the victims of physical and sexual atrocities perpetrated by the invading Germans (Kingsley Kent, 9). In this way, male protection of "passive" and "vulnerable" women was used as a justification for the war itself, which would occasion much bitterness against women from the returning disillusioned soldiers.

Kingsley Kent also argues that the experiences of the war problematized notions of both masculinity and femininity. The shared experiences of the trench soldiers bound them into a brotherhood of fraternity. The homoerotic undertones of this, combined with a bitterness towards women and anxiety about female encroachment on the male public world, problematized gender roles and raised the specter of a sex war like the one which had been waged in pre-war Britain. Therefore comfort was taken in the seemingly unproblematical notion of "natural" gender roles. Emphasis was placed on the idea of separate spheres which would now protect women, not from the foreign enemy as in wartime rhetoric, but from the anger of returning men (Kent, 38). In the context of a European war the notion of the home had been expanded to include all of Britain, which contained the potentially radical implications of war work for women. However, with the

cessation of hostilities, the definition of the home once again shrunk to encompass only the individual domicile.

The limited suffrage women gained in 1918 has been used as an example of the liberation the war effected for women. The war had allowed women to prove their worth to the country, and suffrage was their reward (Marwick, 96). In fact, as Martin Pugh, Kent and Wilson argue, the limited granting of the suffrage was more of a defeat than a victory for the women's movement. War had fractured the pre-war suffrage movement along the lines dominating male politics (Wilson, 726), and, according to Pugh, it was only the virtual disappearance of the suffrage campaign that made it safe for Parliament to enfranchise women at all. The original motivation for changes to the franchise was to make it possible for returning soldiers to vote, not to include women in the electorate. Under the old franchise, a man had to be a householder with a twelve month period of occupancy to vote, which would disqualify those who had been at the Front. While the legislated changes made suffrage universal for men over the age of 21, women were included in the franchise on the basis of being a householder, or married to one, and being over the age of thirty. This excluded not only single women living at home, but also the young women who had worked in the factories or overseas during the war, and most working

class women, too. Thus, suffrage could not have been a reward for wartime service, but rather was an attempt to avoid the recurrence of militancy by splitting the suffrage movement along the lines of age and class. The women who were enfranchised under the act were likely to be married middle class women with children, thereby effectively silencing women who might have used their vote to "maintain their footing in industry and retreat further from marriage and motherhood." (Pugh 26) The partial enfranchisement of women also ensured that women's votes would not swamp those of men, since the prewar surplus of women was only exacerbated by the loss of men during the war. Thus, the Representation of the People Act of 1918 was entirely a conservative measure, emphasizing women in their traditional roles and serving only to fracture the pre-war suffrage movement beyond redemption.

Women empirically lost more than they had gained in their experience of war. They had had the brief experience of industrial work, only to be demobilised, reviled in the press and banned from industrial unions in 1918 (Pugh, 29). The suffrage movement was irreparably shattered by the partial enfranchisement of 1918. After the war women were pushed back into the domestic sphere, in the belief that a reversion to traditional gender roles would return Britain to a peaceful existence. Any hint of the feminist demand for equal rights that had characterized the prewar

suffrage movement raised the specter of a never-ending gender war, which threatened the return to normalcy. Any dissatisfaction expressed by women was seen as petty and uncharitable in the face of the sacrifices men had been asked to make during the war. For women this raised the twin specters of guilt and loss. Over a million British men had died during the war, and the loss of their sons, fathers, brothers and lovers was the most emphatic empirical loss of the war for women.

In most historical analyses of the First World War, whether they be social or cultural studies, women are perceived to have been peripheral to both the actual waging of the war and its aftermath. Trevor Wilson argues, for instance, that women only participated in the war insofar as they chose to, whether motivated by patriotism, money incentives or a wish to improve the status of women. Men suffered the horrors of battle while women did not, and though women had the "desire to care...the gulf between experience and its absence was well-nigh unbridgeable." (Wilson, 709) The same line of reasoning is apparent in the works of Hynes and Fussell. Both historians see an alternate rhetoric of war emerging from the soldier at the front which created "a reality in war that the customary ways of seeing and saying cannot render, and consequently it divides the soldier from the civilian...." (Hynes, 116) This would lead, after the war,

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to a Britain divided against itself, between the "Soldiers" who had fought, and the "Rest". (Fussell, 89) The myths erected by and around the soldiers were to prove the determinants of postwar culture and consciousness, thus making the First World War the most important imaginative event in the twentieth century.

From these arguments arise two questions: Were those who were excluded from direct participation in the war also excluded from the postwar British culture that is arranged around this pivotal point? Is the imaginative experience of war on the part of non-combatants, specifically women, who were ideologically constructed as "other" to war, rendered invalid because they did not fight? If this is so, women are denied both participation in and understanding of postwar British culture, and their experiences and representations of war are marginalized.

The masculinist bias of such arguments is also reflected in Fussell's treatment of women writers. With over five hundred literary sources, he considers women only as the recipients of letters from men at the front, or as tellers of anecdotes about men. Virginia Woolf, for example, is reduced to describing an occasion of nude bathing with Rupert Brooke, with only a one-line mention of her wartime literary work. While Hynes is not so overt, he also excludes women from the literary account, though he does consider their historical experiences.

Representation and remembrance of the war, according to Hynes and Fussell, are the exclusive province of men.

However, not all historians agree that women should be, or indeed were, excluded from direct participation in the cultural experience of war. Susan Kingsley Kent argues that the language and outlook of women who had seen and worked at the front was markedly different from those who stayed at home: "Direct contact with the war or with its victims was articulated in sober, constrained, sharp, and clear terms". (Kingsley Kent, 52) It was not femininity itself that excluded women from cultural participation, but rather femininity only insofar as it excluded the majority of women from experience of the front. The problem lay not in gender, but in experience: "It was as if, in making the transition from home to front, the individual had received a secret knowledge, knowledge that transformed the consciousness, the senses, the very soul of the initiate, who was thereby ushered into a wholly different existence". (Kingsley Kent, 52) The refusal to recognize that women at the front shared many of the perceptions of the fighting soldiers, it is implied, is the masculinist bias which privileges direct experience of battle.

Modris Eksteins argues that women participated in the cultural experience of war even when not at the front. Like Fussell, he sees a dislocation between the official

rhetoric of an overarching meaning to the war and the direct experience of its horrors, which he argues led soldiers to retreat within themselves to an imaginary landscape in their search for meaning and solace. However, this retreat was not exclusive to soldiers: "The war entailed a 'journey inward' for soldiers but a parallel journey was taken by civilians at home." (Eksteins, 233) Propaganda was the main factor in this, blurring the lines between the fact and the fiction of war. The difference between Eksteins' account and those of other historians rests in the question of how much, if at all, civilians believed the official propaganda of war. Eksteins, unlike Wilson, Fussell and Hynes, argues that those at home believed the official rhetoric no more than those at the front did, and thus shared the cultural experience of dichotomization and a growing interiority brought by war.

The exclusion of women from the cultural canon of the First World War and the modernist period is not entirely attributable to their omission from anthologies and works of contemporary and modern cultural and literary history. It stems mostly, as Janet Wolff argues, from a narrow definition of "modernity" which privileges, in the case of the war, the masculine experiences of combat, male-bonding and post-war angst: "Women's different perspective on the war was seen as secondary, since they did not write about

the trenches, the activism and involvement, the proximity of death." (Wolff, 56) A broader definition of modernity and modernism would need to be created to accommodate women's reactions to their experiences of modernity.

Claire Tylee answers the arguments about women's exclusion from the cultural account of the war in a similar way. She argues that the ideological conception of war itself excluded women, since war "was taken to mean armed conflict, with the assumption that physical combat is natural (and even desirable) among males." (Tylee, 13) Since women were only auxiliaries at the front, and did not participate in direct combat, their experiences were invalidated and their writings accordingly excluded from the category of 'war literature'. Tylee's work is a direct answer to Fussell's, intended, through her reclaiming of women's literature, as a corrective to his exclusion of women from participation in the cultural myths of the First World War and in their national culture.

This emphasis on war as a social and "human" event continues in Nosheen Khan's work. She argues that not only did women participate on several levels during the war, but also that the societal nature of war ensured that, especially in the case of the First World War, even those on the home front felt the effects of war, through rationing, raids and bereavement. Since everyone felt its effects, women were as entitled to comment upon it as men:

"...a war poetry which does not include the depth and range of female reaction cannot claim to tell the 'truth' of war, since it ignores the response of those who, at great cost, produce the principal munition of war -men- with which their destinies are inextricably linked."

(Khan, 2) She argues, like Tylee, that cultural myths need to be revised through the reclaiming of women's writings about war. This literary inclusion will modify the masculinist bias by demonstrating the volume and topicality of women's war writing.

The problem with the approaches of Tylee and Khan is that they focus mainly on the cultural myths they seek to modify, and reproduce uncritically the women's writings with which they intend to do so. Sharon Ouditt answers this critical gap by focusing on women's war writing itself, arguing that this writing is a web of complex narratives about the "proximity and interchangeability of ideas of conservatism and radicalism in relation to discussions of femininity" and war (Ouditt, 2). While recognizing that there is no one "women's" experience of war which is unproblematically represented or universally available, she argues that women were defined, in minds as well as mouths, as "Other" to war. While women could either manipulate, reject, accept or try to ignore this definition, all women's experiences and representations of war revolved around this "otherness". The tension between

the unprecedented inclusion of women in the waging of war and the rhetorical definitions of "women" created in women's writing a problematized femininity "negotiating the allure of a fixed, feminine identity with the necessity of social change." (Ouditt, 2) Thus, Ouditt acknowledges the full or partial complicity of women in the rhetorical structures which perpetuated their exclusion. It is this ambiguity, self-contradiction and complexity that she sees as the main feature of women's wartime writing.

It is in awareness of this complexity, rather than a celebratory aesthetic, that I want to center my discussion of women's writing during the First World War. Poetry is the best and most obvious choice of form on which to concentrate, because of its wide distribution, the volume of its publication, and its association with the First World War and the "trench poets". It was also a form which was accessible and appealing for non-professional writers, which many women poets were at that time. Catherine Reilly, in her bibliography of published British poets of the First World War, has identified over five hundred women poets whose work accounts for a quarter of all the verse published in Britain between 1914 and 1918 (Reilly, 4). These women were mostly minor poets from a middle class background, the class of women whose wartime experiences were the most radically divergent from their

pre-war existence. Thus, these women will be the main focus of my enquiry. To ground the analysis of this literature in the context of women's experiences, social histories of women in wartime and women's diaries will also be considered. War memoirs written by women will be discussed, being careful to distinguish between the immediacy of poetry and the necessary focus on remembrance which this form demands.

These texts present certain difficulties for the historian. Though the poems themselves represent various aspects of women's war experiences, actual biographical data of the majority of these poets is scarce. Rather than look in depth at the lives and works of the few poets for whom such biographical detail is available, I have chosen to look at the body of women's war poetry as a massive, and mostly anonymous, response to war.

Any discussion of the literature of a particular period from which historical meaning is to be extrapolated must be prefaced by a discussion of historical context. Thus, in the first chapter I will briefly discuss the social history of women's activities and some public reactions to these during the war. The next two chapters will focus on women's war poetry itself. Women's war writing is best arranged according to theme, rather than chronologically. Unlike the trench poets, women's war writings do not show a sharp divide between the first

heady months of the conflict and disillusion after the slaughter on the Somme, the former exemplified by Rupert Brooke and the latter by Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. The major themes explored by women war poets are the problematization of femininity by war, the ambivalence and complicity of those at home, war's inversion of the natural order, and the losses women suffer during war. In the final chapter, I will discuss the memorialization of war, the exclusion of the female viewpoint from the myth of war, and its impact on subsequent understandings of war. In this way the historical importance of these works by women authors can be assessed. For what must be remembered when looking at women's war writings is not only the interrelation of experience and representation, but also the cultural and historical impact of the exclusion of the female viewpoint from the discussion of a pivotal historical event of the twentieth century.

Chapter One: The Social History

In the following chapters I intend to analyse the work of British women poets of the Great War both the texts themselves and their relation to British culture. As in any discussion of cultural history, such an analysis must be based on historical experience if it is not to become an ephemeral exercise in contingencies. Janet Wolff, in Feminine Sentences, argues that feminist cultural and textual analysis must be combined with a socio-historical exploration of women's actual participation in societal arrangements and institutions if accurate critical observations are to be made (Wolff, 4-5). To this end, I will preface my study of the texts of British women during the war with a discussion of their actual work and experiences in the war itself. Such a discussion must be constrained in scope by limited space, but I will nevertheless look at the historical experiences of women who did "non-traditional" war work, as well as those of women who stayed at home. Finally, I will examine how women's activities in wartime were perceived by others, including journalists and writers.

There is an implicit feminist philosophy behind the analysis of shifting gender roles in history. Feminist historians, such as Denise Riley and Joan Scott, have argued that the construction of gender roles and stereotypes are always, in existential terms, in a state of "becoming" rather than "being". Specific historical moments may boast a particular ideal of "masculinity" or "femininity", but such ideals are always in flux, both assailed by shifts in the social, political and cultural atmosphere and contributing to those shifts.

So it was in Victorian and Edwardian Britain. The ideal image most often portrayed in this period was the "Perfect Lady" or the "angel in the house". This image was centred upon "woman" being based firmly in the home, ministering to her family's needs, offering the warmth and refuge of the hearth against the harshness of the external world of industry and squalor (Beddoe, 9). However, by the end of the nineteenth century this ideal was under pressure from a variety of societal factors. As Martha Vicinus argues, the Victorian values of industry, self-improvement and philanthropy made active careers in volunteer social work possible for women, and modified the feminine ideal of "ministering angel" to widen the sphere of women's "ministrations" (Vicinus, 4). The traditional ideal was supplanted in some cases by the Edwardian "New Woman", a term used both perjoratively and in admiration.

The New Woman was educated, usually single, rumoured to be sexually immoral, went out in public without accompaniment, and generally flouted sexual conventions. Yet, at the same time as traditional feminine ideals were being modified and supplanted, they were also being reinforced by the demands of imperialism, which used the image of the traditional ideal of hearth and home. The ideal and rhetoric of the traditional "angel in the house", because of imperialist rhetoric, was stronger at the end of the nineteenth century even while it had less and less basis in social reality. Thus, while the agency of certain groups and individual women precipitated women's entry into the public world, the demands of that world also imposed its own definitions upon women. This resulted in the various images of femininity available at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The active campaign for women's suffrage, which began in 1906, made this problematization of femininity explicit. Martin Pugh, among others, has pointed out that women's demands for suffrage were based on the assumption of women's moral superiority and the importance of their role as mothers, both aspects of traditional femininity (Pugh, 4). Yet, the idea of women being participants in Parliament, the most sacrosanct of British institutions, challenged the notion of separate spheres and the public hegemony of men. The militant tactics used by the

suffragettes of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, which included picture slashing, arson, window-breaking and heckling, were all very public and visible forms of protest which further underlined the female trespass into the public world. The suffrage campaign therefore operated on two levels. On the one hand the suffragettes reinforced a gender politics of irony, demonstrating how the roles and activities of women no longer fit traditional stereotypes. Yet, on the other hand, the suffrage campaign relied upon and reinforced traditional views of femininity as both the suffragettes and the social purity campaigners used the rhetoric of maternity to justify their demands and to add authority to their campaigns.

The Great War widened the gap between rhetorical femininity and reality, offering a series of ironic discourses and experiences. In one sense the war was a series of emancipations for women, as they entered into jobs and positions of public authority which before had been closed to them. However, instead of reflecting the new expansion and multiplicity of women's roles and identities, the dominant rhetoric in the press, propaganda posters and pamphlets emphasized even more strongly women's traditional roles. For instance, newspaper reports about women munitions workers emphasized the housekeeping aspect of their work, and the delicacy and

pretty femininity of the workers, downplaying or omitting the dangers and sheer physical burden involved in such work. The popular journalist, Hall Caine, famously articulated this ironic portrait:

There is at first something so incongruous in the spectacle of women operating masses of powerful machinery (or, indeed, any machinery more formidable than a sewing-machine), that for a moment, as you stand at the entrance, the sight is scarcely believable.... The machines themselves seem almost human in their automatic intelligence.... So the women get along very well with them, learning all their ways, their whims, their needs and their limitations. It is surprising how speedily the women have wooed and won this new kind of male monster.... If there is any man in London who can pass through the workshops of Woolwich without thinking he has been looking at some thousands of the best-looking young women of the world, it is certainly not the present writer.

(Caine, 20-41)

The irony was particularly pointed in the case of working class women, who had been performing these tasks since the industrial revolution. This dichotomy between the rhetoric and the reality of women's work was underlined by overwhelmingly male public voices. At the time of the Great War there were only miniscule numbers of women journalists and no women editors, M.P.'s or civil servants. The definition of woman had, of course, long depended upon a language which stressed women's inverted

or alienated relationships to men and male roles. For instance, the 19th century 'Perfect Lady' and her 'separate sphere' of home and hearth were defined as the inverse of the man and his public world of business, finance, politics and industry. The war offered a chance to re-establish women's role as Other, after the confusions of the pre-war period, especially suffragism. Women's role in wartime was defined primarily and most importantly by her exclusion from direct combat: "The dualities of front and home front, militaristic male and pacifist female... have traditionally structured - and so perpetuated - the war story." (Logenbach, 16) As Ouditt argues, women could not escape this idea of women's alterity to war, though some tried to resist and manipulate this definition. (Ouditt, 217) The result of this definition of women and the feminine identity was a public which then, as well as now, privileged the male experience of war and created rhetorically if not actually an "unbridgeable" gap of experience between men and women, in both the waging of war and its remembrance.

This problematization of femininity is pivotal to much of women's war writing. The task facing women writers, whether consciously or not, was to explore the space between being excluded from, participating in, and transforming the dominant discourse of gender. The fluctuating gender identities of women were further

complicated by the rhetoric of war and its exclusion, manipulation and celebration of 'femininity'. This negotiation of changeable gender roles for women and the demands of war and war rhetoric makes women's writing of the Great War distinctive. Women's poetry of that conflict, like all war poetry, is uneven in quality and sometimes marred by war hysteria, jingoism and cliches. It still, however, provides a fascinating example of the intersection of ideas about gender and war, as well as a record of women's war experiences during a pivotal historical moment.

I

Women's writing during the First World War reflected their wartime activities. The Great War offered British women the unprecedented opportunity to be active agents. For the first time women were offered a selection of roles parallel to the active ones of men. Though women were not asked to perform the soldier's role on the battlefield, many women served near the front as volunteer nurses, orderlies, cooks, ambulance drivers and canteen workers. At home, women were encouraged to sign up for war work, whether in munitions factories, on the land, in hospitals,

and - to a small extent - to fill the jobs men had left vacant in transport, the civil service and as clerks.

To correspond to these novel demands and roles, new female role models and heroines began to be honoured. Inspiration was found in real-life heroines of the war, such as Elsie Inglis, the Scottish suffragette and doctor whose offer of service was turned down by the British War Office. The Belgian, French and Russian Red Cross organizations, however, gratefully accepted her proposal to set up two Scottish Women's Hospitals in Serbia and one in France (MacDonald, 140). These hospitals were the first to have all women doctors and surgeons. Diagnosed with terminal cancer, Dr. Inglis worked tirelessly up to her death in 1917 (Mitchell, 176). She and the Scottish nurses became popular heroines, both to women at the front and women at home. Another famous group were the Women of Pervyse. Originally attached to Hector Monro's Ambulance Unit, Mairi Chisolm and Elsie Knocker left the unit in November 1914 to create a nursing station directly behind the front line in Pervyse. Set up in a cellar and constantly under fire, the two women would take their stretchers out into the Belgian mud and rescue wounded men. Mrs. Knocker was a nurse, and Mairi, who was only eighteen years old in 1914, drove the ambulance. They were the only women allowed within three miles of the front lines. In 1917 they were awarded the Star of the

Order of Leopold by King Albert, the highest honour given by Belgium. In March 1918 they were gassed, and Mrs. Knocker - now Baroness de T'Serclaes - was forced to return home. After being gassed again that spring, Mairi too had to go back to England and the operation was shut down.

These were only the most famous of the many women who participated at the front, and their numbers are difficult to estimate. Because much of the work done by women was voluntary, most could not afford to stay for the duration of the war. Also, since many of the volunteer hospitals and canteens were privately operated, few records were left behind. Combined statistics of voluntary and paid work would suggest that there were probably close to 100,000 British women who experienced life at or near the front. Working abroad presented a dual opportunity for women, at once private and public. It was a chance to serve their country in its time of need as well as a chance for travel and adventure for themselves. Women's experiences at the front differed sharply with the domestic life most of them had left at home: "Women at the Front often contrasted their newly active and assertive behavior with the passivity, distance, indirectness and sense of slow motion that verged on paralysis that they had experienced at home." (Kent, Peace, 58)

The unprecedented carnage of the Great War, especially on the western front, created the need for veritable armies of doctors, nurses and orderlies to keep up with the torrent of wounded soldiers. Most women who came to the front did so in a medical capacity. British nurses and doctors worked in military and civilian hospitals, and in some cases established hospitals themselves. Dr. Flora Murray and Dr. Louisa Garrett Anderson created the Women's Hospital Corps in 1914 (Mitchell, 187). Mrs. St.Clair Stobart set up a chain of hospitals in Serbia and France (Mitchell, 156). The Dowager Duchess of Sutherland set foot in France before the war was one hundred hours old, and formed the 'Millincent Sutherland Ambulance Corps' in Belgium. The ambulance corps was in Namur when that city fell to the Germans. After a long and arduous journey, its members got to neutral Holland, then to England. There, the Duchess raised the funds for the Duchess of Sutherland's Red Cross Hospital just outside Calais, which remained operative for the duration of the war. (Macdonald, 40-50) The war was thus instrumental in opening up positions for women as doctors and surgeons. The number of female doctors in England and Wales was 477 in 1911; by 1921 that figure had quadrupled to 1,253 (Marwick, Women at War, 167).

The women who most captured the public imagination were nurses, the "Roses of No-Man's Land" (Ouditt, 10). Nursing had become a pre-war profession for many women, albeit one rewarded with little pay. Having proved their worth in the Boer War, military nurses were quickly mobilized in Britain and the colonies in 1914 and sent to Europe. By the end of the war, the Royal Army Medical Corps employed 2,396 British, 1,298 colonial and 807 American nurses. (Marwick, 168) Nursing sisters also worked for the British Red Cross, St. John Ambulance, and a variety of private and volunteer hospitals.

