

SCARS UPON MY HEART

Key Points

1. **Scars Upon My Heart. Its place in anthologies of WW1 poetry.** A pioneering work which opened the way for feminist reformation of the canon of war poetry.
2. **Women's right to speak.** To articulate and give meaning to their non-combatant or civilian experience just as the soldier-poets articulated and gave meaning to their experience of combat in the trench lyric. The debate within literary criticism: combat gnosticism (as defined by James Campbell, see Further Reading below) v. civilian experience of war.
3. **What does this edition offer the reader?** [preface by Judith Kazantzis; introduction by the editor Catherine Reilly; acknowledgements – textual sources; 79 poets arranged alphabetically by last name; list of biographical entries]. Each section offers a wealth of material for analysis, and each section illuminates the others. Are there other ways of ordering the poems within the anthology? (eg by date of composition, by theme). How was it received? Published Virago the most important feminist press of the 1970s and 1980s, which greatly assisted canon-reformation by making texts by women available to general readers. Virago also re-published Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* in this period.
4. **Stereotypes of women in time of war:** to what extent does this anthology contest or affirm these stereotypes? A. men bear arms, women bear children. B. Masculinity defends the feminine - war heightens this polarisation of gender. C. Edwardian women, rendered passive by their lack of full citizenship because unable to vote, were culture-bearers within the family, guardians of the nation's morals, symbols of the nation. D. Men are active, women are passive. E. men are rational, women are emotional. F. Fallen men are heroes, fallen women are whores.
5. **Two suggested ways of reading the anthology.** Within the represented multiplicity of experience and political perspective we can 1. Look for common forms and themes (eg polarisation of gendered experience, contrast between rhythms of nature and events of war, the challenges of non-combatant experience, home and away, valorisation of the domestic sphere, compassion for the wounded and fallen, positive social opportunities for women) 2. Discuss individual poems and find out more about the poetry published by individual poets.

Further Reading

1. **Claire Buck, 'British women's writing of the Great War', *Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 85-112**
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521821452.005>
Buck surveys women writers of this era by genre: poetry, drama and prose. The first section of her essay examines women's war poetry and offers dynamic readings of many of the poems printed in *Scars Upon My Heart*, drawing out shared themes, commenting on competing political viewpoints and styles. Her remarks are often embedded in biographical vignettes or political context.
2. **Claire Buck, 'Reframing Women's War Poetry', *Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century British and Irish Women's Poetry*, ed. Jane Dowson (CUP 2011), pp. 24-41** <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521197854.003>
This is a chapter about women's poetry of war across the twentieth century which includes incisive analyses of several poems printed in *Scars Upon My Heart*.
3. **James Campbell, 'Combat Gnosticism: The Ideology of First World War Poetry Criticism', *New Literary History*, 30.1 (1999), 203-14** <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/24440>
An important article which critiques the way in which literary criticism has privileged the authority of the soldier-poet's experience of war as the primary measure of aesthetic virtue and truth telling (identified as 'combat gnosticism'), as well as the long exclusion of women from the canon of war poetry which this tradition has occasioned. Fine close readings of the Wilfred Owen's 'Strange Meeting' and 'Dulce et Decorum est'.
4. **Margaret R. Higonnet, 'Women's Poetry of the First World War', *Cambridge Companion to Poetry of the First World War*, ed. Santanu Das (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 185-197**
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CCO9781139087520.019>
Higonnet surveys feminist scholarship of the subject and illustrates her reading of the value of women's war poetry by close interpretation of four contrasting poets, all of whom are represented in *Scars Upon My Heart*: Charlotte Mew (1869–1928), Eleanor Farjeon (1881–1965), Rose Macaulay (1881–1958) and Margaret Postgate Cole (1893–1980).
5. **Nosheen Kahn, *Women's Poetry of the First World War* (London: Harvester, 1988)**
The first thorough-going book length study of the subject, still highly regarded by scholars today.
6. **Anne Varty, 'Scars Upon My Heart', *English Review*, 28:4 (April 2018), pp. 2-5**

Situates the publication of *Scars Upon My Heart* in the British feminist movement of the 1970s, notes its groundbreaking influence on received ideas of 'war poetry', and explores how important it is for today's readers to hear women's previously silenced voices from this pre-suffrage era.

7. Anne Varty, 'Women's Poetry in First World War Anthologies and Two Collections of 1916', *Women's Writing. Special Edition Women's Writing and WW1*, ed. Emma Liggins and Liz Nolan. DOI 10.1080/09699082.2016.1233772. October 2016

Reflects on the increasing under-representation of women in anthologies of First World War poetry compiled after WW1, and considers the competing literary values of anthologies and single-author collections. Examines two contrasting collections both published in 1916, one by the previously unknown woman poet W. J. Cameron, the other by the well-known pacifist Lady Margaret Sackville.

Web Links

- Oxford University offers a comprehensive range of resources to further the understanding of the First World War at <http://ww1centenary.oucs.ox.ac.uk/resource-library/>
- It includes an article by Tim Kendall (University of Exeter), 'Combat Gnosticism and the Woman Poets': <http://ww1centenary.oucs.ox.ac.uk/memoryofwar/combat-gnosticism-and-the-woman-poets-of-the-first-world-war/>
- All five episodes of the 1979 BBC mini-series of Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* can be watched on You Tube. Contemporaneous with *Scars Upon My Heart*, this mini-series contains much war poetry in line with Brittain's own use of poetry throughout her autobiography. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUaNuP82y3M>
- The British Library offers excellent online resources on the Poetry of World War I. See for example the article by Santanu Das, 'Reframing First World War Poetry', a wide ranging and stimulating piece which contains commentary and documentary evidence about Jessie' Pope's *War Poems* (1915) from which Catherine Reilly selected 'The Call' and 'Socks' for *Scars Upon My Heart*: <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/reframing-first-world-war-poetry>
- For an enthusiastic, eclectic, amateur blog run by Lucy London about women poets of WW1 visit: <http://femalewarpoets.blogspot.com/> You will find many biographical entries, poems, and photographs or images. This could be a starting point for students to make their own inquiries about the profiles of women whose work appears in *Scars Upon My Heart*. Always worth checking against the *Dictionary Of National Biography*.
- There are two very useful websites for the study of poetry, which includes war poetry by women. These are Poetry Archive and The Poetry Foundation. Poetry Archive hosts the Poetry by Heart schools competition in recitation. This contains a showcase of World War 1 poets, both men and women: <http://www.poetrybyheart.org.uk/first-world-war-poetry-showcase/>
- Poetry Foundation offers a selection of biographical information and poems, searchable by individual poet. See for example the search results on Poetry Foundation for Jessie Pope: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/search?query=jessie+pope>