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## ZADÁNÍ BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE (projektu, uměleckého díla, uměleckého výkonu)

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### Zásady pro vypracování

Jaroslav Bureš se ve své bakalářské práci bude zabývat poezií britských ženských autorek v období první světové války. V teoretické části zmapuje problematiku postavení žen v britské společnosti na počátku 20. století. Věnovat se bude zejména rozdílům ve vnímání žen napříč společenskými vrstvami, emancipačním hnutím a roli, kterou různé organizace sehrály v proměně postavení žen během prvních desetiletí 20. století. V této části práce také nastíní jeden z dopadů emancipace – zapojení žen do pracovního procesu a jejich aktivní i pasivní roli během válečných let (např. The National Federation of Women Workers). V praktické části se autor bude plně věnovat poezii vybraných autorek, např. Vera Brittain a May Wedderburn Cannan, tematizujících válečné období. Zaměří se hlavně na tematické spojnice a osobitý přístup autorek k vybraným motivům (např. rodina, zaměstnání, odchod mužů z domova, ekonomické strádání, oficiální propaganda, aj.). Okruh těchto témat bude upřesněn v průběhu zpracovávání práce

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## **ANNOTATION**

The aim of this bachelor's thesis is to analyse typical themes reoccurring in the woman's poetry of the era of the First World War. The thesis is divided into three theoretical chapters, each accompanied by a practical subchapter. In the first chapter, the area of women's working opportunities during the First World War is described. The second chapter covers the area of religion, it consists of description of official clergy's attitude towards the conflict, contradictory movements and work of army clergymen. The final, third chapter focuses on the propagandistic tendencies, its processes and contradictory pacifist movements active during the conflict, where women played a role.

## **KEYWORDS**

Britain, poetry, women, Great War, religion, propaganda, labour

## **NÁZEV**

Ženská poezie období první světové války

## **ANOTACE**

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na analýzu typických témat objevujících se v ženské poezii období první světové války. Práce je rozdělena do tří teoretických kapitol, každá je doplněna praktickou podkapitolou. V první kapitole je popsána oblast ženských pracovních příležitostí doby první světové války. Druhá kapitola pokrývá oblast náboženství, sestává se z postoje oficiálního náboženství ke konfliktu, protichůdných hnutí a prací válečných duchovní. Poslední, třetí kapitola se zaměřuje na propagandistické tendence, jejich procesy a protichůdná hnutí, která byla za války aktivní a kde ženy sehrávaly roli.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Británie, poezie, ženy, velká válka, náboženství, propaganda, práce

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## **Introduction**

World War I, also called the Great War, was a conflict that started at 28 July 1914 following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo by Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1914. Great Britain has joined the conflict on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1914 at the Allied side, fighting against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Since all wars need soldiers to fight in, men of Britain have started to enlist into army service. Sometimes voluntarily, sometimes with the help of local propaganda, religion or persuasion from their loved ones. For this reason, a great deal of effort was put into the persuasion of these men until the introduction of compulsory conscription in 1916. Because of that, the role of man in any conflict is usually strictly given.

However, the second half of the British population experienced war in their own light. Before the start of the Great War, women of Britain have fought constantly for more rights and equality for their sex, mainly in the field of voting rights. Both suffragettes and militant suffragists have fought for their cause since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and were part of various movements, such as the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies or more radical Women's Social or Political Union. With the start of the conflict and the lack of men in the domestic field a great deal of needed emancipation has suddenly met the woman demographic of the Great Britain, most notably in the field of labour. This need to fill free space after the men has brought change to the everyday life of British women. They started to be active in various nationalistic and pacifist movements, became employed in wider range of labours, and helped their nation in various ways both in the at home and at the front alike. Some of the activities which were previously unthinkable for a woman to do before the war has suddenly become available.

Since women have, even before the war, been producers of various literary texts, even this time they have produced a wide range of texts describing their feelings and opinions on society they were members of and situations they came into contact with. Even though no texts cannot be seen as a true, objective description of society and era they were written in, the feelings and thoughts portrayed into them by their authors can describe what they thought about various aspects of their lives.

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to analyse several pieces of poetry written and/or released by British women during the era of the Great War (1914–1918) and find similarities in their topics. Since these topics will be found repeatedly, it could be deducted, that these areas of life were important for British women during the War, as more



authors felt the urge to express their opinion on that matter. Each chapter of the thesis will be devoted to a specific area of society and the era. The first chapter will cover the area of labour positions for women, the second chapter will be devoted to the religious themes, position of the official church and the work of clergy in the war and the third chapter will describe the influence of propaganda on British society and its processes. It will also cover pacifist movements as a reaction against the nationalistic tendencies. Each theoretical chapter will be followed by a practical chapter, where poems portraying the specific area will be analysed and findings documented.

# 1. Working Opportunities for Women in the Great War

With the start of the World War I, many women found themselves in a new position on a workplace. As their men enlisted, they needed to fill their positions to help the cause in any way possible. In the theoretical part of this chapter, the social shift of women with the start of the war will be described, the most common areas of work will be mentioned, and the enthusiasm of working women will be covered in addition to feminist tendencies of the era. In the theoretical part of this chapter, poems about work will be analysed. It is important to mention, that the social class of women covered in this chapter will concern women of lower and middle classes.

The position of a woman in the society has changed with the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and with start of the War. In the pre-war period, women held a different position in the workplace. As mentioned by Joan W. Scott, the idea of a working woman became apparent with the start of the industrial revolution. However, their position was very limited and became a target of prejudice. In the eighteenth century, women were seen only suitable to be at home, taking care for children and household. However, it is not true to say that women did not work at all. They frequently sold goods at markets, worked as nurses or laundresses, made pottery and many more, in order to make at least some money.<sup>1</sup> However, it is needed to be added, that these women were usually from the working-class layer of the society, as they needed the wages to survive. Because of this, they had no other choice than to operate in both fields: At home and in the work. The labour they did was that of domestic skills, such as motherly skills in nursing or practical skills needed at home, such as selling pottery.

Even though the viewpoint of woman being able to do mostly housework and childcare persisted, the arrival of the nineteenth century and its urbanization created several new working positions and labour fields women could be employed in, such as factory works or white-collar jobs. However, this era was still a one of great social and sexual prejudices towards women. For example, as Scott mentions, some Scottish factories did not want to employ any women who were married, in fear of children being neglected at home because of their mother working. This era was also prominent in classifying and assigning working positions by gender, not

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Scott, "The Woman Worker," in *A History of Women in the West. Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War*, ed. Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 399–403.

by skill.<sup>2</sup> It can be seen, that even in the nineteenth century women were still not favourable in all areas of the labour sector. There were, however, some areas women were employed regularly. Scott describes the radical shift in women's labour in the nineteenth century from agricultural and domestic to white-collar jobs. Secretaries, typists, salesgirls, operatories, nurses and teachers newly became favourable positions for women. This shift also created a new workforce of women's population: Middle-class women.<sup>3</sup> These women were not present only in the area of white-collar jobs, such as teachers or nurses, but they also started to work in the agricultural field of labour, pursuing careers. According to Nicola Verdon, these women were driven to the outdoors by women magazines, which described fieldwork as a refreshment from the urban life, or as a way to stay healthy and strong.<sup>4</sup> The popularity of fieldwork among the middle-class women show that women were not only interested in "easy," white-collar jobs, but were also eager to participate in more laborious fields of labour.

During this time, a self-interested tendency of women can be seen to have arisen. Women were no longer only subjects of men's discussions whether they are eligible for different areas of labour but showed their own efforts to be further included in the labour processes. As Scott mentions, women have been active in numerous working unions. These unions, being mostly consisted of working women in areas of textile production, tobacco production and shoe trades. These women participated in numerous strikes or gathered together to fight for their rights. An example is the British Women's Trade Union League. This union, formed in 1889, later founded the National Federation of Woman Workers in 1906. The federation was popular among British women, as at the beginning of the First World War it had over 20,000 members.<sup>5</sup> It can be seen, that the women's emancipation efforts were present not only in the field of feminism, which was targeted at the right of vote for women, but also focused at different areas of women's lives.

The start of the First World War at the beginning of the twentieth century has created another shift in women's position in the workplace. With men being recruited and sent to the Front, many new, previously banned or "unsuitable" working positions has suddenly become available for women labourers as well. The fact that women has suddenly become a social group suitable for a variety of jobs can be seen in the British War Office's

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<sup>2</sup> Scott, "The Woman Worker," 402, 413.

<sup>3</sup> Scott, "The Woman Worker," 406–407.

<sup>4</sup> Nicola Verdon, "Business and Pleasure: Middle-Class Women's Work and the Professionalization of Farming in England, 1890–1939," *Journal of British Studies* 51, no. 2 (April 2012): 395–399.

<sup>5</sup> Scott, "The Woman Worker," 418–419

“Women’s War Work,” published in 1916. This handbook specifies all viable areas and positions where women can be employed. It mentions 10 areas of production and 66 sub-areas within them. Each sub-area is then further characterised by detailed list of positions where “Women are successfully employed.”<sup>6</sup> Since this handbook was published by the government, it could be said that the public opinion about women has changed, at least a little. Women started to be employed in previous “masculine” areas, such as munition works or chemical works. These labour areas were not without its difficulties. As Vivien Newman writes, workers there were not treated well. Women had lesser wages than men, suffered from oppression, low sanitization standards and constant danger of dying in an explosion. In addition, the quality of accommodation in factory hostels was poor and insufficient.<sup>7</sup> However, with the need of labour, it is expected that women must have taken these positions.

One of the most prominent and well-documented areas women were employed in were the nursing positions. In the second chapter of her book Vivien Newman mentions the position of trained woman medical personnel. The number of trained professional nurses has skyrocketed with the start of the conflict, with only 1,800 trained nurses present with the army before 1914, to over 24,000 nurses active at land (and approximately 900 more at the sea) in the conflict’s duration. These trained nurses worked mostly in Base hospitals, helped at flotillas or at the ambulance trains.<sup>8</sup> Second part of the nursing personnel were volunteers. The most prominent organization concerning voluntary healthcare was the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD). According to Janet Watson, these women helped at the Front and had many different tasks. Not only they helped during the healthcare, they also cooked meals for both the injured and other nurses, cleaned in the hospitals and drove ambulances when needed.<sup>9</sup> This field of work was commonly found in the poetry, as some of the poets were part of the VAD themselves. Works by these women will be described in the practical part of this chapter.

There was an activity the domestic British women actively participated in: Knitting. As Vivien Newman writes, that in the similar fashion as men were persuaded to enlist at the beginning of the conflict, women were advised to go home and knit socks for the army. This activity was highly supported by the government, as in 1914, the Queen Mary Needlework

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<sup>6</sup> War Office of Great Britain, *Women’s War Work* (London: Chiswick Press, 1916), 13–30.

<sup>7</sup> Vivien Newman, *We also Served: The Forgotten Women of the First World War* (Yorkshire: Pen and Sword Press, 2014), chapter 3.

<sup>8</sup> Newman, *We Also Served*, chapter 2.

<sup>9</sup> Janet Watson, “Khaki Girls, VADs and Tommie’s Sisters: Gender and Class in First World War Britain,” *The International History Review* 19, no. 1 (February 1997): 33.