Working next to the sisters in most military hospitals were women nurses and orderlies from Voluntary Aid Detachments. Created in 1909 by the War Office to fill a gap in the Territorial Medical Service (Ouditt, 10), the V.A.D.'s were to be mobilized in case of invasion. Response was overwhelming; at the outbreak of war there were 47,196 women and 23,047 men organized in the various Detachments, but by 1921 there would be 82,807 women and 39,909 men (Marwick, 168). Unlike the nursing profession, which attracted upper working class and lower middle class women, the V.A.D.'s worked to encourage middle class and upper class women to join. Uniforms, training fees and subscription fees all had to be paid by the member, in the spirit of Victorian middle class voluntarism. At the outbreak of war, V.A.D.'s were called

upon to set up hospitals all over England. After the first Battle of Ypres in October 1914, they were called upon to go to Europe as orderlies to assist the trained nurses there. In 1915 the War Office recognized that there were insufficient numbers of trained nurses and suggested that the V.A.D.'s be supplied as probationary nurses, to be paid approximately £ 20 per annum and housed by the military authorities. Recruitment soared, and as many as 600 members a week were posted to hospitals at home and abroad (Ouditt, 15).

Caring for the wounded was not the only capacity in which women came to the front. Many served as volunteers in canteens for soldiers, which were run by the Red Cross as well as privately. May Wedderburn Cannan did a four-week stint at a canteen in France, where she made and served gallons of coffee and legions of 'Handy Ham' sandwiches (Cannan, Grey, 90). The busiest canteens, set up in train stations where traffic was heavy, went through extraordinary amounts of food. Lorna Neill, a volunteer at the privately funded Cantine Anglais in the Verdun sector, recorded that in February 1916 the canteen gave out 302,000 cups of coffee, tea, chocolate and soup, an average of over 10,000 cups every twenty-four hours (Macdonald, 136).

Women were also sent to the front in a military capacity, though only one known British woman, Flora

Sandes, took part in combat, and that was with the Serbian army. The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, along with the Women's Royal Air Force (W.R.A.F.) and Women's Royal Naval Service (W.R.N.S.), was created in 1917 to relieve military men of non-combatant duties such as clerical or kitchen work. The War Office ruled the corps would be civilian, arguing that the enlisting of women would require an Act of Parliament, even though the Interpretation Act of 1889 held that male words included the feminine in all Acts of Parliament. The construction of the feminine as other to war was so rigid that it could not accommodate the 'official' enlistment of women. Thus, the W.A.A.C. had no officers or ranks, only officials and workers, though titles and levels corresponded exactly with army ranks. The W.A.A.C. had various categories of employment: domestic, cook, mechanic, clerk and those responsible for tending war graves. Wages varied from £26-40 a year for a domestic to 25-32s a week for a clerk. In contrast to the V.A.D.'s and other volunteer organisations, the W.A.A.C. promoted itself as an egalitarian body, and recruited mainly from the working and lower middle classes. This may have been a factor in the scandals that rocked the W.A.A.C. in 1918, based on nothing more than rumours of 'loose conduct' and a few ribald jokes. Of all the women in the W.A.A.C. only twenty-one were dismissed because of pregnancy; of those

two were married and most others were pregnant before enrolling. By January 1915 there were 22,479 members of the W.A.A.C., with 5000 serving in France and more needed, but applications had slowed to a trickle. The chief controller, Helen Gwynne- Vaughn, blamed it on the rumours, writing: "With however little justification, immorality is an excellent stick with which to beat a corps of women." (Terry, 70) In April 1918, the W.A.A.C. became the Queen Mary Army Auxiliary Corps, ostensibly to reward the women's service but probably to reassure those worried about scandal. It worked, for by the end of the war there were 40,850 members of the Q.M.A.A.C., an increase of 8000 since April (Marwick, 169). The Q.M.A.A.C. remained the largest paramilitary employer of women, for only 332,000 served in the W.R.A.F. and 3000 in the W.R.N.S. (Mitchell, 221).

All told, women performed a wide variety of tasks in active service at the front. And, like the men who served in the trenches, their experiences at the Front changed them. As May Wedderburn wrote about returning to England: "the world was different since I had been to France. I was different, though I did not know exactly how or why".

(Cannan, Grey, 94)

II

Women at the front were not the only ones to be active participants in the war. Women at home were asked to step in and fill places soldiers had left vacant. The biggest proportional increase was in transport, where the level of women employees rose from 18,200 in 1914 to 117,200 in 1918 (Marwick, 166). The numbers of women in commerce and government rose as well, from 505,200 to 934,500 and from 262,200 to 420,200 respectively. The Women's Police Service, a voluntary patrolling body, was also created and numbered 10,800 trained and equipped members by the end of the war. All of the volunteer agencies which worked at the front, for instance the Red Cross, the V.A.D.'s and their sister organization the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry Corps, also worked in England as did the army auxiliaries. In fact, for the V.A.D.'s in English hospitals, it was almost like being at the front, for during a big 'push' it was not uncommon that a wounded soldier arrived in 'Blighty' within 48 hours of being wounded, still with his field dressings on (Macdonald, 74).

Women's war work at home was a potentially radical and destabilizing force. As the number of recruits mounted, women were encouraged by posters and other propoganda to step into the places men had left vacant.

One famous poster shows a munition's worker pulling on a smock as a line of soldiers marches out of the factories with the caption: "These women are doing their bit; Learn to make munitions." The two dominant images of the First World War's "transgressive female forces" (Ouditt, 47) were the land worker and the munition's worker; agriculture and munitions were the smallest and largest recruiters of home front women, respectively. Through the radical nature of this work, female workers "found themselves shattering the image of womanhood that propoganda sought to protect" (Ouditt, 47).

The transgressive nature of women's work on the land lay not only in the fact that a woman was doing a man's job, but also that she was dressed like a man in breeches. This change of costume was necessary to give women the freedom of movement they needed for hard, manual labour. It was emblematic of the challenge to traditional sex roles which work on the land offered.

In order to help the war effort, and lured by higher wages, many more women went into munition's work. In munitions, there were a different set of dangers - the worst being death by explosion - and benefits. Women flocked to and were actively recruited for the munition's factories. In July 1914 there were 212,000 women working in munitions. By November 1918, their numbers had swelled to 947,000 (Marwick, 166). Munition's work problematized

traditional ideals of femininity in two ways. The first was a challenge to the doctrine of separate spheres. Not only had women invaded factories in great numbers, but also the work they did in those factories had changed. Women now set their own tools and did jobs that were the equivalent to those of men, though employers usually got around the equal pay promised in the Munitions War Act of 1915. Also, the products of these factories challenged the inherited concepts of femininity by associating the traditional givers of life with the new industry of death.

One challenge facing women at home was the difficulty in getting a clear view of the war from the home front. Radios and telephones were almost unknown, and newspapers and letters were subject to censorship from the end of 1914 onward. News from the front arrived gradually, and it was not unknown for families to have to wait weeks after a big battle to find out whether their loved ones were alive or dead (Daker, 112).

Life on the home front was thus best characterized as a state of nervous waiting. The anxiety that Paul Fussell describes as characteristic of the front - "anxiety without end, without purpose, without reward and without meaning" (Fussell, 320) - was pervasive at home as well. This relentless anxiety is documented in the diaries of Cynthia Asquith and Vera Brittain. Both chronicle the

strain of waiting for news, as in this passage of Brittain's:

I was on the look-out for telegrams and telephone messages all day, but nothing came. I tried to make time pass by walking and walking and then cycling over the hills, for I could not rest... I am tired of being at home waiting for things to come off. One is always waiting, waiting in war.

(Brittain,Chronicle, 281-85)

Cynthia Asquith describes a ceaseless round of feverish activity in an attempt to escape thinking. Shortly after the deaths of her two brothers, she writes: "I hope I plumbed the depth of human misery alone in this beastly hotel: dead tired - the first sort of excitement gone and succeeded by the dreary, dreary stage, with a sense of desolation gradually soaking through and through." (Asquith, 189) Unlike the soldiers at the front, civilians had no outlets for their anxiety, and the build-up of war nerves often led to mental breakdowns, as in the case of Asquith.

III

Despite the revolutionary nature of the work women were asked to do in wartime, these types of labour and the

organisations around them were publicly constructed to cater to traditional feminine identity and women's ideological stance as 'other' to war. The Q.M.A.A.C., W.R.N.S. and W.R.A.F., however the directors and memberes saw them, were presented to the public as merely auxiliaries to men's service. A 1918 poster for the Q.M.A.A.C. read, "the Girl behind the Man behind the Gun" (Beddoe, 11). This was despite the fact that the auxiliary women were doing work in the military camps that had been formerly done by soldiers. It was much easier to present nursing as a traditional - and therefore respectable - role for women, and thus nursing was the most popular wartime activity for women volunteers and in the public eye. A man could serve at the front in the capacity of a nurse and still be considered nurturing, caring and therefore traditionally feminine. The V.A.D.'s, however, like the Q.M.A.A.C., had to put up with a code of conduct in order not to compromise their feminine identity. So while V.A.D. nurses in Rouen were told to "remember that you are on active service", these were the rules:

- 1) You are not allowed to have civilian clothes in your possession and you must not leave your own part of the hospital.
- 2) You are not allowed to go out to luncheon or dinner - or go riding, driving or boating with anyone of the opposite sex, and no dancing!
- 3) You must always be in camp by 7 p.m.

(Macdonald, 114)

It would be impossible to imagine such strictures against fraternization being given to men on active service. Obviously, the public recognition and entrance onto the world stage of the V.A.D.'s was contingent upon the reassertion of a traditional feminine 'sororal' role and "a feminine piety that implied deference to masculinity, militarism and the patriarchal nation state." (Ouditt, 7)

Those who worked at home were also constrained by the limits of a traditional feminine identity. Deborah Thom has pointed out that images of working women had been shifting prior to the war from anachronistic to a "symbol of the unacceptable present." (Thom, 86) Women workers were seen as weak and defenceless, and the sweated worker became the paradigm of the woman worker. This change in attitude is shown in wartime photographs, which focus on the frail girl next to fearsome machinery, and by journalistic accounts like Hall Caine's. War necessarily underlined this process by focusing more attention on the woman worker and her implied physical weakness. The Land Army also suffered from the suspicion of physical and moral frailty. The Land Army women were issued in their Handbook the following directives:

You are doing a man's work and so you
are dressed rather like a man, but remember

that just because you wear a smock and breeches you should take care to behave like an English girl who expects chivalry and respect from everyone she meets. Noisy or ugly behaviour brings discredit, not only upon yourself but upon the uniform and the whole Women's Land Army. When people see you pass... show them that an English girl who is working for their country is the best sort of girl.

(Dakers, 150)

In this passage the contradictory demands on women are clearly seen. While women who want to be "the best sort of girl" must be feminine, they must also share the desire of British men to do their duty fearlessly.

Thus, the new values created by war problematized conventional femininity. Q.M.A.A.C., land workers and munition's workers, because they challenged male supremacy directly, also had to put up with abuse and opposition from soldiers, farm workers and unions. While the war seemed to offer women access to wider areas of employment in greater numbers, resulting in financial independence and a role in the wartime and post-war public world, much of the progress was in fact illusory:

These aspirations... were held in check by the class template, which assumed that middle-class women would take the top jobs and then leave at the end of the war - thus keeping the working-class women in their subordinate place until the men came back, at which point they would be ejected

from... trades and sent back to traditional female employment. So the potential revolutionariness of these new roles was caught in conflict with the authorities' desire to preserve and protect.

(Ouditt, 49)

All women's war work, furthermore, was bound by notions of temporality - patriotic women would 'do their bit' for the duration, and that same patriotism would make them leave employment for the returning soldiers. Women's work overseas would naturally end with the cessation of hostilities.

Nowhere is the problematization of women's work and roles during the war more evident than in the case of Edith Cavell. Cavell was a professional nurse in her forties who was operating a teaching hospital in Belgium when the war broke out. She was instrumental in helping English patients-prisoners escape back to England. When she was caught by the Germans, she was imprisoned and then shot on October 15th, 1915, in the face of loud English public outrage. Cavell's death and its subsequent mythologization provides a telling example of the ways in which ideas of femininity were manipulated by the needs of war.

Cavell herself was a sober and professional woman, with a very strong moral ethic. Her letters show that she rescued English soldiers out of a sense of patriotic duty

(Rider, 199). Yet on the eve of her death, she said to the chaplain attending her: "This I would say, standing in view of God and Eternity, I realize that patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards anyone." (Rider, 214) Although she accepted that she had to die for her country, this was no fervent patriot.

Cavell became, however, a sentimental patriotic heroine. Thousands of postcards with her image, portrayed as a young girl in a nurse's uniform lying in the snow before a firing squad, were printed and sold. When her body was disinterred and sent back to England it was followed at every stage of the three-day journey by military and nursing pallbearers, at times becoming more like a parade than a funeral. At her memorial service in Westminster Abbey the Bishop referred to her as "an innocent, unselfish, devout and pretty girl." (Rider, 228) Her courage was lauded by all, including Prime Minister Asquith in the House of Commons in 1915. A statue in her memory was raised in Charing Cross in 1923, and for a while, men would stand in front of it, ensuring that all men removed their hats in a gesture of respect (Rider, 257).

Yet, the sentimentalized public figure of Cavell was not the real Cavell. She was neither young, nor pretty, nor innocent, but rather a professional woman in middle life. The fact that public figures felt the need to create

this image of her was perhaps due to the challenge she presented to the idea of women's alterity to war. Cavell was a woman who made the supreme sacrifice on the same level as men, without asking mercy because of her gender, and she did so courageously, soberly, and with a finely articulated moral vision. Both her actions and that vision of patriotism being "not enough", presented a challenge to the traditional views of war and of women's place in relation to it. The last example of this is the refusal to inscribe her statue with her final words, deemed inappropriate, until the first Labour Commissioner of Works, F.W. Jarrett, had them added in 1924 (Rider, 257).

Thus, despite the revolutionary nature of their work in wartime, women were still bound by how others saw them, and by the public definitions of femininity. The representation of women in war propaganda and literature are indices of women's problematical identity in wartime. Early propaganda for the war used gendered images both to justify the war itself and to reassert the traditional gender stereotypes disrupted by the pre-war 'sex war', in an attempt to emphasize normalcy in wartime. Images of Belgium as the innocent maiden ravaged by the brutal Hun were calculated to arouse chivalric fervour in potential soldiers (Kent, 22). Much of the atrocity propaganda circulated during the war, most notably in the Bryce Report on German Atrocities of 1915, centred around

stories of women being violated in various horrible and usually sexual ways. German soldiers supposedly violated and bayoneted pregnant women, cut off women's breasts and legs, and publicly raped young girls in the marketplaces (Mitchell, 42). These reports were invariably from unnamed, usually second-hand sources, and all such records mysteriously disappeared from government offices after the war. Assuming that the accounts were indeed inventions, they could be viewed as the "pent-up sexual fantasies in a Britain just emerging from the Victorian era of restraint" (Buitenhuis, 12), and also as an attempt to reassert traditional gender roles of women as passive agents and as property in the wake of the challenges to sexual identity posed by the suffragettes.

Wartime propaganda also represented women as unofficial recruiters for the war. Two popular war posters show women blatantly encouraging their men to fight: the first shows a mother and her children waving goodbye to a soldier with the caption, "Women of Britain Say: Go!" (Khan, 79), and the second depicts an elderly mother with her hand on her son's shoulder and saying, "Go! It's Your Duty, Lad" (Beddoe, 11). Some posters tried to use images of women to shame men into enlisting, with captions like, "Will you go, or must I?" (Haste, 55) The white feather campaign, created by Admiral Pembrose, pressured women to shame men into enlisting by handing all

men not in uniform a white feather. Others appealed directly to women to send their men to fight: "When the war is over and someone asks your husband or your son what he did in the great War, is he to hang his head because you did not let him go?" (Haste, 54) Even when, later in the war, women were exhorted to do their 'bit', it was always within the context of its temporality. A poster captioned, "Do Your Bit: Learn to Make Munitions" shows a legion of men marching out the door of a factory, while a woman pulls on an overall and cloth cap. The implication is that, when the men come marching back, she will just as quickly take off her work-clothes and return home. Other propaganda appealed to women as housewives, as did advertisers who exhorted women to "Fight the War with Perrier Water." (Pugh, 13) The conflicting and fluctuating nature of women's public identities in wartime is seen in advertisements for Rowntree's Cocoa. While advertisements during the war depicted women as workers - as in the Rowntree's ad from February 1918 depicting a woman in a cloth cap and trousers working in a lumberyard - when demobilization orders came, women were once again shown in a domestic setting. A Rowntree's ad that ran a year later showed a woman in her kitchen wearing a dress and apron, while the newly returned man holds up a child and says, "Why, how he's grown!" (Beddoe, 89)

IV

Women were spectators to war in a real and in an ideological sense. They were spectators to the battlefield aspect of war, and were not conscripted or asked to kill. But it was also the very construction of feminine identity that made women 'spectators'. The alignment of women with "cyclically reproduced, permanent values" placed them beyond the boundaries of masculine politics, law and warfare. This alterity to the public sphere worked both for and against women and women's claim to citizenship. On the one hand, V.A.D. nurses were allowed near the front in the capacity of nurturer and spectator, and were believed to be insulated by their femininity from its gruesome effects. On the other, it firmly placed women ideologically away from the public realm and made them the repository of "spiritual values" (Ouditt, 5). All women's war work and women's lives on the home front were couched in the language of spectatorship. One of the best reflections of how women and their roles were perceived during wartime is to look at male poetry from the trenches.

There were two prominent strains of male war poetry, both epitomized by a small number of specific poets. The first strain was popular at the beginning of the war and was associated primarily with the poet Rupert Brooke. This poetry arose out of a 500 year-old British tradition of poems celebrating battle, and thus was mainly concerned with the rhetoric of chivalry, heroism and the glory of war. These concepts were given added strength by the idea, shared by many, that British society had grown decadent and soft, and that war was the emetic which would restore Britain to its former fitness. These two themes combined to create a powerful argument for war, and when hostilities were declared on August 4th 1914, there was an air of anticipation and excitement. This is seen in Brooke's sonnet "Peace":

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with
 this hour,
 And caught our youth, and wakened us from
 sleeping,
 With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened
 power,
 To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
 Glad from a world grown old and cold and
 weary....

(Treasury, 169)

The welcoming of war as a purifying ritual is clearly seen in these lines, and especially in the simile of "swimmers

into cleanness leaping". This ethos stressed the primacy of Englishness, as in Brooke's "The Soldier":

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich dust a richer dust concealed:
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware....
(War Verse, 71)

This romantic imperialism imbued with the rhetoric of English pastoralism was immensely popular with soldiers and civilians alike.

In 1916, however, a new literary soldier-poetry sprang from the trenches. This poetry reflected the disillusionment and cynicism of the soldiers forced to endure horrible conditions at the front. The imagery of this strain of poetry emphasized the physical horrors of war, and characterized dying soldiers as innocents sacrificed by those at home. Wilfred Owen is considered the greatest of those poets, though most of his poems were published posthumously. In "Dulce Et Decorum Est", Owen contrasts the reality of modern warfare with the traditional rhetoric:

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud

Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues -
 My friend, you would not tell with such high
 zest
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,
 The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
 Pro patria mori.

(Owen, 55)

The image of the "cud / of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues", emphasizes the painful and grotesque nature of the soldier's death and in contrast to his innocence.

These war poets, popularly known as the 'trench poets', felt that the blame for the sacrifice of innocent lives lay with those at home, as well as with the incompetent generals. In Siegfried Sassoon's "Blighters", the antics of those at home dishonour the dead:

The house is crammed: tier beyond tier they grin
 And cackle at the Show, while prancing ranks
 Of harlots shrill the chorus, drunk with din;
 "We're sure the Kaiser loves the dear old
 Tanks!"

I'd like to see a Tank come down the stalls,
 Lurching to rag-time, or "Home, sweet Home", -
 And there'd be no more jokes in music-halls
 To mock the riddled corpses round Bapaume.
 (Blunden, Anthology, 136)

The violence with which Sassoon wishes harm upon civilians points to the extreme nature of his disillusionment and cynicism, a hallmark of trench poetry.

Though these two literary groups differed widely in their imagery and attitude towards war, they shared one fundamental belief: the supremacy of the soldier. Rupert Brooke's "Peace" elevates the soldier beyond "the sick hearts that honour could not move, / And half-men" (Treasury, 169). Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen declared the moral and spiritual superiority of the soldier fated to suffer and be sacrificed for the civilian world's whims.

This attribute was shared not only by writers, but by critics and anthologists as well. The introductions to the popular anthologies of poetry by soldiers demonstrate this. In the introduction to Songs and Sonnets for England in War-Time, the anonymous author writes:

What can so nobly uplift the hearts of a people facing war with its unspeakable agony as music and poetry? The sound of martial music steels men's hearts before the battle. The sound of martial words inspires human souls to do and to endure. God, His poetry, and His music are the Holy Trinity of war.

(Songs and Sonnets, v.)

While this may be an extreme view, it shows the high honour that poetry by soldiers was accorded in the English tradition. Galloway Kyle, the well-known editor and critic, writes in his introduction to Soldier Poets:

The soldier poets leave the maudlin and the mock-heroic, the gruesome and fearful handling

of Death and his allies to the neurotic civilian who stayed behind to gloat on imagined horrors and inconveniences and anticipate the uncomfortable demise of friends.

(Soldier Poets, 8-9)

This disparagement of the non-combatant is aimed at the fit male who refuses to enlist, but includes all civilians, most notably women.

Soldiers were glorified everywhere, both in the press and by government. It is a natural extension of this glorification that their poetry should be accorded such a high place in literature. War, as well as war poetry, was like a brotherhood. Soldier poetry, especially that written in the latter years of the war, celebrates the community and friendship of men created by the shared experience of the trenches. Robert Graves, another trench poet, explores the bonds of war friendship in "Two Fusiliers":

And there's no need of pledge or oath
To bind our lovely friendship fast,
By firmer stuff
Close bound enough.

By wire and wood and stake we're bound,
By Fricourt and by Festubert,
By whipping rain, by the sun's glare,
By all the misery and loud sound...

Show me the two so closely bound
As we, by the wet bond of blood,
By friendship blossoming from mud,
By Death: we faced him and we found

Beauty in Death,
In dead men, breath.

(Blunden, Anthology, 78)

The morbidity of such friendships is alluded to in soldiers finding beauty in death and sustenance from dead men. For some, this meant not only the memory of the departed, but their actual physical beings. One such poem is Harold Monro's "Youth in Arms", which is both an elegy and a love poem for a corpse:

You are fuel for a coming spring if they leave
you here,
The crop that will rise from your bones is healthy
bread.
You died- we know you- without a word of fear
And as they loved you living I love you dead.

No girl would kiss you. But then
No girl would ever kiss the earth
In the manner they hug the lips of men:
You are not known to them in this, your
second birth.

(Taylor, 136)

The worship of death binds together the soldiers and excludes women, who are implied to be shallow and not rooted in the earth, which dead men become. The experiences leading to death are also exclusive, as in Wilfred Owen's "Apologia Poemate Meo":

Nonetheless, except you share

With them in hell the sorrowful dark of hell
 Whose world is but the trembling of a flare
 And heaven but as the highway for a shell,

You shall not hear their mirth:
 You shall not come to think them well content
 By any jest of mine. These men are worth
 Your tears. You are not worth their merriment.

(Owen, 40)

Owen effectively portrays how reality for soldiers shrinks to what is visible in the "trembling of a flare". In this world, powerful bonds are forged between men. Owen not only excludes non-combatants from this reality, but also disparages them as unworthy, a common theme of trench poetry.

Women were doubly excluded in this version of war, by virtue of their being non-combatants and by the misogyny of many trench poets. Owen wrote in a 1913 letter: "All women, without exception, annoy me, and the mercenaries... I utterly detest." (Owen, 18) Sassoon's misogyny is apparent in "Blighters", in which he describes "prancing ranks / of harlots", and in the poem "Glory of Women":

You love us when we're heroes, home on leave,
 Or wounded in a mentionable place.
 You worship decorations; you believe
 That chivalry redeems the war's disgrace.
 You make us shells.

(Blunden, 137)

Women are the targets of Sassoon's scorn and contempt, seen as those who fuel the war with their obsession with chivalry and decorations, as well as their making of munitions. The last sentence has a double meaning, suggesting also that women have vampiric qualities, sucking the souls of men.

There were male poets who were sympathetic to women. Some soldiers praised women for their courage and accorded them a place in the 'battle', as did Stephen Phillips in "Women and War":

Women of England, yours how hard the task,
 Service from you how difficult we ask!
 ... O dull expectancey that finds not vent!
 O silent anguish that **will** not lament!
 O mad uncertainty from dawn to eve!
 O worse to wait than battle to receive!
 Heroes are ye, who but the sob repress,
 Your victory dumb is victory no less!
(Verse, 130)

And Laurence Binyon wrote in "To Women":

For you, you too, to battle go,
 Not with the marching drums and cheers
 But in the watch of solitude
 And through the boundless night of fears.
(Trotter, 21)

Both of these poems recognize the difference in women's war experience, and accord the silent suffering and loss of loved ones the same honour as the sacrifices of men.

However, poems like these are the exception, and are rarely anthologized. What survives is the image of women left by the trench poets, one who is selfish, ungrateful, callous and ignorant of the true horrors of war, glory and pleasure seeking, and alien to the soldiers.

This was the misogynist climate that surrounded women and women writers in wartime. When looking at women's poetry, the attitudes and assumptions they faced must be taken into account, not only to appreciate that such poetry could be written at all, but also to understand the challenges facing women and women writers during the First World War. Thus, while the war work asked from and done by women during the war was both potentially and, in some cases, actually liberating, the rhetoric of war and of the war poets, along with pre-existing stereotypes, led to a problematization of femininity both in the public realm and in the works of women themselves, as will be seen in the next chapter.

Chapter Two: Images of Women

Literature, especially modern poetry with its emphasis on the subjective, reveals to the reader a sense of the writer's own experience. This subjectivity, set against knowledge of the objective facts of the poet's time and circumstance, combines to provide a comprehensive picture of specific historical periods. So it is with women's poetry of the Great War. Poetry, still a popular literary form in 1914, provided one medium by which women could express the experiences and thoughts engendered by war. By analysing this poetry, in the context of the historical background provided in the first chapter, a picture of how women saw themselves in relation to war emerges.

In the previous chapter, we have seen how femininity became problematized in the face of the demands of war and conflicting gender roles. This was expressed in the public realm by journalists such as Hall Caine who attempted to reconcile the traditional ideals of pretty and passive femininity with the new roles demanded by war work, by the

public canonization of Edith Cavell, and by propaganda which

tried to harmonize the need for women industrial and medical workers with the stereotype of feminine subservience.

This problematization of femininity is a major theme in women's writings on the war.

Like women's historical experiences of war, women's writings are best analysed according to groupings of work experience. The most prolific, and in some ways the most original writings were by women who served overseas as nurses. Because they saw the massive human wreckage caused by war, their writings provide visceral evidence of conditions at the front and in field hospitals. These nurses write not only of their own reactions to the war and to their new roles, but also about the new relationships between men and women engendered by the war. The literal deconstruction of the male body and the female ascendancy in these hospitals provided a point of intersection for various gender discourses and roles. Some women related to the wounded men as sisters or as mothers, while others retained a romanticism towards the soldier as hero and lover. The most unsettling writing is from women for whom the damaged male body becomes dehumanized, as merely one more item of debris in a ruined landscape. These writings show, in stark physical as well as

philosophical terms, how both femininity and masculinity were problematized by war.

The second grouping of women's writings centers around other work done by women in wartime, such as manufacturing munitions, land work, canteen service and other volunteer and paid employment. These poems, written by women who, for the most part, were not faced with the horrors of the battlefield, show the appeal of active roles and the possibility of adventure for women. Poems written by women who served in places other than hospitals often celebrate the release from enforced passivity that the war allowed, and the vigour and pride which they felt in their work. These poems also deal with the problem of and challenges to class, as did some poems by volunteer nurses. The entrance of middle class women volunteers into skilled occupations such as nursing and munitions, brought them into conflict with lower class supervisors and matrons. The friction from both sides informs much of this writing, as do assumptions about such class-based stereotypes as the overpaid munition's worker.

The writings of women on the home front and the question of spectatorship makes up the third section of this chapter. Women at home wrote about the dreariness of their daily lives, the privations caused by rationing and the atmosphere of tense waiting that pervaded life for those with a loved one overseas. Poems written by women at

home focused more on questions of guilt and complicity than did those by women who spent the war in an active role. The sound of guns in France, which could be heard in certain parts of England, was for some women writers an unwelcome reminder of the destruction being enacted overseas and their complicity in it. The question of safety

and of the guilt and shame of the non-combatant was a related theme in poetry written by women at home. This concept of the non-combatant was specifically linked to gender. While some women writers accepted the guilt of the non-combatant themselves, others turned against other women in anger at their perceived thoughtlessness. The most reflective of these poems are those which reject not only the guilt of the "protected", but also the entire discourse of gendered difference. Thus, these poems show to what extent femininity and gender were problematized by war, and how various women writers responded to the discourse of gender in wartime.

It must be remembered, however, that these poems were not dealing with questions of guilt and pain and its relation to gender in a purely philosophical or detached way. Nearly all of these women writers would experience the loss of a loved one during the war. The fourth grouping of poems deals with the losses that women had to face and the sacrifices they made during wartime. Elegies

for lost loved ones form a major part of the body of women's writing on war. These losses were not only the deaths of sons, friends and lovers, but also the more ephemeral losses of those who came back from the war so changed they were rendered unrecognizable. These poems of loss and remembrance are the most poignant of women's war writings, and a reminder that while men were asked to sacrifice their lives, women had to sacrifice their loved ones and face a post-war world of bereavement and loneliness.

Thus, women's writings of their experiences of war provide two sources of interest to the historian. In one aspect, they delineate women's historical experiences during wartime and provide a record of how women saw themselves in relation to the new gender roles that were then forged out of necessity. In another aspect, women's poetry of the Great War provides a fascinating insight into how women involved themselves in the discourse of gender in wartime: how they accepted, adapted, changed or rejected the dominant public discourse of the propagandists and the policy makers. These poems, interesting in their own right, gain new significance when accorded the same historical and critical weight that has been given the trench poets since the 'twenties.

I

As we have seen in the previous chapter, caring for the massive numbers of men wounded in the war was an accepted and expected role for women in wartime. Nursing saw, if not the largest, then the most celebrated increase in volunteers, mostly women, during the war. Nurses were presented to the public as sentimental heroines in popular songs such as "The Roses of No Man's Land", in photographs by war photographers such as Horace W. Nicholls (Condell, 20), and in other popular forms such as postcards. Because nursing was an occupation in which women were perceived to be nurturing men, public praise and admiration of war nurses was more forthcoming than for other war workers such as women who were employed in munitions.

War nurses themselves wrote many poems in admiration of other nurses. Mary Henderson, who helped Dr. Elsie Inglis set up the Scottish Women's Hospitals and served with her in Rumania and Russia, wrote an elegaic poem about Dr. Inglis: "In Memoriam: Elsie Maude Inglis". Henderson praises Inglis as both a British heroine who loved "her country's honour and her country's name" and a spiritual woman with a godly "Task":

...The hands, indeed,

So quick to minister where there was need,
 The hands we loved, may not touch ours again...
 Yet we who followed when your footsteps trod
 Beyond our Island shores, who knew your quick
 Instinctive action for the helpless sick,
 Your clear-voiced answer when there came the call
 For succour from a nation like to fall
 Who saw the the undulled radiance in your eyes
 Given to those with whom "the Vision" lies -
 We know that in that Flag-protected cask
 Lies but the weariness of her whose Task,
 Grown greater than her tired mortal frame,
 Bears her beyond to greater strength and fame.
 (Henderson, 13).

Inglis is portrayed here in one sense as a traditional hero: brave, capable and strong. Yet, her calling was undeniably traditionally feminine and is even described as "instinctive": to care for and nurture the sick. Thus, the heroic nurse occupies a space between the stereotypes of hero and helpmate to men.

Nurses were also honoured by women at home. Agnes S. Falconer, in her poem "Scottish Nurses in Serbia", pays homage to the Scottish nurses who died of fever:

Death takes his toll - the young, the bright,
 the brave -
 Europe's proud nations in his net lie snared:
 But **these** hands - weaponed not to smite but
 save -
 How ill can these be spared!
 (Country Life, 24)

Again the nurses are described as both brave hero and feminine nurturer.

This same intersection, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is emblematic of the "canonization" of Edith Cavell. Alice Meynell sidesteps the issue of Cavell's role in the war by imagining the hour of her death,

By dial of the clock
 'Twas day in the dark above her lonely head.
 'This day thou shalt be with Me.' Ere the cock
 Announced that day she met the Immortal Dead.
 (Meynell, 80)

By avoiding the issue of patriotism, much as Cavell herself did, and by not eulogizing her based on stereotypical gender traits, whether feminine or masculine, Meynell creates a portrait of a person whose soul is in accord with God, which is praise of the highest order.

Nursing sisters appear in women's poetry in a variety of guises and descriptions. They were praised by some as women who nurtured the physical as well as the spiritual aspects of wounded men, as in Edith M. Thomas' poem, "the Red Cross Nurse".

A cross of red was on her sleeve;
 And here she stayed, the wound to bind,
 And there, the fighting soul relieve,
 That strove its Unknown Peace to find.

(Treasury, 269)

The poem depicts a battle scene in which the nurse stays to help the wounded, at the cost of her own life. This is an extreme example of the perceived bravery of nurses, but shows to what extent they were praised.

Nursing sisters were lauded for their hard work and dedication to the job, but they were also often admired for attributes which were less under their control. Winnifred Letts, an Irish Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse (V.A.D)., wrote "A Sister in a Military Hospital" in praise of the sister of her ward. She describes not only the "diligent service" and "cool, kind hands" of the sister, but also her beauty:

A face that could have brought delight
To some pure-souled pre-Raphaelite;
Madonna of a moment, caught
Unwary in the toils of thought,
Stilled in her tireless energy,
Dark-eyed and hushed with sympathy.
(Letts, 32)

This description could be of a nurse from a Nicholls portrait: beautiful, dreamy, compassionate, and very feminine.

What the beautiful nurse was presumed to be dreaming about was her man. In poetry, as well as popular perception, nurses were believed to be, while tending wounded men, thinking of their sweethearts. In Miss G.

M. Mitchell's poem, "the Nurse", a pause in the routine is the opportunity for "the cold fingers of fear" to clutch the nurse's heart:

While here I strive, as best I may,
 Strangers' long hours of pain to ease,
 Dumbly I question - Far away
 Lies my beloved even as these?
 (Brereton, 110)

Concern for a sweetheart was often seen as the reason many nurses served abroad. It was why Vera Brittain became a V.A.D. nurse: "And when I look after any one of them, it is like nursing Roland [herlover] myself by proxy". (Chronicle, 215) This linking of nurses with absent sweethearts served to reinforce their image of ministering angel to men. It also assuaged the public fears precipitated by the single suffragettes, for by reasoning that women nursed men out of romantic love for an absent sweetheart, any potentially transgressive forces that an independent working role for women could unleash would be neutralized.

In fact, nursing could be and, in some cases, was an extremely transgressive force. Most striking of all the poetry written by women during the war is that which deals with the female gaze on the wounded and naked male body. The relationship between female nurse and male patient during the war provided an intersection of various gender discourses and roles.

For some nurses, the men became comrades, and were treated as friends and brothers. In A War Nurse's Diary, the unnamed nurse describes the soldiers as family: "men whose suffering we had shared with when we had passed through the horrors of the war." (War Nurse, 47) Enid Bagnold also describes the men in her hospital as a family. "In all honesty the hospital is a convent, and the men in it are my brothers." (Bagnold, 78) This description depicts the sexlessness of the relations between the women and men in her ward as well as the metaphorical filial bond.

For other nurses, the wounded men were seen with romantic eyes. This romanticism was expressed by some poets in religious terms, with the soldier becoming the Christ-figure. In Alberta Vickridge's poem, "In a V.A.D. Pantry", she transforms dishwashing into a quasi-religious ritual:

Lips of fever, parched for drink
 From this vessel seek relief
 Ah, so often, that I think
 Many a sad Last Supper's grief
 Haunts it still - that they who died,
 In man's quarrel crucified,
 Shed a nimbus strange and pale
 Round about this humble Grail.

(Reilly, 122)

The soldier is akin to Christ because he sacrifices his life; to Vickridge, the sacrifice made by the women who "rinse and dry" are but pale reflections. This romantic

musings over a mug is complemented by Elinor Jenkins' "Night Duty", in which she imagines she hears ghosts in the ward:

Softly the shadows stir,
 Softly the footfalls creep,
 Softly, softly, come the mothers,
 To look at their sons asleep.
 (Jenkins, 67)

In Eva Dobell's poem of the same name, she imagines herself as mother to the soldiers as she puts her "sons" to bed. She tries to imagine what each soldier is dreaming:

They bandied talk and jest from bed to bed;
 Now sleep has touched them with a subtle change.
 They lie here deep withdrawn, remote and strange
 A dimly outlined shape, a tumbled head.
 Through what far lands do now their wand'ring
 spirits range?

(Dobell, 32)

These fancies rest on the romantic view of soldiers as fundamentally heroic, even when wounded, whether that romanticism expresses itself in religious or maternal terms. These poems also try to romanticize the strangeness of men and the distance between men and women. This romanticism towards wounded men had the effect of putting the service of women constantly in the context of men, and of rationalizing the gaps between the sexes.

The view of soldiers as fallen heroes is expressed in Vera Brittain's poem, "A Military Hospital", in which she describes the hospital as a sort of way-station for romantic adventurers:

A mass of human wreckage, drifting in
 Borne on a blood-red tide,
 Some never more to brave the stormy sea
 Laid reverently aside,
 And some with love restored to sail again
 For regions far and wide.

(Brittain, Verses, 21)

Yet, the term "human wreckage" belies the tone of the poem, suggesting both the non-human quality of wounded soldiers and their lack of agency. Though Brittain's intentions were probably the opposite, the wounded men seem to be portrayed ironically as broken dolls who, if their wounds are too serious, are laid aside in favour of those who can once again serve as toy soldiers.

This undercutting of the romantic ideal of masculinity is seen in women writers who wrote about the physical maiming of men's bodies. These women felt a sense of detachment from the wounded men, often learned as a protective measure against the horrors that they encountered in the hospital wards. This detachment is expressed as dry irony in Winnifred Letts' "Screens":

They put the screens around his bed;
 A crumpled heap I saw him lie,
 White counterpane and rough dark head,
 Those screens - they showed that he would die.

They put the screens about his bed;
We might not play the gramophone,
And so we played at cards instead
And left him dying there alone.

The covers on the screen are red,
The counterpanes are white and clean; -
He might have lived and loved and wed
But now he's done for at nineteen.

(Letts, 21)

The fact that "they've brought the Union Jack to spread / Upon him when he goes away" means nothing, though the author says, as she contemplates another man taking his bed that "Jove! - I'm sorry that he's dead." (Letts, 21-22) This mingling of detachment and sympathy, devoid of patriotic ideals, is seen in two of the best prose works of the war - Enid Bagnold's *A Diary Without Dates* and Mary Borden's *The Forbidden Zone*, a collection of stories and poems. Both are modernist in form. Mary Borden is obviously influenced by Gertrude Stein, and her tone is "hallucinatory yet detached" (*Arms* 127), as she describes the hospital scenes and her reactions to them.

Enid Bagnold's diary is highly impressionistic and lyrical, and often takes the form of an interior monologue. Its sense of veracity lies not in minute detail of names and dates, but the psychological insight she has achieved into herself and the men. She describes the wounds as if they are somehow detached from the men,

and her reactions as if they are separate from her and beyond her control:

Six inches deep the gauze stuck, crackling under the pull of the forceps, blood and pus leaping forward from the cavities as the steady hand of the doctor pulled inch after inch of the gauze to the light. And when one hole was emptied there was another, five in all...
 Sometimes, when your mind has a grip like iron, your stomach will undo you; sometimes when you say "Today is Tuesday, the fifth of August", you faint. There are so many parts of the body to look after, one of the flock may slip your control while you are holding the other by the neck.

(Bagnold, 141)

In Mary Borden's The Forbidden Zone this sense of detachment is even more pronounced:

When the dresser came back I said: "His brain came off in the bandage."
 "Where have you put it?"
 "I put it in the pail under the table."
 "It's only one half of his brain", he said, looking into the man's skull, "the rest is here".
 I left him to finish the dressing and went about my own business. I had much to do.

(Borden, 151)

Her detachment is such that she, along with the other nurses, is able to eat her supper in the operating room, sometimes pushing amputated arms and legs out of the way.

"The cocoa tastes very good. It is part of the routine."
 (Borden, 59) To her, the men become their wounds: "There are no men here, so why should I be a woman? There are heads and knees and mangled testicles. There are chests with holes big as your fist, and pulpy thighs, shapeless; and stumps where legs once were fashioned." (Borden, 69) Bagnold, too, finds her feminine identity slipping away under the onslaught of convoys of wounded men: "The gallants in the ward don't like a convoy, it unsexes us" (Bagnold, 73). The fragmented form of these texts reflects the fragments of men's bodies and the women's fragmented identities.

If in Borden and Bagnold's works, men become their fragmented bodies, in Shirley Millard's memoir of her nursing activity at the front, I Saw Them Die, men's bodies themselves become dehumanized. Millard describes a field hospital after a bombing:

Against the blood red sky of sunrise stood
 a tree which had spread its bare branches
 over one of the barracks. For a moment I could
 think of nothing but a Christmas tree: the
 building had disappeared and the barren branches
 had blossomed horribly with fragments of human
 bodies, arms and legs, bits of bedding, furniture,
 and hospital equipment. (Millard, 21)

In this passage the focus is not on the fragments of men's bodies but on the tree; the bodies become only another item of horrible debris. The same is true of passages from

Lesley Smith's memoir, as she when writes: "Hour after hour, day after day, we cut down stinking bandages and exposed great gaping wounds which distorted the whole original plan of the body; human figures had become mere curious abortions." (Smith, 119) These passages show the ultimate problematization of masculinity and the masculine body; they are eradicated by war. Joanna Bourke has commented on similar processes in her book, Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War (1996). She argues that there were shifts in concepts of masculinity and male bodies, as men were mutilated, self-mutilated or destroyed by the war. The writings of these women show the female gaze on the deconstruction of the male body and the guilt, horror, detachment and pity that it engendered in women.

Not all of women's reactions to the wounded male body in their care were negative. Vera Brittain describes in Testament of Youth how the access to the male body she gained as a nurse in wartime eroticized the it for her:

Although there was much to shock in Army hospital service, this day to day contact with male anatomy was never part of the shame. Since it was always Roland whom I was nursing by proxy, my attitudes towards him imperceptibly changed; it became less romantic and more realistic, and thus a new depth was added to my love. (Testament, 166)

Brittain legitimizes her sexual feelings towards the men in her care by associating them with Roland, but the erotic undercurrent is clear.

Thus wounded men's bodies became the intersection of a variety of discourses about gender, corporeality and power.

For the subtext of all these poems on men's broken bodies is that the women writing the accounts are whole and have an authoritative, albeit nurturing, role over men in the hospital. The fact that women writers felt entitled to look upon and remain detached from male bodies, however ironic that detachment might be, shows the extent to which these women rejected a subservient and silent role for themselves in the narrative of war.

Most of the war poetry written by British women at the front came from members of V.A.D.'s. Through these poems, as well as memoirs by both nursing sisters and V.A.D.'s, two very different pictures of women nurses' roles and the war itself emerges (MacDonald, 110). There were several factors which set the two groups at odds. Firstly, nursing sisters were professionals, and saw it as their duty to adhere to a rigid code of duties and not to become sentimental over the soldiers in their care. Nurses in military hospitals, especially, were the disciples of discipline. This professional distance was

viewed by many V.A.D.'s, who had joined out of patriotism for the most part, as coldness and rigidity.

Being held to strict discipline was also deeply resented by the V.A.D.'s who, because of their low rate of pay, were essentially volunteers. The two best examples of this antagonism are Enid Bagnold's A Diary Without Dates (1918) and Vera Brittain's Testament of Youth (1933). Enid Bagnold was dismissed from the hospital in which she was working as a V.A.D. after she published her memoir because "a) to publish it was a breach of military discipline... and b) the breach was glaring because antagonism to the sisters showed through what I wrote." (Bagnold, ix) She goes on to say in her introduction that "I should not like to beg their pardon now. They were a tough lot... laying about them like savage old queens." (Bagnold, ix) In her memoir she describes a ward in which conformity is so rigid that "so long as I conform absolutely, not a soul will glance at my thoughts - few at my face." (Bagnold, 19) The discipline is such that she writes "a patient may be washed, fed, dressed, but not talked to." (Bagnold, 85) The struggle for authority is apparent throughout the book: "Does one go into a ward primarily to help the patients or to help the sister?" (Bagnold, 129) Bagnold probably exaggerated the situation with the sisters, since she hated the other V.A.D.'s too: "As far as I can see, their conception of a white female

mind is the silliest, most mulish, incurious, unresponsive, condemning kind of an ideal that a human creature could set before it." (Bagnold, 74) Vera Brittain felt the same way towards her Sister-in-Charge, whom she describes as "an Amazonian individual with a harsh voice and hawk-like features, [who] appeared to us as one of those women whose idea of discipline is to visualize every activity that her subordinates might enjoy and issue a general prohibition." (Testament, 294) She attributes the friction between the V.A.D.'s and the sisters to jealousy on the part of the sisters.