Guild was established, providing women with necessary materials and accolades for their contributions. Apparently, even Queen Mary herself knit, motivating all British women to do the same. In some time, this fashion has developed into a craze. Women of all social classes knit in all social environments.<sup>10</sup> It is therefore understandable, that with such a broadly developed and promoted activity, poems by domestic women about knitting can be found. Since women of all classes knit, this activity can be seen as a symbol of an only-female expressed means of patriotism and desire to help the Tommies at the Front.

### **1.1 Themes of Work, Labour and Help in Women's War Poetry**

As mentioned in the theoretical part of the chapter, women were present in numerous job positions throughout the War. It is therefore understandable that their feelings about some of these helping job positions were present in their poetry. Some authors, like May Sinclair, were enthusiastic about their jobs, other were more melancholic about their position. This subchapter will analyse poems targeted at different ways women's work during the War was portrayed in the poetry.

There are several poems addressing the area of women's work, which cannot be put into any other category. The first two poems are Jessie Pope's "A Worker" (1916) and "War Girls" (1916). Both present women's work in a general sense of meaning and are not targeted at any specific labour area. In "A Worker," Pope describes a woman worker who, although being negatively affected by the war, keeps her spirit and will to carry on:

Her black is getting shabby and her cheeks  
are rather thin,  
But the courage of her eyes conceals an  
aching scar within,<sup>11</sup>

Pope, unlike her other poems, is not as pompous when describing the woman worker. She is visibly scarred by the war, as Pope mentions: "The War has hit her badly, and she is lonely and bereft."<sup>12</sup> However, she keeps on working to help her nation. It is her courage, and her will which press her forward. This tendency of wanting to help the nation is seen throughout the poem a few more times, such as at the end of the second stanza: "She has given all for England and she goes on giving / more."<sup>13</sup> It is not apparent what is the "all" that she has

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<sup>10</sup> Newman, *We Also Served*, chapter 1.

<sup>11</sup> Jessie Pope, *Simple Rhymes for Stirring Times* (London: C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., 1916), 24.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

given to the nation until the very end of the third, and final stanza: “Her man has fought and fallen, so she steps into the / ranks.”

Second poem by Jessie Pope concerning the area of general women labour force is “War Girls.” The whole poem serves as a description of different working positions women were employed in, for example:

There’s the motor girl who drives a heavy van,  
There’s the butcher girl who brings your joint of  
meat<sup>14</sup>

The second part of the first stanza shows Pope’s excitement about the women’s new opportunities. As the poem indicates, the women are “no longer caged and penned up.”<sup>15</sup> Pope is happy that the women have finally gotten the chance to prove their worth at the workplace and they will succeed. They are “Strong, sensible and fit, / They’re out to show they grit.”<sup>16</sup> Each stanza ends with a reoccurring line “Till the khaki boys come marching back.”<sup>17</sup> It can be seen that those women mentioned in the poem do their jobs because of the men’s recruitment. Maybe it can even indicate that when the khaki boys come back, the women maybe return to their original professions or return home, as it is expected of them. Compared to the previous poem, Pope is much more enthusiastic about the workload women had to endure. While in the previous poem the woman is shown as courageous because of the loss she suffered, here the courage comes from the fact that the Tommies will return home, alive and well.

Another poem concerning woman’s working labour is “Women in Munition Making” by Mary Gabriel Collins. This is the last poem that cannot be put into connection with any other labour area, as no other poems specifically about the work in munition works were found. The general theme of this poem is grim. The persona is negative about women’s involvement in the process of munition making, as by doing it, they contribute to the killings at the Front, rather than being home or doing some less cruel job:

Their hands should minister unto the flame of life,  
[...]  
But now,  
[...]

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<sup>14</sup> Pope, *Simple Rhymes*, 42.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

They must take part in defacing and destroying natural body<sup>18</sup>

The contrast between the idea what a woman according to the persona “should” do and what she does is apparent. She despises the thought that women, who bring new people to this world, and whose responsibility is to prevent them from dying, should take part in the reverse process. This poem can be connected to the gruelling conditions women suffered in the munition works and chemical works, as mentioned in the theoretical part of this chapter. The setting, the factory, is described as having a negative effect on the workers, as their hands are “...coarsened in the munition factories” and that their thoughts “Are bruised against the law, / ‘Kill, kill.’.”<sup>19</sup> Again, the idea of women having indirect effect on the number of killed soldiers is directly shown. In contrast to Pope’s poems, the idea of a working woman should not be taken as a generally positive thing, at least from the moral point of view. Of course, the women in munition works help their country, but for the price of sacrificing their femininity.

When concerning the specific areas of employment, the most prominent and written about field of work was the field of healthcare. Here, both enthusiastic and melancholic voices can be found. One of the enthusiastic authors is May Sinclair. According to Tim Kendall, she was not afraid of the War, but rather saw it as an opportunity to make her life more interesting.<sup>20</sup> It is therefore understandable, that her poems were filled with such tendencies.

One of the examples is her poem “Field Ambulance in Retreat,” (1914) written while assisting the retreat of Allied forces in Belgium in 1914 as a part of voluntary ambulance corps. She is fully aware of the hardships of her job, as mentions in the second stanza:

And, where the piled corn—wagons went, our dripping  
    Ambulance carries home  
Its red and white harvest from the fields<sup>21</sup>

Sinclair does not seem to be idealistic about her job. The metaphorical description of red and white harvest symbolizes the wounded soldiers patched in bandages. The losses must have been numerous, as their ambulance is described as “dripping.” The blood of the numerous wounded

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<sup>18</sup> Mary Gabriel Collins, “Women in Munition Making,” in *Scars Upon my Heart: Women’s Poetry and Verse of the First World War*, ed. Catherine Reilly (London: Virago, 1984), 24.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Tim Kendall, *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology* (New York: OUP, 2014), 16.

<sup>21</sup> May Sinclair, “Field Ambulance in Retreat,” in *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology*, ed. Tim Kendall (New York: OUP, 2014), 17.

described as “harvest” she had to carry away soaked her ambulance so much that the blood is dripping away from it.

In the next stanza, Sinclair describes the soldiers as happy for their arrival, writing:

They smile as the Red Cross Ambulance rushes by.  
[...]  
They go: And our shining, beckoning danger goes with them,<sup>22</sup>

Sinclair is equally enthusiastic about her part in saving the soldiers’ lives. While it may seem morbid, further in the poem she writes about “our joy in the harvests that we gathered in at nightfall in the fields.”<sup>23</sup> The soldiers, again being referred to as a harvest, were saved by Sinclair. She could not do anything to stop them from getting wounded, but at least she could help them not die. And the more wounded she carried away, the bigger the harvest is, the more lives could she save.

Another poem by May Sinclair, showing her enthusiasm to help at the front, is her poem “Dedication.” (1915) This poem is meant to be dedicated to her colleagues at the Front. According to Tim Kendall, Sinclair returned to Britain in 1914 to raise funds. When she wanted to return to the front, her application was declined.<sup>24</sup> This poem shows her struggle to cope up with the situation and expresses her anger towards her latter colleagues who in her eyes can still be useful, while she cannot. At the beginning of the poem, Sinclair addresses her former colleagues:

I do not call you comrades,  
You,  
Who did what I only dreamed.<sup>25</sup>

Sinclair feels cheated and seems to blame her colleagues, who are still at the Front, for it. She does not even want to call them her “comrades” anymore, she feels alienated. This blame can be further seen in the next lines where she accuses them that they “[...] have taken my dream, / and dressed yourself in its beauty and its glory,”<sup>26</sup> She wanted to help others, she saw her dream as beautiful and glorious. Now, when she cannot fulfil her dream, she feels robbed of it.

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<sup>22</sup> Sinclair, “Field Ambulance in Retreat,” 17.

<sup>23</sup> Sinclair, “Field Ambulance in Retreat,” 18.

<sup>24</sup> Kendall, *Poetry of the First World War*, 17.

<sup>25</sup> May Sinclair, “Dedication,” in *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology*, ed. Tim Kendall (New York: OUP, 2014), 19.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid



In the third stanza, she addresses some things her comrades do at the Front and tells them with grief that “You go; / And only my dream follows you.”<sup>27</sup>

Jessie Pope is another author writing enthusiastically about the medical-related positions. In her poem “V.A.D.,” (1916) the persona introduces the reader to Kit, a spoiled girl who has never had to worry about anything, suddenly enlists for the V.A.D. and finds herself in a different environment, opposite to she was used to:

Discipline she'd never known ;  
Bossed her family, but here  
Found she was the smallest beer.<sup>28</sup>

The persona calls Kit the “smallest beer,” probably meaning the least important and useless part of the ward. Kit is no longer at home, she is a nurse, and has her responsibilities. Pope does acknowledge the difficulties and severity of being a nurse in the following lines: “On the run—no time to sit; / how her feet ached, poor old Kit!”<sup>29</sup> It is interesting that while Mary Borden, who has actually been employed as a medical worker, writes about the difficulties in her job in a morbid manner, Pope sticks to mere exhaustion. It can be deduced, that Pope has not ever worked in a medical ward and can only see the exhaustion of the nurses as the worst thing they have to endure.

Further in the poem, however, Kit in a patriotic fashion turns around, starts to take her job seriously and finds dignity she has not had before, as she “Bowed her head and bit her lip, / Learnt her job with surer grip;”<sup>30</sup> The persona is clearly happy to see Kit turn around and praises her, as in the last two lines, she calls to her that “Kit, you're but a type, it's true— / And your country is proud of you!”<sup>31</sup> While this poem is clearly propagandistic and patriotic, and while no accounts that Pope has ever actually worked in a V.A.D. can be found, this poem still shows that this topic was used frequently.

Another author writing about the medical topic was Vera Brittain. According to Nosheen Khan, Brittain has served in France as a part of the VAD. Although initially it was her patriotism that brought her there, her poems reflect that her work experiences have turned her into a pacifist.<sup>32</sup> Her poems, unlike Sinclair's or Pope's, reflect more the negative aspects

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<sup>27</sup> Sinclair, “Dedication,” 19.

<sup>28</sup> Pope, *Simple Rhymes*, 34.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Nosheen Khan, *Women's Poetry of the First World War* (Kentucky: KUP, 1988), 134.

of her job, the emotional struggle of nurses and are not as enthusiastic. A poem “A Military Hospital,” (1916) can be put side to side with the “Field Ambulance in Retreat,” as it contains similar metaphors when describing the wounded as “A mass of human wreckage, drifting in / Borne on a blood-red tide,”<sup>33</sup> While Sinclair chooses the metaphor of a “bloody harvest”, Brittain chooses that of a “mass of wreckage.” Both authors are not blind to the fact of wounded, dying soldiers they need to take care of. However, while Sinclair further describes the happy faces of soldiers who saw her driving by, Brittain’s turn is more affectionate and there are no hints of enthusiasm. More so, Brittain’s use of a metaphor seems more morbid than that of a harvest.