...she and other promoters of state registration evidently visualized a post-war professional chaos in which hundreds of experienced V.A.D.s would undercut and supplant the fully qualified nurses. Actually, this fear was groundless; all but a very few V.A.D.s were only too thankful when the War was over to quit a singularly backward profession for their own occupations and interests, but many "trained women", having no such interests themselves, could not believe that others were attracted to them. The presence of Red Cross nurses drove some of them almost frantic with jealousy and suspicion...

(Testament, 309)

This dislike of trained women had its basis at least in part in class snobbery. Like the illusion that class ceased to matter in the trenches, it was a myth that the demands of war work subsumed those demands of a rigid class system. While middle and upper class women were willing to work for others in the name of patriotism, it

was always understood to be a temporary situation and did not alter conceptions of class. For instance, Hilda Poole of the Voluntary Aid Detachment Kent 60 felt the role reversal was amusing because it ended when she returned home: "It was amusing when we came off duty and went home tired and the maid brought in our tea, just as we had been doing a little while before." (Macdonald, 58) In the same vein, Lesley Smith, during a scolding from her Matron, to "prevent the rags of my self-assurance from being destroyed" pictured herself "graciously entertaining the ill-dressed, red-faced women to lunch at my club." (Smith, 144)

The V.A.D.'s were mired in unaccustomed drudgery. Used to a leisurely lifestyle, many middle and upper class women, like Vera Brittain in 1914, literally did not know how to boil an egg (Testament, 165). While most quickly adapted, suffering after a while only from chronically sore feet, for most this physically demanding labour was made bearable only by the fact that it was temporary. As Vera Brittain wrote in 1915: "How glad I am I am not a professional nurse! One day I shall have time to contemplate and enjoy the things I love." (Chronicle, 292) M. Winnifred Wedgwood's book of poems, Verses of a V.A.D. Kitchen Maid, is a good example of this. While Wedgwood, a V.A.D. from Devon 26, writes humorously about her work in the kitchen of a military hospital in such poems as

"Ten Little Kitchen Maids", she is able to "hold on" because she knows at the end of the war she can leave the kitchen:

Washing up the dishes;
 Washing up the plates;
 Washing up the greasy tins,
 That everybody hates.

...Washing 'for duration',
 That's what I will do;
 As I've got no head-piece
 For the cooking too.

...We're baking, and frying, and boiling,
 From morning until night;
 But we've got to keep on a bit longer,
 Till Victory comes in sight.

...Yes! we've got to hold on a while longer,
 Till we've beaten the Hun to his knees;
 And **then** "Good-bye" to the kitchen;
 The treacle, the jam, and the cheese!

(Wedgwood, 13-15)

In this poem, the class role reversal is made clear. Once the war is over, Wedgwood can bid farewell to the kitchen, for it is patriotism that placed her there and not economic necessity.

Thus, the writings of women who served at the front as nurses provide a variety of discourses on gender, class and war. The image of the nurse as presented in women's poetry shows the blending of masculine and feminine

admirable traits, and the emphasis on the aesthetic image of the young, beautiful nurse. The female gaze on the male wounded body was an intersection of various gender discourses, from the romantic to the detached. And in the various ways that V.A.D.'s and professional nurses reacted to one another, the class conflict between upper middle class voluntarism and lower class supervisors is revealed. It could be argued that in the closed world of the hospital ward, class and gender conflicts which may have been undercurrents at home were brought to the surface.

II

Women worked in a variety of other capacities during the war, as seen in the previous chapter. These experiences, however, lacked the literary cohesiveness of nursing, because of the fewer numbers of women workers and greater variety of experience. The most common theme in these accounts of women's work is their pleasure and pride in it, complicated as it may have been by privation, guilt, sorrow and exhaustion.

Women who served at the front as ambulance workers had a singularly unglamorous and difficult job. They went

out behind the trenches at night to collect the wounded, sometimes going on the battlefields themselves with stretchers to bring out wounded men. Then they drove the wounded, who by this point may or may not have received any medical care, to the nearest field hospital.

Mairi Chisholm recorded in her diary how nerve-wracking ambulance drives could be, with no lights, shelled roads, often being under fire, and moans from the men in the back. After two or three trips "one's eyes were on stalks, bloodshot and strained." (Mitchell, 133)

Yet, despite the difficult nature of this work, some ambulance drivers took pleasure in their work. Carola Oman was a V.A.D. attached to an ambulance unit. Her poems use simple poetic images to highlight the aesthetic qualities of her experiences, whether it be the movement of the stretcher-bearers in "Unloading Ambulance Train", or the men whom she sees in "Night Duty in the Station". Here the men themselves are peripheral to the aesthetic qualities of their forms and movement:

Forms sleeping crowd beneath the rifle-rack,
 Upon the bookstall, in the carts. They seem
 All to be grey and burdened. Blue and black,
 Khaki and red, are blended, as a dream
 Into eternal grey, and from the back
 They stagger from this darkness into light
 And move and shout
 And sing a little, and move on and out
 Unready, and again, into the night.

(Oman, 24)

Other workers felt pleasure at their new tasks as well. C.A.L.T. was a canteen volunteer and in her poem, "Y.M.C.A.", she describes the joy her work brings her:

Oh Monday night's the night for me!
 On happy Mondays, after tea
 We canteen workers drive to _____...
 We stand and wait behind the bar,
 You've no idea how smart we are
 At serving Horlck's tea and 'pop'....
 (Reilly, 108)

When C.A.L.T. thanks God for Tommies at the end of the poem, she is thanking them as much for providing her with an exciting experience as for fighting the war.

Rose Macaulay, the daughter of an academic and herself a novelist in her mid-thirties, worked as a volunteer on Station Farm during the bitter winter of 1916. Without any agricultural machinery, she and her fellow workers helped to prepare the land for planting and tended sheep. From her experiences she wrote a series of five short, sensory poems which described the rhythms of farm work: "Driving Sheep", "Burning Twitch", "Hoeing the Wheat", "Lunch Hour", and "Spreading Manure". In "Burning the Twitch", Macaulay alludes to the displeasure of the farmer when "he'll be finding some twitch left", and to the hard work of the women:

Our dim eyes are blind with crying,

Our feet wrenched by baked earth-clods.
 The farmer talks of St. John's fires:
 They may be St. John's or God's,
 Or the devil's, for all we are caring;
 We would light them to any saint who
 Would keep the west wind blowing
 Till all the twitch burns through.
 (Macaulay, 30)

She takes the description one step farther in "Spreading Manure", and compares the lot of the land worker unfavourably with that of the soldier:

I think no soldier is so cold as we,
 Sitting in the Flanders mud.
 I wish I was out there, for it might be
 A shell would burst to heat my blood...

I wish I was out there, and off the open land:
 A deep trench I could just endure.
 But, things being other, I needs must stand
 Frozen, and spread wet manure.
 (Macaulay, 34)

These poems reflect the rigorous labour endured by the land workers. The drudgery, however, had its benefits as well. Underlying all five poems is a sensual pleasure in the land itself, as well as pride in hard work well done. In "Lunch Hour" Macaulay describes a pastoral scene of "food, drink, smoke and mirth" in a field "sweet, and heavy / with poppy flowers, and tangled with nettle-weed." (Macaulay, 34) Images like this showed the pleasures of work on the land.

As Gail Braybon has noted, women felt a sense of pride in their wartime work, which must be carefully distinguished from women's attitudes towards the war itself (Constantine, 160). Braybon argues that the war opened up new possibilities for women, both at home and abroad. It offered middle and upper class women the chance to experience hard, physical labour, to leave their homes and encounter fields, factories and the world beyond England. For working class women, the war offered better labour conditions, at least for the duration of the war, and the chance to work in the army auxiliaries.

For many women the war meant adventure, as it did to May Wedderburn Cannan in her poem, "Rouen", written about her month as a canteen worker:

Can I forget the evenings and the sunsets on
 the island,
 And the tall black ships at anchor far below
 our balcony,
 And the distant call of bugles, and the white
 wine in the glasses,
 And the long line of the street lamps, stretching
 Eastwards to the sea?

... When the world slips slow to darkness, when
 the office fire burns lower,
 My heart goes out to Rouen, Rouen all the world
 away;
 When other men remember I remember our
 Adventure
 And the trains that go out from Rouen at the
 ending of the day.

(Cannan, In War Time, 55-56)

The imagery of ships and trains emphasizes the association of Rouen with freedom and adventure for Cannan, and the ballad form of the poem underlines its romantic imagery. The memories of canteen service for Cannan were obviously happy ones.

The war also instilled the desire for and value of work in many middle class girls. May Cannan wrote in the dedicatory poem of an office magazine, "The Day's Work", on the value of work:

We bring small merchandise
When all is said:
We pray our day's work buys
Our daily bread.

(The Forgotten Army, 4)

The fierce desire for self-sufficiency characterized the post-war experience of many women who first tasted economic independence during the war, such as Vera Brittain.

Through the experiences of war work, what were considered admirable qualities in women subtly shifted. While the ideal 'Perfect Lady' was modest and retiring, war work demanded the qualities of rigour, bravery, courage and fortitude. This need for feminine strength was recognized by even the most conservative and jingoistic writers, such as Jessie Pope in "Heads Up Girls":

The feet that used to mince and tap
 Must stride with vigour now.
 No longer must a plastic crouch
 Debilitate the knees;
 We've finished with the "Slinker Slouch".
 Heads up, girls, if you please!
 (Pope, More, 16)

For those who had served under fire, this praise of feminine strength became even more pronounced, as in Mary J. Henderson's "Like That":

... I've seen
 How very gallant women's hearts may be
 Though torn the while with deepest sympathy,
 British and women - women to the core.

I've seen you kneeling on the wooden floor,
 Tending your wounded on their straw-strewn bed,
 Heedless the while that right above your head
 The Bird of Menace scattered death around.
 I've seen you guiding over shell-marked ground
 The cars of succour for the shattered men,
 Dauntless, clear-eyed, strong-handed, even when
 The bullets flung the dust up from the road
 By which you bore your anguished, helpless load.

I've seen you, oh, my sisters, "under fire",
 While in your hearts there burned but one desire

-

What British men and women hold so dear -
 To do your duty without any fear.
 (Henderson, 12)

In this passage the contradictory demands on women are clearly depicted. While women who want to be "like that" must be "women to the core" and express sympathy and

compassion for the men in their nurturing care, they must also share the desire of British men to do their duty fearlessly.

Thus the most celebrated qualities of these women are those of bravery and strength.

While women were experiencing new roles and creating new self-definitions, they were at the same time still constrained by traditional ideals of femininity. For instance, the introduction to Mary Henderson's book of poems, while it celebrates her service at the front, is careful to emphasize her traditional feminine traits:

Those quiet fearless eyes of hers have seen many grim sights - have looked Death in the face, and have not shrunk before the horrors of modern warfare.

And yet, withal, she is a very woman, large-hearted, deep and high-thoughted, sweet-voiced, full of tenderness for all humanity.

(Henderson, 6)

Both in Henderson's poems and in descriptions of Henderson herself, active roles and assertive qualities admired in women existed alongside traditional conventions of femininity.

Munition's work presented a greater challenge to the notions of traditional femininity than nursing. While women were conventionally seen as intimately connected

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form, argues for the timelessness of these visions of femininity.

The idea that women making munitions hurt God's Heart may have been extreme, but the opposition of women and the instruments of war was an assumption that prevailed in British society and this paradox was central to the discussion of women's war work. Hall Caine, in his propagandistic Our Girls, acknowledges this:

... when we think of all this [the horrors of war] we ask ourselves, with quivering hearts, why have we ever allowed woman to take any part in this hellish if inevitable business, she, the giver of life, to be set to the making of the weapons of death!

(Caine, 96-97)

He finds an answer to this, however, by narrowing the definition of 'life' to mean 'British life':

Yet who shall say but that the unconquerable impulse of woman's sex which says "**Thou shalt not kill**" **may be operating even here?**

... This mysterious call [to munition's work] is the spirit of our race, the spirit that keeps it alive, telling our women, who are bearing within them the future of our nation, that our men are being destroyed out there in France... and therefore they must kill if they would not be killed, or much worse than killed - left mateless and loveless and barren.

(Caine, 97-98)

Caine's argument seems to suggest that munition's work is the lesser of two evils with respect to the emancipation of women: by making weapons women ensured that men would remain alive and thus the traditional relationships between men and women could remain static. Hence, the challenges munition-making offered to the traditional feminine identity could be contained within a gendered and patriotic discourse.

The problem of class surfaced in women's work at home as clearly as it did for the V.A.D.'s. Lady Cynthia Asquith could record in her diary:

We did a two hours 'shift' at making portions of respirators... Any manual labour has a great fascination for me and I simply loved it. It is such fun feeling a factory girl and it gave one some idea of how exiting it must be to do piecework for money. One felt so competitive even unrewarded. I must say I was very glad I hadn't got to do a twelve-hour day - it is quite tiring. (Asquith, 34)

Queen Mary could likewise record in hers that she "worked from 3 to 5 planting potatoes. Got very hot and tired." (Mitchell, 83) Yet, the bulk of all women's manual and industrial labour at home was done by working class women. Wartime employees both on the land and in the factories recruited middle or upper class forewomen or matrons, in the belief that "breeding" would ensure the lower classes did not get unruly, and these were either poorly paid or

volunteer positions since patriotism was deemed to be its own reward. Class snobbery manifested itself against the munition's workers, commonly known as "munitionettes", through the press and public opinion which was critical of the workers' high wages and the rumoured frivolity with which they spent it. The munionette in her fur coat became a popular figure of scorn (Braybon, 166). This snobbery is seen in Madeline Ida Bedford's poem, "Munition Wages", in which she adopts the voice of a working class woman:

Earning high wages? Yus,
 Five quid a week.
 A woman, too, mind you,
 I calls it dim sweet.

Ye'are asking some questions -
 But bless yer, here goes:
 I spends the whole racket
 On good times and clothes.

Me saving? Elijah!
 Yer do think I'm mad.
 I'm acting the lady,
 But - I ain't living bad.

(Bedford, 7)

This poem shows the extent to which women's wages were exaggerated, since even the highest paid female munition's worker rarely made over £2 a week. Assumptions about women's frivolous spending, and the rumours of immorality

- "living bad", as it were - were attached to working class women just as they had been to the W.A.A.C.

Women writing about their experiences of work during the war described the pleasures inherent in such activity. Their poems show the pride they took in both their labour itself and the self-sufficiency such work gave them. These poems also show how the labour done by women, especially that of women working in the field of munitions, challenged and problematized conventional notions of gender and of class.

For while women made empirical gains in the field of work, whether in experiences of adventure and freedom, or receiving higher wages, their work and notions of femininity itself were still constructed in the language of conventional ideals of feminine "otherness" to war.

III

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the home front was characterized by a state of anxiety and deprivation. Poems written by women about their experiences at home emphasize the contrast between an interior life of agonizing waiting for news from the front

What is terrible about the sound of the guns for Macaulay is not the fear and anxiety they produce, but rather the lack of it:

We did not wince, we did not weep,
 We did not curse or pray;
 We drowsily heard, and someone said,
 "They sound clear today".

How "remote the anguish [overseas] seems" because:

We are shut about by guarding walls:
 (We have built them lest we run
 Mad from dreaming of naked fear
 And of black things done.)

We are ringed all round by guarding walls,
 So high, they shut the view.
 Not all the guns that shatter the world
 Can quite break through...

Oh, we'll lie quite still, nor listen nor look,
 While the earth's bounds reel and shake,
 Lest, battered too long, our walls and we
 Should break... should break...

(Macaulay, 11-13)

Macaulay describes a process of self-insulation and detachment similar to that of the nursing V.A.D.'s. In order to avoid engagement with the horrors of war, or in this case the imagined horrors, these women built mental barriers against them. Therefore the sound of the guns becomes doubly disturbing in this poem, since it signifies

not only the war which the narrator is trying to forget, but also the self deadened against further thoughts of war.

Enid Bagnold also wrote about the sound of French guns. In her poem, "The Guns in Kent", she describes how, despite the trappings of a pretty youth, she feels hopeless:

But I think as an old woman thinks
That life isn't much,
That on each of my pleasures is writ
"Musn't touch. Musn't touch".

And my eyes from the star
I withdraw, and my face from the flower,
This isn't my hour. I withdraw
My life out of this hour.

For there comes very faint, very far,
As such voices are,
A sound I can hear. That I hear
Every night with my ear.

And the window shakes at my head
Over and over,
And each little spring in my bed
Twangs with its brother.

And there thumps at the heart of the Hill,
On the house-wall, and runs
In the grass at the foot of the trees,
The Reminder- The guns.

(Bagnold, Ships, 34-5).

The repetition of phrases and the flat inflection of the verses points to the same feelings of guilt, complicity

and loss which form the subtext of Macaulay's poem. The guns are a reminder not only of the carnage being enacted overseas, but also of the losses which the war created in the lives of those at home.

It was not always easy for those at home to remain isolated from the effects of war. The Great War was the first in which airplane and zeppelin bombings made random civilian death and destruction a real danger. Thus the front was expanded to the homeland. The first air-raid took place on December 17, 1917, when German cruisers shelled Hartlepoons, Whitby and Scarborough, killing 194 people and wounding 592 others (Dakers, 43). Zeppelin raids began that Christmas Eve, when a bomb was dropped on Dover. Air-raids were the cause of much outrage, not only because of civilian deaths, as in Nancy Cunard's "Zeppelins":

The fires flamed up and burnt the serried town,
Most where the sadder, poorer houses were;
... And many died and hid in unfound places
In the black ruins of the frenzied night.
(Reilly, 26)

The aerial attacks also symbolized Germany's 'atrocious' war methods. Emily Orr, in her poem "Zeppelin Raids", compares the slaughter of the innocent during these raids to the rending of the Lord's robe which had been spared at his crucifixion:

- they rend His robe!
 ... The childish bodies bruised to reddened clay,
 The slaughter, ten times useless, of old folk,
 Who from safe sleep to horrid death awoke!
 (Orr, 56)

On the other hand, there were those who saw Zeppelin raids as a source of entertainment and relief from strained passivity. Cynthia Asquith records the excitement produced by the appearance of a German Zeppelin in the English sky:

We rushed out and found people in dramatic groups, staring skyward... Our guns were popping away and shells bursting in the air. I felt excited pleasurably, but not the faintest tremor and I longed... for more to happen. Bibs was the only member of the family who had sufficient imagination to be frightened...
 (Asquith, 87)

Iris Tree describes a similar excitement in her poem, "Zeppelins":

Suddenly
 Shutting our lips upon a jest
 As we are sipping thoughts from little glasses,
 A gun bursts thunder and the echoing streets
 Quiver with startled terrors -
 How swift runs fear: quicksilver that is free!
 Now every muscle weakens, every pulse
 Is set at gallop-pace and every nerve
 Stretched taut with horror and a wild revolt...
 How sweetly spins the world to noise of music,
 How sweet to live life's arrogant adventure!

Fear in this poem becomes a pleasurable sensation, because it awakens the senses deadened by the monotony of waiting. Tree's use of metaphors and diction associated with motion, such as "startled", "swift runs fear" and "gallop-pace", underlines the sense of excitement and "adventure" brought by the Zeppelins. Since Zeppelin raids seemed to echo the dangers and excitement of the war overseas, for some they were a welcome relief from the dreary monotony and low-grade anxiety of the home front.

From the beginning of the war there had been food shortages in England, as people stockpiled against the uncertainty of what lay ahead. By 1916 there were serious shortfalls in the food supply and in 1917 voluntary rationing was made mandatory. Meat, butter, and sugar ration cards were issued, though sometimes even the minimum allotted could not be found, due to inadequate supplies in the shops and the rising food prices. Rations as of December 10th, 1917, were 4 lbs of meat, 8 ozs of bread, 10 ozs of fat, and 8 ozs of sugar for men doing sedentary work (Peel, 219). The resultant diet was poor and bland. Those at home attempted to bear inconvenience and hunger good-humouredly, as is seen in Aelfrida Tillyard's poem, "Invitation au Festin" and Catherine Durning Wetham's poem, "The Poet and the

Butcher", both parodies. "Invitation au Festin" begins thus:

Oh come and live with me, my love,
 And share my war-time dinner.
 Who eats the least at this our feast,
 Shall make John Bull the winner.

Tillyard recounts the culinary delights of the wartime meal: "Here is a plate of cabbage soup / With caterpillars in... / Now will you have a minnow, love, / Or half an inch of eel?" Wetham's poem parodies Wordsworth's sonnet to Milton:

Milton, thou shouldest be living at this hour,
 England hath need of thee. She is a den
 Of sugar cards and meatless days and feasts,
 Yclept of all their wonted pageantry...
 Nature, good cateress, once you called her so,
 Means her provisions only for the good,
 And therefore, looking at the piece of meat
 Reposing doleful on our platter blue,
 We know we must be bad, O very bad,
 And quite unworthy, Milton, John, of you.

(Reilly, 126).

Both poems use humour to make light of the food shortages, while at the same time detailing them. Another poem which both mocks and draws attention to the insufficient diet of those at home is Helen Dirck's "After Bourslon Wood". In it she describes a conversation with her beau, in which she depicts her wartime existence:

'I go to bed', I said, at half past ten,
 And lead the life of any simple Waac,
 Alas! A meatless, sweetless one- and then
 I have a little joy when you come back.

'But mostly life is dull upon this isle
 And inclined to be a trifle limp...'
 (Reilly, 29)

These poems reflect woman's traditional role of food-provider and housekeeper. It is telling that the ironic voice in these poems does not seem to be taking the issue of the quality and availability of food for those at home too seriously. This could be partly out of a desire not to complain, but it also could be because women accorded less importance to their roles as housekeepers during wartime.

We have seen in the previous chapter how women at home were and were constructed as spectators to the war. Much of the poetry written by women at home deals with the theme of women's perceived "otherness" to war and their roles as "non-combatants". The safety of their lives at home was for some women a hated burden of guilt and shame, as asserted in Cicely Hamilton's poem, "Non-Combatant":

Before one drop of angry blood was shed
 I was sore hurt and beaten to my knee;
 Before one fighting man reeled back and died
 The War-Lords struck at me.

They struck me down - an idle, useless mouth,
 As cumbrous - nay, more cumbrous - than
 the dead...

Here Hamilton recognizes the construction of women's wartime role by propagandists and "war-lords". She relieves her shame and feelings of uselessness not by demanding an active role but by surrendering the pride which makes her resent her passivity:

That is my hurt - my burning, beating wound;
 That is the spear-thrust driven through my
 pride!
 With aimless hands, and mouth that must be fed,
 I wait and stand aside.

Let me endure it, then, with stiffened lip:
 I, even I, have suffered in the strife!
 Let me endure it then - I give my pride
 Where others give a life.

(Reilly, 46)

Hamilton evokes vividly the shame felt by the protected by using the metaphor of wounds: "my burning, beating wound/...the spear-thrust driven through my pride." Thus, women's metaphorical wounding is set against the literal wounding of men.

Muriel E. Graham expressed a similar shame in her poem "Non-Combatants":

As one who hears, far inland from the sea,

The deep-mouthed thunder, the reverberant roar
 Of unleashed waters baying at the shore,
 Challenge the rooted rocks for mastery,
 So stand we now - sheltered, defended, free.

...

And we - we stand as those on holy ground,
 Far off, with humbled heart and feet unshod.

(Graham, 52)

The humbling of the non-combatant, in contrast to Hamilton's poem, is expressed in traditional religious terms of unshod feet. The irony of the sacrifice of men for women to remain "sheltered, defended, free", is that women can never enjoy their freedom without guilt and sorrow.

May Sinclair suffered the double humiliation of the civilian; she tried to find an active role in Hector Munro's Field Ambulance in Belgium, but was sent home after two weeks. The memoir Sinclair wrote of her experiences in Belgium is in many ways a record of her humiliations, as she is physically pushed off an ambulance twice and told, "You'll take the place of a wounded man!" (Sinclair, 248) Her dedicatory poem, "To a Field Ambulance in Flanders", describes how she went to Belgium to follow the allure of "Danger":

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.

Having been pushed aside and left behind on numerous occasions by the Ambulance Corps, by the time she leaves Belgium Sinclair's humiliation is complete. She has become the "infernal nuisance" of her childhood by seeking a place in a man's game:

I began to feel like a large and useless parcel
which the Commandant had brought with him in
sheer absence of mind, and was now anxious to
lose or otherwise get rid of.

(Sinclair, 324)

Other women poets also located the roots of their constructed passive role during wartime in childhood. Rose Macaulay recalls, for instance, in "Many Sisters to Many Brothers", a childhood in which she equalled her brother:

When we fought campaigns (in the long Christmas
rains)

With soldiers spread in troops on the floor,
I shot as straight as you, my losses were as few,
My victories were as many, or more.

However, now that both are grown to adulthood their destinies have become separated by gender:

Oh, it's you that have the luck, out there
in blood and muck...

All we dreamt, I and you, you can really
go and do,

And I can't, the way things are.

In a trench you are sitting, while I am knitting
 A hopeless sock that never gets done.
 ... for me... a war is poor fun.
 (Valour & Vision, 21-22)

While this poem is partially ironic, being written in the language of childhood, Macaulay's lament of "poor fun" underlines the injustice of strictures which keep women from the possibility of fulfilling their childhood "dreams".

Nora Bomford, in "Drafts", states more explicitly the arbitrary nature of constructed gender roles which keep women safe at home:

Sex, nothing more, constituent no greater
 Than those which make an eyebrow's slant or fall,
 In origin, sheer accident, which, later,
 Decides the biggest differences of all.
 And, through a war, involves the chance of death
 Against a life of physical normality -
 So dreadfully safe! O, damn the shibboleth
 Of sex! God knows we've equal personality.
 Why should men face the dark while women stay
 To live and laugh and meet the sun each day.

(Bomford, Panttheist, 10)

The "sheer accident" decides in wartime, in effect, who will live and die. This arbitrary and "dreadful" safety is for Bomford a source of frustration, as evinced by her

outburst damning "the shibboleth of sex". This poem makes clear the resentment of a constructed safety for women who longed for an active role in the war.

This feeling of powerlessness led to some women poets cursing their own gender, as Helena Coleman does in "Tis Not the Will That's Wanted":

Would God that mine were better luck
 Than falls to the lot of woman,
 In these great days with the world ablaze
 And Britain's face to the foeman;
 In these great days when the hour has struck
 Calling for every ounce of pluck -
 God help me not to curse my luck
 That I was born a woman!

(Coleman, 11)

Coleman directs her frustration at being a woman rather than, as Bomford does, at the construction of gender which denigrates the contributions made by women in time of war.

Amy Lowell's "Patterns" describes another woman trapped in the construction of her gender. The speaker in the poem walks in a formally patterned garden arrayed in her "stiff, correct brocade". Her lover has been killed in the war and she is bound by her gown, a symbol of her constructed femininity, and her passivity:

I shall go
 Up and down,
 In my gown.
 Georgeously arrayed,
 Boned and stayed.

And the softness of my body will be guarded from
 embrace
 By each button, hook, and lace.
 For the man who should loose me is dead,
 Fighting with the Duke in Flanders,
 In a pattern called a war.
 Christ! What are patterns for?
 (Cunliffe, 165)

The woman in this poem is doubly bound by the war: trapped in her gendered role, and left bereft of the man who could release her. The frustration she feels at her situation is expressed, as in Bomford's poem, in the cursing of her lot and of the war.

The war created these feelings of powerlessness in women because their roles in wartime, if any, were purely secondary. The desire to serve, along with a shaming safety and strong artificial pressure, "became transliterated into a conviction that feminists' greatest and most obvious responsibilities in sustaining the vital strength of the nation involved those associated with domesticity" (Kent, Peace, 16), such as sewing, bandage rolling, and that ultimate wartime activity: knitting. Knitting was perceived as an acceptable and patriotic activity for women, and in the early days of war it was the only "official" war activity open to them. They set to it in a frenzy. Elmina Atkinson in "Gray Gauntlet" (War Verse, 46) and Jessie Pope in "The Knitting Song" (Pope, More War Poems, 12) describe the endless round of knitting women did during the war. This knitting was not only

perceived as a useful activity, but also as a check to nervous brooding, as in Pope's "Socks":

Shining pins that dart and click
 In the fireside's sheltered peace
 Check the thoughts that cluster thick -
 20 plain and then decrease.

He was brave - well, so was I -
 Keen and merry, but his lip
 Quivered when he said good-bye -

Purl the seam-stitch, purl and slip.

(Pope, War Poems, 21)

The punctuation of the speaker's inner monologue by knitting directions seems to reinforce the pathos of her words. Elmina Atkinson, in "Gray Gauntlet", visualizes her knitting becoming a sort of "mail" for the soldiers:

Gray Gauntlet, you of the sword must go,
 We of the spindle stay:
 And our needles speed that our lads may march
 Mail-coated in woolen gray.

(Foxcroft, War Verse, 46)

As well as the warmth knitted garments brought the soldiers, it was often superstitiously believed that garments knitted with prayer and thoughts of love would bring the bearer luck and safety.

There were women who shared the trench poets' opinion that women were not worthy of the sacrifices men were making on their behalf on the battlefields. This feeling

was exacerbated by the perception of women's gains during wartime being made at the expense of men's lives (Kent, 42). Women criticized other women for any number of faults. Helen Hamilton, in her book of "war betes-noires", criticizes some women for being "ghouls", and gaining life and enjoyment from the misfortune of others:

You strange old ghouls,
Who gloat with dulled old eyes,
Over those lists,
Those dreadful lists,
Of young men dead.

(Hamilton, 1)

She also criticizes women for being "Prudes", "Puritans", "Grouzers", "Malcontents" and "Scolds". She reserves her strongest scorn, however, for "The Jingo-Woman":

Jingo-woman
(How I dislike you!)
Dealer in white feathers,
Insulter, self-appointed,
Of all the men you meet,
Not dressed in uniform...

Do hold your tongue!
You shame us women.
Can't you see it isn't decent,
To flout and goad men into doing
What is not asked of you?

(Hamilton, 92-94)

The conversational form and tone of the poem reinforces the impression of Hamilton scolding these women.

The Jingo-woman is criticized because she abuses her status of safety. So is the subject of May O'Rourke's poem, "The Minority: 1917":

She curls her darkened lashes; manicures
 Her scented hands; rubs cream where by and by
 the tell-tale lines will gather. -
She is yours,
 O Dead! Who went to die

To save her light blue eyes from dreadful scenes,
 To keep her dainty feet from broken ways,
 Her youth from Hell - now see her as she preens
 Bright thro' the weary days,

Tinkling her silly mirth against the dread
 Calm of those lives who listen for dead feet
 That will not come again.

(Reilly, 86)

In an inversion of the traditional depiction of the protected, the beauty of the woman is used as a mark against her. Though men were sacrificed precisely to preserve the innocence of her "light blue eyes", in O'Rourke's poem the frivolity of this woman's concern with beauty cheapens the sacrifice of the men. According to O'Rourke, this woman has abused her safety by treating it lightly, without being thankful or grateful to those who purchased that safety for her.

There were women who counted themselves among the unworthy. Edith Sitwell, in the poem "The Dancers", describes the complicity of those who remain safe at home while the slaughter of those overseas take place:

The floors are slippery with blood:
 The world gyrates too. God is good
 That while His wind blows out the light
 For those who hourly die for us-
 We can still dance, each night.

The music has grown numb with death-
 But we will suck their dying breath...
 We are the dull blind carrion-fly
 That dance and batten. (Sitwell, Houses, 25)

The visceral images of death, decay and madness show the guilt and the horror of those forced to watch the slaughter of war which was ideologically constructed to be for their protection. Sitwell's brilliant image of the carrion-fly articulates the view, shared by Siegfried Sassoon in poems such as "Blighters", that those at home gained sustenance from the deaths overseas.

Women were thus caught in a double bind: not allowed to fight, they were relegated to the status of ineffectual spectator, yet they were unable to pursue a normal life without inviting scorn for their lack of reverence for the sacrificed soldiers. Women were penalized for their ideological construction because nothing they could do could equal the sacrificed lives of the soldiers.

There were women who rejected this characterization of the role of women. Evelyn Underhill, in her poem "Non-Combatants", argues that the sacrifices of women were equal to those of men:

Never of us be said
 We had no war to wage,
 Because our womanhood
 Because the weight of age,
 Held us in servitude.
 None sees us fight,
 Yet we in the long night
 Battle to give release
 To all whom we must send to seek and die for peace.
 When they have gone, we in a twilit place
 Meet Terror face to face,
 And strive
 With him, that we may save our fortitude alive.
 Theirs be the hard, but ours the lonely bed.
 Nought were we spared- of us, this word shall not
 be said. (Underhill, 115-6)

Underhill rejects the categories of combatant and non-combatant by arguing the equality of those who sacrificed loved ones and those who sacrificed their lives. Her use of short, emphatic verses and simple rhyme give weight to the convictions she expresses.

Poems written by women at home showed their reactions to wartime conditions on the home front, such as Zeppelin raids, boredom, and rationing, as well as to the construction of gender that kept them at home. Women's pride in their work, seen in the poems discussed in the last section, can be contrasted those poems of the

women in this one section, who wrote about their feelings of guilt, sorrow, complicity and anger when faced with a war overseas in which they could not take part.

IV

The sacrifices women were asked to make in war is the fourth major theme in women's poetry of the period. While men were expected to sacrifice their lives and risk losing their limbs, women were asked to sacrifice those they loved and risk a long lifetime of loneliness, grief, and often, poverty. Queen Mary, in 1928, recognized the bereavement of women in her message "To the Women of the Empire", in which she wrote:

Yet those who fell are not alone in having sacrificed all that life has to offer. Every man of our million dead may have been dearer than anything on earth to some one woman, and in every part of the Empire to-day are the women who go on living with wounds in their hearts that time cannot heal. (War Graves of the Empire, vii)

The awareness of the sacrifices women had to make in wartime informs much of women's poetry of the Great War.

Awareness of loss and potential loss is an undercurrent which runs through much of this body of work.

For example, Teresa Hooley, in the poem "A War Film", envisions sacrificing her son in some future war:

I saw,
 With a catch of the breath and the heart's
 uplifting,
 Sorrow and pride,
 The 'week's great draw' -
 The Mons retreat...
 As in a dream,
 Still hearing machine-guns rattle and shells
 scream,
 I came out into the street.

When the day was done,
 My little son
 Wondered at bath-time why I kissed him so,
 Naked upon my knee.
 How could he know
 The sudden terror that assaulted me? ...
 The body I had borne
 Nine moons beneath my heart,
 A part of me...
 If, someday,
 It should be taken away
 To War. Tortured. Torn.
 Slain.
 Rotting in No Man's Land, out in the rain -
 My little son...
 Yet all those men had mothers, every one.

The short verses and simple rhyme underscores the emotional impact of the poem. Her vision of the potential death of her son, expressed in one-word sentence fragments, is in brutal contrast to her description of his bath scene. Her connection of her infant son with the bodies in No Man's Land and with their mothers re-

humanizes the dead soldiers in the war newsreel and makes clear the human cost, for men and women, of war.

May Herschel-Clarke also envisions losing her son at the front in her poem, "The Mother":

If you should die, think only this of me
 In that still quietness where is space for
 thought,
 Where parting, loss and bloodshed shall not be,
 And men may rest themselves and dream of nought:
 That in some place a mystic mile away
 One whom you loved has drained the bitter cup
 Till there is nought to drink; has faced the day
 Once more, and now, has raised the standard up.
(Herschel-Clarke, 10)

She reverses Rupert Brooke's words in "The Soldier", "If I should die, think only this of me...", so that the death becomes her son's. Unlike the speaker in Brooke's poem, who dies to plant "a piece of England" in some foreign field and thereby gains peace and oblivion Herschel-Clarke must face her bereavement in the years to come. She is the one left who must face her bitterness and yet "raise the standard up". "The Mother" articulates the poet's awareness of what the losses on the battlefield meant for the future of those who did not fight.

In this atmosphere of potential loss, leave and leave-takings became almost unbearably poignant for those left behind. Eleanor Farjeon, in "Now that You Too",

records the strain that the awareness of the potential death of her lover creates:

Now that you too must shortly go the way
Which in these bloodshot years uncounted men
Have gone in vanishing armies day by day,
And in their numbers will not come again:
I must not strain the moments of our meeting
Striving each look, each accent, not to miss,
Or question of our parting and our greeting,
Is this the last of all? is this - or this?
(Farjeon, 49)

The pressure such anxiety placed on what may have been the last moments she and her lover would spend together is clear from the agonized questioning of the last verse.

Mothers losing their sons in war time was a prominent theme in these poems of loss and sacrifice. May Herschel-Clarke takes on the persona of a working class mother in the poem, "For Valour":

... After all, it ain't so much
To see - jest bronze, no gold nor such,
Nor nothing bright to make it grand.
Jest bronze - you wouldn't ever know,
To see it jest a-lying there,
It's really made o' golden hair,
And firm young flesh as white as snow...

Yes, that's 'is photo. Look at it.
Say, don't you think I've done my bit?...
Jest bronze... **Gawd! What a price to pay!**
(Herschel-Clark, 11-12)

The concrete imagery of her son's body and its "firm white flesh", contrasted with the dull bronze of the medal that symbolized his sacrifice, makes clear the sacrifice that was demanded of women. The last lines express both anger and resignation as she speaks of doing "her bit" and yet mourns the price she was asked to pay.

The high price mothers had to pay in wartime is also described in S. Gertrude Ford's "The Soldier's Mother":

They say I should but weep for joy
 Because the hero's death he died.
 Alas! I can but see my boy
 With that black wound along his side.

Died for his country's need? O yes!
 Men made the war; mere women we,
 Born to accept and acquiesce.
 But how long, Lord, shall these things be?

The body I built up with pain
 Through nine long moons - the mother's lot -
 Took not so long to ruin; slain
 They tell me, with a single shot.

Like Teresa Hooley, Ford contrasts the nine months of pregnancy and the lifetime of nurture that she invested in her son's life with the moment it took to end it. She also offers a critique of the gendered spheres which kept women in the home and then robbed them of their children:

O men whose kingdom was the world,
 The home, ye said, sufficed for us.
 See it in flaming havoc hurled!
 Temples we reared ye shatter thus!

Ye make the Shrine a place accursed:
 For this his life grew fair and strong,
 I bore him and I reared and nursed
 For this! O Prince of Peace, how long?
 (Ford, 22-23)

The anger and grief that accompany her sacrifice are made clear in the exclamation of the last line, as she asks God to answer for her pain.

In "Missing", Beatrice Ravenel also looks to God to answer for her bereavement:

Lord, how can he be dead?
 ... Dost Thou remember, Lord, when he was born,
 And all my heart went forth thy praise to seek...
 Master, I lit my tender candle-light
 Straight at the living fire that rays abroad
 From thy dread altar, God!
 How should it end in night?

Like Ford, she argues that war is hardest on the women who have no official part in it:

How many women in how many lands -
 Almost I weep for them as for mine own -
 That wait beside the desolate hearthstone!
 Always before the embattled army stands
 The horde of women like a phantom wall,
 Barring the way with desperate, futile hands.
 The first charge tramples them, the first
 of all!

(War Verse, 314-15)

Ravenal describes a community of women, transcending national boundaries and united in their grief and loss. The futility of their attempts to stop the war are symbolized in the image of women as phantoms, without agency. The paradox of women's losses in war, as expressed in this poem, lies in the fact that they are "trampled" by bereavement, yet must go on living.

Poems about the loss of brothers are fewer, though no less heartrending . Alys Fane Trotter dedicated a volume of poetry to her brother, Nigel, who died in the war. Vera Brittain wrote "To My Brother" to wish her brother, Edward, luck before a battle:

Your battle-wounds are scars upon my heart,
 Received when in that grand and tragic "show"
 You played your part
 Two years ago...

(Brittain, Verses, 33)

He died four days later. The impact of even the wounding of her brother is shown in the metaphor of scarring: her emotional scars match his physical ones.

Sybil Bristowe wrote "To His Dear Memory" for her brother:

Beneath the sun-lit skies
 Where bright birds wing, and rich luxuriant
 trees
 Sway in the fevered breeze,

My Brother lies.

The bending grasses woo
 His hurried grave; a cross of oak to show
 The drifting winds a Soldier sleeps below
 - Our Saviour's Cross, I know,
 Was wooden too.

(Macklin, 57)

The images of swaying trees and the wooden cross evoke a sense of calm and acceptance of his death. The reference to Christ justifies to some extent his sacrificed life, yet the image evoked of the grave is one of loneliness.

Women's losses as lovers are particularly poignant because, in most cases, they lost the chance of a shared future. Mothers had their sons close by for years and sisters their brothers, but the loss of a sweetheart lay more in the loss of possibilities than of actualities. May Wedderburn Cannan's "Lamplight" evokes these lost opportunities:

Now in the quiet of a chill Winter's night
 Your voice comes hushed to me
 Full of forgotten memories: you and I
 Dreamed great dreams of our future in those days,
 Setting our feet on undiscovered ways,
 And all I asked of fame
 A scarlet cross on my breast, my Dear,
 For the swords by your name.
 We shall never shake the world together,
 you and I,
 For you gave your life away;
 And I think my heart was broken by the war,
 Since on a summer day
 You took the road we never spoke of...

(Cannan, 70-71)

Her lover walks away on a summer day, but the speaker is left with a lifetime of evenings alone in the lamplight with her memories.

A lost future is also the subject of Kathleen Montgomery Wallace's "Because You Are Dead":

Because you are dead so many words they say.
 If you could hear them, how they crowd,
 they crowd!
 "Dying for England - but you must be proud."
 And "Greater Love" - "Honor" - "A debt to pay."
 And "Cry, dear!" some one says: and some one
 "Pray!"
 What do they mean, their words that throng
 so loud?

This, dearest, that for us there will not be
 Laughter and joy of living dwindling cold...
 This only, heart's desire, for you and me,
 We who lived love will not see love grown old.
 (War Verse, 338)

Wallace successfully contrasts the heroic rhetoric of the war, as seen in the words of others, with the actuality of her loss.

"The Armistice" by May Wedderburn Cannan also contrasts the rhetoric of victory with the reality of bereavement. She describes the announcement of the Armistice to the

girls in an office. Instead of a joyous celebration of 'victory' there is only the dull numbness of loss:

She said, 'I've told you; he was killed in June'.
The other said, 'My dear, I know; I know...
It's over for me too... My Man was killed,
Wounded and died... at Ypres... three
years ago..
And he's my Man, and I want him', she said,
And knew that peace could not give back her Dead.
(Cannan, The Splendid Days, 13)

In this poem, it is the simple words of the women which evoke the barrenness of military victory in the face of the human cost.

Elinor Jenkins also writes of the loss of a lover, but it is not the conventional one:

I loved in days that were,
A fair boy and young,
His eyes danced to an air,
That his heart sung...

My love went out from me
To walk a dark way -
Ill things to hear and see,
By night and day...

My love came back to me
A man that went a child,
Still he was fair to see,
And still he smiled...

He had grown too high for my whim.
Out of the ease of my lot
I stretched my hands to him,
And reached him not.

Oh maids that mourn, give ear,
 With ghosts ye wed;
 How shall I win my dear
 Whose heart is dead?

You grieve your loves are slain,
 'Tis worse for me,
 My love came back in vain.
 Yet 'twas not he.

(Jenkins, Last Poems, 70-71)

Jenkins recognizes the pain felt by women who lost their sweethearts entirely, but points to the loss of a love who came back so changed by war that he was no longer the man she knew. Women whose lovers actually died, she argues, had at least the ghost of their sweetheart for solace.

So it is for Anna Gordon Keown in "Reported Missing". For her, a lover's physical death is not actual death:

My thought shall never be that you are dead:
 Who laughed so lately in this quiet place.
 The dear and deep-eyed humour of that face
 Held something ever living, in Death's stead.
 Scornful I hear the flat things they have said
 And all their piteous platitudes of pain.
 I laugh! I laugh! - For you will come again -
 This heart would never beat if you were dead.

The line "You will come again" implies both a religious resurrection and a belief in love so strong that it transcends death.

Yet, despite religious faith and strong love, many women were left bereft to face the coming years alone. Mary J. Henderson describes this bereavement in "A Grave in France":

... As one who views
 At setting of the sun on level sand
 The long line of the darkening sea, I stand
 And look towards the years through which my days
 Indefinite stretch without you. Many ways
 Lead to those graves in France across the sea
 Which women deck with wreaths of memory.
 Our path of duty still leads to the grave.
 (Henderson, 11)

The image of the long stretch of dark sea beautifully renders the years of loneliness before bereaved women. The "grave" which the path of duty leads towards is both the soldier's grave and the woman's grave, towards which she must now move alone.