The emotional struggle of nurses is also reflected in some of Brittain’s poems. In “To Another Sister,” Brittain prays for a certain sister that the horrors of War which turned her cold will fade away. Again, no enthusiasm can be found, and the poem is deeply emotional. Most of the poem concerns the devotion to the said sister, describing her emotional state:

And in your smile the lurking scorn that springs  
From cruel knowledge of a love, once deep,  
Grown gradually cold,<sup>34</sup>

From this stanza, it can be deducted that the War makes nurses apathic and causes them deep emotional scarring. Even though the nurse must smile, the persona knows it is not real and hides a deep negation. The apathy was not imminent, however, as she mentions in the third line. It grew gradually.

The theme of suffering of nurses Brittain openly addresses in the next poem titled “Vengeance is Mine,” (1918) written, as Brittain herself adds, in memoriam of nurses who died during the Great Air Raid in Étampes.<sup>35</sup> Even though the suffering is not emotional, but rather physical, it still concerns Brittain’s protective and pacifist tendencies towards her ward-sisters. The introductory line of the poem addresses this: “Who shall avenge us for anguish unnameable,”<sup>36</sup> Brittain uses pronoun “us,” as she probably talks about nurses and women in general. Further in the poem, Brittain’s description of women at the Front is pitiful. She does not mention a single positive aspect of their jobs and is again targeted at the suffering:

Voices too feeble to utter a cry?  
Shall they not answer, the foemen assailing us,

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<sup>33</sup> Vera Brittain, *Verses of a V.A.D.* (London: Erskine Macdonald, Ltd., 1918), 21.

<sup>34</sup> Brittain, *Verses of a V.A.D.*, 42.

<sup>35</sup> Brittain, *Verses of a V.A.D.*, 43.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

### Women who suffer and women who die?<sup>37</sup>

Brittain's description of a woman is melancholic. A woman is only a "feeble voice." When compared to Pope's Kit, who is called a "type" for learning how to do her job properly, Brittain's nurses are portrayed as suffering, dying, emotionally exhausted shells of their former selves. They do not grow to glory; their nation is not proud of them. For Brittain, they are insignificant, suffering figures.

The poetic description of medical workers was depicted in both sides of the manner. Some, like Borden or Pope, wrote about the rewards and excitement that comes from these positions. Some, on the other hand, like Brittain, were targeted at the struggle and death nurses experienced and endured. However, no matter the tone, all four poems are not blind to the fact that working as a nurse was not easy. No poem writing only about the positive aspects was found.

Another topic concerning women's work is connected to knitting. As mentioned in the theoretical part, knitting has become an essential part of women's lives. This is reflected in poetry as well. The first example is poem "Socks" (1915) by Jessie Pope. This poem describes a woman, knitting socks for either her lover or son:

Never used to living rough,  
    Lots of things he'd got to learn ;  
Wonder if he's warm enough—  
    *Knit 2, catch 2, knit 1, turn*<sup>38</sup>

Each stanza of the poem is ended by a description of the knitting process in italics. This creates two levels of this poem's persona thoughts. While the standard text expresses her monologue, the italics most likely show her thoughts recalling the steps of the knitting process. It can be deducted, that she is knitting while talking and thinking about her lover/son.

Pope further mentions knitting in another poem, "No!" (1915). This patriotic poem describes the unwillingness of British soldiers to lose their spirit. However, while most of the poem is targeted at men's spirit, in the last stanza Pope shifts to women who are at home in Britain. Here, she speaks for all the women who help by taking their part in the conflict, as unbroken and unbent as their male counterparts:

Oh, well, we've got our business to mind

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<sup>37</sup> Brittain, *Verses of a V.A.D.*, 44.

<sup>38</sup> Jessie Pope, *Jessie Pope's War Poems* (London: Grant Richards Ltd., 1915), 21.

[...]

As we busily knit and sew,  
Trying, God help us, do our part,<sup>39</sup>

Although patriotic in nature, this poem highlights knitting as one of the most important activities a woman can do to help her country. The persona specifically mentions knitting as “our business.” By doing so, she appears to give it a special importance as an activity designed specifically for women. While men are at the front, women at home knit and sew. They do their part, which is only their business.

Same as Pope, Muriel Kenny also mentions a topic of knitting in a poem “The Knitting Game” (1915). The persona of this poem is, probably, at home knitting a scarf. While doing so, she uses her imagination and plays a pretending game:

Knitting stitches—let’s pretend :  
Soldiers in a trench are mine ;  
I’ll be in command and send  
Fighting orders down the line.<sup>40</sup>

The persona pretends she has a control of a group of soldiers in the trenches at the Front. In the following stanzas, she gives her soldiers commands. This pretention of commanding a group of soldiers “down the line” can be understood metaphorically. The persona imagines soldiers advancing from trench to trench, no one left behind. This can be found in the fourth stanza: “Pressing forward, no retreat / Trench by trench the field is won.”<sup>41</sup> This “pressing forward” can be likened to her knitting. As her stitches advance from line to line, her imaginary soldiers also press forward from trench to trench. With every trench won, another line is knit.

The persona, like Pope’s women in “No!,” is proud of her work. In the last stanza, the persona addresses a soldier who will wear her scarf, asking him to “Treat it please with honour due;”<sup>42</sup> The two following lines, and the last two lines in the poem, “The gallant men who guard you there / Won their battles—so must you.”<sup>43</sup> can also be understood metaphorically. The “gallant men” can be understood as the stitches, the imaginary soldiers the persona pretends to command. Her soldiers won their battles; they have won every trench; all the lines are knit, and the scarf is completed, guarding the real soldier while he fights.

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<sup>39</sup> Pope, *War Poems*, 10.

<sup>40</sup> Muriel Kenny, *Khaki Soldiers: And Other Poems for Children* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd., 1915), 8

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Kenny, *Khaki Soldiers*, 8.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

To conclude, the themes of work in woman's poetry show that most of poems analysed show enthusiastic tendencies about the women's involvement in the labour process. Apart from few melancholic poems by Vera Brittain and Mary Gabriel Collins, most authors see their newly acquired working rights as a new opportunity to experience something new, to become useful and, in the case of knitting, even remotely affect their men's achievements at the Front. In case of the healthcare, the poems are not blind to the cruelty of the conflict, but they still show the brighter side of the issue.

## 2. The Position of Religion in the Great-War Britain

Since some of women's poems of the Great War were targeted towards the greater, faith-related cause of it, this chapter will be devoted to the position and interpretation of religion towards the conflict in Britain. In the theoretical part of this chapter, the initial propagandistic functions of the Church during the War will be presented as well as the opposite, less enthusiastic point of view. In the end, the function of clergy at the Front will be described. In the practical part of this chapter, both pessimistic and optimistic poems targeted at this cause will be analysed.

Religion and divine help have always been important for a society in war conflict. Many people seek peace and reassuring in the Church and therefore, it is understandable that with the start of the War, there was an increase of churchgoers in Great Britain. Even though some experts say that the clergy saw War and the increase of attendants as a way of purgatory, as cleansing of previously "uncatholic" nation,<sup>44</sup> the popularity of Christianity did not experience any dramatic changes with the start of the war and during its length. As stated by John Wolffe, there certainly was an initial increase of Christians. However, after this initial increase, the number slowly declined. As an example, he presents a statistic of the number of Easter Day church attendants. It can be seen, that the number fell from 2.3 million in 1913 to 2.1 million in 1917.<sup>45</sup> However, these numbers show that while the number of churchgoers declined during the war, this decline is not that striking. It can be deducted that the help of clergy was sought by a rather stable number of people. Because of that, the Church had an impact on public opinion about the war.

At the beginning of the War, most notably in 1914, many experts agree that the position of the official religion, the Anglican Church, was that of pro-war and patriotic. Because of that, one of the functions the Anglican clergy of the War had was the role of propagating pro-war optimism and support. According to Nosheen Khan, The Great War was often described by clergyman as a Holy War, where the British fought at the righteous side.<sup>46</sup> Another author supporting this claim is Phillip Jenkins who mentions that all sides of the conflict tried to justify their participation by interpreting religious imagery in their cause. He further writes that some clergymen of the era highly supported this view and frequently used it in their sermons. As an example, he further uses the example of the Anglican bishop of London, Arthur F.

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<sup>44</sup> Khan, *Women's Poetry of the First World War*, 40–41.

<sup>45</sup> John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland 1843–1945* (London: Routledge, 1994), 236–237.

<sup>46</sup> Khan, *Women's Poetry of the First World War*, 39.

Winnington-Ingram and his sermon in which he urges British forces to kill Germans.<sup>47</sup> It can therefore be seen, that the clergy was actively participating in pro-war activities. Whether they were supported by the propagandistic bureau or were acting so from their own conviction would be hard to distinguish and probably differed from one to another. Another high-ranking clergyman supporting the initial nationalist view on the war was the Archbishop of York, Cosmo Gordon Lang. According to John Wolffe, Lang tried to project patriotic tendencies during the funeral of Queen Victoria in November 1914 and that the "... general tone of his speech had been strongly anti-German."<sup>48</sup>

Another way the work of clergy was used in pro-war operations in a more straightforward way mentions Michael Sanders. According to him, the British propaganda bureau, The Wellington House used, at the beginning of the War, pastoral letters of Belgian cardinal Desiré-Joseph Mercier for their pro-war themed pamphlets.<sup>49</sup> One example is his pastoral letter 'Patriotism and Endurance.' In this pastoral letter, written in 1914, Mercier appeals to the people what their duty should be: "That duty I shall express in two words: Patriotism and Endurance."<sup>50</sup> It is therefore understandable, that this appeal was sought by the propaganda bureau.

Both Khan and Jenkins agree that the imagery of the Holy War and the interpretation of the Great War as a religious crusade was sometimes essential. Khan writes that the War was described as a Crusade and the Germans were portrayed as infidels, needed to be destroyed.<sup>51</sup> This view can be metaphorically traced back to the medieval times and Crusades in the Middle East in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century. Jenkins also supports this claim. According to him, the clergymen described the Allied forces as knights under the protection of God during their sermons.<sup>52</sup>

Not all clergymen and believers were enthusiastic about the war. One of the most prominent groups of Christians being involved in pacifist activities were the Quakers. As mentioned by John Wolffe, the general opinion among Quakers has, for a long time, been

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<sup>47</sup> Phillip Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade* (New York: HarperCollins, 1952), 63–71.

<sup>48</sup> Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, 238–239.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Sanders, Philip M. Taylor, *The British propaganda during the First World War 1914–18* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1982), 159.

<sup>50</sup> Desiré-Joseph Mercier, "Patriotism and Endurance," in *Cardinal Mercier, Pastorals, Letters, Allocutions*, ed. Rev. Joseph Stillemans (New York: P. J. Kennedy and Sons, 1917), 6.

<sup>51</sup> Khan, *Women's poetry of the First World War*, 40.