Images of ghosts and haunting were a frequent metaphor women poets employed to describe their post-war world. May O'Rourke, in the poem "In England", describes a nightmarish universe in which the 'wasted lives' of soldiers haunt those who cannot die:

For -
 There are ghosts abroad in England, now,
 And crying winds in England, now,
 And none forget in England, now,
 The wasted lives and powers.

Here, we who cannot even die

Live out our emptied days -
 The maimed, the blind, the witless, throng
 Our unassaulted ways.

(War Verse, 200)

The post-war world is made ghostly not only by the absence of dead loved ones, but also by the presence of those destroyed by war: "the maimed, the blind, the witless".

Marian Allen's "Charing Cross" also describes a world made ghostly by the memories of soldiers:

I went along the river-side today
 Under the railway bridge at Charing Cross.
 Where many such as you are sped away
 And we are left to wonder at your loss.
 The station echoes with your ghostly feet;
 Your laughing voices cling about each wall...

(Allen, 33)

In this case, the ghosts and their "laughing voices" are poignant reminders of happier days.

The imagery of ghosts and haunting is taken to its furthest extent in Winnifred Letts' "Hallow-e'en, 1914" and "Hallow-e'en, 1915", in which she envisions all the dead soldiers coming back to visit their homes:

We have no fear of you, silent shadows, who tread
 The leaf-bestrewn paths, the dew-wet lawns.
 Draw near
 To the glowing fire, the empty chair, - we shall
 not fear,
 Being but ghosts for the lack of you, ghosts of

our well-beloved dead.

(Letts, 4)

She reverses the ghostly imagery in the last stanza, calling the living 'ghosts' because they are substanceless without the presence of the "well-beloved dead".

The introduction to The Lyceum Book of War Verse, a 1917 anthology of women's war poetry, acknowledges the sacrifices of women in wartime and its essential difference from those of men, as revealed in women's writing:

... for the real value of the collection lies in the way it shows that the mental attitude of women towards the war is very different from that of men. Our soldier-poets either sing gaily, making light of what they seem to regard as a kind of "sport", or they speak from a high ideal point of view that lifts one above the actual facts that make war the monstrous thing it has become. Here you have over thirty women, of very varying ages, different bents of mind, living under all kinds of conditions imposed on them by the war-work one and all are doing, and almost without exception their cry comes from the depths of an overwhelming sense of tragedy. Resignation, revolt, or a striving to comfort self or others, the attitude is almost invariably the same one of suffering, of grief.

(Macklin, vii-viii)

This sense of tragedy lay not so much in war's privations or in any personal sacrifice, but instead stemmed from the long years of emptiness that stretched before many women.

Alison Lindsay's "The Toll-Payers", like Ruth Duffin's "The Woman's Toll", emphasizes the absences and loss which formed women's experiences of war:

But what remains to us, who knew
 No memories they did not share,
 The brothers and the boys who grew
 Through days and years beside us, who
 Were part of all we were?

For every light is quenched that shone
 For us, about Love's Diadem,
 And every hope we dreamed upon,
 Our future, and our past, is gone
 Into that dark with them...

Unveiled by any mist of tears
 We see the long and empty years
 Of our unmenaced lives.

When time will change us, until we
 Shall be as strangers when we go
 To greet our own, and though we see
 Them look for us, we shall not be
 The friends they used to know.

(War Verse, 143-44)

Women are left to carry on in the "long and empty years", and even the thought of reunion after death brings no solace, for those left behind will have been changed by the passage of years while the dead will remain forever young.

This feeling of being caught out of time is reiterated in Margaret Postgate Cole's "Praematuri":

So our memories are only hopes that came
to nothing.
We are left alone like old men; we should be dead
- But there are years and years in which we shall
still be young.
(Cole, 33)

Youth ceases to hold any joy, now that hopes of a shared
future can never be realised.

One of the finest poetic renderings of a woman's
experience of war is Marian Allen's "The Wind on the
Downs":

It is a rising water, deep and wide,
Which washes some away, and leaves some lonely,
Like driftwood, stranded by the ebbing tide...

A growing stillness, many empty places,
A haunted look that comes in women's eyes...

The sound of laughing voices disappearing,
The marching of a thousand eager feet,
Passing, ever passing out of hearing,
Echoing, ever echoing down the street;
A sudden gust of wind, a clanging door,
And then a lasting silence - that is war.
(Allen, 44)

Allen's use of natural images, such as water, wind and
tide, emphasizes the lack of control women, or anyone, had
over the events of the war. Her descriptions of emptiness
and loss, the "growing stillness" and "clanging door",

describe the bereavement of women which lasted long after the Armistice.

May Wedderburn Cannan, in her poem "Women Demobilized", describes the world left to women after the war's end:

Now we must go again back to the world
 Full of grey ghosts and voices of men dying...
 Now are put by the bugles and the drums,
 And the worn spurs, and the great swords they
 carried,
 Now we are made most lonely...
 Now are the Fallen happy and sleep sound,
 Now, in the end, to us is come the paying...
 Now in our hearts abides always our war,
 Time brings, to us, no day for our forgetting,
 Never for us is folded War away,
 Dawn or sun setting,
 Now in our hearts abides always our war.

(Cannan, Forgotten Army, 30).

The rhetoric of the war remembered on Armistice Day, the "bugles and the drums", is contrasted with the remembrance of war for women for whom the war and its attendant losses never ends. The real price of the war, Cannan argues, is not paid by the fallen, who are "happy and sleep sound", but by the women who must face the empty years ahead and a world of "grey ghosts and voices", from which time will bring no relief.

The poems analyzed in this chapter, written by women about their experiences of the Great War, reveal two major themes to the critical reader. The first is the description of women's war experiences themselves, from working as V.A.D.'s to enduring the strain of the home front. The second theme revealed in these writings is how women defined themselves and their roles in relationship to war. While nurses working at the front saw the brunt of the physical effects of war on men's bodies, and felt the assurance of traditional gender roles slip away as a result, most women saw both the battlefields and the rhetoric of war as something apart from themselves. The struggle to reconcile the negative emotions of the war's impact on women, whether they be shame, anger, guilt or sorrow, with a definition of war that excluded them, led to a problematization of femininity which underlies this body of writing. The struggle to define themselves, and to give voice to their experiences, is what makes women's poetry of the Great War fascinating to the historian interested in the construction of war and of gender.

Chapter Three: Images of War

Just as there was a plethora of different views on what it meant to be a woman in wartime, women poets held widely different convictions, ideas, and beliefs about the war itself. These convictions, like definitions of 'femininity', were not static for the four-year duration of the war, but there was no sharp shift in belief like that which characterizes the trench poets. Arranged thematically, writers' Great War poetry revolves around six major themes. The first, as seen in the last chapter, is women's identity in regard to war. The second is women's reactions to the prevailing atmosphere of militarism at home.

The prescribing and 'official' tone of the war on the home front, especially in its first months, was of a militant patriotism. Christobel and Emmeline Pankhurst, and with them the Women's Social and Political Union (W.S.P.U.), ceased their agitation against the state and took up the cause of war. In 1914, Christobel did a speaking tour of the United States, trying to convert Americans to the cause of the war. In 1915, the W.S.P.U. organized the famous march for women's right to work. Mrs. Pankhurst's rhetoric had dramatically shifted: "Women are going to work. They are going to save the men in the

trenches.... Three cheers for the good old country that we mean to save!" (Mitchell, 60) The W.S.P.U.'s paper The Suffragette, later renamed Britannia, became a forum for Hun-bashing, and, after 1917, Bolshevik-bashing. Others were just as quick to embrace the war. The London Times, published the "Author's Declaration of Support" for the war in September 1914 (Buitenhuis, 18). May Sinclair was one of fifty-four signees, and her romanticism and support for the war is evident in her poems and memoirs. This Declaration was only one of many propagandist statements that appeared in the British press, while from the beginning descriptions of fighting and the battlefields were heavily censored, both officially and by the newspapers themselves. Propagandists could call upon a number of popular stock images to describe and garner support for the war (Buitenhuis, 22), such as the Christian soldier, the public school ethos, sportsmanship, glory, sacrifice, and a tradition of heroic warrior literature and history dating back to Beowulf. Newspapers, posters, political speeches and popular songs all emphasized the heroic and chivalric aspects of war, focusing on the brave and gallant soldier, fighting to save his country and redeem Belgium's honour.

For some women poets, like Jessie Pope and Cicely Fox Smith, there was no need to stray from these accepted attitudes and metaphors. Their poetry reproduces

uncritically the heroic tradition, using the traditional poetic forms of ballads and songs. Other poets who championed the war's cause used the metaphors and imagery popularized by Rupert Brooke's sonnets: that of the ritual purification of England through the blood sacrifice of her young men. This thematic current runs through poets as varied as the Irish religious poet, Katherine Tynan, and the minor poet Grace Tollemache.

In direct opposition to these writers were the pacifist poets. Women such as Lady Margaret Sackville and S. Gertrude Ford were as unequivocally opposed to war as Pope and Fox Smith were supporters of it. These convictions were rooted in Christianity as well as an essentialist view of women as "naturally" opposed to war. The forms of these pacifist poems are more stylistically varied, and show the interplay of poetic tradition and radical theme. One especially interesting feature of the poems by female pacifists is the extent to which they considered themselves complicit in the war. Margaret Sackville, for instance, makes clear in her poems that she considered herself and other women at least partly responsible for the war, since they went along with the militarism of men out of fear and pride. The pacifist poet, S. Gertrude Ford, in contrast, absolved women from responsibility since they were excluded from the political life of the nation. The fact that this exclusion was not

nessessarily a matter of choice is where the two arguments diverge; in Sackville's opinion, women should have made the business of the nation their concern.

The ambivalence seen to some extent in the pacifist poems is much more marked in a significant portion of women's Great War poetry. Much of this poetry did not subscribe to either absolutist view, but instead sought a middle ground between the two. The interplay between patriotism and resistance in the narratives of these poems provides a fascinating insight into the tensions inherent in women's perspective on war and how these complications impact on form.

The third theme prevalent in British women's war poetry is the pastoral. Nature had been a popular theme for poets since the Romantics, and the pre-war Georgians also used the natural world as a favourite subject. Nature, in its use by women writers of the war, became as problematized as did femininity and patriotism. The beauty of the natural world, especially that of England in the spring, becomes the supreme irony of war, that the natural world continues to bloom at home while overseas scenes of mass human carnage are being enacted. Underlying these poems are the same themes of complicity and guilt, as women look at the natural beauty around them and see it ransomed with soldier's lives.

The fourth major theme in this body of work is that of spirituality. Women poets used ideas of God and spirituality much as they did those of patriotism, to reinforce the position they held on the war. Pacifists employed the example of Christ, especially his words to Peter at Gethsemene, to argue for the immorality of war. Other poets, like Katherine Tynan, spoke of a holy war; since soldiers would go to heaven and attain eternal felicity as young heroes, war and the soldier's deaths were glorious in a religious sense as well as a heroic one. Between these poles was the idea of Christ as a friend to the soldier, neither telling him to put up his sword nor leading him forward to eternal bliss, but an everyday role model. Thus, religion also provides a metaphor and a justification for women's views on the war.

One of the most frequent criticisms of women's war poetry, then as now, centers on its accuracy. If women were excluded from the major theatres of war, how could they write war poetry? The fourth theme of British women's literary work revolves around justifying their imaginative vision of war. This was done mainly by taking on male narrative personae. What better way to bridge the metaphorical gap between soldier and civilian than by making an imaginative leap over it? These poems, as well as those by women poets written about men, also show the problematization of masculinity by war. They provide an

insight into the problems of identification cast up by war and are, in themselves, a powerful argument for the legitimacy of the imaginative vision of women in regard to war.

The last theme of women's war poetry does not center upon war, but rather looks ahead to what will come afterwards. These poems are almost without exception melancholy, from the traditional appeal for remembrance of the dead to apocalyptic visions of the future. Perhaps it is these bleak visions that reveal more than anything the cost of war for women: they cannot imagine a bright future for themselves or for others.

Women's poetry of the Great War is a varied body of work. But underlying the different themes and metaphors are two currents: the tension between militaristic patriotism, resistance to it and women's complicity in war, and the movement between hope and loss, between pastoral beauty and mass human death. The political and the emotional thus both underly women's war poetry, as they do men's. In periods of massive loss and bereavement caused by political considerations, these two are indeed inseparable.

The most organized and self-conscious group of women writers of the war, both politically and artistically, were the pacifists. Pacifism had a long, if not always illustrious, history in Britain. Various new pacifist groups and organizations sprang up in 1914 after the failure of the Peace Society to prevent a declaration of war, the largest being the No-Conscription Fellowship formed in November 1914 (Ceadel, 30). British pacifism was made up of two strands: socialism and Christianity. Socialists objected to the political ends for which capitalist governments fought wars, while pacifist Christians - mostly Christadelphians, Quakers and Non-Conformists - objected to the waging of war on moral grounds. The two strands were intertwined in that socialism in Britain evolved from liberal Christianity and, for some, socialism was a religion. For pacifist women, gender was another locus of their convictions. Belief in essential gender roles made women the repository of spiritual values and therefore the 'natural' opponents of war. The Hague Peace Congress of April 1915 was attended by over 1,000 delegates representing 12 countries, a considerable feat in wartime (Ouditt, 137). This conference was condemned as treasonous by Mrs. Pankhurst and Mrs. Fawcett of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (N.U.W.S.S.), as well as by the British government who refused transport at the last

minute to the 180 British delegates under the guise of protecting them from the submarine menace in the North Sea (Mitchell, 316). The list of resolutions produced by the conference was similar to Wilson's Fourteen Points, urging international disarmament, the creation of a League of Nations and female suffrage (Mitchell, 318). The Conference was marred, however, by an "atmosphere of soporific platitudes." Amy Lillingston, a former suffragette, objected to the pious attitudes of those present, saying: "For every hundred women ready to come to this Congress a thousand are ready to fight. We know that most women are quite as ready to fight as men. Why go on saying old silly things and platitudes which men have seen through a hundred years ago?" (Mitchell, 317) She could barely make herself heard over the hostile hissing. Gender was thus a primary grounds for pacifism in most female pacifists.

After conscription was invoked in March 1916, conscientious objectors, of whom there were 16,500 by the end of the war (Ceadel, 32), were conscripted into alternative service or sent to prison. More often than not it was women who took over the management of and agitation for pacifist organizations, sometimes going to prison themselves.

Lady Margaret Sackville, daughter of the Seventh Earl of Warr, was a prominent pacifist and poet, belonging to

the Union for Democratic Control, which called for direct democratic control of foreign policy. Like most female pacifists, she saw women as bound together in a mutual community, as expressed in her poem "Reconciliation":

When all the stress and all the toil is over,
 And my lover lies sleeping by your lover,
 With alien earth on hands and brows and feet,
 Then we may meet...

We who are bound by the same grief for ever,
 When all our sons are dead may talk together,
 Each asking pardon from the other one
 For her dead son.

(Sackville, 256)

In this case the women of warring nations are linked by their love for their dead sons and lovers, who also are bound together in death. However, in "Nostra Culpa", Sackville argues that women had to bear responsibility for the war since their silence had made war possible:

We knew, this thing at least we knew, -
 the worth
 Of life: this was our secret learned at birth.
 We knew that Force the world has deified,
 How weak it is. We spoke not, so men died.
 Upon a world down-trampled, blood-defiled,
 Fearing that men should praise us less,
 we smiled.

... We feared the scorn
 Of men; men worshipped pride; so were they led,
 We followed. Dare we now lament our dead?

... **Our** hands prepared these blood-drenched,

dreadful lands.
 What shall we plead? That we were deaf and blind?
 We mothers and we murderers of mankind.
 (Forgotten Army, 7)

Here, women are characterized as dependent on the admiration of men, and afraid to risk their scorn. The last two lines are especially powerful, with the two questions of responsibility culminating in an answer which juxtaposes seeming opposites - mother and murderer.

Margaret Sackville's creed demands as much of women as it did of men. Her best poetry, however, plays upon the chivalric mode of war poetry which Rupert Brooke popularized in his war sonnets. In "Sacrament", she uses the metaphor of the Eucharist, just as Brooke did:

Before the Altar of the world in flower,
 Upon whose steps thy creatures kneel in line,
 We do beseech Thee in this wild Spring hour,
 Grant us, O Lord, Thy wine. But not this
 wine.

(Sackville, 258)

But unlike Brooke, who regards the blood of youth as an abstract purification of the nation, Sackville sees it in concrete human terms:

Helpless, we, praying by Thy shimmering seas,
 Beside Thy fields, whence all the world is fed,
 Thy little children clinging about Thy knees,
 Cry: "Grant us, Lord, Thy bread!" But not
 this bread.

This wine of awful sacrifice outpoured;
This bread of life - of human lives.

Thus, she reduces the chivalric myth by exposing the corporeal reality of mass death it conceals.

She is not only critical of war and patriotic myths, but also of the period between hostilities that passes for peace. In "The Fighters" she describes how soldiers were consoled by death "for all life promised and might not give". But this sacrifice results not in glory but an ambiguous "peace":

So from our exultation may take shape
Peace which is neither merchandise nor lust,
Nor that false ease men hunger to escape,
Which is but war without the bayonet thrust.

Flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, we die
To give peace birth - peace once born among men,
Deformed and stained and twisted into a lie:
We die to bring that peace to earth again.
(Sackville, 261-262)

Thus, the sacrifices asked of and given by men are shown to be ultimately in vain in a militaristic society.

Sackville further exposed the horrible face of a war-like society in "The Pageant of War." Here she describes a pageant coming down a road made white with the trampled bones of men, women and children sacrificed in the name of war "since the world began." The pageant consists of the figure of War, described as appallingly hideous:

He had to wear a mask, lest seeing
 That obscene countenance too near,
 The heart of every human being
 Should shrink in loathing and in fear,
 And turn upon this thing and slay it there.
 (Sackville, 268)

Following War are the "pitiful, bright army of the dead",
 who

Saw not, or saw too late,
 The face of him
 To whom so willingly they sacrificed,
 And whom had come to them disguised
 In the garb sometimes of Peace, sometimes
 of Christ.

Again Sackville tears down the myths used to justify the waging of war, whether they be Christian doctrine or the belief that a just war creates peace. This path and pageant of war - the "road which every land has trod / Since the beginning of its story" (Sackville, 271) - is the means and end of a militaristic society. This thoughtful and passionate critique of war and a warring society is all the more remarkable because it was written in 1914, when most of Britain felt only excitement and rapture about the war.

Another prominent British pacifist poet was S. Gertrude Ford. She was a Christian pacifist, belonging to the predominantly Quaker and non-conformist Fellowship of

Reconciliation. Their creed was not based on literal interpretation of the Bible, but instead argued: "Love, as revealed and interpreted in the life and death of Jesus Christ, involves more than we have yet seen, that it is the only power by which evil can be overcome, and the only sufficient basis of human society." (Ceadel, 36) In the poem "In the Twentieth Century", Ford describes how war has dimmed the lustre of Love:

Twenty centuries! A scar
 Like a brand on each is set:
 Twenty centuries of war,
 And the world, from sea to sea, is warring yet!
 And, unslaked and unsufficed,
 Blood-lust, choosing Cain for Christ,
 Reigns; and Mars' red glare above
 Dims thy silver lustre, Love!
 And the nations still are torn with feud and fret.
 (Ford, Poems of War and Peace, 11)

Her poems rely much more on classical and Christian imagery than Margaret Sackville's, and she writes in a more formal style, using more complex syntax and archaic pronouns. Her vision of war in "C'est La Guerre" is apocalyptic:

The race depleted, dwindling; whole lands lying
 'Twixt agony and torpor; fields untilled
 And homes unbuilt; none left to plough or build;
 The widowed wife, the child unfathered crying;
 And, all night long, a deeper, sadder sighing,
 Desecrate maidenhood's; the green bud killed
 Ere it could open; all earth's sunshine chilled,
 A carnival of death, a world-wide dying!

This monster ravening on our best, this dragon
 Slain, yet, by no St. George; this ghastly scar
 On life's fair face; this over-foaming flagon
 Filled with heart's blood for wine...

(Ford, A Fight To the Finish, 8)

She uses images of waste and neglect, focusing on the pastoral, the untilled field and green bud killed, to emphasize the unnaturalness of war. She reverses the metaphor of the dragon traditionally used to portray the enemy, and used in war posters on both sides, and employs it to depict War itself. In "A Conscientious Objector", the C.O. becomes a Christ-like figure:

They bound him, mocked, maltreated; wounded sore
 They left him, crying "Coward". So once the rude
 Cries of the crowd rang round the Tree that bore
 Leaves for the healing of the nations strewed.
 Few then His followers; now, the wide world o'er,
 Behold them as the stars for multitude.

(Ford, Fight, 7)

Traditionally used to portray the soldier and his sacrificed life, the Christ metaphor here alludes to how C.O.s were mocked, imprisoned and made to suffer for their pacifist beliefs. Like the spread of Christianity to all the nations, Ford sees the spread of pacifism as inevitable. Just as Ford emphasizes a different source of her pacifism than Margaret Sackville, she also views the role and nature of women and their relation to war

Tilford Dargan's poem, "Beyond War", attacks the rhetoric of war:

For "honor" lift we dripping hands.
 For "home" we loose the storm of steel
 Till over earth Thy homeless reel.
 For "country!" - Thine are all the lands.
 We pray, but thou hast seen our dead
 Who knew not why they bled.
 (Verse, 42)

Like Ford, Dargan's pacifism has its locus in Christian internationalism, but instead of a biblical metaphor she uses the more visceral imagery of "dripping hands" and the "storm of steel". Josephine Preston Peabody was another American pacifist poet, whose poems are more abstract and metaphysical. For instance, in her poem "Harvest Moon", she dramatizes a conversation between a woman and the moon:

But we were crazed...
 We should laugh now together, I and you;
 We two.
 You, for your ever dreaming it was worth
 A star's while to look on, and light the earth;
 And I, for ever telling to my mind
 Glory it was and gladness, to give birth
 To human kind.
 I gave the breath, - and thought it not amiss,
 I gave the breath to men,
 For men to slay again;
 Lording it over anguish, all to give
 My life, that men might live,
 For this.