<sup>52</sup> Jenkins, *The Great and Holy War*, 72–73.

that of anti-war and pacifist. Many of them were part of the even pre-war active Peace Society, seeking a way to resolve international conflicts without the use of force.<sup>53</sup> One of the most numerous pacifist groups with the strong religious (mostly Quaker) support was the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FoR). As Helen Bevel writes, the basis for this movement was founded in August 1914 by two Christians: An English Quaker Henry Hodkin and German Lutheran Fridrich Siegmunt-Schultze. Together, they came up with a set of movement's basic principles, known as "The Basis," which, for example, urges Christians to love each other and forbids them to lead a war.<sup>54</sup> With Hodkin being British and Fridrich-Schultze being German it can be seen, that the Christian voices against the War were present at both sides. The fact that Hodkin was a Quaker also further confirms the Quaker viewpoint at the conflict mentioned by Wolffe. Even though this fellowship is international, the beliefs are universal. The main characteristic of a typical member of the FoR can be found in the American FoR's pamphlet which defines its members as:

...men and women belonging to various Christian communions, and of others who are adhered to no Communion, who are profoundly disturbed by the confronted utterance of the Christian Churches concerning war and other great social questions.<sup>55</sup>

As seen from this description, the most important (and therefore numerous) area of members are Christian believers, which the FoR focused on during the War. As Wolffe further states, the British FoR had, by 1918, around 8,000 members.<sup>56</sup> The FoR survived through both the World Wars and is still active to this day, present in over 40 countries of the world.<sup>57</sup>

The clergy was not active only at home. Since many young chaplains were, just like others, called to arms, the religious work of these men cannot be overseen. One of the centres of religious army work of Army Chaplains' Department (AChD), a special military department of Anglican clergymen, trained for chaplain works. As the war progressed, the numbers of chaplains in AChD was increasing. According to a table released by Great Britain's War Office, the number of chaplains within AChD rose from 117 in 1914 to 2,143 military chaplains in active duty in 1916 and 3,416 in 1918.<sup>58</sup> When compared to the slow decline of civilian

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<sup>53</sup> Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, 248.

<sup>54</sup> Helen Bevel, *The Nonviolent Right to Vote Movement Almanach* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Morrisville: Lulu.com, 2012), 192.

<sup>55</sup> Fellowship of Reconciliation, *The Fellowship of Reconciliation* (New York: Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1914), 1.

<sup>56</sup> Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, 248.

<sup>57</sup> "About IFOR," International Fellowship of Reconciliation, accessed June 30, 2020, <http://www.ifor.org/#mission>.

<sup>58</sup> War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War* (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1922), 190.



churchgoers during the war, the need of clergy at the Front was visibly on the rise. This fact can be partly related to the introduction of compulsory war service. Army chaplains' duties were numerous. As Michael Snape further writes, the main goal of the chaplains at the Front was that of keeping high morale among the soldiers. This process was maintained systematically from the higher centres of control.<sup>59</sup> There were numerous tasks army chaplains did in order to maintain their general task, but they also had other duties. According to Edward Madigan, the clergymen had two main areas of duties. The first area were the official ones, which covered (most notably) organizing church parades for soldiers, leading of burials and contacting the families of deceased soldiers. These tasks were often ordered by the superior officers and were compulsory. Other duties mentioned were the unofficial ones, such as holding sports events, recreations or maintaining a stable culture-rich environment at the Front by organizing concerts or movie nights.<sup>60</sup>

## 2.1 Religious Themes in Women's War Poetry

One of themes present in women's religious war poetry is the theme of depicting First World War as a Holy War. In these poems, War is seen as something greater than a secular conflict, as God himself intervenes and wants the soldiers to fight for peace. One of the poets writing in this fashion is Margaret Peterson. Her two poems, "The Roll of Honour" (1915) and "A Mother's Dedication" (1917) show clear implications of this conviction. "The Roll of Honour" is not entirely nationalist or propagandistic. As can be seen from the first stanza, the persona is not secretive about people's suffering and death. She asks a recently killed soldier on the Front a question:

We speak of Glory and the Cause you died  
for,  
[...]  
Will Glory help to ease the women's  
anguish,  
Or solace them for these dear dead they  
gave?<sup>61</sup>

Peterson uses words "Glory" and "Cause" with capital letters. By doing so, she elevates and distinguishes these two terms from the other words in the excerpt. This can imply that,

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<sup>59</sup> Michael Snape, *God and British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 91–92.

<sup>60</sup> Edward Madigan, *Faith Under Fire: Anglican Army Chaplains and the Great War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 99–114.

<sup>61</sup> Margaret Peterson, "Roll of Honour," in *Lest We Forget: A War Anthology*, ed. H.B. Elliott (London: Jarrold & Sons, 1915), 17.

according to Peterson's editorial style, these people died for values greater than they are. They are not described as something secular, but rather spiritual.

In the next stanza, the persona without any hesitation answers her question: "Yes, surely. For your spirits go before / them,"<sup>62</sup> From this point on, the focus of the poems shifts from the suffering women to the soldiers at the Front. According to the persona, the very fact that these soldiers' spirits are strong enough to create the Glory is enough to ease those who shall mourn for them. Again, the concept of War shifts from the secular, human themes and shifts back to the spiritual. The soldiers may die, but their spirits, that contributed to the Glory and Cause, will prevail.

In the second part of the stanza, the soldier's motives for fighting and dying are further described. The persona applauds to those, who are willing to fight and die in this spiritual conflict. She is happy that these people fought and died "For Love and Faith, for Truth and priceless / Honour."<sup>63</sup> Again, the metaphysical values are highlighted by Peterson by the usage of capital letters.

Up until this point, it is not yet clearly stated that these values have something to do with the God himself. Maybe they are used as universal concepts independent on any deity. However, in the last two lines of the poem, Peterson creates a clear link between the God, the values, and the soldier's spirit:

God guards them safe and in His mighty  
    keeping  
Are those who nobly looked at  
    Death!<sup>64</sup>

By this final shift of focus from the soldier to the God indisputably confirms persona's conviction of God being involved in the War not only as a guardian of values presented, but also as a protector of those who fight to perceive them, willing to "nobly" die in the process. Again, the usage of the word "nobly" implies that the persona highly values soldiers who died while fulfilling their duty, fighting for a holy purpose.

Another poem by Margaret Peterson, "A Mother's Dedication," also depicts God as someone who cares for the soldiers and who would lead them in battle. Even though this poem is shorter than the previous one, consisting only of three stanzas, the theme is clearly

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Peterson, "Roll of Honour," 18

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

seen. The persona of this poem is saying goodbye to her son, who is being sent to war. From the very beginning, she does not seem very concerned about his safety. In the first stanza, she assures him that "...the baby days are over, / I can no longer shield you from the earth;"<sup>65</sup> In her eyes, her duty as the protector has ended. Her son is old enough to be eligible for enlisting.

The main focus of the poem comes in the last stanza. Here, it can be seen why the mother thinks her duty as the protector has ended. She cannot follow her son to war. However, there is God, who will look after him. As stated in the first line of the third stanza: "God guard you, son of mine, where'er you wander."<sup>66</sup> Even though this can seem as a typical way of saying farewell, the mother means something more by it. For her, the God and Nation are the ones who he fights for and who will fight with him:

God lead the banners under which you fight;  
You are my all, I give you to the Nation,  
God shall uphold you that you fight alright.<sup>67</sup>

In these final lines, the persona makes a clear statement who does the son fight for: For the Nation together with the God. By telling him that He leads the banners under which he fights, the God's role as the flag bearer for the Nation is apparent. These lines can be interpreted as that the God fights for the Allies; he represents them against the forces of evil. The last line shows a clear connection to "The Roll of Honour." Similarly, the God in this poem is seen as a protector of the soldiers. The mother sees Him as someone who will assure her son will fight well and win in the end. With the help of God, he will save the Nation and the mother is probably proud of it.

Next poem concerning the vision of war as a divine conflict is "To the Others" (1917) by Katharine Tynan. The persona of this poem addresses all mothers who would read this poem. For her, the War seems to be a holy crusade, where her son and all the other sons fight for the divine cause:

This was the gleam then that lured from far  
Your son and my son to the Holy War:  
[...]  
With the banner of Christ over them, in steel arrayed.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Margaret Peterson, "A Mother's Dedication," in *A Treasury of War Poetry: British and American Poems of the World War, 1914–1917*, ed. Herbert Clarke (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917), 250.

<sup>66</sup> Peterson, "A Mother's Dedication," 251.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> Katharine Tynnan, "To the Others," in *A Treasury of War Poetry: British and American Poems of the World War, 1914–1917*, ed. Herbert Clarke (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917), 246.

Again, the banner of holiness is mentioned, same as in the previous poem. The persona is happy that her son fights in a “Holy War,” as a crusader, against the evil. She even depicts the soldiers as “in steel arrayed,” adding to the overall feel of a holy crusader. The metaphor of a crusade reappears in the poem multiple times. Most notably in the ending lines, where the persona again describes their sons as knights:

Your son and my son for the Great Crusade,  
With the banner of Christ over them – our knights  
new-made.<sup>69</sup>

The persona, again, now more directly describes soldiers as knights, riding under the “banner of Christ.” This metaphor can be tied to the official religion’s depictions of the conflict to the masses. As mentioned in the theoretical part of this chapter, the official clergy tend to portray the conflict as a Holy War against the forces of evil, with God on their side. This poem visibly resonates with this view. Even though the Germans are not openly depicted as evil forces, the overall feeling of Allies being holy knights under the protection of God subtly indicate, that the opposing force must be necessarily the one, which is not under the protection, and therefore evil.

Like in the previously mentioned poem “The Roll of Honour,” here, in the third stanza, the theme of God as a protector of soldiers reappears. The persona is talking about “mother’s wings” that used to guard their sons. However, now that they marched into war, she calms down any sceptics, that “Should they be broken in the Lord’s wars – Peace! / He Who has given them – are they not His?”<sup>70</sup> For the persona, the mother’s wings were in fact God’s wings, not only hers that had protected their sons from the very beginning. Because of that, they will not be broken, as they are His.

There is an opposite point of view present in women’s war poetry. Not all poems show excitement about the God’s involvement in the conflict. Poems about the abandonment of God, even denying its existence can be found. One of the authors writing about this topic is Mary Borden. As mentioned by Tim Kendall, Borden, working as a nurse for the Red Cross in France at the Somme (i.e.), wrote her poem “At the Somme” (1916) here.<sup>71</sup> This poem is split into three

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<sup>69</sup> Tynan, “To The Others,” 247.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

<sup>71</sup> Kendall, *Poetry of the First World War*, 75.

parts and in the first part, called “Where is Jehovah?” (1916) is not secretive about its author’s anger at the God.

The poem opens with several references to the Old Testament, with the persona explicitly naming wonders Jehovah did for the Israelites to help them survive. Next, she calls Him for help, wondering where His wonders are now, taunting Him:

Where is Jehovah, the God of Israel, with his Ark and his  
Tabernacle and his Pillars of Fire?  
He ought to be here— This place would suit him.<sup>72</sup>

Borden tries to make a link between the biblical and the war atrocities. The persona calls for the God, the Jehovah, to arrive to help, as He did in the past. However, as can be seen further in the poem, the God did not arrive, and Borden even gives a hint of explanation why might it be like that.

This is His hour, but Jehovah has missed it.  
This is not His thunder, nor His lightning—  
These are not His people—<sup>73</sup>

The main theme of the poem starts to emerge here. Even though the soldiers fighting at the Somme might be Christians, they will not be helped by any wonder. They are not Jews; they are no longer people worthy of some heavenly help. They were abandoned by the Jehovah. He is not here, as implied in the first line. The soldiers are left there and “They must look after themselves.”<sup>74</sup> The persona’s anger at God is accompanied by the description of the soldier’s surroundings:

With the sky cracking—  
With creatures of wide metal wings tearing the sky over his head—  
With the earth shaking—  
With the solid earth under his feet giving away—<sup>75</sup>

The anaphoric “With,” present in total of 13 successive lines, creates a metaphorical contrast to the biblical stories. The persona explicitly describes what is, unlike Jehovah, present with the soldier. Her descriptions put Jehovah to the background and start to highlight the soldier, further describing his appearance and thoughts.