(Peabody, 1-2)

The style is markedly different from the other pacifist poets, with a modernist stanza structure and simple diction. In her poem, "The Hunted", she imagines the conversations of animals hunted by man, now set free because man is hunting man:

Come out of exile, come, come: the
 harvest fields grow gaunt.
 The over-lord, he has gone his way.
 Lordlier spoil is his today.
 Beasts of burden and beasts of prey,
 Why will you suffer want?

... They have made them gods out of iron
 and blood; and they plough a smouldering
 path.
 Blind and blinded, they follow now, the eyeless
 gods of wrath.

(Peabody, 77)

Now it is the hunter who is "goaded / and yoked, he plods / Under a scourge of knotted lies." (Peabody, 78)

Peabody's verse shows how pacifism can escape the mere refutation of militarist rhetoric, and find its own metaphors and images.

Thus, women's pacifist verse calls on a variety of traditional and innovative forms and metaphors in its attempt to expand conventional notions of war.

At the opposite end of the spectrum were those women poets who accepted and promoted the war unreservedly. The most famous of such propagandists is Jessie Pope, to whom

Wilfred Owen originally and bitterly dedicated "Dulce Et Decorum Est". Pope's poetry was simplistic and jingoistic, as in the poem "The Call":

Who's for the trench -
 Are you my laddie?
 Who'll follow French -
 Will you my laddie?
 Who's fretting to begin,
 Who's going out to win?
 And who wants to save his skin -
 Do you, my laddie?

(Pope, War Poems, 8)

This type of poetry was aimed at potential army recruits, and emphasized the glory of war and the shame of wanting to save one's skin. Cicely Fox Smith wrote in a similar vein, as in the poem "Saint George of England":

Saint George he was a fighting man, he's here
 and fighting still
 While any wrong is yet to right or Dragon yet
 to kill,
 And faith! he's finding work this day to suit
 his war-worn sword,
 For he's strafing Huns in Flanders to the glory
 of the Lord.

(Treasury, 23)

Appealing to British heroic figures and the glory of God was a stock theme of propagandist poetry. The simple ballad form of rhyming stanzas was also designed to make the poems appeal to a wide popular audience.

... Paradise now is the soldiers' land,
 Their own country its shining sod,
 Comrades all in a merry band;
 And the young Knights' laughter pleaseth God.
 (Treasury, 301)

That boys with "barely the down on the lip" are dying is transmuted into a pleasure for God, and battlefield wounds become "glorious" jewels. These two rhetorics, of patriotic and religious sacrifice, both glorifying the deaths of the young, form the main theme of patriotic poetry written during the war.

In between the two poles of pacifism and jingoism falls the majority of women's war poetry. In this group, the interplay of patriotism and resistance can be seen, as well as varying degrees of criticism and acceptance. One of the best examples the combination of these themes is Winnifred Letts' poem, "The Deserter". In it she describes the deserter thus:

There was a man, - don't mind his name,
 Whom Fear dogged by night and day.
 He could not face the German guns
 And so he turned and ran away.
 Just that - he turned and ran away.

At first, the deserter is absolved:

But who can judge him, you or I?
 God makes a man of flesh and blood
 Who yearns to live and not to die.
 And this man when he feared to die
 Was scared as any frightened child,

His knees were shaking under him...

But this fear is then characterized as shameful both to the soldier and the observer:

But oh! it shames one's soul to see
A man in abject fear of death.

The deserter suffers the military penalty for his crime:

They shot him when the dawn was grey.
Blindfolded, when the dawn was grey,
He stood there in a place apart,
The shots rang out and down he fell,
An English bullet in his heart.
An English bullet in his heart!

The repetition of "English bullet" is ambiguous, underlying

both the irony of being shot by your own side, and the "English" valour which the deserter apparently lacked.

There is another irony in this situation:

But here's the irony of life, -
His mother thinks he fought and fell
A hero, foremost in the strife.
So she goes proudly; to the strife
Her best, her hero son she gave.
O well for her she does not know
He lies in a deserter's grave.

(Letts, 30-31)

That it is best for the mother that she not know the truth about her son implies the shamefulness of both the act of

desertion and the execution. This line of logic, by extension, implies that blissful ignorance and the willing acceptance of lies is sometimes preferable to knowing the truth; needless shame can be avoided and patriotic fervour is sustained intact. Letts herself falls short of drawing such a conclusion. The ambiguity, however, of this poem points to the tension between patriotism and the resistance to sacrifice.

Elinor Jenkins' poem "Dulce et Decorum?" also explores this tension. The poem begins with a description of a funeral which evokes the images of Rupert Brooke's poetry:

We buried of our dead the dearest one -
Said each to other, "Here then let him lie,
And they may find the place, when all is done,
From the old may tree standing guard near by.

There is, however, a dramatic reversal in the third stanza:

For we, that loved him, covered up his face,
And laid him in the sodden earth away,
And left him lying in that lonely place
To rot and moulder with the mouldering clay.

Here, the sacrifice of youth moves from the rhetorical to the actual - the physical decomposition of the slain soldier. In the final stanza, added at a later date, the tone shifts again:

Oh Lord of Hosts, no hallowed prayer we bring,
 Here for Thy grace is no importuning,
 No room for those that will not strive nor cry
 When lovingkindness with our dead lies slain:
 Give us our fathers' heathen hearts again,
 Valour to dare, and fortitude to die.
 (Jenkins, Poems, 35)

Instead of a Christian message of redemption and resurrection, Jenkins appeals to a Roman ideal of sacrifice: the "fortitude to die". The tension between the various rhetorics of the war - the picturesque grave, the mouldering body, and the Roman sacrifice - imply a narrator moving between ideological poles, searching for a definitive vision of the war.

Emily Orr's "Europe at War" uses the metaphor of salt water causing madness in sailors to describe the state of Europe at war:

If shipwrecked sailors in their madness sip
 A beaker of the salt flood's flowing brine,
 The burning draught - far other than the vine -
 Will pour redoubled thirst upon each lip.

The "true Vine" of Christ is "shed from every vein" for sinners' thirst, which implies that soldiers killed on the battlefield are akin to the crucified Christ. Yet, "we ingrates coldly watch Thee bleed" and

More wild than frenzied seamen do we seize

Upon the cup of staggering and woe.
 Salt tides of sorrow wash us to and fro,
 And yet we dip our vessels in such seas.
 (Orr, 31)

That the author consistently uses the pronoun "we" argues that she is complicit with the madness of the European war. This tension between condemnation and complicity informs much of women's war poetry.

One reason that many women felt they had to support the war was for the sake of the memory of their dead. If they came to feel the war was senseless, then the sacrifice of their loved ones would have been in vain, and their deaths just as meaningless. This struggle is the subject of Edith Nesbit's "The Mother's Prayer", in which a mother strives to come to terms with the death of her son in the war. The final stanzas contain a feverish plea to God:

We have watched on till the light burned low,
 And watched the dawn awake;
 We have lived hardly and hardly fared
 For our sons' sake.
 All that was good in Thy earth,
 All that taught us of Heaven,
 All that we had in the world
 We have given.
 We pray with empty hands
 And hearts that are stiff with pain.
 O God! O God! O God!
 Let the sacrifice not be in vain.
 This is his blood, Lord, see!
 His blood that was shed for Thee;
 Thy banner is dyed in that red tide

Lord, take Thy victory!

(Nesbit, 89)

The speaker pleads on behalf of women that the "sacrifice not be in vain" for the British to gain not only victory but righteousness, and thus to legitimize the deaths of their sons. For if the war was lost, or shown to be unrighteous, then the deaths of loved ones would be in vain and therefore meaningless.

We have seen in these poems, from the pacifists to the jingoists, the complex interplay of identification with and resistance to war and the rhetoric of war. Despite the fairly clear distinctions between groups, it would not be overstatement to say that that each poet had her own individual view towards and metaphors for war, much as did the trench poets.

II

The Romantic literary movement of the seventeenth century introduced nature to poetry as a subject, rather than a metaphor. This fascination with the natural world found its continuance in the Georgian movement of pre-war Britain. Though the Georgians claimed to be breaking away from the Romantic tradition, in their fascination with the

rural, the homely and the pastoral they were continuing that Romantic tradition. What defined their verse was a sense of "shared spiritual euphoria that poetry was being infused with a new vital release of creative energy" (Ross, 125), a sense of being modern and of perceived freedom from Victorian literary artifice.

The Georgians were possibly the most influential literary movement of the early days of the twentieth century, especially in regard to its influence on war poetry. Because its focus was on an unaffected realism, especially in its treatment of the natural world, Georgian poetry opened the door to realistic descriptions of the battlefields and trenches by the soldier poets and others.

The Georgians were known, if somewhat reductively, for their homely and picturesque descriptions of nature. An example of traditional Georgian imagery is A. Vivian Bunbury's poem, "The Two"

A tender love between us twined, and death
 is hard to bear -
 And at the first I could not find courage to
 stem despair;
 I did not know how I should find your presence
 everywhere,
 In the trees and woods and wilds and desert
 places.

(Cambridge Poets, 35)

She finds comfort in nature because her memories of her lover are echoed therein. Nature here becomes a benign comforter, as in much Georgian poetry.

For some poets, however, the realism of the Georgians translated into irony. Some of the most striking poems by women on the war are ones which take conventional descriptions of England's pastoral beauty and contrast them with realistic and horrifying descriptions of conditions overseas. The brutal contrast and visceral images make these some of the most effective poems for demonstrating the horrors of war.

The most popular theme of war poetry concerned with nature is the irony of spring in wartime. The natural world's rebirth and regeneration is contrasted with the human world's preoccupation with war. In her poem "June, 1915", Charlotte Mew contrasts the worlds of nature and war:

Who thinks of June's first rose to-day?
 Only some child, perhaps, with shining eyes
 and rough bright hair will reach it down
 In a green sunny lane, to us almost as far away
 As are the fearless stars from these veiled
 lamps of town.
 What's little June to a great broken world
 with eyes gone dim
 From too much looking on the face of grief,
 the face of dread?
 Or what's the broken world to June
 and him
 Of the small eager hand, the shining eyes,
 the rough bright head?

(Mew, 76)

The two worlds are almost totally discrete, with the child caring as little for the world of grief and war as that world cares for the rose. The natural world is considered the superior reality, like the stars as compared with streetlights. The idea of separate realities is also emblematic of the poems which compare the trenches with spring in England. In the mediocre poem, "From a Trench", Maud Anna Bell takes the voice of a soldier to emphasize the separation of pastoral felicity from the horrors of the war, and to emphasize the necessity of one in order to maintain the other:

Why!
 There are crocuses at Nottingham!
 Bright crocuses at Nottingham!
 Real crocuses at Nottingham!
 Because we're here in Hell.

(Treasury, 159)

This same theme is explored more eloquently in Norah M. Holland's "April in England". She emphasizes the longing of soldiers to share the beauty of English nature:

April in England. Daffodils are growing
 By every wayside, golden, tall and fair;
 April - and all the little winds are blowing
 The scents of springtime though the sunny air.
 April in England. God, that we were there.

This pleasant landscape is then contrasted with the horrors of the trenches:

April in England. Blood and dust and smother,
Screaming of horses, men in agony,
April - full man of thy sons, O Mother,
Never again those dewy dawns shall see
April in England. God keep England free.
(Cunliffe, 133).

The short, terse end sentence suggests a concealed surfeit of emotion, a longing for England, an acceptance of probable mortality and patriotic feeling. The thought that dead soldiers will miss England's spring is also present in Muriel Elsie Graham's "Persephone in Picardy". In this poem she appeals to Persephone, goddess of spring and queen of the underworld:

Your shadowy realms are thronged , Persephone,
The gates wide open stay,
The heroes of the past rise up to greet
Brave hearts that die to-day,
Young eyes that see no more the flowering earth
You visit year by year,
So for your dead youth's sake, Persephone,
Hold our dead sons more dear.
(Graham, 73)

Through Persephone's dual role, the dead sons of England can once again be close to spring.

Those at home, able to enjoy the pastoral pleasures the soldiers were denied, had to take account of the cost

poem begins with a description of an abundant harvest in England. Then the scene turns to Flanders:

And while this rose made round her cup,
 The armies died convulsed. And when
 This chaste young silver sun went up
 Softly, a thousand shattered men,
 One wet corruption, heaped the plain,
 After a league-long throb of pain.

Flower following tender flower; and birds,
 And berries; and benignant skies
 Made thrive the serried flocks and herds. -
 Yonder are men shot through the eyes.
 Love, hide thy face
 From man's unpardonable race.

(Meynell, 69)

The imagery is evocative of both beauty and horror, and the romantic descriptions of pastoral beauty contrast dramatically with the visceral details of men's deaths on the battlefield. Muriel Stuart's "It's Rose-Time Here..." also makes use of the rose as a symbol of England's pastoral tranquility. The rose symbolizes the soldiers too, : "Those heavenly roses, torn and tossed about / On the vast plains of Death". The description then dwells on a much less rhapsodic image:

All, all, that once was ours
 Lies faceless, mouthless, mire in mire,
 So lost to all sweet semblance of desire
 That we in those fields seeking desperately
 One face long-lost to Love, - one face that lies
 Only upon the breast of Memory -
 Would never know it - even though we stood

Katharine Tynan, the daughter of an Irish farmer and a popular poet, used Christian metaphor to show the war as a form of Christian redemption. In "To Two Bereaved" she offers consoling words to parents whose two sons have been killed:

Now in your days of worst distress,
 The empty days that stretch before,
 When all your sweet's turned bitterness; -
 The Hand of the Lord is at your door...

The Lord recalls not gifts once given:
 They shall sit down beside your hearth;
 They shall come in, in white, new-shriven,
 Make you new Heaven and a new earth.

The Will of the Lord is great and good,
 The cup of your joy shall He brim o'er;
 They shall come in with life renewed.
 They shall go out from you no more.
 (Tynan, 44-45)

She argues that only in death will parents be able to keep their sons by the hearth forever, and thus bereavement is a blessing from God. The paradox of this argument in logical terms is central to Christian spiritual doctrine, that only in death can eternal life be attained.

In the poem, "Flower of Youth", Tynan describes the felicities of a heaven populated by the young:

Lest Heaven be thronged with grey-beards hoary,
 God, who made boys for His delight,
 Stoops in a day of grief and glory
 And calls them in, in from the night.
 When they come trooping from the war

Our skies have many a new gold star.

Heaven's thronged with gay and careless faces,
 New-waked from dreams of dreadful things,
 They walk in green and pleasant places
 And by the crystal water-springs...

(Tynan, 54)

This sentimental rendering of death - God calling soldiers in from the night - is used both to normalize death and to emphasize the boyishness of the soldiers. Heaven is portrayed as the true reality, and the "dreadful things" of the battlefield are only dreams. Those who grieve are exhorted to accept this reality:

Oh, if the sonless mothers weeping,
 And widowed girls could look inside
 The glory that hath them in keeping
 Who went to the Great War and died,
 They would rise and put their mourning off,
 And say: "Thank God, he has enough!"

(Tynan, 55)

Again, the soldier's death is portrayed as a gift from God, for now he will lack nothing. Tynan may be an extreme example of traditional Christian rhetoric, for she argues that the only reality is God's Heaven, and that earthly things are of little importance, but this belief that all soldiers attain felicity through the glory of God in battle informs much of the heroic rhetoric of war.

Lucy Whitmell, the wife of a vicar, looks at a different aspect of religion in her poem "With Christ in

Flanders". Rather than using abstract concepts of Christian spiritual belief, like "glory", Whitmell imagines how thoughts of Christ help comfort the men in the trenches:

Now we remember: over here in Flanders,
 (It isn't strange to think of You in Flanders),
 This hideous warfare seems to make things clear

...

You helped to pass the jest along the trenches,
 Where in cold blood we waited in the trenches,
 You touched its ribaldry and made it fine.

...

We think about You kneeling in the Garden...
 We know You prayed for us upon the Cross.
 If anything could make us glad to bear it,
 'Twould be the knowledge that You willed
 to bear it,

Pain - death - the uttermost of human loss.

(Valour and Vision, 70)

Christ becomes a comrade, a sharer in trench life and its jests. Though wartime suffering and death is still portrayed as the will of God, it is the will of God humanized, prayed for by a man suffering on his own, personal cross. The final stanza is almost a prayer:

Though we forgot You - You will not forget us,
 We feel so sure that You will not forget us,
 But stay with us until this dream is past.
 And so we ask for courage, strength and pardon,
 Especially, I think we ask for pardon,
 And that you'll stand beside us at the last.

The soldiers ask Christ to be the perfect friend and stand by them until "this dream has passed". No mention is made of afterlife - Christ here is not the King of Heaven but the best friend of man.

The enigmatic figure of Christ was also used to signify different aspects of war. Helen Parry Eden, in the poem "The Great Rebuke", uses Christ's words to Peter to criticize the militarism of the war, and all use of physical force. She describes how Peter cut off the ear of a Roman guard when he came to arrest Jesus. Jesus rebuked him, saying "Put up thy sword", and healed the guard's ear. This is taken to be the strongest invocation against violence:

See,
 O World, the lovely evidence -
 True lesson of Gethsemane -
 That Heaven on Earth disdained defence.
 (Eden, 77)

The words of God are the weapons which will conquer war:

Never, Oh never yet, will war,
 Howe'er so poisonous root and stem,
 Lack the assurance of a star
 Outdazzling His of Bethlehem
 Till Truth and Innocence reprove
 Their ghastly champions with His word -
 Who chid the violence even of love -
 "Put up thy sword." "Put up thy sword."
 (Eden, 79)

Jesus' exhortation to Peter was the basis of much pacifist belief, and Christ was seen by pacifists as one of their own.

Aelfrida Tillyard takes religion beyond militarism and pacifism. In the poem, "In the Time of War", she argues not only that it is morally wrong to fight in the war, but that it might also be better if Britain lost:

But if we win, and with our victory
Gain lands and gold and hatred of the foe,
Lust of this world, and blood-stained pride
That holds Thy white humility in scorn,
Better to forgo such spoils; - nay, best to know
The utter blinding shame of sheer defeat.
Lay Thou, O Lord, Thy lash across our backs,
Bow these our stubborn heads, and from our hands
Strike down the sword. Cut short our triumph-
songs
And bind our souls with helplessness and fear.

Then the enslaved Britons would have no choice but to turn to God:

God, God alone should be our king; His name
Our glorious sigil and our pride. Homeless,
We turn to Him, as waters seek the sea;
Lord God of Hosts, we need no home but Thee!
(Tillyard, 3-4)

Like Tynan, Tillyard is arguing that God supercedes the importance of earthly matters; but the two poets use their beliefs to come to opposite conclusions.

Christ and Christian metaphors were used by poets to legitimize and express their attitudes towards war. While these attitudes usually revolved around morality, in the cases of Tynan and Tillyard, for example, Christian metaphor could also be used as a comfort in the most everyday sense, as in Lucy Whitnell's "Christ in Flanders". Closely held Christian belief was one of the determining factors in attitudes towards war, and religious poems about war reflect both the variety of these beliefs and the intensity of their possession.

IV

As has been said in the first chapter, and as will be argued in the last, it is from the popular acceptance of the views of the trench poets, misogynistic as they were, that much of the mythology and conventional wisdom of the effects of war sprang. It was, and is, alleged that the Great War and the horrible sights of the trenches created a gulf of experience between soldier and civilian, or more specifically between men and women, which could not be bridged. This gap was considered absolute both in society and in literature: women's war writings were therefore considered peripheral.

But artists, and indeed people in general, are not limited to their subjectivity and the realm of their personal experience. What A. Banerjee condemns Wilfred Owen as being incapable of, "imaginative suffering" (Banerjee, 32), is the artistic quality which allows women poets to write realistically about the front. Letters and visits from soldiers, as well as the imagination to look beyond the platitudes of propaganda, gave women the materials they needed to create topical and accurate poetic renderings of the life of the soldier. These poems about soldiers form the fifth major theme of women's war poetry.

War poetry is not bound absolutely by the topicality of its detail. Women's war poetry, like men's, did not always measure up to these standards. War poetry, marked with the excitement of patriotism and a range of tumultuous emotions, easily succumbed to the jingoistic and the maudlin. Excess of romanticism also marred some poetry, as in Helen Coale Crew's "Sing Ye Trenches":

Sing, ye trenches bloody lipped!
 Sing! For into you has slipped
 Lycidas, dead ere his prime.
 All ye cruel trenches sing!
 ... Now, cunningly,
 April, with sweet mystery,
 Molds the trenches horror-lipped
 Into chalices of spring

(Verse, 37)

The trenches did not lend themselves well to metaphors inspired by romantic sensibility.

Other women poets with clearer eyes gave more accurate descriptions of conditions in the trenches. Alice Meynell's "Summer in England" and Muriel Stuart's "It's Rose-Time Here..." are two of the finest poetic renderings of the horrible conditions in Flanders. Margery Lawrence, in her poem "Transport of Wounded in Mesopotamia, 1917", describes the conditions in the Middle East:

You who sat safe at home
 And let us die
 You who said "all was well"
 And knew the lie...
 (Fever and flies and sand
 Sand and fever and flies
 Till the end of each weary day
 Saw the wearier night arise!)

You who sat safe at home
 And let us die!

(Lawrence, 29)

The repetition of the words "fever", "sand" and "flies" emphasizes that these were the mainstays of a desert landscape, and a source of despair for the soldiers. Lawrence's narrator's anger at the civilian populace at home echoes that of the trench poets, especially Siegfried Sassoon.

Poems in the voice of a soldier were a popular theme for women poets, and not all narrators were as angry as

Lawrence's. Aelfrida Tillyard's soldier in "Letter from an Ealing Broadway Station" thinks fondly of his friends at university:

I wonder who has got my rooms!
 I like to think that Frank is there,
 And Willie in the basket-chair...
 The smoke-rings rise, and we discuss
 Friendship, and What Life Means to Us,
 What it is that the kitchens lack
 And where we'll take our tramp next vac.
 Those girls at Newnham whom I taught
 I'll spare them each a thought...
 (Tillyard, 5)

This soldier, obviously an upper middle or upper class student, is not at the front, but guarding Ealing Broadway Station. Thus, he might be expected to escape disillusionment and anger, not having been to the Front.

May Herschel-Clarke and Sybil Bristowe use a very different type of soldier-narrator. In "Over the Top", Bristowe imagines the inner monologue of a British Tommy during the countdown before battle:

Ten more minutes! - Say yer prayers,
 Read yer Bibles, pass the rum!
 Ten more minutes! Strike me dumb,
 'Ow they creeps on unawares,
 Those blooming minutes. Nine. It's queer,
 I'm sorta stunned. It ain't with fear!

Eight. It's like as if a frog
 Waddled round in your inside,
 Cold as ice blocks, straddle wide,
 Tired o'waiting. Where's the grog?

(Lyceum, 13)

Bristowe describes in the working class vernacular of the "Tommy" the nervous anticipation and fear before the battle. The simile of the cold frog in the insides, tired of waiting, is both original and apt. Bristowe's poem is a good psychological study of what gave men courage to go "over the top", with "no fife, no blare, no drum".

May Herschel-Clarke's "Somewhere in France" describes the inner monologue of a soldier, wounded and lying in No-Man's Land:

Seems kind o' chill on this darn field,
 Though somewhere in my blame old head
 There's red-'ot coals a-burning, 'stead
 My thinkbox...
 I wonder if our boys did well?
 I heard old Brown say, "Give 'em hell,
 My lads, and stop their little game!"
 Afore I fell... Some'ow, seems strange
 Out here alone, and kind o' dark
 Without a blooming "Woodbine's" spark
 To 'elp them blighters find their range...

... Why, Ma,
 'Ow did **you** manage to git here?
 O, I can see you, never fear,
 A-smiling at me from that star!
 "**My**, Jim! But you're a lazy clod!
 Rouse up now!" Fact is, I'm **that** tired...
 It feels my whole inside's bin fired...
 A'right, I'm coming!... O, my God!

(Herschel-Clarke, 9)

Like Bristowe, Herschel-Clarke uses working class slang to give a sense of authenticity to her poem, and to celebrate the sacrifices of the Tommy. The sentimental idea that his mother would appear to him before death may be banal, but her nagging words infuse humour into the scene and saves it from being maudlin. Herschel-Clarke's other poem written in the voice of the soldier, "Nothing to Report", is very different in tone:

One minute we was laughin', me an' Ted,
 The next, he lay beside me grinnin' - dead.
 "There's nothin' to report," the papers said.
(Herschel-Clarke, 13)

The succinctness of the three lines add dramatic impact to the poem, which moves rapidly from companionship to sudden death to the world's indifference. The irony of the phrase "nothing to report" underlies the senseless death of the soldier.

War not only problematized femininity, it also problematized masculinity. The homoerotic bonds of the trenches, the havoc wreaked on the male body, women's war work, and the horror and terrors of war "problematized masculinity, fragmented it, causing men to question their relationship to universal maleness" (Kent, 38). This confusion of gender roles is evident in how women poets depict men in their war poetry. We have already seen how men were characterized by war nurses as broken parts of

fragmented bodies. There were marked differences in how women poets saw men. There were some, like Agnes Grozier Herbertson, who wrote sensitive portraits empathizing with the loneliness of the soldier:

Almost it seemed
 You looked out from the train as one who dreamed
 And watched some phantom show's queer pageant
 flit,
 And were lonely, outside, watching it.

Just what you left - maybe had not to leave -
 Of hearts to hope and grieve,
 Just what you lost, won, dreaded, hoped to win,
 These made your secret which your face locked
 in.

(Forgotten Army, 8)

The description of a soldier whose face locks in his secret sadness and whose life is considered nothing in the grand scheme of war is evidence of a more piercing vision than that of those who glorified men as nameless, faceless soldiers, such as Jessie Pope and Cicely Fox Smith.

Those women at the front, mostly nurses, saw a different side of the soldiers. As nurses, their job was a traditionally nurturing one, and that, coupled with the helplessness of the men in their care, combined to make them see the wounded soldiers as children and themselves as mothers. Mary Borden, in the story "Blind", writes:

So they walked with the blind man suspended
 in the bright, hot, misty air between them,

like a pair of old horses in shafts with
 their heads down while the little boy who had
 been crying for his mother died with his head
 on my breast.

(Borden, 56)

The two aspects of the wounded soldier, the maimed body
 and the child-role, combine in Eva Dobell's portrait of a
 soldier in "Pluck":

Crippled for life at seventeen,
 His great eyes seem to question why:
 With both legs smashed it might have been
 Better in that grim trench to die
 Than drag maimed years out helplessly.

A child - so wasted and so white,
 He told a lie to get his way,
 To march, a man with men, and fight
 While other boys are still at play.
 A gallant lie your heart will say.

So broke with pain, he shrinks in dread
 To see the 'dresser' drawing near;
 And winds the clothes about his head
 That none may see his heart-sick fear.
 His shaking, strangled sobs you hear.

Dobell emphasizes the pathos of the young soldier, whose
 body is "wasted" and "white" and who fears the additional
 pain the 'dresser' will inflict. The wounded soldier is
 redeemed in the last stanza with his display of child-like
 bravado:

But when the dreaded moment's there
 He'll face us all, a soldier yet,

Watch his bared wounds with unmoved air,
 (Though tell-tale lashes still are wet),
 And smoke his woodbine cigarette.
 (Reilly, 31)

This stanza emphasizes the mother-child relationship, as Dobell describes the "tell-tale lashes" in her motherly tone.

This maternal feeling is even more explicit in Mary J. Henderson's "The Young Serbian".

And the boy turned when his wounds were dressed,
 Held up his face like a child at the breast,
 Turned and held his tired face up,
 For he could not hold the spoon or cup,
 And I fed him... Mary, Mother of God,
 All women tread where thy feet have trod.
 (Henderson, 15)

Henderson not only identifies herself as a mother, but as the Mother of all Mothers, Mary. Thus, Henderson's care and nurturing love for the wounded soldier takes on a religious aspect. Sometimes the mothering role of the war nurse is explicitly felt even when the soldiers are not wounded, as in Carola Oman's "The Lower Deck", in which the soldiers are going home on leave:

These were my sons. Ah, who shall know
 Into what night I watched them go,
 How each blank face was dear to me,
 How kindly fell the evening rain?
 And I could see - and I could see.
 (Oman, 31)

This maternal protectiveness translates for Oman not into sadness, but, perhaps because the men are not wounded, into joy. The relationships between women and men forged by the circumstances of war were undisputedly intense, and familial, especially maternal metaphors were one way to express the new emotions women felt for men.

Women poets taking on male speakers in their poems, and writing about men and their feelings for men, demonstrate to what extent women felt they shared men's experiences of war and were entitled to comment on them. Had women felt that the gap between men and women was unbridgeable, they would not have tried to transcend it, by imaginative means or otherwise, let alone have felt the strong protective emotions towards men that these poems reveal.

V

Some of the most striking women's war poetry is not about war at all, but looks forward to the time when the war would be over. These poems range from the traditional exhortations not to forget, to apocalyptic visions of the future. Marjorie Pickthall's "When It is Finished", for instance, looks forward to a traditional form of remembrance:

When it is finished, Father, and we set
 The war-stained buckler and the bright blade by,
 Bid us remember then what bloody sweat,
 What thorns, what agony,
 Purchased our wreaths of harvest and ripe ears;
 Whose empty hands, whose empty heart, whose tears
 In this Gethsemane
 Ransomed the days to be.

(Treasury, 321)

The tone of this poem, though it looks forward to victory, is bleak. Pickthall gives a vision of the future as a state of death in life, whose only desire and responsibility is to look back on the suffering that made the future possible. This pessimism about the future is expanded upon in Eleanor Farjeon's "Peace":

I am as awful as my brother War,
 I am the sudden silence after clamour.
 I am the face that shows the seamy scar
 When blood has lost its frenzy and its glamour.
 Men in my pause shall know the cost at last
 That is not to be paid in triumphs or tears,
 Men will begin to judge the thing that's past
 As men will judge it in a hundred years.

(Farjeon, 48)

Peace is ugly because of the scars of war, and because hindsight will condemn the peace of a militarist state as only an interval between wars:

Let no man call me good. I am not blest.
 My single virtue is the end of crimes,
 I only am the period of unrest,

The ceasing of the horrors of the times;
 My good is but the negative of ill,
 Such ill as bends the spirit with despair,
 Such ill as makes the nations' soul stand still
 And freeze to stone beneath its Gorgon glare.

Here also the end of war is a state of death-in-life, as nations freeze to stone in despair. The only way to end the cycle of violence and despair is pacifism:

O which of ye whose battle-cry is Hate
 Will first in peace dare shout the name of Love?

This option is presented only as a possibility, not a certainty.

Iris Tree has an even bleaker vision of life after war. Her poem, "Blow upon blow they bruise the daylight wan", describes her fear of a "thing more terrible than death":

I fear the time when slow the flame expires,
 When this kaleidoscope of roaring color
 Fades, and rage faints; and of the funeral-fires
 That shone with battle, nothing left of valour
 Save chill ignoble ashes for despair
 To strew with widowed hands upon her hair.

Livid and damp unfolds the winding-sheet,
 Hiding the mangled body of the Earth:
 The slow grey aftermath, the limping feet
 Of days that shall not know the sound of mirth,
 But pass in dry-eyed patience, with no trust
 Save to end living and be heaped with dust.

(Tree, 54)

In a post-war world, valour dims to "ashes / and despair", and each "limping" day that passes brings desired death closer. Tree's vivid imagery becomes even more disturbing in the next stanzas:

That stillness that must follow where Death trod,
 The sullen street, the empty drinking-hall,
 The tuneless voices cringing praise to God,
 Deaf gods, that did not heed the anguished call,
 Now to be soothed with humbleness and praise,
 With fawning kisses for the hand that slays.

Across the world from out the fevered ground
 Decay from every pore exhales its breath:

 ...And unto Death,
 As to a conquering king, we yield the keys
 Of Beauty's gates upon our bended knees.

(Tree, 54-5).

The world after the war is not only empty, but also spiritually bankrupt, as "tuneless voices cringing to praise God" placate a cruel Deity. Tree's images of decay, of subjection and emptiness, are even more disturbing because her poem was written in 1914, before disillusionment and despair were common currency among the war-weary.

Rose Macaulay, in the poem "Recovery", describes a post-war world completely dislocated from the old:

When this so bitter tide
 Shall turn and ebb to the waste whence it came,
 The world, like a wrecked ship shorn of her pride,
 ...shall ride
 From storm to port, bankrupt of all but shame.

In that dark dawn all we
 As lost mariners shall reel crazily
 On a new earth, grown stranger than the sea.
 As drowned men shall we come,
 All pale and sick and dumb...
 (Macaulay, 36).

The metaphor of war survivors as shipwrecked sailors evokes the myth of Noah's ark, and the utter destruction wrought upon the world during the Flood. But these survivors will not bring a history of their experiences to the new world: "We'll have no words to string, no tales to tell/ Of the unutterable/ Black dreams dreamt in the drifting deeps of hell." (Macaulay, 36) However, there is hope and promise in the new world, even if it be only in the appreciation of "white daisies and red wine":

So, bankrupt of hope and blind
 To faith and love, we'll find,
 We, even we, joy in things small and kind.
 Though it lie drowned, the world we dreamt
 we knew,
 - Oh, though no dream be true -
 We shall cry and laugh, as sailors and
 children do.

(Macaulay, 37)

The only joy is found in forgetting.

The overall picture in these poems is of a vision of the future, at best, as a shrine for the dead, and at worst as a post-apocalyptic world of despair and subjection to indifferent gods. Perhaps because of the

irretrievable losses women suffered, or because of unpleasant revelations about human nature that the war may have evoked, these women are unable to conceive of a post-war world that could measure up to the pre-war one. Their visions of the future, though they may be somewhat hopeful, have one similarity: they are all ultimately bereft.

It is this tension between two opposing poles which characterizes women's Great War poetry. The poems move between patriotism and resistance to it, between beauty and tragedy, between empowerment and bereavement, between hope and despair. It is perhaps because of the problematical position women occupied during the war, and the conflicting roles that they were asked to play, that they live in an artistic as well as a socio-political limbo during the war. However, this does not mean that the lack of concrete adherence to one particular view of the war made women poets as individuals or as a group somehow less than worthy. Indeed, it is the ambiguity of these poems and their exploration of the space between certainties that is perhaps their finest quality, and which provides a fascinating record for the historian of how British women saw war in relation to themselves.

Conclusion

In the previous chapters, we have looked at the body of British women's poetry of the Great War and the multiplicity of its themes, styles and ideologies. The heterogeneity of this poetry and its temporal proximity to the trench poets and the Modernists makes it a subject of interest to the literary critic. These same elements, combined with the fact that these poems were written during and about one of the most resounding historical events of the twentieth century, form an intersection of literature and history that creates a fascinating source for the historian as well. The union of the representation of women's experiences of war, the language in which they were written and the philosophic discourses which they reveal, combine to form a comprehensive view of how women in Britain saw the war, how they defined themselves in relation to it, and how the narrative processes of war, such as propaganda, defined women.

Literary critics and historians have reacted to this body of work and its cultural and philosophic impact in various ways. Janet Montefiorre has argued against both

the literary quality and the emancipatory element in women's Great War poetry. She argues that what is wanting in this work is not an authenticity of historical experiences they represent, but both the lack of symbolic languages to express these experiences as important in their own right, and the "record of minds accomodating themselves to massive historical evil" (Montefiorre, 56). Gill Plain, on the other hand, maintains that even the existence of a body of women's war poetry is emancipatory and a source of potential political radicalism. In war time, she reasons, the act of writing is as significant as what is actually written, since literature produced in the process of mourning encodes and reveals the pain of personal loss, the politics of personal identity and a subversive response to the dominant rhetoric of war. (Plain, 43-4) Women's war poetry, she argues, had enough potential destabilizing force to resist literary and cultural assimilation (Plain, 47)

The most accurate analysis lies between these views. While it can be argued, as Plain does, that the tension between the explicit content of the poems and their form created "an arena for the articulation of a plethora of implicit possibilities" (Plain, 43), for most women writers these possibilities remained only vaguely realized.

Yet it is in precisely the ambivalence and ambiguity of these poems that reveals the interplay of discourses of gender and the constructions of war.

To ground my analysis of the writings and cultural and literary theory of the Great War, in the first chapter I have examined the social history of women's experiences during the Great War. The Great War solidified the problematization of femininity ushered in by the suffragettes, and widened the gap between rhetorical femininity and reality. For while the war extended to women the unprecedented chance to become active agents, through nursing positions, army auxiliaries and land and munitions work at home, it also reinforced the ideals of traditional femininity through the public definition of women as "other" to war. Margaret and Patrice Higonnet have characterized the war's effect on women as a double helix, (Higonnet, 41) for while war may seemingly offer women new roles and opportunities, they are offered in the same language of feminine dependence. For example, women's entry into the public world was ideologically neutralized by expanding the idea of women's sphere of the "home" to become the "homefront". Thus the emancipatory potential of women's war work outside the home was countered by an intensification of propaganda and public voices reinforcing traditional gender roles.

This reinforcement of traditional femininity in the face of war had its roots in the definition of women as "other" to war. An examination of the public response to women's war work, such as the journalistic records of Hall Caine, and the mythologizing of Edith Cavell reveals this perceived alterity. This idea of women as spectators to war is especially visible in the works of the trench poets. These poems reveal not only the view of women as separate from war, but a misogyny which assigns much of the blame for the war on women. It was in this ideological climate in which women lived and wrote during the Great War.

Chapter Two begins to examine the body of British women's war writings. This section looks at poems relating to the empirical changes and conditions described in the first chapter. By looking at poems which represent the wartime experiences of women, challenges to femininity and their impact on women's self-definitions were assessed. The two most startling examples of the problematization of femininity wrought by war are the writings of nurses who worked at the front, and the poems written by women at home in the face of their ideologically constructed "otherness". Nurses who worked at the Front had unprecedented access to the male body through their work. This damaged male body becomes in their works an intersection of various gender discourses. Women looked at

the male body maternally, romantically, and practically, but the most shockingly graphic of the descriptions of the damaged male body reveals a detachment from the human body and the concept of gender itself. Poems written by women at home also described challenges to the constructions of gender. These poems revealed the preoccupation of some women with ideas of guilt and complicity. These writers challenge, accept or try to modify their role as spectators, but are unable to break entirely free of this definition.

Chapter Two also contains poems of loss and remembrance. Poems eulogizing lost sons, sweethearts and brothers point to the different sacrifices asked of women in wartime. While men were expected to sacrifice their bodies, women had to relinquish their loved ones, and face a lonely and uncertain future.

The third chapter looks at how women conceived of the war that had demanded so much from them. Writings from women pacifists and jingoists are examined, as well as the ambivalence towards the war and militarism seen in the majority of women's writings of war. This ambivalence reveals itself in a variety of themes, including nature and spirituality, which are manipulated and constructed to reflect the views of the writer. Also in this section are poems written by women in the voice of men, or describing the battle-scenes from which they were excluded. These

poems demonstrate that women felt confident enough to comment on the war in the voice of those authoritative on the subject, and that women portrayed masculinity as ambiguously as they did femininity in their war writings.

Also analyzed in this chapter are poems which look forward to the end of war, and describe a vision of the future. These poems, though they range from the commemorative to the apocalyptic, share the view that life after the war will be lesser than life before. The bleakness of these forward-looking poems are complementary to the poems of loss; together they reveal the ransoming of women's lives by the war.

Charlotte Mew's poem "The Cenotaph" describes the memorialisation movement which swept through Britain after the war. She characterizes the rhetoric of "winged" victory as essentially opposed to the suffering of the bereaved:

Not yet will those measureless fields be green again
 Where only yesterday the wild sweet blood of wonderful
 youth was shed;
 There is a grave whose earth must hold too long, too
 deep a stain,
 Though for ever over it we may speak as proudly as we
 may tread.
 But here, where the watchers by lonely hearths from
 the thrust of an inward sword have more slowly bled,
 We shall build the Cenotaph: Victory, winged, with
 Peace, winged too, at the column's head.
 And over the stairway, at the foot- oh! here, leave
 desolate, passionate hands to spread
 Violets, roses, and the small, sweet, twinkling

war. Throughout this analysis, the inescapability of traditional dominant notions of war and of gender roles has been established. Yet, even this being so, women poets used the space between form and explicit content, as well as literary techniques such as allusion, irony and humour, to negotiate between the demands of the old rhetoric, and the depiction of new experiences and ideologies arising out of the necessity of war. Thus women writers of the Great war, though constrained, still had the artistic and philosophical agency to manipulate the discourses of gender and war.

The importance of an analysis of British women's poetry of the Great War may be questioned by some. It is more than enough, in one sense, to reiterate Joan Scott and argue that the examination of the representation and historical experience of men and women, public and private, taken together forms a means of analyzing how and by whom national history and memory is constructed. But any historian of the World Wars, I would argue, begins their analysis not only in the desire to understand the processes of history, but also to honour those who made a multiplicity of sacrifices in the hopes of bettering the fate of their descendants. While, in hindsight, their choices can be viewed critically, it is in awareness of the selflessness and courage of most during the war that I began this project, and it is how I would like to end it.

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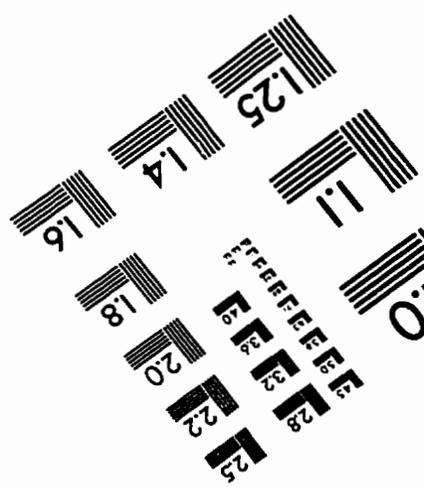
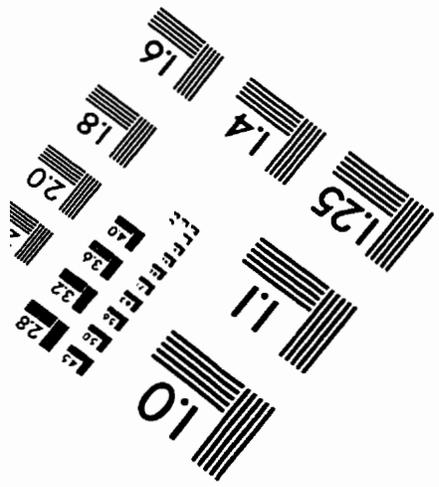
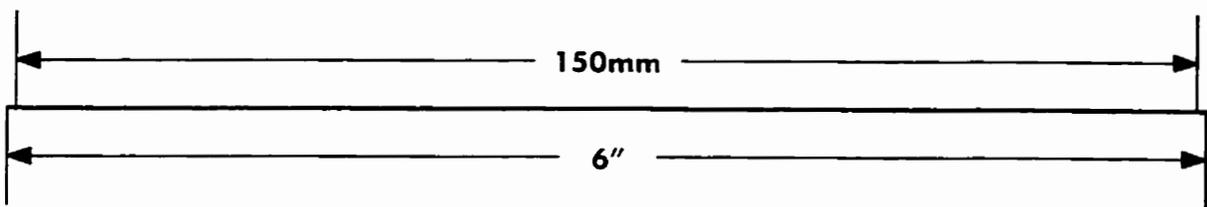
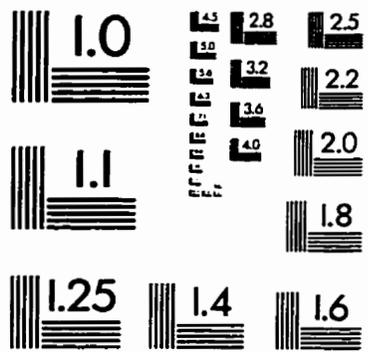
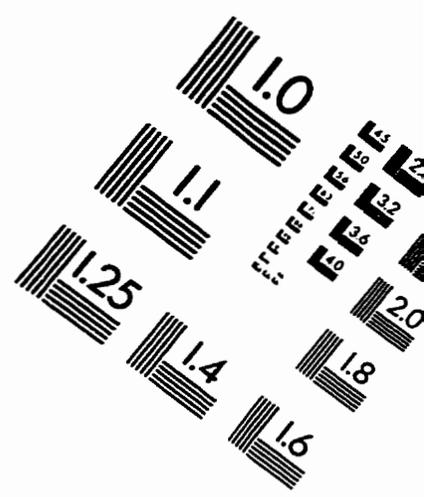
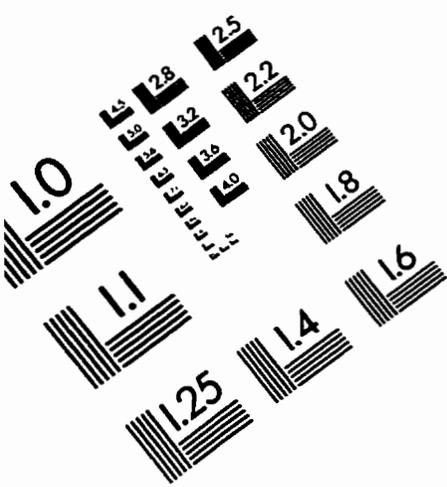
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