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<sup>72</sup> Mary Borden, “Where is Jehovah?,” in *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology*, ed. Tim Kendall (New York: OUP, 2014), 76.

<sup>73</sup> Borden, “Where is Jehovah?,” 77.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid

<sup>75</sup> Borden, “Where is Jehovah?,” 77.

For Borden, it is the common soldier who is the most important figure in the War. While he fights in the war bravely, the almighty Jehovah seems to be a coward for not interfering. The soldier "...is bigger than all the world."<sup>76</sup> This thought is explicitly confirmed at the last two lines of the poem: "Jehovah's not here—/ There's only a man standing, quite still."<sup>77</sup>

Another author focusing at the similar topic of God's abandonment is Vera Brittain. In her poem "August 1914" (1914), she puts into contrast the viewpoint of God and the mortal. In the first stanza of the poem, the persona quotes the God himself, telling us about his point of view, that "Men have forgotten me [...] And blinded eyes must learn to see."<sup>78</sup> God is anxious of the humankind, who has forgotten him. Because of this, he needs to cleanse the humankind. The whole second stanza of the poems addresses this:

So since redemption comes through pain  
He smote the earth with a cleansing rod,  
And brought Destruction's lurid reign ;<sup>79</sup>

Brittain's metaphor of a "cleansing rod" and the "Destruction's reign," representing the war conflict, however, does not, according to the persona, correlate with the humankind anymore. The last stanza of the poem puts a strong contrast to the God's conviction, described at the beginning. It focuses on the people who were, according to Him, being cleansed: "The people in their agony / Despairing cried, 'There is no God.'"<sup>80</sup>

There is a similarity between Brittain's and Borden's poem. Both tend to put the God at the margin of the conflict and focuses more at the secular participators: The mortals who are, even without God, able to carry on. In "Where is Jehovah?," the soldier is the most important and central character of the poem: He is the main part of the War, independent on the God's judgement. Borden rejects Jehovah as unable to interfere. In "August 1914," while Brittain does acknowledge God's interference, she does not seem to fully believe it herself, as the people do not recognize the cleansing and repudiate God in the last line of the poem.

In comparison to the poems depicting God as the direct participant in the war, these poems are much more secular in their metaphors. While Katharine Tynan describes soldiers as knights in shining armour under the God's leadership, Mary Borden depicts them as the force

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<sup>76</sup> Borden, "Where is Jehovah?," 78.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> Brittain, *Verses of a V.A.D.*, 15

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

bigger than the God Himself. Vera Brittain, in her depiction of suffering people, also puts her focus at the secular, human depiction of the war, rather than spiritual. It can be seen, that for these authors, the independent people are more important than the spiritual “greater cause” they fight and die for.

To conclude, the clergy has played an important role in the war, both at home and at the Front. At home, while the official religion was supportive of the War, there were some who were opposing it strongly. Nevertheless, there were numerous army chaplains in active duty who were responsible for keeping the morale at a stable level, surely meeting with women army nurses. It is therefore understandable, that while some women poets of the era correlated with the ideas presented by the official clergy, there were surely some who were opposing the War and their poetry is representing these opinions.

Poems about religious topics show that there were different opinions about the spiritual guidance in the war. At the one hand, there are poems which put God into the centre of the conflict or describe Him as a direct involver, the flag bearer of the Allied forces. These poems are usually full of hope both in life and even after death. While these poems can be described as party propagandist or nationalist, the topic of God’s involvement, rather than the government’s, is depicted as much more important. They do not depict the conflict on a secular level, but rather at the spiritual. On the other hand, there are poems which process the theme of spirituality in a different manner. As seen from the examples analysed, these poems do not put any spiritual force in the centre, but rather at the margin. They deny the involvement of God or deny His very existence. These poems were written by poets who, at some point in their lives, had spent some time at the front. While these poems can be seen as anti-Christian, they still focus on the general topic of the God in the conflict. To conclude, these poems show that women poets of the First World War were not silent in religious topics and were active in portraying their hopes and frustrations into their poetry.

### 3. The British Great War Propaganda and its Depiction of Society

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the clergy was used to promote the War and to justify Britain's cause in it. However, the clergy was not the only way the propaganda operated in Britain. The theoretical part of this chapter will mention the policies of foreign and domestic British propaganda and focus on depictions of men and the involvement of women in the cause. It will also focus on the contrarian pacifist and anti-war movements. The practical part will be firstly focused on an analysis of pro-war-themed poems by Jessie Pope and Muriel Kenny and secondly, anti-war themed poems by Vera Brittain, Margaret Sackville, and May Wedderburn Cannan will be mentioned and put into contrast.

The propaganda was an essential part of foreign policy in Britain and was debated about even before the start of the War. According to Michael Sanders, the British had to be prepared for the possibility of the start of international conflict and established a specialized policy to fight already established German pro-war propagandistic tendencies.<sup>81</sup> The main centre of the British foreign propaganda during the initial years of the War was the British War Propaganda Bureau, situated in Buckingham Gate, in a complex known as the Wellington House. Its main task was to persuade the United States, who have not yet joined the conflict, to fight for the Allied forces. Since its establishment, the work of the British War Propaganda Bureau was done in secrecy. As stated by Phillip M. Taylor the work of the Bureau "...was so secret that even most members of the Parliament were unaware of it."<sup>82</sup>

The War propaganda Bureau was established in September 1914 by Charles Masterman, the chairman of a previous similar institution, the National Insurance Commission. The literature has played a central role in the ways of propaganda distribution. As stated by Sanders, one of the first steps Masterman made was to hold a conference on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September with prominent British literary figures to write in Britain's cause.<sup>83</sup> The fact that Charles Masterman was a writer himself supports the claim that he was aware of the important function of literature on shaping public opinions.

The War Bureau was the main propagandistic centre of Great Britain. However, another means of distribution of propaganda can be found. Another way the propaganda was used was

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<sup>81</sup> Sanders, *The British Propaganda*, 38.

<sup>82</sup> Phillip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda From the Ancient World to the Present Day* 3rd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 177.

<sup>83</sup> M. L. Sanders, "Wellington House and British Propaganda during the First World War," *The Historical Journal* 18, no. 1 (March 1975): 119.



the work of the Parliamentary Recruitment Committee (PRC). PRC was given the task of extending military forces. Since the enlistment to the army was, until 1916, based on a voluntary decision, the men sometimes needed to be persuaded to do so. As Meg Albrinck writes, the Committee used different methods of persuasion: recruitment rallies, printing posters or face-to-face canvassing, while giving the focus on the poster-printing.<sup>84</sup> It can be seen that while the War Bureau was more aimed at foreign policies, the PRC was aimed on a domestic audience. M. L. Sanders describes the PRC as "...the first modern systematic official propaganda campaign in Britain directed at the mass of civilian population."<sup>85</sup>

Even though the War Bureau and the PRC were branches targeted at different audiences, some similarities can be found, for example in the sources used for their propagandistic materials. Some of the pamphlets distributed were inspired by the investigations of James Bryce concerning German atrocities in Belgium. These investigations were used, as Sanders writes, as a basis for one of the most important pieces of the War Bureau's literary propaganda, the "Bryce Report", which was translated to many foreign languages and used in their foreign policy.<sup>86</sup> This source of information was also used by the PRC for domestic recruitment purposes. As Emily Robertson mentions, the PRC also carefully picked the most atrocious findings in the investigations to help their recruitment cause, such as the story of a German soldier with a two-year-old child impaled on his bayonet to the enjoyment of his comrades.<sup>87</sup>

Not only men, also some of the British women supported the pro-war thoughts and played a role in the propagandistic, persuasive campaigns. One of the most prominent supporters was baroness Emma Orczy. As mentioned by Nicoletta Gullace, Orczy, author of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* series, formed in September 1914 a militant feminine group called "The Active Service League," with the goal of persuasion of young men into enlisting. Women who joined were given a badge and their name on the League's "Roll of Honour."<sup>88</sup> Another group of women taking part in the persuasion processes were members of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). Members of this militant, violent feminist group, known mostly

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<sup>84</sup> Meg Albrinck, "The Humanitarians and the He-Men: Recruitment Posters and the Masculine Ideal" in *Picture This: World War I Posters and Visual Culture*, ed. Pearl James (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2009) 313.

<sup>85</sup> Sanders, *Munitions of the Mind*, 193.

<sup>86</sup> Sanders, *Munitions of the Mind*, 178.

<sup>87</sup> Emily Robertson, "Atrocity Propaganda in Australia and Great Britain During the First World War" in *The SAGE Handbook of Propaganda*, ed. Paul Baines, Nicholas O'Shaughnessy and Nancy Snow (California: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2019), 29.

<sup>88</sup> Nicoletta Gullace, "White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War," *Journal of British Studies* 36, no. 2 (April 1997): 192.

as suffragettes, were known to use violent means of feminist activism before the War. According to John Simkin, Christabel Pankhurst, the leader of the WSPU at the time, started to negotiate with the government at the outbreak of the War. In exchange for amnesty for the arrested members of the WSPU, the organization would take part in pro-war persuasive activities and abandon all their former feminist tendencies.<sup>89</sup> It is therefore understandable, that this decision was not universally accepted, as many members did not want to abandon their feminist activities. As Holton writes, this step has caused a division among the supporters of the WSPU, which resulted in more fragmentation and finally contributed to its eventual dissolution in 1917.<sup>90</sup>

Another women's persuasive group was the White Feather Movement. As stated by Nicoletta Gullace, this organization was founded by Admiral Charles Penrose Fitzgerald in August 1914. The main goal of its members was to give a white feather to every man who was not wearing a uniform.<sup>91</sup> The symbol of White Feather, according to the Online Etymological Dictionary, is used as a symbol of cowardice.<sup>92</sup> Because of the metaphorical meaning of the white feather, it can be deduced that this campaign was aimed mostly at diminishing and shaming of male masculinity. Therefore, the presence of woman, "fair sex," was essential in the cause. Men's masculinity was an easy target for persuasive means. These tendencies are present in some of Jessie Pope's poetry, which will be analysed in the practical part.

Not only propaganda was present in the War. Opposite, anti-war movements were prominent as well. As mentioned in the previous chapter, many religious groups stated anti-war views. However, political groups were also active. One of the most prominent anti-war political groups operating in Great Britain was the Union of Democratic Control (UDC). According to Angus Mitchell, the union was founded in 1914 by Charles Trevelyan, J. Ramsay Macdonald, Arthur Ponsonby, and Norman Angell. The main form of UDC's activism was the distribution of pamphlets, denying the reasons for the Britain to join the conflict, thus openly fighting against the official statements. However, the activities of the UDC were being heavily

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<sup>89</sup> "Women's Social and political Union (Suffragettes)," Spartacus Educational, last modified January 2020, <https://spartacus-educational.com/Wwspu.htm>

<sup>90</sup> Sandra Stanley Holton, *Suffrage Days: Stories from the Women's Suffrage Movement* 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), 211.

<sup>91</sup> Gullace, "White Feathers," 178, 182–183.

<sup>92</sup> "white feather (n.)," The Online Etymological Dictionary, accessed May 11, 2020, [https://www.etymonline.com/word/white%20feather#etymonline\\_v\\_25606](https://www.etymonline.com/word/white%20feather#etymonline_v_25606).

suppressed and censored, even after the end of the War.<sup>93</sup> It can be seen, that prominent socialist political figures more openly expressed their opinions about the War. Macdonald, being a chairman of the left-wing Labour party and Angell being a member of the Parliament for the Labour Party supports the fact, that the socialists were more prominent in the anti-war related processes, unlike their right-wing counterparts.

The women's feminist society also played an active role in the anti-war campaigns. According to John Simkin and Stanley Holton, the leader of the NUWSS, Millicent Fawcett, refused to take any part in the persuasion processes, unlike her WSPU counterpart, Christabel Pankhurst. However, she was not entirely pacifist either, as she also refused to use the NUWSS for political pacifist campaigns to stop the War.<sup>94</sup> This view was not universal within the group. As Stanley Holton writes in "Suffrage Days," with the start of the war, some members of the NUWSS openly expressed pacifist opinions, such as Helena Swanwick or Isabella Ford. These women's attitudes correlated with, the UDC's view to have a more responsive and open foreign policy.<sup>95</sup> The fact that Swanwick was a member of the Labour Party further contributes to the previous statement that the socialists were more anti-war oriented. Furthermore, as stated by Stanley Holton, these pacifist feminists also urged the NUWSS to be represented at the International Congress of Women in Hague in 1915, although without success, as they were prevented to do so by Ms Fawcett.<sup>96</sup> On this international meeting, as John Paull explains, over 1000 women from twelve countries have gathered to discuss ways of avoiding the continuation of the War.<sup>97</sup> It can therefore be seen that feminist women expressed anti-war opinions on both the domestic and the international field.

### **3.1 Pro- and Anti-war Themes in Women's War Poetry**

Since the beginning of the conflict in 1914, one of the themes persistent in several poems is that of pro-war, aggressively national voices against men of Great Britain, not wanting to enlist to service. This can be caused by the propaganda of the era. As Michael Sanders mentions, England's poets and writers were used to the propagandistic cause and most of the time their

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<sup>93</sup> Angus Mitchell, "1914–18 And the War on Peace," *History Ireland* 22, no. 4 (July/August 2014): 46–48.

<sup>94</sup> Spartacus Educational, "Women's Social and Political Union.,"; Holton, *Suffrage Days*, 212.

<sup>95</sup> Holton, *Suffrage Days*, 213–214.

<sup>96</sup> Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900–1918* (Cambridge, CUP, 1986), 136–138.

<sup>97</sup> John Paull, "The Women Who Tried to Stop the Great War: The International Congress of Women at The Hague 1915," in *Global Leadership Initiatives for Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding*, ed. Andrew H. Campbell (Hershey: IGI Global, 2018): 253.

main aim was to depict the enemy in a harmful way. These writers were mostly used to work for propaganda's cause.<sup>98</sup> It affected the women demographic, as posters aimed specifically at women can be found. Nosheen Khan writes about posters that aimed at women and forced them to either enlist their men, or shame men for not doing so themselves.<sup>99</sup>

The effect of these tendencies can be seen in the poems of the era. Plenty of them address men directly or show them in good light. The most prominent pro-war poet is Jessie Pope. As an example, her poem "The Call" (1916) aims at men who would be too scared to enlist, pledging:

Who's going out to win,  
And who wants to save his skin -  
Will you, my laddie?<sup>100</sup>

In this poem a clear attack on anyone who would not go to war can be seen. A comparison of men who already enlisted "to win," and those who want to "save their skin" shows two separate views on men the persona tries to evoke. On the first look, looks like they try to applaud enlisted men by calling them winners. On the other hand, anyone who does not want to go is shown in a humiliating way and called "laddie." This mother-like, protective denomination seems to be used to depict men who did not enlist yet as mere scared boys, whereas those who had already done as brave men, not scared of going to war and looking forward to winning.

Another evidence of calling the not-yet-enlisted men weak or insufficient can be found in a poem "A Call To Arms" (1915) by Scottish poet Mary Symon. In the second stanza, the persona pledges young men to "Give weakling hands your work to do, / Leave child and wife to God."<sup>101</sup> The "weakling hands" possibly refer to those men who did not want to go, fuelling the propagandistic nature of such poems. The fact that it was written for a London newspaper "The Graphic" supports this claim.<sup>102</sup>

As mentioned above, men who enlisted are depicted as better in these poems. This view of seeing young soldiers as brave is mentioned in another poem by Jessie Pope, titled "A Question of Courage" (1916). Here, family members of certain private Brown are shown as supportive of his departure and full of hope. One specific stanza mentions his mother,

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<sup>98</sup> Sanders, *The British Propaganda*, 107, 162.

<sup>99</sup> Khan, *Woman's Poetry of the First World War*, 80.

<sup>100</sup> Pope, *Simple Rhymes*, 38.

<sup>101</sup> Mary Symon, "A Call To Arms," in *Songs and Poems of the Great War*, ed. Donald Tulloch (Worcester: The Davis Press, 1915), 39.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*

Mrs. Brown, who shows no doubts in her son's bravery, saying "'I'm confident' she said, *my* son would never want to hide or run,.'"<sup>103</sup> Even here, a slight hint on the comparison mentioned above can be deducted. The word "my" is highlighted with italics. By this elevation, Pope could evoke feeling that there *are* sons who would like to hide or run, but certainly not Mrs. Brown's and she is proud because of that.

Jessie Pope is not the only poet depicting men soldiers as brave warriors. Another poet is Muriel Kenny. In her poem "Khaki soldiers", she aims to even a greater scope of focus. She praises not only soldiers from Britain alone, but those from all the British Empire as well, mentioning that:

Wher'er our colours wave,  
Each land has khaki soldiers  
As busy and as brave.<sup>104</sup>

The topic of brave service appears repeatedly throughout the poem, such as in the last two lines of the second stanza, where Kenny writes that, no matter the weather, "You hear the khaki soldiers / Still singing as they go."<sup>105</sup> In the last stanza Kenny advises people to acknowledge the determination of these khaki soldiers and to repeat in their heart that "'There go the men would gaily / Their lives for England give -'"<sup>106</sup> She describes these soldiers as determined to die for their nation. Bravery in the willingness to die.

The topic of praising injury, mutilation or even death in action is shown in more poems. Jessie Pope is no exception to this attitude. Two examples of her poems, "Not Forgotten" (1916) and "The One-Legged Soldier Man" (1916) depict death and crippling to show the brave spirit of those soldiers despite their suffering. In "Not Forgotten", the focus is directed towards soldiers who died before they could engage in combat. The persona is not blind to the fact of death on the battlefield, writing that before these soldiers started to fight, "A shadow crossed their path, and laid them low."<sup>107</sup> However, the picture of death, portrayed by the metaphor of a shadow, is not shown as something insignificant and meaningless. It is rather used as something to remember as shown at the very end of the poem: "Their spirit lives! Shall we forget them? -no- / The lads who died before they struck their blow."<sup>108</sup> This enthusiasm

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<sup>103</sup> Pope, *Simple Rhymes*, 30.

<sup>104</sup> Kenny, *Khaki Soldiers*, 4.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>107</sup> Pope, *Simple Rhymes*, 29.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*

correlates with Kenny's poem in describing falling in combat as something soldiers were prepared for and would happily undergo. Also, the advice to people to remember and admire these soldiers is present in both poems.

The second poem, "The One-Legged Soldier Man," provides an appraisal of a mutilated soldier who, despite his physical disability, still stands strong-willed and is full of energy. This enthusiasm can be seen at the beginning of the first stanza:

He's ready to box  
A couple of crocks.  
At the door of your heart he cheerily knocks –<sup>109</sup>

The diction is essential. The one-legged soldier is described as someone willing to fight even the "crocks." This term, according to *The Oxford Dictionary of Slang* describes "...an old person, who is deliberated, or invalid."<sup>110</sup> Pope uses this slang term in order to distinguish her brave soldier from other invalid people, attacking their weakness in favour of propagandistic cause. In the next line Pope uses the expression "cheerily" to evoke feeling that this wounded soldier is still full of joy, despite his disability. This lack of romantic grief and pity is further described in the second stanza which focuses on the fact that even though this soldier has lost one of his legs, he still has the other one, which serves him well, and even though "One shank may be wooden, There's kick left in the good 'un."<sup>111</sup> The whole poem seems to promote the idea that losing a leg in a warfare is not the end for him, but rather a beginning of something new and something which should not be grieved, but rather encouraged and admired.

Another poem dealing with the topic of admirable loss is "A Visit to the Hospital" (1915) by Muriel Kenny. The poem is written in a first-person narrative. The persona admires a wounded soldier lying in the hospital she came to visit. The whole second stanza is dedicated to the sole admiration of the soldier, with persona saying, that: "I sat beside my hero-man,"<sup>112</sup> asking him if he can show his "honourable scars."<sup>113</sup> This approach is found further in the poem in the fifth stanza, where the narrator "thought him very brave and kind."<sup>114</sup>

The depiction of a soldier in Kenny's poem strongly correlates with that in Pope's. As in the previous poem, the soldier is also shown being proud of his injuries. Even though

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<sup>109</sup> Pope, *Simple Rhymes*, 21

<sup>110</sup> John Ayto, *The Oxford Dictionary of Slang* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), 369.

<sup>111</sup> Pope, *Simple Rhymes*, 21.

<sup>112</sup> Kenny, *Khaki Soldiers*, 10.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*

readers do not know exactly how Kenny's soldier is wounded, the positivity is shown also with the soldier in the second stanza, saying "I knew the fight was won." And the fifth stanza claiming "And if I never fight again, At least I played the game."<sup>115</sup> Even though he does not necessarily fight those who pity him, he is proud that he could fight in the war, just like the soldier in Pope's "The One-Legged Soldier Man".

Just like poems with pro-war themes can be found, poems containing the opposite point of view are to be found as well. One of the differences in non-propaganda poems is the opposite vision of personal loss in war. Many poems deal with this subject and are usually centred around someone that the poet, or the narrator, knew very well, being it a lover or a family member. These poems neither praise the death on the battlefield nor admire the death for a bigger cause. They usually depict a strong personal feel of grief or anger.

One of the poems illustrating this point of view is "Perhaps" (1915) by Vera Brittain, dedicated to her deceased fiancé. Most of the poem describes a possible future world where the persona will be able to live a normal life again, writing that maybe, she will: "...feel once more I do not live in vain, / Although bereft of You."<sup>116</sup> However, the last stanza of the poem gives all these claims a strong contrast. The persona mentions that, even though all in the world could be great again,

There is one greatest joy I shall not know  
Again, because my heart for loss of You  
Was broken, long ago.<sup>117</sup>

Another poem targeting the loss of someone close is "Victory" (1916) by Lady Margaret Sackville. Its scope is broader, targeting groups of women who do not cheer during a victorious moment. The first stanza is devoted to mothers who have lost their sons. The whole poem opens with the question "Who are ye that come with eyes red and weeping"<sup>118</sup> The enthusiastic crowd gets their response: "'We are mothers, and each has lost a son."<sup>119</sup> There is a certain contrast found, similar to that in Brittain's poem. Of course, there is a victory, but for what cost? This attitude does not correlate with the enthusiasm and lack of grief pro-war poets showed in their

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<sup>115</sup> Kenny, *Khaki Soldiers*, 10.

<sup>116</sup> Vera Brittain, *Verses of a V.A.D.*, 20.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid

<sup>118</sup> Margaret Sackville, *The Pageant of War* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent and Co. Ltd., 1916), 30.

<sup>119</sup> Sackville, *The Pageant of War*, 30.

poems. For Sackville, the loss in war is not something to appraise, but rather something to mourn about.

Another poem contrasting joy and grief is May Wedderburn Cannan's "For a Girl" (1918). Written at the end of the War, it depicts personal grief and anger of a woman who has lost her lover in the war and is partly addressed to another enthusiastic girl. The persona is seen as full of grief and anger, addressing the girl in an ill-tempered manner to "Go cheering down the boulevards and shout and wave your flags."<sup>120</sup> This line evokes the feeling that the persona does not want to participate in the cheering, as later in the stanza the reason for this mood can be found. The persona pledges the girl to "... let me break my heart in peace / For all the best men die."<sup>121</sup> Again, no empathy for a heroic death can be found, unlike the pro-war poems. Each stanza ends with a persona's personal grief, describing feeling of anger and mystification. This can be seen in invocations of her lover's promises that he will return to her after the war is over. However, the end of this stream of consciousness proves quite the opposite, saying "And the War is over, over And they never can come true."<sup>122</sup>

Another common feature of some anti-war poems is the use of negative metaphors of the conflict and sometimes the era itself. One of such poems is "June, 1915" (1915) by Charlotte Mew. Part of this poem is targeted at the way the world perceives positiveness, here depicted in the form of the month of June, which is usually full of colours and warmth. The poem states that: "What's little June to a great broken world with eyes gone dim / From too much looking at the face of grief, the face of dread?"<sup>123</sup> Even though war is not explicitly mentioned, it is metaphorized as a face of grief and dread, which caused the world to become blind to any beauty.

Another poem using negative descriptions of the era is "War" (1918) by Vera Brittain. This poem concerns the non-successful German offensive in March 1918. However, no enthusiasm can be found. The beginning of the second stanza depicts the whole war period as "An Age of Death and Agony and Tears, a cruel age of woe unguessed before—"<sup>124</sup> Brittain's

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<sup>120</sup> May Wedderburn Cannan, "For a Girl," in *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology*, ed. Tim Kendall (New York, OUP, 2014), 184.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Cannan, "For a Girl," 185.

<sup>123</sup> Charlotte Mew, "June, 1915," in *Poetry of the First World War: An Anthology*, ed. Tim Kendall (New York, OUP, 2014), 46.

<sup>124</sup> Brittain, *Verses of a V.A.D.*, 44.



usage of capital letters when describing the age in the initial line suggests the author's need to emphasize these words, making the importance of this lines much bigger for her.

However, the most diverse negative description of the conflict is provided in "The Pageant of War" by Lady Margaret Sackville. The persona of the poem describes war as a pageant of "million a million feet,"<sup>125</sup> thus creating "The pitiful army of the dead."<sup>126</sup>

Here, the War is embodied as a leader of this pageant, having "overhanging eyes glassy with pride"<sup>127</sup> and "blue-veined, swollen face."<sup>128</sup> His clothing is further described in an interesting manner, with the persona saying, that the War must "wear a mask,"<sup>129</sup> otherwise the hearts of all the people watching it would "shrink in loathing and in fear."<sup>130</sup> Sackville uses the metaphor of a mask to possibly refer to propaganda the War has to use to look pretty. This is further confirmed, as the crowd, watching the pageant, is described as enthusiastic about it:

I heard the crowd give voice,  
They saw the crests and did rejoice—  
The crowd exalted with one voice.<sup>131</sup>

Another evidence of the War using different strategies to become appealing to the people is the narrator's description how the people got in this pageant in the first place. They comment on the War as coming "to them disguised, sometimes of Piece, sometimes of Christ."<sup>132</sup> Here, Sackville criticizes some methods propaganda used to get more people to enlist, such as the vision of sacrifice and holy war, as already presented in the previous chapter.

Another topic covered in the poem is the motif of the white road the pageant marches on. The persona wonders "what had made the road so white,"<sup>133</sup> as it shines "...too white – too white, as though in some unnatural light."<sup>134</sup> The usage of "unnatural" is important, as it provides a foreshadowing that this road is not any regular road. Later in the poem, there is given the explanation why the road is so bright and white. The persona gives a description

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<sup>125</sup> Sackville, *The Pageant of War*, 10.

<sup>126</sup> Sackville, *The Pageant of War*, 13.

<sup>127</sup> Sackville, *The Pageant of War*, 12.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Sackville, *The Pageant of War*, 17.

<sup>132</sup> Sackville, *The Pageant of War*, 14.

<sup>133</sup> Sackville, *The Pageant of War*, 15.

<sup>134</sup> Sackville, *The Pageant of War*, 11.

of the material the road is made of, saying “The dust was trampled bones. ‘Twas *they* who made the road so white.”<sup>135</sup> The destructive aspect of war is shown here. Sackville even uses the italics to emphasize the importance of what the roadblocks are made of.

The British propaganda in the Great Britain was since its beginning aimed at all spheres of society, with the field of literature not being excluded. Not only posters and pamphlets were used to justify Britain’s involvement in the conflict, women themselves were used to persuade men into enlisting, with the help of prominent female figures. Contrary to this movement, the pacifist and anti-war parts of society started to become apparent. The most prominent, mostly left-wing-oriented UDC had many woman members and tried to, despite official censorship, promote the anti-war ideas. Women’s suffrage movements had different appeals to the propaganda. While former-activist WSPU agreed to cooperate with the government, the more peaceful NUWSS remained impartial.

The poetry concerning propaganda has its entries on both sides of the coin: Both pro- and anti-war in nature. In the nationalistic poems, soldiers are usually seen as brave individuals, proud of their service and having a strong will pushing them forward, earning admiration and respect from their surroundings. Those who did not want to enlist or were not eager enough are shown in the opposite matter, being made fun of or called names, as seen in the poems showed above. Contrary, anti-war poetry of the era also shows some recurring themes, which are targeted at both experience of loss and the global impact of the War. The loss is usually interpreted in a personal manner, with the poems being told by a grievous narrator. The global impact of war on the era is shown in the depiction of it as something full of negation, with the metaphors of death reoccurring in some of the poems. It is therefore clearly seen that these poets wanted the war to stop, targeting those who applaud the war and those negatively affected by it. Their voices in these poems are represented either in form of a melancholic moaning or by using dark, sombre metaphors to emphasise the negative aspects of both the War and the era it created.

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<sup>135</sup> Sackville, *The Pageant of War*, 18.

## Conclusion

As a conclusion, the poetry of British women of the Great War (1914–1918) shows that reoccurring tendencies in analysed texts are visible and clearly distinguishable. With the connection to the theoretical part of this thesis, analysed pieces of poetry can be sorted into three main spheres: Poems depicting labour and help to the nation from the woman's perspective, religious themes aimed at God and metaphors, sometimes fuelled by the religious approach to the conflict and finally themes of pro-war, propagandist and anti-war, even pacifist themes. Interestingly, in most cases, poems written in both enthusiastic and melancholic tone can be found in all three categories.

Analysed poems depicting labour and help to nation are divided into three main subareas: Poetry about general work, poetry about healthcare and finally texts depicting knitting. Poems in the first area were found to be divided in their themes. On the one hand, poems by Jessie Pope show that even though they might not be always fully enthusiastic, they still depict a general vision of success and faith in the conflict's cause. On the other hand, a poem "Women in Munition Making" by Mary Gabriel Collins. This poem depicts disgust and fear of the loss of feminine purity when working in munition works. Healthcare-themed poetry also depicts both sides of the coin. Mary Borden and Jessie Pope depict women nurses and ambulance drivers as heroines, strong and capable of doing unpleasant jobs while at Front, or at home in hospitals. Unlike Jessie Pope, Mary Borden has been a direct participant in battles in Belgium, which makes her enthusiasm that more believable. More credibility to this fact adds her poems "Dedication," which depicts Borden's disgust and envy for her former colleagues after not being re-applied for return to the Front following her return to Britain. The other side of the coin is showed by poems written by Vera Brittain. Like Borden, Brittain, too, was a member of the VAD at the Front. However, her poems are more sorrowful in nature. They concern death of nurses in "Vengeance is Mine" and, similarly to Collins' poem, the dissolution of women's empathy and womanhood in "To Another Sister". The third area of labour, covered by poems by Jessie Pope and Muriel Kenny, is the area of knitting. As knitting became a popular way for women to help their nation, these poems, "No!," "Socks" and "Knitting Game" show women's enthusiasm about knitting in a nationalistic way.

Second main area of woman poetry's themes is the area of religion and religious depictions. These poems again show contrasts in their depiction of God. On the one hand, poems such as "The Roll of Honour" by Margaret Peterson and "To the Others" by Katharine

Tynan show God as the protector and follower of the Allied forces, which are then depicted as forces of Good fighting against the forces of Evil in a Biblical-like crusade. They depict soldiers fighting in the War as knights under the banners of Lord. Therefore, these poems can correlate with the publicly promoted view of the war as a divine conflict, justifying the atrocities war brings with itself. On the other hand, there are poems which are bitter in nature. Such is the poem “Where is Jehovah?” by Mary Borden, which depicts God as someone who has forgotten His people and is no longer important for the conflict. Instead, the poem is focused more at the soldier himself who is more important than the God Himself, as he fights bravely, unlike his supposed divine protector. Vera Brittain is also bitter about the God’s involvement in the conflict. To her, God sees the conflict as a way of global cleansing. However, for the people who lived through the conflict, He is no longer existent, and they repudiate Him. The fact that these two authors were present in the combat itself can explain the bitterness their poetry is full of.

The last area women poets frequently wrote about is the area of pro- or anti-war themes. In the light of propaganda and nationalism, several poets, like Muriel Kenny or Jessie Pope are seen to write about the heroism of soldiers fighting at the Front, regardless of possible injuries or even death. Jessie Pope’s “The One-Legged Soldier Man” depicts a crippled soldier lying in the hospital. Despite his mutilation, he is described as full of spirit and optimism. Another theme present in propagandistic poems is their aim at men who did not enlist to army yet, such as in “A Call to Arms” by Scottish poet Mary Symon. The persona of this poem pledges men to leave everything they do to their relatives and rush to enlist. More straightforward way of persuasion is used by Jessie Pope in “The Question of Courage,” evoking feelings of inferiority and femininity in those not-yet-enlisted men who would read it. Contrary to these patriotic and propagandistic poems, poems which are pacifist in nature are also present. These anti-war poems focus on the losses the war brings to people and are melancholic in nature. Such is the case of Vera Brittain’s “Perhaps,” “For a Girl” by May Wedderburn Cannan and Lady Margaret Sackville’s “Victory.” These poems show, that when someone is killed in action, they will never return back and is gone forever. Another common feature of anti-war poems is the depiction of war itself in a negative metaphorical manner. Such is the case of, for example, “June, 1914” by Charlotte Mew, where the war-torn world is described as an entity with dimmed eyes. The last and most notable example is “The Pageant of War” by Lady Margaret Sackville. In here, the war is shown as a leader of parade full of death, misery and destruction, which is applauded by those nationalists who see it.

From the findings made in these thesis it can be concluded that women poets of the Great War wrote frequently about social issues, domestic and international situation and mostly covered areas of work and national help, religion and its depiction of the conflict and either propaganda or pacifism, aimed at both foreign and domestic affairs and include personal believes of individual poets. Apart from the theme of knitting socks, which is unite in its depiction of enthusiasm in corresponding poems, in almost all cases, contrary voices can be found and are equally distributed. It cannot be said that one point of view was more prominent than the other, as poems depicting each theme in opposite manners were found. These beliefs were surely individually fuelled by the era: The change of the surroundings, newly acquired emancipation, some's work at the Front, propagandistic features distributed by official means and religion, or opposite, peaceful movements present within the nation and the religious population.

## Resumé

Tématem této bakalářské práce je zanalyzovat a popsat typická témata básní, které byly napsány a vydány ženskými básničkami v období první světové války, v letech 1914 až 1918. Tato práce je rozdělena do třech kapitol, z čehož každá obsahuje teoretickou a následně praktickou podkapitolu. Každá kapitola mapuje jednu oblast témat, která se v básních opakovaně objevují.

První teoretická kapitola se zabývá problematikou ženské zaměstnanosti a pozici na trhu práce ve Velké Británii. V teoretické podkapitole je nejprve řešena pozice žen nižší a střední třídy v devatenáctém století, v době přímo předcházející první světové válce. V této době, především v osmnáctém a devatenáctém století, byla žena vnímána jinak než muž. Zatímco muž měl dle obecného mínění pracovat, žena byla především vnímána jako ta, která zůstává doma a stará se o děti. Nicméně ženy nižších tříd byly nuceny i přesto pracovat, aby si zajistily obživu. Prodávaly na trzích, pracovaly jako pomocná síla v nemocnicích a jiné. S příchodem devatenáctého století a vlny urbanizace dochází k postupné změně pracovních příležitostí pro ženy. Objevují se pracovní pozice v továrnách, či na úřadech. I zde však ženy stále čelily nerovným podmínkám, především v přijímacích procesech. V tomto období dochází také k zásadní změně: Ženy středních tříd začínají pracovat také. Živí se jako učitelky či úřednice a některé z nich začínají budovat vlastní kariéru například v zemědělství. S vypuknutím první světové války však dochází k nové vlně pracovních příležitostí. Jelikož muži byli odvedeni na frontu, bylo nutné nahradit prázdné pracovní pozice, které ženy zaplnily, například v továrnách na munici a chemičkách, kde čelily drsným pracovním podmínkám. Typickou oblastí, kde se ženy během války uplatňovaly, byly pozice ve zdravotnictví, kde ženy pracovaly jak na pozicích profesionálních, tak i dobrovolnických. Nejzásadnější dobrovolnickou skupinou za války byla Voluntary Aid Detachment, zvaná také VAD. Poslední pokrytou oblastí, kde ženy pomáhaly svému národu prací, bylo pletení. Tato činnost byla v době války mezi ženami extrémně populární a podporovaná, jelikož bylo potřeba dovážet teplé oblečení na frontu. Popularita pletení byla podnícena založením Queen Mary Needlework Guild, odměňující ženy za jejich upletené ponožky, šály a jiné.

Druhá teoretická kapitola pokrývá otázku náboženství. V teoretické podkapitole je nejprve popsána pozice duchovenstva ve vztahu ke konfliktu. V raných stádiích války oficiální duchovenstvo převážně zastávalo názor, že válka je nutná. Nikoliv z důvodu teritoriálního dobývání, nicméně z hlediska vidiny konfliktu jako Boží války, kdy Bůh stojí nad

spojeneckými silami, které jsou předurčené k vymýcení zla, které představují nepřátelské jednotky. Práce duchovenstva byla využívána k nacionalistickým účelům i nepřímo. Wellington House, vrchní sídlo britské propagandistické činnosti, využívalo pro své pamflety pastorační dopisy belgického kněze Desiré-Josepha Merciera, jehož mše byly vedeny v silně patriotickém duchu a nabádaly k vytrvalosti a důvěře vlasti. Kromě proválečných tendencí a propagace existovaly za války i tací, kteří vykazovali protiválečné názory. Jednalo se především o Quakery, jejichž člen, Henry Hodkin se v roce 1914 podílí na založení Fellowship of Reconciliation, mezinárodního, převážně náboženského hnutí opovrhující válkou. Duchovenstvo však nebylo aktivní pouze v domácí sféře. Příchod války způsobil nárůst počtu vojenských kaplanů, kteří měli za úkol udržovat a případně zvyšovat morálku vojka na frontě a starat se o další duchovní aktivity, jako například pořádání mší či pohřebních ceremonií.

Třetí kapitola pokrývá oblast propagandy v Británii. S hrozící válkou bylo nutné bojovat proti již zařízené německé proválečné propagandě. Zároveň bylo potřeba zajistit, aby Spojené Státy Americké, které se zatím do konfliktu nezapojily, v případě zapojení bojovaly za spojeneckou stranu. Plnění tohoto úkolu měl na starosti Charles Masterman, který zřídil propagandistickou centrálu, přezdívanou Wellington House. Propaganda byla nutná i z jiných důvodů. Před zavedením povinné branné povinnosti v roce 1916 muži narukovali dobrovolně a v některých případech bylo nutné je přesvědčit. K tomuto účelu bylo použito více způsobů. Jedním byla činnost Parliamentary Recruitment Committee (PRC). Členové PRC oslovovali muže na ulicích, chodili dům od domu a tiskly proválečné plakáty. Ženy byly do tohoto procesu zapojeny také. Emma Orczy, nacionalistka a uznávaná spisovatelka, založila ženskou organizaci The Active Service League, jejímž úkolem bylo přesvědčovat muže k narukování. Další skupinou žen, které se podílely na přesvědčovacích procesech, byly členky WSPU, extremistické feministické skupiny, která se podílela na několika násilných procesech před válkou. Vedoucí této skupiny, Christabel Pankhurst, přislíbila vládě spolupráci výměnou za amnestii uvězněných členek. Poslední popsanou skupinou je White Feather Movement. Toto hnutí, tvořené pouze ženami, mělo za úkol dehonestovat muže bez uniforem předáváním bílých peříček, symbolů čistoty a bážlivosti. Kromě proválečných postupů byly projevovány i protiválečné přístupy. Jednou z nejprominentnějších protiválečných skupin byla Union for Democratic Control (UDC), která hlásala větší otevřenost zahraniční politiky, a jejíž členové byli často členové levicově smýšlející. I ženy vykazovaly protiválečné vlivy, jako například některé členky NUWSS, další feministické skupiny prominentní ve Velké Británii. Tyto ženy, jako například Helena Swanwick, úzce spolupracovaly s UDC.

Výsledkem praktických podkapitol je dokumentace způsobu zpracování výše popsaných témat ve vybraných ženských básních. Typická témata zabývající se ženskou prací a pomocí byla nalezena tři: Téma zdravotnictví, pletení, a nakonec tři básně, které, ač také pokrývají obecné téma, nedají se zařadit ani do jedné z předchozích dvou skupin. Básně pokrývající obecně ženské pracovnice popisují jejich nasazení jak melancholickým způsobem, jako například v básni „Women in Munition Making,“ která popisuje práci žen v továrnách na munici a znázorňuje zničení ženské něžnosti. Téma zdravotnictví, jak bylo zjištěno, bylo zpracováváno dvojím způsobem. Dají se najít básně, které opěvují honosnou a heroickou práci, kterou sestry a řidičky sanitek vykonávají, tak i básně, které se zaměřují na negativní aspekty této práce. Téma pletení je znázorněno v převážně patriotistickém duchu. Dvě básně, které se pletením zabývají v obou případech znázorňují důležitost této práce pro vojsko, a tím pádem pro celou Británii. Žena je v těchto básních popsána jako silná, majíc svůj podíl na průběhu války.

Téma náboženství je v ženské poezii zpracováno převážně dvěma způsoby. Prvním opakujícím se tématem s náboženskou tematikou je vidina války jako Božího konfliktu. Tyto básně, ač patriotistické, vždy zmiňují Boha jako hlavního a aktivního účastníka války. Příkladem mohou být básně „The Roll of Honour“ a „The Mother’s Dedication“ od Margaret Peterson, které opakovaně popisují vojáky jako rytíře bojující pod standartou Boha, či jako jeho chráněnce. Druhé téma je naprosto odlišné, a zabývá se myšlenkou odloučení Boha. Tyto básně dávají silný kontrast k básním zkoumaným dříve. V těchto básních se autorky rozhořčují nad myšlenkou, že by Bůh vedl tak krutý konflikt. Typickým příkladem je Mary Borden, která v básni „Where is Jehovah?“ zaměřuje svůj pohled na obyčejného vojáka, který má pro ni ve válce vyšší cenu než Bůh, který ho opustil. Další autorkou je Vera Brittain, která ve své básni „August 1914“ dává do kontrastu pohled Boha, který vidí válku jako způsob očištění světa s pohledem vojáků a civilistů, kteří ho zavrhnou. Již pro ně není důležitý.

Básně s propagandistickou tematikou jsou rozdělené do dvou polárních protikladů. První, propagandistické básně se zaměřují především na popisy vojáka. Znázorňují ho jako hrdinu, nezlomného a věčně pozitivního, jako například v básních „The One-Legged Soldier Man“ od Jessie Pope, nebo „Khaki Soldiers“ od Muriel Kenny. Vojáky v propagandistických básních nezlomí ani zranění, ani smrt, ba právě naopak. Zranění vojáků jsou opěvovány, jako například jizvy vojáka v básni „A Visit to the Hospital,“ napsaná Muriel Kenny. Opakem těchto básní jsou básně protiválečné. Tyto básně se zaměřují na tíhu způsobenou ztrátou milované osoby. Příkladem mohou být básně „Perhaps“ Lady Margaret Sackville a „For a Girl“ od Lady



Wedderburn Cannan. Tyto básně jsou napsány v melancholickém duchu a na rozdíl od propagandistických básní se zaměřují na smrt z pohledu pozůstalých, nikoliv z pohledu národa. Další typickou součástí protiválečných básní je zobrazení války formou negativních přirovnání. Tyto metafory se objevují v básni „June, 1915“ Charlotte Mew, „War“ pacifistky Vera Brittain a „The Pageant of War“ Lady Margaret Sackville. Tyto básně popisují válku buď jako sílu ničící svět, či, jako v případě Lady Margaret Sackville, jako průvod smrti, ničící vše, co mu přijde do cesty.

Tyto básně ukazují, že ženy období první světové války se vyjadřovaly k otázkám domácím i mezinárodním, že panovaly protichůdné i společné názory, a že tyto názory často promítaly do poetické literární tvorby.

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